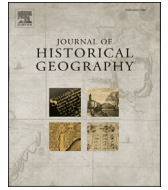




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Military mobilities in an age of global war, 1870–1945

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ABSTRACT

Whilst historians and historical geographers have offered much to scholarship concerning military geographies, rarely have military mobilities been at the forefront of these enquiries. Where scholars have considered the movements that underscore military activities (within and beyond the theatre of war) movement is frequently taken to be the straightforward motion of people, equipment, vehicles and so on, from point A to B. This paper opens the special issue on 'Military mobilities in an age of global war, 1870–1945' by outlining the role that scholarship on mobility can play in understanding military operations and activities. It focuses on a number of military mobilities, examining how different technologies, knowledges, infrastructures and mobile embodied practices have been vital to military operations. Centred around four themes – military 'moorings' and 'hubs'; military movement spaces; the work of military geographers on movement; and the movement of military bodies – this paper demonstrates how mobilities literature and historical geographies may intersect and inform one another. The paper closes by introducing the four papers which focus on the increasing mechanisation and mobilisation of military forces between 1870 and 1945.

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There can be no doubt that, in their design and construction, military considerations have played an important part. The roads which follow the frontiers lie well back from them so as to be beyond the range of artillery fire. Where the autobahnen cross railway lines there are always cutouts and bypasses so that should the rails be destroyed or the bridges blown up cars can leave the highways and join them again further on without loss of time. The autobahn network may possibly be completed by the end of 1940, for more and more men will be transferred to road-work as the rearmament of Germany progresses towards its completion. These great roads are, indeed, as much an essential part of the rearmament programme as is the motorization of the army; for they are absolutely necessary if the new army is to be the instrument for rapid and decisive action which the present-day rulers of Germany wish to make it.¹

Writing in *The Geographical Magazine* in January 1938, Alan H. Brodrick discussed 'The New German Motor Roads' in a lavishly

illustrated photo-essay which conveyed the visual spectacle and modernity of the *Autobahnen* for a British readership. While historians frequently stress the pre-Nazi origins of these new roads, there is no denying that the close association of the National Socialist state with both the construction and promotion of the *Autobahnen* in the 1930s led many commentators to see them as symbols of an authoritarian dictatorship, military aggression, national mobilisation and rearmament.² The German *Autobahnen* appeared to be militarized by design, as well as facilitating the production of specific militarized mobilities during World War Two. Indeed, while British government scientists later doubted their planning for military purposes – due to their positioning and incompleteness – contemporary observers remarked upon how

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E-mail addresses: prm@aber.ac.uk (P. Merriman), Kimberley.Peters@liverpool.ac.uk (K. Peters).¹ A.H. Brodrick, The new German motor-roads, *The Geographical Magazine* 6 (1938) 209.² W.H. Rollins, Whose landscape? Technology, Fascism, and environmentalism on the National Socialist *Autobahn*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1995) 494–520; R. Vahrenkamp, *The German Autobahn 1920–1945: Hafra Visions and Mega Projects*, Lohmar, 2010; J.D. Shand, The Reichsautobahn: symbol for the Third Reich, *Journal of Contemporary History* 19 (1984) 189–200; E. Dimendberg, The will to motorization: cinema, highways, and modernity, *October* 73 (1995) 91–137; T. Zeller, *Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930–1970*, Oxford, 2007; P. Merriman, *Driving Spaces: A Cultural-Historical Geography of England's M1 Motorway*, Oxford, 2007; P. Merriman, Britain and 'the motorway club': the effect of European and North American motorway construction on attitudes in Britain, 1930–1960, *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies* 2 (2012) 106–133.

they were utilised by the German state in military operations.³ As a special correspondent of *The Times* reported on 11 March 1938 (at the time of the *Anschluss* of Austria):

German troops have crossed the Austrian frontier at Salzburg, Kufstein, and Mittenwald The Reich motor road leading to Freilassing near Salzburg was blocked this morning with a long train of lorries and armoured cars and soldiers on motorcycles destined for Freilassing and Kiefersfelden, on the German side of the frontier opposite Kufstein. A goods train filled with infantry and cavalry arrived at Kiefersfelden at midday, and later contingents came by road.... Further contingents of troops were still being rushed along the Reich Autobahn in the direction of Salzburg and Kufstein and on the high road to Garmisch at a late hour to-night.⁴

On the one hand, the *Autobahnen* enabled the smooth and efficient movement of military personnel and equipment. On the other hand, they emerged as a strategic target by which military movements could be curtailed and blocked. Military movements thus became entangled with an intricate and complex politics of road construction, promotion, appropriation, interpretation and destruction.

German road, river and rail infrastructures were all vital to the logistics of military operations, emerging as important to both German strategies for advancement and also British strategies of aerial bombardment.⁵ A similar story was presented in official accounts of Britain's transport infrastructure during World War Two. Railway and port infrastructures were seen as vital to the efficient transportation of troops, tanks and other military equipment within Britain, with transport infrastructures being adapted to facilitate the wartime demands of specifically militarized mobilities.⁶ Moreover, other infrastructures – particularly airfields and

airbases – were planned and built for the purpose of enabling new kinds of militarized movements in a war that was fought not just on the ground and at sea, but also from the air.⁷

This opening vignette hints at the complex relationship between militarized movements and the politics of particular architectures, spaces and practices; highlighting the role of different technologies, knowledges, infrastructures and practices in enacting movement. From the Roman road through to more recent technologies such as the railway, aircraft, drone and internet, one can observe how the production and consumption of particular technologies, vehicles and infrastructures has been associated with military practices.⁸ Military historians and archaeologists have focussed considerable attention on infrastructures of military mobilisation and transportation, but in this introductory article and special issue we want to call upon historians and historical geographers to adopt a much broader approach to military mobilities, wherein mobility is not simply defined as the 'brute fact' of the physical displacement of people, equipment, vehicles and so on, from point A to point B.⁹ It is for this reason that we would suggest that both historians and historical geographers concerned with military movements could usefully engage with scholarship on mobility and mobilities within the social sciences and humanities, in which attention is focused on the different spaces, embodied practices, materialities, infrastructural moorings, qualities, meanings and power relations associated with movements.¹⁰ That said, we do not see this influence as one way. Mobility scholars have tended to focus largely on civilian and commercial mobilities, and an attention to military scholarship could enable them to trace the distinctive ambitions, strategies, technologies, logistical challenges, spaces and qualities of movement which affect and shape military and militarized mobilities of different kinds.

Military and militarized mobilities are, of course, many and varied. Some of the distinctive characteristics of military mobilities include, for example, the adoption and use of distinctive mobile technologies (such as the bicycle, motor car, horse and submarine) for strategic and offensive advantage; the diverse strategic movements of historic armies, navies, air forces, or guerrilla and terrorist forces; the mobile experiences of conscripted soldiers, prisoners of war and migrants displaced by war; secret and covert military movements; the complex entanglements of technologies, infrastructures and experiences of movement and stasis; and the role of strategic sites such as bases or control centres for military mobilities – amongst many other topics. What the foregrounding of ideas and experiences of movement and mobility can facilitate is the production of accounts of military action, events and movements which are neither wholly nor primarily focussed upon static, territorial geographical imaginations.

In this special issue the contributors focus on military mobilities between 1870 and 1945, a period when the capabilities, strategies, tactics and mobilities of military powers were fundamentally reshaped alongside the enrolment of new technologies of offence, defence, transportation and communication. The start of this period was marked by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), wherein German troops and materiel were mobilized using railway lines with a speed and success which, as one historian

³ See Road Research Laboratory, *The German Motor Roads 1946 (Road Research Technical Paper No.8, British Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee Overall Report No.5)*, London, 1948, 3.

⁴ Reich troops cross the frontier, *The Times* (12 March 1938) 12.

⁵ See, for example, Air Ministry and Ministry of Information, *Bomber Command: The Air Ministry Account of Bomber Command's Offensive Against the Axis, September, 1939–July, 1941*, London, 1941.

⁶ Ministry of War Transport and Ministry of Information, *Transport Goes to War: The Official Story of British Transport, 1939–42*, London, 1942. On the adaptation of aerial transport for war, see P. Adey and W. Lin, Social and cultural geographies of air transport, in: A.R. Goetz and L. Budd (Eds.), *The Geographies of Air Transport*, London, 2014, 61–72.

⁷ See P. Adey, *Aerial Life: Spaces, Mobilities, Affects*, Chichester, 2010 and also P. Adey, A. Williams and M. Whitehead, Introduction: Air-target: distance, reach and the politics of verticality, *Theory, Culture and Society* 28 (2011) 173–187.

⁸ See R. Laurence, *The Roads of Roman Italy: Mobility and Cultural Change*, London, 2011; J. Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State*, Cambridge, 2011; E.M. Spiers, *Engines for Empire: The Victorian Army and its Use of Railways*, Manchester, 2015; G. Pirie, *Air Empire: British Imperial Civil Aviation, 1919–39*, Manchester, 2009; Adey, *Aerial Life*; J. Packer, Automobility and the driving force of warfare: from public safety to national security, in: S. Bergmann and T. Sager (Eds.), *The Ethics of Mobilities: Rethinking Place, Exclusion, Freedom and Environment*, Farnham, 2008, 39–64; A. Briggs and P. Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, third edition, Cambridge, 2009. There is a now extensive literature on drones, including I. Shaw, Scorched atmospheres: the violent geographies of the Vietnam war and the rise of drone warfare, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 106 (2016) 688–704; D.J. Gregory, From a view to a kill: drones and late modern war, *Theory, Culture and Society* 28 (2011) 188–215; D.J. Gregory, Drone geographies, *Radical Philosophy* 183 (2014) 7–19. On the politics and affective qualities of infrastructure more broadly, see A. Amin, Lively infrastructure, *Theory, Culture and Society* 31 (2014) 137–161; B. Larkin, The politics and poetics of infrastructure, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013) 327–343; P. Merriman, Mobility infrastructures: modern visions, affective environments, and the problem of car parking, *Mobilities* 11 (2016) 83–98; P. Merriman and R. Jones, Nations, materialities and affects, *Progress in Human Geography* (2017) doi: 10.1177/0309132516649453.

⁹ See Cresswell's critique of the push/pull factors that are typically understood to drive mobilities in T. Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Western World*, New York, 2006.

¹⁰ See, for example, P. Adey, D. Bissell, K. Hannam, P. Merriman and M. Sheller (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*, London, 2011; Cresswell, *On the Move*; T. Cresswell and P. Merriman (Eds.), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, Farnham, 2011; J. Urry, *Mobilities*, Cambridge, 2007.

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