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Military Training at New York's Elmira Reformatory, 1888-1920

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IN THE controversial *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault outlines the relationships between the prison and several other social institutions, including the military, as each developed into its modern form. According to Foucault, the birth of the modern prison, a private environment for reform, was accompanied by the demise of torture, execution, and other corporal punishments, which had been public spectacles of retribution. Each element of those older public spectacles had to "speak, repeat the crime, recall the law, show the need for punishment and justify its degree." This "representative, scenic, signifying, public, collective model" was replaced by the "coercive, corporal, solitary, secret model of the power to punish," which was the prison. And the military pattern or model of regimentation, discipline, and obedience was one of five used to develop the modern prison. From those five models, Foucault argues, a " 'political autonomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have hold over others' bodies, not only so that they do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines." This "political anatomy" developed from intertwined, imitative "minor processes" which "were adopted in response to particular needs."[1]

Dealing with the birth of the prison, Foucault does not trace the influence of the military model beyond the initial stages of the prison. He implies a hardiness or consistency in its use, and other scholars have interpreted his *Discipline and Punish* as more nearly an outline of the entirety of prison history, both in Europe and in the United States.[2] However, beyond brief references to primarily juvenile institutions in Europe, historians have not tested Foucault's model by exploring certain basic questions. How precisely and how successfully did individual prisons use the military model? And how did specific wars, increasingly sophisticated weaponry, and changing public ideas about the military affect the long-term applicability of the military model to prisons?

The 19th century introduction and development of military training at New York's Elmira Reformatory, part of the state's prison system, would seem to confirm several of Foucault's contentions. The training was instituted to meet an emergency, but survived long after the short-lived trouble. The military organization permeated almost every aspect of the institution: schooling, manual training, sports teams, physical training, daily time-tables, supervision of inmates, and even parole practices. In short, the training was used to discipline the inmates and organize the institution.

Contrary to Foucault's argument, Elmira and its military training presented a synthesis of both the newer, private "corporal" and the older, "public collective" punishment. While designed to punish felons, Elmira, more than any other single adult penal institution in the United States, also represented the late 19th century's primary emphasis on reform, an extended form of discipline. Elmira's administrators engineered several different public spectacles of reform and rehabilitation, including state fair exhibits and baseball games open to a carefully selected public. The reformatory regiment offered the clearest examples of the individual and collective aspects of both punishment and rehabilitation. An inmate's body was to be trained against his will so as to discipline the whole of the inmate, a whole subsumed in progressively larger collectives—the company, the battalion, and the regiment. The measured steps of the regiment were to be measures of reform accomplished or anticipated in offenders once out of step with society's morals. Different colored uniforms, replaced by different collar insignia, announced to all observers the prisoners' grades or roughly their nearness to parole under indeterminate sentences. The military regiment was displayed with greater selectivity and care than had been employed in the older public spectacles of torture, for only screened visitors saw the regularly scheduled dress parades. But wider audiences saw the regiment

[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1979 [1975], pp. 111, 131, 138.

[2] Allan Megill, "Foucault, Structuralism, and the Ends of History," *Journal of Modern History*, 51,3 (September 1979): 451-503.

through the controlled medium of printed photographs.

The military training, like other aspects of Elmira, changed in response to forces and events, both inside and outside the institution. Of course, legislation, court decisions, and political interests have been long acknowledged as influential on prisons. By contrast, the military exercised a more subtle, less direct influence on Elmira. The post-Civil War reformers who supported and administered Elmira during its first decades of operation saw military training as a viable, even ideal, tool to restructure the institution and inmates' lives. In operation, military training was less than that ideal. And as America experienced other wars and as ideas about the criminal changed, the public and Elmira officials questioned not just the details, but even the viability of military training as a whole.

Origins and Operation of Military Training

The New York State Reformatory at Elmira received its first superintendent, Zebulon R. Brockway, and its first prisoners in 1876. Elmira was designated to receive 16- to 30-year-old males convicted of first felonies and given indeterminate sentences. In line with its reformative purpose, Elmira offered manual training to inmates who were to learn marketable, honest skills in building part of the institution and making several products. During the 1880's, Elmira's formative years, the state legislature made four dramatic changes in the law affecting this prison labor: the 1881 abandonment of all other labor systems in favor of contract labor; the 1884 abolition of contract labor; the 1888 "Yates Law" prohibiting productive labor in prisons; and the 1889 state supply system which re-established penal industries for inmate training and the production of goods sold only to other state institutions or departments.

The "Yates Law" and court interpretations of it in July 1888 rendered Elmira's labor system illegal. Officials had to find another means of occupying, if not training, more than a thousand men "to prevent [their] physical and moral deterioration that would in a brief period prove fatal to whatever germs of good might have been cultivated in the subjects under treatment."[3] On a more practical level, officials believed that inmate idleness would result in violence, vandalism, and the need for a larger guard staff, and Brockway's reputation for efficient, profitable prison administration was endangered. The institution also needed a means of occupying the men that might not be subject to frequent legislative interference. The expediency chosen, reportedly within 2 days, was military training. That expediency soon became a long-lasting Elmira trademark.

Brockway in his memoirs[4] credited two people with the idea of military training—himself and a 30-year old inmate, a college dropout and reporter convicted of forgery. Brockway was firmly immersed in the network of reformers developed in the abolitionist movement who remembered the Civil War as a noble cause. Much of this 19th century American view of the military was based on insufficient evidence and misconceptions. Inherited from the colonial period's hostility toward the British quartering of troops was an antimilitarist strain that had not disappeared with the Revolution. This hostility, coupled with the exigencies of a moving frontier, "isolated the armed forces politically, intellectually, socially, even physically from the community which they served."[5] This isolation bred an unreality which the Civil War enhanced, while at the same time changing the public's overall view of the military. Perhaps a self-protecting denial of the destruction and bloodshed of the internecine conflict required glorification of the "best" of war. Individual veterans "remembered the self-control that had mitigated violence, not the terror of life under fire and the scorched earth campaigns." A "clean and uplifting war" had "provided the opportunity (so rare in American society, many said) for the nation to learn obedience to law."'[6] If only in hindsight, many felt the Civil War had served the cause of right by freeing the slaves. With their personal careers and ideologies often tied to the abolition movement, many penal reformers saw war and the military as beneficial, though maintained through sacrifice. Each battle and each war were stages in an overall grand progression in which virtue triumphed over vice.[7] The military, with its own hierarchical structure, seemed a fitting agent for this progression. If ordinary soldiers and the nation at large learned self-control and obedience to law through war and the military, it was argued, so too could criminals.

In beginning military training, Brockway appointed the inmate who had shared his idea about the program as the colonel of the regiment and charged him with selecting and training 60 inmates of the first

[3] *Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the State Reformatory at Elmira* (hereinafter *Annual Report*), 1888, p. 19.

[4] Zebulon R. Brockway, *Fifty Years of Prison Life*. New York Charities Publication Committee, 1912.

[5] S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1957, p. 227.

[6] Thomas C. Leonard, *Above The Battle: War-making in America from Appomattox to Versailles*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 9,15.

[7] R.H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1929*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967, pp. 140-41; Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865*. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown & Co., 1968, p. 137.

grade (those closest to parole) for an officer corps. Soon inmates were spending 5 to 8 hours a day exercising, marching, and executing the manual of arms, along with being instructed in the primary principles of military tactics. Symbolic of the place military was to hold, the dress parades were staged in the yard, soon to be called the parade ground, and the old foundry, soon the armory. The inmates drilled with wooden imitations of the Springfield rifle made in the trades shop, and inmate officers carried brass-hilted steel swords, reported as highly polished, but not finely hone.

Instead it was the inmates, and the reformatory's organization, that were to become finely hone. The annual reports on the institutions, written by master publicist Brockway, described the military experiment in glowing terms. For example, in the words of the 1889 *Annual Report*: "The health and bearing of the men is better, their habitual mental tone is improved, common disciplinary difficulties have been diminished or well-nigh removed, and the military government of a reformatory seems now almost indispensable to satisfactory management"[8] The word "discipline," which constantly appeared, meant both education for the present and future goals and punishment for past misdeeds. And "discipline" applied to the mind, the spirit, and the moral sense, that 19th century term, as well as to the body. But this reformation was aimed at the inmate as part of the collective whole during the first years of military training. In the words of Elmira's school superintendent, "salvation now depends on the heroic crushing out of conceited individualism, and the subjection of their mental growth to the opposite conditions of compulsion, classification, and collective training"[9] Military training was sometimes held to be the chief, but never the sole, means of discipline. It was, nonetheless, seen as an essential part of the reformatory system, both for the institution of Elmira and for the institution of new character in the inmates.

Most numerous among the primary agents of the system and the reform were the regimental officers, who at one time from colonel to non-commissioned officers were all inmates or former inmates, the latter hired for the initial 6-month probationary periods of their paroles. The criteria for selection as an officer were, in order of importance: "previous character"; "all around conduct and effort" at Elmira; "military proficiency, temperament, disposition"; and "schooling"[10] Lieutenants acted as monitors in the shops, trade schools, and cell house corridors. The non-commissioned officers were turnkeys on the cell blocks. At first, these lieutenants could issue disciplinary reports directly to the superintendent, reports that cost other inmates marks earned toward promotion in grade, parole, and gratuities including money to obtain medical care, clothing, and additional food. The inmate officers were appointed to sit on courts-martial of their fellows. Brockway and others argued that using inmate officers would "stimulate ambition for promotion and . . . preserve a healthful disciplinary influence."[11] Inmates and former inmates were "well acquainted with the life and duties of guards and endowed with a knowledge of prisoners and their ways, far more perfect than is ordinarily acquired by civilians." And their sheer number, 170 or more for a regiment of 1,500, supposedly reduced "to a minimum the possibility of neglect of discipline or untruthful accusation."[12] Having inmate officers, in other words, was to benefit both the inmate leaders and those they led.

As might be expected in a closed institution, one program influenced the thinking on and performance of other aspects of Elmira. For example, a school teacher was "to marshal the collective capacity of his class, to drill the faculties under his command in exercises that shall give them alertness and steadiness . . ."[13] The spirit of competition among companies for parade ground drill prizes carried over to the baseball diamonds where each company fielded its own team. And the companies formed separate work details in the shops and on construction projects, including a new armory built in 1892/93.

Of course, Elmira was not unique in its reliance on military training for individual discipline and institutional organization. American and European juvenile institutions, reformatories, and schools alike, had long used the military model.[14] Since the Morrill Act of 1862, land grant colleges had provided military training to an age group more nearly matching that of Elmira's population. Elmira officials noted these debts and comparisons. Referring to the reformatory's nickname as "the College on the Hill," Brockway argued: "a college perhaps it is; a college in accordance with the true Athenian spirit, which demanded culture of body as well as culture of mind; a college of conformity with strict

[8] *Annual Report*, 1889, p. 19.
[9] *Annual Report*, 1892, p. 35.
[10] *Annual Report*, 1902, p. 116.
[11] *Annual Report*, 1890, p. 9.
[12] *Annual Report*, 1892, p. 116.
[13] *Annual Report*, 1992, p. 36.
[14] For examples see: Alexander W. Pisciotta, "Race, Sex and Rehabilitation: A Study of Differential Treatment in the Juvenile Reformatory, 1825-1900." *Crime and Delinquency*, 29, No. 2 (1983), pp. 254-69; and Dennis Thavenet (1976) The Beginnings of Reformatory Education in Michigan. *Michigan History*, 60, No. 3 (1976), pp. 240-59.

Spartan principles and discipline."[15] But was Elmira the best of the two city-states, the best of all possible reformatory worlds?

Undeniably, Elmira officials and others believed in the rightness and efficacy of the reformatory system as a whole and of military training in particular. But there were faults and contradictions within the system, only some of which were recognized by its administrators. For example, the use of inmates as clerks and officers, i.e., guards, had inherent and enforced limitations. The original inmate-colonel lasted less than a year; ironically, he violated his parole while on an unsupervised informational trip to West Point. He was replaced by a series of civilian (non-inmate) colonels or military instructors, including Vincent Masten, a former army officer, whose term lasted through much of the time period under consideration. Masten's prior employment had been as head of the State Agricultural and Industrial School at Rochester, New York. The School, formerly the Western House of Refuge, had military training in the boys' department.

By selecting certain men for special rewards and responsibilities, the use of inmate officers went against the announced purpose of crushing individualism. Perhaps at worst the military regiment's hierarchy was a recognition of a well-known feature of prison life—prisoners control much of the day-to-day life of the institutions. At best the hierarchy was a means to control that feature. The use of inmate officers rather than salaried guards "from a financial standpoint, presents also a favorable economic feature . . ."[16] At a time when penal institutions were supposed to be self-sufficient, these savings presented a real attraction, especially to Brockway who had built his reputation in part upon his business acumen. Parolees kept at Elmira as officers improved another numerical column in the reformatory's books. Subject to many, if not all, of the restrictions placed on ordinary inmates, they were registered as not only duly employed, but also law-abiding. Because many other cases could not be followed up, Elmira's reform success rate had long been tentatively questioned. The inclusion of institutionalized parolees rendered that rate even more suspect.

Around the turn of the century, several changes took place. Beginning at the top, inmate officers were replaced by civilian guards. At the 1895 congress of the National Prison Association, Brockway reported that Elmira had "more outside officers, for we desire to make the military organization permanent and not subject to the fluctuations of changes of the prisoners."[17] Both outside interest groups such as the Prison Association of New York and Elmira officials, especially after Brockway retired in 1900/01, felt that the inmate officer monitor system unwisely legitimized the informer network and that inmate-issued disciplinary reports caused resentment and were used in personal vendettas.[18] His successors pushed for an even greater turnover until the highest rank an inmate could reach was lieutenant, and parolees disappeared from the officer ranks and institutional employment in general. Apparently at no time had inmates and guards shared the same military rank. Gradually guards, holding military officer ranks but wearing uniforms different from those of the inmates, took over all disciplinary functions from inmate officers.

In the midst of these changes, military training and other aspects of the institution were partially discredited because Brockway was shown to have resorted too often to a literal "disciplinary appliance," namely a 3-inch wide leather strap. Almost from Elmira's opening, rumors had circulated about excessive corporal punishment exacted by Brockway himself. For years his nationwide reputation for noncoercive control, carefully nurtured in his own writings and the many publications of the reformatory's own press, countered these rumors. However, in 1894, New York's governor under some public pressure appointed a special commission to investigate the superintendent's use of corporal punishment.

Apparently Brockway directed most of those beatings against a certain group of inmates. In military terms, those men did not even qualify for the "awkward squad." The "incorrigibles," failures in the other training programs as well, were a personal and professional effront to Brockway whose well-publicized ideas were based upon a concept of free will, a will that could be nurtured and directed toward morality at Elmira. Clearly influenced by the Italian school of criminology, Brockway excused the failure, if not the inmates' certainly his own, by ascribing the irredeemability to mental and physical defects present since birth. Although the governor's commission admonished rather than censured Brockway, his reputation and those of all the practices identified with Elmira were all undercut.[19]

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[15] *Annual Report*, 1892, pp. 124-25.

[16] *Annual Report*, 1892, p. 118.

[17] Zebulon R. Brockway, "Address," *Proceedings of the Annual Congress [1895] of the National Prison Association*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Shaw Bros., p. 319.

[18] Prison Association of New York, *Annual Report*, 1904, p. 52.

[19] An overall condemnation of Brockway is: Alexander W. Pisciotta, "Scientific Reform: The 'New Penology' at Elmira, 1876-1900." *Crime and Delinquency*, 29, No. 4 (1983), pp. 613-30; for a contrasting view, see: Thom Gehring, "Zebulon Brockway of Elmira: 19th Century Correctional Education Hero." *Journal of Correctional Education*, 33 (1982), pp. 4-7.

So there were several reasons for contemporaries to question the effectiveness of the military system in reforming inmates. In hindsight, there are additional reasons. It is doubtful that marching in unison on simple, direct commands and in company units actually prepared inmates, as Masten claimed, "to make right individual and social uses of their military knowledge and skill in meeting the requirements of parole from the reformatory, as well as in facing the increasingly complex exactions of free life."[20] Even its sponsors did not hold that military training evoked the fighting skills and patriotism that its name implied. Once when asked publicly whether military discipline developed patriotism, Brockway himself referred instead to the ethics class.[21] Colonel Masten argued that the military system did "not look to making soldiers of its inmates: it was adopted for the value of the process itself, not for the ultimate ends usually attaching to this process . . . ."[22] In that same report, Masten announced the formation of an artillery squad. The "process" involved in artillery training replicated to an even lesser degree the demands of civilian life. And some of the ends were more ulterior than "ultimate."

Photographic evidence shows the artillery squads as made up entirely of black inmates.[23] As Masten's choice and not inmate preference determined selection, the squad may have been a means of racial segregation. The special drill team of "colored boys" certainly was. Tacit segregation was practiced at most, perhaps all, Northern institutions, even the so-called progressive ones. These institutions mirrored the racism of a segregated American society that denied blacks opportunities and ignored their achievements, while extolling the virtues of hard work and self-help. The contradiction between image and practice within Elmira was more blatant. Believing blacks more criminal and less capable of reform than whites, officials denied black inmates the collectivity of the regiment and progression through the military hierarchy. In other words, racism subverted the institutional goals of providing training mechanisms and clear-cut rewards for right conduct. All the more ironic is the fact that those same blacks were disproportionately represented among Elmira's ex-inmates most honored for their service in the First World War.

World War I and Its Aftermath

How did Elmira Reformatory, its officers, and its militarily trained inmates react to World War I, both before and after America's entry? Although the military regiment was very much a part of their institutional lives, their reactions mirrored those of the general public, a general public much further removed from the military example. At first both official reports and the inmate-staffed, but officially censored newspaper, *The Summary*, reflected an ambivalence, even an animosity toward the war in Europe. Later as opinions moved towards support of an American war effort, military training which had declined under Brockway's successors experienced a short-lived resurgence. In the 1920's American dissolutionment with war and militarism, together with changes in penal thought, brought an end to military training as a mainstay of Elmira.

In the first year of the war, *The Summary* reprinted letters from former inmates who had enlisted in the Canadian or British forces, despite the hostility of Canadian immigration authorities.[24] The sordidness of trench warfare did not show through the cheerfulness and pride, either because the letters contained no such passages or the editors refused to print them. Meanwhile, administrators stressed that they could "neither prate nor approve of war,"[25] despite their continuance of military training. In 1915, two months after the *Lusitania's* sinking, an editorial compared the inmates' "selfish and malignant passions" which had caused crimes to the hatreds which had perpetrated the greater crime of war.[26] But practices and ideas began to change gradually. Because "military exigencies, remote or otherwise, may be forced on the United States," Masten wrote, "it may be good policy to plan somewhat more of extended order drill, and field and combat exercises, and less of the purely disciplinary exercise."[27]

After Congress' declaration of war in April 1917, Elmira along with the rest of the nation largely supported the war effort. However, the War Department forbade the drafting and enlistment of paroled or discharged felons. *The Summary* editors argued that the practice was unwise and unfair. A "rascal" who had committed but not been convicted of any number of "dishonest, immoral, indecent, mean

[20] *Annual Report*, 1910, p. 26.

[21] Zebulon R. Brockway, "Address," *Proceedings of the Annual Congress [1895] of the National Prison Association*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Shaw Bros., 1896, p. 323.

[22] *Annual Report*, 1893, p. 123.

[23] Prison Association of New York, *Annual Report*, 1910; F.C. Allen, ed. *Extracts from Penological Reports and Lectures Written by Members of the Management and Staff of the New York State Reformatory*. Elmira, New York: Summary Press, 1926.

[24] J.M. Pawa, "Manpower, Diplomacy and Social Maladies: Canada, Britain, the United States and the Recruitment Controversy of 1917-1919." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 11 (1980), pp. 295-311.

[25] *Annual Report*, 1914, p. 54.

[26] *Summary*, 3 July 1915.

[27] *Annual Report*, 1915, p. 32.

low acts" could serve while a felon convicted of a single, less serious act had to sit at home with the shirkers. Argued another way, "courage, alertness, fearlessness, willingness to risk life, these are the attributes of a successful soldier and a successful highwayman alike." Or even more blatantly, "if war is the killing of human beings, many of them are somewhat equipped for the task," as an American foreign legion. When those arguments failed, there was always the old adage—they also serve, in this case in several senses of the word, who only stand and wait. To conserve food or engage in productive employment at Elmira was "an act of patriotism rather than a task performed under compulsion . . . ."[28]

Regardless of the restrictions, ex-Elmira inmates signed up to fight, and the institution marginally geared up to train those still incarcerated. "After many years' use of the 'military' to assist the boy to success in peaceful pursuits, we are now led to further consider this word from a purely military view-point"[29] Bayonet practice was introduced as "a special feature" in the training which provided "no mean apprenticeship to the trade of war which so many of our young men take up after their release from the reformatory."[30] A sense of competition with colleges having military programs was encouraged. A report that 600 of Harvard's 700 seniors in 1917 had enlisted inspired *Summary* editors to challenge Elmira "graduates" to meet or surpass that figure. By war's end at least 400 former inmates and 11 officers had volunteered or been drafted. Their exploits were sketchily retold in a regular column called "Our War Babies."

Only on occasion did a soldier's reprinted letter warn inmates to stay at Elmira "and play ball every afternoon in preference to being over in the trenches throwing lead at each other."[31] Much more often, letters praised the worth of the military training received at Elmira or the bravery of fellow ex-inmates. Death notices began to appear: "we consider that a life given in the glorious cause cannot be mourned in any petty manner and that we praise 24685 for his glorious end."[32] The guards, some of whom were Spanish-American War veterans, served as officers in the armed forces. When one former guard was wounded, *The Summary* reported that "at last" [sic] the casualty lists have "struck a stunning blow at our very doorstep."[33] For black ex-inmates, like other blacks, the war effort offered a chance for pride and promotion, as well as a chance to die. One ex-inmate was the first sergeant of the 369th Infantry, a much decorated black unit in the segregated army. He thought 18 of that unit's non-commissioned officers, as well as other soldiers, were former inmates.[34]

At the war's close, Elmira commemorated all its servicemen, black and white, with a bronze, prisoner-made tablet, which listed by name only the guards and officials who had served. After that Elmira promptly made almost an about-face in its attitudes toward former soldiers. The reformatory's population had fallen dramatically during the war. It was argued that men who might otherwise have been in Elmira were in the armed forces or wartime industries. With the war over, many feared that these men would return to crime and end up in Elmira. Others hardened by their war experiences were expected to turn for the first time to crime.

Elmira's superintendent from 1917 to 1939 was Dr. Frank L. Christian, a psychiatrist who had volunteered for the army medical corps during the war. At Elmira since 1901 in various capacities, Christian specialized in defective delinquents, a direct descendent of Brockway's born criminals, born with a physical or more likely a mental defect that made them criminal. Coming out of the Progressive Era, Christian was one of many professionals who embraced the quantification and classification possible with the newly developed intelligence tests. The progressive spirit, which had influenced Elmira from its inception, had long held that what could be counted and studied could be remedied, whether urban poor, industrial hazards, or the criminal underground. Many professionals believed that the sophistication and the scientific objectivity of the early 20th century psychological tests did more than separate themselves from the earlier generation of talented, energetic amateurs like Brockway. Those tests narrowed the possibility of mistaken diagnoses and opened the way for the much vaunted reform of individuals and society as a whole. But this was false optimism built quite literally upon false correlations.

In practice, the supposedly neutral, scientific classification was used as an excuse for institutional failure. As the group labeled as incapable of reform grew larger, Christian ascribed the blame to both the war and defective delinquency. He found that inmate ex-servicemen were physically and mentally below

[28] *Summary*, 22 September 1917; *Summary*, 8 June 1918.
[29] *Annual Report*, 1917, p. 42.
[30] *Annual Report*, 1918, p. 30.
[31] *Summary*, 21 July 1917.
[32] *Summary*, 15 December 1917.
[33] *Summary*, 12 October 1918.
[34] *Summary*, 9 February 1918: *Summary* 19 July 1919.

military standards, had twice the normal rate of syphilis for regular admissions, were almost all addicted to drugs, and had been delinquent before entering the service. "Except in rare instances the war did not recreate men; it only made emphatic in them tendencies that had been latent." Christian seemingly failed to take into consideration that more men in the general and the criminal populations had wartime or military experience in 1918-1920 than at any time since the Civil War. Morever, Christian ignored reasons other than defective delinquency to explain unreformable, even when additional, contradictory information was available to him. One of Christian's frequently invoked examples of ex-servicemen prisoners was an AEF veteran with a child's mentality and "no sense of moral responsibility"—a "moron," a defective delinquent. In making that diagnosis, Christian noted and then dismissed another explanation for the man's criminal record and dissociation. That veteran had been gassed and shell-shocked in addition to having lost an arm at Belleau Wood.[35]

Christian believed ex-servicemen like the "moron" amputee illustrated two of his basic contentions. One, the defectives were beyond hope of reform. And military life was at best an inadequate means of discipline and at worst perhaps even a harmful catalyst of otherwise dormant characteristics. Underlying all this was a rejection of the very basis for Elmira's existence, the reform justification for punishment of the individual, who as an agent of free will had chosen crime, but once released from Elmira would choose lawful endeavors despite the pressures of environment or fate. Psychiatric testing, having gained professional respectability in massive wartime testing of troops, found increasing numbers of inmates mentally incapable of the sound exercise of free will and, thereby, also incapable of reform.[36] Military training, like other reform programs, was largely doomed to failure.

The discouragement felt about Elmira inmates and military training was part of an overall disillusionment which followed the First World War. Because of the war and related events, the American people lost their almost unquestioned faith in progress and more particularly their faith in the military and war as agents of that progress, whether of individuals or the nation as a whole. The seeds of that disillusionment had lain in the basic contradictions between the American ideals of social progress and hard work. Why did an individual or a society have to strive for achievement if progress were predetermined? On the smaller scale of Elmira, why did an inmate have to work for advancement if his eventual release date had been set with his sentence? As long as the present had seemed satisfactory and the future rosy, these questions were seldom asked. Any doubts raised had been more than balanced by a basic confidence in American society and its certain progress through the law-abiding, hard work of its people. Social ills, when recognized, had been thought on the way to being cured. This confidence had been anchored in what has been called the social law, that "explained where society was at a particular time, what scientific events meant, what men should do, and where their actions would take them."[37] The social law formed the fiber of American society; it was the standard against which both men and events were measured. Such a scheme could not encompass the idea that society might break its own law. For many, however, the trenches, tanks, poison gas, and millions of casualties of World War I were evidence of society's own lawlessness. This realization developed gradually. An upswing of patriotism carried the nation through the war and the immediate post-war period. "Only in the 1920's did Americans begin to concede that war might produce pain without redemption, force without mitigation, and violence of a scale preclusive of individual comprehension or meaning."[38]

People believed the victory won by all American heroes like Sergeant York, who had risen above rural poverty and clung to a strong religious faith. Much of the blame for the sordidness of war lay with those soldiers who were not "proper" men—the violent, addicted, and syphilis-ridden from immigrant families and urban slums. These were the same men labeled as defective delinquents at Elmira. In some respects, these "improper" men were nothing new. Each post-war period had witnessed an increase in crime, much of which had been attributed to ex-servicemen and those dislocated by war.[39] Venereal disease had been a scourge of armies for centuries. And doctors and military commanders had been concerned about drug addiction since the Civil War. But the First World War coincided with stringent drives against prostitution and drugs. The wartime effort to cleanse the

[35] *Annual Report*, 1920, pp. 20-21.

[36] N.F. Hahn, "The Defective Delinquency Movement: A History of the Born Criminal in New York State, 1850-1966." Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 1978.

[37] R.H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1929*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967, p. 144.

[38] Gerald F. Linderman, "Review of T.C. Leonard's *Above the Battle.*" *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), p. 1326.

[39] See: Dane Archer and Rosemary Gartner, "Violent Acts and Violent Times: A Comparative Approach to Postwar Homicide Rates." *American Sociological Review*, 41, No. 6 (1976), pp. 937-62; and Warren L. Schaich, "Mirrors of War: Murder and Violent Crime—A Relationship between War and Violent Crime." Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1979.

home front of prostitution culminated one aspect of the progressive movement's highly publicized drive against urban immorality. Increasingly by the 1920's, reformers found that the elimination of red-light districts had merely dispersed prostitutes and driven them further underground. The Harrison Act of 1914 and subsequent legislation changed the legal status of drugs in the United States and gave the armed forces leverage in their anti-drug programs. However, the number of drug addicts in the armed forces continued to grow, as it did in the general population. Neither long-term effort nor groundbreaking legislation proved effective against social ills which pre-World War I America had deemed curable.[40] With those failures in mind, many feared that the progress of the American nation had been slowed, altered, if not stopped. The First World War and the men discharged from the armed forces came to symbolize both the nation's failures and the fears of its people. War had produced undesirable change bought at too dear a price.

Throughout all this upheaval, the American soldier acquired a tarnished image. Perhaps such declines in prestige were inevitable, for the nation always had had unrealistic views of the army and what military training could accomplish. "The army never reflected American society, unless a centralized, stratified, cohesive, authoritarian institution that has stressed obedience and sacrifice can reflect a decentralized, heterogeneous, individualistic, democratic, capitalist society."[41] Universities once enthusiastically behind military training for moral education dropped their cadet programs. At Elmira in the 1920's, military training was retained in limited forms, as were various other programs deemed of limited effectiveness with the defective inmate population. Previous modifications, plus general inertia, kept military training at the reformatory. It had been too long a part of the institution's public image and internal structure to be abandoned totally.

Conclusion

At its instigation, military training at Elmira was to be one of the institution's most publicized embodiments of the 1870 National Prison Congress. At least to some degree, guards and inmates mixed within the regiment, thereby breaking down some of the stigma or distance that separated the keepers from the kept. Diligence and obedience were rewarded with advancements in rank, matched by greater privileges. Post-Civil War reformers believed the military an ennobling experience that could train men to war against their own criminal natures. Despite these hopes, Brockway continued to resort to corporal punishment, outside the structure of peer-imposed discipline. An increasing number of inmates failed to participate actively or advance in the regiment, but the military model was a convenient way of ordering the institution for Brockway, whose personal reputation in part rested on that publicized aspect of Elmira.

With World War I, several changes took place. Recruiting law to the contrary, Elmira more directly prepared inmates for combat, and ex-inmates served in relatively large numbers. After 1918, Elmira reflected the public's attitudes toward war and the military in general. The tolls of WWI included Americans' confidence in the military as an enervating, even moral force. At the same time, so-called "scientific testing" carried out by Brockway's successors blamed both the war and defective delinquency for inmate recidivism and recalcitrance. For officials, the regiment remained in place as little more than a means of ordering the institution. The regiment was also a reminder of lost hopes.

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[40] For these issues, see: Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920.* Cambridge: Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1978; David T. Courtwright, *Dark Paradise: Opiate Addiction in America before 1940.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982; David. J. Pivar, "Cleansing the Nation: The War on Prostitution, 1871-1921," *Prologue*, 12 (1980), pp. 29-40; and J. A. Sandos, "Prostitution and Drugs: The US Army on the Mexican-American Border, 1916-1917," *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (1980), pp. 621-45.

[41] Richard H. Kohn, "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," *American Historical Review*, 86 (1981), pp. 533-67.