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Markus C. Cotton

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Typical Bavarian Soldiers?

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
History.

By:

Markus Cotton

Under the mentorship of Brian K. Feltman

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses Eduard Husslein and Urban Weigand, who were two Bavarian farmers called up for military service in 1914. The introduction begins with giving background information on both of the men, including how they lived and their family life at the time of war. The first and second chapters discuss the impact of the outbreak of war on their hometown and their specific involvement in the war. While the third chapter discusses demobilization and how it affected their return home. This thesis attempts to use the methodology of Thomas Weber *Hitler's First War* and recreate the story of two typical Bavarian soldiers whose story had been lost over the generations and to see whether their war experience was that of a typical soldier.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. Brian K. Feltman

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

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University Honors Program

Georgia Southern University

INTRODUCTION

Eduard Husslein was born on March 16, 1891 in Stadtlauringen, Bavaria and served in both World Wars for the German Army. The Husslein family had been living in Stadtlauringen for several generations and they had acquired many acres of farmland outside of the city, which became the livelihood of the family. Eduard Husslein left his home on December 2, 1914 to serve in the Bavarian army. During his time as a soldier, he served in many of the war's most infamous battles, including one of the first recorded gas attacks at the Battle of Hulluch, the Battle of the Somme, and the Battle of Passchendaele. Another Stadtlauringener, Urban Weigand was born on October 17, 1891 and likewise served in both World Wars for the German army. He grew up on a farm in Stadtlauringen, much like Eduard, and was charged with helping out until the call for war struck his heart. Urban joined the war in December of 1915, when the infamous trenches had been set and fortified heavily on the western front. During his time with the Bavarian army, Urban served in one of the most notorious battles on the Western Front and was later transferred to the Eastern front to fight the Russians and Romanians in the area of Galicia, receiving war wounds on numerous occasions.

The stories of Eduard Husslein and Urban Weigand have been lost over the generations. In Husslein's case, the lack of information about his war experiences was related to the family's desire to destroy any memorabilia that came out of either of the World Wars. One surviving document that has lasted through the years is his military pass book from the First World War. It chronicles all the significant events or any battles in which he participated from December 2, 1914 until the end of the war. Additionally, records of Eduard's service with the Bavarian army remain in the holdings of the Bavarian War Archive in Munich, Germany. Although Urban

Weigand's war passes are no longer in the family's possession, his service records are likewise accessible through the Bavarian War Archive.

The purpose of this thesis is to reconstruct Husslein's and Weigand's experiences as Bavarian soldiers in the First World War. In *Hitler's First War*, the historian Thomas Weber successfully recreated the story of Adolf Hitler's First World War experience. By recreating Eduard's and Urban's story, we may determine what the typical experience was for a soldier on the front line during the First World War. Building upon Weber's methodology, this thesis seeks to determine if the same methods may be used to reconstruct the experiences of ordinary farmer in Bavaria.¹ Weber in *Hitler's First War* uses a distinct methodology to recreate the story for a profound person in the history of Germany. Weber used the documents and diaries from other people in Hitler's regiment to write the story of Hitler in World War I. He was able to reconstruct a story by beginning with nothing more than a photograph that showed Hitler in uniform. Besides the work by Thomas Weber, I will also use Benjamin Ziemann's *War Experiences in Rural Germany* to describe the life of a rural Bavarian soldier. Ziemann's book focuses on the rural aspect to examine how the experiences of rural soldiers may have been different from those coming from urban areas. Ziemann's work will make it possible to determine whether Husslein and Weigand were typical soldiers in the Bavarian regiments.

I intend to attempt to use Weber's methodology in order to see if his tactics can be used to recreate the story of an ordinary Bavarian soldier by beginning with war passes and relevant service records. Interpretation of the passes and service records is difficult due to the old German handwriting in which they were written, which is difficult for most Germans to read. Finding out where Eduard and was stationed and other relevant information proved to be one of the biggest

¹ Thomas Weber, *Hitler's First War*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

challenges of the paper. Weber recreated Hitler's story from diaries and other sorts of paraphernalia that came from other soldiers in his regiment during this time. The importance of recreating the story of the ordinary Bavarian soldier is to tell the story of someone who would not become the most infamous man in history but to see the effects the war had on his family and what men from small rural town went through in the front lines. I do not intend to focus solely on battles in order to tell if Husslein and Weigand were ordinary soldiers. I will also reconstruct their prewar lives through oral histories made available to me through their granddaughter.

CHAPTER 1: EDUARD HUSSLEIN, URBAN WEIGAND, AND THE GREAT WAR
IN STADTLAURINGEN

Stadtlauringen is a small rural community located several hours southeast of Frankfurt, Germany. In the center of town was a Catholic Church surrounded by houses. Located amongst the houses were the occasional barn inside the city limits where local farmers would bring back tools or animals for the night and a garden within the walls of their yard. Surrounding the city was acres of farmland that included pastures for cattle and crops for harvest. Most people in Stadtlauringen farmed and for those who did not there was a sawmill located just outside the city limits or you would own your own business, either a bakery or delicatessen. For those who did not farm for a living, located just outside the city to the south were several small plots of gardens in which people would grow their own vegetables or fruits for their own sustenance farming.² This was a very tightly knit community in which everyone would be willing to help out their neighbor in a time of need, therefore those who did not go to war, or the families of those who did, could work together to keep up with what needed to be done. In these communities it was all about church and helping your neighbor.

Working in an agricultural community you live for two periods in the year, harvest and planting. While in these communities they worked from sun up to sundown making sure to maximize their crop yields by weeding the fields, and getting rid of the bugs and taking care of the animals that you need for harvesting or planting. Planting comes in around March when the weather starts to warm up and harvest generally starts around August, so during the winter most farmers are not preoccupied with farm work, but during the summer one did everything possible

² Birgit Cotton, Granddaughter of Eduard Husslein and Urban Weigand, Interview. Cordele, Georgia; December 15, 2015.

to increase the productivity of the crops. In the early morning, if farmers had livestock, they would go and milk the cow or move the herd to a pasture from being in the barn overnight and then begin a day in the field. For established farmers, like Eduard's or Urban's family, it was common to own 100+ acres on which to grow crops including corn, wheat, and other foods that could be eaten at your home or sold in the local farmers' market.³

The Catholic Church played a big role on the battlefield, as the Bavarian Army put much emphasis on the military chaplain and how church was to be portrayed at the front lines. However, early in the war with the major battles that marked the first few years of war, churchgoers were very slim on the front. The slack in church attendance initially started showing in 1915 and had diminished drastically in 1916. Many commanding officers noticed that there was no longer "any sign of prayer" and out of one division only six soldiers bothered to go to the Sunday confessional.⁴ This was a dramatic change from the first year of war where religion was their primary means for interpreting the world and acted as a guide through life, these men soon realized that the hell that they were in could not be helped by a wartime church. Many of the people in the front lines would not be able to go to church as often as they would have initially liked, those who were stationed in the rear or at the reserve point would be able to attend church every day or go to Sunday communion. This was not the same for those who were stationed on the front because when they would rotate for rest, these men would go back to their bunkers and sleep and eat until they were content. After they were able to recuperate, these men would be sent back to the front lines allowing no time for religious affairs. The effects of this decline in the amount of men going to church even showed when they were home on leave. They would not attend mass or any service and this resulted in the amount of nonbelievers in the village to grow

³ Cotton, Interview. Cordele, Georgia; December 2015.

⁴ Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914-1923*. (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 124-127.

exponentially as these men whom had gone off to war had been huge activists for God, now would not even step into the doorway of a church.⁵ Many would soon come to realize that religion could not save them from the horrors that most of them would endure.

World War I is known as the Great War, and it claimed millions of lives from all of the nations that were involved. The assassination of the Arch Duke Franz-Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary resulted in a conflict that required millions of men to leave their lives behind and mobilize for war.⁶ Europeans greeted the outbreak of war with a variety of emotions, including enthusiasm, fear, and mere acceptance of their responsibility to defend their homeland. Stadtlauringen greeted the war with angst; many of the farmers did not want to go to war because of their “hatred for Prussia.”⁷ The Bavarians did not like to be under the control of the Prussians and this proved difficult in later years when national integration was attempted. As Ziemann states, most of the citizens who supported the outbreak of war were nationalistic middle-class who supported the youth movement and student fraternities. While the working class was despondent to the war. Only when the soldiers were called to duty was there any sort of enthusiasm for the war. In July of 1914 it can be seen that the rural communities were tense because of the serious concern of war for the first time and once Austria-Hungary declared war the tension grew even more. However in certain rural communities, mobilization was seen as a “bolt out of the blue” because they had been so preoccupied with the harvest.⁸ The report of positive reactions of the outbreak of war came from the cities where the young middle class greeted it as an opportunity to expand their youth movement.

⁵ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, 124-127.

⁶ Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014).

⁷ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, 142-143.

⁸ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, 17-18.

Bavaria was a highly agricultural based economy in the late 1800's when Husslein was born. His family farmed over 100 acres outside of the small town of Stadtlauringen and that was how they provided food for the family and also made a living. Each day they traveled with their farm animals just outside the town where most of their farmland was located, to ensure that they would be able to survive the seasons when no crops could grow. While the men and boys worked in the fields, Eduard's mother worked with the chickens and in other small gardens around the house. When Eduard was growing up, he started out helping his mother weed the smaller gardens located by the house and outside of the city and also with the chickens and other small farm animals. As he got older he took on more responsibility and began helping his father with the bigger projects on the family farm, starting off with the harvest. When Husslein was 15 years old he experienced the tragic event of his mother's passing, which meant that as an only child, he would have to pull more weight around both the house and the farm to help their family operation stay afloat. The farm that had been in Husslein's family for generations, and it was not something that he wanted to see fail and be sold, but the struggle with the harvest and preparing the fields with very basic farming technology could prove to be very consequential. Eduard had a very important obligation to help his father on the farm but also felt a need to join the army when war broke out in 1914.⁹

When Germany entered what would become the Great War, Eduard Husslein was twenty-three years old. He and his father had been taking care of their 100+ acre farm for eight years by themselves after his mother had died. As a farmer in rural Germany, he struggled with leaving his hometown and still helping provide for his father. The difficulties of providing for a family during a time of war increase, and with Eduard's mother having passed away in 1906, and

⁹Cotton. Interview, Cordele, Georgia; December 15, 2015.

with him being an only child, Eduard's father was in charge of the upkeep of over 100 acres of farm land at the time Eduard was sent off to war. The Husslein family faced giving up a large portion of their crop in wartime, but they remained self-sufficient.¹⁰ The call for war did not impact everyone the same, as it seemed that Eduard was very eager to leave the rural town in Bavaria and support his country by fighting against the British and French. Many of the farmers in Bavaria were dealing with the predicament of someone taking over their farm and looking after their family. Many of the people in a small town like Stadtlauringen would be more than willing to serve, but they would also have their own farms and businesses to attend to. For Eduard to try so feverishly to join the war in 1914 there must have been an underlying cause to push him away from helping his father. As Alexander Watson has observed, many people felt an obligation to go to war and protect their country while many of them wanted to escape from the pressures of their lives. The average citizen saw the war as a possible invasion of their homeland and it was thus a defensive war.¹¹

Eduard's eagerness shows that he felt an obligation to fight for his country and also knew that he would be able to leave for several months at a time because of his occupation as a farmer. With his decision to go to war in 1914, Eduard surely understood the workload that his father would shoulder alone, but also must have been able to secure some help for his father and then assured him that he would be back for the harvest and field work in fall and spring each year. Eduard's war passes indicate that he attempted to join the army in September of 1914 but was declined for not being in the best physical condition or not meeting the requirements. It is

¹⁰ Cotton. Interview, Cordele, Georgia; December 15, 2015.

¹¹ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44-72.

unclear as to why he was not able to join the first time he attempted to enlist.¹² However, he did persist and in December of 1914 he was recruited and trained for a month before being sent out to battle. We have no record of Husslein's response to his initial rejection, but he probably reacted in much the same way as others who were turned away in the war's opening days. As described in Ernst Toller's *I Was a German*, he tells of the excitement of joining the ranks, but in his case he was rejected the first time and persisted so hard the second time he went to the recruiting office that the doctor passed him. He could not handle being the only man left in Deutschland that was not going off to fight. Toller also talks about the sense of pride he had once he joined, no matter the conditions of training, he was a soldier at last.¹³ This urgency to join the ranks was seen in many Germans, as Toller describes the air was light with the excitement of the men and everyone singing "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles." However, this time was not full of embracing Germans ready to fight, many people were so paranoid of spies that anyone or anything that was foreign was beaten or destroyed.

As can be seen in the records from the Bavarian War Archives in Munich, Urban Weigand, unlike Husslein, had two children by the time he joined the war.¹⁴ Like Husslein, he was a farmer, and he too was faced with a difficult decision when war was declared. Leaving for the front meant abandoning his farm and leaving his children without a father, but he opted to fight for his country. When Urban Weigand enlisted in the Bavarian Army he was first part of the 5th Bavarian Infantry Regiment Ersatz Battalion from February 13, 1915 where he stayed for two months before being transferred to the 4th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment part of the 12

¹² Eduard Hußlein's Militärpaß, Bavarian Reserve Infanterie Regiment 4, pgs. 4-5. Original in author's private collection.

¹³ Ernst Toller. *I Was a German*. (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1934), 64.

¹⁴ Kriegsstammrollen 7459 22 J-R, *I Ers. Batl. Gen. Komp- A*, Bavarian War Archive, accessed through Ancestry.com, interactive.ancestry.com, 263.

Company on April 28, 1915 where he remained for nearly two years on the Western and Eastern Fronts. He was transferred to the 22nd Bavarian Infantry Regiment around June 10, 1917 where he then would have participated in in Passchendaele and then remained on the western front.¹⁵

Although Husslein and Weigand joined separate units of the Bavarian army, their training would have been very similar. Husslein's training took place on the Franco-German border in a town called Metz.¹⁶ While Weigand was sent to the city of Bamberg to receive his training, they generally received the same type of training. They would be sent to a recruit training depot that generally were a battalion size (1,000-1,200) they would be split into four groups for basic training, which lasted for 6 months before being sent to the depot's three or four replacement companies. Husslein would have taken this path of going to the depot then to the replacement company training and then he awaited active duty, while Weigand joining in 1915 would have been given a short one to three months of basic training and then sent to a field recruit depot in the rear area of an active theatre of operations.¹⁷ By taking the path of field recruit depots, Weigand received training in an environment that had realism and urgency and physical/mental challenges that those who took the other paths generally would not receive while also knowing that the enemy was just a few kilometers away. These field recruit depots were also considered as an immediate source of reinforcements in emergency situations as well as receiving front line experience in quiet sectors. However, since they were directly linked to the battalion they were training behind, if that battalion were to be redeployed then arrangements were made for the

¹⁵ Kriegsstammrollen 7459, 22 J-R: I-Ers.-Batl, 263.

¹⁶ Husslein's Militärpaß, Author's Private Collection. 8-9.

¹⁷ David Stone, *The Kaiser's Army: The German Army in World War One*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 46.

cross-posting of training personnel to maintain training continuity and capability of the field recruit depot.¹⁸

After training Eduard and Urban received a daily pay rate of 33 Pfennig (100 Pfennig = 1 Mark) and newly signed soldiers would also receive a signing bonus of 7.10 marks for infantry men.¹⁹ This meant that while Eduard and Urban were away they were able to still provide for their family in a time of need, however it was not the best pay but it allowed them to survive the hardships that people on the home front had to experience. As the war pushed on, these regular infantry men like Husslein and Weigand, received a pay increase of 33%, which brought their daily pay to 70 Pfennig.²⁰ According to the sources on Urban's and Eduard's service it is apparent that they never rose much in rank and stayed as infantry men the entire length of the war so their pay was substantially less than that of an officer but in the case of Urban, who has already had two children, he received an extra 2.60 Marks for a wife and two children.²¹ Eduard was not lucky enough to receive these extra benefits because the sources show that he was neither married or had children during the time of war. His base pay towards the end of the war was nearly 5 Marks per week, which would not buy you much immediately but if you were to save it over the course of your service you could have quite a substantial amount.²² Many soldiers would also send back home a portion of their pay to help provide for the family while they were still out fighting to defend the home front.

¹⁸ Stone, *The Kaiser's Army*, 179-181.

¹⁹ Stone, *The Kaiser's Army*, 181

²⁰ Stone, *The Kaiser's Army*, 181.

²¹ Stone, *The Kaiser's Army*, 182.

²² Stone, *The Kaiser's Army*, 182.

CHAPTER II: INTO BATTLE

By the time Weigand and Husslein arrived at the front, the opening engagements of the war had concluded and the trench lines had been firmly established. Eduard Husslein trained in Metz with the Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment 5 until January 2, 1915, but he served in most of the Great War as part of the 4th Bavarian Division.²³ While in the 4th Division he fought with two separate regiments: the 5th Bavarian Infantry Reserve Regiment and the 9th Infantry Regiment Wrede.²⁴ After joining the 4th Bavarian Division on December 2, 1914, Eduard was first involved at the Battle of Flanders. He was sent to Artois on September 26, 1915, where the purpose of the German attack was to take back a trench from the British line. The British had successfully used gas the previous day and his battalion was ordered to retake the ground lost to the British.²⁵ They succeeded but suffered heavy losses in the process. The regiment remained in this area from November 1915 until August 1916 where it participated in mine warfare and also lost approximately 1,000 men in an attempted gas attacks.²⁶ During the time they were stationed in this area, Eduard's regiment was involved in a prominent gas attack at the Battle of Hulluch. The Battle of Hulluch took place as part of the Battle of Loos, and Eduard was at Hulluch from 27-29 of April 1916. During the two days of battle, the Germans installed 7,400 cylinders along the front trench line.²⁷ The cylinders contained a mixture of phosgene gas and chlorine gas and on April 27 at 5:00 a.m. the first cloud of gas was released from 3,800 cylinders near St. Elie. Two hours after the first gas cloud, the regiments sent another gas cloud and following this

²³ Husslein's Militärpaß, Author's Private Collection, 8-9.

²⁴ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War (1914-1918)*. Compiled from Records of Intelligence Section of the General Staff, American Expeditionary Forces, at General Head-Quarters: Chaumont, France; Great Britain; London Stamp Exchanged LTD, 1989, 102.

²⁵ Yves Le Maner. "The Battle of the Loos (25 September to 19 October 1915)." *Paix Friedey Peace*. Accessed March 28, 2016. <http://www.remembrancetrails-northernfrance.com/history/battles/the-battle-of-loos-25-september-to-19-october-1915.html>.

²⁶ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army*, 102.

²⁷ L.F. Haber. *The Poisonous Cloud: Chemical Warfare in the First World War*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 88-89.

cloud, the Bavarians carried out a raid of the British trenches. The gas killed 135 British soldiers but they were able to fight off the German advances. Two days later, the Germans attempted a repeat of the events on the 27th, opening 3,600 cylinders, but the wind was slowly blowing towards the British line and suddenly changed direction back towards the Germans. During the panic of the gas coming into the German trenches, they were also unable to close the cylinders to stop the flow of gas. During this failed attempt by the Germans, they suffered 1,500 casualties from the gas, which was later found out to be caused by faulty gas masks provided to the Bavarian Army.²⁸ Gas had an effect on both the soldiers physically and psychologically, as each regiment would have experienced it differently.

Ernst Jünger describes in *Storm of Steel* how the trenches would react to a gas attack. He describes it as a chaotic time with multiple alarm clocks going off, mixed in with hundreds of rifles, and generally accompanied by trench mortars. Then the words that would send a shiver down any soldier's neck....Gas!!! The soldiers would be able to tell what kind of gas attack it was by the smell of it as the cloud would approach. Jünger recalls his first gas attack and how they lit a fire near the entrance to their trench hole to pull the gas that came in out and keep out any more gas. They risked carbon monoxide poisoning to avoid the effects of the chlorine gas. After the gas attack was over and morning had arrived the soldiers went out to marvel at the damage that the gas had caused, from the withered plants, and the small animals that lay dead²⁹. This type of gas causes the lungs and eyes to basically burn from the chemical concentration of the chlorine. With the use of chlorine gas the soldiers always had to fear if their reactions were quick enough to cover their eyes and mouth because the effects of the gas could cause temporary

²⁸ Haber, *The Poisonous Cloud*, 88-89.

²⁹ Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel* (New York: Penguin Classic, 2014), 84.

or permanent blindness and even death in some severe cases due to the gas causing the lungs to become filled with fluid or burn the alveoli.

After leaving the area of Lens, the regiment remained in the area of Flanders until June 1916. The regiment was sent to the Somme on June 24, 1916 in which it gave a demonstration with the 6th Army, according to the war passes. They fought in the area of Longueval and MartinPuich in which Husslein's battalion, joined with the 3rd Bavarian Division to form the 2nd Bavarian Army Corps, was responsible for the largest German counter-attack at the Somme.³⁰

The first makings of the Battle of the Somme was on June 16, 1916 when the Germans had learned of a large-scale offensive on the Western Front. During the early stages of the war Ernst Jünger describes the trench life as constant British mortars as the Battle loomed closer the British barrage increased. Soon it became clear to the Germans that they were significantly outnumbered in the trenches and artillery as they would be bombarded for hours by hundred pound mortars while their response would be a Lanz mortar, according to Jünger these mortars did nothing in comparison to the British.³¹ The British are often ridiculed for the types of warfare they would participate in and have no regard for the cost of life on the battlefield. After suffering around 50,000 casualties in one day because they walked across no-man's land is a bit of a failure. He took part in the Battle of the Somme from June 24 through July 7, 1916, during which time the division suffered 2 deaths, 10 missing, and 23 were hit with gas.³² Gas had become a problem that many soldiers feared. During this time gas was being experimented with first by the Germans and then soon after the British began to experiment and used these against the Germans

³⁰ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army*, 102.

³¹ Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 74-77.

³² Gerhard von Bearbeitet Bauer & Jürgen Kraus. *Teil VI: Infanterie Band 2 Reserve and Landwehr-Infanterie*. Verlag Militaria; Wien, 2012, 306.

as they attempted to take certain territory around the Somme. During this counter-attack they were able to push one British battalion to the eastern side of the Edge Trench. Later into the battle, his regiment was responsible for stopping a British counter-attack from their bombers. After the regiment stopped it, the British repeatedly tried to push back through the line but each time they were pushed back by a different regiment³³. Even though they were able to hold off any advancement by the British they suffered heavy losses in which 60% of its effectives, roughly 5,400 men were killed during this month of battle.³⁴

The Battle of Guillemont was part of the Somme and had attempts by the British and French to coordinate a 4 army offensive against the 2nd Army Corps. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson discussed how much the battle of the Somme achieved but “at unnecessarily high costs in lives” due to the inadequate command. They asked the question of “lions led by donkeys?” because the soldiers would just follow orders into battle while the person that gave the orders would sit back behind the lines and the fighting would have no impact on him.³⁵ Another work by Christopher Duffy called *Through German Eyes- the British and the Somme, 1916* discusses what was undoubtedly the bloodiest day in British history as well as the intensity in which the Germans retaliated. In one day they had approximately 20,000 deaths as compared to only the 8,000 German casualties (includes wounded, dead, missing, etc.). Duffy analyzes the British mindset and efforts throughout the battle of the Somme and gives good insight to the opposing German forces. By researching the topic I found a work by Professor Robin Prior that has many accounts from the British perspective of the Somme, which had the bloodiest day in British military history. My great-grandfather was part of the German army, but by using sources that

³³ "The Texture of the Somme, 1916." *History Today* 26, no. 9 (September 1976): 559-568, 566.

³⁴ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army*, 102.

³⁵ Prior, Robin, and Trevor Wilson. *Summing up the Somme*. *History Today* 41, no. 11 (November 1991): 37-43, 43.

are not strictly limited to the German perspective, it allows for the complete story to become uncovered. The analysis of the Germans involved in the battles will help to see if Eduard was in a regiment that was feared by the other belligerents or if his regiment was an easy opponent.

Trench life was not something that the soldiers looked forward to, while officers account what the battles were like the typical soldiers had to live with the lice and rats and decomposing bodies for weeks at a time while the officers would sit back miles behind the front in a nice house with delicious, hot food delivered daily. As the war continued on and the moral in the German trenches dwindled, more problems arose in the trenches. Now the German trenches in comparison with the British and French trenches were seen as better and more established better suited for long involvements due to their dugouts and walls of the trenches. The Germans had concrete and other things to make the walls of their trenches more stable and their trench lines were not lined with bodies like the French or just covered in sheet metal for protection. Soldiers knew at the beginning of the war that their feet were their most important asset to them and to take care of them as best as possible by changing their socks and letting them air out every few hours or so. As the tide of the war changed so did the moral of the soldiers, they began to let their feet develop what was called “trench foot” where their feet would get infected and start to rot so that they could go home. If you were found to be suffering from trench foot the NCO or junior officer would send you to the psychiatrist or someone else in charge to punish you.³⁶ However, before the war started to turn life in the trenches was still not much better. Soldiers on the front would not be engaged constantly with the enemy so during the times of nothing happening the soldiers would sit around and play cards or sleep because many of them were not able to sleep very much during the night. The main reason for deaths in the trenches was not

³⁶ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 140.

from the rifles or bayonets from the enemy but rather their artillery and how accurately they could shoot. Soldiers who had been on the front for a little while were able to tell what kind of artillery was being fired and how long they had before they needed to duck while the new recruits would dive every time they had heard the guns go off.³⁷ This life did not do well for the nerves of the soldiers and they often would cope with alcohol and women whenever they were given leave. The life in the trenches made them want to return home on leave and never return to the front lines because they were the pigs that the officers in charge sent to be slaughtered time after time with no remorse and as the war continued and the tide began to turn all the resentment towards the officers in charge led to many of them being taken prisoner or refusing orders.³⁸

Following the battle of the Somme, on July 6, 1916 his division was sent back to the area of Flanders. Now the area of Flanders in most of the area in northern Belgium and France near the English Channel, and the war passes do not specify the specific area they just mention Flanders, but soon after Flanders, he was sent back to the Somme from August 25 through September 17. After being at the Somme for a month, he was out for 6 months based on the dates of the war passes. He returned to Flanders on March 4, 1917 and stayed until May 26, 1917. His regiment was sent to Messines Ridge more specifically to Wytschaete- Bogen³⁹ which was part of the British mine attacks in which they used over one million tons of explosives along the trench line of the Messines Ridge as a way to surprise the Germans but many of the mines did not explode but the ones that did explode accounted for 10,000 German deaths. The reason for the British attack on the Messines Ridge was an attempt to get the high ground because the

³⁷ Ernst Toller. *I Was a German*, 70-91.

³⁸ Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 184.

³⁹ Bauer. *Teil VI: Infanterie Band 2 Reserve*, 306.

Germans were able to hold the ridge and keep the Allied offensives from pushing the German trench line back, but the Allies wanted to take the ridge to have better vantage point.⁴⁰

According to the maps of the British mine placement and explosion chart for the ridge and the mine placed near Eduard was not detonated either because the charges did not work or because the division was able to destroy the charges before they were detonated. During the time of mine placement, the Germans were not completely caught off guard and they had many attempts to dig tunnels to find the charges before the British could detonate them. During the attack the British set off all of the charges at 3:10 a.m. and soon followed with artillery fire and then an infantry attack, the British were able to take the ridge but the Germans were not upset with the defeat as they had an elastic trench line that allowed them to move backwards in a strategic manner. During this time the German Army had been making slow withdrawals back to the permanent trenches that had been established on the western front.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Passchendaele

The next battle that has been interpreted from the war pass was the Battle of Passchendaele. Passchendaele was near the Battle of Messines Ridge but was fought on a much more difficult level due to inclement weather that turned the battle field into a treacherous mud pit. Several soldiers were reported missing and

were believed to have fallen off into one of the mud holes and disappeared. The Battle of Passchendaele was one of the worst battles condition wise for either side. The Germans were set

⁴⁰ Robin Prior & Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 49.

up on a hill overlooking the positions of the enemy and during the engagement it rained heavily for several days and made the terrain from the artillery shells even more difficult to traverse. During this battle there were several million artillery shells shot from both sides and during the battle the British attempted and succeeded in taking the top of the hill only after suffering major casualties from the enemy fire and the conditions. It was extremely difficult to move anything heavy through the terrain to the Germans, some of their supplies sunk and were lost like what is believed to have happened to several people also. In order to make a move on the Germans the British had to build bridges that they could carry across the battle field to cross all the rivers and puddles of water that formed from the artillery blasts.⁴¹ Urban's experience here would have been of chaos and luck due to the fact that the German Army was in a defensive position and the British had to advance towards them through the rain and mud and craters that were created due to the artillery of each side. After being positioned here for nearly two months with possibly two or three weeks of rest he was sent back to Flanders on July 22, 1917 and remained there until September 17 following the month in Flanders he was given nearly a month of rest and when he returned on the 14th of October he was sent to the area of Remenauville, Regnieville, and Fey-en-Haye.⁴²

Urban was wounded twice, the first time on March 1, 1916 in the upper left leg, and the second time in November of 1918 where he was hit by grenade shrapnel in the upper underarm area. Each time he was transported to the Army field hospital where he was given time to recover and recuperate before being sent back out to the front. The injury Urban suffered to his leg ended up becoming infected and he had to go back to the field hospital to prevent the infection spreading and causing death. The hospital used what they called a "furunkel" which translates to

⁴¹ Prior, *Passchendaele*, 89.

⁴² Hußlein's Militärpaß, Author's Private Collection, 12-13.

something that encapsulates the “foreign object” that caused the infection and preventing it from getting any worse.⁴³

Urban’s service was on both the eastern and western fronts during the war, in the early years of the war he was stationed near La Vaux Fery, according to the documents in the Bavarian



<http://www.edinburghwargames.com/Verdun%202.htm>

War Archives. After about a year he was sent to the area of Verdun where he sustained his first injury on March 1, 1916, only three days after making it to the battle of Verdun. He spent the next three months in the Field Hospital before being cleared for the front lines again.

Urban may have had his life saved by being wounded so quickly into the engagement because the Battle of Verdun is one of the bloodiest battles of the war. There was no strategic win for the Germans by capturing these forts but Erich von Falkenhayn saw the opportunity to “bleed the French white”. These forts had sentimental value and Falkenhayn knew that the French would not let the Germans control it without a fight. During this battle there were over 300,000 casualties and more than 100,000 deaths. The Germans took over the area of Verdun, which had several forts around it. The major ones were Fort Douamont and Fort Vaux where the Germans took a defensive position on these forts and were able to see the incoming French from a distance and use artillery to hold them back. The French understood that they could not lose these forts because of the significance to the French people so they sent hundreds of thousands of troops to fight the Germans and push them back.

⁴³ Kriegsstammrollen 1956, 22 J-R 8 Komp, Bavarian War Archives, accessed through Ancestry.com, interactive.ancestry.com, 38.

The Germans thought that if they could maintain control of these forts that they would force the French civilian population to turn against the war ultimately pulling the French out of the war. Unfortunately for General Falkenhayn, the Kaiser did not see this battle as a win for the Germans and he was not happy with the loss of life for no strategic importance so he was relieved of his duty as Chief of the German Army General Staff and replaced by Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff.⁴⁴ Lucky for Urban or unlucky for his injury, he did not have to endure this long and tedious fight for a position that had no significance for the war besides upsetting the French. Following his short involvement at the Battle of Verdun he was then sent over to the Eastern Front to take on the Russians and Romanians near the Narajowka River. These engagements were shortly before the Russian revolution began in 1917 so the Russians were not fighting to the best of their abilities due to the political discourse.⁴⁵

As Benjamin Ziemann points out, about half of all Bavarian soldiers were from a rural background, and made up about five percent of the entire German army.⁴⁶ These young farmers had a more difficult decision, and as Ziemann explained, more of a calling to return home. Many of the soldiers from rural backgrounds often yearned for home especially during times of harvest and sowing. They would report in letters or journals that they would rather work from early morning until late at night on their farm with their loved ones than be in the wretched situation.⁴⁷ Once young men were sent to war, they started bottling up their emotions because they did not want to seem weak around the other soldiers. In order to counter act the build-up of emotions on the front, soldiers would send back letters to the one person in their life that would be able to

⁴⁴ Ian Ousby. *The Road to Verdun: World War I's Most Momentous Battle and the Folly of Nationalism* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 39.

⁴⁵ Kriegsstammrollen 2539, R-J-J No. 4. 12 Komp, Bavarian War Archives, accessed through Ancestry.com, interactive.ancestry.com, 508-509.

⁴⁶ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914-1923*, 4.

⁴⁷ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914-1923*, 120.

understand: their mothers, girlfriends, and families.⁴⁸ Urban and Eduard would have communicated with their families through letters and when they were given leave back home and it would generally be a sigh of relief for the families back home to receive a letter or see them coming into town, but they knew that Eduard and Urban would need to return. On the days that they needed to return back to the front, families would have fake enthusiasm to let their soldier know not to worry when deep down both of them knew it could be the last time that either one would see the other.

During the war, the families of soldiers in rural areas often got along better than those in the urban areas because they had steady access to food and other necessities. They were affected by the German government's attempts to ration and other programs to support the war effort but the evidence supports that they were not affected tremendously unless they were inspected. Many people in the small town in which Husslein and Stadtlauringen grew up likely did not struggle because the government was not as strict on the rural areas as they were on the urban areas unless the amount of goods sent in did not add up to the amount produced. Therefore, the families of Husslein and Weigand probably ate as well as other Bavarians whose lives revolved around agriculture, but their experience was not typical of a citizen living in an urban environment. The difference between the rural and urban areas caused a period of resentment from the urban people to the rural farmers, because they felt that they suffered more than the farmers did because they would live off of 1400 calories a week. During the time of food shortages many people in the urban areas would complain of food shortages. They would line up outside when the bread truck arrived and attempt to be the first one to receive bread because it was generally the freshest, and as the war continued many people stopped sending food to feed

⁴⁸ Jason Crounhamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality, and German Soldiers in the First World War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 65.

the country because they themselves were suffering from the lack of food that would be left for them. People in the major cities began to steal food and keep more for themselves instead of sending food to the front, and once it was clear at the front lines that they were losing support from the home front then they began to lose morale and starve because the food would become scarcer.⁴⁹ As Hindenburg said after the war, we did not lose the battle we were “stabbed in the back by the home front.”⁵⁰

Husslein faced a particular concern because his mother had passed away nearly ten years before the outbreak of war. How would he be able to handle the stresses of battle without a mother, and as far as we could tell, no girlfriend either? Eduard had to deal with the struggles of what could be experienced on the front by himself, as more often than not, soldiers would not write to their fathers for emotional support or help with their feelings. Many of the soldiers used their letters from home as a refuge for their imaginations so they could go to a world with love and compassion and escape the horrors in the trenches.⁵¹ However, according to Eduard’s family, there were several letters that he had written home but no one knows the content of them because after he passed away the family discarded the letters.⁵²

Urban had a slightly different experience because he was already married and had two children by the beginning of the war. Therefore he would have struggled with being gone for so long and dealing with the possibility that he may not be able to watch his children grow up. His children’s age is unclear from the records received from the Bavarian War Archives so when

⁴⁹ See Belinda Davis. *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Paul von Hindenburg's Testimony before the Parliamentary Investigatory Committee ["The Stab in the Back"] (November 18, 1919), http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3829, accessed March 31, 2016.

⁵¹ Crounhamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 66.

⁵² Cotton, Interview. Cordele, Georgia; December 2015.

Urban went to join the ranks he may have left his wife with two infants that could not have been alone or two toddlers that could help around the house.⁵³ Either way he would have struggled to leave his family behind without the guarantee of returning to watch his family grow. Urban would have been able to partially escape from the terrors at the front by writing to his wife and being able to drift back to his home every time he read a letter from her. However, it would have caused strain on their marriage because his wife would not have known whether the next letter she received was from the War Ministry saying he was killed or whether she would ever receive another letter. As Jason Crouthamel describes the attitude of soldiers at the front he describes also the importance of having a woman to talk to.⁵⁴ The difference for Urban and Eduard is that Urban was able to talk to someone and have a refuge for his imagination. The horrors on the front lines and in the trenches were a lot to bear for a regular man and it made it difficult because soldiers were not supposed to communicate their feeling with other soldiers, so they would rely on the women in their life. As can be seen with Eduard, he had no woman yet Urban did. The effect that this had on either one is unclear, but most pictures of both of them show Urban in a lighter mood while Eduard always had a stern expression. They would be at the same occasion celebrating with family yet Eduard would never crack a smile. This could be caused by the lack of escape from the trenches and femininity needed for Eduard as he was going through this difficult time.

⁵³ *Kriegsstammrollen 7459 22 J-R, I Ers. Batl. Gen. Komp- A*, Bavarian War Archive, accessed through Ancestry.com, interactive.ancestry.com, 263.

⁵⁴ Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 66.

CHAPTER III: WAR'S END AND DEMOBILIZATION

Both Urban Weigand and Eduard Husslein remained in the front lines after the great battles of 1916 and the subsequent engagements the following year. Husslein remained in Flanders until March 22, 1918 and during his time stationed here, he was given about a week of rest from December 28 through January 1, 1918. After these smaller battles he was sent to the area of Kemmel on April 16, 1918 and remained there for eleven days. After the eleven days he was sent to Flanders from April 28 through May 3, 1918. He was given a month off and then was sent to Merris from June 9, 1918 until July 7, 1918. Then he returned to the Somme from August 15, 1918 to the 30th of August. He was given another month off and was sent to the Battle of Champagne from September 29 through October 18, 1918.⁵⁵

These last few battles in 1918 were collectively known as the Spring Offensive. Operation Georgette was an attempt to turn the tide of the war as the Germans began to notice they were losing the war of attrition. This offensive was less significant than Spring Offensive Michael, yet it had its specific objectives to meet and they ended up failing because of the failure of strategic planning and being outflanked by the enemy. After these dates the passes do not show any dates but according to the *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War (1914-1918)* his regiment, which had changed from the 5th Bavarian Infantry Reserve Regiment to the 9th Infantry Regiment Wrede, was given border control in the area of Tirol where he stayed until the war had ended.⁵⁶ During his time in

⁵⁵ Husslein's Militärpaß, Author's Original Collection, 11.

⁵⁶ "4TH ROYAL BAVARIAN DIVISION." World Public Library. Accessed March 30, 2016. http://www.worldlibrary.org/articles/4th_Royal_Bavarian_Division#Combat_chronicle.

the war he was given time off during different times of the year. It is uncertain whether it was due to injury or sickness or if Eduard needed to go back home and help on the farm.⁵⁷

The regiment he was a part of fought in many battles across the western front, including the Somme, Artois, Spring Offensive, Arras, Passchendaele and others. During some of these attacks his battalion lost up to 60% of its effectives. During the war, he was primarily stationed around the same area, known as Flanders in Belgium and France, but in 1918 he was sent to the Franco-German border around Verdun, Nancy, and Metz as the trench lines began to fall back to the German border. At war's end, his division was stationed around Tirol⁵⁸ in southern Germany, where he was in charge of border security as the war ended. Based off the war documents recovered from the Bavarian War Archive, through some speculation, it would appear that Eduard suffered an injury and that was his reason for being put on border patrol. It is unclear what exactly was written on the document but the interpretation for the soldier underneath his entry with the same writing and red underline, it is clearly written that the man underneath Eduard's name was killed in action.⁵⁹

Towards the end of the war, in September 14-16 in 1918, when the 5th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment dissolved after intense fighting in early to mid-1918. Both divisions were involved on the Western Front in places like Lorraine, the Somme, Flanders and Kemmel. The estimates of the division by opposing forces were that they were a very tenacious division in both attacks and on defense. Even while losing 60% of its effectives at times, they were still able to

⁵⁷ Hußlein's Militärpaß, Author's Original Collection, 12-13.

⁵⁸ Bauer. *Teil VI: Infanterie Band 2 Reserve*, 307.

⁵⁹ Kriegsstammrollen 1089. 6 Inf. Rg. 9 Komp. Bavarian War Archives, accessed through ancestry.com, interactive.ancestry.com, 151.

regroup and continue fighting on until they were relieved.⁶⁰ As mentioned before, Eduard was sent to Tirol either immediately before the war ended or as it was coming to a close.

Urban had different late war experiences as can be seen in the *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War (1914-1918)*. Urban was involved in 1917 and 1918 in areas similar to those of Eduard around Flanders and in France. In 1917 he was in France, Alsace, Aisne, Flanders, and Cotes de Meuse of which his regiment did not have much action on the front but still suffered casualties from enemy bombardments. In 1918 he was involved in Louvre, Armentieres, Soissons, Ypres, and Ghent where they stayed at the front lines near Ghent until the armistice was signed. For Urban, he was involved the entire war in fighting except during his injuries sustained at the front. While Eduard was able to relax within the border of his country, Urban was still fighting at the front with the Allies until the armistice was signed.

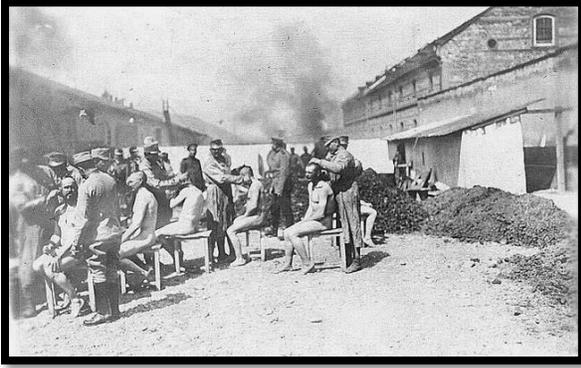
⁶⁰ *Histories of Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army*, 102.

CHAPTER III: DEMOBILIZATION AND POSTWAR LIFE

The process of demobilization came as a complicated task for the Germans as they had not prepared for it when the war began to turn. So eventually, once the armistice was signed, the soldiers would begin just walking home. There was no protocol set in place to systematically take regiments home from their places on the Western Front because the German government felt that they could not lose the war. For Eduard and Urban, their return home did not seem to be that of a defeated country. Once they returned to town the citizens would throw parades for their brave soldiers that survived. If you were to go to a town in Germany after the war it would seem that the Germans had won by the way they would celebrate. The reason for the celebrations was because the civilians realized that the soldiers protected their homeland from being laid to waste so they felt the need for festivals. These festivities were encouraged by the Bavarian Council of Ministers in 1918 and many people decorated houses and there were parades and dancing.⁶¹ However, everything would not return to normal quickly, as a new government was slow to establish and the Kaiser had escaped to exile. According to Ziemann most of the soldiers in rural Germany had returned to their hometown by late 1918 because a majority of them were in the reserve regiments and they were already on home ground at the time of the Armistice. The return of the rural soldiers proved to be more easily done than urban soldiers because they shared the same view of the war as the peasants so they could integrate back into life easier while also sharing the desire to till the earth once again.⁶²

⁶¹ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, 215.

⁶² Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, 214.



<http://www.ipernity.com/doc/57114/7872743>

Once the soldiers started returning home the government had attempted to set up stations to protect the civilians from diseases such as Typhus fever and other diseases carried by ticks. There would be delousing stations that would be set up in public baths for the soldiers to go through and kill all of the

ticks that had crawled into the seams of their uniforms. The Army had been pretty consistent on delousing every time a soldier would come back off the front lines but they realized that in order to stop the diseases from becoming an epidemic they would have to make sure that every soldier is clean and does not spread it to the civilian population. The German economy was spent because they had used all of their resources and goods to fund the war. For farmer like Eduard and Urban, they did not have machinery like they had before or fertilizer or really anything to keep their small operations up and running. Luckily for them, millions of men needed jobs and the entire population needed to be fed so the countryside was put to work quickly following the end of the war to increase food production for the population.⁶³ The transition back to normal life needed to happen very quickly for these two because they needed to resume control of their farm and provide food for their families because of the shortage that took over the country during the war. Also seen during the period of demobilization was the rise in support for the SPD (Social Democratic Party), which allowed them to voice their dissatisfaction against the monarchy.⁶⁴ This change in support from the monarchy to the SPD may have allowed for the rise of Hitler as he came to power in the NSDAP. As can be seen following the war, priests began to notice an

⁶³ Richard Bessel. *Germany after the First World War*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 197.

⁶⁴ Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany*, 218.

uptake in attendance from the ex-servicemen of the rural areas, which again showed that the rural Bavarian took religion as the sole mean for understanding the world. Rural soldiers also were unhampered by unemployment that so heavily damaged the urban population because most of the rural soldiers had been farm heads or worked on a farm within their family, so they would come back from war and prepare for the next season of cultivation.

Perhaps the transition after war from soldier to civilian may have been easier for Eduard and Urban being from a rural town in Bavaria being that they had a job to come home to along with parades to celebrate the end of the war and their return home. The German economy as a whole would suffer for years to come due to the effects of the war, and it would affect everyone that considered themselves German. As for Eduard and Urban being typical Bavarian soldiers during the engagement, that question is a difficult one to answer because what standard do you set as typical? Watching hundreds of men die as you storm blindly toward enemy trenches? Or being wounded several times yet being sent right back out as soon as you can hold a gun again? Either way their war experiences shaped the lives of these men, and whether or not they actually experienced all that is stated has been lost over the generations of these people trying to forget the loss of a war and horrors that they experienced with it.

The purpose of this thesis was to reconstruct the stories of Eduard Husslein and Urban Weigand and their involvement in World War I. Using the methodology of Thomas Weber's *Hitler's First War* I was able to roughly recreate the events and locations of the two small town Bavarian soldiers throughout their entire conscription for the German Army. Through this thesis we learned about the battles and other events that these two soldiers might have encountered and not only survived but were able to move on from it and continue their lives as rural farmers, fathers, and husbands. With Eduard's involvement at the Somme, Passchendaele, and Battle of

Hulluch, his experience would have seemed slightly more traumatic than someone stationed on the Eastern Front. Yet, looking at Urban's involvement, after being injured twice and shipped across the country to fight on both fronts, he would seem to have had a traumatic experience as well. The main question of this thesis was to try and recreate their stories to tell if they could be considered typical soldiers but what would be typical? They were both a part of some of the bloodiest and most gruesome battles of the war yet they survived and were able to return home to either start a family or continue to grow a family. Also considering the total number of soldiers who perished for their country is astounding that these two men, my great grandfathers, did not perish along the trench lines that became a part of their lives. With all considerations, there is no possible way to tell whether they were typical soldiers because you are not able to identify what a typical war experience is by the amount of death you see, or the amount of battles you are a part of, or how many times you are injured yet continue to fight.

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