

History RMA, Thesis

# Dreaming of Home

*A neurohistorical approach to study masculinity through the dreams and nightmares of British prisoners of war in Nazi Germany (1940-1942).*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the dreams and nightmares of British prisoners of war in Nazi Germany to shed new light on the historical embodiment of masculinity. It aims to make progress in the historiography of PoW camps in Western Europe during the Second World War. Contrary to scholarship on PoW camps in South-East Asia and the Pacific, little work has been done on the gendered experience of imprisonment in Nazi Germany. I argue that traditional source materials, such as letters and memoirs, significantly lack emotional portrayal due to silencing gender expectations. However, the dreams and nightmares experienced inside the Laufen PoW camp are indicative of a wide range of emotions. I use insights from neurocognitive studies to illustrate how these dreams and nightmares can be used to study the mental trauma and emotional state of the prisoners of war.

My research is founded on source material created by British Major Kenneth Davies Hopkins. Between 1940 and 1942, Hopkins collected over 600 descriptions of dreams inside the Laufen PoW camp. These dream descriptions offer an intimate insight into the prisoners' obsessive thoughts, fears, and fantasies. I conclude that men experienced a wide range of emotions that contested gender expectations at the time. The emotions include severe homesickness, self-doubt, mental trauma resulting from military combat, and a break-down in self-esteem. I also investigate how friendship offered some feeling of security and explore the existence of same-sex desire within the camp. I thereby demonstrate how a historic study of dreams can be used to investigate silenced emotions in gender history.

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## Introduction

In popular memory and popular history, the Prisoners of War (PoW) camps in Nazi Germany live on as grand spectacles of adventurous stories. Tall tales of escape competitions amongst British prisoners of war have become well known through personal memoirs, films, and documentary series. Military historian Joan Beaumont observes that in England especially the stories of PoW camps have attained a somewhat mythical status.<sup>1</sup> This status is echoed in the academically informed studies on war imprisonment in Western Europe since they also rely on the same personal memoirs that shape public consciousness. As Beaumont points out, these memoirs never seem to show any emotional depth.<sup>2</sup> For instance, *Rumours: A Memoir of a British PoW*, *The Great Escape* (and the 1963 movie with the same name starring Steve McQueen), *Zero Nights*, and many more famous memoirs depict imprisonment as exhilarating or even enjoyable experiences. Soldiers never appear to be homesick, anxious, or ashamed of being imprisoned. These are however emotions that one would anticipate when imprisoned by the enemy after heavy combat. And even though there is substantial literature on the traumatic experiences of British soldiers during the First World War, none of the PoW memoirs mentioned above-discussed trauma and only two historians detected manifestations of mental problems amongst detainees.<sup>3</sup>

Beaumont points out that literature on prisoners of war in Nazi Germany seems to be very ‘old fashioned’.<sup>4</sup> This is in contrast to studies on PoW camps in South-East Asia and the Pacific during the same period, which do focus on the role of gender, race, or colonialism. According to Beaumont, this is because those areas ‘lend themselves better to innovative historiography’, but given the time period in which the historiographical debates on PoWs in Nazi Germany were played out, I also think that it could be a generational difference.<sup>5</sup> Most of the twentieth-century scholarship lacked our current understanding of gender and embodiment.

In the past, gender historians have noted that many (non-imprisoned) British soldiers struggled with the gender expectations of being a masculine war hero.<sup>6</sup> British society had

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<sup>1</sup> J. Beaumont, ‘Review article: Prisoners of War in the Second World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 42 (2007) 3, 535-544, there 536.

<sup>2</sup> Beaumont, ‘Review article: Prisoners of War in the Second World War’, 536.

<sup>3</sup> Simon MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2005) & David Rolf, *Prisoners of the Reich* (London 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Beaumont, ‘Review article: Prisoners of War in the Second World War’, 537.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 540.

<sup>6</sup> M. Roper, ‘Between manliness and masculinity: the “war generation” and the psychology of fear in Britain, 1914–1950’, *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005) 2, 343-362 & Joanna Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960. Gender, class and ethnicity* (London 1994).

constructed an image in which men were expected to be fearless soldiers who endured hardship through stoicism. Showing emotions was considered to be unmanly and mental war trauma was even seen as a childish exaggeration.<sup>7</sup> These gender expectations were not only implicitly learned through upbringing but were also communicated very explicitly during military training.<sup>8</sup>

I find it highly unlikely that these men did not experience strong emotions or trauma during their imprisonment. It is more believable that their gender identity simply did not allow soldiers to show these subjective experiences, which results in a lack of source material that display private emotional experience. This presents a puzzling methodological challenge: how do you conduct historical research on subjective experiences which very likely occurred but are not discussed amongst historical subjects? In this thesis, I would like to present an unconventional way to study these silenced emotions by investigating the dreams and nightmares that prisoners of war experienced. Over the past thirty years, neuroscientists have established that a large majority of dreams and nightmares reflect the emotional state during waking life. Especially in the case of mental trauma, there is a strong connection between nightmares at night and the obsessive thoughts and depressive clouding of the mind that takes place during the daytime.

This thesis thus consists of two red threads that are intermingled and also contain several historiographical debates, which makes it somewhat of a cobweb that needs to be untangled first. On the one hand, I try to create an insight into the male experience of western PoW camps during the Second World War. This thread contains different strings of historiography: literature on masculinities and experience as well as research on prisoners of war camps in Western Europe during the Second World War. The second thread questions the state of the art of cultural history by engaging with the academically awkward topic of dreams. A topic historians have experimented with in the past, but which has been largely neglected due to the infamous indecipherable quality dreams seem to have. In this introduction, I firstly discuss both threads before I endeavour in the source material and research questions.

## **Dreams in historiography**

The study of dreams in Western historiography is not entirely new. The first historian in the modern era who seriously considered dreams as an object of historical enquiry was Jacques Le

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<sup>7</sup> Roper, 'Between manliness and masculinity', 343.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, 343.

Goff in his *Pour un autre Moyen Âge* (1977). Le Goff, a leading figure of the *nouvelle histoire*, criticised traditional ways of writing history which was predominantly focused on ‘great men’. By only studying administrative documents, historians neglected to consider the historicity of mentality. One way of exposing those past mentalities, Le Goff contended, was the study of dreams. He argued that dreams were historically relevant since within ‘a given culture people tend to dream particular kinds of dreams’, and that dreams stress ‘anxieties and conflicts’ within a particular cultural mentality.<sup>9</sup> In his case study on the dreams of Henry I of England (1100-1135), coincidentally another ‘great man’, he concluded that medieval dreams could be used to assess ‘obsessions and repressions, examining both individual and collective mechanisms of censorship’ during the medieval period.<sup>10</sup> Historian Peter Burke was quick to pick up on this new interest of Le Goff, which he called a new ‘lively inquiry’ in the history of mentalities in a 1981 book review.<sup>11</sup> Burke himself would wait another twenty years before the subject appeared in his own *Varieties of History* (1997). Like Le Goff, Burke stated that ‘dreams have a cultural layer of meaning as well as a personal and a universal layer’.<sup>12</sup> Both historians applied a close reading to symbolism within the dreams.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Burke’s survey on dreams of seventeenth-century Englishmen showed that the oneiric imagery (the visuals of dreaming) was predominantly concerned with religious life and iconography.<sup>14</sup>

Even though their terminology might have already given it away, it should be noted that Le Goff and Burke equipped themselves with Freudian lenses when studying historical dreams. Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper’s *Dreams and History* (2004) also discussed dreams solely in terms of psychoanalytic theory by referring to unconscious urges and drives. Nevertheless, Roper and Pick do keep the door open for other approaches in their conclusion: ‘there is something inexhaustible about [dreams], just as Sigmund Freud said; and doubtless, as psychoanalytic theory and technique changes, the way that we are told dreams, and the way that we interpret them, will change as well’.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago 1980) 201.

<sup>10</sup> Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 202.

<sup>11</sup> P. Burke, ‘Medieval Dreams’, *London Review of Books* 3 (1981) 4, 37-41, there 37.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca 1997) 28.

<sup>13</sup> Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History*, 27-29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, 27-29.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper, *Dreams and History: The interpretation of dreams from ancient Greece to modern psychoanalysis* (London 2004) 268. Other works on dreams within the field of cultural studies have been published, but the work by Le Goff and Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper are characteristic of the current positions within historiography. Other noteworthy works are: a chapter in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Colombia 1979), Peter-André Alt, *Der Schlaf der Vernunft: Literatur und Traum in der Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt 2002), Helen Groth & Natalya Lusty, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History* (London, 2013), Jonathan Crary, *24/7 Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep* (New York, 2014). Charles Stewart, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece* (London 2017) and Janine Riviere, *Dreams in Early Modern England* (London 2018).



Even in the year 2020, every scientific examination of dreams is expected to at least incorporate a dutiful discussion of Freudian theory on dreams. Of course, Freud's *Die Traumdeutung*, published in 1900, has been of paramount importance by introducing dreams as rational scientific objects of study. Although deeply aware of Freud's historical contribution in an epistemological sense, current-day neuroscientific research is exceptionally critical towards the psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams in general, and Freudian theory in particular. They criticise scholars in the humanities who continue coming back to Freud.<sup>16</sup> The main empirical findings that refute Freudian theory can be summarized as follows.

Essential to Freudian dream theory is the idea that dreams are disguised wish fulfilments. For Freud, these wishes are mostly central urges which motivate humans, like sex and hunger. These wishes are incorporated into the dream to occupy the mind with those urges. This prevents the body from waking up and trying to fulfil the wish in waking life. Dreams for Freud are thus a diversion from physically executing the urges, or in his own words, dreams are the 'guardians of sleep'.<sup>17</sup> Often, the unconscious mind concealed its urges through symbols instead of literal imagery. By disguising these wishes the mind is still preoccupied with the urges while the body gets enough time necessary for physiological recovery. According to this theory, dreams, therefore, show us the unconscious wishes that people have during waking life.<sup>18</sup>

The discovery of different sleep phases such as REM and nREM in the 1950s undermined the theory that dreams are the guardians of sleep. Dreams only take place at specific moments during sleep-cycles which means that the body can rest without needing a diversion.<sup>19</sup> During REM sleep the muscles paralyse, the eyes start to move rapidly and the brain becomes hyper associative. It is theorised that this happens to contextualise new memories with older ones. Typically, this process takes place every seventy to ninety minutes, varying from a duration of five minutes to half an hour.<sup>20</sup> Since dreams only take place during specific moments during the night, neuroscientists refute they have anything to do with being the 'guardians of sleep'.

Concerning the very notion of wish-fulfillment, Freud famously claimed that: 'wish-fulfillment is the meaning of each dream'.<sup>21</sup> Since these wishes are always disguised in adult

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<sup>16</sup> Michaela Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination* (New York, 2017) 11.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (Leipzig 1900) 106.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> W. Domhoff, 'Why Did Empirical Dream Researchers Reject Freud? A Critique of Historical Claims by Mark Solms', *Dreaming* 14 (2004) 1, 3-17, there 6.

<sup>20</sup> Domhoff, 'Why Did Empirical Dream Researchers Reject Freud?', 8.

<sup>21</sup> Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 106.

dreams, Freud used anecdotal evidence from his own daughter, Anna, claiming that the dreams of children are less hidden and thus ‘invaluable proof’ for his theory.<sup>22</sup> Not only can this be considered a flaw of argumentation – basing a theory on the very exceptions of a theory – but longitudinal laboratory studies have shown that until the age of five, children's dreams are often static and bland in content, with few correlations between the described waking wishes.<sup>23</sup> In reaction to these studies, present-day Freudians claim that free associations, based on the dream narratives, must first be obtained to find the true wish.<sup>24</sup> This is well has been refuted. Successive studies that played association games with research subjects did not appear to express any new emotions or thoughts.<sup>25</sup> Rather, it is now more generally assumed that dreams are less complex:

Laboratory dreams generally involve clear, coherent accounts of realistic situations in which the self is involved in mundane activities and preoccupations. 90% would have been considered credible descriptions of everyday experience... Both the prosaic nature of content and the rich phenomenological similarity to waking experience found are in keeping with the results of early [dream] studies, but discrepant from the usually accepted conception of dreaming.<sup>26</sup>

Neurocognitive researchers assume that most dreams are simply reasonable simulations of real-world events that are not so improbable in their content.<sup>27</sup> Whereas Freud was looking for hidden symbolic meanings within dreams that convey emotions and urges, non-Freudian researchers maintain that dream content is fairly straightforward in its meaning. Quite simply, laboratory tests show that a large majority of dreams are on the same subjects that occupy a person’s thought in daily life.<sup>28</sup>

Although no theory is currently accepted on the true meaning of dreams, the AMPHAC-model formulated by neuroscientists Ross Levin and Tore A. Nielsen is commonly regarded as authoritative since it is built on extensive empirical and falsifiable grounding. The model assumes that during sleep the amygdala (AM), prefrontal cortex (P), hippocampus (HA), and the cortex cingularis anterior (C) are transforming short-term memory into long-term

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<sup>22</sup> William Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming. Mind-Wandering, Embodied Simulation and the Default Network* (Oxford 2018) 248.

<sup>23</sup> David Foulkes, *Children's dreams* (New York 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 251.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, 252.

<sup>26</sup> F. Snyder, I. Karacan & J. Scott, ‘Phenomenology of REMS dreaming’, *Psychophysiology*, 4 (1968) 3, 364-384 375.

<sup>27</sup> Domhoff, ‘Why Did Empirical Dream Researchers Reject Freud?’, 9.

<sup>28</sup> R. Levin & T. Nielsen, ‘Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation: A review and new neurocognitive model of dreaming’, *Current Directions in psychological science* 18 (2009) 2, 84-88, there 85.

memory. During sleep, the input of our daily lives is incorporated into the already acquired memory. It is argued that these functions have an evolutionary advantage because the transformation to long-term memory helps to identify pleasure and danger in the future. Laboratory tests in which REM-cycles are abruptly also show that research subjects find it harder to identify and contextualise emotions in new situations. It is very likely that due to the disruptions the amygdala – which mediates emotional responses – is unable to form new neurological pathways with the rest of the AMPHAC-network.<sup>29</sup> Levin and Nielsen, therefore, argue that dreams also play a key role in the identification and contextualisation of emotions.

The emotional reactions during the dreams determine what Levin and Nielsen call ‘affect load’.<sup>30</sup> When someone experiences repetitive nightmares, like in the case of trauma, it is assumed that memories of a past event are unsuccessfully integrated because of the high amount of affect load. The shock is so intense and overwhelming that it is hard to identify and anticipate the event, this also means that the brain is unable to contextualise a person’s emotional reaction. As a result, the lower part of the brain, the triune brain (also known as the reptilian brain), is stuck in the fight, freeze, or flight response during daytime and will keep trying to process the events during nighttime.<sup>31</sup> I quote another passage from these neuroscientists, also to give the historian-reader a taste of the discourse in dream studies:

Under normal circumstances (normal dreaming), [dream] elements are combined in novel contexts to facilitate the acquisition and the maintenance of fear extinction memory elements, possibly functioning as an offline regulator of the emotional activation system. DD [disturbed dreaming] indicates failures of emotion regulation as it resists processing and often self-terminates due to awakening, thus becoming strengthened through repeated activation and avoidance.<sup>32</sup>

These neuroscientists thus argue that dreams are contextualising memories and emotions for future reference. Considering the occasional strange run-of-the-mill dreams, we should therefore first try to understand dreams matter-of-factly, evaluating the dream content on the emotional responses they evoke.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Levin & Nielsen, ‘Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation’, 85-87.

<sup>30</sup> R. Levin, G. Fireman, S. Spindlove & A. Pope, ‘The Relative Contribution of Affect Load and Affect Distress as Predictors of Disturbed Dreaming’, *Behavioral sleep medicine* 9 (2011) 3, 173-183, there 175.

<sup>31</sup> Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (London 2018) 14.

<sup>32</sup> Levin, et al , ‘The Relative Contribution of Affect Load and Affect Distress as Predictors of Disturbed Dreaming’, 175.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

In summary, contrary to the Freudian theory followed by cultural historians, who assume that dreams try to keep the mind occupied with symbolic representations of human urges to prevent the body from waking up, it is now hypothesised that dreams are mostly concerned with the processing of memory and emotions. Instead of finding the hidden or repressed meaning in dreams, I argue that historians should take note of the insights from neuroscientific research and take most dream content at face-value. Since dream content is so strongly tied to emotional processing, dreams might specifically be used for historical research on emotions when other sources are not readily available.

## Neurohistory

Integrations of neuroscientific findings into historical research are relatively new. The first historian to introduce neuroscience in the field of history was Daniel Lord Smail in his 2008 book *On Deep History and the Brain*. Through neuroscience, Smail explained how human emotions, experiences, and behaviours emerge and disappear over time. He called this approach ‘neurohistory’. Central to neurohistory is the plasticity of the brain: the idea that the human mind develops in accordance with its historical environment. This is a ground-breaking hypothesis since for most of modern history the mind was thought to be separated from the material world and it was assumed that this mind was static in its development path. This traditional theory of the mind, also known as Cartesian dualism since it was first formulated by René Descartes in the seventeenth century, understands that there are two fundamentally distinct phenomena in the universe: there is matter (including the body) and there is the mind.<sup>34</sup>

Neurohistory is a fast-growing offshoot from the field of the history of emotions, which some call history of experience or the history of feelings. Over the past two decades, this field has grown into an established and accepted terrain of historical enquiry. These studies are concerned with the historical changes of emotional experience, how emotions are performed, embodied, and how they are depicted in texts. As pointed out by Rob Boddice, neurohistory is specifically concerned with extremely long or very short timeframes since these are indicative of either evolutionary changes, or abrupt neurocognitive alterations. Neurohistory is unique in its extensive use of neuroscientific research.<sup>35</sup> The break with Cartesian dualism is especially important. In his work, Smail invites historians to no longer think in terms of dualisms, be they

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<sup>34</sup> Rob Boddice, *A history of Feelings* (London 2019) 89.

<sup>35</sup> Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester 2017) 157.

mind-body or nature-nurture. Instead, he proposed to approach history in terms of bioculture, stating that ‘there is not much culture without biology’.<sup>36</sup>

What Smail meant by this is that neuroscientists now understand individuals to have ‘neurological signatures’ in the body which are shaped in reaction to their environment.<sup>37</sup> Neurological signatures are the neurological patterns in the brain that collectively make up the self. A change in environmental stimulus results in a change of neurological patterns and will eventually lead to a change in neurological signatures. It explains why the same amount of physical stimulus for two persons – for instance, a punch - can have different pain experiences for both individuals. Likewise, it explains phenomena such as phantom pain, in which the individual still has the knowledge, the neurological signature, of a body part even though they miss the input itself. Treatment for phantom pain involves the modification of a patient's neurological signatures through therapy, which makes the brain aware that the body part itself is missing. From this, Smail concluded that different historical practices can have profound neurophysiological consequences, since a change in the environment means a change in the neurological signatures.<sup>38</sup> In his book, he for instance discusses how new practices of timekeeping or the invention of the steam engine also influence our neurological pathways. They changed our spatio-temporal awareness and as a result, also created new nervous illnesses.<sup>39</sup> Smail’s work informs us that the functioning of the brain should be studied in its situatedness, something Smail himself calls ‘situated cognition’.<sup>40</sup> Below I will further develop the role of situated cognition in the formation of dreams specifically, and how it relates to Nielsen and Levin’s AMPHAC-model.

## Neurohistory and dreams

The influence of the historical environment on the way our experiences are shaped is exceptionally interesting when we consider that neuroscientists understand dreams to be culturally different as well. Le Goff already found that within a given culture, people tend to experience particular kinds of dreams. Further ethnographic and neurocognitive studies have indeed shown that the vocabulary of images, narrative structures, and the affective responses

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (London 2008) 154.

<sup>37</sup> Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain*, 155.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, 117.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, ‘Neurohistory in Action Hoarding and the Human Past’, *Isis* 105 (2014) 1, 110-122, there 110.

within dreams also differ from culture to culture.<sup>41</sup> The academic interdisciplinary journal *Dreaming* contains a wide range of such analyses. For instance, the Amazonian Ese Eja community has specific conceptual imagery of what is referred to as ‘multinatural perspectivism’. Individual dreamers see the world from shifting perspectives between the spiritual, corporeal, environmental, and animal world.<sup>42</sup> The same holds for certain emotions that are experienced while dreaming. Jeannette Mageo found that ‘Not Quite American’-identities, more often dream stories of self-doubt and alienation in comparison to their ‘American’ peers, which has a strong correlation with the same emotions in waking life.<sup>43</sup> Here again, we see the influence of situated cognition: different socio-cultural environments create different neurological signatures amongst people, which leads to different dreams. I argue that these insights into the situatedness of dreams and how they convey the emotional state of an individual allows historians to move past the Freudian understandings of dreams that are currently applied by cultural historians. A study in the dreams of the prisoners of war in Nazi Germany might therefore expose the emotional depth that is currently missing in historiography. This is both the case for emotions in general, but specifically for anxiety and trauma.

As psychologist Bessel van der Kolk wrote, when it comes to emotions and trauma, ‘the body keeps the score’.<sup>44</sup> Over the last four decades research from psychologists and neuroscientists has offered new insights into the effect of emotions and trauma on the brain. As explained above, many experimental psychologists argue that dreams are generally composed of coherent emotions that reflect the mental condition of the dreamer. This becomes even stronger in the case of traumatized subjects, who typically dream vivid accounts of awful scenarios that are based on memories of specific traumatic events.<sup>45</sup> It is now generally understood that the triune brain activates the body’s stress response during a traumatic event. Studies on traumatised people show how images, sounds, or thoughts related to the particular trauma, can trigger a cascade of stress hormones and nerve impulses that drive up the blood pressure, increase oxygen intake and increase the heart rate, even decades after the event.<sup>46</sup> These neurological patterns that are fired together, will get wired together, forming new neurological signatures which makes trauma a perdurable experience that manifests through

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<sup>41</sup> L. Kirmayer, ‘Nightmares, neurophenomenology and the cultural logic of trauma’, *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 33 (2009) 2, 323-331, there 329-330.

<sup>42</sup> D. M. Peluso, ‘That which I dream is true: Dream narratives in an Amazonian community’, *Dreaming* 14 (2004) 3, 107-119.

<sup>43</sup> J. Mageo, ‘Nightmares, abjection, and American not-quite identities’, *Dreaming* 27 (2017) 4 290-310.

<sup>44</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Nielsen & Levin, ‘Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation’, 85.

<sup>46</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 41.

repetitive nightmares.<sup>47</sup> Seeing that trauma fundamentally alters the brain's neurological signatures, feminist scholar Katherine Malabou even pleads to considers mental trauma as a physical injury.<sup>48</sup>

One last remark on brain plasticity: As Rob Boddice also notes, neurohistorians have to take into account that brain plasticity also implies a different functioning brain in different historical periods.<sup>49</sup> This might be a critique of my suggestion to apply current-day neuroscientific findings. After all, a brain from a soldier in the Second World War might behave differently to trauma than a brain today. This is certainly true, but brain plasticity should also not be overstated; the entire brain is not one clump of warm clay. What makes dreams and nightmares so interesting as a neurohistorical research object is a connection between the triune – or the reptilian – brain's fight, freeze, or flight response, which, as the name implies, is a product of long-term human evolution and already fully functional on the day we are born, and the triune brain's disruptions on the functioning of the malleable part of the brain, the limbic system that is formed in the context of culture.<sup>50</sup> The AMPHAC-model proposed by Levin and Nielsen specifically concentrates on these two parts. The triune brain's fight, freeze, or flight response results in the failure of the limbic brain to accommodate the fear responses, which lead to the failure of the AMPHAC-systems to contextualize and understand the traumatic events. Soldiers might have learned behavioural patterns to act as a fearless masculine hero during combat training and might have learned not to discuss or even show fear, but the triune brain is still creating fear impulses by increasing the heart rate and driving up the blood pressure, forming new neurological signatures resulting in repetitive nightmares.

These neurocognitive reactions to trauma, I will argue, confronted these soldiers to their inability to live up to masculine gender expectations. Even though I talk about gender expectations here, it is important to underline that this does not imply naturalised sexual differences. For decades feminist scholars have shown how gender can be a fluid and ambiguous concept; gender constructs in society should not be naturalised yet again by talking about the 'male' brain.<sup>51</sup> I am however interested in how the cultural constructions of masculinities, the environmental world, are internalised in the malleable limbic brain and come in conflict with responses of the triune brain which results in particular dreams and nightmares.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded. From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (New York, 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London 2019) 11-12.

<sup>50</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 30-31.

<sup>51</sup> M. Aerts, G. Mak, M. Schwegman & I. van der Tuin, 'Sekse als vraagstuk. Een rondetafelgesprek over vrouwenstudies en genderstudies', in: Myriam Everard & Ulla Jansz (ed.), *Sekse. Een begripsgeschiedenis* (Amsterdam 2018) 261-279, there 265.

Terminologies of the relationship between historical experience and environment vary widely between different academic fields. Neurocognitive researchers use the term neurophenomenology; philosophers follow what they call extended mind theory; cultural historians prefer to talk about embodiment and psychologists use environmental psychology.<sup>52</sup> All approaches do, however, in their own words, underline the notion of situated cognition. Since masculine gender expectations are such an important part in this study I will, for the remainder of this introduction, therefore present the current historical understandings of masculinity and the literature of prisoners of war. I will then present my source material, methodology, and research questions.

## Historiography of masculinities

Historical studies that investigate masculinity as an object of enquiry in and of itself was up until the 1990s considered as ‘extremely rare’.<sup>53</sup> For instance, one of the main figures of the history in western masculinity, John Tosh, described how the founding editors of the journal *Gender and History* struggled to commission any article on the topic in the 1990s.<sup>54</sup> Taking their cue from feminist theorists, the somewhat brute and static conceptualisation of hegemonic masculinity became systematically problematised in the last three decades. The works from postmodernist scholars were especially guiding in this. Michel Foucault and Judith Butler had already questioned gender relationships by attending to discursively produced power relations. Influential as well was Joan Scott’s ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’ which urged historians to analyse ‘systems of power’.<sup>55</sup> For Scott, gender is always present, even when women or men are not. Gender, she argued, is a concept that comes into existence by a wide range of social, political, and institutional bases that presuppose sexual identity. She encouraged historians to deconstruct these power relationships, to pay special attention to textual sources from policy documents to newspapers, and how they presuppose gender roles in society.

It can be tricky to conduct such research. Masculinity is a concept that has been perceived as so self-evident and universal that it needed little discussion and is, therefore, less explicitly talked about than other gender concepts. Joan Scott already warned that this

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<sup>52</sup> Respectively, Kirmayer, ‘Nightmares, neurophenomenology and the cultural logic of trauma’, 323; A. Clark & D. Chalmers, ‘The Extended Mind’, *Analysis* 58 (1998) 1, 7-19; Willemijn Ruberg, *History of the Body* (London 2020); Robert Gifford, *Environmental psychology: principles and practice* (Colville 2007).

<sup>53</sup> R. Connell, ‘The Big Picture: masculinities in recent world history’, *Theory and Society*, 22 (1993) 5, 597-623, there 606.

<sup>54</sup> J. Tosh, ‘The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?’ in: John H. Arnold & Sean Brady (ed.), *What is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World* (2011), 7-36, there, 18.

<sup>55</sup> J. W. Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986) 1053-1075, 1058.



implicitness can lead historians into amplifying masculine stereotypes. She noted that historians should always keep in mind that gender is a sticky concept and that most discussions on gender tend to reify or naturalise discursively produced concepts. In other words, for Scott a study of the experience of male imprisonment could easily fall into the trap of amplifying the discursively produced masculine identity. I argue that this has precisely been the case in historiography of PoWs since it is mostly concentrated on male heroes. Moreover, the matter-of-factness of masculinity also means that there are not many sources that explicitly discuss ‘masculinity’; what masculinity is or how it differs from femininity is easily left unnoticed. To counteract this problem, historians of masculinity study how it is entanglement with other concepts.

Historian Stefan Dudink for instance, in his research on masculinity in the Dutch Republic of the eighteenth century, shows how the gender concept became intertwined with the role of ‘citizenship’. Oftentimes, a criticism of a slacking sense of masculinity was aimed at the notion of Dutch citizenship or vice versa. Dudink argues therefore that masculinity as such should not be seen separate from contiguous and entangled ideas. A similar entanglement can be seen in England during both world wars. In her analysis of the representation of hegemonic masculinity in England, historian Sonya O. Rose shows that masculinity was associated with good civic virtue and social manners. During the war, soldiers also had to conform to the image of a masculine hero. Such a hero was able to form strong bonds with his mates, was physically fit and therefore showed moral and physical strength, was a team-player but also, as an individual, went above and beyond his duty by boldness, adventurousness, intelligence, efficiency, and patriotism.<sup>56</sup> I will delve further into this during the thesis, but for now, it is important to stress the many dimensions in which masculinity implicitly manifests itself.

The great increase of histories of masculinity in recent decades has contributed greatly to the expansion of gender history as a research area, but also made gender history a one-sided study into the culturalization of sex. In 2011 John Tosh asked whether we can speak of a ‘history of masculinity’ at all since our knowledge of the subject is mostly confined to discourse.<sup>57</sup> This emphasis on discourse, he argued, resulted in the neglect of the physicality of the body and its experience. In a recent roundtable discussion, historians Marjan Schwegman, Mieke Aerts, Geertje Mak, and Iris van der Tuin also argued to reincorporate physicality and experience into

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<sup>56</sup> S. O. Rose, ‘Temperate heroes: concepts of masculinity in Second World War Britain’, in: Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann & John Tosh (ed.) *Masculinities in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History* (Manchester 2004) 177-199, there 183-189.

<sup>57</sup> Tosh, ‘The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?’, 24.

the research on gender.<sup>58</sup> The same assessment was made by Laura Lee Downs who noticed that the lack of attention on the body results in the ‘flattening’ of complex and varied individual emotional experiences.<sup>59</sup> More and more historians become aware that we lose something significant when we only speak of masculinity in terms of discourse.

Michael Roper’s manifesto ‘Slipping Out of View’ already made a powerful plea to explore subjectivity and emotion in gender history.<sup>60</sup> In this piece, Roper discusses some fundamental problems that have traversed the fields of British socio-cultural history. He argues that historical subjects should be approached as active, thinking, and feeling beings who are constantly negotiating the cultural norms that discourse analysis so importantly pointed out.<sup>61</sup> This plea also connects with Joan Beaumont’s earlier quoted statement in which she criticised scholarship on PoW camp in Nazi Germany for not being innovative enough. Roper shows that because of this one-dimensionality many ‘vicissitudes of masculinity’ during the war slip out of view.<sup>62</sup>

Roper, in other words, attends to the precariousness of human experience in relation to the discursive masculine identity, not so much to the changing discourse of masculinity. In his text, Roper applies psychoanalytical methods to study masculinity. The principle advantages, he argues, lie in the ability of psychoanalysis to look beyond what is said. This allows him to pay close attention to the silences in the sources.<sup>63</sup> He notes that the inability to write about one’s suffering is just as meaningful as a graphical description. Roper quotes one soldier from the Great War who writes: ‘Several of my friends have been killed in the business, which is sad. I feel so tired today. I cannot write anymore. Please send socks as soon as possible’.<sup>64</sup> Roper points out that the abrupt change of topic can be seen as a sign of the soldier’s complex trauma in which he is unable to come to terms with the war horrors and is longing for domestic comforts. He shows that the letters written by soldiers are curiously detached from emotional content, something that was also addressed by historian John Tosh.<sup>65</sup> I appreciate this creative approach by Roper since these silences are also highly characteristic in the source materials on PoWs during the Second World War, but which have, up until this point, not been picked up by

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<sup>58</sup> Aerts, et al, ‘Sekse als vraagstuk. Een rondetafelgesprek over vrouwenstudies en genderstudies’, 265.

<sup>59</sup> L. L. Downs, ‘Writing Gender History’, in: Marek Tamm & Peter Burke (ed.), *Debating New Approaches to History* (London 2019), 101-127, 109.

<sup>60</sup> M. Roper, ‘Slipping out of view: Subjectivity and emotion in gender history’, *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005) 1, 57-72.

<sup>61</sup> Roper, ‘Slipping out of view’, 66.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 63.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, 65.

<sup>65</sup> J. Tosh, ‘Hegemonic masculinity and the history of gender’, in: Dudink, Hagerman and Tosh (ed.), *Masculinities in Politics and War* (Manchester 2004) 41-62, there 52.

historians even where one might anticipate signs of intense emotional distress. Contrary to Roper, however, who solely uses a Freudian reading of the sources, I will use neurocognitive findings to understand how the triune brain's fight, freeze, or flight response disrupts internalised masculine gender expectations. This results in a confrontation of the inability to live up to those ideals. According to the AMPHAC-model, this confrontation becomes visible in the dreams and nightmares of PoWs. This, I argue, lays bare what Roper calls the historical vicissitudes of masculinity. I will discuss how this will be operationalised after I present the source material.

## Sources

This study on the dreams and nightmares of British PoWs is only feasible because of a unique research project conducted by the late British Mayor Kenneth Davies Hopkins. Before the war, Hopkins was studying psychology at Birmingham University, under the guidance of Professor Charles Valentine. After intense combat in the summer of 1940, Hopkins was detained by Nazi German soldiers and was forced to march from French to *Oflag VII-C*, a PoW camp in South-East Bavaria where many soldiers would be interned. Testimonial to his optimistic spirit, Hopkins started to collect the dreams of fellow prisoners during his confinement, hoping to write a research article on the dreams once he returned home. Hopkins and Valentine had ongoing contact throughout his research in *Oflag VII-C*. In a letter dating from 8<sup>th</sup> November 1940, professor Valentine wrote the following:

Dear Hopkins, I have heard through your wife that you would like to make a study of dreams while you are interned, and I think it is an excellent idea. [...] I am ordering a copy of my book (now called "The New Psychology of the Unconscious") to be sent to you through the proper channels. [...] of course personally I think many dreams have no deep significance, and many are primarily caused by physiological processes. [...] I should think you ought to be able to get sufficient material from your research to publish an interesting article when you return.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Wellcome Library, London (hereafter WLL), PSY/VAL/1/ Books and Correspondence, Prisoner of War Post. Kriegsgefangenenpost. Major Kenneth D. Hopkins, British Prisoner of War, Gefangenennummer. 411. Lager Bezeichnung, Oslag [sic] 7C/H. Germany, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1940.

Hopkins intended to use the dream reports for scientific purposes after the war.<sup>67</sup> He, unfortunately, died in 1942 due to complications of pneumonia and was unable to finish his research, but he did leave a remarkably well-structured corpus that contained many detailed dream descriptions alongside a rich inventory of metadata. At the start of the project, the 79 contributing research participants were assigned a subject number. These subject numbers were noted in each reported dream, along with the date of the dream and the dream entry number (counting from 1 to 660). This information was collected in five different notebooks, with an additional sixth notebook which contained extra information such as the names of the research participants and corresponding the subject numbers. Hopkins also made a categorisation on the dream topics, their proposed meanings, the corresponding dream numbers, the addresses of the participating officers. He also included a list for further reading and a handful of personal notes such as a hidden food inventory and some drawings. Although the material is very well preserved, the first notebook containing the first 181 dreams has disappeared. This only leaves the other 479 dreams accessible to study.

Every dream description also contained valuable footnotes. The footnotes discuss which dreams are analogous with the events inside the camp, contain descriptions of the emotional state during the dream, how those emotions related to the emotions during waking life, and sometimes a Freudian interpretation of the dream narrative written by Hopkins himself. From Hopkins' correspondence, we can deduce that he collected the dreams every morning. In one footnote Hopkins refers to a research participant who recorded his dream with pen and paper and kept the notes under his pillow, suggesting that at least some prisoners kept their diary as well.<sup>68</sup> Since Hopkins' notebooks are all written in one handwriting, it is likely that Hopkins himself then copied the reports.

I discovered the source material by coincidence in the Wellcome Collection. Through letters in Professor C.W. Valentine's archive in the Wellcome Collection, we can reconstruct the journey that the dream reports made after Hopkins' passing. A letter dating from April 19, 1945, from Major R.G Boulton (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) notes that

CONTRIBUTORS	
1. Lt. D. FRAZER	39 Maj. HICKEY
2. Lt. MERA	40 Maj. MAQUE
3. Maj. R.D. HOPKINS	41 2/Lt. NICHOLS
4. Col. HOLLAND	42 Lt. CLIFTON
5. Capt. LOCKWOOD	43 Maj. WALLACE
6. Maj. M. WILSON	44 Lt. WRIGHT
7. Maj. S. LAWSON	45 Maj. ARCHER
8. 2/Lt. P. DODD	46 Capt. MORTON
9. 2/Lt. C. PETERKIN	47 2/Lt. LESLIE
10. Lt. Col. LEFROY	48 Maj. COUSINS
11. 2/Lt. SILVERWOOD - COPE	49 Capt. BLACKETT
12. Maj. T. PRINCE	50 Capt. RAWLINGS
13. Maj. JONES - MORTIMER	51 Capt. LODER
14. Capt. PROUD #	52 Maj. MASON
15. Lt. BREWSTER #	53 Capt. MOUND
16. Maj. CARR	54 Maj. CHILLINGWORTH
17. 2/Lt. BOLSTER	55 Maj. SETH - SMITH
18. 2/Lt. PRESTON	56 2/Lt. WALLACE
19. Lt. Col. MILLER	57 Maj. KILGOUR
20. Pilot Off. DERCON	58 2/Lt. MARTIN
21. Capt. LAINE	59 Maj. VINING
22. Maj. VERSCHOYLE	60 Capt. FREEMAN
23. 2/Lt. LEWELTIN	61 Maj. BEVILLE
24. Capt. ELLIOTT	62 Maj. HODGSON
25. Capt. FERENS	63 2/Lt. H.C. MUNDY
26. Capt. CROFT	64 2/Lt. ARCHER
27. Maj. PILDITCH	65 Maj. BRUSH
28. Lt. Col. GETHEN	66 Lt. Col. TAYLOR
29. Maj. E.N. DEALL	67 Capt. LEWTHWAITE
30. Maj. EATON	68 Capt. H.B. MEEK
31. Lt. PETRIE	69 2/Lt. PRATT
32. Lt. ROBERTS	70 Lt. Col. SWINBURNE
33. Lt. LAWREN	71 2/Lt. WAGSTAFFE

Figure 1 WLL, PSY/VAL/4 Notebook, list of research participants

<sup>67</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/1/ Books and Correspondence, Prisoner of War Post. Kriegsgefangenenpost. Major Kenneth D. Hopkins, British Prisoner of War, Gefangenenummer. 411. Lager Bezeichnung, Oslag [sic] 7C/H. Germany, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1941.

<sup>68</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 311, page 317.

Hopkins notebooks were passed to him through U.S. Army channels. Boulton describes how he found Valentine's letter to Hopkins and how he hopes that by sending the notebooks to Valentine, he might be able to do something with them.<sup>69</sup> In 1989, after Valentine's passing, Birmingham University librarian Jean Gamink sent the notebooks to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Archive in Liverpool, which was finally relocated to central London in the 2000s. Retired psychologist David Stevens tried to write an article on the source material, but he also died before being able to publish anything.<sup>70</sup> The BPS archived his research notes which contain some preliminary observations on the dreams, such as the number of dreams about combat and sexual dreams.<sup>71</sup> From a printed personal e-mail it can be deduced that he presented a conference paper in June 2004 titled: 'Major Hopkins' Dream Collection: PoW dreams from WWII' at the 21st annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Dreams in Copenhagen. The content of the paper is unclear, but since the research notes were only work in progress and did not contain a methodological explanation, none of his work is used in this thesis.

The only published work on Hopkins' dream collection is by the hand of psychologist Deirdre Barrett, who in 2014 wrote an exploratory article. In the article, Barrett compares the dreams from Hopkins' collection to the data from another dream study conducted in 1966 under a randomised group of U.S. American citizens. The ad hoc comparison allowed her to conclude some general findings. She for instance noted that men appeared significantly more frequent in these PoW dreams than women did.<sup>72</sup> She also noticed a higher percentage of dead characters which 'probably reflected previous wartime and camp experience', and a significant drop in positive emotions (from 40% to 20%).<sup>73</sup> Since the 1966 study did not contain information on the frequency of war-related dreams, Barrett is only able to note that 22% of all the dream scenarios took place inside the camp, that 3% of the dreams were about escape and that 15% were about active combat.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, she does not further reflect on the value of these findings and neglects to contextualise the dreams in their situated cognition. By also leaving out the AMPHAC-model, a valuable opportunity is missed to conduct neurohistorical research.

The way Hopkins structured his research does however highly benefit a neurohistorical approach. The dream reports were most probably direct transcriptions of the research subject's

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<sup>69</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/1/ Books and Correspondence/letter to Professor C.W. Valentine, The University, Edmund St. 3, Birmingham, England. 19<sup>th</sup> April 1945.

<sup>70</sup> The History of Psychology Centre Archive, London, Stev/001/01/Analyses Folder.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>72</sup> D. Barrett, 'Content of Dreams from WWII POWs', *Imagination, Cognition and Personality* 33 (2014) 1, 193-204, there 200.

<sup>73</sup> Barrett, 'Content of Dream from WWII POWs', 201.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem.

dream description and Hopkins only applied his Freudian interpretation of the dream in the footnotes. Furthermore, he actively asked the research subjects whether they noticed similarities between the dream and what happened during waking life. Although these statements from the subjects are subjective, they do show correlations between dreaming and waking thought which can be further explored. In the dream footnotes, Hopkins paid extra attention to the emotions that dreams evoked, from describing general ethos to specifically pinpointing feelings that were attached to objects. Especially in the case of nightmares, extra attention is paid to physiological reactions such as sweating, sleep-talking, and screaming. The combination of detailed dream descriptions, with clear notations on the emotions they evoked, allows for a unique neurohistorical research. Below I will discuss how that will be operationalised.

## Methodology and research questions

Following the findings of William Domhoff, Tore Nielsen, and Ross Levin which suggest that dreams and nightmares should firstly be analysed on the alignments of the evoked emotions (as reported by the research subject) and the dream content itself, I will categorise the reported dreams according to these two criteria.<sup>75</sup> I will also contextualise these results with the environmental observations made by Hopkins, which I will supplement with the historiography on prisoners of war in Nazi Germany, and observations made by gender historians on the notion of masculinity during that same era.

Since neuroscientific research has shown a causal relationship between emotions during daytime and images during dreaming, a neurohistorical approach will potentially offer an intimate insight into the interior lives of the prisoners of war interned in *Oflag VII-C*. This will reveal a more complex understanding of the gender experience inside the camp. I will specifically pay attention to Michael Roper's remarks to attend to the silences of trauma and emotions of British soldiers to come to a broader understanding of the vicissitudes of masculinity. My primary research question is: *which particular vicissitudes of masculinity during warfare come to light in the dreams and nightmare experiences of British WWII officers imprisoned in Oflag VII-C?* I divided this main question into several sub-questions to operationalise the neurohistorical approach.

Since a neurohistorical approach calls for a detailed understanding of the living environment of the prisoners, my first sub-question will try to map the current historiography

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<sup>75</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 117 & David Foulkes, *Dreaming: A cognitive-psychological analysis* (Hillsdale 1985).

of PoW literature. In this first chapter, I ask the descriptive sub-question: *what were the living conditions, and what was the masculine gender expectation before and during Hopkins' imprisonment in Oflag VII-C?* In this chapter, I review secondary literature on *Oflag VII-C*. I also analyse primary source material such as the war diaries from the British Expedition Force to track the movement of Major Kenneth Hopkins' battalion and I will discuss the few historical studies on gender experience inside Nazi PoW camps.

In the second chapter, I follow Roper's call to attend to the silences of trauma. I investigate whether vicissitudes of masculinity can be distilled from the nightmares of British PoWs. Central in this chapter will be the functioning of the AMPHAC-model and the affect load of the described dreams. Affect load concerns the amount of emotions evoked by the dreams. This is depended on the frequency of nightmares, the strong bodily reactions like sweating and screaming, strong emotional content within the dream, and the frequent interruption of sleep-cycles (waking up). There is no score system or a set number of symptoms that conclusively determine whether there is a high affect load. I will use a close reading of the sources in which I look for these manifestations in the dream. In the first chapter, I will only concentrate on the nightmares, since they contain a higher affect load and often contain direct images from combat memory which makes it easier to determine causality between trauma and nightmare. With historiography on British masculinity during this era, I will also evaluate how the nightmares and their affect load were aligning with the masculine gender expectations at the time. Central to this second chapter is the research question: *Which particular nightmares show strong affect load amongst the imprisoned officers in Oflag VII-C and thereby expose vicissitudes of masculinity?*

However, vicissitudes of masculinity during wartime are not exclusively traumatic. Even though the AMPHAC-model is specifically concerned with traumatic and anxious experiences, some dreams during imprisonment might still have been pleasant. It is harder to find causality between dreams and mundane or routine experience, but still, there are laboratory findings that suggest a relation between general day-time emotions and dreams. As stated above, about 90% of dreams are realistic depictions and inspired by what happened during daily life. Although it is harder to determine the affect load of these pleasant dreams, I will nonetheless experiment whether it is possible for historical enquiry to research these dreams in the third chapter. As with the second chapter, I am interested in how these dreams illustrate vicissitudes of masculinity through their alignments between dream image and emotions by asking the sub-question: *Which particular dreams show strong affect load amongst the imprisoned officers in Oflag VII-C and thereby expose vicissitudes of masculinity?*

Following Domhoff, Levin, and Nielsen's findings that dreams should be categorised on the alignments of the evoked emotions and dream content, I grouped several dream themes that contained a strong affect load. When it comes to explicitly anxious or even traumatic experiences, the most frequent matches resulted in the following dream themes: 'anxiety and returning home', 'doubt about home based on news outside the camp', 'combat and trauma', and 'anxiety about appearances'. These themes will therefore be discussed in the second chapter. Other dream narratives were also present, but do not necessarily seem to have been the result of trauma or anxiety since the research subjects explicitly reported on other emotions. In the third chapter, I will investigate these non-traumatic dream themes, which were 'Friendship and same-sex desires', and 'food'. Since food is the most common dream topic even in mundane circumstances it is strangely enough hard to point out a causal relationship between imprisonment and hunger when it comes to dream studies.<sup>76</sup> Because there also is no clear connection to my research question on masculinity, I will therefore refrain from delving further into the analysis of food-based dreams and only analyse 'friendship' and 'same-sex desires' as pleasurable dream themes.

In my conclusive remarks, I will reflect on which vicissitudes of masculinity inside *Oflag VII-C* become visible when we investigate dreams and nightmares. I argue that a wide range of emotions was present inside the PoW camp and that the personal experience of detainees was more complex than is currently acknowledged in the historiography. I also meditate on how a neurohistorical approach to dreams can enrich the current state of the art of cultural history. Not only does this approach offer new insights into the experience of prisoners of war, but it also invites a methodological and epistemological reflection on the use and value of dreams as historical source material.

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<sup>76</sup> Calvin S. Hall & Robert L. van de Castle, *The content analysis of dreams* (New York 1968) 42.



## Chapter 1: Arriving at *Oflag VII-C*: reviewing the living conditions of imprisonment

The role of situated cognition is centre stage in neurohistory. Historian Edmund Russell notes that in order to understand the plasticity of the brain, we need to contextualise behaviour in terms of environmental specificities. Changes in the behaviour can then further be understood in terms of neurological changes in the brain.<sup>77</sup> Before my analysis of the embodiment of masculinity through the dreams and nightmares of the officers imprisoned in *Oflag VII-C*, it is, therefore, necessary to create a picture under which circumstances these officers were captured and imprisoned and what gender expectations on masculinity were prevailing in society in general, and the army specifically. The central question to this chapter is: *what were the living conditions and what was the masculine gender expectation before and during Hopkins' imprisonment in Oflag VII-C?*

### 1.1. Historiography on PoW camps in Nazi Germany

Over the last two decades, historians have noticed that the historiography of prisoners of war in the Second World War is underdeveloped. Military historians Joan Beaumont and Brian Feltman have argued that academic historians have left the field largely to popular historians, memoirists, and documentary makers.<sup>78</sup> Although this situation has begun to change over the last five years with innovative research by gender historians like Clare Makepeace and religious scholar Vesna Drapac, all aforementioned historians argue that research on PoW camps in Nazi Germany is still lacking insights into the gendered experience of imprisonment. In 2007 Beaumont identified two branches of literature: those who deal with the politics of PoW diplomacy and those on the living conditions of British Commonwealth prisoners in internment camps in Nazi Germany.<sup>79</sup> Today, I would add a third sprouting branch which consists of the work by Makepeace and Drapac, but I will return to them momentarily.

The first branch of scholarship specialised in the diplomacy of PoWs mainly focus on the role of the Geneva Convention, practices of shackling, and deals on prisoner exchanges.

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<sup>77</sup> E. Russel 'How can Neurohistory Help Us Understand the Past?', in: Edmund Russell (ed.), *Environment, Culture, and the Brain New Explorations in Neurohistory* (Munich 2012) 9-17, there, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Brian Feltman, *The Stigma of Surrender: German Prisoners, British Captors, and Manhood in the Great War and Beyond* (Chapel Hill 2015) 3-4. J. Beaumont, 'Review Article Prisoners of War in the Second World War', 535.

<sup>79</sup> Beaumont, 'Review article Prisoners of War in the Second World War', 534-535.

Military historians Arie Kovachi and Neville Wylie for instance argue that the Geneva Convention played an important role in the living conditions of PoWs. The convention stipulated that all imprisoned personnel had to be treated with respect and dignity. Prisoners in Nazi Germany were allowed to have contact with their families and with the International Red Cross, not only to report on their capture but also to maintain fairly regular contact through letter writing. Geneva stipulated that health care should be provided when necessary, and that food intake should be on par with the rations that enemy soldiers receive daily.<sup>80</sup>

Even though the Geneva Convention was never followed to the letter, Wylie and Kovachi agree that British and German diplomats invested significant energy to find common ground on the treatment of prisoners. Especially article 11, on the diet of soldiers, was frequently referred to by both parties. The underlining idea is that when one party was following the rules, it was more likely that the other party also treated their captives better.

The second branch of literature largely disagrees with these findings. In contrast to Wylie and Kovachi, Vasilis Vourkoutiotis and David Rolf argue that the Germans often neglected the Geneva convention. Based on the personal memoirs published after the war, Rolf in particular notes that the treatment of soldiers was alarming. Prisoners were often beaten, humiliated, and underfed simply when a camp guard had a personal vengeance on one of the prisoners. Although Berlin claimed that British prisoners were kept on the same rations as the German prison guards, it became clear quite early on that this was not lived up to in practice.<sup>81</sup>

Simon MacKenzie made an important contribution by combining both branches. He underlines how unprepared Nazi Germany was in detaining the large number of soldiers who were captured in the summer of 1940. As a result, many camps were chaotically managed. Although attempts were made to live up to the Geneva convention, the unexpected high number of prisoners at the start of the war made it impossible to oblige to the rules. For example, *Oflag VII-C*, the camp where Major Kenneth Hopkins and many others from the British Expeditionary Forces were incarcerated, was severely overcrowded.<sup>82</sup> The camp, a castle that used to be the seat of the Archbishop of Salzburg, housed 1.500 soldiers. This is three times the number of people that it could reasonably accommodate.<sup>83</sup> MacKenzie sketches an image of the extreme conditions inside the camp:

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<sup>80</sup> Arie J. Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity. Britain and the United States and their PoWS in Nazi Germany* (Berkeley, 2005) 282.

<sup>81</sup> Vasilis Vourkoutiotis, *Prisoners of War and the German High Command: The British and American Experience* (Basingstoke 2003) & David Rolf, *Prisoners of the Reich* (London 1988).

<sup>82</sup> MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 96.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, 96.

‘It was extremely cramped’, Major Charles Irwin of the Northumberland Fusiliers remembered. Up to ninety or so officers finding themselves living in a room only 45 feet by 25 feet was not unusual, each room filled with triple-tier bunks rising from floor to ceiling. Toilet and washing facilities were inadequate, and there was no laundry service. ‘Conditions are almost unbearable’, Michael Duncan, a second lieutenant in the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, wrote despairingly in his diary on 29 June 1940.<sup>84</sup>

MacKenzie also stresses that the way camps were managed differed between camp guards. The monocle-wearing Prussian camp guard of *Oflag VII-C*, Oberst Von Frey, is reported to have called the Geneva Convention a document for ‘old women and pacifists’.<sup>85</sup> In several instances, Von Frey used deadly force out of sheer boredom or irritation.<sup>86</sup> Food rations in *Oflag VII-C* mostly consisted of small potatoes, which, by the time they reached the camp, were already largely rotten: ‘only a small part of each potato was edible; the rest was just revolting’, wrote one of the inmates.<sup>87</sup> Importantly, however, many food parcels provided by the Red Cross started to arrive around the summer of 1942. The parcels alleviated the direst circumstances, although hunger was never completely eased.

By combining the insights of diplomatic research on the Geneva Convention and the Red Cross with the autobiographical branch, MacKenzie successfully shows how both were strongly intertwined and that living conditions differed between camps. To come to a deeper understanding of the living conditions of the Hopkins’ battalion though, I will try to combine both insights, and mainly concentrate on the information we have of *Oflag VII-C* since the conditions were wide-ranging per prisoner of war camp. Where certain information is lacking, I explicitly say when I base assumptions on reports from other camps.

## 1.2. Summer of 1940

Before I delve into what we know about the capture of Hopkins battalion, the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment, which was captured on 22 May, it is important to discuss the circumstances that led to the capture of Major Hopkins’ regiment. According to Neville Wylie and Simon MacKenzie, most soldiers were captured after weeks of heavy combat in a military

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<sup>84</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, 111.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, 157.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem, 157.

system that quickly fell apart. Men were invariably ‘filthy, scruffy, and hungry’.<sup>88</sup> MacKenzie underlines that during the summer of 1940, both sides did not prepare for Nazi Germany to advance so fast through Western Europe. Many surrendering Englishmen, especially of low rank, were shot on sight since no instructions were given on the imprisonment of opponents.<sup>89</sup> Historians also point out that there was strong resentment amongst Nazi German soldiers towards the British. This was not only because they saw their friends being killed by British soldiers, but also because of (untrue) rumours that the British were using dum-dum bullets, a type of ammunition banned under international law.<sup>90</sup>

Military war diaries archived in the National Archives in Kew give us insight into the timeline of Major Hopkins’ movement before his imprisonment. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1940, the forty-year-old major reported his arrival at Bolbec-Nointot station, a train station in Normandy, France.<sup>91</sup> His regiment (8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Worcestershire) then moved up through Tourville towards Moncheaux near the Belgian border. By March 12 they continued to Le Boujon.<sup>92</sup> Even though German patrols were encountered on multiple occasions, there were no casualties in these early months in France. Historian Louis Scully even suggests that this period might have been regarded as a continuation of training camp.<sup>93</sup> Hopkins’ task was to patrol about fifteen kilometres in front of the Maginot Line, an area with patches of forest and cropland which had been unattended for some weeks since most of the civilian population had evacuated the area. Following research by Kochavi and MacKenzie on other regiments, I assume that for Hopkins and the Expeditionary Forces the empty and peaceful setting in April must have created the impression that combat was unrealistic and far away. This is all changed on May 14<sup>th</sup> when Nazi German forces invaded the Low Countries. The rapid succession of the German advances was unheard of. In operation *Fall Gelb*, German armoured units pushed through the Ardennes and along the Somme, catching British Expeditionary Forces by surprise. Two days later Hopkins’ regiment is reported to have moved into Belgium, marching both night and day. The British organisation was caught by surprise and quickly fell apart; Hopkins’ regiment was decimated within a week. He was instructed to retreat, blowing up bridges behind him and sometimes trapping his fellow soldiers on the wrong side of the water.<sup>94</sup> The war diary notes

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<sup>88</sup> Neville Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy. Britain, Germany, and the Politics of Prisoners of War 1939-1945* (Oxford 2010) 94.

<sup>89</sup> MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 55.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, 56.

<sup>91</sup> The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNAK), WO 416/183/159, Name: Kenneth Davies Hopkins. Date of Birth: 24/5/1900.

<sup>92</sup> TNAK, WO 361/55, British Expeditionary Force, France: 8th battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

<sup>93</sup> Louis Scully, 'Dunkirk - 8th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment (1939-40)' (version 1 May 2015)

[http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/h\\_dunkirk\\_8thBn.php](http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/h_dunkirk_8thBn.php) (13 July 2020).

<sup>94</sup> TNAK, WO 361/55, British Expeditionary Force, France: 8th battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

that Hopkins and his regiment were last seen defending a bridge that crosses the Schelde between Calonne and Antoin. By May 22<sup>nd</sup> he was captured with dozens of other soldiers as a prisoner of war by German forces. Between the first German advances and the complete evacuation of Dunkirk on June 4<sup>th</sup> around 40,000 soldiers from the British Commonwealth had fallen into German hands.<sup>95</sup>

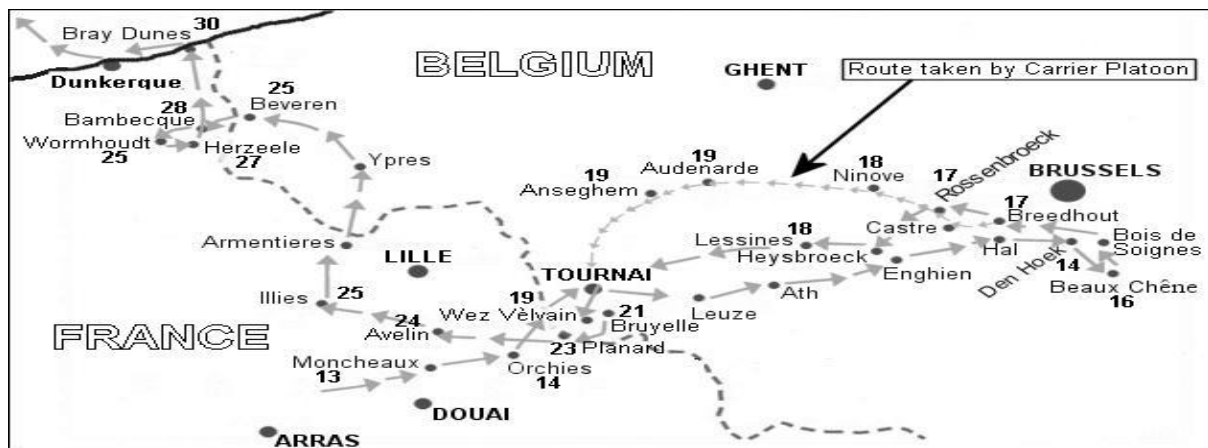


Figure 2 Route taken by the 8th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment (13th May to 30th May 1940) The numbers indicate the day in May that the Battalion was at that location. From Scully, Louis, 'Dunkirk - 8th Battalion Worcestershire Regiment (1939-40)' (version 1 May 2015) [http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/h\\_dunkirk\\_8thBn.php](http://www.worcestershireregiment.com/h_dunkirk_8thBn.php) (13 July 2020).

There is little doubt amongst historians that these first captives found themselves in a terrible situation. Historian Neville Wylie explains how the unexpected rapid collapse of the British army, the shock from combat, and the great losses of fellow soldiers were overwhelmingly traumatic for many.<sup>96</sup> Although we do not know what happened to Hopkins and the other captives in the first weeks of their capture, Wylie underlines that after weeks of marching through France and Belgium and two weeks of heavy fighting, all captives had to walk from France to East Bavaria for days on end while frequently being humiliated by German citizens once they passed the German border.<sup>97</sup> During their journey, food and accommodation were in short supply and as a consequence, most prisoners had to march for hundreds of kilometres on an intermittent hunger ration. Typically, soldiers were fed small pieces of black bread and thin potato soup.<sup>98</sup> Officers were separated from their men immediately. The feeling of defeat under these officers was bitter and is reported to have been an all-consuming conversation piece for

<sup>95</sup> Wylie talks about 45,000 English prisoners, whereas Kochavi talks about 34,000 English prisoners. Compare Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 92 with Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 95.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*, 94.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*.

the first few weeks of imprisonment.<sup>99</sup> During the first weeks especially, diarrhoea was widespread amongst soldiers because the utensils they used were only cleaned with cold water. Most cases of illness were non-malignant, but cases of bacillary dysentery inside the PoW camps never disappeared.<sup>100</sup> While Hopkins and his battalion fought for only two weeks, it must have been a horrific and chaotic experience to see the allied forces fall apart. The high rates of casualties and the unexpectedness of the attack were shocking. After a tiresome journey, they arrived at one of the many improvised prison camps. As a major, Hopkins was separated from the lower ranks and was brought to a camp that only held officers.

### 1.3. Laufen Castle, *Oflag VII-C*

In this section, I will discuss the PoW camp in which Hopkins and many of the officers of the British Expeditionary Forces were detained. Opinions about the living conditions of PoW camps in Nazi Germany differ, but in general, historians agree that these camps cannot be compared with the extermination camps like Auschwitz. Firstly, I will make some general observations about *Oflag VII-C*, before I further discuss the topic of hunger and violence within the camp.

During the Second World War Nazi Germany established different types of PoW camps. Most prominent were the *Stalags* (an abbreviation of *Stammlager*). *Stalags* were permanent camps for non-commissioned officers or enlisted men (privates, gunners, seaman, etc.). Air force prisoners on the other hand were imprisoned in special *Stalag Luft* (*Stammlager Luftwaffe*), and navy personnel was put in their own *Marlag* (*Marinelager*). Separated from their men were the officers, who were brought to their *Oflag* (*Offizierlager*). In contrast to the other prison camps, officers imprisoned in the *Oflags* were not expected to conduct manual labour. The entire German PoW system was controlled by the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (High Command of the Armed Forces) which meant that, at the end of the day, Adolf Hitler himself was responsible for all PoW-related decisions. In practice, however, he never visited any of the camps.<sup>101</sup>

*Oflag VII-C* was the main camp in Germany where all officers were held. The camp was improvised in an old castle that used to house the archbishops of southern Germany and was located in Laufen, near Salzburg. Around the time that Hopkins must have arrived at the camp,

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<sup>99</sup> Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 95.

<sup>100</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 28.

<sup>101</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 10.

Laufen held 600 officers and eighty orderlies, which was already over the limit of 500 persons that the castle would reasonably be able to confine. At that time camp commandant Lieutenant Colonel Frey reported that he expected another 1.600 officers to arrive during the summer weeks – excluding the extra orderlies that will be needed to maintain control in the camp.<sup>102</sup> All prisoners inside *Oflag VII-C* were English. The segregation of different nationalities amongst different camps was the product of Nazi race theory. White English soldiers, although perceived as inferior within Nazi racial ideology, nevertheless ranked favourably in comparison to black English soldiers. Soviet prisoners were regarded as *Untermenschen* as well, which meant that the Geneva Convention was ignored altogether in their case.<sup>103</sup>

Considering that most of the higher-ranked officers came from a well-to-do family, *Oflag VII-C* was most probably only populated with upper-middle-class white Englishmen. Among the prisoners in *Oflag VII-C* was Brigadier C.N. Nicholson who was the Senior British Officers (SBO), several colonels, and seventeen chaplains. Second lieutenant Desmond Llewelyn was also imprisoned in the camp. After his release, Llewelyn would become world-famous for playing the fiction character Q in seventeen James Bond movies. Both Llewelyn and Nicholson participated in Hopkins' dream study several times.<sup>104</sup>

The castle was surrounded by two recreational fields and contained an unroofed inner courtyard. The castle had four floors from which the top three served as sleeping quarters. The smallest room of twenty-five square meters housed twelve prisoners although most rooms were bigger and held up to one hundred officers. Each prisoner was given two blankets and one pillow on arrival, but no sheets were present. There were about twelve toilets present which was just enough for the first group that arrived at the castle. Cold running water was available for washing, which could be done by the single cake of soap every prisoner received each month.<sup>105</sup>

A lot has been written on the subject of food and hunger inside the camp. Historians like Simon Mackenzie, Joan Beaumont, and Arie J. Kochavi base their research on valuable sources like letter correspondences between prisoners and their families, memoirs about imprisoned life after the war, administration from the camp officials, and the international Red Cross archives. Simon MacKenzie concluded from the many letter correspondences that there

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<sup>102</sup> Ibidem, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Ibidem, 28.

<sup>104</sup> The fact that this was indeed the same Llewelyn can be verified in MacKenzie, *Colditz Myth*, 398 & Sandy Hernu, *The Biography of Desmond Llewelyn* (Seaford, 1999) 51.

<sup>105</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 14.

must have been severe hunger inside *Oflag VII-C*, especially in their first few months when the organisation of the camp was largely improvised.

Additionally, researchers base their work on the many reports that were written by U.S. diplomats in the first two years of the war. American diplomats inspected the camps every three months and sent reports to the British War Office. These reports were made to guarantee that both sides were abiding by the rules. For example, Neville Wylie notes that a report from November 1941 remarked that although the rules were not lived up to in daily practice, things could have been worse: ‘it would appear that the German government does not intend, for political reasons, to feed its prisoners better than its civilian population, particularly because of [Britain’s] use of food as a ‘weapon’.<sup>106</sup> From these reports, historian Neville Wylie critiques the image that MacKenzie sketched, noting that there was indeed hunger, but no starvation; the level of hunger was the same as German civilians.

I would argue that these reports which Wylie uses show a distorted image. Camp commander Von Frey in turn complained that prisoner rations were at least as good, if not better, than the amount of food German soldiers received.<sup>107</sup> It was of course in Germany’s interest to show the world they treated their prisoners according to the rules. This insured that German prisoners in England were treated accordingly as well. The U.S. reports were thus very tainted. As stated above, camp commander of *Oflag VII-C*, Oberst Von Frey, was known amongst prisoners to behave erratically violent.<sup>108</sup> But according to the American inspectors, however, Frey was a ‘cultivated and conscientious’ individual: ‘The irreproachable attitude of the camp commander and the senior officers and the fine morale of the prisoners together with the spirit of cooperation prevailing between captor and captured formed the major impressions obtained during this visit to *Oflag VII-C*’.<sup>109</sup>

In reality, historian Arieh J. Kochavi notes, many memoirs and letters cited food as the main source of complaints within the camps. Kochavi quotes an unnamed prisoner who is reported to have said: ‘[food] is provided with the purpose of sustaining life but with all luxuries eliminated and with certain necessities sharply reduced in quantity. Considering the fact that the prisoners have little opportunity for exercise the menu as a whole seemed little better than what could be called starvation rations’.<sup>110</sup> Food was on everyone’s mind – not just in terms of

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<sup>106</sup> Wylie, *Barbed Wire Diplomacy*, 93.

<sup>107</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 15.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, 157.

<sup>109</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 15.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, 15.



calories alone, but especially in terms of justice within the camp. A loaf of bread for instance needed to be cut into equal sizes:

All twelve men crowded round the one who was dividing the loaf, to make certain that they received their due, and as the loaf sloped away at each end, he had a thankless task. There was always someone who felt that the next piece to his was slightly larger, but to ensure that justice was done, a playing card was placed on each portion and we drew lots. This may sound extremely uncomradely, but terrible hunger strips off all the veneer of civilisation, and it becomes a case of each man for himself, and devil take the hindmost.<sup>111</sup>

Some testimonies, which Kochavi refers to, describe the obsession with food akin to Solzhenitsyn's descriptions of life inside Soviet gulags. Occasionally a camp guard would not finish his soup and upon putting the almost-empty container at the main gate, several prisoners would rush out and fight for the small spoon of soup that was left at the bottom.<sup>112</sup> Although the reports from the Red Cross and U.S. American diplomats can thus give us some extra insights, I argue that the testimonies from prisoners, which create a bleak and terrible picture of systemic hunger, should be authoritative over the diplomat reports.

Kochavi also points out that there was a serious lack of clothing in the first two years of the war. All soldiers were expected to wear the clothes they had on when captured. Replacement clothing was in rare cases provided, but always in exchange for the damaged clothes. This also meant that soldiers who were captured during the summer, and who had not packed many layers or gloves, had no opportunity to receive these from the German camp commander during winter. Kochavi quotes one officer who wrote in a letter to his wife 'I have no overcoat, underclothes, pyjamas or shoes, only a tattered cotton shirt so am bitterly cold. I have bought a German blanket after weeks of economy and by borrowing'.<sup>113</sup> Most of the time, the replacing garments were even worse than the already broken items. For instance, the prisoner's army boots that had disintegrated were replaced by wooden clogs.<sup>114</sup>

In summary, like the availability of food, other living essentials like clothing were hard to come by, resulting in harsh living conditions that were unimaginable when these officers were patrolling the French countryside only a couple of weeks ago. The Laufen Castle was

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<sup>111</sup> Ibidem, 16.

<sup>112</sup> Ibidem, 32.

<sup>113</sup> Ibidem, 16.

<sup>114</sup> Ibidem, 3.

severely overcrowded as well, which made the lack of living essentials and low quality of life systemic. In the paragraph below I discuss how parcels with extra clothing and food rations were sent from the home front and would gradually improve the living conditions from the summer of 1942 onwards.

## 1.4. Contact with home

As was stipulated in the Geneva Convention, prisoners were allowed to write letters to home. To alleviate their problems, many prisoners from all over Germany wrote home and asked their relatives to send them extra food and clothing.<sup>115</sup> According to Kochavi, the most active writers were the officers in *Oflag VII-C*.<sup>116</sup> Officers in this camp practically begged their families to send food parcels to supplement the camp rations. The Germans allowed one parcel per individual each month. In reality, the transport and distribution of the packages proved to be challenging – especially during the first two years. On Christmas Eve 1940, the *Times* published a letter from the aforementioned Brigadier Nicholson that except for three medical parcels and the letters, nothing had arrived in *Oflag VII-C* since the beginning of August. The War Office rejected the criticism, arguing that all posts had been handed over to the Red Cross.<sup>117</sup> It would quickly become clear that most of the parcels had been accumulating in Lisbon. By the time Nicholson had written the letter, over 100.000 packages were waiting there to be transported to Geneva.<sup>118</sup> Apart from Nicholson's letter, many other officers in *Oflag VII-C* wrote their MPs and complained about not receiving any parcels from the Red Cross. These letters were frequently read out loud on the Parliament floor. By the start of 1941, the War Office was still insisting that the letters were an exaggeration. The spokesperson even insisted that the letters were: 'misleading and calculated to cause needless anxiety to the families and friends of prisoners of war'.<sup>119</sup>

Typically, the parcels were supposed to contain protein and sugar to supplement the weekly rations, as well as medical instruments and personalised items such as books and pens. In the letter writings between Hopkins and his professor, there is evidence of him receiving these packages in July, including the writing material which he used to conduct his study. It can be assumed that a month later, Hopkins stopped receiving the packages just like all other

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<sup>115</sup> Ibidem, 20.

<sup>116</sup> Ibidem, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, 21.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem, 81.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem, 22.

prisoners. The letters however did continue to arrive at the camp, although the prisoners' letters were heavily redacted by the Nazi censors. Without a stamp of a camp censor, the letter was not allowed to arrive at the soldier at all.<sup>120</sup>

The 'parcel crisis' finally subsided by the summer of 1942. At its peak, over 174.000 parcels had accumulated in Portuguese ports. Transport arrangements to Geneva and the further distribution of the packages were finally established between Germany and Britain through the communication lines of the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross. At the same time, Britain had created a reserve of 300.000 more parcels that were stored in southern England.<sup>121</sup> For a while, this alleviated the major problems concerning food and clothing in the camps. Especially in *Oflag VII-C*, where officers had been urging to send parcels for months, there was a rapid overflow of extra foodstuffs and clothing.<sup>122</sup> The arrival of the parcels had a tremendous impact on the psychological wellbeing of the soldiers. One US inspector quoted one of the prisoners in his summer 1940 report, who said that the ability to touch articles that 'handled by my parents and packed with loving care', was an 'almost indescribable feeling'.<sup>123</sup>

For a little while, soldiers were able to increase their caloric intake from 1.500 to about 2.000 calories a day. The Nazi government however saw the increase of food packages as an opportunity to decrease the food rations that they provided while still following Geneva. By December 1942, the Nazis confirmed that they had slashed the rations by a third on the grounds of the blockade of food transport to Germany.<sup>124</sup> Bringing soldiers back to square one in terms of calorie intake. Although physical exercise was almost impossible, watery beer and the practice of 'goon baiting' made life a little bit more bearable. Goon baiting was a challenge amongst prisoners to create disorder amongst the camp officials without being caught. Practices included being counted double in the morning and singing English propaganda without moving one's lips.<sup>125</sup>

## 1.5. Masculinity and the Second World War

The First and Second World Wars continue to loom large in the historiography of twentieth-century masculinity in Britain. The debate has particularly focused on the reassessment of Edwardian concepts of manliness as a result of the war trauma that became so visible during

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<sup>120</sup> Ibidem, 4.

<sup>121</sup> Ibidem, 117.

<sup>122</sup> Ibidem, 17.

<sup>123</sup> Ibidem, 118.

<sup>124</sup> Ibidem, 93.

<sup>125</sup> Beaumont, *Review Article Prisoners of War in the Second World War*, 539.

the interwar period. Historians Ted Bogacz and Dennis Showalter argued that the traumatic shell-shock experiences of British soldiers after the Great War challenged pre-war norms of manly behaviour such as courage.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, based on autobiographical writings from soldiers, Michael Roper concluded that the interwar period ‘contained significant shifts in masculine identity’ which moved away from the masculine gender expectations towards men to be a fearless masculine hero.<sup>127</sup> Joanna Bourke, however, has questioned this narrative in numerous publications, arguing that many masculine gender expectations from the First World War were still upheld during the interwar years and that medical and military understandings of shock and fear were still emphasizing a lack of courage up until the late 1950s.<sup>128</sup>

Although the exact state of masculinity in interwar England is still debated, historians agree that by the start of the Second World War, masculinity became militarised once again. Very early in the Second World War, the image of the male hero made a comeback. German propaganda had already underlined the ‘hyper-masculine’ traits of strong and rational soldiers. In return, Sonya O. Rose argues, the British hero was clear and calm. In propaganda, the British celebrated their ‘stiff upper lip’.<sup>129</sup> Military training furthermore suppressed ‘muscular Christianity’, which emphasised qualities such as compassion, fairness, and altruism to give way to the image of the fearless masculine hero.<sup>130</sup> As was the case during the First World War, military training

placed particular value on stoic endurance, that is, the forbearance of pain and the suppression of sentiment.<sup>131</sup> ‘Kindliness’, Bertrand Russel commented, ‘was sacrificed for toughness, imagination for firmness’.<sup>132</sup> More than anything, military training consisted of spartan surroundings designed to toughen boys into men.<sup>133</sup> Important for now is that especially during

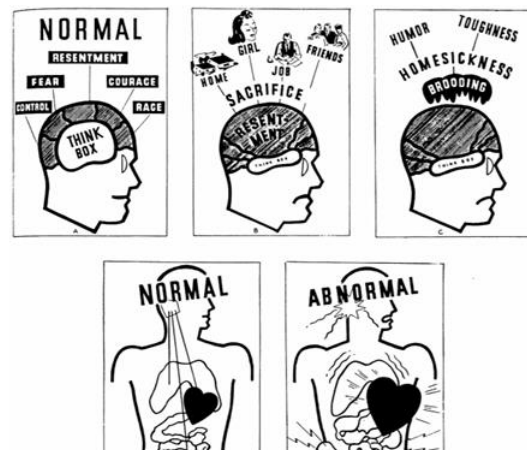


Figure 3. Illustrations from a SPEECH/LECTURE given in 1944 by R.R. Robert, 'Factors in Adjustment to Army Life: A Plan for Preventative Psychiatry by Mass Psychotherapy,' *War Medicine* 5 (1944) 3, 83-91, there, 85.

<sup>126</sup> T. Bogacz, 'War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'', *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989) 2, 227-256 & D. Showalter, 'The Great War and Its Historiography' *The Historian* 66 (2006) 4, 713-721.

<sup>127</sup> Roper, 'Between manliness and masculinity', 360.

<sup>128</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960. Gender, class and ethnicity* (London 1994).

<sup>129</sup> Rose, 'Temperate heroes: concepts of masculinity in Second World War Britain', 177.

<sup>130</sup> Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity* (Cambridge MA, 2001) 58.

<sup>131</sup> Roper, 'Between manliness and masculinity', 360.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in *Ibidem*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibidem*, 361.

wartime, nervous complaints were seen as failures of manliness, which might be cured through routines of physical hardening.<sup>134</sup>

The aforementioned Beaumont and cultural historians Juliette Pattinson, Lucy Noakes, and Wendy Ugolini underline that little is known about what happened to these norms during imprisonment and argue that innovative approaches are necessary to come to a deeper understanding of the experience of male imprisonment in Nazi Germany.<sup>135</sup> Vesna Drapac's study on the religious life of French PoWs follows this call from Pattison and others. In her work Drapac emphasised the importance of the concept of home in the imagination for prisoners by analysing how the practices of religious devotion of St. Thérèse of Lisieux inside PoW camps recreated a sense of homeliness. The devotion provided these imprisoned men a means of constructing a sense of home which was an alternative to the defeated model of militarized masculinity.<sup>136</sup>

Popular memoirs about PoW-life frequently mention how soldiers were constantly talking about home.<sup>137</sup> Eric Williams' *The Wooden Horse*, for example, describes how some officers spent long afternoons lying on their bunks and talking about home.<sup>138</sup> The same also holds for J. Woods' *Detour: The Story of Oflag IV C*.<sup>139</sup> But all these memoirs lack any emotional attachment to the home. Indeed, home seems to be an end-goal, a destination to return to after a prison escape or when the war has ended. The narratives always seem to follow a discourse in which the soldier is not particularly emotionally invested in the home itself.

I argue that these silences are mostly the product of internalised gender expectations. During combat training, soldiers who experienced homesickness and nervousness were told that although thoughts about home were normal, they should not evoke any negative feelings since that would be distracting. Doctor R. Robert Cohen of the U.S. Army even gave lectures on how to suppress emotional feelings. He noted that soldiers should overcome homesickness since it was testimony to spoiled boyish behaviour.<sup>140</sup> Real men were able to overcome hardship through humour, determination, and toughness (see figure 3). They should think about why and for who they are making sacrifices. The notion of military toughness and masculinity are

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<sup>134</sup> M. Cohen, "Manners" make the man: politeness, chivalry, and the construction of masculinity', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005) 2, 312-329.

<sup>135</sup> J. Pattinson, L. Noakes & W. Ugolini. 'Incarcerated Masculinities: Male PoWs and the Second World War', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 7 (2014) 3, 179-190, there, 187.

<sup>136</sup> Vesna Drapac, 'The Devotion of French Prisoners of War and Requisitioned Workers to Thérèse of Lisieux: Transcending the 'Diocese behind Barbed Wire'', *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 7 (2014) 3, 283-296.

<sup>137</sup> Patrick Reid, *Colditz: the full story* (London 1984) 8.

<sup>138</sup> Eric William, *The Wooden Horse* (London 1949) 32.

<sup>139</sup> John Wood, *Detour: The Story of Oflag IV C* (London 1946). An introduction in a 2014 theme issue on 'Incarcerated Masculinities' in the *Journal of War & Culture Studies* used all three books to sketch a picture of life inside the camp.

<sup>140</sup> R.R. Robert, 'Factors in Adjustment to Army Life: A Plan for Preventative Psychiatry by Mass Psychotherapy,' *War Medicine* 5 (1944) 3, 83-91, there, 85.

intertwined here in the form of militarised masculinity. Men, simply, needed to overcome their emotions and serve their country. Like Drapac, I argue that after the horrifying and unexpected capture of the PoWs which I described above, it is indeed very likely that soldiers felt as though the model of militarized masculinity had been defeated. Indeed, the observation of Drapac is part of my hypothesis which is aimed at exposing the vicissitudes of masculinity.

## 1.6. Conclusion

By the end of the Second World War, more than two million Allied soldiers had been imprisoned by the Germans. Two hundred thousand of them came from the British Commonwealth.<sup>141</sup> By the spring of 1942 however, *Oflag VII-C* had closed down and prisoners had been transferred either to the neighbouring *Oflag VII-B*, *Oflag IX-A/H*, or *Oflag IV-C* (Colditz Castle). Hopkins himself transferred to *Oflag IX-A/H*, located in the Spangenberg Castle, northeast of Hesse in the summer of 1942. In Spangenberg, he made a handful of final dream descriptions before he died of lung disease in one of the hospital barracks. His body must have been especially weakened due to the dire circumstance in *Oflag VII-C*. The life he and the other prisoners lived were harsh and although circumstances would improve in 1942 up until the winter of 1944, Hopkins' research only covered the most dire period.<sup>142</sup>

At the start of this chapter, I noted that contextualisation was highly important for the neurohistorical approach since it stresses the relationship between environment and human behaviour. I have refrained from further developing this relation since I have not yet come to the analysis of the dream descriptions that Major Kenneth Hopkins wrote down in his imprisonment. Instead, I asked a descriptive question to investigate the capture and imprisonment of Major Kenneth Hopkins' Battalion. The living conditions in *Oflag VII-C* were harsh, but as a camp that only housed English officers, conditions were generally better than in regular Stalag camps. Nevertheless, *Oflag VII-C* was notorious for the bad distribution lines and overcrowding. Moreover, while Hopkins and his battalion fought for only two weeks, it must have been a horrific and chaotic experience to see the British war organisation fall apart in such a short timeframe. The high rates of casualties and the unexpectedness of the attack were traumatic.

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<sup>141</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibidem*.

## Chapter 2: Contesting masculinities in nightmares

In the introduction, I explained how current historiography on British prisoners of war in Nazi Germany is theoretically underdeveloped. Except for a handful of publications from the last five years, little has been done to explore the gendered and emotional experience of imprisonment. In the previous chapter, I discussed the harsh circumstances in which these officers were captured and imprisoned. Together with additional environmental contextualisation offered by Hopkins in the footnotes of his research notebooks, nightmare descriptions can be evaluated on the basis of the affect load and their situated cognition. As explained, affect load concerns the intensity of emotions evoked in the dream. This can be established through studying whether or not nightmares are repetitive if they are manifested with strong bodily reactions like sweating, crying, mumbling, or screaming, when they evoke strong emotions in the dream itself and when they frequently interrupt sleep-cycles because their intensity wakes up the dreamer.<sup>143</sup> Situated cognition is the contextualisation of dreams by taking into account the cultural environment in which the dreamer is situated, as well as the events that might have led to behaviour differences (in this case resulting in a cascade of nightmares during the night).

In this chapter, I reflect on how the affect load of the nightmares was opposed to presupposed masculine gender expectations, by asking the question: *Which particular nightmares show strong affect load amongst the imprisoned officers in Oflag VII-C and thereby expose vicissitudes of masculinity?* I discuss several dream narratives that I have selected based on the frequency of their occurrence. I have grouped these narratives based on the alignment of emotional evocation and imagery, as suggested by Domhoff and Nielsen, and Levin. Firstly, an explanation is required of how I connected the vicissitudes of masculinity with the current neuroscientific understanding of dreams.

In Michael Roper's 'Slipping Out of View', the historian pleads for a historiography of masculinity that pays attention to the failures to live up to gender norms. These experiences uncover the vicissitudes of masculinity, the break lines between what is expected of gender identities from society, and what is experienced as impossible by the individual. In his manifesto, Roper exclusively uses a Freudian perspective to the study of these vicissitudes of masculinity. With the discovery of (n)REM cycles and the contemporary AMPHAC-model by Nielsen and Levin, neuroscientists have gradually moved on from Freud. Following Nielsen

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<sup>143</sup> Tore Nielsen & Ross Levin, 'Nightmares: a new neurocognitive model', *Sleep Medicine Reviews* 11 (2007) 4, 295-310.

and Levin, I argue that mental conflicts with the outside environment (such as war trauma) impact the way our neurological patterns are wired together, which subsequently confronts the soldiers' inability to live up to the masculine gender expectations, exposing the vicissitudes of masculinity in a new way.

It is theorised by neuroscientists that new neurological patterns are created during and after traumatic and stressful events because the brain tries to process the dangerous event in question. When traumatic events or its memories occur, the body is aware of the danger it is in, but since it is shockingly unexpected the event cannot be referenced to past experiences to predict whether or not the trauma will reoccur.<sup>144</sup> The subsequent excessive activity in the right temporal lobe, the part of the brain which manages fear responses, in combination with a very slow-wave brain activity results in the hyper-aroused state that dominates the mental life.<sup>145</sup> While asleep the brain tries to formulate a phenomenologically coherent flow of this hyperarousal by (re)producing images which result in similar or adjacent emotional response to the traumatic event. Psychologists Nielsen and Levin argue that the brain has to simulate these memory elements to maximise their impact on the limbic structures so that eventually the memory of the traumatic event can be contextualised and understood. Tests have shown that for the limbic brain, these images are perceived as functionally identical to when the traumatic event itself took place.<sup>146</sup> The anterior cingulate has also been implicated with the processing of trauma through nightmares. This region digests pain distress, social exclusion, and separation anxiety.<sup>147</sup> Lesser traumatic stimulus during waking life can therefore still evoke persisting negative emotional responses during dreaming. I, therefore, pay close attention to the varied affect load in de nightmares to develop a full understanding of how the disruption of trauma influenced the experience of imprisonment for the British prisoners.

## 2.1. Homesickness and masculinity

In this section, I investigate how the imagination of home in the officers' dreams related to the notion of masculinity. Dreams and nightmares about home are by far the most common in Hopkins' research notebook, accounting for 18% of all dreams. Most of the dream content about home is described as very lifelike, with strong emotional sensations. Some subjects dreamed

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<sup>144</sup> Nielsen & Levin, 'Nightmares: a new neurocognitive model', 295.

<sup>145</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 354.

<sup>146</sup> Nielsen & Levin, 'Nightmares: a new neurocognitive model', 298.

<sup>147</sup> R. Levin, G. Fireman & T. Nielsen, 'Disturbed Dreaming and Emotion Dysregulation', *Sleep Medicine Clinics* 5 (2010) 2, 229-240, there, 230.



they were able to return home during a Christmas break or because they escaped. However, for most of them, dreams about returning home marked the end of the war. A feeling that, as subject twenty-three described, evoked a ‘general feeling of happiness’.<sup>148</sup> Apart from these predictable feelings, dreams also show a more complicated relation to home and suggest more ambivalent emotions. In half of the dreams in which the context of home is explicit, a feeling of disappointment or shame was reported. The dream of subject three is testimony to the frustration that images about homecoming typically were associated with. He explains:

I was at home after the war and kept meeting various friends. I was rather disappointed and hurt that they did not seem particularly interested in hearing about my experiences as a P.O.W. They were quite indifferent to any remarks I made with reference to the shortage of food, hunger, and lack of sweet things while I was a prisoner. Even my wife was less concerned than I felt she ought to be. I had an idea that this attitude was due to the people at home having suffered hardships also, but this thought did little to compensate for my disappointment. I was also conscious of a slightly jealous feeling because they had air-raids and therefore the raids I had been in were not unique experiences.<sup>149</sup>

Half a year later, the subject reported still experience the same dreams every night. He reiterates about a new dream he had: ‘No one seemed interested in my life as a P.O.W. when I started to talk about it. Someone (my wife?) quickly changed the conversation’.<sup>150</sup> He further explained how it hurt, but that he convinced himself that it was the natural attitude that people should take towards him. Many dreams from other officers describe the same feeling of unworthiness that subject three discusses, noting that the dreams about returning home ‘were surprisingly cool’.<sup>151</sup> while another PoW even compared the experience of not being listened to as ‘the same feeling of dismay as [the] fall of France’.<sup>152</sup>

Hopkins noted many more of such dreams that did not specifically mention ‘home’ but did connect the idea of ‘homecoming’ with a strong feeling of shame and despair. On the first of August 1941, subject sixty dreamed the following:

I went back to my old firm, thinking I was going to have a really good, easy time and be made a fuss of; instead I had a very hard time and found I had forgotten most of the work. The firm

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<sup>148</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/ notebooks/ Dream 254, page 260.

<sup>149</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 432, page 436-437.

<sup>150</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream M20, page 618.

<sup>151</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 344, page 344.

<sup>152</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream m28, page 626.

was extremely busy, all the employees were new to me and I only knew one of them. The managing director came and put his hand on my shoulder and asked how I was getting on. I was disappointed with my reception and anxious at not being up-to-date with the job.<sup>153</sup>

Subject thirteen noted that their attitude was: ‘well, you have only been in prison six or seven months (or weeks)’.<sup>154</sup> Subject eleven dreamed much the same, stating that ‘I had to dispel the most odd ideas about what happened. Aspersions were cast on my [sic] being made prisoner’.<sup>155</sup>

Readers of Primo Levi’s *If This is a Man* might recognise a theme in these dreams. His autobiographical work, which describes life from inside the Auschwitz extermination camps, contains a chapter titled ‘Our Nights’. In this chapter, Levi explains how for him, nights are the psychological continuation of waking physical torment. Levi dreams about returning home, feeling relieved about having survived one of the biggest atrocities in the modern Western world, but somehow nobody seems interested in his stories about the camp. The more he tries to talk about what happened in Auschwitz, the more people – even his own sister – turn around and walk away.<sup>156</sup> He recognises that in fact, he is not the only one, but that the entire camp seems to experience the same dream. Levi asks himself: ‘why does it happen? Why is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story?’.<sup>157</sup>

According to the AMPHAC-model, the strong resonation of emotions during dreams are indicative of long-lasting anxiety during the daytime. The continuation of stress hormones and nerve impulses create new neurological patterns between fear impulses and imagination.<sup>158</sup> The dreams point towards feelings of jealousy and fear for not having a unique ‘heroic’ story to tell and even illustrate the feeling of shame for being imprisoned.

Reports often describe the dreams to be very lifelike and emotionally evocative. On the night of 24 July 1940 for instance, research subject forty-one dreamed about attending a garden party at his parental house. Major Hopkins noted that ‘[the] dream was so vivid + impression of subj[ect]’s own folks was so real that when woke + realised where he was + that it was all a dream, he was bitterly disappointed’.<sup>159</sup> Considering that these vivid dreams also occurred in almost 20% of all dreams, I argue that dreams about home contained a very high affect load. The work by Vesna Drapac, which I discussed in the previous chapter, already hinted at the existence of

<sup>153</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 296, page 303-304.

<sup>154</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 182, page 195.

<sup>155</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 358, page 361.

<sup>156</sup> Primo Levi, *If This is a Man / the truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (1988) 64.

<sup>157</sup> Levi, *If This is a Man*, 65.

<sup>158</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 55.

<sup>159</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 254, page 260.

homesickness inside the camp, but considering that none of the PoW memoirs discuss home with any emotion, it is surprising that the topic of home contained such strong affect load. As I argued, the lack of emotional portrayal in traditional sources is very likely a product of combat training and the subsequent gender expectations of men. Soldiers were told to move beyond their homesickness since it was considered to be unmanly. However, the dreams I discussed illustrate that feelings of homesickness were indeed present and they contained a lot of affect load. I, therefore, argue that these dreams contain emotions that confronted these soldiers with the inability to live up to the notion of the masculine hero.

I argue that these dreams should be considered as war trauma. Other historians have also argued for the incorporation of homesickness (albeit not manifested in dreams) into the war trauma scholarship. In her research on homesickness of American Civil War soldiers, Frances Clarke for instance argued that current literature has placed too much emphasis on the horrors of military combat and that studies have overlooked the mental devastation of being displaced for a longer period. Clarke concluded that fractured family ties are one of the most ‘distressing trials that a soldier undergoes’.<sup>160</sup> This call was amplified by trauma historian Eric T. Dean who recognised that feelings of depression, stress and homesickness should be seen as the historical antecedents to twentieth-century shell-shock and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>161</sup>

I, therefore, see the feelings of homesickness, jealousy, fear, and shame – which are manifested in the dreams and nightmares of the officers – as traumatic vicissitudes of masculinity. Both because of their high affect load, which is indicative of mental suffering, and because these silenced feelings opposed the masculine gender expectations men were learned during combat training. In the paragraph below, I take a closer look at how the imagination of home was also influenced by letter-writing, which subsequently also evoked other complicating emotions.

## **2.2. Dreams about home and news from outside the camp**

As discussed in the first chapter, the International and British Red Cross provided the possibility of correspondence between the officers inside the PoW camp and their families. More than any other prisoner camp, the officers in Laufen wrote their partners to be informed about life at home.<sup>162</sup> Arieh J. Kochavi, a historian specialised in Second World War imprisonment, already

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<sup>160</sup> F. Clarke, 'So Lonesome I Could Die: Nostalgia and Debates Over Emotional Control in the Civil War North', *Journal of Social History* 41 (2007) 4, 253-282.

<sup>161</sup> E. T. Dean, *Shook over Hell* (Cambridge, MA 1999).

<sup>162</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 20.

pointed out that together with the post-war memoirs, letters from the officers in *Oflag VII-C* are probably the most valuable sources for historians to investigate the mental condition of officers inside the camp. Within these letters, officers mainly asked their spouses for practical help by sending parcels with food supplements.<sup>163</sup> For the officers, the letters were something to look forward to. MacKenzie notes that it was an exhilarating experience to touch a letter or item that was handled by a loved one.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, the importance of familial communication on someone's mental well-being can hardly be overemphasised. Multiple dreams focused on parcels and letters alone.

What remains undiscussed by Kochavi and MacKenzie, is what happened in the wake of having received the letters. In this section, I demonstrate how letter-writing influenced the dream content of many officers inside the camp. Although I do not disagree with MacKenzie's observation that receiving letters must have been exhilarating, I aim to show that news from the home front also confronted the officer's inability to live up to some core elements of masculine performativity, quite similar to what I argued with regards to dreams about home. This is in line with Joanna Bourke's research, in which she notes that for the young, working-class male, masculinity was expected to reaffirm his place in the household by simple performances such as doing maintenance work around the house, earning a wage that fed the family and fighting for King and country.<sup>165</sup>

The letters and parcels that were sent by relatives through the Red Cross were often reincorporated in the dreams of the officers inside the camp. 10% of the dreams discussed parcels or letters. For example, subject thirty-one dreamed that he received a package with sheets of paper to write back to his family. Importantly, Hopkins always provided additional context to the dream. He noted that the subject had been dreaming about this before, and states that there was a 'probable connection with Red+ representatives visit + questioning him about our letters. [...] + feeling there is something unexplainably wrong about their delivery'.<sup>166</sup> For another dream about a food package, Hopkins wrote in a footnote 'there was to be an issue of Red+ parcels on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. The probable contents had been discussed'.<sup>167</sup> As has been discussed in the previous chapter, at this point over 180.000 parcels were stuck in a Portuguese port and it is indeed very likely that imprisoned officers by then began to suspect that something must have been going wrong on the delivery-side.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibidem, 31.

<sup>164</sup> MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 56.

<sup>165</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960*, 91 & 106.

<sup>166</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 291, page 297.

<sup>167</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 402, page 405.

In 58% of the dreams about letter-writing we see that the research subject explicitly made a connection between the content of a letter they read the day before the dream, and the dream content once they awoke and reported on the dream. Oftentimes, these dreams evoked feelings that were connected with shortcomings of being the backbone of the household. In one dream subject nine returned home to find his wife welcoming him and introducing him to his new-born child: In the footnote, Hopkins wrote ‘Subj[ect] had received news of birth [of] a child while in prison’ and that it filled him with excitement and pity for not being able to be there with his family.<sup>168</sup> In the dreaming life of subject twelve, life at the home front also continued without him. He writes about his dream of the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1941:

Myself and wife (whom I did not see) and a man. (1[one of Hopkins’ footnotes]) We were all in quite a new house which we had taken. It had a very large kitchen at the back and, next door to the kitchen, was the tiniest of tiny oblong dining rooms, almost like a cupboard. There was room for a table but no chairs, but this did not worry me. I remember two other small cupboards and decided I should eventually have to build a new dining room on the other side of the kitchen.(2[footnote])

In the footnotes, Hopkins writes down a couple of very important details. According to the subject, the man who has been helping his wife is the subject’s father-in-law, who is also going to live with his wife while he is not at home. Hopkins also noted that the subject seemed to be worried that his wife had moved to a new house which he had never seen before. For the subject, it seemed that he had become expandable since the father-in-law took on all of his domestic duties.<sup>169</sup> Exactly one month later, the same research subject experienced another long and confusing dream about driving through a house the size of a cathedral. His wife showed him around and told him how she has been planting potatoes during the time he was not present. The potatoes were not only meant for herself, but also for him to eat in the camp. Through the footnotes of Hopkins, we know that he received a letter from his wife the morning before, telling him about the new house and how she wanted to help him.<sup>170</sup> Again, the subject made it clear that he felt worried and embarrassed for not being able to help his wife with the relocation of his family.

Similar to dream about homesickness, I argue that the fear attached to these narratives is primarily centred around losing the ability to perform masculine gender expectations. Joanna

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<sup>168</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 259, page 69.

<sup>169</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 288, page 293-295

<sup>170</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 389, page 384-386

Bourke already noted that within the domestic scene, men were rivals in doing handywork around the house and when somebody else, like a father-in-law, replaced this job it would ruin his reputation within the community or household.<sup>171</sup> If the man as breadwinner wanted to earn the love of his family, ‘the inability to do so risked his status’.<sup>172</sup> In all of these dreams, the consequences of not living up to that ideal come to the fore. Different from the previous paragraph the influence of situated cognition becomes more visible. The influence of letter-writing and parcel shipments on PoW’s dreams also underlines the influence of environmental stimuli on the neurological patterns that are formed. According to the AMPHAC-model, these daily preoccupations, which are stored as short-term memory, manifest themselves as dreams once they are converted to long-term memory. Especially in the case of enduring stress and worry, this neuroprocessing can lead to obsessive thought, which is illustrated in these dreams of the prisoners.

Present historiography on life inside the PoW camp stresses the positive aspects of letter-writing whilst being imprisoned. As MacKenzie argues, these letters must have been little beacons of hope for the depressed and exhausted men. It is important to underscore that I do not aim to refute MacKenzie’s claims, but rather to complicate them by showing a wider range of emotional reactions to the letters’ contents, which were not necessarily experienced as only positive. Through the dreams, we see that the letters sparked a concern about the failure to perform masculine duties at home. Fear of being left out, not being able to keep up with the work, to become redundant, or to be replaced by someone else was experienced remarkably frequent by the dreaming subjects. In addition to the vicissitudes of masculinity I mentioned in the previous paragraph – homesickness, jealousy, fear, and shame – I, therefore, conclude that alienation and anxiety were also present in *Oflag VII-C*.

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<sup>171</sup> Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960*, 64 & 73.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibidem*, 108.

### 2.3. Nightmares on war trauma and the shortcomings of men

In this section, I discuss the dreams about combat in Hopkins' notebooks. With 10% of all dreams written down, these dreams are the most frequent after dreams about home. Studies show that mental trauma already frequently occurred during combat – before officers returned home. Historian Joanna Bourke estimates that, when we discount the wounded, one-third of all army discharges in Great Britain resulted from a nervous disorder.<sup>173</sup> From the First World War, we know that many discharged officers were experienced officers as well, being awarded medals for bravery. This shows how common and pervasive mental trauma really was. An often-cited source in the discussion on militarised masculinity during the Second World War is *The Anatomy of Courage*, published in 1944 by Lord Charles Moran who at the time was Winston Churchill's physician. In the book, Moran gives a detailed explanation of how to overcome fear, basing his statements on older Edwardian notions of war as a romantic quest. Staying courageous, and overcoming fear is 'the supreme and final test if you will—of character'.<sup>174</sup> Moran insisted that the opposite of courage, cowardice, was a failure of will. He even specifically discussed nightmares as signs of weak character.<sup>175</sup>

Both Bourke and Michael Roper agree that trauma became even more debilitating because of the militarisation of masculinity during the war.<sup>176</sup> Military training suppressed narratives of 'muscular Christianity', which emphasised qualities such as compassion, fairness, and altruism to give way to the image of the fearless masculine hero.<sup>177</sup> Men were expected to be tough and firm.<sup>178</sup> As lined out in the sections above, trauma confronted men with the inability to live up to that ideal. From all the different types of dream content discussed in this chapter, the dreams that relate to combat appear to have evoked the strongest affect load. Many officers report to have woken up sweating, or to experience muscle ache after a nightmare, suggesting distress in the AMPHAC-system due to mental trauma.

One distressing example is the dream on 15 March 1942 from subject thirty-six. He 'woke with such a yell of horror that whole room was awakened'.<sup>179</sup> According to Hopkins' notes, he had been discussing the circumstances of his capture the evening before: 'some of the dream

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<sup>173</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago 1996) 109.

<sup>174</sup> Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (London 1945 [2007]) 21.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

<sup>176</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 110 & Roper, 'Between manliness and masculinity', 360.

<sup>177</sup> Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity* (Cambridge MA, 2001) 58.

<sup>178</sup> Roper, 'Between manliness and masculinity', 360.

<sup>179</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream m5, page 590.

images were reminiscent of that'.<sup>180</sup> Subject forty-eight dreamed a long and violent battle scene that ended with the following:

When I got out, I heard guns in action and then the houses on the opposite side of the street simply disappeared and I realised that I was witnessing the most severe air-raid of my experience. I was terrified.<sup>181</sup>

Hopkins noted that both the visual and auditory imagery were very clear, and that the subject woke up sweating with fear. Subject eleven had a long and detailed dream about a battle in the woods, which according to him was a 'conglomerate [of] scenes from [the] actual battle'. The dream was very vivid and the imagery was 'still persisting during some weeks later'.<sup>182</sup> Another strong indication of the presence of high affect load were the dreams of subject seventy-two. In one of the footnotes, Hopkins writes: 'very unpleasant dream. Subj[ect] knows what is coming as soon as the dream starts + dreads it but has to dream it through to the end, cannot wake himself nor stop nor change the sequence + 'sleep talking''.<sup>183</sup> Several studies by neuroscientists on combat-related nightmares from U.S. veterans who fought in Vietnam have delineated a pattern of traumatic nightmares. Typically, these dreams are initially fairly close to an authentic re-enactment of the trauma and are described as horrifically visually clear, sometimes with a twist of an additional horror or slightly fictionalised or unrealistic event.<sup>184</sup> In the dreams noted down by Hopkins, we see that some dreams were literal performances of what had happened to these officers. Subject fifty, for instance, dreamed the 'most vivid + realistic dream' about his capture:

I was in a seaside port and in a house. On looking through the window I saw a lot of German torpedo boats in the beams of some searchlights. The house was hit by a shell which came in at the window and went through to the lower floors and I was just waiting for it to burst when some Germans rushed in at the door. I found myself by Colonel Frazer who said, 'Good lord, we are captured again'. I experienced an awful feeling of despair.<sup>185</sup>

Although direct translations of memory such as the one by subject fifty are less common, thirty dreams and nightmares of *Oflag VII-C* contain a lot of direct re-enactments of multiple events

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<sup>180</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, footnote 2, page 590.

<sup>181</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 485, page 503.

<sup>182</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 479, page 478-479.

<sup>183</sup> PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, drams M8, page 593

<sup>184</sup> Deirdre Barret, *Trauma and Dreams* (London, 2001) 3.

<sup>185</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 418, page 420-421.



combined. Subject sixty-eight, for instance, dreamed the following on the night of 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> September:

I was on board ship and was being bombed. A little girl came up to me crying because her mother and father had been killed. I said, 'I'll look after you and find your next-of-kin'. The ship arrived in port and I was at the railway station with the little girl. There were crowds of people hurrying for the air-raid shelters. They all looked very anxious.<sup>186</sup>

In the footnotes it becomes clear that the dreams consisted of two re-enactments. His boat was indeed bombed on his way to Norway in April 1941 and the scene of people running away was straight out of the Norway campaign, *Operation Wilfred*. No mention is made about the little girl calling for help.<sup>187</sup> Later on, the earlier literal dream that the subject had about his war trauma changed in some aspects, making it more fictional, but nonetheless the similarities are striking:

I was firing at boats full of torpedoes to block the entrance to the harbour of one of the Cinque Ports [Southeast England]. One of our battleships was sinking, and the captain of another one (footnote: man whom subj. knew), was standing on his deck saluting as the ship went down. I saw an announcement in the paper that my father was dead.<sup>188</sup>

Strong bodily reactions such as tensing up during the nightmare, waking up screaming, the repetition of dream content, resemblance to the actual combat, and the strong emotions felt during the nightmares are indicative of a failure within the AMPHAC-system to process traumatic memory and accompanied high affect load.<sup>189</sup> The stress response of the triune brain results in the failure of the limbic brain to identify and contextualise the traumatic memory. Taking in mind the laboratory studies discussed in the introduction, I argue that it is very likely that the subsequent neurological patterns which resulted from an increase of stress hormones and nerve impulses created fixed neurological signatures, which make the experience of trauma long-lasting. The gradual change of dreams based on realistic depictions of what happened, towards a more creative contextualisation of other events and memory is a sign that the brain is

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<sup>186</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 397, page 400.

<sup>187</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 397, page 400-401.

<sup>188</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 308, page 314.

<sup>189</sup> Nielsen & Levin, 'Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation', 85.

still trying to process these events.<sup>190</sup> As time passes, the dream content becomes more wide-ranging and interwoven with concerns from the dreamer's daily life.

I argue that there is a clear split between the stoic image of militarised masculinity that was expected of these officers and the affect load that these dreams contained. Although many memoirs on life inside the camp paint a picture that seems to emphasise the courage that was expected of men and neglect the possibility of shock amongst military personnel, the systemic nightmares experienced inside the camp challenge this picture significantly. Next to the vicissitudes of masculinity on homesickness, jealousy, fear, shame, alienation, and anxiety, I also observe severe mental trauma resulting from combat.

## 2.4. Anxious dreams and breakdown of self-presentation

With 4% of all dreams, dreams about appearances are the least common in Hopkins' dream research. Although small in number, dreams about appearances had clear emotions attached to the content. Dreams about bad physical appearances went hand in hand with perceived sloppiness and inattentiveness amongst detainees, and there was a clear emotional value attributed to the dream content. In sixteen of these dreams, subjects were ashamed of how bewildered they looked and behaved, and in the remaining six there was a clear sense of pride attached to wearing clean clothes. The bad condition of hygiene amongst officers and clothing should come as no surprise. In the previous chapter I described the terrible situation these officers were in. Mackenzie and Kochavi quoted some prisoners of war in Nazi German prison camps, who give urgent descriptions of how these bad appearances affected their self-image: some officers even said that they found themselves to be revolting.<sup>191</sup>

Significant historical research has been done on the relationship between clothing and gender identity. Historian Laura Ugolini points out that during interwar Britain, clothes played an important part in constructing and reinforcing collective male identities.<sup>192</sup> Historian Joanna Bourke also stresses the communicative value of military dress codes in militarised masculinity. A clean and complete uniform, even in the most dire circumstances, showed discipline and steadfastness.<sup>193</sup> It was understood that such rules were the foundation upon which civilisation rested: they showed a man's capability to take care of himself, and by extension, they showed

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<sup>190</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 41.

<sup>191</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 32-33.

<sup>192</sup> Laura Ugolini, *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain 1880-1939* (Oxford 2007) 254.

<sup>193</sup> J. Bourke, 'The great male renunciation: Men's dress reform in inter-war Britain', *Journal of Design History* 9 (1996) 1, 23-33, there 29.

that a man was able to take care of his nation: ‘Truly, clothes were more than covering or decorations: they were symbols. British men should be manly and not turned into boy scouts or schoolboys’.<sup>194</sup> During the First and Second World War, this was even amplified when the temporary discrediting of most civilian attire took place, in favour of military uniforms.<sup>195</sup>

What mattered most of all, according to Laura Ugolini, was the act of conformity when wearing a certain style of clothes.<sup>196</sup> Not that there was a single British model of the masculine ‘look’. The ability to assert a difference from women, of ‘fitting in’ through following sartorial codes, and in the case of uniforms embodying a greater national narrative, gave men a sense of pride and belonging.<sup>197</sup> Simon MacKenzie also notes that amongst British prisoners of war, uniforms were tremendously important to the soldier’s self-image. For instance, when liberated by the U.S. Army, British soldiers were asked to put on fresh U.S. uniforms to stop the spread of parasites. Many soldiers declined to do so, to arrive back at home in their British uniform, no matter how dirty it was.<sup>198</sup>

In Hopkins’ dream study, subject eleven reported a detailed dream about clothing. The dream is a great example of how pride and attire were internalised in the dreams of these officers. He dreamed about attending a party with friends:

Across the passage I found a friend in a Cameron kilt, but I knew I was smarter. In the mirror I could see myself in Black Watch Trews and a full-dress red jacket, and swelled with pride, patting my gigantic sporran. I was smarting myself up to see my sister and, later, went down into the local town for her. My sister, another and a friend in Black Watch Uniform, appeared at times, then many of us piled into a closed car, all Black Watch, and drove to a park. Here we bundled out and my lovely spick and span uniform got covered with mud as I splashed over a ditch. I wore white socks and tried hard to clean them. The others were taking things more calmly and did not care but I was excited and anxious to impress. We hurried on to parade in the park [...].<sup>199</sup>

There seems to be a clear connection with pride and cleanliness, and concerning that, the display civic virtue. In general, there is an important evocative characteristic that clothes seem to have

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<sup>194</sup> Bourke, ‘The great male renunciation’, 30.

<sup>195</sup> Ugolini, *Men and Menswear*, 254.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>198</sup> MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 389.

<sup>199</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 520, page 568-570.

in this dream.<sup>200</sup> In many other dreams, there is a feeling of shame for not being able to follow proper maintenance codes of the military uniforms. On July 23, 1941, Subject thirty-five dreamed that he was too ashamed to look at his superiors since he had lost his hat. Indeed, the subject reported having lost his hat when he was captured.<sup>201</sup> Subject fifty dreamed that he was wearing the wrong clothes and was uncovered by one of the guardsmen for not belonging to the regiment.<sup>202</sup> Another officer, who had been conducting the camp orchestra, dreamed that the PoWs had become ‘rather slack among many of the junior ranks and orderlies’: They were wearing all sorts of clothes and caps and were a very dirty, slovenly show [...] I objected to one man’s hat and he said that, under the circumstances, he was going to wear what hat he liked.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, in the footnotes, the subject reported that ‘Dress here is in a bad way’, and that a great many officers turned into sloppy and undisciplined men.<sup>204</sup> More often than not dreams about the deplorable conditions of clothing are mirror images from real life. One subject describes how there is a nail that goes right through his shoe, which incidentally also was the case for his real shoe.<sup>205</sup>

Historians have already pointed out the lack of adequate footwear inside PoW camps. When the army boots in which the prisoner was captured disintegrated, the Germans would often issue wooden clogs that chafed the feet.<sup>206</sup> Since basic supplies were low in the first two years, there was a chronic lack of soap to wash the body and clothing. Apart from obvious problems such as smell and bad health, this also resulted in louse plagues within the camps. Louse were only discussed twice in dreams, but in both cases, it was done with repulsion to the person own circumstances.<sup>207</sup>

Apart from the affect load attached to these dreams, the aspect I am interested in is the notable stressing of behavioural changes, or ‘lack of civic virtue’, which are incorporated in the dreams. Psychiatrist Alexander McFarlane has noticed similar behavioural changes in his studies on military combat in contemporary war conflict. By measuring the gEEG of 179 combat troops in Iraq and Afghanistan over a period of three years, he found that stress was associated with a progressive decrease in activity at the back of the brain due to changes in soldier’s neurological patterns.<sup>208</sup> This is the area that monitors the state of the body and

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<sup>200</sup> Nielsen & Levin, ‘Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation’, 85.

<sup>201</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 245, page 256.

<sup>202</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 436, page 439.

<sup>203</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 500, page 529.

<sup>204</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 500, page 529.

<sup>205</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 252, page 262-263

<sup>206</sup> Kochavi, *Confronting Captivity*, 33.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>208</sup> EEG measures the electrophysiological voltage fluctuations. In this particular case, it measures the gamma band. A decrease in the gamma-band is associated with cognitive decline. For more information, see Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 151 & 171-184.

regulates waking and sleeping patterns. Subsequently, the soldiers were increasingly less able to sleep and gradually developed frontal-lobe activity which resembles that of children with ADHD.<sup>209</sup>

The research subjects inside *Oflag VII-C* also note frequent awakenings during the night, often (but not always) after a bad dream.<sup>210</sup> One night, Hopkins writes, a 'subj[ect] woke [up] breathing with some difficulty'.<sup>211</sup> Some woke up abruptly, 'sweating with fear'.<sup>212</sup> Another subject 'woke [up] in state of intense horror during [the] dream'.<sup>213</sup> Given these behaviour changes and frequent awakening, I argue that the officers inside *Oflag VII-C* might very well have suffered the same challenges as the soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is very likely that the new neurological patterns developed inside the minds of these officers would have interfered with their executive functioning and their ability to focus attention. As these neurological patterns are very closely related to the sleep-cycles themselves, it is no wonder that officers report on gaining sleeping problems throughout their imprisonment. In turn, this would have made them more agitated, sloppy, and restless during waking life as well.

Although dreams about the personal appearances and behaviour of subjects were less frequent, they are important to understand the vicissitudes of masculinity among the British officers imprisoned in *Oflag VII-C*. Across all dreams about self-presentation, two emotional responses come to light - and very strongly so. These emotions are shame and pride. This finding confirms what MacKenzie and Kochavi already established in previous research about the deteriorating self-image of officers and what they argue is the resulting sloppiness amongst officers. Many gender historians have emphasised the role of sartorial codes in the performance of masculinity and I did indeed verify that this was a somewhat important subject in the dreams. I, therefore, do not necessarily disagree with MacKenzie and Kochavi on the importance of clothing inside the PoW specifically, but it is necessary to include the lens of situated cognition to fully appreciate the extent of stress and trauma on this change in behaviour. Building on their literature with neuroscientific insights, I argue that we can see that the perceived sloppiness, or decline of civic virtue, might also have been the result of newly formed neurological patterns resulting in behavioural changes like disorientation, restlessness, and changing sleeping patterns. In addition to the aforementioned vicissitudes of masculinity on homesickness,

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<sup>209</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 354-355.

<sup>210</sup> Compare PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 477, page 492 with PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream m5, page 500.

<sup>211</sup> PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 406, page 309.

<sup>212</sup> PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 485, page 504.

<sup>213</sup> PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream M6, page 592.

jealousy, fear, shame, alienation, anxiety, and mental war trauma, I also notice experiences of restlessness and more cases of shame.

## 2.5. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I showed that most of the historiography of PoW camps neglects valuable aspects of imprisonment during the Second World War, namely the role that masculinity played in the formation of individual experiences. Following the call by Laura Lee Downs, Michael Roper, and others to try to move beyond the ‘flattening’ of complex and varied emotional experiences in historiography at large, and in gender history, in particular, I identified dreams and nightmares which can inform us about the broader complexities of the emotional experiences inside the camp. In this chapter, I established that multiple themes of dreams, primarily nightmares, can be found in the research work of Major Kenneth Hopkins: nightmares about combat, dreams about home, dreams that were based on correspondence with the home front and dreams on the officer’s living conditions. My intention was to show whether it was possible to move beyond the repetition of research that reinforces the ‘male hero’. Indeed, it is striking that many gender historians already paid significant attention to the themes mentioned above, when it comes to studies about masculinities during the interwar period, or about non-imprisoned soldiers during the war. It says a lot about the state of prisoner of war historiography focused on Nazi Germany that such studies are almost non-existent. However, in the next chapter on dreams - which is not related to trauma - we will encounter the work by Clare Makepeace, whose work is a valuable exception.

When we consider all these dreams it stands out that, in line with Nielsen and Levin’s predictions, Hopkins’ describes dreams of traumatic or stressful memories as exceptionally bright, vivid, and clear. Together with the many repetitive dreaming, the high frequency of coherent correlations between dream images and negative emotions in all dreams, and the somatic responses like tensing-up and sweating, it is indeed highly likely that many nightmares were the result of war trauma. Interestingly, this strong connection between anxiety and images of home are described by the officers as almost as vivid as anxiety and combat-images, although the home-themed dreams evoked less somatic responses. I, therefore, underscore Frances Clarke’s and Eric T. Dean’s incentives to widen our perspective on war trauma and incorporate homesickness into this discourse. Gender historians have stressed the importance of home in the conceptualisation of masculinity as well. Given the strong affect load of this dream content, I argue that these nightmares also lay bare many vicissitudes of masculinity. These vicissitudes

include homesickness, jealousy, fear, shame, alienation, anxiety, mental war trauma, and restlessness.

I also showed the importance of situated cognition in the analysis of the affect load of dreams. Of course, the occurrence of nightmares about combat-related trauma and the strong somatic response it evoked is already a clear sign of causality according to the AMPHAC-model, but I would like to emphasise the role of letter-writing. Especially in the case of letter-writing, it becomes clear that new, short-term information from home also leads to new dream narratives. In the next chapter, I investigate whether we can also find dreams which relate to masculinity that are not trauma-related, this will give us an even richer understanding of the vicissitudes of masculinity.

## **Chapter 3: Dreams and desires inside *Oflag VII-C*. Friendships and same-sex desires**

In the second chapter, I pointed out that many dream researchers have established a causal relationship between trauma, anxiety, and nightmares. For neurohistorians this means that research on dream content is especially relevant when studying trauma of historic subjects. Indeed, I argued that many officers in *Oflag VII-C* showed strong signs of traumatic memory since many nightmares evoked strong somatic responses like sweating and screaming. Moreover, the dreams contained images similar to, or copies of, traumatic memories and were often repetitive. All of these characteristics are signs of a high affect load.

Nevertheless, the dream reports recorded by Hopkins do not only show disturbing nightmares but also contain several mundane or even pleasant dreams which have to be accounted for to come a full understanding of the emotional experience of these officers. In this chapter, I discuss the dreams about friendships and same-sex desires which were particularly prominent in Hopkins' research. There is however one dream theme that I came across that will not be included in this analysis, which are the dreams about food. As explained in the introduction, food dreams are fairly common in general, which makes it hard to analyse these from the perspective of situated-cognition. Furthermore, I was unable to find any correlations between these dreams about food and my main research question which is concerned with the vicissitudes of masculinity.

Since I am also going to discuss sexuality explicitly, I would like to emphasise again that this thesis is investigating the responses of the triune brain to the environmental world, which includes masculine gender expectations. I argue that the responses of the triune brain to its surroundings can show us how experience can be different from the historical discourse on gender that prevailed during this period. After decades of work by feminist scholars on the fluidity of gender, it is important to stay critical towards the anchoring of masculine identity traits in neurocognitive behaviour. Nevertheless, from a historian's perspective it is interesting to analyse how their desires were experienced in the dreams, how they were discussed inside the camp, and what – if any – relation they had to the gender discourse during the Second World War to form a more complex understanding of the embodiment of masculinity. These dreams, I argue, give us further insight into the many vicissitudes of masculinity inside the camp. Central to this chapter is the sub-question: *Which particular dreams show strong affect load amongst the imprisoned officers in Oflag VII-C and thereby expose vicissitudes of masculinity?*



### 3.1. Dreams about friendship and same-sex desires

Although Sony O. Rose, Michael Roper, and Joanna Bourke noticed many shifts in the discourse on masculinity between the interwar period and the Second World War, one important characterisation of British masculinity remained stable throughout this period: the role of friendship. Historians generally agree that to be part of the ‘brotherhood’, the male soldier had to be a well-adjusted and sociable individual who was just as capable of cracking a few jokes as he was of doing manual labour. Sonya O. Rose explains that brotherhood could easily be incorporated with militarised masculinity since men had to excel in individuality during the war, which is something different than individualism.<sup>214</sup> Dreams about friendships were always saturated with a wide range of emotions. They were infused with desires for trust, pleasure, security, comfort, and intimacy. This chapter on friendships and desires differs from all the other dream themes in the previous chapter in that it seems to be the only one in which the research subject’s experienced emotions that did not necessarily contest the masculine gender expectations in public discourse.

Dreams about friendship miss the important ‘fear extinction’ role that Levin and Nielsen identified in traumatic nightmares.<sup>215</sup> Meaning, it misses the strong causality of memory contextualisation that also show high amounts of affect load. Although more challenging, I argue that this does not necessarily exclude non-traumatic dreams. We can still follow recent findings from Domhoff and older hypotheses from Foulkes which suggest that a great majority of dreams (90%) reflect the emotional concerns in everyday life.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, there are some signs which suggest that friendship, or rather, social relationships in general, play a key role in dreams all over the world. It is hypothesised that this is due to the heightened activity of the medial prefrontal cortex. As the AMPHAC-theory by Nielsen and Levin also underlines, the medial prefrontal cortex gives the awareness of the self to social relationships.<sup>217</sup> These psychologists and neuroscientist therefore argue that it because of this heightened activity in this area during dreaming which makes dreams so profoundly interpersonal. Dreams therefore provide us with clues about the relationships between the self and individuals. According to Domhoff: ‘the most frequently studied and best established continuities for individual dream series involve the main people in a dreamer’s life and the nature of the social interactions with

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<sup>214</sup> Rose, ‘Temperate heroes: concepts of masculinity in Second World War Britain’, 181.

<sup>215</sup> Levin & Nielsen, ‘Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation’, 85.

<sup>216</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 150.

<sup>217</sup> Levin & Nielsen, ‘Nightmares, bad dreams, and emotion dysregulation’, 85-87.

them'.<sup>218</sup> In a separate study, psychologist Inge Strauch came to the same conclusion.<sup>219</sup> Psychologist Richard Schweickert even noted that social networks in dreams seem to follow the same degree of lawfulness as social networks during waking life.<sup>220</sup> For instance, like in waking life, the appearances of the most popular characters in dreams double the number of appearances for the second most popular characters, who double the amount of the third most popular characters, and so on.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, as in real life, people who appear frequently also often appear together.<sup>222</sup> These findings led to the theory that 'relations between [people] in dreams primarily arise from relations represented in the dreamer's memory'.<sup>223</sup> Since dreams follow the same semantic knowledge of social relations we create during waking life and our emotional state, it can therefore be said that dreams give us significant insight into the friendship relations of these officers inside *Oflag VII-C*.

Some of the dreams of friendship and intimacy also contained same-sex desires. When it comes to sexual dreams, studies have shown that 88% of dreams about sexual thoughts are comparable to sexual fantasies during the daytime.<sup>224</sup> I will however consciously refrain from categorising the same-sex desires as homosexual experiences for three reasons.

Firstly, many historians have agreed that ideas surrounding male sexual behaviour was more fluid during the first half of the twentieth century, and especially in predominantly male-only environments during war times.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, during this time there is still no clear language attached to same-sex experiences. According to Helen Smith, 'Language is key to developing, categorising and solidifying sexual identities', she, therefore, suggests 'homosexuality was not spoken of because there was no clear, widespread understanding in the community of what it meant as an identity'.<sup>226</sup> We will see that this is not the case, since Major Kenneth Hopkins himself explicitly uses the word homosexual and queerness on several occasions. Though 'queerness' at the time was not synonymous with homosexuality, it was indeed seen as something 'different' and 'eccentric'.<sup>227</sup>

Secondly, following Laura Doan, I want to draw on a queer analytical framework to speculate on a wider nature of heterosexual friendships. Heterosexuality was a relative

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<sup>218</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 96.

<sup>219</sup> Inge Strauch & Barbara Meier, *Den Träumen auf der Spur: Zugang zur modernen Traumforschung* (Bern 2004).

<sup>220</sup> R. Schweickert, 'Social networks of characters in dreams', in: Deirdre Barret & Patrick McNamara (ed.) *The New Science of Dreaming: Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives* (Westport 2007) 277–297, there 279.

<sup>221</sup> Schweickert, 'Social networks of characters in dreams', 287.

<sup>222</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 112.

<sup>223</sup> Schweickert, 'Social networks of characters in dreams', 279 & 290.

<sup>224</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 113.

<sup>225</sup> Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-Sex desire in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945* (Manchester 2015) 7.

<sup>226</sup> Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (London 2015) 184.

<sup>227</sup> Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities. Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London. Gender and Sexualities in History* (London 2014) 25.

latecomer in the ‘evolving nomenclatures of sexual practices’, and only slowly came to take shape in Britain during the interwar years.<sup>228</sup> Doan’s point is that the distinctive calibrations of wartime hetero-relations disappear when we project current understandings of heterosexuality onto the past.<sup>229</sup> I, therefore, apply a queer reconceptualization of the same-sex desires between officers to come to a broader understanding of imprisoned masculine experiences.

Thirdly, and in extension to Doan’s point, the current neuroscientific understanding of sexual dreams does not show a causal relationship between sexual dreams and sexual practices during waking life. There is however evidence that suggests causality between waking life sexual fantasies and sexual dreams.<sup>230</sup> I find it important to include these fantasies to lay bare the many vicissitudes of masculinity inside the camp, but aim to do so through a queer lens that is not aimed at naturalising gender differences.

### 3.2. Dreams about friendship

Of the forty-one dreams which specifically dealt with friendship, the themes security and intimacy appear as closely tied and reoccurring concepts. All these dreams played out in a war-related context as well. Taking care of friends’ internal and external wounds for instance was a particularly present motive. Subject thirty-one describes a vague dream he had in which he discovered that sunlight helped to recover the physical wounds of his fellow soldiers and subject fifty dreamed about taking care of his best friend’s dog after his friend was killed in Egypt.<sup>231</sup> Subject fifty-two fantasised about running a hostel for the traumatized soldiers:

I was running a hostel for shell-shocked soldiers. My friends were very ragged and in a poor way altogether. My plan to improve this was to introduce more discipline and I made them tidy themselves, clean boots and polish up their brasswork etc. This treatment seemed particularly effective and successful in one case – a particularly shabby inmate.<sup>232</sup>

Although implicit, these dreams seemed to underline the role of loyalty within friendship more than anything else. In many ways, they seem to follow the masculine gender expectations that Sonya O. Rose sketched out; in these dreams, individuals take action to take care of their

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<sup>228</sup> L. Doan, ‘Sex Education and the Great War Soldier: A Queer Analysis of the Practice of “Hetero” Sex’, *The Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012) 3, 641-663, 642.

<sup>229</sup> Doan, ‘Sex Education and the Great War Soldier’, 643.

<sup>230</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 113.

<sup>231</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 311, page 317; WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 364 page 364

<sup>232</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 192, page 202

friends.<sup>233</sup> Taking care of each other is especially a popular motive, in 8% of all if the dreams in Hopkins' research a subject dreamed about taking care of other prisoners, and in about a third of that, the subject himself is being taken care of by someone else. Two subjects even dreamed – about two years apart from each other – that they had escaped from the camp, but thereupon felt the urge to go back to the camp since they did not want to leave their friends behind. Subject forty-three's girlfriend drove him back by car and subject five was brought back by his mother and felt relieved when he arrived back at his friends in the camp.<sup>234</sup> There are also three dreams of similar funeral ceremonies in which groups of friends from within the army had to bury a friend.<sup>235</sup>

When the dreams were about friends without their presence in the dream narrative, the accompanying feeling was always negative. For instance, when subject fifty-four dreamed that he was waiting for his friends at the war office, Hopkins records the subject saying 'I got in and went to a waiting room upstairs but time went on and I got into a great state of anxiety about meeting the chaps'.<sup>236</sup> Likewise, in another dream, someone felt jealous of his friend for being included in a group of men while the subject himself was not included. One of the footnotes from Hopkins notes 'Friendship with these three always made subject very jealous'.<sup>237</sup> These descriptions show a correlation between waking and dreaming life and underscores the opportunity to investigate dreams as forms of situated-cognition.

These clear connections between friendship, caretaking, and inclusion follow the gender expectations that were discussed through the work of Rose and Bourke. In this case however, it is doubtful whether these dreams are also the result of gender expectations since dreams about social relations are universal in all genders and cultures. Nonetheless, the wish to take care of friends and to be part of the group still is part of the masculine experience. Furthermore, the theoretical points about emotions in dreams being similar to thoughts and emotions in waking life is validated by the many footnotes in Hopkins' research that stress the overlap of emotions such as jealousy and anxiety in the dreams mentioned in this chapter. In these sources, I did not even find a single deviation whereas Domhoff mentions a 90% overlap. This still suggests that dreams which are less anxious or traumatic in their content might still be investigated as situated cognition. Of course, taking care of combat-related trauma might still be interpreted within the realm of trauma studies. But since these dreams show a considerably lower affect load (I did

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<sup>233</sup> Rose, 'Temperate heroes: concepts of masculinity in Second World War Britain', 181.

<sup>234</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 204, page 213-214.

<sup>235</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 370, 399 and 405.

<sup>236</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 200, page 210-211.

<sup>237</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 508, page 542.

not come across physiological reactions such as muscle tension and sweating during sleep or images which were very close to a real event and which evoked strong emotions) the AMPHAC-model suggests these dreams show less disruptive life events.

These feelings of wanting to take care of others and to be included align with the notion of ‘brotherhood’, as described by Rose. In addition to the negative vicissitudes of masculinity, we encountered in the previous chapter – homesickness, jealousy, fear, shame, alienation, anxiety, mental war trauma, and restlessness – the desire for trust, security and comfort were also present inside the camp. These dreams about interpersonal relations sometimes became more intimate in their content, which I will further discuss below.

### 3.3. Current discussions on same-sex desires

Many dreams also contained quite an outspoken physical attraction towards friends inside the camp. Historians have only just begun to discuss the possibility of emerging same-sex desires within military imprisonment, which is why I shortly want to discuss some of the recent developments about this scholarship. The existence of same-sex desires inside PoW camps in South-East Asia has already been well established in works by Robin Gerster and Joshua Goldstein. They note that during the Second World War, imprisonment had already contented the notion of heterosexual manhood to such an extent that it was only a small step to also break down existing gender dichotomies.<sup>238</sup> Following Gerster, Christina Twomey described the internment camp as an ‘ambiguous zone’ in which masculinity was forced into passivity.<sup>239</sup> When we look at the studies on PoW camps in Nazi Germany however, there seems to be less consensus. The aforementioned military historian Simon MacKenzie concluded that the pursuit of same-sex desires within the camp was rare to non-existing at all. As evidence, MacKenzie uses oral testimonies and the fact that sex between men was not discussed in any letter. He also pointed out that hunger was so overwhelming that it left little space to even fantasise about any physical urges, quoting one chaplain who wrote that in the neighbouring *Oflag VII-F* ‘libido [amongst internees] seemed to be dead’.<sup>240</sup>

A recent study by Clare Makepeace questions MacKenzie’s conclusions. Makepeace studied preparatory notes and correspondence on theatre plays organised by the detainees. In *Oflag VII-C*, officers were allowed to organise plays which sometimes took months to prepare.

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<sup>238</sup> Robin Gerster, *Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* (Melbourne, 1987) 228 & Joshua S. Goldstein, *Gender and War: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge 2001), 252.

<sup>239</sup> Christina Twomey, *The Battle Within: POWs in postwar Australia* (Sydney 2018) 27.

<sup>240</sup> MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth*, 232-233.

By focusing on the neglected existence of female impersonators in the camp who played a role in these theatre plays, Makepeace points out that heterosexual manhood was actively hollowed out by men themselves. The officers inside *Oflag VII-C* even wrote instruction manuals to help men perform more realistic (by wearing appropriate undergarments, modulating the voice as high as possible, and learning how to walk in a feminine way).<sup>241</sup> In several written testimonies it is stated that, when dressed for the play, these ‘playgirls’ were even sexually harassed which resulted in them needing protection from other internees when walking around the camp in drag.<sup>242</sup> Normative fantasies had thus made way for new forms of desire. The fluidity of this was also described by an imprisoned medical officer, Lieutenant Trevor Gibbins, who talked both about ‘emotional homosexuality’ and ‘intimate friendships’.<sup>243</sup> Contrary to Mackenzie’s claim, it might therefore be possible that similar to the PoW camps in South-East Asia, *Oflag VII-C* functioned as an ‘ambiguous zone’ that contested normative masculinity.

### 3.4. Same-sex desires inside *Oflag VII-C*

In the dreams from Hopkins’ research, same-sex desires are surprisingly frequent and spoken off very matter-of-factly. nine of the twenty-one sex dreams were explicitly characterised as same-sex desires by the research subjects themselves. Most of these dreams were concerning friends from inside the camp. Subject eleven for instance had two same-sex erotic dreams in which his friend named Ken played a key role. In dream 519 he finds Ken to be lying in his bed. Although the dream report does not go into a lot of detail, the subject describes that both he and Ken felt ashamed about what they did and ‘it was indeed rather coarse’.<sup>244</sup> When somebody turned the light up, in the dream, they saw that most of the other beds had two occupants as well. Dismissively mentioned by Hopkins in one of the footnotes is that some of these gentlemen had a reputation for ‘doing that sort of thing’.<sup>245</sup> In another dream from subject eleven, Ken reappears:

Leigh and I were in the cobbler’s block, ground floor. I was waiting for Ken to come back from some lecture on music (or choir-practice?). Leigh asked me to go to bed with him

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<sup>241</sup> C. Makepeace, ‘“Pinky Smith Looks Gorgeous!” Female Impersonators and Male Bonding in Prisoner of War Camp’, in: Linsey Robb and Juliette Pattinsons (ed.) *Men, Masculinities and Male Culture in the Second World War* 2018. 71-97, there 72.

<sup>242</sup> Makepeace, ‘“Pinky Smith Looks Gorgeous!”’, 72.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibidem*, 89.

<sup>244</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 519, page 563.

<sup>245</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, footnote 2, page 567.

‘just half-a-dozen each way’. I grunted as I was physically repelled by him but did not want to be rude. Later I heard Bertie asking Leigh a similar question and determined I would ask Ken’.

The subject then exits the cobbler’s block and continues looking for Ken. After being trapped inside a business class, where people inside refuse to let him leave until the class is over, the subject continues his search:

But I got loose and went back till Ken came. He agreed to my idea, seemed neither keen nor hostile but took it as a matter of course, so we started moving the benches of the recreation room together to sleep on.<sup>246</sup>

In another dream, subject fifty-three dreamed that after being issued an extra ration of food, he returned to bed where he found a friend from inside the camp who was waiting for him. The friend started flirting with him as soon as they made eye contact. In the footnotes, Hopkins writes that the ‘subj[ect] considers this fellow [to be] a very sensual person’.<sup>247</sup> The story progresses though, subject fifty-three notes that the other man: ‘stuck his finger up my anus and I was very surprised and contracted my muscles very suddenly’.<sup>248</sup> When subject fifty-three woke up he is reported to have ‘messed his bed’.<sup>249</sup>

Contrary to MacKenzie’s claim that there were no sexual desires inside the camp I would argue, based on these dreams, that same-sex fantasies were very likely present. I would also like to point out that the reports indicate that same-sex desires were even spoken about amongst prisoners, albeit in an ambiguous way. For instance, in one case the additional footnotes to a same-sex desire dream show that one of the subjects returned to Hopkins after having reported his dream. According to the footnote written by Hopkins, the subject instructed him to write an additional commentary to the dream report, noting that the dream was not really a sex dream, but that it rather seemed very matter-of-course. Curiously though, it is recognizable that a number of words, such as ‘incidents’ replaced previously erased words.<sup>250</sup> Although it would be a stretch to give much significance to only one possible occurrence of censorship, it is noticeable that given some other wordings that Hopkins himself used, like ‘bummus’, ‘homosexual incident’, ‘nancy’, and ‘doing that sort of thing’, it seems that at least

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<sup>246</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 514, page 550-551.

<sup>247</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, footnote 2, page 283.

<sup>248</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 276, page 282.

<sup>249</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, footnote 3, page 283.

<sup>250</sup> WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, footnote 3, page 551.

Hopkins, and possibly others inside the camp, were still uncomfortable about the expression of same-sex desires. Given the different attitudes in the reporting, I, therefore, assume that there might not have been a homogenous stance on same-sex desires in the camp, and the opinions varied between persons.<sup>251</sup>

These same-sex dream descriptions importantly differ from the nightmare descriptions in that the re-experiencing of traumatic events can more easily be connected with the mental preoccupations as empirical evidence shows. On the other hand, as neuroscientific research shows, 90% of mundane dreams contain a causal relationship with everyday thoughts in waking life. The strong causalities between sex dreams and daytime fantasies show that this is also applicable to these same-sex desire dreams.<sup>252</sup> Since 43% of all sex dreams contained same-sex desires it, therefore, might still give us a clue about the vicissitudes of masculinity inside the camp. In addition to the negative vicissitudes of masculinity, we encountered in the previous chapter – homesickness, jealousy, fear, shame, alienation, anxiety, mental war trauma, and restlessness – and the desire for trust, security and comfort which were presented in the previous paragraph, there also seems to have been a desire for same-sex intimacy.

Following Doan, I do not mean to naturalise these findings or to see these same-sex desire dreams as identity markers of the research subjects. This is not just an ideological choice, but also a historical consideration since heterosexuality as a concept was only just gaining clear form in society.<sup>253</sup> As explained in the introduction, we also see from studies on PoW camps in South-East Asia that normative desires quickly became contested in a male-only environment. Considering that we see the same contention in the dreams and how they were reported, I hope to show that Makepeace's argument on the fluidity of desires inside *Oflag VII-C* was in fact valid.

### 3.5. Conclusion

The dreams about friendships and same-sex desires are a stark reminder that experiences inside the PoW camp were not exclusively negative and traumatic. Gender historians already noticed the significant role of friendship in the discourse on masculinity in other contexts.

We see that men frequently dreamed about taking care of each other. The urge to being the assertive caretaking individual aligns with an important discursive element of masculinity

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<sup>251</sup> See dreams WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 275, page 283 & WLL, PSY/VAL/2/notebooks, dream 225, page 237 & WLL, PSY/VAL/3/notebooks, dream 513, Page 549.

<sup>252</sup> Domhoff, *The Emergence of Dreaming*, 251.

<sup>253</sup> Doan, 'Sex Education and the Great War Soldier', 642.



at the time in which individual outstanding acts of comradeship were highly valued. In addition to these acts of caretaking, same-sex desires can be found. Although the contents of these sexual desire dreams are less easy to evaluate since they contain a lower affect load than nightmares related to trauma, it can still be argued that the discussion of these dream topics in waking life challenges the boundaries of masculine normativity. Contrary to Simon MacKenzie's argument that same-sex desires did not exist inside the camp, we can indeed confirm Makepeace's conclusion that these desires amongst imprisoned officers were present, both in waking life practices and dreaming life imagination.

I therefore argue that these dreams and their descriptions display the wide range of emotions that were experienced inside *Oflag VII-C*. Both the importance of care-taking within the fraternity and the same-sex desires which were present show important vicissitudes of masculinity. The fact that these desires were non-existing, and silenced, in the personal memoirs that were written about imprisoned life after liberation tells us that the experience of masculinity does not necessarily align with the master discourse of masculine gender expectations within *Oflag VII-C*.

## Conclusion

I started this thesis by presenting two threads that were intermingled and touched upon several historiographical debates. On the one hand, there was the literature on western PoW camps in Nazi Germany which significantly lacked a gendered perspective by its neglect of the masculine experience of imprisonment. On the other hand, I proposed to engage with these topics from the academically awkward topic of dreams. In these concluding remarks, I will tie these threads together to relate this thesis' findings back to historiography, and reflect on the challenges and advantages of a neurohistorical approach to the study of dreams, and how it can contribute to the current state of the art of cultural history.

### 4.1. Historiography of PoW camps in Nazi Germany

Even though men were actively discouraged to talk about their emotions or show their trauma, the dreams of the officers inside *Oflag VII-C* show an astonishing amount of material which give us an intimate insight into the experience of imprisonment. When we approach these dreams through the lens of neurohistory it reveals the wide range and severity of desires and mental trauma. Indeed, I argued that the dreams and reoccurring nightmares illustrate that our current understanding of male PoWs in Nazi Germany is far too simplistic and both theoretically and methodologically outdated. A neurohistorical approach shows that men were haunted by the memories of battle and that they showed strong emotional attachment to their home, friendships and their (loss of) dignity. In line with Michael Roper, I argued that the current approach in the historiography of PoW camps in Nazi Germany flattens the varied individual and emotional experiences of historical masculinities. In this research, I tried to put Roper's call for intervention into practice by responding to the appeal made by Joan Beaumont. Beaumont noted that the academic literature on prisoners of war inside Nazi Germany was in dire need of innovation and that a closer look at the gendered experience is necessary. By introducing dreams into the historiography of prisoners of war in Nazi Germany, I demonstrated that such gendered experiences, the vicissitudes of masculinity, can indeed be studied.

Following the AMHAC-model formulated by Nielsen and Levin, I choose to pay careful attention to the affect load of dreams. The affect load of dreams can be determined by studying whether or not dreams are repetitive if they are manifested with strong bodily reactions like sweating, crying, mumbling, or screaming, when they evoke strong emotions in the dream itself and when they frequently interrupt the sleeping-cycles due to their intensity. In addition to

showing the presence of homesickness in the mind of these officers inside *Oflag VII-C*, this thesis illustrates that the longing for home was accompanied by anxiety. Particularly the feeling of officers being unable to fulfil the masculine gender expectations of the masculine hero, due to their imprisonment, frequently resulted in self-doubt. This manifested in many dreams about coming home to a disappointing and disapproving family. In many dreams, there was also little concern about the harsh conditions of imprisonment. Ironically, and understandably, the officers turned the lack of knowledge about those harsh conditions into a self-fulfilling prophecy by only writing memoirs that did conform to the masculine gender expectations once they returned home. While frequent anxiety and self-doubt is just one vicissitude of masculinity inside the PoW camp in Laufen, another one was shame. Officers walked around in the camp in dirty and damaged combat costumes which evoked strong emotions in the dreams. I argued that this was because of the lack of dignity and subsequent self-worth, motives which were important in the masculine gender expectations. Additionally, I suggest that the often-reported abrupt awakening in the dream reports also offer insight into the decline in 'civic virtue' inside the camp. After all, similar neurocognitive studies on soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan show how long-term stress is associated with a progressive decrease in activity at the back of the brain, which subsequently, leads to a more disruptive sleep cycle. In turn, this would have made them more agitated, restless and sloppy during waking life as well.

The range of emotions inside the camp was not only negative. The feeling attached to caretaking and brotherhood remained important inside the camp. Following the emotions of the dreams I deduced that care for each other's mental and physical wellbeing was of paramount importance amongst the soldiers. Historical research from gender historians already revealed that this was the case amongst non-imprisoned soldiers. There was however also a striking presence of same-sex desire dreams amongst detainees, a topic which is more heavily debated in historiography. In their dreams men fantasised about sexual relations with other men, sometimes to their own shame, sometimes to their own pleasure. Interestingly, not only the dreams themselves were a tell-tale of these fantasies amongst prisoners, the way these dreams were discussed after having been reported also gives us valuable information about the acceptance of same-sex desire inside the PoW camp. Some subjects openly discussed their same-sex dream desires, while others were more hesitant and were mindful of the formulation of the dreams. The notation and comments of Hopkins himself were overall dismissive and talked about the occurrence of same-sex desires as something queer and alien. These findings on the fantasies and possible practices of same-sex desires are in contrast to the findings by

MacKenzie, who strongly argued that PoWs did not have sexual fantasies in general, let alone same-sex desires.

## 4.2. Vicissitudes of masculinity inside *Oflag VII-C*

The affect load concerning fear of abandonment by the home front, the shame for not being able to fulfil the gender expectations of the masculine hero due to imprisonment, the presence of mental trauma resulting from combat show and the intimate friendships which range from care-taking to same-sex desire show many vicissitudes of masculinity inside *Oflag VII-C*. Except for the work by Drapac and Makepeace, these vicissitudes have been neglected in prisoner of war literature on Nazi Germany up until now. In popular history and the great majority of academically informed research, the role of masculinity in PoW camps has never been explicitly evaluated.

Following Stefan Dudink's remark that masculinity is a contiguous and entangled concept, I also observed similar entanglements with concepts like brotherhood, civic virtue, home-maker, care-taker and militarism. Gender historians of twentieth-century British masculinity already paid significant attention to these individual concepts outside of PoW camps. Shame about dirty clothes for instance both referenced masculine gender expectations that men should be able to take care of themselves, but this also referenced to a bigger discourse of men protecting their country's pride in extension. Like the studies of PoW camps in South-East Asia, I also noticed that the normative desires quickly became contested in an environment that was only populated by men.

In both the trauma-related dreams and non-traumatic dreams, I also observed a great influence of situated cognition in the experience of masculinity. Different from the historiography of masculinity outside the PoW camps, the situated cognition of *Oflag VII-C* shows the break lines of masculinity when these entanglements of masculine practices cannot be performed. The notion of situated cognition may help historians to move past the emphasis of discourse in historiography. In 2011 John Tosh asked whether we are able to speak of a 'history of masculinity' at all, since our knowledge of the subject is mostly confined to discourses.<sup>254</sup> Since historiography of masculinity has largely been focused on the study of masculinity as a discourse, these vicissitudes have 'slipped out of view'. This thesis shows that masculinity as an identity construct was not only entangled with other constructs, but also

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<sup>254</sup> Tosh, 'The History of Masculinity: An Outdated Concept?', 24.

entangled with a wide range of experiences: homesickness, jealousy, fear, shame, alienation, anxiety, mental war trauma, restlessness, desire for trust, security and comfort and desire for same-sex intimacy.

These experiences were opposed to the characteristics of the masculine hero, but need to be included to come to a fuller understanding of British masculinity during the twentieth century in general, and the PoW literature specifically. This cannot only be done by investigating what is ‘written between the lines’, as John Tosh argues, but such research needs to be mindful of different approaches from different fields, and the use of different kinds of source materials.<sup>255</sup> A neurohistorical approach reveals a wider range of vicissitudes of masculinity and thereby enriches our current understanding of life inside PoW camps. Indeed, similar calls have been made from cultural history about the concept of embodiment. Below I will discuss how neurohistory relates to this current body of literature and which specific advantages and challenges it brings to the table.

### **4.3. Neuroscience and history: advantages and challenges**

In this thesis I showed how neuroscientific findings from sleep laboratories can be combined with the historiography on militarized masculinities. In his manifesto ‘slipping out of view’ Michael Roper already urged historians to look for the vicissitudes of masculinity. Not only can we see that varied manifestations and failing forms of masculinity come to light when observing these dreams, neuroscience also offers a better explanation than previous Freudian understandings of dreams and the subsequent vicissitudes of masculinity. In the case of combat trauma, we saw that men were conditioned to neglect and suppress their fears and anxiety. Nonetheless, the triune brain’s fight or flight response, triggering an overflow of stress hormones and nerve impulses. In turn, the AMPHAC-system is unable to correctly identify and contextualise the traumatic events.<sup>256</sup> These neurological patterns that are fired together, will get wired together, forming new neurological signatures which makes trauma a long-lasting experience that can be observed in repetitive nightmares.<sup>257</sup> As a result, officers woke up screaming from nightmares and sweat frantically when confronted with the memories of combat. This does not mean that this trauma would not have occurred when the notion of the

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<sup>255</sup> John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (Harlow 2013) 141.

<sup>256</sup> Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 41.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

masculine hero had not been internalised, but it did confront the officers of their inability to live up to that ideal.

Shifting the perspective from a Freudian understanding to a neurohistorical approach also underlines the importance of situated cognition within historical experiences. The first chapter, which provided a review of the turmoil that Hopkins' battalion went through and which described what they were and were not allowed to do inside the *Oflag*, provided valuable information that would have gone unnoticed when following a Freudian perspective. Given the Freudian focus on sex, aggression and the pleasure principle, the analysis above would simply have been an association and interpretation game. I could have argued that the dreams about letters were symbolic of deeper sexual urges. Instead, following findings from contemporary falsifiable laboratory tests that prefer situated cognition, I argued that it is not such a surprise that when officers are so concerned with receiving and sending correspondence to home during the daytime, these mental images will come back in their dream during night-time. Not only did this verify the statement that officers were looking forward to receiving the letters, it also showed that the letters not only evoked positive, but also negative feelings concerning abandonment and shame. The same holds for clothing and especially military uniforms. We already know from secondary literature that soldiers were constantly requesting to send new clothing in the parcels provided by the Red Cross. From the dreams, we can not only verify that this was indeed a topic on the mind of many soldiers, but that this was also a topic with significant affect load which can be related to dignity and pride.

But a neurohistorical understanding also brings multiple challenges. First of all, this study on dreams and nightmares would have been impossible to conduct without the very specific and unique source material that Major Kenneth Davies Hopkins compiled. Indeed, in case studies historians are always dependent on source material, but this specific combination of dream content, with annotations on physiological responses and emotional reflections is very rare for dream descriptions in this historical period when the current knowledge from neuroscientific research was lacking. This also means that comparative analyses are nearly impossible. The Mass Observation Archive at Sussex University for instance contains a couple of hundred dream reports from English civilians at the home front during the Second World War, but these reports lack the valuable emphasis on emotions that are present in Hopkins' research.

In addition, since neurocognitive reactions are significantly stronger in cases of mental trauma, it was easier to construe affect load in the nightmares than in the cases of non-traumatic dreams. Especially when it came to sexual fantasies there is no strong connection between

waking life sexual practices and sexual dreams, although laboratory tests do show correlations between waking life sexual fantasies and dreams. In this particular case study, the footnotes in Hopkins' research notebooks provided additional information that make it more likely that same-sex practices did occur, but caution is necessary when we only have the dreams themselves to our disposal since the AMPHAC-model is largely concerned with trauma contextualisation.

Furthermore, historians Geertje Mak, Marjan Schwegman and others have underlined that the long absence of physicality in both women's and gender studies can be explained by the fear to fixate gender one again.<sup>258</sup> One of the major conclusions from postmodern thought was the fluidity of gender as a cultural construct. Mak and others warned for the academic tendency, which is especially prevalent in neuroscience, to fixate gender along the lines of biological determinism. Although this thesis very clearly was not concerned with the 'masculine brain', but rather with the subjective experience of the masculine identity constructs and the many ways in which social conventions on masculinity are broken through by the sheer force of emotional experience, historians need to be aware that there is not such a thing as the 'male brain', or the 'female brain'. For me, writing a neurohistory of masculine experience, it is especially important to stay critical towards the anchoring of masculine (cultural) identity traits in neurocognitive behaviour. My conclusion is the very opposite: this thesis shows how the cultural constructions of masculinities, the environmental world, come in conflict with responses of the triune brain, and through the dreams we see how soldiers are emotionally confronted with that.

#### **4.4. Dreams and neurohistory**

From Jacques Le Goff to Lyndal Roper, historians already established that dreams and nightmares are contextually bound. In that sense, this thesis is in line with an older historiography on dreams. Although the application of Freudian theory is well contested within academic circles, up until now no research within cultural history on the topic of dreams has moved past this paradigm. When it comes to dream studies in neuroscience, however, scientists have moved beyond Freudian theory, beginning with the early discovery of (n)REM cycles in the 1950s to the present-day laboratory test on affect load in the AMPHAC-model. Instead of applying a Freudian lens to the study of dreams, I tried to reevaluate this field with new findings

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<sup>258</sup> Aerts et al., 'Sekse als vraagstuk', 265.

from neuroscientific research which reframe the contextually bound dreams in terms of situated-cognition.

Although I appreciate the term neurohistory for explicating the relationship between the fields of neuroscience and history, and that neurohistory is gradually carving out a permanent place within historiography, we should ask ourselves how innovative neurohistory really is within history. I argue that scholars within the humanities might underestimate the extent to which they are already incorporating neuroscientific findings in their research. The embodied, distributed and situated perspectives are already well established. These perspectives are not only based on bookish philosophical, particularly phenomenological, propositions but also consider the plasticity of the brain. In handbooks that deal with these findings, however, like the 2017 and 2019 works written by Rob Boddice, it is never further developed what this plasticity entails, how it works or what precise consequences it really has.<sup>259</sup> Neuroplasticity is often discussed in a very broad manner, as though the entire brain is one lump of warm clay. If we intend to learn from other disciplines, we should not just approach plasticity as a catch-all phrase for variance in experience, but instead we should also look at how this knowledge is actually interpreted and applied by neuroscientists.

By not engaging with neuroplasticity on a detailed level, neurohistorians also miss the opportunity for neuroscientists to engage, correct and built upon these insights. A lack of doing so shuts the door for a detailed cross-disciplinary review process and subsequent meaningful cross-fertilisation. A neurohistorical approach is a long and confusing process that takes patience: it took me quite a while to understand Nielsen and Levin's AMPHAC-model for instance. Inevitably though, this will enrich the way we look at historical subjects and, vice versa, historians might have an influence in neuroscience. Although there are plenty interdisciplinary research journals on the topic of dreams, a general interdisciplinary journal for neurohistory is currently not existing.

#### **4.5. Closing statement**

Laura Lee Downs and John Tosh have noticed that for most of its existence, the historiography of masculinity has been too focused on discourse. They proposed to include the bodily experience of historic subjects to come a deeper understanding of what gender means; cultural historians might call this the 'embodiment of masculinity'. This thesis suggested one way to

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<sup>259</sup> See for instance the recent discussion on neurohistory in Rob Boddice, *A history of Feelings* (London 2019) 60 & Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester 2017) 94.



engage with historic gender experience by taking into account the affect load of dreams and nightmares. The study of dreams is only one of many ways that a wide range of vicissitudes of masculinity, but it enables historians to shed new light on the many silences in history. I would like to encourage cultural historians to be mindful of the rich sources and methods other disciplines have to offer to research these silences. For instance, contextualisation has always been of paramount importance in cultural history. Situated cognition however delves further into this by showing the influence of environment on the brain at a neural level. Especially in the case of traumatised historic subject, this knowledge might also be used to formulate hypotheses about behaviour changes which point towards trauma even when this is not actively discussed. In general, my hope is that this thesis showed how the synergy between neuroscience and history can really offer new insights into silences and that it allows us to re-evaluate dreams a possible object of historical enquiry.

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