

CHAPTER V

THE WAR EXPERIENCE¹

Whatever the pattern of their life histories each of the men interviewed had had one common experience—the army. No matter how different their individual fate during the war may have been, it was something they had all shared to some degree. This shared experience permitted some objective evaluation of how reasonable they were in their attitudes toward their own experiences. A man who had been severely wounded had more obvious reason to complain than another whose worst experience was his separation from his family. The men were queried both as to their actual experiences in the army and their own evaluation of them. In this way, it was possible to determine whether tolerant and intolerant persons viewed comparable life experiences in the same way. The answer to this question was to provide evidence as to whether, in addition to the social and economic correlates (social mobility), there were also psychological correlates of intolerance, such as viewing one's experiences as deprivational, regardless of their objective character.

In setting up the questions, no effort was made to study the full impact of war experiences on a man's attitudes. The questions were designed to ascertain whether the reactions of veterans to wartime experiences were rather a reflection of their total personalities than of the actual content of their experiences. In particular, it was anticipated that the discussion and analysis of wartime experiences might produce data which could be used in testing the hypothesis that hostility toward out-groups is a function of the hostile individual's sense of past deprivation.² Therefore the veteran's war experiences were examined both in terms of the actual deprivations he experienced and of his feelings of deprivation.

¹ In this chapter no effort is made to study directly the impact of the war on inter-ethnic attitudes. The war experience is used solely as a means of analyzing the veterans' attitudes and outlooks on life.

² It was also anticipated that the analysis of wartime experiences would produce other pertinent data on attitudes toward the army. Some of them are discussed in Chapter VII.

On the other hand, it was also important to find which of the men reacted favorably to army life because they experienced it as a relief from the insecurities and routines of civilian life.

The different types of army experiences were classified on the basis of objective characteristics and the apparent deprivations associated with them, for example: (1) the objectively greater danger of combat service; (2) wounds and injuries; (3) length of service.

Nevertheless, the findings revealed that army experiences which seemed to involve objective deprivations were not related to differential degrees of interethnic intolerance.³ Thus, as in the case of low economic status, where the objective deprivation which it implied was not positively related to intolerance, objective deprivations in the army were without relation to intolerance.

On the other hand, when a number of different approaches were employed to determine whether army life was subjectively experienced as deprivation, a *significant* association emerged between the expression of subjective feelings of deprivation and outspoken and intense anti-Semitic attitudes.

For example, the men were queried, "Do you feel that you got a bad break in your army career?"

Typical examples of responses by men who thought they had had a bad break were the following:

A twenty-seven year old private first-class said:

"Being in the infantry was a bad break—anything would have been better. You had no way to keep clean—we had the worst food of any."

Another twenty-seven year old private said he had had a bad break because:

"I wanted to get somewhere. But somebody else always got it. I deserved a rating and never got it. When they wanted somebody to repair something on a gun, I was always called because the other guy didn't know. That's why I never had no use for the army. They never gave a rating to a person who should get one."

On the other hand, some men felt it characteristic of the army to give men a good break. A twenty-nine year old private first-class said:

"I got a good break. I went to school and had the opportunity to be somebody. What I liked about the army is that they always give you a break."

A thirty year old staff sergeant had once been demoted; yet he bore no resentment and felt well satisfied with his lot. He said:

³ For an analysis of these characteristics and their relationship to intolerance see Appendix Tables 9(A), 10(A), 11(A).

"In my army career I got a good break. I was made staff sergeant in 1942 only I was busted. But I made it back in another outfit. And I got to be mess sergeant, and mess sergeants eat good."

The responses revealed a sharp distinction between tolerant and intolerant veterans (Table 1(V)). Of those who claimed to have had a bad break in the army, almost five times as many were intolerant as tolerant. On the other hand, a considerable majority of those who claimed to have had a good break were tolerant.

TABLE 1(V)
"DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU GOT A BAD BREAK IN
YOUR ARMY CAREER?"

	Tolerant		Stereotyped		Outspoken and Intense		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Good break	38	62	26	62	20	43	84	56
Bad break	3	5	5	12	16	34	24	16
"Normal"	13	21	5	12	3	6	21	14
Other	7	12	6	14	8	17	21	14
Total	61		42		47		150	

Below it will be shown that, by and large, both tolerant and intolerant persons had had the same type of army experience. Hence, the intolerant man's tendency to consider his fate as worse than it should have been was five times that of the tolerant man's. Equally interesting was the distribution of the opinion that one's fate was average; that one is (or was) not particularly "bad off" or the converse. Of those men who considered their fate in the army to have been "normal," over four times as many were tolerant as were intolerant.

Despite the clear association between subjective feelings of deprivation in the army and hostility toward ethnic minority groups such as the Jews, it should be noted that there was a small group of men who did not follow this pattern. Twenty expressed outspoken intolerance toward the Jews, but felt that they had had a good break in the army. On the other hand, three men who fell into the tolerant group claimed that they had had a bad break in the army.

Of course, the type of statistical analysis applied in this study reveals only the tendencies of attitudes to be related; almost never will there

exist a perfect correlation. As a matter of fact, if a perfect correlation were to exist, it would probably mean that data on one and the same attitude were gathered under two different headings. Still, much could be learned about the relationship between attitudes from a study of deviant cases.

An examination of the interview records suggests interesting hypotheses which may partially explain why some of the men deviated from prevalent patterns. All three tolerant men who claimed that they had gotten a bad break in the army gave the same reason for their "bad break." In a general way they all resented the treatment they received from their officers. For example, a thirty-three year old air corps sergeant said:

"I wasn't treated right by those damn officers. There was no respect due to an enlisted man from an officer."

Thus, their feeling of having had a "bad break" was not due to an overall attitude toward the army but rather to a specific resentment of officers.

On the other hand, it is also striking that contrary grounds were offered by the intolerant men for their thinking they had gotten a good break in the army. Five of them, either in connection with this question or elsewhere in discussing army experiences, declared that they reacted favorably to the army because of the discipline of army life or because of the position of authority they held. For example, one intolerant man stated that what he liked most was:

"The discipline and the strong order. . . . If I were single I'd make a career out of it. I liked the physical culture, fitness."

A twenty-six year old sergeant said:

"I enjoyed every day of it. When you're home you have no steady routine, you do what you want when you want."

For three other intolerant men, army life was a "great adventure." For example, a twenty-six year old private first class said:

"It was a good experience; things happened that never would have happened. Going across, seeing some of the wonders of the world. Before that I never got farther than the north woods and never expected to go any farther. It's a good experience."

A thirty-one year old sergeant said:

"It's put more beef and muscle on me. . . . Panama was very beautiful and the Islands—they get you. I'd like to go back."

Clearly these eight of the twenty intolerant men felt that they had had a good break for reasons markedly different from the matter-of-fact

attitude of having had a "good break" in the army which characterized tolerant veterans.

Another question designed to probe subjective feelings of deprivation, may also be discussed. Responses to: "Do you think the time you spent in the army set you back in any way?" revealed a statistically *significant* difference between tolerant and anti-Semitic veterans (Table 2(V)).

TABLE 2(V)
"DO YOU THINK THE TIME YOU SPENT IN THE ARMY SET
YOU BACK IN ANY WAY?"

	Tolerant		Stereotyped		Outspoken and Intense		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Yes	29	47	19	45	36	77	84	56
No	26	43	15	36	9	19	50	33
Other	6	10	8	19	2	4	16	11
Total	61		42		47		150	

Here again, there was a greater tendency among intolerant persons to view their army experiences as deprivational. The tolerant men who expressed an opinion on this question were almost evenly divided as might well have been expected; but only a fifth of the anti-Semites saw their war experiences as having been no setback.

The tendency to "feel" that an experience was deprivational can coexist with the ability to objectively evaluate what has actually happened. The findings seem to suggest that intolerance is highly associated with feelings of deprivation and that such feelings persist despite the "knowledge" that one's fate was by no means particularly bad. If this is so, then it should be obvious that attempts to guide the individual to a rational view of past experiences must fail if emotional (and, one may add, unconscious) needs force the individual to view them as deprivational. Similarly, attempts to combat intolerance by means of rational arguments may fail for identical reasons.

In this connection, statements by certain veterans were striking in the degree to which they revealed the discrepancy between objective conditions and the individual's estimate of them. These veterans admitted frankly that frustrations suffered in the army were slight. Nevertheless,

they expressed feelings of deep deprivation which revealed convictions of personal incompetence. For example, a twenty-five year old air corps mechanic who held the rank of corporal summarized his army career as follows:

"I did no fighting, I was never wounded, I was never hospitalized."

Yet, in answer to the question as to whether he had had a bad break in the army, he declared:

"I decided it was impossible to get ahead with the rules the army had and the way the game was being played. I couldn't do the things you had to do to get ahead. There's no use for one person to try to change things. If you want a rating, you let the sergeant make a loan that you know he won't repay."

Thus, for him, failure to rise in the ranks was a subjective frustration. His remarks revealed efforts to rationalize his real or felt incompetence in gaining promotion in the army, in exactly those terms which anti-Semites often use to rationalize their intolerance. He accused others of underhanded methods, against which it was useless to fight, and he considered the hated institution as so overpowering that it was impossible "for one person to try to change it."

A most convincing demonstration that objectively bad experiences do not necessarily lead to feelings of frustration and deprivation was found in the statement of a twenty-five year old ex-combat infantryman private first-class (not a corporal as in the case above), who fought in North Africa, Italy, and Germany, and who claimed, with some justification, that army life had ruined his health and set him back both in education and in the business world. He described his war experience as follows:

"I was a teletype operator in Africa for three or four months, and wasn't in combat then, but all the rest of the time I was laying wire in combat areas. We lost 80 per cent of our company. I never thought I had a chance to come out of it alive."

Yet when questioned about his "break" in the army, he declared:

"I came out lucky. I came out swell on money and passes. I didn't get any breaks, but to come back and be alive today is really swell."

It is not possible to say a priori that all combat soldiers experienced greater actual (as opposed to felt) deprivations, since a man might have experienced rough treatment while training in this country, and even have been maimed in the army without ever having seen the front. But, aside from these individual cases it may be assumed that, within a random

sample, noncombat soldiers experienced the least actual hardship, combat soldiers the most, and combat-support troops something in between. The lack of any relationship between type of army service and subjective feelings of deprivation can be seen below, from Table 3(V). Whether the individual soldier felt he had had a bad break in the army proved independent of his war experience. In fact, the percentage of combat soldiers who felt they had had a bad break was somewhat lower than that of noncombat soldiers.

Thus, a man's evaluation of his army career in retrospect was largely independent of the actual deprivations experienced and depended mainly on his emotional attitude toward this experience in particular, and, one may add, to life experiences in general.

TABLE 3(V)
ARMY EXPERIENCE AND FEELINGS OF DEPRIVATION

	Combat		Combat Support		Noncombat	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Good break	30	57	12	40	42	63
Bad break	7	13	4	13	13	19
Normal break; Other	16	30	14	47	12	18
Total	53		30		67	

Answers to specific interview questions on army experiences could be tabulated with exactness and statistically treated, but they did not encompass the totality of the war experience or the total reaction to it. Therefore, in an additional effort to study these reactions, the entire section of each interview dealing with wartime experiences was evaluated as a whole. In this evaluation an attempt was made to estimate the dominant feeling of the subject toward his army experience. It was found that the data permitted reliable judgments as to whether the veteran's responses indicated that he was either: (1) embittered about army life; (2) attached to it (gratified by it); (3) indifferent to it or had feelings about it which could not be clearly determined; or (4) accepted it in a matter-of-fact way. (See Appendix for reliability of coding procedures.)

When, on the basis of these categories of analysis, those men who accepted army life were contrasted with those who were embittered by

it, a strikingly *significant* difference was found between the intolerant and tolerant veterans (Table 4(V)). The overwhelming majority of those who were tolerant had an attitude of acceptance toward army life. The outspokenly and intensely anti-Jewish veterans presented a completely reversed picture, in that they were overwhelmingly embittered toward it.⁴

TABLE 4(V)

ACCEPTANCE OF ARMY LIFE

	Tolerant		Stereotyped		Outspoken and Intense		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Accepted army life	44	81	21	64	6	17	71	58
Embittered about army life	6	11	7	21	20	56	33	27
Attached to, or gratified by	4	8	5	15	10	27	19	15
Total	54		33		36		123	

In evaluating the preceding table, it should be mentioned that mere "beefing" about the army was not evaluated as constituting embitterment. On the contrary, it was part of the mores of most enlisted men. Nor were statements about the army as being "O.K." considered as revealing attachment to army life.⁵

All sociopsychological investigations seem to indicate that attitudes toward the army are largely the result of experiences antedating enlistment. Thus, what these tables reveal about attitudes toward life, is largely independent of whether or not the individual was a soldier. Judging one's

⁴ Similar patterns characterized the attitude of the veterans in respect to anti-Negro feeling. See Chapter VIII.

⁵ Within a consensus society one would expect that in time of war such a central institution of society as the army would be accepted as "normal" in a matter-of-fact fashion. That fully 27 per cent of those who expressed their opinions in this type of interview should have revealed an essential embitterment toward army life, was therefore striking. To this figure of 27 per cent must be added the 15 per cent who were gratified by army life—again an attitude which in our society can hardly be considered a "normal" reaction to army experience. Thus, an underlying dissensus with one of the basic institutions of our society was found among more than 40 per cent of those who could be classified.

war experiences as either deprivational or not is a function of the individual's total personality or of the adequacy of his adjustive mechanisms in particular. The case material collected by Grinker and Spiegel⁶ corroborates this observation for combat soldiers. Likewise, the fifth of the group who declared themselves attached to or gratified by the army experiences were disposed toward such a reaction because of long-standing factors. They displayed neither a general tendency to accept life experiences in a matter-of-fact fashion nor an ability to make the best of a given situation. These men liked army life because it offered gratifications not previously available to them in civilian life. An examination of their interview records indicates they were men who described their economic or social position before induction into the army as having been deprivational. They seemed to be men who were poorly adjusted to civilian society, and who found gratification and release in the particular adventure and comradeship of army life. They appreciated the "freedom" they experienced in the army from certain restrictions required by "nice" society. It was not surprising, therefore, that among this group there was a high concentration of intolerant men.

It is easier to understand why intolerance was much more frequent among those who rejected military life. The army—particularly during a time of war—is such a central institution of existing society that one cannot very well accept existing society and reject the army, or vice versa. Racial tolerance is the attitude officially favored by the spokesmen of existing society, although they themselves may follow customs condoning intolerance. But intolerance is not favored by the men who reject the army simply because official society condones it, though pretending to frown upon it. On the contrary, intolerance, like hating the army, is an expression of the same body of underlying tendencies, namely a dissatisfaction with existing society, which expresses itself through all channels available.

The thesis postulating an association between intolerance and rejection of existing society was such an important one that it had to be given further attention. When all has been said, the army as such is but one institution, and not the whole of existing society. To investigate this problem, the exclusively negative approach, namely the study of the rejection of institutions of existing society, would not do. There is hardly a man who does not disapprove of some aspect of existing society. And even if it were not so, according to the frame of reference within which this investigation proceeded, rejection of society, or the inability to form positive

⁶ Grinker, R. R., and Spiegel, J. P.: *Men Under Stress*, The Blakiston Company, Philadelphia, 1945.

ties, was not considered an attitude basic to human nature, but rather an after-phenomenon, the consequence of not having formed positive attachments in infancy and childhood.⁷ Therefore, it was considered equally important to study the individual's positive attachments in order to complete the picture of his attitudes toward existing society or any of its institutions. It was not enough to probe the individual's attitudes toward the army since this institution had certain features which might reasonably be rejected by the citizen who was unable to see beyond the petty annoyances of army life to the essential values at stake. The need thus arose to investigate the individual's positive ties to existing society and how their distribution related to intolerance. This was done chiefly in terms of national identification, for reasons outlined below.

The sample under investigation included many second generation Americans living in a metropolis and coming from a social and economic group which had inferior status within that city. They had all felt the impact of modern urban society with its high mobility and complicated division of labor, both of which tend to destroy the identification of the individual with primary and local groups. Instead, social identification and consensus among them was, in a measure, based on identification with functional organizations, and with more inclusive and national symbols of identification.

It is through these identifications that the individual gains a sense of belonging, a sense of personal security, and a sense of worth. It is obvious that the extent and strength of feelings of identification with more inclusive and national symbols of identification are not uniformly distributed throughout the community. For the purposes of this analysis, it seemed reasonable to assume that those sectors of the community where feelings of national identification are weak are made up of individuals whose personal disorganization, insecurity, and apprehension are relatively high.

Interviewing on army experiences presented an adequate opportunity to gather attitude data on identifications with the community at large—the nation. This section of the interview was chosen because in the context of reporting the hardships of wartime experiences, veterans seemed less likely to offer superficial verbalizations which fitted patriotic formulae.

Observers have pointed out that while the war was in progress, American soldiers were not apt to make spontaneous use of patriotic symbols in discussing the war, either among themselves, in conversations with Allied

⁷ The valid assumption that rejection is due to an initial positive attachment which was frustrated may be disregarded here, since rejection as a reaction-formation following initial positive ties still signifies an absence of positive attachment at the present moment and a felt alienation from existing society.

troops and civilians in foreign countries, or for that matter, in conversations with the enemy during occupation. This same absence of a spontaneous use of patriotic symbols was encountered in the sample. It was found that less than one-tenth of them referred favorably to such symbols during any part of the interview. (For example, "the United States," "the flag," "the nation," were considered as patriotic symbols or phrases.) Three per cent referred negatively to such patriotic symbols, while the bulk of the veterans (88 per cent) made no references to them whatsoever. The section of the interview dealing with wartime experiences contained a wide range of questions, both direct and indirect, which might well have supplied the opportunity for such responses.

However, these data throw little light on the actual extent of the men's national identification. They merely indicate a pattern of speech according to which it is "silly" or in bad taste to express freely one's attitudes in terms of traditional symbols of patriotism. This lack of a spontaneous use of symbols, it should be noted, was typical for both intolerant and tolerant veterans.

Since national and patriotic symbols were of no help in fixing the degree to which a man felt he "belonged," other methods were used to determine the character and extent of the veteran's identifications with the nation, and his ability to identify with the objectives of the war. The results of such probes indicated that, by and large, reasonably well grounded identifications of such types were associated with significantly greater intolerance.

For example, in an indirect attempt to probe identifications with the war effort, the veterans were asked who gained through the success of the war. The responses could be classified as to the presence or absence of collective identifications. The men who employed collective symbols which obviously included themselves, rather than specific symbols which excluded them from the group who gained through victory, were *significantly* more tolerant. Collective identifications including the veteran himself were such responses as: "we all gained," "the people," "our country," and the like (Table 5(V)).

As can be seen from the following table, only an approximate two-thirds of the group used symbols which made it possible to determine their attitudes.

Respondents who manifested their collective or national identifications, as well as those who failed to manifest such identification, were not characterized by any particular wartime experiences. Those who felt that

TABLE 5(V)
 "WHO GAINED THROUGH THE WAR?"

	Tolerant		Stereotyped		Outspoken and Intense		Total	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Collective sym- bols, including veteran	14	34	11	52	6	19	31	33
Nobody	19	46	5	24	4	12	28	30
Specific sym- bols, excluding veteran	8	20	5	24	22	69	35	37
Total	41		21		32		94	

they, too, were recipients of the benefits of the war, irrespective of the cost of the war to themselves, obviously had strong enough feelings of identification to believe that the results of their effort were beneficial to the country as a whole and thus also to themselves. They had a stronger sense of personal security, of "belonging," and these factors seemed intimately connected with a lesser need or desire to express hostile sentiments against particular groups—either functional or ethnic.