The Great War Association
Central Powers Handbook:
Der Mann:
Building the German Man under the Stahlhelm

Beta 1.04
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Please note, there are a few notes for things to add and also a few formatting things. Some text is “greyed-out”—meaning it needs to be re-written—just a note on that so you didn’t think it was in error. Yes, we know, sometimes we have repeated things in sections... oh well. Maybe it’s important, maybe it will get fixed in a future edit.

You might see some formatting errors, as this document was brought from Adobe InDesign, to MS Word, a much more primitive program, but one that is also much more common to our team. Again, as we say, bear with us and use this in German-ly comradeship.

Credits to come. We also will be crediting photos, just not time yet. And YES, we know, some are form books... we are using them under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in that we are NOT making a profit. Again, we will duly credit them :-)

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Der Mann
„Unter dem Stahlhelm!"

This chapter is about the German man himself—“the man under the Stahlhelm” if you will. Here we will try and give you some information on the person we portray, that guy wearing the Stahlhelm, the man himself. Now, you might be asking why this is important as a reenactor, but it is, it really is! Otherwise, what are you but an American in a costume? To portray the German soldier correctly AND do it in a way which perhaps honors these men, you need more than window dressing, you need a foundation, a rock-solid foundation—that is what this section is for.

The Big Three

“Man” is one of the three essential parts of the persona—these being: Man, Methods, and Minutia. What we are referring to here by “Man” is the person inside the uniform (not just men, either; women too). Without putting some effort into understanding the German person—his environment, background, traits, etc., it is impossible to understand the German soldier and portray him!

Some of the elements we are concerned with are: appearance, mannerisms, cultural heritage, and language (probably the most obvious characteristic outside the different uniform when compared with American soldiers).

The Basic Concept

Our basic concept when implementing things in this area is slightly different than our requirements in other areas. In other areas, the main task is to research the correct detail, and use this new detail as our standard. With the “Man” category, however, many of the “correct” details are easy to find, but literally impossible to implement. For example, the most accurate impression of German soldiers would have the reenactors speaking German—like natives, without a foreign accent and in the correct regional dialect for their region. Now, even though the research material to attain such a goal is readily available, we could not realistically hope to set such a high standard for our members. So, in this area at least, we have to compromise. Our minimum standards then, should be to act and sound like (at least to non-German spectators) genuine Germans.
Staying in Character

If you doubt the importance of “staying in character,” try thinking about it this way: Have you ever gone to an event or a living-history facility which specialized in a period that you weren’t familiar with—then came away genuinely impressed? What was it that impressed you? It was probably not a minute attention to “material authenticity” because the layman doesn’t know what is, and what is not, right. Instead, what probably did impress you was the attempt by these living historians to stay “in character.” By doing this, most likely it helped give you the feeling that you really were talking with a British “Redcoat,” a medieval knight, or whatever. It is this attempt at “staying in character” that makes these historical figures really “come alive!”

One other thing must be stressed: implementing the items detailed in this section is not easy—”Man” is the hardest facet of the impression to develop. You just have to keep trying, because it is important and eventually you’ll get it!
Let's start at the beginning... a quick overview of your body parts auf Deutsch. Of course, you want to get to the neato uniforms and guns and shootin' and stuff—and we will, but this stuff is important too! Let's do it right!

Notice many of the words are the same as in English (or close enough to figure it out)... see, German isn't so hard after all! Just try and learn the important ones (all would be great, but this is enough to start). As you go, try and think of the German term instead of the English one for your body parts. This is how we learn this stuff—we find a use for the word, so we will remember it.

**GERMAN AND AMERICAN EQUIVALENTS - MALE HUMAN ANATOMY**

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**Front View**

- Haar: Hair
- Mund: Mouth
- Backe: Cheek
- Leisten: Groin
- Brust: Chest
- Arm: Arm
- Finger: Finger
- Daumen: Thumb
- Knie: Knee
- Unterschenkel: Lower Leg
- Knöchel: Ankle
- Vorderansicht: Front View

**Back View**

- Wirbel: Vortex
- Nacken: Neck
- Schulterschulter: Shoulder Blade
- Kreuz: Cross
- Rücken: Back
- Lende: Lumbar
- Gesäß: Buttocks
- Hand: Hand
- Backen: Cheek
- Waden: Calf
- Fuß: Foot
- Ferse: Heel

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Appearance

What did a German Soldier of the first World War look like? We already know something about his uniform, equipment, etc. But what did the actual person inside the uniform look like?

First, remember we are talking about the “Edwardian Period” or in our case “Wilhelmine.” Like the Victorian-era man, no self-respecting Edwardian would walk about in his underwear (which is what going out in one’s shirt-sleeves would have been considered). Doing manual work would be one thing, but as soon as it was done, back on would come the coat. Just because we “modern folk” dress for comfort, please don’t be fooled into thinking they did. Proper and correct!

Next, a couple of observations on German soldiers are in order. German soldiers were not expected to maintain their kit in the same immaculate condition expected in the British army—but neither were they sloppy, wandering around with everything unbuttoned—LOOK at the pictures. German soldiers were expected to keep their weapons in good condition, free from dirt and rust. While they were near the frontlines, German Soldiers carried their gas masks everywhere they went. Out of the line, the uniform was kept brushed with rips and tears to be mended; the soldier’s leather gear was also to be kept clean and oiled. Overall, a good appearance was maintained at all times without going to the extreme of keeping every button done-up and polished.

Facial Hair

Early in the war, mustaches were common, as were goatees and even full beards. Later in the war though, most soldiers were clean-shaven so as to make sure that the gas mask sealed to their face properly. Our only caveat on facial hair is that it must be of period style and worn according to regs.

Note: The German Army regs said: that “Mutton-chops” and “side-burns” were not allowed for enlisted wear. See art on page 8.
Hair

The truly authentic “Prussian” haircut has the neck shaved and tapered from the top of the ears all the way around and slicked back. “Crew-cuts” were also quite popular in the trenches. We realize these types of haircuts may be a little extreme, especially if you don’t want to scare your family or the people you work with! [okay, well... some of us think that kind of thing is funny!!!] What we require is that the hair be short enough on the sides as to not touch the ears (i.e. “whitewalls”), and tapered in back. This is very important, since at WWI reenactments there are strict rules on haircuts, and if you find yourself at the event with hair that is too long, the only options are to leave the event, go to town and get it cut or... have the “field barber” cut your hair. And, if you have ever seen anyone who has been to the field barber, you will know that this is truly a much more frightening prospect than it sounds (think “wifely ire”).

Look at the guys in this photo to the right—REAL Frontschweine! Look how their hair is—not in locks and styles to woo the girls. You’d want it short when you can’t wash it all the time. Really, it will grow back and the girls might even like the new, manlier you...

Note: Go to a real barber shop, not a “salon” or a “stylist” — go to a place with a barber pole outside (or at least a drawing of one in the window). You know, the kind of place where old guys go to and that still has un-PC stuff like Playboy Magazine and Field & Stream sitting around—they’ll know how to cut your hair right!

Soldaten hunting for lice in their clothing... hence the title: „Auf der Jagd im Schützengraben“ (on the hunt in the trenches).
Art showing original regs on hair and beard styles see next page for translation of text.
Mützen, Haar und Baarttract
Hats, Hair- and Beard-Styles

a translation by Herrn Dr. Donald Crosby

1. The enlisted „Feldmütze“ (also called the „Krätench“).

2. The „Dienstmütze“ for wear by NCOs (and also for men retired from the foot troops).

3. Special Feldmütze for mounted troops (and also their unmounted troops).

4. Mütze for Officers.

5-6. Feldmütze for officers, The colored Mütze was supposed to be worn as of 1. Feb. 1913, but this was not taken too seriously by the officers. NCOs were also permitted to buy the „Schlappmütze“ with their own money.

7. The Schirmmütze for Marine-Infanterie (naval infantry).

The hairstyles worn by the unit can be decided by the Kompaniechef's choice, as he wants. Totally short-cut hair was, in general, less desired in most cases; used mostly by people who wore parts in their hair or had unruly hair and were already used to that cut, the so-called “Pencilhead.” The neck was always supposed to be free of hair [shaved clean]. This was often checked by the bare hand if necessary. During the training maneuvers of “draftee-reservists,” naturally, many of these things weren’t taken seriously (exceptions were made for this).

*A Special permission was required from “higher up” if an individual wanted to keep a totally unmilitary hairstyle (i.e. the long hair of an artist) such as he chose to wear as a civilian. Such requests were occasionally given. As is well known, Feldmarschall Haeseler also wore his hair in a long style (almost like a [pony] tail) and after all, the [old] Kaiser himself had a curly beard.

The style of beard was a matter of choice. To be sure though, this freedom was not always tolerated in certain units by superior officers. Usually however, either the Kaiser or his military Commander-in-

chief served as the model for what was allowed. Only seldom did one see genuine big-full beards among active troops, usually those sporting them, either officers or enlisted men, were reserves or Landwehr troops.

Muttonchops were rarely seen and if worn at all were usually worn by cavalry officers. High-brushed temple hair—so-called “helmet supporters”—were popular.

Face whiskers with a shaved chin in the “Old Kaiser” style were rarely seen and were worn almost exclusively by officers who had served before 1888.

Before the war, smooth beardless faces were rare and were usually seen among very young soldiers who were still waiting for their first mustaches to grow.

A: The only person who had to wear a proscribed style beard was the drummer of the Regiment Garde du Corps.

Here are some more examples of German hair styles in WWI.
An original

Here is a set of photos of Friederich Lenz from when the war started in 1914 and later, in 1917. Uffz. Lenz survived the war. With the kind permission of his Grandson, Peter Kraft.

Uffz. Lenz was a member of Leibgarde-Infanterie Regiment (Grossherzoglich-Hessisches) No.115... This set of photos shows how he looked at the start and at the end of the war. He was badly wounded in the Spring of 1918 during “Operation Michael” (Kaiserschlacht).
Eye Glasses

LOOK, non-period frames are re-ally noticeable and detract greatly from the unit impression—more so, they ruin the feeling of “being there” for everyone else. This is a “gotta-do!” Looking through photos of WWI German soldiers and you will be hard-pressed to find ANY of these guys with non-standard type eyeglasses. Occasionally you might see period civilian style frames, but you definitely would not find any of the little Rev-War or Civil War era style frames so popular in other reenacting periods on the WWI German Frontsoldat! [Soldat! Thou must break thyself of thine Silly War afflictions].

Note also: you don’t know how jarring it is to see someone with a really good impression, but with modern dork glasses. Really, all your work in building your impression will be for naught; the person you are talking to is most likely going to notice you didn’t much care about your glasses and not take you seriously. Or not, you believe what you want, but modern glasses are a dead give-away that you don’t care.

Your eyewear options are:

* Buy an original pair of Dienstbrille or Maskenbrille and have the lenses changed to your prescription (www.soldat.com has good pairs for the reenactor).

* Get yourself a pair of silver, round-lensed wire-rimmed frames (flea-markets or antique stores are great sources for this).

* Wear contacts; or...

* Do without your glasses. However, if you are going without your prescription eyewear, make sure that our unit commander and/or your Gruppenführer (squad leader) knows. This is, of course, for your own safety as well as that of everyone else at the event.

* NO SUNGLASSES! This is a real example of how modern comfort needs to be subordinated to historical truth. In the time period we portray, sunglasses were a sign of someone who has SYPHILIS!! Yep, that’s right, no normal person wore them. So, if you see someone at a WWI event in sunglasses, ask them if they have syphilis!

Maskenbrille—for wearing under your gasmask.
Tattoos

Yes, of course the Germans had tattoos, especially those from the port cities (a sailor’s trademark, we suppose). If your tattoos have German words in them, good for you. If there aren’t any words in them, perhaps you’re still all right. However, if your tattoo says something like “MOM,” “Harley Davidson” or “USMC,” keep your shirt sleeves rolled down! Obviously, no visible modern tattoos.

Weight

Take a look at original photographs and you will see that the men are quite thin. This is mostly due to their wartime diet, but it also comes from being under the stress of combat—combat burns up a lot of calories. When we ask military veterans to criticize our impressions, the bolder ones will always say something like: “You are all too fat!” Be conscious of your weight (which is something we should all try and do more of anyway!)

Posture

We once showed a picture of a bunch of German reenactors to someone in the German military. He immediately commented: “Look at that! He [one of the men] is standing like an American—slouched with hands in pockets!” Be careful of the typical casual American posture, the traditional German stance is much more upright. (and yes, Poindexter, whilst you can find pictures of Germans standing like this, it is rare! Don’t do it, do it right!)
Mannerisms and Cultural Traits of Germans in General

By Erich Tobey, edited and added to, by Marsh Wise

If you have ever been around Europeans for any length of time, then you will know that there are other differences aside from the obvious ones such as in language. What follows are some guidelines for acting less like an “American” of the early 21st Century and more like a German of the “Edwardian-era” (actually “Wilhelmine-era”). The more we can “stay in character,” the more convincing our impression will be; doing this will not be easy because in some cases the correct “German” mannerism will seem awkward to us.

And yes, we realize that the following traits are stereotypes, and possess all of the dangers inherent in such generalizations, however, we have done this to give the reenactor a better understanding and grasp of just who the German “Mann” was.

A writer named Willi Hellpach compiled what he termed the “positive characteristics of the Germans.” What he may not have realized was that the same “positive” characteristics were probably also the source of many of the negative stereotypes about Germans. The following traits outlined in this section are more or less valid for all Germans.

Creative Energy

On a large scale, the Germans have always been great builders and inventors. On a smaller scale, individual Germans are some of the hardest-working people on the planet. In fact, the negative corollary of this trait was expressed by another writer named Hermann Eich: “The Germans have a mania for work. They have no idea how to enjoy life.” Allies who occupied captured German positions were amazed to find bunkers with carpets, paneling—even electricity and false windows—sometimes with flowers on the table. In other German camps, the Landser raised gardens and had small rabbit farms. German prisoners even made working model trains using nothing but wood. Germans have a well-founded reputation of being diligent and creative workers.

☑ Germans were seldom idle, so we should try and stay busy: improving a camp site or positions, repairing uniforms and equipment, conducting document checks, writing letters, etc.

Thoroughness

The Germans have a much-used saying: „Wenn schon, denn schon”. In English, this means that if something is worth doing at all, it is worth doing right. It seems that the Germans never do something halfway—they are masters of organization and give great attention to detail. The negative implication here, of course, is that they are perfectionists and fussy—the perfect trait for the stereotypical bureaucrat, who appears again and again in German literature.

☑ „Wenn schon, denn schon“. It would be tough to improve on this. We should also go to great pains to develop the smaller details, like emulating the traits found here: developing a persona, issuing paperwork, procurement of personal effects, etc. We should also strive to perfect an organization that works for the benefit of not only our members, but also the hobby in general. By helping others, we help ourselves—the day where we refuse to help someone who asks, is the day we should stop!
Orderliness
Here’s another famous German saying: „Ordnung muß sein!” (There must be order!) Germans are neat and everything must go by the rules. Punctuality is another by-product: the trains are always on time and woe to the person who is late for a meeting with a German! Germans even try to make their free time orderly and scheduled. Of course, this mania for order also has some bad side effects—German soccer teams are often driven to frustrated distraction by Latin teams who do some “artful” fouling or subtle cheating. History shows that German soldiers during both World Wars reacted with unreasonable ferocity when occupied peoples did not “play by the rules” (i.e. “Partisans”).

✔️ We should stick to our rules. Our camps, billets, trenches and persons will be neat and clean. Sloppy or ill-maintained uniforms and equipment will not be tolerated, nor will disruptive behavior. We will also be punctual.

Sincerity
Germans pride themselves in their honor; they generally do what they say they will. On the other hand, there is another famous quote: “A German never tells a lie unless he believes it.” It appears that sincerity can also sometimes be interpreted as “blue-eyed self-righteousness.”

✔️ When we tell someone we will do something, either as individuals or as a unit, we will be honest with one another!

Firmness
More tangible terms might be “persistence,” or “single-mindedness.” More accurate might be the terms “bull-headed” or “stubborn”—take your pick. Willi Helpach was German, so he chose the more attractive term—what can you expect, he was probably “loyal,” (see below).

✔️ When we set a goal for ourselves, we should be single-minded in its attainment. Most importantly, we will stick to our policies and regulations as much as possible without being unreasonably stubborn.

Loyalty
Here is a trait which the Germans have developed almost to the point of self-destruction. Loyalty to his unit, family, country, and comrades is one of the things that makes the German a natural soldier. However, at various times throughout history, the Germans have developed loyalty to its negative extreme: fanatical nationalism. Combine this with “firmness,” and you get the stereotypical German who will tell you that Germany and the Germans are superior, no matter what you say.

✔️ We will practice Kameradschaft (Comradeship). We will support our fellow members, our organization, and the hobby. We WILL be loyal to the unit and our Kameraden! We will also help out any other German unit that needs our help, if at all possible. For that matter, we will help out any fellow reenactor that needs it! Lastly, our organization will be structured to support the member and make this hobby better.
More German Traits

By Erich Tobey, edited and added to, by Marsh Wise

Does all this sound a little intense? Good, it should—this ain’t the Boy Scouts—it’s supposed to be the Kaiser’s Army in World War I! Does it feel foreign? It should, and that is exactly the quality we are looking for. In this article, you will find some other traits of the 1914-18 era German which are useful to know about.

Song

Yes, singing! Germans like group singing. However, to Americans, singing often seems overly sentimental or corny; singing of patriotic tunes is considered especially trite. To German officers though, a lack of singing was an indication of bad morale. It is surprising just how much this aspect of German military life is neglected by reenactors, despite its authenticity and relative cost—nothing! Learn some of the marching songs and sing them! It may feel awkward at first, but we’re all together in this and it is important and... the more members who sing, the better we sound.

Love of nature

We read again and again about how the Germans are great fans of nature and animals. The examples are legion; Albert Krupp, the great industrialist, used to have a hose leading from his lofty office above his bustling factory down to a pile of manure. To relax and give himself pleasant thoughts, he would take a big whiff through the hose. Another example of this is after WWII, when Germans who could barely get enough for themselves to eat, were seen feeding portions of their rationed bread to the geese on the lakes near Berlin. Even today, dogs are allowed in hotels and restaurants. There are many stories of Germans who carried a loyalty to their sick pets to almost ridiculous (by American standards, anyway) extremes. One summer, a friend of ours played host to four young German men, one of whom was a member of the Border Guard. He had great expectations of conversations about history and military topics, but to his disappointment, the Border Guard turned out to be most interested in rocks and soccer. Two of the others were tree buffs and the fourth only wanted to take pictures of deer and woodchucks.

Class Consciousness

This is not such an admirable custom, but one that was very much in existence in Germany, both before, during and after WWI. The Germans call this Stände, and it is almost as ingrained in German culture as it is in the British. The prosperous female who rated to be addressed „Dame“ (Lady) or „Gnadige Frau“ (gracious lady), would boil over at the ill-mannered brute who had the audacity to call her merely „Frau“ (Ma’am).
Politeness

Germans seem to have this in common with most other Europeans, at least when compared with Americans. German society was (and is) very formal compared to that in America. The German language has many polite mechanisms built into it, for example the use of the he informal “you” („Du“) versus the formal “you” („Sie“). The first is used only with very close friends (usually only one or two people qualified as “close”), children, family, and when speaking to animals. Soldiers, students and young people address each other as „Du.” Officers on the other hand, are always addressed with the „Sie,” while they addressed soldiers with the informal „Du.“ Last names were almost exclusively used among soldiers; the first name was used only in addressing one’s closest Kamerad. Germans also place great importance on introductions and greetings; American observers have commented on what they consider the tiring custom of shaking everyone’s hand both on entering and leaving a room.
Smoking was such a part of life during the period that we portray, that it has to be mentioned and smoking the right things, can’t be emphasized enough! Cigars and cigarettes were general issue in the Imperial German Army. Many German soldiers smoked—and prized—to tobacco in various forms. Smoking is permitted, of course, but the items smoked and the implements to smoke with must be accurate to the period and appropriate for a frontline soldier. Cigars and pipes were the most common. Hand rolled cigarettes and short filter-less cigarettes were also becoming popular at this time, and therefore permitted.

We have been told that a dead giveaway for a German was the way in which he held his cigarettes. Rather than hold them between his index and middle finger, the way an American does, the German was supposed to have held them between his thumb and index finger.

Cigarettes (Zigaretten)

Filter-less (yes, no filters—deal with it!) cigarettes and cigars were common, as were hand rolled cigarettes. Here again, we have another biggie—NO FILTERS! If you must smoke, take off the filters, better yet, buy some European non-filtered cigarettes such as Players. Some kind of Turkish cigarettes would also be appropriate or you might try some of the French cigarettes called Gauloises (not really recommended as they’re nasty). European cigarettes came in paper packs or small cardboard boxes—Turkish cigarettes like this are still available at most tobacco shops. Repro German cigarette boxes are available, so it is pretty easy to do this right!

A note on cigarettes though: At the time we portray, at least at the start of the war, cigarettes were considered rather effeminate, as “real” men smoked pipes or cigars—this changed as the war went on, as cigarettes were easier to stash than big cigars or a fragile pipe.
Pipes (Pfeife)

Pipes were also quite common, certainly pipe smoking was not limited to a few old men, like it seems to be today :-( Anyway, pipe smoking is an “art” and not something that you can just “pick-up.

Lighter (Anzünder o. Feuerzeug)

Another biggie! Non-period lighters look horrible—if you need to “make fire” but don’t have an authentic lighter, take some wooden matches with you. Period lighters came in many different styles, but the “trench-lighter” kind, where it doesn’t show a flame was common and relatively easy to find!

A Note on Eating

Europeans often hold their forks upside down in their left hand. A knife, or spoon is held in the right hand. A piece of bread is held with the left hand, you break it with the right and feed it into your mouth with the right hand. Both hands should be on the table at all times. Germans do not allow an unused hand to dangle limply at their sides.
General Cultural Heritage

By Erich Tobey, edited and added to, by Marsh Wise

In this section, we will cover the cultural heritage of Germany and some of the common things that every German would know. Think of this as a Cliff’s Notes for reenactor’s history lesson. The following is information which pertains to Germany as a whole:

A Bluffer’s Guide to German History (up to WW1)

What do we mean by “A Bluffer’s Guide to German History”? We mean that in this section we will hope to give the reenactor a basic knowledge of German history that every German soldier would know. Instead of showing these things in minute detail, we have given this history about the content one would remember after a few years away from class.

The Neanderthals

Like most other Europeans, the first inhabitants of Germany were cave-men. In fact, the German word Neanderthal means “Neander Valley,” which is where the bones of this early humanoid were first identified.

The Celts

The next dominant race was Celtic. They built hill forts and had a pretty advanced civilization, but neither of these could save them from the Teutonic tribes who decided to make central Europe their own. The tribes of Indo-European Teutons booted the Celts across the Rhine river, where they eventually became known as Gauls and still later as Frenchmen (now you see where it all started). And so began a 2000 year grudge match.

The Romans try their hand

Next up to the plate were the Romans, the originators of territorial greed. They marched with hobnailed soles, under eagle standards and gave straight-arm salutes accompanied by a Hail!—sound familiar? After overrunning much of Europe, the Romans were justifiably surprised when they tried to invade the German lands and promptly got a bloody nose from the first great German hero, Arminius (also known as Hermann the German), who wiped out three entire Roman legions and put a stop to the total Roman conquest of German-land. The Romans apparently got the message from this and from then-on, spent most of their time building forts along the Rhine and conducting short campaigns against the Germans to soothe their own hurt pride. Eventually, Rome degenerated and various “barbarian” people, the Germanic Goths among them, fell on Rome and destroyed it.

The Huns

The next tourists to visit Germany were the Huns (about 300 AD), and fortunately, they didn’t stay long. Like American tourists, they tended to leave a lot of litter behind. Unlike the Americans, however, the Huns’ litter usually consisted of ashes and rotting bodies.

The Holy Roman Empire

Charlemagne (the “Saxon Slaughterer”) and his family came out of France to found the Holy Roman Empire, which formally came into existence in 962. Contrary to what the name might imply, however, this Empire, which consisted of almost all of what is now Germany, was hardly unified and was quite Feudal in nature, with the numerous small fiefdoms quarreling and fighting for their place in the sun.

The next German hero was Friederich Barbarossa, who managed to bring some small amount of central authority over the empire in 1138. He was sort of a German version of King Arthur.

Maximillian I started the Hapsburg Dynasty in 1432 when he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor. The Hapsburgs lasted for about 400 years.
A Big Change

The Catholic church was quite powerful in the old days, but unfortunately, it also had some questionable practices, such as allowing rich people to purchase forgiveness with sums of money. This and other corrupt practices began to tick people off and their indignation found its representative in the form of Martin Luther. With his Protestant Reformation, Martin created a political and religious schism, bringing it about by nailing his complaints to church doors [not as blasphemous as it suggests, as this was the common way to post notices at this time], and all this set the stage for the extremely destructive 30 Years War (1618 to 1648). The 30 Years War brought untold devastation in its train and allowed Germany to become Europe’s “theatre of war.” Eventually the Protestants were able to defeat the Catholic forces of the Hapsburgs.

Prussia Rises to the Top

The only German state to survive this upheaval relatively intact was tiny Prussia. Prussian power grew through the 18th Century and became a major German power under Frederick the Great, who reigned from 1740 to 1786. Frederick the Great is kind of a German “George Washington” and “Abe Lincoln” all rolled-up together—he built the Prussian Army into a force to be reckoned with and is still revered in Germany to this day.

Napoleon

In 1806, Napoleon invaded Germany and ended up beating the crap out of the Prussian Army, which had been allowed to fall behind in training and tactics. After the disastrous defeat of the Prussian Army, Napoleon took much of it to fight his battles. The score was now Celts 1, Teutons 1.

This subjugation was not to last—at Leipzig in 1813, Prussia defeated Napoleon and then later participated in old Nappy’s final whuppin’ two years later at Waterloo. Teutons-2, Celts-1. Germany Nationalism

German nationalism began to grow, and it was nurtured and exploited to good effect by Prince Otto von Bismarck who became Prussia’s chief minister in 1862. As the Germans began to feel “German,” they started to look with a jaundiced eye at their Austrian Hapsburg rulers, who still lorded over the “German Confederation.” This led to the Austro-Prussian War, in which Prussia won the means to create the North German Confederation with Prussia as its leader.

The Franco-Prussian War and the Birth of the German Empire

It was time to test German strength, so Prussia turned to their faithful foes across the Rhine. The Franco-Prussian war culminated in the German takeover of Paris in 1870. Teutons-3, Celts-1.

The German Empire (Reich) was established and Wilhelm I was crowned “The German Kaiser” in 1871. During this time, Bismarck continued to foster German growth, but began to butt heads with the new Kaiser, Wilhelm II, who came to power in 1888 after the short reign of his father, Kaiser Friederich I. Not one to tolerate annoyance, Kaiser Bill replaced Bismarck in 1890 and in doing so, lost Germany’s political rudder.
The Great War—WW1

Pre-war Europe was an idealic time and place to live. Prosperity reigned and people were educated (well, in Western Europe anyway) — life was good.

These last few years of peace in Edwardian England, pre-war France and Wilhelmine Germany were called “the Golden Years” and things were looking up for the world — what could halt this prosperity? Only man’s greed and politics...

Armed Camps

By 1907, Europe was two huge armed camps with Russia, France and Great Britain on one side and Germany, Austro-Hungary and Italy on the other. It was a powder keg with no lid. This war was born in a place where so many other wars have been born; the Balkans...

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June 28, 1914

So now, we come to that tragic day in 1914, June 28 to be exact, when the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz-Ferdinand, and his pregnant wife Sophie were murdered by a Serbian terrorist named Gavrilo Princip. Princip was a member of a nationalist society dedicated to Serbian independence and is, if you can believe this, a national hero in Serbia today (these people haven’t learned anything at all, as witness to the current troubles there). Full Steam to War

After this tragic event, nothing, it seemed, could stop the train wreck from occurring. The Austrians wanted to (quite justly) punish the Serbs for their outrageous crime, but things quickly got out of hand; other nations such as Russia and France each had to get a hand in it. Countries siding with one another to fullfill their treaty obligations. Germany was forced to honour its obligations to Austria, with Russia siding with the Serbs — France being drawn in as an ally to Russia, Britain with France. Sides were drawn up and soon, the war came, just like a racing locomotive, seemingly unstoppable. And in the waning days of 1914, Europe held its breath and hoped that the problem would go away.

Nobody wanted the war (well, maybe the Austrians and the Serbs did...), but also nobody seemed to be able to put their foot on the brakes. The belief at that time was that once you mobilized your army, war was imminent... and over the summer of 1914, the armies of Europe mobilized. In August 1914, that beautiful “Indian Summer” was destroyed as the armies of Europe marched out to fight and the world exploded!

3 paras more on war so far
German Holidays

The Germans celebrate many of the same holidays we do, but have a great many extras as well. Here are most of the holidays the Germans celebrate (or celebrated):

- **Neu Jahr** (New Year's Day). January 1.
- **Heilige Drei Könige** (Feast of Epiphany). January 6. Celebration of the visit of the three kings to the Christ child. A legal holiday only in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria.
- **Der Kaiser's Geburtstag** (our Kaiser, Wilhelm II's birthday). January 27
- **Karfreitag** (Good Friday). A moveable feast, it can take place any time between mid-March and mid-April. It commemorates the death by crucifixion of Christ. A number of solemn church services are held during the day.
- **Ostersonntag und Ostermontag** (Easter Sunday and Monday). Moveable feast. The same as above, as Easter is always two days after Good Friday. It celebrates what Christians see as Christ's resurrection from the dead.
- **Walpurgis** (Death of winter). The night before May 1. Celebrated mostly in the Harz mountains.
- **Tag der Arbeit** (Labor Day or May Day). May 1. Large parades culminating in uplifting or defiant speeches in praise of working people characterize this day.
- **Christi Himmelfahrt** (Ascension Thursday). Moveable feast, celebrating the ascension of Christ into heaven, it falls 40 days after Easter, and thus is held between the middle of May and beginning of June. This day is also always Father's Day in Germany, which is generally not a family holiday. Father's Day German-style means fathers go out together and engage in a lot of male bonding and drinking.
- **Pfingstsonntag und Montag** (Whitsun or Pentecost). Moveable feast. Celebrates the Holy Spirit descending on Christ's apostles with the gift of tongues. Always occurs in late May or early June, about 10 days before the next holiday.
- **Fronleichnam** (Corpus Christi). Moveable feast. Celebrated in all the Catholic or quasi-Catholic states (i.e. the West's southern states and the Rhineland area). The highlights of this holiday are open-air masses followed by processions carrying the Euchrist through the streets—especially big in smaller towns and villages.
- **Maria Himmelfahrt** (Feast of Assumption). August 15. Celebration the ascension to Heaven of Mary, the Blessed Mother of Christ, it is a legal holiday only in the Saarland and parts of Bavaria.
- **Allerheiligen** (All Saint’s Day). November 1. A Roman Catholic celebration of all saints recognized or non-recognized.
- **Fasching** (Carnival festivals which reach their peak preceding Ash Wednesday). Begins officially on November 11 (Also St. Martin’s Day) but really picks up steam in February or March.
- **Nikolaus** (St. Nicholas’ Day). December 6.
- **Heiligabend** (Christmas Eve). December 24. The German holiday for the family. Christmas gifts are presented on that day, people attend church services and every soldier is dreaming of being home.
- **Sylvester** (New Year's Eve). December 31.
Myths and Folklore:

The Niebelungenlied

One of the most famous German stories is, of course, the *Niebelungenlied*. It is a rather complex story, rather violent, and its heroes, heroines, and villains—Siegfried, Günther, Brunhilde, Kriemhilde, and Hagen—have become part of German legend. There is probably no poem of German literature that has excited such universal interest, or that has been so much studied and discussed, as the *Niebelungenlied*. In its present form it is a product of the age of chivalry, but it reaches back to the earliest epochs of German antiquity, and embraces not only the pageantry of courtly chivalry, but also traits of ancient Germanic folklore and probably of Teutonic mythology. One of its earliest critics fitly called it a German “Iliad,” for, like this great Greek epic, it goes back to the remotest times and unites the monumental fragments of half-forgetten myths and historical personages into a poem that is essentially national in character, and the embodiment of all that is great in the antiquity of the race. Though lacking to some extent the dignity of the “Iliad,” the “Niebelungenlied” surpasses the former in the deep tragedy which pervades it, the tragedy of fate, the inevitable retribution for crime, the never-dying struggle between the powers of good and evil, between light and darkness.

- For more on the *Niebelungenlied*, do a Web search on [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)—you’ll find tons of links there on this subject.

Barbarossa

Another myth involves the historical personality of Fredrick I, also called *Barbarossa* (red beard). One of the great heroes of German medieval history, he is, according to the legend, still alive, sleeping within the bowels of the Kyffhäuser mountain. Frederick is the subject of many legends, including that of a sleeping hero, like the much older British Celtic legends of Arthur or Bran the Blessed. Legend says he is not dead, but asleep with his knights in a cave in the Kyffhäuser Mountain in Thuringia or Mount Untersberg in Bavaria, Germany, and that when the ravens cease to fly around the mountain he will awake and restore Germany to its ancient greatness. According to the story, his red beard has grown through the table at which he sits.

His eyes are half closed in sleep, but now and then he raises his hand and sends a boy out to see if the ravens have stopped flying. It is also said that Frederick will awaken at some desperate time for Germany and lead them into another golden age (1918 and/or 1945 weren’t desperate enough, I guess).

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Till Eulenspiegel

Till Eulenspiegel was a practical joker whose pranks became a favourite subject of writers and musicians. Till is said to have lived in Germany during the first half of the 1300’s. According to tradition, he was born in Braunschweig, and was the son of a peasant farmer. Many tales were told about the pranks Till played on the Burghers (townfolk) and the nobility, the traditional enemies of the peasant class. Till made fun of his enemies and cheated them out of money, while pretending to be stupid himself.

The first collection of Till stories was published in German during the late 1400’s. Translators retold them in many other languages. The first version in English, called Howleglas (or Owl-glass), dates from 1560. Hans Sachs of Germany wrote plays and songs about Till during the 1500’s. Charles de Coster wrote a Flemish epic with Till as the hero in the 1800’s. Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks (1895) is a famous musical composition by Richard Strauss of Germany.

Grimm’s Tales

Grimm’s Tales are the “classic” children’s tales, such as Rottcäpchen (Little Red Riding Hood), Hansel and Gretel and Sleeping Beauty—yes, Virginia, old Uncle Walt lifted some of his stuff from the Grimms... In the real tales though, you’ll find the stories less “Disneyesque” and nice. If you’re looking for a sweet, soothing tale to waft you toward dreamland, look some-where else. The stories that were collected and edited by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, back in the early 1800s, serve up life as generations of central Europeans knew it—capricious and often cruel. The two brothers, patriots determined to preserve Germanic folktales, were only accidental entertainers. Once they saw how the tales bewitched young readers however, the Grimms (and editors aplenty after them) started “fixing” things. The tales gradually got softer, sweeter, and primly moral. Yet all the polishing never rubbed away the solid heart of the stories, now read and loved in more than 160 languages.
How to build a Persona
A Reenactors Guide to the Persona and How to Make it Work!

by Rudolf Weiß,
1./Inf.Rgt. 23 „von Winterfeldt”

Persona

Just what is this “persona” that we are always talking about? Most WWI reenactors are always saying “I need to figure out my persona, so I can get my Soldbuch done!” Or… “Wouldn’t it be cool if we could do a first-person impression all the time.” Yes, you do and it certainly would! A lot of Reenactors either don’t know where to look, or can’t think of who they want to be. Researching a persona is not that hard; it just takes a little time and research. This article will help you to build your persona and also to give you a good foundation for acting it out.

Who Are You?

When you’re figuring out who you are, there are some basic questions to ask. Among them: Who am I? Where do I live?; In a town or in the country? Is my family rich? What’s my occupation? Do I have a formal profession?

Persona Name

The first item that you come to is your German persona’s name. This is usually one of the very first things a new Rekrut does and hopefully you will pick a good authentic, period, name for your persona. If you’re having trouble with this, read the following:

Your persona name can be your own name (if it is of German extraction), the name of a relative or actually any German name that catches your fancy. A neat way to HONOR someone who fought in the war would be to pick the name of say… a German soldier from your Kompagnie who was killed in WWI

Do not pick the name of someone such as “Paul Baumer” from All Quiet on the Western Front, this is considered “cheesy” and will only result in your getting taunted by your fellows. Picking reenacting names from any war movie is bad form. Nor should you make your last name Bismarck or some other BS like that (yes, I have seen it done). Another thing about your German name, it should not have a „von” in it! Unless you are of the nobility and are an officer, you shouldn’t have a „von” in your name! [*Rant begins]

Just because every single WWI or WWII movie ever made has a German with the name „von Somebody-or-other” in it, does not mean that you should be a „von.” Nobility generally were not enlisted scum (like we portray), they went off and got to be officers. Usually, about the ONLY way a „von” would be an enlisted man, was for screwing up badly, and being a disgrace to his family!
Social Class

What social class do you come from? Germany before the war was, like most other nations, quite “class conscious.” This is not such an admirable custom, but one which was very much in existence in Germany, both before, during and after WWI. The Germans call this Stände, and it is almost as ingrained in German culture as it is in the British. The prosperous female who rated to be addressed „Dame”(Lady) or „Gna- dige Frau” (gracious lady), would boil over at the ill-mannered brute who had the audacity to call her merely „Frau” (Ma’am).

Where are you from?

Even to this day in Germany, just like in the US, there is a lot of “Home-Town” pride. If you’re from the North or South, you usually let others know it, and even if you don’t, many little things—such as the way you speak, the clothes you wear, mannerisms, etc. give you away. It was the same “back then.” Get an old map of Germany, from before 1945.

If you look at the enclosed map pages below, you will see that Germany was a lot bigger then and there are, of course, a multitude of little towns and villages which don’t even show up on this map. My advice is that, unless you have some kind of heartfelt attachment to some big and famous city, to pick a small town or village. Anyway, pick one! Then to do this right, try and get a more detailed map of just that area (or even the town) you want to be from. So, voila!—you can now find your address! Another note here: Other real good sources for this kind of research would be either the U.S. Library of Congress or the German Embassy in Washington D.C. Lastly, you might try the German military archives:

Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt
Abteilung Historische Bildung III
7800 Freiburg im Breisgau
Grünwalderstraße 10-14
I think this address is out of date, but still should work.

Birthday and your Age

Okay, now that you have a home, when were you born? This is pretty easy, simply subtract your current age from 1917 and this is the date you want to be born on. Of course you can pick another date than your own birthday, but it’s easier to remember. A note on this: you might want to add a couple years or so to your age so as to not grow out of your impression.

Family

Now, think about your family. Are they still alive? Who is your father and what are his interests? Most Germans have a formal profession—what is his? How about Mutti, what was her maiden name? Does she do war work? Are you married? If so, make up a good German name for your wife. Go for it, I’m sure she’ll be thrilled with your choice. Any kids? If so, “Germanize” their names.

Profession

Now, what is your peacetime profession? Have fun with this, or simply use the equivalent of your modern job. If there is no equivalent, we’ll try and match it to some period profession. More notes: There are way too many printers in reenacting personas. Instead, were you an engineer? A salesman, laborer, or farmer would be good, as would a student. Or perhaps you are a factory worker, teacher, lawyer or ditch-digger (There you go, that last one fits you just perfect!)

Conscription and the War

German men were eligible to be conscripted for two years military service. When were you called-up? Did you voluntarily return to service after the war started, or did you force the Kettenhunde to come and drag you away?
Modern map of Germany, showing just how much of it was stolen after WWII.
Persona II;
Acting out your Persona

Conversation

While scenarios are underway, try to maintain a “first person” impression—talk about period topics and concerns, carry out period activities, and act like it is “1917” (as much as possible). You should try and speak German as much as possible or at least use an accent (more on this later). You don’t have to do these things all the time, but when in a period situation such as: when an attack is underway, you are bringing in a prisoner, etc., do your best to play your part as a German Soldat.

Remember the Frontsoldat did not always talk about his uniform, equipment or weapon. To him, these items were part of his job, not a hobby. Would you like to think about, talk about or even be reminded of your job all day, all the time? Of course not, just like now, soldiers wanted to try and escape from their “job,” that’s why they pursued other amusements.

Hobbies

What are your hobbies? Don’t say reenacting, it didn’t exist then. Perhaps you like music, politics, sports, photography, or going to the theater? It’s possible you just like to read; this was quite popular in the olden days (You know, before cable TV brought you drivel like American Idol or the Kardashians). Possibly, you are a poet!? Maybe you traveled before the war—possibly even to America. Whatever your persona does, try and make it something that you enjoy now; something you have knowledge about (or barring that, something you feel like studying). These are just a few of the details that you should think about.

Use of the German Language and on using an Accent

When trying to maintain historic accuracy in the presence of French, British or American troops, members who speak no German are asked not to make loud conversation in English and to, in general keep usage of the English language to a minimum.

Each member (if he doesn’t already have a knowledge of German) should try and familiarize himself with the German words for parts of his uniform and equipment, as well as the most common military terms (i.e. “Schützengraben,” “Hande hoch,” “Stellung,” „Hinlegen” etc…). The Bildsprecher Deutsch books help here, along with the Commo Section and reenactor CD’s—although Bildsprecher was made for WWII, it is applicable to what we do. Those of us who have a working knowledge of the German language are greatly encouraged to speak German as much as their fluency permits (Don’t be “elitist” about it though, we want to help people have a better experience, not drive them away!).

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Accents

If you cannot speak German or when English speech is necessary, it has been found that the use of an accent can be quite effective and greatly reduces distraction. Using an accent will also put people in a much better mind-set to then try and create a German dialog or conversation.

Although some reenactors are against this, the use of a German accent (especially if you don’t know much German) can really be effective. Speaking with a German accent will add a lot to your impression, just as buying a good uniform, boots and a rifle will. Sometimes when you first try using an accent, people will think you’re strange, but... if you persevere, eventually it will catch on with them too.

To be effective though, an accent can’t be goofy—like some actor in an old WWII movie or Sgt. Schultz in Hogan’s Heroes; „Vell, vell Col-o-nel Hogan, Vhat do you tink I am, an eediot?” Instead of this kind of crap, simply pronounce some of the letters as a German would; Especially the “W” as a “V” and the “J” as a “Y.” Reinforce this with the addition of German words interspersed throughout your conversation.

Really Irritating and Ridiculous

Nothing is more irritating than seeing an otherwise authentic German soldier yell out (and I HAVE...) “Hey German guys! First squad with me, second squad with Joe. Everyone fall-in at left-shoulder arms.” WAUGH! This sounds like SHIT!!! Instead, how hard is it to say: „Achtung, Deutsche Soldaten! Erste Gruppe with me, Zweite Gruppe with Gefreiter Schmidt. With Stahlhelms... Angetreten! Mach schnell! Das Gewehr... über!” Doesn’t that sound much better? Of course it does, it was in what I call “Pidgin-Deutsch,” which anyone can do! Most of us could figure out what was just said there—especially with a little practice and study. Look through the Commo Section and start to try using common words and phrases in your every- day reenactor speech. Also, STOP calling it a helmet, it’s a „Stahlhelm.” And, you don’t have a gun or a rifle—it’s a „Gewehr.” Soon, you’ll be using these words without thought, much like most of us already do with the word „Zeltbahn.”

This isn’t all there is to your persona, but it will put you on the road to it’s completion! I expect to hear about your persona at the next reenactment.

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First Person? What’s that? How can I do it? These are just a few of the many questions that new recruits might ask in this hobby. Aside from the bewildering mass of new equipment, foreign commands, and endless searching through surplus junk, the “neues Helden” or “Fleisch” coming into the hobby is also faced with old-timer windbags extolling the virtues of “first person.” “First person” out of the trench? The car? The event? Into the food? Multiple personalities? Unfortunately, this arcane art is often assumed to arise instinctively in the reenactor, and few questions are asked or answered about it.

Basically, first person is the direct portrayal of a participant in the Great War. It is the mental or non-physical aspect of all of our impressions. Any one can get into a uniform and run around a muddy field with a helmet and rifle, but having a good first person impression is more difficult to do. It is strongly related to character acting, or “living the part”, and is truly “living history”.

It isn’t for everyone, but if even a few practice it well, the whole event can benefit dramatically, and everyone will have a better time. World War One is probably more suited to first person portrayal than any of the other eras of re-enacting. The trench, and the subterranean life of the soldiers in it, demands a very high level of living history to make it work, and if we don’t try, then why are we here at all? To really achieve the feeling of having seen a small part of the Great War is what we are all here to do, and there is more to this than just the uniform and equipment. The ability to put himself and others “in-period” by using first person is one of the greatest skills that a reenactor can possess, and the following basic steps can help everyone, from the Alte Hase to the newest Grünschnabel (recruit)—give it a try.

Choose a Name

The first thing that you should do is choose your name. There are two different ways of doing this, either by using your own name, or creating a new one. Due to the different nationalities involved in the war, it is often impossible to use your own name, due to the inappropriateness of your name for the nationality you’re portraying. Many people modify their own name, usually by adding to it.

Selecting a new name can be a lot of fun. You should first look at the types of people in the area that your unit was from. Most of the armies of the Great War recruited units from particular areas of their nations, and certain names may be especially appropriate for the area that your unit is from. The second half of choosing a new name is to broadcast it to the other members of your unit, so that it is used. This may take some insistence on your part, but as long as you haven’t chosen something impossible to say (or remember), it will eventually stick. Just remember to answer to it when called!

Your age

This is one of the areas that many impressions founder on. When were you born? The best way to find this is to look at the year that you are portraying, (or the beginning of the war if you are planning to stamp your birthdate on a tag) and subtract your age. You can use your own birthday, and a good idea to help your impression is to check the traditional German holidays, to see if it falls near a period holiday of some sort (found elsewhere in...
This can give you a good item for your impression, i.e. born the same day as the Kaiser (January 27), the week after a battle in 1870, the Diamond Jubilee, Ladysmith, during Fasching, etc.

Home!

This is important to soldiers of every war, and perhaps even more on the minds of soldiers in the muddy trenches of 1914-18. Where was it for your character? Again, look at where your unit is from. The towns and cities of the home district make great fodder for this. Choose one, and if possible, read all you can about it, even studying modern tour guides for pictures. What is the terrain like? The weather? The main industry? If you have some major reason why you don’t quite fit or would be unusual, (like English-language tattoos in Germany) you will need a cover story as to how you got there. If you choose a hometown outside your unit’s district, again, you’ll need a cover story. Business? Wife’s family is from the unit’s area? Shanghaied? Unit reputation? Family/Friends already in the unit? Whatever the reason, you’ll need it, but will enjoy making it.

Family

Married? Bachelor? Rake? Who is waiting for you at home? How many brothers and sisters do you have? The size of families had decreased tremendously in Europe, especially Western Europe, since before 1850. It had become a major issue in France in 1890-1910, as the Generals worried about the “baby gap” between France and Germany. Some in the French military were even interested in stopping contraception, so that more future French soldiers could be born.

Again, study where your unit is from. Southern Germans (Roman Catholics especially) had large families. Urban French generally didn’t. How are your parents? Grandparents? Is your spouse living? Is it your first spouse? Are all of your children alive? Many of the late Victorians/Edwardians married fairly late, usually in their 20’s. This is especially true if you were educated. Uneducated and rural types might still get married younger, at age 18 or 20. It would be highly unlikely for anyone to get married at 16 or younger, except in Russia, Serbia, or points in-between. It was common for many Germans to put off marriage until after the obligatory years service with the colors. Divorce was generally extremely difficult, and very uncommon. The education of your family is also something that you should decide, such as has your spouse attended any school?

Your Occupation

Chances are, that this war thing is not what you do for a living, unless you were 18-20 at the start of the war. If you were, than what did your father do? The rank that you are will have a great affect on the occupation that you can pick. Officers for all armies were generally either professionals or men of means in civilian life. The enlisted ranks held a huge variety of people, and people from every walk of life were brought together in any unit. Again look at were your unit is from. If farming was common in your area, pick that, or if factories were common, pick worker.

Above all, pick something that you know something about, or study up on the occupation at the local library, so that you can discuss it. If you have a group of friends that all live together, perhaps you should pick something that would have brought you together as a group in civilian life, and invent a story about your enlisting together! Just make sure that your story of your career can hold water. No-one, then or now, can make a farm profitable on half an acre of land, (legally) and there were precious few—read no—airmail pilots.

Your Education

This would probably be tied to your job that you hold in civilian life. Almost all of the people in the various nations of Central and Western Europe could read and write, and most had attended secondary education, like a modern high school. Many were exceptionally well educated by the standards of the American Civil War era. Almost any impression that you choose from the Western or Central European nations should be able to read and write. In the east, the story is different. Russians and other eastern troops would be the opposite, often being illiterate. Germany had a very good nationwide schooling system, and so did Austria-Hungary, England, and France.

Your Personality

So is the person that you are portraying an easygoing old trench hog, or a snapping martinet? What kind of person are they? You don’t have to be the same kind of person that you are in civilian life! Actually, the sort of person that you are might be partially determined by the rank that you are and the job that you have. A
drill-corporal would very likely be a strutting martinet, while a supply officer might be a sneering thief. Remember though, that there would be far more good or normal people than the legendary “Col. Blimp” types, and that the Super-Hero types were few.

What has happened so far in the War?

This is not absolutely necessary, but helpful. Find out the nominal dates that the event is set in, and look up the events of the day. What is the news of the war? What has happened to you or your family directly? Has your family lost anyone so far? Have your fortunes prospered or declined? What battle is going on? We are supposed to be historians, and a big part of living history is research. Look it up. Take some notes. It probably won’t take very long, if you can keep from just reading all that you see.

Is there some area of the war that you are particularly interested in your real life? Transfer it over! If you like airplanes, look up what the latest models are that each side has out. If you like trucks or motorcycles, look up what the latest developments in them were, or how they were being used. If you like artillery or guns, study the newest things or most interesting new idea of the day. Maybe the Navy and the commerce raiders have your attention, or the war in the colonies. Look it up, and you can talk about it. If enough of us look these things up, it can lead to great discussions and a better experience for us all.

Politics

Yes, the favorite topic of lots of people now, was the favorite of a lot of people then. What do you want out of the war? What kind of politics did you believe in before the war and how have you changed? Remember that politics then in Europe were far different than politics in the United States now. Communism was a bold new idea, and one that swept through the armies and nations of Europe in 1917-18. There should be communist activists, monarchists, and even democracy activists in the armies of all nations. Defeatists, war hawks and people just wanting to survive would all be there as well. Do you believe in the goal of a greater Empire? What goal, for you, would make all the deaths worthwhile? Why did the war start in the first place?

Most of the soldiers in any army should believe in the system that they are fighting for, or the nation as an abstract idea. But there would also be many who would not believe, such as Communists, leftover Bonapartists, and other groups, especially by 1918.

Language

We portray soldiers of many different nationalities and languages, and knowing how to speak the language of the nationality that you are portraying is a real plus. Learn it! Chances are, you’ll have a fun time doing it, and will learn a lot more about the people that you are portraying. You’ll also meet a lot of very fun people, and be able to read all that WWI printed matter that we all collect.

If you know something of the language, even a little bit, you can truly help the other side have a better event as well. This is true from the easiest impression on the field, the Americans, to the hardest to do right, the French or Russians. If the language of your nationality is English, study the dialect.

Learn the period slang and the way that people talked then. Remember that “Black Adder” is a TV series, not reality, and try and study what the soldiers would have really said.

If you don’t have the time or the inclination to study the language, then just try to speak with an accent, and softly. A German loudly speaking English isn’t really right, and if you’ve spent all the money and all the time to get out in the field, why not do it right? We’ve all been guilty of doing this at times, and will do it again, whether in the heat of action or just exasperation. And of course, no-one can do this the whole event. Just using a few words of your language at the right time can make all the difference. Above all, if you do speak a foreign language, don’t be elitist about it. Try to bring others into the conversations that you are having. You might be amazed at how quickly they start to pick up the language! Remember, we’re all out here to have fun together, not to show off that.

Your Unit

Just look it up and find out some basic facts about it. If you know what it’s done so far, or did in the past, you can talk comfortably about it. You might also talk about some of the things that you’ve done in it, such as how you got up to the line this time, what that last fun trip to Etaples was like, or when the last time that you saw any cavalry in action was. You might also discuss something that has actually happened to your
current unit, like an attack several years ago, a lorry going kaput on the way to the event, (the front) or someone doing something especially noteworthy, heinous, or atrocious. When talking about an old battle, remember that just because the history books say one side or the other won it, it didn’t have to look that way from your point of view! You would also likely see only a small part of the battle anyway.

You should also know the names of your (reenactment) commanding officer and your ranking NCO [knowing the real unit CO’s name wouldn’t hurt either]. What do you think of them? What company do you belong to, and when did you join it? Why? Are you a volunteer or a conscript? How long are you signed up for? Where were you inducted into the unit? You should be able to come up with a short history of the company from the soldiers point of view, and the others in your unit should help with this. You should also be able to explain the different distinguishing points on your uniform, from bayonet knots to patches, to people from other units. What is the history behind all that stuff?

Your Religion

Last, but certainly not least, religion played and still does play an important part in many people’s lives. You can stay with your own, or you can do an impression of someone else’s. Keep in mind though, that if you are taking on some one else’s, to make sure it is period (no Moonies existed then) and that you do it right. Your use of it may be limited to a religious medal or book, or may even involve daily ritual, like Indian or Jewish troops’ religious dietary scruples. Whatever you decide to do, remember to do it right and have fun!

This article is not all encompassing, and can’t be. But it may start you on the right direction, and hopefully, even help a little. Doing first person can bring our impressions to life, and lend a whole new dimension to our hobby. It is not easy, and in the beginning, you’ll have a tendency to slip back into the current time. There will even be those who will purposely try to make you slip out of character. When you have mastered it though, you’ll have a much better time with your Kameraden, and even with the enemy.

I wish to encourage every one to give first person a try. World War One is, again, perfect for it. We have few spectators, and none visible inside the trench lines. If we ever do, running candlelight tours through the trench, in which everyone is in first person except the guide, would be a wonderful way to show what we do. But since we are all in the trenches together at any event, we can give each other a better time by practicing first person in the trenches and bunkers of the front. If you give it a try, stick with it, and ask others that have done it for pointers and tips. The end result truly is Living History, which is, after all, what we’re all here to do!
Names

A note: This short article, which, while it came from a book about the WWII Germans and their paperwork, is useful in that it shows German first names or names Germans might have had at this time. Don’t get all spooled up about the “Nazi” thing, as this is THE best way to find German names for our time period. Please give it a look—especially if you’ve not picked a German name yet. [From Papers Please!]

Given Names in Nazi Documents

The Nazi government of Germany delved very deeply into matters that had generally been considered quite private prior to 1933. Through the Reichsverband der Standesbeamten Deutschlands e. V. in Berlin they published and sold all manner of materials for the recording of family genealogies.

Principal among these was the Deutsches Einheits = Familiен = Stammbuch, a hardcover book in which every family could depict their family tree and record births, marriages and deaths on an ongoing basis. A Standesbeamten (registrar) would notarize all entries in the book. Among other reference material contained in the 56 page “Stammbuch” was a list of acceptable German, Germanic and foreign given names for the consideration of families about to have children. The list is reproduced here in its entirety.

German and Germanic Names (Female)
Ada, Adele, Adelgard, Adelgund, Adelheid, Adeltraut, Adolfine, Alberta, Albertine, Aloisia, Altrud, Alwine, Amalie, Anselma, Bernhilde(e), Berta, Berthilde(e), Bertraud, Brunhilde(e), Edelburg, Edelgard, Edeltr(au)de, Edith, Elfriede, Ella, Ellen, Ellegard, Elvira, Emma, Engelberta, Engelgard, Erdmute, Erika, Erna, Ernestine, Ferdinande, Frieda, Fried(au)de, Friedegund, Friederike, Frigga, Genoveva, Gerda, Gerharde, Gerhilde(e), Gerhilde(de), Gertraud, Gertrud, Gisa, Gisela, Gieseltr(au)de, Gislinde, Gudrun, Gunhilde(e), Hedwig, Helga, Helgard, Helma, Helmgr(au)de, Hen- rike, Herma, Hermine, Herta, Hertr(au)de, Hilde, Hildegard, Hilde- gund, Hiltr(au)de, Hulda, Ida, Ilse, Inge, Ingeborg, Ingrid, Irma, Irmfriede, Irmgard, Irmhuld, Irmhilde(e), Irmtr(au)de, Isa, Ishild(e), Isolde, Karla, Karoline, Klothilde(e), Kriemhilde(e), Kunigunde(e), Leopolda, Leopoldine, Lina, Ludwiga, Malwine, Mathilde(e), Mechthilde(e), Miltrud, Minna, Northilde(e), Nortrud, Notburg(de), Olga, Ortr(au)de, Ottrun, Oswine, Ottelie, Reimunde, Reinhilde(e), Richarda, Roberta, Rosa, Rosamund(e), Roswitha, Rotr(au)de, Rudolfine, Ruperta, Selma, Senta, Siegherte, Siegild(e), Sieglinde, Siegrun, Thelka, Theodelinde, Thusnelda, Trude, Traudlind(e), Udbaum(e), Ulla, Ulrike, Ute, Walburg, Walfriede, Walpurga, Wahrtr(au)de, Wanda, Werngard, Wilfriede, Wilhelma, Wilhelmine, Wilma, Wiltrud, Winfriede.

German and Germanic Names (Male)
Names of Foreign Origin (Female)

(G=Greek, F=French, L=Latin, H=Hebrew, D=Germar I=Old Irish, M=Mideastern, E=Spanish, Ga=Galilean, A=Aramaic, C=Celtic, P=Persian)

Names of Foreign Origin (Male)


Names for Jews

During the 18th century the rulers of Austria decided that Protestants and Jews were undesirable and not fit to live in a Catholic country. They did everything in their power to deprive these minorities in the hope that they would relocate to other lands. A great many of the Protestants and Jews were induced to leave Austria and the few that remained were simply deported.

One of the punitive measures the Habsburg rulers of Austria devised to get Jews to leave was to require every Jew to abandon their original family name and adopt anew one from a short list prepared by the government.

Among the names “invented” for Jews in Austria were Goldberg, Silverman, Diamond, Spielberg, etc. Many of these are still very common Jewish family names in America a couple of hundred years later.

The Nazis borrowed a page from the Habsburg book in August 1938 when they published a list of acceptable given names for German Jews. Any German Jew with a given name other than those on the list was required to add either Israel (males) or Sarah (females) to their existing names and to use that name in all business transactions and communications (including identity documents). All babies of German Jews born after the list was published had to be given names from the list. Here is the complete list.

Female Names


Male Names