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THE IMPACT OF WAR EXPERIENCES IN EUROPE

THE CONSCRIPTION OF NON-GERMAN MEN AND WOMEN INTO THE 'WEHRMACHT' AND 'REICHSARBEITSDIENST' (1938–1945)

Edited by Nina Janz and Denis Scuto

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Nina Janz and Denis Scuto

Introduction – War Experiences of Conscripted Non-German Men and Women

During the Second World War, under Nazi occupation, more than half a million men and women without Reich German citizenship were subjected to German labour and military service. The annexed and/or occupied territories were subjected to Reich German laws and obligations due to their German or ethnic German heritage, as claimed by the Nazis. Despite the common perception of the Wehrmacht and the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* as being comprised solely of Germans, it is essential to acknowledge the significant presence of up to half a million foreigners in the ranks of the Reich German labour organisations and armed forces. This volume aims to highlight these overlooked aspects, providing a comprehensive analysis of the diverse experiences and contributions of conscripted individuals.

One of the affected regions was the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which fell under Nazi occupation in May 1940, and was subsequently de facto annexed. To investigate this period and its consequences, the research project "WARLUX – Soldiers and their Communities in WWII: The Impact and Legacy of War Experiences in Luxembourg" was launched at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH) at the University of Luxembourg, running from 2020 to 2024. Funded by the Luxembourg National Research Fund (Fond National de la Recherche, FNR), the project aimed to study the individuals subjected to labour and military service, as well as their families and communities, from an actor-centred perspective. The goal was to move away from a national, top-down narrative and focus on individual perceptions and experiences of war, examining the social impact of conscription on a large number of families and individuals in Luxembourg.

Moreover, the project sought to broaden its perspective to a European level by launching a Call for Papers to investigate European war experiences and the ramifications of war on non-German nationals who served in the Nazi German armed forces and labour organisations. The conference aimed to illuminate the individual profiles and identities of these men and women from an actor-centred perspective. It also sought to examine the impact on local communities and families, recognising that forced conscription has broader consequences beyond the individual, affecting family and community dynamics.

In October 2022, Denis Scuto, the Principal Investigator (PI), Nina Janz, the Co-PI, and doctoral researcher Sarah Maya Vercruysse, hosted an international conference on forced conscription and wartime experiences at the University of Luxembourg,

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focusing on the individual perceptions of those most impacted. The conference elicited a positive response, with contributions from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, France, Belgium, and Italy. This anthology is a culmination of the discussions and insights shared during this international conference.[1]

During the Second World War, the Luxembourg civil occupation administration, under Gauleiter Gustav Simon, introduced a swift conscription of both male and female Luxembourgers into various National Socialist services. Labour service became compulsory for both genders on May 23, 1941,[2] and young men were drafted into military service on August 30, 1942.[3] A similar situation occurred in the French regions of Lorraine and Alsace. The conscription and integration of these subjects into the Reich were a consequence of the Nazi notions of "race" and ethnicity. Those identified as "deutsche Volkszugehörige" or "Deutschstämmige" (of German descent) were obliged to fulfil certain civic and military service duties and subjected to Reich German citizenship. According to the German Military Conscription Act of 1935, only Reich Germans could be drafted into the Wehrmacht.[4] Consequently, before conscription could proceed, legal issues concerning the nationality of these officially foreign citizens needed to be resolved.

In addition to the 10,200 male Luxembourgers, approximately 130,000 French citizens, including Alsace-Lorraine residents, were subjected to mandatory enlistment. Moreover, up to 90,000 men from Upper Carniola and Lower Styria,[5] 8,500 men from Eastern Belgium,[6] and between 375,000 and 500,000 Silesian[7] men were conscripted. These men primarily ended up in the Wehrmacht (and the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*).

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1 See the conference report, https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinkering/impact-war-experiences-europe-conscription-non-german-men-and-women-wehrmacht-and.

2 Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg (hereinafter VBl. CdZ), "Verordnung über die Reichsarbeitsdienstpflicht in Luxemburg", 23 May 1941, 232.

3 VBl. CdZ, "Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg", 31 August 1942, 253.

4 The Reichsgesetzblatt (hereinafter RGBl.) I 1935, 375, "Law on the Structure of the Armed Forces" (Gesetz über den Aufbau der Wehrmacht) of 16 March 1935 reintroduced mandatory military service; the duration this service was initially set at one year, before being extended to two years in August 1936.

5 Gregor Kranjc, "Fight or Flight: Desertion, Defection, and Draft- Dodging in Occupied Slovenia, 1941–1945," *Journal of Military History*, no. 81 (January 2017): 141. The numbers are not clear; other researchers estimate between 38,000 and 80,000; see Kokalj Kočeva, Monika, "Langer Kampf um Anerkennnung. Zwangsmobilisierte Slowenen und ihre Rechtsstellung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021), 191.

6 Peter M. Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen". Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2008), 6.

7 Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polen in der Wehrmacht* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), 25.

Although the Wehrmacht served as the primary conscripting power, the Waffen-SS also played a significant role. Many men found themselves in the Wehrmacht through various means, including forced conscription and deceptive recruitment tactics.

Forced conscription, which compelled individuals from occupied and annexed territories – non-citizens of the occupying power – into various services, notably military and labour roles under Nazi rule during World War II, forms the central focus of this volume. Developed within the framework of the WARLUX project, its objective is to examine the individual wartime experiences of those impacted by conscription within their respective regional, territorial, and national contexts of residency, naturalisation, and military service. The authors have drawn upon a diverse array of sources, including letters, diaries, literary works, poetry, and photo albums. Furthermore, oral history interviews have been crucial in capturing firsthand accounts, supplemented by extensive research in institutional archives such as those of the Wehrmacht, trial records, and documents from Allied and Soviet POW camps.

The exploration of personal perspectives within affected communities is paramount in this discussion. Forced conscription, known by various terms across the nations and regions impacted, emerges as a critical national concern. In Luxembourg, the portrayal of conscripted individuals as “Ons Jongen” (Our Boys), highlighted their victimhood, eliciting empathy within the Luxembourgish context. Similarly, the Malgré-Nous (“Against our will”) in France are often viewed through a nationalistic lens. This phenomenon of forced conscription was uniquely contextualised in each country. To transcend these narratives and mitigate post-war biases, this study proposes an experiential framework, employing an actor-centred perspective to authentically explore the personal and nuanced perceptions of these men.

The approach to focus on “experience” aligns with Reinhart Koselleck’s notion of “Erfahrungsraum,” which emphasises how historical events shape human perception.[8] The individuals living under forced conscription not only encounter events but also engage in subjective experiences, uniquely interpreting their surroundings and emotions. Klaus Latzel, in his immense study on the war experiences of German soldiers in the Second World War (based on letters from the front) underscores that war experiences are shaped not only on an individual level but also by societal influences, including self-images and external perceptions, an idea that is captured within the letters studied here.[9]

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8 “Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont. Zwei historische Kategorien”, in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, by Reinhart Koselleck, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 349–75.

9 Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); Klaus Latzel, “Wehrmachtsoldaten zwischen „Normali-

The focus on ego documents and personal testimonies is pivotal for comprehending the diverse experiences of individuals during times of conflict. The chapters in this volume examine the methodologies and the utilisation of ego documents (such as letters, diaries, and memoirs), as well as personal testimonies such as oral history interviews, to analyse the recruitment practices of the Wehrmacht. Understanding wartime experiences necessitates a multifaceted exploration that extends beyond the conventional narratives associated with forced conscription and occupation. However, the study of wartime experiences, here based on the ego-documents, also has its limits. The authors of these accounts may present information that the recipient wants to hear, or how they themselves wish to be portrayed. Memoirs, which are also considered personal primary sources, contain statements and perspectives written with a temporal distance from the war. Consequently, they may reflect distorted accounts and the author's attempts to "correct" their own experiences.[10] Nevertheless, approaching this topic via primary sources, such as letters, diaries and memoirs and interviews, provides a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and how they were affected by the events of the National Socialist war of extermination in which they participated. Although such personal accounts, also known as ego-documents, can be helpful for research, they nonetheless also feature constructed narratives.

Alongside Latzel, scholarly discourse on war experiences, particularly from a grassroots perspective, has been enriched by works such as "Andere Helme – andere Menschen?" edited by Wolfram Wette and Detlef Vogel.[11] This study offers an international comparison of front-line experiences among diverse soldiers of various nationalities and armies during World War II, primarily drawing on correspondence and letters. German-speaking historical research (Wolfram Wette in

tät" und NS-Ideologie, oder: Was sucht die Forschung in der Feldpost?," in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, ed. Müller, Rolf-Dieter and Volkmann, Hans-Erich (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 579, https://doi.org/10.1524/9783486852028.

10 On the critical reflection of front letters, see Ortwin Buchbender, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939–1945* (München: Beck, 1982); Veit Didczuneiet, Jens Ebert, and Thomas Jander, *Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Essen, 2011); Katrin Kilian, "Die anderen zu Wort kommen lassen. Feldpostbriefe als Historische Quelle aus den Jahren 1939 bis 1945. Eine Projektskizze," *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 60, no. 1 (2017): 153–66, https://doi.org/10.1524/mgzs.2001.60.1.153; Klaus Latzel, "Vom Kriegserlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 56 (1997): 1–30.

11 Vogel, Detlef and Wette, Wolfram, eds., *Andere Helme - Andere Menschen? Heimaterfahrung und Frontalltag im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ein internationaler Vergleich*, *Schriften der Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte* (Tübingen: Klartext, 1995).

particular) has directed attention in military history towards the "little man" – the average soldier – contributing to a perspective of military history "from below."[12] Many authors studying the Wehrmacht and the German military similarly emphasise this bottom-up perspective, focusing on the individual and their personal experiences, primarily through wartime correspondence, as demonstrated by Latzel and numerous other scholars.[13]

Works on the forced conscription of non-German soldiers within Hitler's army remain limited, with most research primarily focused on national contexts.[14] One of the earliest studies to adopt a transnational approach is Georges Gilbert Nonnenmacher's "La Grand Honte" ("The Great Shame"). This work exam-

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12 Wolfram. Wette, *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich: Piper, 1995).

13 Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*; Latzel, "Vom Kriegserlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen"; Buchbender, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939–1945*; Didczuneiet, Ebert, and Jander, *Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege.*

14 To name but a few, on Poland (Silesia), see Kaczmarek, *Polen in der Wehrmacht*; Jerzy Kochanowski, "Polen in die Wehrmacht? Zu einem wenig erforschten Aspekt der Nationalsozialistischen Besatzungspolitik," *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte in deutscher Sprache* 1, no. 6 (2022): 59–82. On the Czech conscripts Zdenko Marsalek, "Wieder auf „unserer" Seite: Ehemalige Angehörige der Wehrmacht als Soldaten der tschechoslowakischen Exilarmee," in *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Jiri Neminar and Marsalek, Zdenko (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021), 69–98; Frantisek Emmert, *Tschechen in der deutschen Wehrmacht: Totgeschwiegene Schicksale* (Kehl am Rhein: Morstadt, 2021). On Slovenia, see Bernard Nežmah et al., *Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v drugi svetovni vojni* (Celje: Zveza društev mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1941–1945, 2001); Kokalj Kočeva, Monika, "Forcible Mobilisation of Upper Carniolans into German Army and Germanisation Process," in *Slovenia in 20th Century: The Legacy of Totalitarian Regimes*, ed. Mateja Čoh Kladnik, Zbirka Totalitarizmi - Vprašanja in Izzivi; 6 (Ljubljana: Study Centre for National Reconciliation, 2016), 133–51. On Eupen-Malmedy, Belgium, one example is the work mentioning the forced conscription by Heinrich Toussaint, *Verlorene Jahre Schicksale einer Kriegsgeneration im Grenzland* (Eupen: Grenz-Echo, 1988). For more information, see the contribution by Philippe Beck (p. 127–164). On the conscripted men from Alsace and Lorraine, Bopp, Marie-Joseph, "L'enrôlement de force des Alsaciens dans la Wehrmacht et la SS," *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 20 (1955): 33–42; Eugène Riedweg, *Les "Malgrè Nous": Histoire de l'incorporation de Force des Alscaciens-Mosellans dans l'armée Allemande* (Strasbourg: Edition du Rhin, 1995). On Luxembourg, Marc Buck, "Les jeunes luxembourgeois 'enrôlés de force' dans la Wehrmacht (1940–1945)" (Bruxelles: École royale militaire, 1969); Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe: Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945* (Luxemburg: Saint-Paul, 1985), 167–88.

ines conscription from a legal standpoint, considering the responsibilities of the Nazi occupation regimes in Alsace and Lorraine, Luxembourg, and the situation in Eupen-Malmedy.[15] Nonnenmacher's 1969 study provides sources and documents, offering insights from a transnational perspective on the regions and countries impacted within Western Europe.

The studies that follow predominantly did not transcend national borders, maintaining a national perspective on the topic.[16] One groundbreaking contribution in this regard is Peter M. Quadflieg's dissertation on forced recruitment in Eupen-Malmedy and Luxembourg, which was the first to adopt a comparative perspective. Quadflieg's work explores the recruitment processes for former Belgian nationals in Eupen-Malmedy, providing a leading comparative approach between Luxembourg and Eupen-Malmedy.[17] Norbert Haase also examined commonalities and differences between the various national and regional groups, particularly regarding desertion and the severe consequences faced by the men when brought before a military court.[18] However, his study leaves room for deeper exploration, especially into the personal experiences of the individuals affected, with much of the human aspect remaining unexplored.

Two more recent influential transnational approaches must be acknowledged: an edited volume by Fréderic Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg, and another by Zdenko Marsakel and Jiri Neminar. These works present an important transnational approach to this topic across different countries and frameworks, highlighting the variety of experiences and emerging narratives in diverse regional and individual

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15 Georges-Gilbert Nonnenmacher, *La grande honte de l'incorporation de forces des Alsaciens-Lorrains, Eupenois-Malmédiens et Luxembourgeois dans l'armée allemande au cours de la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Colmar: ADEIF, 1969).

16 Sovilj, Milan, "Übersicht der bisherigen Forschung," ed. Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021), 25.

17 Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen". Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg.*

18 Norbert Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen' und 'Malgré-nous' und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Die anderen Soldaten : Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1997), 157–73. Also see the forthcoming chapter by Sarah Maya Vercruysse, and Nina Janz, "The "long arm" of the military justice of the Wehrmacht – A case study on Luxembourgish desertions", planned to be published in Maddox, Kelly, Tino Schölz and Urs Matthias Zachmann, *Military Justice in Modern History: The Adjudication of War and Violence in a Globalizing World* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025). Frédéric Stroh published a study about the conscripted men from Alsace and Lorraine and their imprisonment in the Wehrmacht prison in Torgau, see Frédéric. Stroh, *Les Malgré-Nous de Torgau : Des insoumis alsaciens et mosellans face á la justice militaire nazie* (Strasbourg: F. Stroh, 2006).

backgrounds.[19] As pioneering as these edited volumes were, our approach seeks a broader perspective. We delve into aspects such as combat experiences within Allied armies, instances of desertion – particularly their impact on families – and experiences of captivity. This effort aims to push the narrative beyond conventional boundaries. A notable gap in existing literature and research is the lack of women's experiences and their involvement in organisations like the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labor Service)[20] and *Kriegshilfsdienst* (KHD), the War Auxiliary Service.

The Nazi Concept of 'German' and the Path to Forced Conscription

The concept of *German Volkstum* (here meaning German community, heritage)[21] served as the basis for the partial occupation and integration of the impacted territo-

19 Frédéric Stroh and Peter M Quadflieg, *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945. Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten 1939–1945.* (Strasbourg: PU, 2017); Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar, eds., *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive* (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021).

Numerous studies have also been published on post-war narratives, veterans' associations, memorials, and the struggle for compensation and pensions; to mention but a few, Albert Gehlen, "L'indemnisation des enrôlés de force dans l'armée allemande" (Diplome Thesis (Licencie en Histoire), Liege, 2005); Elizabeth Vlossak, "Traitors, Heroes, Martyrs, Victims? Veterans of Nazi Forced Conscription from Alsace and Moselle," in *Rewriting German History: New Perspectives on Modern Germany*, ed. Ruger, Jan and Wachsmann, Nikolaus (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 100–118; Grandhomme, Jean-Noëlle, "La Mémoire de l'incorporation de force en France," in *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945. Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten 1939–1945*, ed. Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg (Strasbourg: PU, 2017), 113–32; Eva Klos, "Umkämpfte Erinnerungen. Die Zwangsrekrutierung im Zweiten Weltkrieg in Erinnerungskulturen Luxemburgs, Ostbelgiens Und des Elsass (1944–2015)" (Dissertation, University of Luxembourg, 2017); Gustijn, Damijan, "Schwierige Heimkehr: Die Konfrontation der slowenischen Zwangssoldaten mit ihrer Heimat," in *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021), 171–87.

20 The conscription of women has not been extensively studied. One example of a collection of personal accounts for the French case is Nina Barbier, *Malgré-elles. Les Alsaciennes et Mosellanes incorporées de force dans la machine de guerre nazie* (Strasbourg: Editions du Rhin, 2000). For Luxembourg, Georges Even, *Frauen erleben den Krieg* (Luxembourg: Editions Saint-Paul, 2007).

21 This can also be translated as "folklore" or "traditions".

ries into the Reich, alongside subsequent measures such as labour and military service tied to citizenship acquisition. The processes of Germanisation and conscription varied across different territories and contexts. In occupied and annexed territories, individuals were coerced into service under the guise of naturalisation or planned assimilation into the *German Volkstum*. This included populations that were considered ethnically German or formerly German, who were granted Reich citizenship, enabling their conscription into the military. The Nazis viewed these individuals as rightful citizens, reinforcing their loyalty through racial and ethnic affinity rather than mere formal citizenship, as highlighted by Mark Mazower's analysis prioritizing racial allegiance over political citizenship by the Nazis, asserting that ethnic Germans owed undivided loyalty to the Third Reich and its leader.[22]

The Nazi regime's concept of "German" and its pathway to conscription were pivotal elements in its strategy of expansion and exploitation. Nazi Germany strategically conscripted individuals for both labour and military service to meet its economic, industrial, and military needs, using these measures to simultaneously indoctrinate and "Germanise" new citizens and subjects within Hitler's Empire, as historian Mazower describes the Nazi Reich and its annexed territories.[23]

In the case of Luxembourg, the *Anordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit* (Citizenship Ordinance) specified that the "deutschstämmige" – Luxembourgers who volunteered or were conscripted into the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS – would be automatically granted German citizenship.[24] Thus, conscription into the Wehrmacht conferred citizenship, rather than citizenship being a prerequisite for conscription.[25]

22 Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe.* (London: Penguin, 2008), 45.

23 Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe.*

24 VBl. CdZ, "Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg", 23 August 1942, 254.

25 Here are some laws and regulations concerning the introduction of German citizenship in the annexed and occupied territories: "Verordnung über den Erwerb der Staatsangehörigkeit in den befreiten Gebieten der Untersteiermark, Kärntens und Krains" 14 October 1941, RGBl., 1941, Part I, 648–649; "Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsass, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg" August 23, 1942, RGBl., 1942, Part I, 533–534; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete" 8 October 1939, RGBL, 1939, Part I, Nr. 204, 2042–2043; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über das Inkrafttreten des Erlasses über Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete" 20 October 1939, RGBL, 1939, Part I, Nr. 207, 2057; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über die Wiedervereinigung der Gebiete von Eupen, Malmedy und Moresnet mit dem Deutschen Reich, 18 May 1940, RGBL, 1940, Part I, 777; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers zur Durchführung der Widervereinigung der Gebiete von Eupen, Malmedy und Moresnet mit dem Deutschen Reich," 23 May 1940, RGBL, 1940, Part I, 803–804.

Conscription of the “New Citizens”: The Imposed Obligation

The modern concept of conscription, whereby all young men (and later, in some cases, women) within a state’s jurisdiction are obliged to undertake military duty, originated in France in 1798 with the “loi Jourdan” during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1801). However, the idea that every male citizen should defend his country dates back to the classical world, where the connection between military service and citizenship was well-established among Greek city-states and the Roman Empire. Revolutionary France gave this notion a new and radical impetus, expanding the concept of “citoyen” beyond its Greco-Roman counterparts. Unlike the militaristic traditions of Athens, Sparta, or Rome, French contemporaries drew inspiration from the absolutist Ancien Régime and its professional army, conscripting all young men into a citizens’ army. However, conscription required citizenship to be called up for the so-called citizens’ army.[26]

Military service is characterised by a dual nature of citizenship and subjection, exercising civic rights while simultaneously denying them, political autonomy coupled with social discipline, and civic participation alongside hierarchical submission.[27] This duality means that an individual’s belonging to the State and the nation extends beyond mere attachment: it reaches an existential level, encompassing the citizen’s potential sacrifice. Conscription exposes individuals to the military machine and, in the worst case, to death “for the homeland.”[28]

In modern states, the formulation is often reversed: the State is conceived as the expression of the general will of the civic nation. This idea is supported by Hippler, who argues that the nation, as an “imagined community” and expression of the collective will of citizens, serves as a necessary link for the mutual integration of the civic individual and the State.[29]

Conscription is intrinsically linked to citizenship. In Nazi Germany, this link was manipulated to enforce control. For instance, in Luxembourg, the *Staatsbürgerschaftsverordnung* stipulated that conscription into the Wehrmacht or Waffen-

26 Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 9.

27 Thomas Hippler, *Soldats et Citoyens: Naissance du Service Militaire en France et en Prusse*, 1re éd, Pratiques théoriques (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006), 11.

28 Ibid., 18.

29 Ibid., 13.

SS automatically conferred German citizenship on the day of enlistment. The conscription of non-German citizens was a clear violation of international law. Article 23 of the "Regulations Annexed to the Fourth Hague Convention" of 1907 stipulated that it was "forbidden to compel the nationals of the hostile party to take part in the operations of war directed against their own country".[30] This illegal manoeuvre, which prioritised conscription before granting citizenship, reflected the Nazi regime's coercive tactics.

The designation 'citizen army' or 'citizen soldier' reflects the understanding that military service is closely related to one's role as a citizen. Conscription acts as a marker of national belonging, simultaneously delineating those who are excluded. For example, the conscription of Lorrainers and Alsatians underscored their status as German citizens, thereby illustrating Nazi Germany's racial politics by excluding others. From its inception, conscription has been both a civic duty and a privilege reserved for citizens, excluding non-citizens or those who had lost their civic rights. This system establishes a direct correlation between conscription and active citizenship, where one concept implies the other. Frevert argues that conscription represented a dual construct capable of both inclusion and exclusion. It provided men from diverse social backgrounds and beliefs with a limited opportunity to engage in the political and social spheres while simultaneously excluding others.[31] For the Nazis, it was an "ideal" means of integrating individuals into the Volksgemeinschaft, partly due to a shortage of men, but also to lay the foundation for an extended national community.

The coerced integration of non-German citizens into Nazi services began with categorising individuals as "German enough" or "German-like," allowing them to receive citizenship or naturalisation. In the case of Silesians, this categorisation involved classification with a *Deutsche Volksliste* in occupied Western Poland.[32] The initial conscription of Luxembourgers, followed by granting them citizenship, not only contradicted German law but also violated international law.

In Hitler's Germany, the forcible conscription of non-Germans, such as Luxembourgers, exemplified the totalitarian state's use of conscription as a tool for

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30 "Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, October 18, 1907", International Humanitarian Law Databases, accessed 21 June 2024. https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907/regulations-art-23#:~:text=A%20belligerent%20is%20likewise%20forbidden,the%20commencement%20of%20the%20war.

31 Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, 4.

32 On the policies of Germanisation, see Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Alexa Stiller, *Völkische Politik: Praktiken der Exklusion und Inklusion in polnischen, französischen und slowenischen Annexionsgebieten 1939–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2022).

the control and regimentation of occupied or annexed territories. Totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany often viewed conscription as essential in transforming societies into warfare or siege states.[33] By coercing individuals into military service, even in its basic form, these regimes compelled populations to align with and support their ideological and military goals, perpetuating a sense of constant[34] external threat that necessitated perpetual vigilance.

The conscription of "new" citizens under Nazi rule was a pivotal mechanism for exerting control and expanding military influence. American sociologist Morris Janowitz argued in 1976 that conscription not only served as a nationalist tool but also facilitated political control over military professionals, highlighting its significance in the Nazi regime's strategy to compensate for manpower shortages and extend its fascist reach.[35] At the onset of Hitler's regime, militarisation progressed from voluntary to compulsory, notably through organisations like the Hitlerjugend. By 1936, 60 percent of German children were members, which was mandated by 1939. This widespread indoctrination instilled military principles, discipline, and allegiance among youths, thereby reinforcing the regime's ideological foundation.[36]

Following Germany's defeat in World War I, Hitler pursued aggressive rearmament despite the Versailles Treaty's restrictions, reintroducing conscription in March 1935. This marked a significant step toward militarising Germany under Nazi ideology. Ute Frevert observed that while the Nazi Party aimed to shape political ideology, the military played a crucial role in training soldiers who embod-

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33 Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service, Citizens and Soldiers* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 33, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501733772.

34 While compulsory military service in occupied territories has been deemed illegal since the 19th century, it was not explicitly categorised as a "war crime" or "crime against humanity" by the Allies in 1945. However, the Allies did label the imposition of compulsory military service in Alsace and Moselle as a "war crime" in their joint indictment. The French delegation went further, considering it a "crime against humanity" due to its impact on nationality. Additionally, the Commission of Fifteen, established in 1919 after World War I, identified the "forced conscription of soldiers from inhabitants of occupied territories" as among the 32 violations of laws and customs of war committed by the Central Powers and their allies, highlighting cases such as the involuntary conscription of Greeks and Serbs into the Bulgarian army, see Frédéric. Stroh, "Introduction. Une Histoire Commune, Mais Plurielle," in *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945 – Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten*, by Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg (Strasbourg: PU, 2017), 8–9.

35 Morris Janowitz, "Military Institutions and Citizenship in Western Societies," *Armed Forces & Society* 2, no. 2 (January 1976): 191, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X7600200202.

36 Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, 248.

ied national identity and upheld state ideals as "political soldiership,"[37] distinct from the conscription of populations in occupied territories.

The extension of conscription to non-German citizens during Nazi occupation and annexation was unprecedented. Conscription symbolised both "imposed" citizenship – forcefully integrating individuals into the Deutsche Volksgemeinschaft – and served as a tool of control and ideological enforcement under the totalitarian rule of the Nazi occupation regime.[38] By coercing individuals into military service, Nazi Germany aligned populations with its militaristic and ideological ambitions, perpetuating a constant state of readiness for war.

Labour Service – Conscription for Men and Women

Besides military conscription, women were also significantly affected by various obligations imposed on populations in occupied and annexed territories. These included compulsory labour services such as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) (also for the male population) and the *Kriegshilfsdienst* (KHD).[39] The *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, originally known as the *Freiwillige Arbeitsdienst* (FAD) during the Weimar Republic, aimed to combat unemployment and instil Nazi ideology among young Germans. Initially used to organised young adults into camps for non-profitable and economically unproductive work,[40] it was formalised as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* in 1935.[41] The *Reichsarbeitsdienst* sought to promote a new work ethic, enhance physi-

37 Ibid., 251.

38 Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen' und 'Malgré–nous' und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg," 174.

39 The central focus of this volume is the forced recruitment and conscription of non-Germans for labour and military service. This should not be conflated with the labour obligations imposed on French ("Service du Travail Obligatoire, STO"), Belgian, and Dutch men ("Arbeidseinsatz"), Organisation Todt, or the forced deportation and enslavement of Polish and Soviet citizens as "Ostarbeiter." See Katarzyna Woniak, *Alltags- und Emotionsgeschichte polnischer "Zivilarbeiter" in Berlin 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Brill | Schöningh, 2020); Charles Dick, *Builders of the Third Reich: The Organisation Todt and Nazi Forced Labour* (London New York NY Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). The discussion specifically addresses the compulsory conscription and obligations imposed on women and men from occupied or annexed territories under German law within the Nazi "new territories," including Alsace, Lorraine, Belgian Eupen-Malmedy, Luxembourg, and Polish regions such as Silesia, Slovenian Upper Carniola, and Lower Styria.

40 Kiran Klaus Patel, *"Soldaten der Arbeit": Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland und den USA 1933–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 15.

41 Ibid., 17.

cal fitness for military service, contribute to the construction of a new national culture, and ultimately fulfil the Nazi concept of a unified national community.[42] Although women could serve, compulsory labour service for women was only introduced after the outbreak of World War II in 1939, alongside the *Kriegshilfsdienst*. Women in the *Kriegshilfsdienst* were involved in various crucial war-related efforts, such as working in armaments factories, hospitals, offices, and other industries vital to the war economy.[43]

This notion of service formed a conceptual link to the military, with labour service equated to conscription. Both were considered services for the "national community" (Volksgemeinschaft) and selfless acts that stemmed from inner conviction, without financial remuneration.[44] Labour service conscripts, dubbed "soldiers of labour," lived in camps subject to rigorous discipline and a strict hierarchy.[45]

For men, the service lasted six months from 1935, typically before military service. From 1939, it lasted six months for women, followed by an additional six months in the *Kriegshilfsdienst*, although during the war this was often extended, eventually without a fixed end date. The labour service system also extended to the "new territories" of the Reich. This system marked the transition from mere membership in the Reich (*Reichsangehöriger*) to full citizenship (*Reichsbürger*) and membership in the racially based "national community" (*Volksgenosse*).[46]

As this book's contribution focuses solely on male conscription into the military, there is an urgent need for more research on female conscription into labour service.

The Impact of Forced Conscription on Individuals and their Communities

Military and labour conscription under Nazi rule posed profound challenges for ordinary citizens, particularly those forcibly integrated into the German war effort. For non-Germans, conscription meant the interruption of careers and daily

42 Ibid., 15.

43 Frank Bajohr, "Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst Im 'Dritten Reich'. Ein Konflikt Zwischen Ideologie Und Ökonomie Author," 1980, 351. Studies mainly cover the female Labour service in Germany, see Dagmar Gabriele Morgan, "Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst in Deutschland" (Dissertation, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, 1979); Michael Jonas, *Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst in Deutschland 1932–1945: Organisationsgeschichte und Dienststellenverzeichnis* (Saarbrücken: VDM Heinz Nickel, 2015).

44 Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, 249.

45 Ibid., 248.

46 Ibid., 249.

lives for extended periods, often leading to dissatisfaction and reduced productivity. The selective application of conscription could foster feelings of injustice among those drafted, straining relations between civilians and the military. Moreover, conscription exacerbated grievances stemming from economic hardships, inadequate living conditions, and the harsh disciplinary regime of military life.[47] Yet conscription transcended mere logistical necessity; it functioned as a potent mechanism for ideological conformity and national integration. Military (and labour) service was elevated to the status of a civic obligation, emphasising loyalty, sacrifice, and obedience as essential components of national identity,[48] as also envisioned by the Nazis. Even non-German nationals integrated into the Wehrmacht encountered rigorous discipline and hierarchical structure, aimed at consolidating a unified front under Nazi racial ideology.[49]

Despite its coercive nature, conscription paradoxically aimed to instil a sense of belonging and loyalty among those conscripted. By mandating equal obligations under the law, conscription purported to unify diverse populations into a singular national identity, albeit under Nazi hegemony. This integration was fraught with complexities, as conscription imposed by a foreign power was often viewed as intrusive and oppressive, challenging individual and community allegiances.

The impact of conscription on non-Germans raises critical questions, which this publication aims to answer:

How did conscription affect the daily lives and social dynamics of non-Germans integrated into the Wehrmacht? What were the familial and communal repercussions? To what extent did conscripted non-Germans align with Nazi ideals versus maintaining loyalty to their own national or ethnic identities? How did conscription contribute to or undermine the formation of national identity among non-German conscripts during the Nazi era? What forms of resistance or evasion were employed by non-German conscripts against Nazi conscription policies? How effective were these acts of defiance in challenging Nazi control? How did German courts adjudicate cases of forced conscription among non-Germans and their supporters? What ethical dilemmas and legal precedents emerged from these proceedings? In what ways did conscripted non-Germans contribute to the Allied war effort against Nazi Germany? How did their involvement shape resistance movements within occupied territories?

Taking these questions into account, the contributions delve into the methods and sources, with a specific focus on the personal and individual experiences of

47 Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 68.
48 Ibid., 33.
49 Kutzner, Rutkiewicz, *Polacy z Wehrmachtu*, 119.

those affected and their communities. This approach centres on the use of ego documents, personal records, and institutional documents from occupying authorities and the Wehrmacht, supplemented by postwar personal accounts such as interviews. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the contributions aim to illuminate the nuanced motivations, challenges, and moral dilemmas encountered by non-German conscripts under Nazi conscription policies. Additionally, they seek to explore the broader societal and historical impacts of these experiences.

The Structure of the Book

Citizenship, Conscription and Volunteering

In "National Socialist Ethnicity and Citizenship Policy under growing military pressure in occupied Luxembourg (1940–1944)", Denis Scuto begins by addressing the increasingly complex issue of citizenship and military service under Nazi occupation. As Nazi Germany expanded its conquests, particularly in the West, the intricacies of these questions intensified. In regions such as Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg, which were not formally annexed, protracted debates and disagreements ensued among Gauleiters, Reich ministries, and NSDAP leaders. After extensive discussions, the naturalisation of selected groups was ultimately decided upon, balancing foreign policy considerations with the strategic use of citizenship for recruitment and the "(re-)Germanization" of these populations. Scuto's analysis delves into these nuanced issues of citizenship and naturalisation, particularly in the context of Luxembourg during its occupation by Nazi Germany. He explores how military recruitment was intricately linked to the broader questions of citizenship and naturalisation, highlighting the layered complexities of these processes in occupied Luxembourg.

Klemen Kojcancic's chapter "Fighting for the enemy: Recruitment of Slovenians for the Waffen-SS during the Second World War" explores the German legal stance towards occupied Slovenian territories and the subsequent treatment of the Slovenian population. He examines Nazi Germany's plans for the complete integration of these lands into the Third Reich following the April War of 1941. Germany occupied the northern half of Slovenia, initiating the recruitment of the local population – initially only German nationals, but later including Slovenians as well. This process eventually led to the involuntary formal mobilisation of Slovenes into various German (para)military formations, such as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS, and other local units. Kojcancic focuses particularly on the initial voluntary recruitment process for the Waffen-SS, utilising contemporary newspapers, ar-

chival documents, and personal testimonies to discuss the experiences of Slovenes in the SS. He notes that while some joined voluntarily, others were mobilised against their will, highlighting the complex and often coercive nature of these recruitment efforts.

Personal Perceptions – War Experiences and Ego Documents

After discussing conscription, and the granting of citizenship, Nina Janz, in "War Experiences of Non-German Soldiers in the Wehrmacht: Insights from War Letters – The Case of Luxembourg", explores the individual perceptions of war through the lens of letters sent by recruits to their families. These letters provide insights into various aspects of military service, including training, front-line experiences, and personal perceptions, while balancing the limited, curated perspectives of the letter writers. The research aims to investigate soldiers' experiences and reactions to military service, with a focus on their Luxembourgish origin. The chapter centres on the war correspondence of two brothers, whose exchange of letters while actively serving in the military offers a unique window into their perceptions of military service. Within her chapter, Janz examines issues of integration into military service, group cohesion, and the maintenance of Luxembourgish identity and language.

Shifting the perspective to Slovenia, in "Forcibly mobilised Slovene soldiers in Wehrmacht: Diary analysis of their war experiences" Monika Kokalj Kočevar examines the conscription of Slovenes into the Wehrmacht from 1942 to 1945, with an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 mobilised. Kočevar's chapter focuses on war diaries, some of the rarest surviving items, written by soldiers on various fronts across Europe. These diaries offer a detailed view of everyday life in the units, encompassing relationships with family, interactions among soldiers, attitudes towards other national groups, experiences of battles, encounters with death, hopes for the war's end, and considerations of desertion or joining resistance units. Moreover, some diaries track soldiers' experiences in POW camps and their eventual return home. The analysis explores the emotional content, personal reflections, and meticulous records found within these diaries, elucidating the significance of diary-writing for the soldiers themselves.

Philippe Beck's chapter "Adaptive stances of East Belgians in the Wehrmacht and *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (1940–1945). Insights through ego documents" examines the conscription of men from Belgium, with a specific focus on St. Vith/Eupen Malmedy. He analyses the remnants of personal perspectives and ego-documents from individuals in this region through a photo album. Beck discusses this document, sourced from his own family archives and supplemented by other materials, to shed light on individual experiences within the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and the

Wehrmacht. Through his analysis, Beck provides motivational explanations and methodological insights into the adaptive stances adopted by individuals from this border region during pivotal historical and biographical moments.

In “Paper and ink in the Soviet camp 188 in Tambov: Capturing the camp life of Luxembourger conscripts” Inna Ganschow explores the intimate accounts left behind by Luxembourgish Wehrmacht soldiers – secretly penned diaries, heartfelt letters, and verses of fallen comrades committed to memory – that eventually made their way back to their homeland. This body of literature, rooted in the prison and POW traditions, provides a documentary glimpse into the experiences of Luxembourgish conscripts in Soviet POW camps from 1943 to 1953, blurring the line between historical record and traditional fiction. Ganschow examines a wide array of texts, ranging from clandestine notes smuggled out by released prisoners to meticulously kept diaries, impassioned speeches, makeshift dictionaries, poignant poetry, succinct narratives, and poignant sketches – some created within the confines of captivity, others upon their return from camps in Tambov and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. By cataloguing these invaluable relics from 1943 to 1946 and analysing their diverse genres, her chapter illustrates how the authors’ biographies and narrative techniques captured the essence of life in the camps.

Desertion and Draft Evasion: Impact on Families and Communities

Sarah Maya Vercruysse, in “Desertion leads to resettlement – The consequences of desertion and draft evasion on the families of Luxembourgish soldiers (1942–1945)”, expands the broader impacts of forced conscription, beyond the recruits themselves. The actions of these conscripts within the German forces significantly affected their families who remained at home. Starting in mid-1943, the number of Luxembourgish deserters surged. In response, the civil administration intensified its focus on their relatives and local communities in order to pressure deserters and deter others from fleeing. Her chapter explores the consequences of desertion and draft evasion on family members in Luxembourg, examining the extent to which the National Socialist principle of Sippenhaft (family liability) and punitive measures such as relocation played a role, as well as how they were enforced. Vercruysse analyses the administrative and legal frameworks of these policies within the context of Nazi Germany’s broader strategies in the occupied territories. It not only brings to light the life trajectories of those impacted, but also reveals interconnections between individuals, shedding light on overarching policies, procedures, and objectives.

In his chapter “Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in der Rechtsprechung der deutschen Sondergerichte in den besetzten Gebieten Polens (1939–1945)”, Konrad Graczyk examines the repercussions of desertion in Upper Silesia, with a specific focus on cases of aiding desertion from the German Wehrmacht before special courts. His study centres on the proceedings before the Kattowitz Special Court and other special courts across occupied Polish territories, including the incorporated eastern territories and the General Government. Graczyk’s analysis delves into the Nazi perception of desertion and aiding desertion as criminal acts, exploring the legal frameworks that guided their prosecution. Graczyk’s findings are drawn from court judgments, covering adjudicated cases, the individuals involved as perpetrators, the factual and legal grounds for convictions, the nature and extent of the sentences imposed, and the subsequent fate of deserters. By examining these dimensions, he provides a comprehensive exploration of the judicial treatment of desertion during the Nazi occupation, shedding light on the operational dynamics of special courts and their impact within the occupied territories, particularly focusing on the recruitment practices in Silesia.

Tobias Kossytorz`s contribution “Alsatian draft evaders in Switzerland (1942–1945)” details the widespread draft evasion among non-German recruits, particularly focusing on Alsatians who sought refuge in neutral Switzerland. Hundreds of young Alsatian men crossed the border near Bonfol to evade enlistment into the German Armed Forces, expecting a welcoming reception which, contrary to their hopes, was far from warm. Within his chapter, Kossytor examines the fate of approximately 1,200 Alsatians who resisted forced incorporation into the German military by fleeing to Switzerland between 1942 and 1945. He delves into their everyday experiences in Switzerland, arguing that they can be understood through the lens of “privileged precarity.” This term captures their situation, which was characterised by a restrictive legal framework that curtailed individual freedoms, demanding labour conditions, and tensions with the local population.

Prisoner of War Captivity and Re-Enlistment

For many forced conscripts, the war did not end upon their return home or their reintegration into civilian life; it persisted through Soviet or Allied captivity, or even renewed conscription.

In “Malgré-Nous: Men from Alsace and Moselle held as POWs by the Western Allies during WWII”, Philippe Geny examines the forcibly recruited non-German soldiers who found themselves in Allied captivity. A significant number of conscripts from Alsace and Lorraine, known as “Malgré-Nous,” were captured as Wehrmacht soldiers by British and American troops. They transitioned from the

battlefield to detention in Western Allied camps, sparking inquiries into their treatment amidst the complexities involving Free France and the Provisional Government of the French Republic. Geny's chapter delves into the experiences of the "Malgré-Nous" in Allied POW camps, detailing their treatment, procedural differences from German prisoners, and the conditions of their detention. He explores the dynamics within these camps, shedding light on how these soldiers were perceived by Allied forces and their fellow German captives, as well as the underlying reasons for their presence and treatment.

Some individuals opted to desert and join the Allied forces. In "Conflicting loyalties among soldiers fighting both in the German army and the Allied Forces", Machteld Venken explores the complex allegiances of the Polish-origin soldiers who fought alongside the Polish Allied Forces. Through interviews, Venken illustrates how these veterans crafted autobiographical narratives to navigate their intricate identities, which despite their individual nuances, shared common themes. Post-war, these soldiers underwent socialisation in Poland and are now revered as Europe's liberators. Venken's analysis reveals that while these soldiers internalised ideological values from both sides – often including prevalent anti-Semitic sentiments – joining the Allies exposed them to the individualistic, humanistic ethos inherent in democratic military environments. However, their conduct in combat remained largely consistent, regardless of which side they fought for. Within her chapter, Venken demonstrates that their actions were shaped not only by personal choice and societal pressures; at times, they adhered to norms under duress while also making spontaneous and unconventional decisions beyond their usual frameworks.

In the last chapter, "From 'forced conscription' to compulsory military service: Luxembourg's 'forced conscripts' and the question of post-war military services", Felix Steicher and Nina Janz explore Luxembourg's dual conscription history. Following the forced enlistment of young Luxembourgish men into the German Army during the occupation, the Government of the Grand Duchy reintroduced national military service in November 1944. Their analysis delves into whether Luxembourg harbours a particular aversion to military service, influenced by lingering memories of forced enlistment under Nazi rule. They pose the question of how post-war conscription was affected by these memories. The focus of their study is on Luxembourgers born in 1925/26, who were initially conscripted into the Wehrmacht in 1944 and subsequently became the first conscripts of Luxembourg's post-war army from July 1945 onwards. Steicher and Janz examine how the experience of forced enlistment during the German occupation (1942–1944) shaped public discourse and impacted the individual experiences of these men during their subsequent military service in Luxembourg uniforms from 1945 to 1946.

Jörg Echternkamp summarises the results and provides his concluding thoughts in the afterword. In short, he states that the narratives in this book should not be understood as compulsory structures but rather as opportunities to express individual and collective experiences, sometimes even serving as a means to resist predominant, hegemonic narratives. Ultimately, he highlights a shift in focus: we are no longer primarily concerned with history as narrative but with the history of narratives.

As these contributions encompass various aspects and sources relating to the experiences of forcibly conscripted men – ranging from personal reflections in ego documents to the influence of families and communities, and the repercussions of volunteering for Allied forces, captivity, and subsequent uniform changes – there remains a lack of comprehensive studies on women and their roles in organisations like the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. Nonetheless, these insights add new layers to our understanding of occupation and the war in Europe, particularly regarding the experiences of those who were forcibly conscripted.

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Part 1: **Military Service – Citizenship, Conscription and Volunteering**

Denis Scuto

National Socialist Ethnicity and Citizenship Policy under Growing Military Pressure in Occupied Luxembourg (1940–1944)

Introduction

This paper attempts to analyse some aspects of the Nazi ethnicity and citizenship policy using the case study of Luxembourg occupied by Nazi Germany, as well as the underlying practices of exclusion and inclusion. These are studied in connection with the heterogeneity of the population of a country like Luxembourg that has both emigration and immigration, along with the changes of the course of war from 1942 onwards. This is the first scientific paper where the focus is placed specifically on ethnicity and citizenship policy for Luxembourg during the Second World War.

These questions are complicated by the fact that Luxembourg, with a small population of about 290,000 in 1940, was at the same time a country of emigration prior to 1940, with tens of thousands of Luxembourgers living abroad, mainly in France and the United States, but also in Belgium, Germany. It was also a country of immigration, with a heterogeneous population in terms of nationalities. Among these foreigners, a majority were German (17,000 German residents in 1935, 11,000 in 1940) or Italian (10,000 residents in 1935, 7,000 in 1940), many of whom were naturalized or opted for Luxembourg nationality before 1940. Their potential military recruitment by the Wehrmacht or the Italian Army during the war is also closely related to questions of citizenship and naturalization.

Ethnicity and citizenship policy became increasingly important during the war as a result of the National Socialist's race policies. In the words of Dieter Gosewinkel: "Racial concepts determined the content of citizenship in the National Socialist colonial empire in Europe in an extreme and radical way."[1]

1 "Rassekonzeptionen determinierten also in extremer und radikaler Weise den Gehalt der Staatsbürgerschaft im nationalsozialistischen Kolonialimperium in Europa." (Gosewinkel, Dieter, *Schutz und Freiheit? Staatsbürgerschaft in Europa im 20. Und 21. Jahrhundert*, (Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2016), 276). Like other historians, sociologists, philosophers and researchers in legal studies (including Manuela Boatca, James Tully and Dimitri Kochenov), Gosewinkel insists on the fact that racial and colonial concepts of citizenship characterized not only the German sphere of power, but were also widespread within the European-Atlantic area during the first half of 20th century, highlighting the racist concepts in US-American citizenship that excluded Americans of Afro-

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In October 1939, Hitler had already transferred responsibility for all matters "for the consolidation of German race" to the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, who was now also the "Reichskommissar zur Festigung deutschen Volkstums" (RKF), and to the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi) working under his command. After the brutal defeat of Poland, on October 1, 1939, Hitler commissioned the Reichsführer-SS and Chief of the German Police Himmler with three tasks, by decree of the Führer and Reich Chancellor, to consolidate German national identity: "1. the repatriation of *Reichs- und Volksdeutsche* abroad who are eligible for final return to the Reich; 2. The elimination of the damaging influence of those parts of the population alien to the Reich that represent a danger to the Reich and the German *Volksgemeinschaft*; 3. The creation of new German settlement areas through resettlement, in particular by settling the *Reichs- und Volksdeutsche* returning from abroad."[2] This decree initially applied to the "incorporated eastern territories", but Himmler and his office of up to 20,000 employees – above all the VoMi – also succeeded in co-determining the Germanization and settlement policy in the western territories, which were de facto annexed although not de jure.[3]

Himmler's "völkische Politik" led to a gradation using the three main criteria of the "Volkstumsnachweis": the "commitment to German ethnicity (Volkstum)", the "ancestry", and the "racial aptitude" decided individuals' inclusion within or exclusion from the "Volksgemeinschaft". Commitment was no longer the only decisive factor; the "deutsches Blut" and the "Abstammung" became more and more central. However, the definition and weight of these criteria were not clear, as Dieter Gosewinkel states: "In their conceptual vagueness, the criteria left a great deal of room for manoeuvre as far as the significance of both 'race' and the 'commit-

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American or Asian origin from citizenship, concepts that in turn influenced Nazi racial concepts (see James Whitman's 2017 study on "Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law"). During the Second World War, Americans of Japanese origin were interned. Racist and colonial concepts also influenced French and British citizenship.

2 "1. die Zurückführung der für die endgültige Heimkehr in das Reich in Betracht kommenden Reichs- und Volksdeutschen im Ausland, 2. die Ausschaltung des schädigenden Einflusses von solchen volksfremden Bevölkerungsteilen, die eine Gefahr für das Reich und die deutsche Volksgemeinschaft bedeuten, 3. die Gestaltung neuer deutscher Siedlungsgebiete durch Umsiedlung, im besonderen durch Seßhaftmachung der aus dem Ausland heimkehrenden Reichs- und Volksdeutschen."

3 Stiller, Alexa, *Völkische Politik. Praktiken der Exklusion und Inklusion in polnischen, französischen und slowenischen Annexionsgebieten 1939– 1945*, 2 Bände (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022).

ment to Germanness' were concerned."[4] In the same vein, Alexa Stiller insists that despite being highly ideologically charged, the Nazi racial citizenship adapted to different contexts and evolving situations (political, economic, and military): "Rather than being determined by a 'racialist' vision of ethnical homogeneity in a uniquely defined and limited space, National Socialist policy in this and other fields was characterized by an astonishing degree of pragmatism and a quite flexible response to arising difficulties or needs."[5]

Due to differences of competence and opinion between institutions such as the Reich Ministry of the Interior (RMdI), the Reichsführer SS and RKF, the OKW, and the Gauleiters, a new codification of citizenship law in the German Reich according to these racial criteria was never achieved, although one main objective was nevertheless reached. To again quote Dieter Gosewinkel:

> The polycratic character of National Socialist rule during the Second World War thus finds a counterpart in the conceptual dissolution of citizenship policy. Although the juridic terms had no graspable clarity, they did not lack a rational function. In their entirety, they represented a state of multiple disparities held together by one objective: the establishment of a hierarchical system of rule. It was not the final legal fixation of the ruling classes, but their mere existence that was decisive, in that they symbolically established a ruling gradient and decided on life chances. Citizenship served in this context decisively as an instrument of "Volkstumspolitik".[6]

In areas in the West such as Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg, which were not de jure annexed, even if a majority of the population was defined by Nazis as Volksdeutsche, no German citizenship was granted to Luxembourgers at the beginning of the occupation. With the shift of the war and growing pressure from the Wehrmacht to recruit more soldiers, the naturalization of selected groups of people was discussed at length before finally being decided in the summer of 1942. The aim was to simultaneously safeguard foreign policy considerations and to allow the instrumentalization of citizenship for recruitment purposes, as well as for the "Germanization" of the population of these western territories. According to the German civil authorities, the selective granting of German citizenship as a privi-

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4 Gosewinkel, Dieter, *Einbürgern und ausschließen. Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 409.

5 Stiller, Alexa, "On the margins of *Volksgemeinschaft*: Criteria for belonging to the *Volk* within the Nazi Germanization policy in annexed territories, 1939–1945," in: *Heimat, Region and Empire: New Approaches to Spatial Identities in National Socialist Germany*, ed. Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann and Maiken Umbach (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 239–255.

6 Ibid., 411–412.

lege served as an educational tool in the (re-)Germanization of the population of Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg.

These Western lands were transformed into: Gau Moselland (Luxembourg along with the regions of Koblenz and Trier, under Gauleiter Gustav Simon); Gau Westmark (Lorraine with the Sarre, under Gauleiter Josef Bürckel); and Gau Baden-Elsass (Alsace and Baden, under Gauleiter Robert Wagner). With the military developments in the East after autumn 1941, currents of resistance to the German occupation and Germanization policies were clearly emerging and thus influenced Nazi citizenship policies.

Let us take a closer look at this evolution in the case of Luxembourg.

"Urdeitsch Muselfranken": The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Arrives in the Wake of the Wehrmacht

In the 1930s, the *Westdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, part of the *Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften*, founded in 1931, developed research aimed at legitimizing the contours of a Greater Germany in Western Europe, based on historical, linguistic, geographical and ethnic ("völkisch") criteria. The aim was not only to legitimize the return of the territories ceded following the Treaty of Versailles. The anti-French construction, created by conservative and nationalist researchers, of a "Westraum" encompassing territories in Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland and even an entire country such as Luxembourg was, above all, intended to justify their expansionist policy. Historians, linguists, geographers and ethnologists provided a rational basis for the Nazi regime's expansionist policy.[7]

Bernard Thomas describes well this "völkisch" propaganda : "First, Volksgeschichte sees the nation as a community of the same ethnic and linguistic origin; second, the rural population becomes the main bearer of the tradition that produces cohesion, while the urban population and industrial workers are seen as elements that dissolve community ties; and finally, third, the question of the geographical foundations of the settlement area becomes the catalyst for the research dynamic."[8]

7 Schöttler, Peter (ed.), *Geschichte als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918–1945* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997).

8 Thomas, Bernard, *Le Luxembourg dans la ligne de mire de la Westforschung (1931–1940)*, (Luxembourg: Fondation Robert Krieps, 2011), 83: "Primo, la Volksgeschichte considère la nation comme une communauté d'une même origine ethnique et linguistique ; secundo, la population rurale devient le porteur principal de la tradition productrice de cohésion tandis que la population urbaine et les travailleurs industriels sont vus comme éléments dissolvant les liens commu-

The themes put forward by the WFG were rooted in people's experience: the community ancestry of a peasant population; the Luxembourgish language being presented as a mere dialect, within which an ancient form of German survives; the historical links with Germany through the emperors of the House of Luxembourg, etc. This endeavor to convince Luxembourg conservative intellectuals of these theories failed, however, because it constituted a thinly veiled attack on the country's independence. However, Bernard Thomas shows how the concept of *Deutschtum* was inverted to give rise to the new discursive figure of *Luxemburgertum*, many elements of which structured the national discourse in Luxembourg from the 1930s onwards.

The Westdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, like the Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften (VFG) and the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (VDA) were gradually absorbed by the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi), one of the Hauptämter of the SS, alongside the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, the Reichswirtschafts- und verwaltungshauptamt and the Waffen-SS. A month after the invasion of Luxembourg, Josef Schmithüsen, Privatdozent in Geography at Bonn University and head of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Bonn, arrived in Luxembourg. In 1939, he had obtained his habilitation in geography with a thesis on Luxembourg, published in 1940: "Das Luxemburger Land. Landesnatur, Volkstum und bäuerliche Wirtschaft".[9] According to historian Henri Wehenkel, who contradicts earlier work on this point, following the invasion of Luxembourg by the Wehrmacht on May 10 1940 and during the first months of Nazi occupation, Schmithüsen was both the main driving force and mentor of the Volksdeutsche Bewegung, a pro-German movement founded in Luxembourg a few days after the invasion.[10] On 6 July 1940, according to the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), he launched the first propaganda campaign, displaying the slogan "Mir wölle bleiwen wat mer sin, urdeitsch Muselfranken" ("We want to stay what we are, original German Francs from the Moselle").[11]

nautaires ; et enfin, tertio, la question des fondements géographiques, de l'espace de peuplement devient le catalyseur de la dynamique de recherche".

9 Müller, Wolfgang, Schmithüsen, Josef, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie 23* (2007), p. 232–233 [Online-Version], https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118609211.html. The Deutsche Biographie euphemistically describes him as "Berater bei der deutschen Besetzung Luxemburgs". Josef Schmithüsen (1909–1984), according to this uncritical biography, finished his career during the Second World War as a "wissenschaftlicher Verbindungsoffizier zur Koordinierung der Fernerkundung und der Luftbilderkennung" in the Wehrmacht. He was arrested by the Americans and liberated in May 1947. In 1948, he took up his academic career at the Technische Hochschule Karslruhe and in 1962 he became professor for economic and cultural geography at the Universität des Saarlandes.

10 Wehenkel, Henri, *Entre chien et loup* (Luxembourg, 2017), 106–126.

11 Ibid., 112.

He prepared the field for the main proponent of the Germanization of Luxembourg, the Gauleiter Gustav Simon, who arrived in August 1940 to make the lands German and to 'purify' and 'clear' the land from all *Volksfremde*.

The Appointment of Gauleiter Gustav Simon as Head of the German Civil Administration and his Role in Germanization

The first speech given on 6 August 1940 at the Place d'Armes in Luxembourg City by Gauleiter Gustav Simon, who had been appointed head of the German civil administration (Chef der Zivilverwaltung, CdZ) at the end of July 1940 by Hitler, took up the ideological elements of Schmithüsen and his VoMi colleagues:

> The country of Luxembourg is an old German settlement area. The population of this country is of German origin, it is Moselle-Franconian, just like the population of Trier and our beautiful Moselle region. So don't be fooled by the outwardly French varnish, which is only artificially applied. (Strong applause). I can promise you that this French varnish, this miserable whitewash, will have disappeared without a trace in a few weeks. (Applause) The people of this country cannot be expected to allow their German character, their German distinctiveness, to be artificially concealed under French inscriptions and designations of all kinds. [. . .] Here in this beautiful and well-kept city, here in this country, where every house and every farm bears witness to the fact that a racially valuable, decent and capable population has settled and worked in the German way.[12]

Even if, under international law, Luxembourgers had remained foreigners after the invasion, according to the Gauleiter Gustav Simon, Luxembourgers were "of German origin" ("deutschstämmig").

12 "Das Land Luxemburg ist altes deutsches Siedlungsgebiet. Die Bevölkerung dieses Landes ist deutschstämmig, sie ist moselfränkisch, genau wie die Bevölkerung von Trier und unserem schönen Moselland. Lassen Sie sich daher nicht täuschen von dem äusseren französischem Firniss, der nur künstlich aufgetragen ist. (Starker Beifall). Ich kann Ihnen das versprechen, dieser französische Firniss, diese jämmerliche Tünche, wird in wenigen Wochen spurlos verschwunden sein. (Bravorufe) Es kann der Bevölkerung dieses Landes nicht zugemutet werden, dass ihr deutscher Charakter, dass ihre deutsche Eigenart künstlich verborgen wird unter französischen Inschriften und Bezeichnungen aller Art. [. . .] Hier in dieser schönen und gepflegten Stadt, hier in diesem Lande, wo jedes Haus und jeder Bauernhof davon zeugt, dass eine rassisch wertvolle, anständige und tüchtige Bevölkerung nach deutscher Art gesiedelt und gearbeitet hat." (Luxemburger Wort, 7.8.1940, 1, quoted by Wehenkel, 121–122)

As stated by Blandine Landau, "one of the Gauleiter's primary concerns was to ensure the promotion of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and therefore to avert any threat to the Germanization of Luxembourg. The three main sources of threat are clearly identified: people attached to the Luxembourg identity and regulations, supporters of French cultural influence, and Jews".[13] In her doctoral thesis, Blandine Landau shows how the expulsion of Luxembourg Jews to the West from May 1940 to October 1941 and, from October 1941 to July 1943, the deportation of all remaining Luxembourg Jews to the East, including their dispossession, helped to finance the Gauleiter's Germanization policy. After July 1943, the expulsion of the entire Jewish population of Luxembourg, approximately 5,000 people, was completed. More than 1,200 of the Jews living in Luxembourg before May 1940 were deported by the Nazis to ghettos and camps and murdered. After 1943, only 'Jews' in 'mixed marriages' remained in Luxembourg. By the end of 1943, the process of expropriation and robbery of the Jewish population in Luxembourg was complete.[14]

However, the Gauleiter's administration was not the only institutional player in the Germanization of Luxembourg. On 11 August 1940, Reichsminister des Innern Wilhelm Frick visited Luxembourg with half a dozen senior civil servants. This was the first stage, before Metz and Strasbourg, of a tour of the new territories under civilian administration in the west of the Reich.[15] He was accompanied by Wilhelm Stuckart, chairman of the *Reichsaussschuss zum Schutze des deutschen Blutes* and co-author with Hans Globke of *Kommentar zur deutschen Rassengesetzgebung*. Stuckart had just been appointed by Frick as head of the Zentralstelle for Elsass, Lothringen and Luxembourg within the RMdI. He also co-authored the Denkschrift of 14 June 1940, described by Peter Schöttler[16] as "Generalplan West", which provided for the annexation of the whole of eastern France, in addition to the de facto

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13 "l'une des premières préoccupations du Gauleiter est de veiller à la promotion de la *Volksgemeinschaft*, et donc d'écarter toute menace à la germanisation du Luxembourg. Les trois principales sources de menace sont clairement identifiées : les personnes attachées à l'identité et aux règlementations luxembourgeoises, les soutiens de l'influence culturelle française, et les Juifs" (Landau, Blandine, "À la recherche des Juifs spoliés : Pillages et « aryanisation » au Luxembourg pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale", (Doctorate thesis, C^{2}DH/Université du Luxembourg & EHESS, 2024), 222.

14 Moyse, Laurent (dir.), *Between shade and darkness: le sort des juifs du Luxembourg de 1940 à 1945*. Catalogue d'exposition, Esch/Sauer, Musée national de la Résistance/Op der Lay, 2016; Wagener, Renée, *Emanzipation und Antisemitismus. Die jüdische Minderheit in Luxemburg vom 19. bis zum beginnenden 21. Jahrhundert*, (Dissertation, Uni Hagen, Berlin, Metropol Verlag, 2022).

15 BArch, R 1501/5224, *Reichsministerium des Innern, Dienstreisen nach Luxemburg, Elsass, Lothringen 1940.*

16 Schöttler, Peter, Eine Art „Generalplan West": Die Stuckart-Denkschrift vom 14. Juni 1940, in: *Sozial. Geschichte*, 18, 3, 2003, 83–131.

annexation of Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg. As Georges Buchler points out, Frick and his colleagues Globke, Stuckart and Pfundtner were involved in drawing up the Judenverordnung for Luxembourg on 5 September 1940.[17] On 8 September 1940, the day after the publication of this first Judenverordnung, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler paid a visit to Luxembourg City, with the aim of recruiting Luxembourg volunteers for the Waffen-SS.

A month later, Hitler, in the *Zweiter Erlass des Führers über die vorläufige Verwaltung in Luxemburg*, promulgated on 18 October 1940, granted the dominant role in the Germanization process to the Gauleiter and Chef der Zivilverwaltung Simon, while asking him to do so in close collaboration with, in particular, the RMdI and Stuckart's Zentralstelle:

> Luxembourg is to be regained to the German people in the shortest possible time. In order to achieve this goal quickly and smoothly, the initiative for every administrative measure in Luxembourg must always come from the Chief of the Civil Administration, who reports directly to me. The Head of the Civil Administration is solely responsible to me for the administration in Luxembourg. He therefore receives instructions exclusively from me. In order to be able to coordinate the measures he takes in Luxembourg with the fundamental planning for the entire German living and economic area, the Chief of the Civil Administration must maintain close contact with the Supreme Reich Authorities with the participation of the Central Office for Luxembourg. In the event of differences of opinion that cannot be resolved by direct negotiations, my decision is to be obtained by the Reich Minister and Chief of the Reich Chancellery.[18]

On 20 December 1940, Himmler appointed Gustav Simon as "Beauftragten für die Aufgaben des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums im Gau

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17 Buchler, Georges, 1940: *Deux photographies. Regards sur une journée en août*, unpublished typescript.

18 "Luxemburg soll in kürzester Zeit dem deutschen Volkstum wieder zurückgewonnen werden. Um dieses Ziel schnell und reibungslos zu erreichen, muss grundsätzlich die Initiative für jede Massnahmen der Verwaltung in Luxemburg von dem mir unmittelbar unterstellten Chef der Zivilverwaltung ausgehen. Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung ist mir für die Verwaltung in Luxemburg allein verantwortlich. Er erhält daher Weisungen ausschliesslich von mir. Um die Massnahme, die er in Luxemburg trifft, auf die grundsätzliche Planung für den gesamtdeutschen Lebens- und Wirtschaftsraum abstimmen zu können, hat der Chef der Zivilverwaltung mit den Obersten Reichsbehörden unter Beteiligung der Zentralstelle für Luxemburg enge Fühlung zu halten. Bei Meinungsverschiedenheiten, die durch unmittelbare Verhandlungen nicht auszuräumen sind, ist meine Entscheidung durch den Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei einzuholen." (quoted by: Artuso, Vincent, La "Question juive" au Luxembourg (1933–1941). *L'Etat luxembourgeois face aux persécutions antisémites nazies*, Rapport final, https://gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/fr/actualites/articles/2015/02-fevrier/10-bettel-artuso/rapport.pdf, 121).

Koblenz-Trier und in Luxemburg".[19] Simon was also on Himmler's list in terms of citizenship, for whom the "deutsches und artverwandtes Blut" was of prime importance, while "commitment to Germanness" also remained a crucial concern.[20]

The End of German and Luxembourg Naturalizations

However, the first questions to be dealt with by the civil administration concerned not Volkszugehörigkeit but Staatsangehörigkeit in the classical sense. The question of citizenship and naturalization thus arose for citizens of German origin who had lost their nationality before the war. As early as 15 September 1940, i.e., a few weeks after the establishment of Gauleiter Simon and the civil administration, the CdZ approached the Reichsminister des Innern to ask how to deal with the many applications for naturalization from former Germans who had been living in Luxembourg for years and had lost their German nationality by dismissal ("Entlassung aus der Reichsangehörigkeit"), which they now wished to recover. Before the war, they had acquired Luxembourg nationality, or some other nationality, or had become stateless. According to the CdZ, these former Germans had lost their nationality in their situation as immigrants, "under the economic pressure that has been exerted so far" ("unter dem hier bisher ausgeübten wirtschaftlichen Druck") or "under the constraints of circumstances" ("unter dem Zwang der Verhältnisse").[21] But on 25 September 1939, a circular by RMdI had ordered a ban on German naturalizations.[22] On 24 October 1940, the RMdI replied to the CdZ that, as long as "Luxembourg's constitutional status" ("staatsrechtliche Stellung Luxemburgs") had not been clarified, these people could only be naturalized as Germans under paragraph 13 of the Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz of 1913, i.e., if they returned to live in the Altreich or if they fulfilled the conditions of the circular of 11 January 1940 (e.g., if they or their son could join the Wehrmacht, if they were a foreign member of the NSDAP, SS,

19 Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe. Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945*, (Luxembourg, 1985), 152.
20 Ibid, 153.
21 ANLux, CdZ-A-4256, *Einbürgerung staatenloser deutscher Volkszugehöriger mit zuletzt deutscher Staatsangehörigkeit sowie Feststellung der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit von in Luxemburg wohnhaften Personen*, 7.
22 Ibid., 12.

SA, etc.).[23] However, exceptions could be made for “flawless people in every respect” (“in jeder Beziehung einwandfreie Personen”).[24]

As already stated, no German citizenship was granted to Luxembourgers at the beginning of the occupation. Moreover, in a decree issued by the CdZ on 5 October 1940, all acquisitions of Luxembourg nationality were halted until further notice.[25]

The Italians’ Headache in Luxembourg from the Perspective of Volkstum

From 1941 onwards, Germanization policy shifted in the sense that belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft was not only defined by German descent, culture, language or consciousness but was also progressively defined by the RKF with the help of the VoMi, the RMdI and the CdZ.

After his appointment as “Beauftragten für die Aufgaben des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums” in December 1940 by Himmler, the Gauleiter and GdZ Gustav Simon and his administration immediately set to work. As part of his endeavor to clearly delimit the “Volkstumsgrenze” in Luxembourg, the Gauleiter was first concerned with the treatment, in terms of *Staatsangehörigkeit* and *Volkstum*, not of people of Luxembourg nationality but of Italians, who were the second largest immigrant community after the Germans. Luxembourgers, on the other hand, were to be considered and treated as people of German Volkszugehörigkeit, as he wrote to Himmler: “in principle, all Luxembourg nationals, unless they are of foreign blood, are considered and treated as German Volkszugehörige”.[26]

On 31 May 1941, in this letter to Himmler, the Gauleiter reported on Italian immigration to the Grand Duchy in the wake of the establishment of heavy industry at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.[27] At the time of the 1935 national

23 Ibid., 8.
24 Ibid., 6.
25 Letter by Luxembourg government councilor Emile Brisbois to Josef Jungers, 15.11.1940, ANLux, CdZ-G-09408.
26 “grundsätzlich werden insoweit alle luxemburgischen Staatsangehörige, soweit sie nicht fremdblütig sind, als deutsche Volkszugehörige betrachtet und behandelt” (*Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung an Reichsführer SS und Chef der deutschen Polizei Herrn Staatsrat Parteigenosse Himmler*, 31. Mai 1941, BArch, NS 19/1163, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer SS, Allgemeine Besatzungs- und Volkstumsfragen).
27 Ibid.

census, 9,248 Italians (men, women and children) were living in Luxembourg. Simon added to these Italians ("italienische Volkszugehörige"), the 620 young people born in Luxembourg to Italian parents who had opted for Luxembourg nationality.[28] Of these 620, the 364 who opted for Luxembourg nationality before the age of 21 also retained their Italian nationality, according to the report. Simon estimates that in addition to these dual nationals, there were around 4–5,000 Italians who had become Luxembourg nationals by virtue of double *ius soli*. The latter also held dual Luxembourg and Italian nationality. As Simon defined them all as "Italienische Volkszugehörige", he recommended reducing their numbers so that they could no longer constitute small colonies, mainly in the industrial south of Luxembourg, which he described as "Fremdkörper im luxemburgischen Siedlungsraum".[29] They should be gradually replaced by "anzusiedelnde Volksdeutsche". One option would be to send them back to Italy, another to move them to other (industrial) regions of the Reich, or to exchange them with Volksdeutsche from Yugoslavia.

At the end of this letter/report, the Gauleiter also asked Himmler to send him some general criteria to be applied in terms of "Volkstumszugehörigkeit" in the western parts of the Reich, in particular within the Luxembourg border area, in order to help him in his efforts: "I ask you, dear Reichsführer SS, for your support in my endeavors to create clear Volkstumsverhältnisse in the Luxembourg border region and to inform me of the measures you consider possible in connection with this."[30]

Himmler replied in two parts. Regarding the specific case of the Italians, he agreed with Simon in principle. For both Himmler and Simon, the "deutsches Blut", the "Abstammung" was central. Himmler disagreed with Simon on two of

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28 For the young men who were sons of Italian immigrants born in Luxembourg, the majority of whom opted for Luxembourg citizenship (as they were listed by CdZ), their dual nationality made them recruitable for the Italian army. On 19.4.1941, in the newspaper Tageblatt, the Fascio Abele Tiapago advertises: "Die in Luxemburg geborenen Italiener, welche zwischen 18 und 21 Jahren für die Luxemburger Staatsangehörigkeit optiert haben und also noch minderjährig waren, werden jetzt nach italienischem Recht als Italiener durch Abstammung betrachtet." The numerous circulars during the following months underline that these young men refused to declare themselves to the Italian Consulate to be enrolled. Their mothers even wrote to the CdZ to prove that they had kept their Luxembourg nationality after marrying an Italian (ANLux, CdZ-A-4304, *Aufenthaltserlaubnis von italienischen Staatsangehörigen welche die luxemburgische Staatsangehörigkeit durch Erklärung erworben haben oder diese von rechts wegen besitzen*).

29 *Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung an Reichsführer SS . . .*, ocit., BArch, NS 19/1163.

30 "Ich bitte Sie, lieber Reichsführer SS, um Unterstützung bei meinen Bemühungen um Schaffung klarer Volkstumsverhältnisse im luxemburgischen Grenzraum und um Mitteilung der nach ihrer Auffassung in diesem Zusammenhang möglichen Massnahmen." (Ibid).

his four points, however, as they were not feasible either economically (during wartime) or in terms of foreign policy. He agreed that the Germanization ("Eindeutschung") of these Italians had to be made impossible. He also agreed that this applied both to people of Italian nationality and to those of Italian origin who had taken Luxembourg nationality, or had acquired it through dual citizenship. However, the necessary repatriation of these people to Italy could, according to Himmler, only take place after the end of the war due to economic (Italians represented a crucial workforce in steel industry and construction sector), political and transportation reasons. Himmler was also against resettling Italians to other regions of the Reich, particularly as it could lead to disagreements with Mussolini's Italy.[31]

We can see here how citizenship during the Second World War became a function of National Socialist race policies: even in the case of nationals of a political ally, Mussolini's Italy, a racial interpretation of citizenship led Gauleiter Simon to propose mass expulsion to Himmler. However, a pragmatic approach integrating political imperatives is also visible: Himmler, agreeing in principle, invokes political and economic constraints to postpone this "repatriation".

Delimit the "Volkstumsgrenzen" in Luxembourg: New Questions for a Census

On the general question of the limits of "Volkszugehörigkeit" in the Luxembourg border region and the general criteria to be applied, i.e., how to define ethnic boundaries, Himmler instructed the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle in Berlin to provide him with answers.[32] SS-Obergruppenführer Werner Lorenz, head of the VoMi, instructed SS-Obersturmbannführer Heinz Brückner to draw up a report on the question, after consulting the Gauleiter's close collaborators Heinrich Siekmeyer, Regierungspräsident in Trier, Friedrich Münzel, Deputy Gauleiter, and Referent Alfons Trossen of the CdZ. This report was delivered on 1 September 1941.[33]

The report confirmed the complex relationship between Staatsangehörigkeit and Volkszugehörigkeit for the population of a country with immigration such as Luxembourg, for several reasons.[34] First, many people of foreign nationality were,

31 Letter by Himmler to Gustav Simon, 21 July 1941, BArch, NS 19/1163.

32 Notice from Brandt (Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS) to the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle Berlin, 26 June 1941, BArch, NS 19/1163.

33 Letter from Lorenz to Himmler, 1st September 1941, BArch, NS 19/1163.

34 Bericht über die Besprechung der volkspolitischen Lage beim Chef der Zivilverwaltung in Luxemburg am 27./28.8.1941 von SS-Obersturmführer Brückner, Sachbearbeiter der VoMi, BArch,

according to the report, of German "Volkszugehörigkeit": many women of Luxembourg origin had married foreigners, thus losing their Luxembourg nationality. Second, many people of Luxembourg nationality were of "fremder Volkszugehörigkeit", since they acquired it by naturalization, by declaration, or by double *ius soli*. These people were considered by Nazis as ethnically Italian, Polish, French or Belgian. Lastly, there was a great deal of 'mixing' between Germans and Luxembourgers ("Deutschen luxemburgischer Staatsangehörigkeit") and "fremdvölkisch" foreigners, given the high number of marriages between Luxembourgers and Italians, French, Belgians, Poles, etc.

In Nazi terminology, this report confirms the statistics produced by the Luxembourg government in the 1930s on the distribution of Luxembourgers according to the mode they had acquired Luxembourg nationality, from the population census of 31 December 1935 (see table).[35] These statistics show that almost 9,000 foreign women (originally of German or Italian nationality) became Luxembourgers through marriage to a Luxembourgish man. Almost 3,500 young people (again mainly of German and Italian origin) became Luxembourgers by declaration or option, while almost 4,400 people acquired Luxembourg nationality through double *ius soli* on their mother's side. In other words, they were born in Luxembourg to a mother of Luxembourgish origin who had lost her nationality through marriage to a foreigner. This last figure, as well as the 3,018 cases of recovering nationality by women of Luxembourg origin married to foreigners, highlights the large number of Luxembourg women who married foreigners, again mainly of German or Italian nationality.

NS 19/1163. Heinz Brückner (1900–1968) headed Büro 6 ("Sicherung deutschen Volkstums im Reich") of the VoMi.

35 Scuto, Denis, *La nationalité luxembourgeoise. Histoire d'un alliage européen*, (Bruxelles, 2012), 200f.

Population census of 31 December 1935: Breakdown of Luxembourg nationals by nationality acquisition method.

Mode of acquisition of Luxembourg nationality	**Male.**	**Female**	**Total**
By descent (born in the Grand Duchy or abroad: art. 10 C. c.; law of 23 April 1934, art. [r] n° 1; art. [r] n° 2; art. 2; art. 3)	236.051	113.838	236.051
By double ius soli a) father's side: law of 1878: law of 1934, art. 1 n° 3 al. 1	102	64	166
b) mother's side: law of 1890; law of 1934, art. 1 n°3 al. 2	2.364	2.011	4.375
By declaration or option by the persons: a) born in the Grand-Duchy: art. 9 C. c., law of 1934, art. 6 n° 1 or art. 6 n° 1 and art. 32	2.690	776	3.466
b) born abroad or in the Grand-Duchy of parents one of whom was a Luxembourger: art. 10 C. c.; born abroad: law of 1934, art. 6 n° 2 or art. 6 n° 2 and art. 32	835	148	983
By declaration: from people whose fathers have been naturalised: art. 10 Constitution	63	7	70
By option: from a foreigner married to a Luxembourg woman: law of 1934, art. 10	284	–	284
By concomitance: from unemancipated minor children who have become Luxembourg nationals at the same time as their parents: law of 1934, art. 10	277	250	527
By mariage: of a foreign woman to a Luxembourg man: art. 12 C. c.; law of 1934, art. 4; or by married women whose husband has become a Luxembourger by option: law of 1934, art. 4	–	8.728	8.728
By recovery: a) a) by entering the Grand Duchy with authorisation: art. 18 C. c.; law of 1934, art. 25 al. 1	33	42	75
b) from widows or divorced women: art. 19 C. c.; law of 1934, art. 25 al. 2	–	445	445
c) on behalf of children who have lost their status as Luxembourg nationals with their author: law of 1934, art. 25 al. 4	–	–	–
d) of women married to foreigners: law of 1934, art. 24 n° 3 al. 2 and art. 32	–	3.018	3.018
By conservation: of women married to foreigners: law of 1934, art. 24 n° 3 al. 2; the Department of Justice circular n° 76 of 2 July 1934	–	116	116
By naturalisation	222	18	240
Luxembourg population with usual residence	129.083	129.461	258.544

Source: Tableau constitué par la section centrale de la Chambre des Députés sur la base des données fournies par l'Office de statistique (Compte-rendu de la Chambre des Députés Luxembourg, *CRCD*, Annexes, 1938–1939, 345).

Brückner sums up the problem in the report: "There are no documents about the treatment of fremdes Volkstum in Luxembourg. All surveys in the past have only been based on nationality. . . . Staatsangehörigkeit cannot simply be used to determine Volkszugehörigkeit."[36] This is why the report recommends clarifying the extent of "fremdes Volkstum" in Luxembourg by four additional questions within the framework of the foreseen fiscal census of 1941, the Personenstandsaufnahme planned for October 10, 1941:

a) current nationality?
b) previous nationality? until when and which ones?
c) native language?
d) *Volkszugehörigkeit*?[37]

The answers to these questions in the census would form the basis of a "Kartei des fremden Volkstums". Based on the information in this Kartei, the necessary political measures could then be taken. According to an analysis of the results of the census carried out by the CdZ on December 15 1940, which in particular provided information on the "in Luxemburg ansässigen Ausländer", these 15,744 persons were chosen purely on the basis of Staatsangehörigkeit, and the following picture appears according to the report from 1 September 1941:[38] the 7,479 Italians and people of Italian origin, although undesirable, were essential to the smooth running of the steel industry and the war industry, and could thus only be expelled after the war. The 1,957 French people were in fact primarily Lorraine and Alsatian, and should therefore be considered "deutschstämmig". Only a minority of around 200 "pure French" were to be repatriated. The 2,660 Belgians would primarily come from the Arlon region, which was part of Luxembourg before 1839. It was considered appropriate to repatriate only the minority who were "pure Walloons". The report raises in passing the question of whether the Arlon region should be given back to Luxembourg. As for the 1,023 Poles, they would be registered through the Deutsche Volksliste defined by the Verordnung of 4 March 1941. If they proved to be of non-German origin ("nichtdeutsche Volkszugehörigkeit"), they would lose

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36 "Unterlagen über den Umgang des fremden Volkstums in Luxemburg liegen nicht vor. Alle Erhebungen der Vergangenheit sind lediglich auf die Staatsangehörigkeit abgestellt. (. . .) Von der Staatsangehörigkeit kann gerade nicht ohne weiteres auf die Volkszugehörigkeit geschlossen werden." (Bericht über die Besprechung der volkspolitischen Lage . . ., ocit.)

37 "a) jetzige Staatsangehörigkeit ?
b) frühere Staatsangehörigkeit ? bis wann und welche?
c) Muttersprache?
d) Volkszugehörigkeit?" (Id.)

38 Ibid.

their nationality, become “Schutzangehörige”, and be repatriated to Poland. On 19 September 1941, Himmler confirmed to the head of the VoMi, Werner Lorenz, that the question of the Italians must remain unresolved, and that the French who were not necessary for production could immediately be repatriated, along with the “nicht eindeutschungsfähigen Polen”.[39]

In the report from 1 September 1941, the criteria for the future treatment of the “Volkstumsverhältnisse” were thus formulated.[40] All this “German territory” should in the future only be inhabited by “Menschen deutscher Volkszugehörigkeit”: “The *fremdes Volkstum* must be eliminated as soon as the political and economic conditions allow this.”[41]

Through these discussions, it appears clear that two motives became predominant in the forging of National Socialist German citizenship, and that this policy was also applied in the occupied territories in the West: first, to make German citizenship an ethnically pure reserve for “deutsche Volkszugehörige”, and second to privilege these citizens over “völkisch Fremde” and “Schutzangehörige”.[42] The term “Schutzangehörige” was ostensibly just a legal figure to indicate a “lesser form of belonging to the German Reich” (Stuckart).[43] In reality, it was an ad hoc bureaucratic construction for the selection, economic exploitation, and deprivation of rights of “fremdvölkischer Minderwertiger” like Poles. In this cynical hierarchy of (non-)rights, only Jews, Sinti and Roma were ranked beneath the “Schutzangehörige”, who became collectively stateless through the Zwölfte Verordnung vom Reichsbürgergesetz of 25 April 1943.

“Erstens kommt es anders und zweitens als man denkt”: The Failure of the Personenstandsaufnahme of 10 October 1941

The Personenstandsaufnahme of 10 October 1941 perfectly illustrates the following adage: “Erstens kommt es anders und zweitens als man denkt”.

39 *Der Reichsführer SS (persönlicher Stab) an den Leiter der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle, SS-Obergruppenführer Lorenz, 19. September 1941*, BArch, NS 19/1163.

40 Richtlinien für die Behandlung der Volkstumsverhältnisse in Luxemburg, 1. September 1941, BArch, NS 19/1163.

41 “Das fremde Volkstum ist, sobald die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Verhältnisse dies zulassen, auszuschalten.” (Ibid.)

42 Gosewinkel, ocit., 407.

43 Gosewinkel, ocit., 414.

As Paul Dostert, André Hohengarten and later Olivier Worré have shown,[44] the Personenstandsaufnahme of 10 October 1940 was a tax census of a racial nature, with additional questions on current and former nationality, mother tongue, and ethnicity as well as on parents and grandparents, asking whether they were "Jewish" or not.[45] We have just seen that, at the suggestion of the VoMI, in order to clarify the "Volkstumsverhältnisse", namely distinguish the members of "fremdes Volkstum" (mainly the Italians, French and Belgians) from the "deutsches Volkstum" (mainly the Luxembourgers and Germans), several questions were added to the census relating to current and past nationality (Staatsangehörigkeit), ethnic affiliation according to Nazi definitions (Volkszugehörigkeit), and mother tongue (Muttersprache). The answers that primarily interested the German civil administration, the VoMi, and the Reichskommissar SS were those where the answer was neither Luxembourgish nor German: "Questionnaires in which information other than German and Luxembourgish is included on questions a-d (regarding current and previous nationality, mother tongue and ethnicity, D.S.) serve as a basis for the accelerated creation of the 'Kartei des fremden Volkstums'".[46]

From the moment when the first practical information and the first forms were sent to municipalities at the end of September / beginning of October, several Luxembourg resistance movements launched a campaign of leafleting against the census. The Luxembourg resistance movement only partially understood the intentions behind the questions about mother tongue and ethnicity. In their view, the National Socialist regime was pursuing geopolitical and military objectives, namely to annex Luxembourg to the German Reich, to turn the people of Luxembourg into citizens of

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44 Hohengarten, André, Die Personenstandsaufnahme vom 10.10.41 im Lichte neuer Dokumente, in: *Hémecht. Zeitschrift für Luxemburger Geschichte*, (1976, 129–157); Dostert, Paul, Vor 50 Jahren. Die Personenstandsaufnahme vom 10. Oktober 1941 und ihre Folgen für die deutsche Zivilverwaltung, in: *Luxemburger Wort, 10.10. 1991*, 13–14, 16; Worré, Olivier, *Le recensement du 10 octobre 1941, Travail de fin d'études présenté en vue de l'obtention du diplôme*, (Université Catholique de Louvain, 2010–2011).

45 On the Personenstandsaufnahem, see also this recent series of articles: Blasen, Philippe/Scuto, Denis, *Die Personenstandsaufnahme vom 10. Oktober 1941. Teil 1: Seit über 80 Jahren incognita im Archiv; "98 Prozent dreimal 'luxemburgisch'" bei der Personenstandsaufnahme 1941? Teil 2: Ein Erfolg der Resistenz und seine Verklärung; Von der Personenstandsaufnahme zur Erhebung des Volkstums. Teil 3: Drohungen, Strafgelder, Schläge und Tote einer Kartei wegen; Die Personenstandsaufnahme und das Vetorecht der Quellen. Teil 4: Überlegungen zur völkischen NS-Politik*, in: Tageblatt, 11/12 May 2024, 10–11; 25/26 May 2024, 9–11; 22/23 June 2024, 13–15; 6/7 July 2024, 10–11.

46 "Fragebogen in denen zu den Fragen a-d (betr. jetzige und frühere Staatsangehörigkeit, Muttersprache und Volkszugehörigkeit, D. S.) andere Angaben als Deutsch und Luxemburgisch enthalten sind, dienen als Unterlage für die beschleunigte Erstellung der « Kartei des fremden Volkstums »". (*Bericht über die Besprechung der volkspolitischen Lage . . .*, op. cit., Barch, NS 19/ 1163)

the Reich, and to conscript them into the Wehrmacht. As evidence of this and as an incentive to resist, the LPL (Luxembourg Patriotic League) and other resistance groups circulated a (fictional) letter from the *Reichsminister für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* Joseph Goebbels to Gauleiter Gustav Simon.[47] As the footnotes of the census forms specified that Luxembourgers should answer the question on Staatsgehörigkeit with "Luxemburger" but that they were forbidden to answer the other two questions on the Volkszugehörigkeit and the Muttersprache with "Luxemburger" (as Luxembourgers were being assimilated within the category of German), these leaflets by the resistance movements first called for the population not to answer these questions and not to sign the forms, fearing that it would become a camouflaged referendum for Germany, used afterwards by the occupier to annex Luxembourg or to enroll young Luxembourgers in the Wehrmacht.

The civil administration responded by publishing an article in the press, "Zählkarten gewissenhaft ausfüllen", urging the population to read the instructions carefully and to fill out the census forms accurately, threatening them with fines and imprisonment if they did not do so.[48] Through new leaflets, the resistance movements then called on Luxembourgers to answer the two questions on Volkszugehörigkeit and Muttersprache with "Letzeburger" ("Luxembourger"). Explanatory articles followed from the CdZ, but also articles threatening those who didn't accurately fill in the forms with deportation to concentration camps. On October 8, the first Luxembourger was sentenced to death by the Sondergericht, Joseph Barthelmy, for having put a bomb in the home of a Luxembourg Nazi Ortsgruppenleiter in Bettembourg.[49]

The call of the resistance movements was widely followed. Many Luxembourgers responded to the census questions not with German but "Letzeburger", as revealed by samples taken by the Gauleiter in several districts. The Personenstandsaufnahme was thus transformed by the action of the resistance movements into a profession of faith for Luxembourg, which forced the CdZ to cancel the census by a decree from 11/12 October 1941. After the war, in 1946, the date of 10 October was chosen as an official day of national commemoration. A tax census that was initially supposed to ascertain who was not German or Luxembourgish, serving as a basis for the exclusion of the "fremdes Volkstum" from the country, is thus now commemorated as part of the creation of a narrative about Luxembourg's resistance, and as a "referendum" against the Nazi occupiers. Alongside

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47 Blasen, Philippe/Scuto, Denis, *"98 Prozent dreimal 'luxemburgisch'" bei der Personenstandsaufnahme 1941? Teil 2: Ein Erfolg der Resistenz und seine Verklärung*, in: Tageblatt, 25/26 May 2024, 9–11.

48 "Zählkarten gewissenhaft ausfüllen", in: *Luxemburger Wort*, 4/5 October 1941, 4.

49 "Ein politischer Verbrecher zum Tode verurteilt", in: *Nationalblatt*, 9 October 1941, 1.

the 31 August 1942 strike against enlisting young Luxembourg men into the Wehrmacht, 10 October 1941 is intended to symbolize the resistance of an entire people against the Nazi occupier.[50]

A fiscal census with questions on race and mother tongue was thus reversed, to say it in the words of Regierungspräsident Sieckmeyer, "because through unprecedented incitement of the population, this statistical measure was stamped into a referendum"[51] – a commitment to Luxembourg by many Luxembourgers who responded to the two questions of "Volkszugehörigkeit" and "Muttersprache" with "Letzeburger". This transformed the Personenstandsaufnahme into a manifestation of opposition to the German occupation. Consequently, the approach of the Gauleiter changed completely. A few days later, on 13 October 1941, the "Verordnung über die Anlegung einer Volkstumskartei in Luxemburg" was published in the press. The Luxembourg population now learned that from 10 May 1940 "there (is) no longer any Luxembourg nationality". During the Referentenbesprechung of 14 October 1941, Sieckmeyer concluded that more coercive measures would be necessary from now on: "There is therefore no reason to hang your head. After all, the experiences were instructive, and the lessons will be learned. It is now important to take the reins tightly everywhere and to take action, and not to allow any more leniency until a change of attitude has occurred among the people of Luxembourg."[52]

As a policy based on "commitment to Germanness" failed in this context, a repressive phase began, culminating in November 1941 with the first big razzia of the Gestapo against Luxembourg resistance movements and the deportation of more than 100 resisters to the SS-Sonderlager Hinzert near Trier.[53]

In December 1941, according to the RMdI, "all Luxembourgers had become stateless on 10 May 1940". However, this term was in fact used in a propagandistic manner, and the legal concept of statelessness did not apply to the Luxembourgers – not even according to the National Socialist views on citizenship. In practice, Luxem-

50 Scuto, Denis, Mémoire et histoire de la Seconde Guerre mondiale au Luxembourg. Réflexions sur une cohabitation difficile, in: *Hémecht. Revue d'histoire luxembourgeoise*, 58/4 (2006), 499–513 ; Majerus, Benoît, Besetzte Vergangenheiten. Erinnerungskulturen an den Zweiten Weltkrieg in Luxemburg – Eine historiografische Baustelle, in: *Hémecht. Revue d'histoire luxembourgeoise et transnationale*, 64 (2012), 23–43.

51 "da durch beispiellose Verhetzung der Bevölkerung diese statistische Maßnahme zu einer Volksabstimmung gestempelt", see Dostert, ocit., notes 168.

52 "Es besteht daher kein Grund, den Kopf hängen zu lassen; immerhin waren die Erfahrungen lehrreich, und die Forderungen werden gezogen werden. Es gilt nun die Zügel überall straff in die Hand zu nehmen und durchzugreifen, keine Milde mehr walten zu lassen, bevor nicht der Gesinnungswandel bei den Luxemburgern eingetreten ist." Quoted by Dostert, ocit., 155.

53 Engel, Marcel/Hohengarten, André, Hinzert. *Das SS-Sonderlager im Hunsrück 1939–1945*, (Luxembourg, 1983), 86.

bourgers nonetheless continued to be defined ambiguously as “deutscher Volkszugehöriger (Luxemburger)” on their identity cards and passports from October 1941 onwards.

Contrary to what Paul Dostert writes in his chapter on the question of nationality in his 1984 doctoral thesis, the Luxembourgers thus did not become stateless. This citizenship status would have deprived them of any state protection, and this was not the intention for a population defined by the Nazis as “deutschstämmig”. Nevertheless, the citizenship status of several thousand Luxembourgers would remain unclear until the end of war, as we will see later. On 4 January 1945, Ministerialrat Hans Globke repeated – in the name of the Reichsminister des Innern, and for the attention of the Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums and the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle – that Luxembourgers who do not possess German citizenship or German citizenship “upon revocation”(“auf Widerruf”) are theoretically stateless but that “for political reasons, however, they should not be described and treated as foreigners.”[54] Globke asks them to enter “unclear” (“ungeklärt”) in their workbooks (“Arbeitsbuch”) in the section concerning citizenship, with the origin “Luxembourg”.[55]

This underlines once more, as Gosewinkel states, that juridic terms had no intelligible clarity and were based on vague criteria, instead primarily serving to establish hierarchical relations between different groups within the population.

The Establishment of the “Kartei des deutschen Volkstums”

After the failure of the Personenstandsaufnahme, the investigation that would serve as a basis for the constitution of a “Kartei des deutschen Volkstums” was attributed to an expert from the Reichskommissar SS Himmler, namely SS-Brigadenführer Erwin Rösener.[56] In the “Schlußbericht über die Erhebungen zur Anlegung einer Volkskartei in Luxemburg” of September 1942, the failure of the census of October 10 was first recorded, referring only to the “very strong resistance of the Luxembourg population” but failing to mention the actions of resistance movements, or the inadequacies in their own organization:

54 BArch, R 59/61, *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, Staatsrechtliche Stellung der Absiedler aus Elsaß, Lothringen und Luxemburg*, 5.

55 Ibid., 6.

56 Blasen, Philippe/Scuto, Denis, “*98 Prozent dreimal ‘luxemburgisch’*” . . ., ocit.

> Initially, it was planned to carry out a survey of the Volkszugehörigkeit of the Luxembourg population on special forms for the occasion of the Personenstandsaufnahme of 10 October 1941. The plan was to have the population fill out the forms themselves and then have police officers collect them with the counting papers from the Personenstandsaufnahme. These plans failed due to the very strong resistance of the Luxembourg population.[57]

Now it would not be the residents who would fill out and sign the census forms, but rather the investigators appointed and trained by the VoMi who would question the residents, who were summoned to their municipality of residence rather than being interviewed in their homes; the investigators would then note down their responses, without the residents having to write or sign the documents themselves. The persistent resistance of the Luxembourg population during this new round of questioning, especially concerning the question of their mother tongue, is noted in the report, but at the same time downplayed. The report concedes that approximately 80% of the surveyed population insisted on the inclusion of Luxembourgish as their mother tongue, and that a certain number of Luxembourgish official investigators even encouraged this. Interestingly, unlike the results on the Volkstumszugehörigkeit, the report does not provide statistics concerning residents' mother tongue.[58]

According to the "Schlußbericht über die Erhebungen zur Anlegung einer Volkskartei in Luxemburg" of September 1942, the population of the country consisted of 287,246 people: 231,554 "Volksdeutsche" (the name given by the VoMI to Luxembourgers), 11,123 "Reichsdeutsche" – these two categories being grouped under the category of 242,677 "Deutsche" (Germans) – 7,777 Italians, 2,378 Belgians, 841 French, 779 Poles, 1,440 Others ("Sonstige Fremdvölkische"), and 31,354 "Mischvölkische".[59]

A "Zusatzbericht betr. die Erhebungen zur Anlegung einer Volkstumskartei in Luxemburg" describes the next steps used to create the final file. Doubtful cases from the point of view of "blood" would once again have to be examined by commissions comprising representatives of the CdZ, the VoMi, the municipality, and the VdB. These people would then be classified into four categories:

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57 "Zunächst war vorgesehen, anlässlich der Personenstandsaufnahme vom 10.10.41 auf besonderem Bogen Erhebungen über die Volkszugehörigkeit der luxemburgischen Bevölkerung vorzunehmen. Dabei war in Aussicht genommen, die Bogen von der Bevölkerung selbst ausfüllen und sie dann mit den Zählpapieren der Personenstandsaufnahme von den Polizeibeamten einsammeln zu lassen. An dem sehr starken Widerstand der luxemburgischen Bevölkerung scheiterten diese Pläne." (BArch, NS 19/1163).

58 See: Blasen, Philippe/Scuto, Denis, *"98 Prozent dreimal 'luxemburgisch'"* . . ., ocit.

59 BArch, R59/58, *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, Vokstumsmäßige Erfassung der Bevölkerung in Luxemburg*, 5.

a) recognized as ethnic Germans,
b) Germanized to the extent that they could live within the border area (Luxembourg)
c) still so strongly influenced by foreign ethnicity that final Germanization is only possible in the Altreich
d) foreign ethnic influence so strong that Germanization is not desirable[60]

It does not appear that the ethnic file could be finalized. The objective of the complete Germanization of Luxembourg was in any case gradually thwarted by military developments on the Eastern Front and by constraints, in terms of both conscription and the war industry. From 1942 onwards, when the ethnic file was implemented in Luxembourg, the ethnicity and citizenship policies linked to expulsion and resettlement projects increasingly depended upon the development of war events. As Alexa Stiller writes, "they were based on the requirements of the war economy, in particular food and labor market policy, and served to deter 'Kriegs- und Arbeitsdienstverweigerer' or to combat insurgency".[61]

We have already seen this with regard to the Italians who the German authorities wished to repatriate, but ultimately were not: the 7,777 Italians residing in the country, as well as the young Italians who became Luxembourgers by choice before the war, or even the "Mischvölkische", resulting from marriages between Luxembourgers and Italians – all were considered "fremdes Volkstum", but were essential at the economic level as most worked in steel industry and construction sector. For this reason, and due to diplomatic conflicts with Mussolini, their expulsion to Italy was not planned during the war but postponed until the post-war period, "sobald die Verhältnisse es zulassen".

The end of German occupation occurred before the exact delimitation of "Volkstumsgrenze" could be completed, as is the case with the expulsion or repatriation of "Fremdvölkische".

60 "a) als Volksdeutsche anerkannt,
b) soweit eingedeutscht, dass sie im Grenzraum (Luxemburg) wohnen können,
c) noch so stark vom fremden Volkstum beeinflusst, dass endgültige Eindeutschung nur im Altreich möglich ist,
d) fremdvölkischer Einschlag so stark, dass Eindeutschung nicht erwünscht." (*Zusatzbericht betr. die Erhebungen zur Anlegung einer Volkstumskartei in Luxemburg*, op. cit., 2)

61 Stiller, Alexa, *Völkische Politik* . . ., ocit., 1312.

Citizenship to Serve Introduction of Compulsory Military Service

The inquiries to define the boundaries of 'Germanness' were implemented in 1942, at the same time as a shift in the war caused the Wehrmacht forces to exert pressure on the CdZ to grant full citizenship to only a minority of Luxembourgers, on the basis of their "German descent" and their "commitment to the German cause".

From October 1941, with the Führer's order to introduce compulsory military service in Alsace and the failure of the Blitzkrieg in the east, another process began in Luxembourg, through which a graduated naturalization of selected groups of people would finally be put in place, to primarily serve not the Germanization of Luxembourg but the planned introduction of compulsory military service. The Wehrmacht had not only called for the recruitment of young people of Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg, but also wanted clarification concerning their legal citizenship.

The "Verordnung zur Regelung von Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen" of 20 January 1942 states that, even without the annexation of territories, in the territories "unter deutscher Hoheit" (like Luxembourg), for political reasons, certain groups of foreigners can be granted German citizenship by "general order" ("allgemeine Anordnung"), i.e., through administrative channels.[62] This granting of German citizenship could be revoked within ten years on a case-by-case basis ("deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf").

For Luxembourg, this led to lengthy discussions and differences of opinion between Gauleiters Simon, Wagner and Bürckel, as well as the Reich ministries and the Reichsführer SS under Hitler's arbitration.

Gauleiter Simon seemed to be the most selective of the three Gauleiters concerning granting citizenship, and even reluctant concerning conscription. Again, he believed in the attraction of "commitment to Germanness" within the Luxembourg population, in this case the success of his campaign for volunteering in the Wehrmacht or the SS and entering the NSDAP. Citizenship, according to Gauleiter Simon, was only to be granted to volunteers and those who were already "champions of the German cause" before 10 May 1940 (those with the red membership card of the NSDAP), along with their families.[63] He had repeatedly asked for accelerated naturalization for volunteers in 1941. Beyond that, a selective introduction of citizenship "upon revocation" ("auf Widerruf") was planned, albeit only for certain categories of the population, since "in Luxembourg, in contrast to Alsace

62 Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und ausschließen . . .*, ocit., 404f.
63 Dostert, ocit., 156.

and Lorraine, due to the lack of a homeland state, there was no deportation of undesirable elements among the ethnic Germans, so that even among the members of the Volksdeutsche Bewegung there were elements unworthy of granting citizenship on revocation". In May 1942, Simon still advocated that "the citizenship regulation can only take place after the final constitutional (staatsrechtliche) integration (of Luxembourg)".[64]

At the beginning of June 1942, according to Deputy Gauleiter Münzel's notes on the meetings held in Berlin from 5 to 6 June 1942, Hitler decided, concerning Luxembourg, "that in accordance with the position of the head of the civil administration in Luxembourg, Gauleiter Staatsrat Simon, the introduction of compulsory military service in Luxembourg should be abandoned for the time being".[65] Continuing, it states "that (the CdZ) has rather preferred, and with great success, the recruitment of volunteers for the Wehrmacht to compulsory conscription, that there are already 1500 voluntary registrations for the Wehrmacht and that, in view of the size of the population and its extraordinarily strong commitment in the war-decisive armaments industry as well as in agriculture, this represents an extraordinarily large percentage of the people who would be eligible for conscription even if general conscription was introduced in Luxembourg".[66]

Nevertheless, after this meeting, the position of the Gauleiter evolved, at the suggestion of Münzel following his meeting in Berlin. Luxembourgers who had done the Reichsarbeitsdienst and Luxembourg policemen who took the oath to the Führer should also be granted German citizenship.[67] In further discussions with the RMdI, Gauleiters Wagner, Bürckel and – after a meeting of the three Gauleiters with Hitler, Himmler, Ribbentrop and Frick in the Führerhauptquartier in Winniza – Simon, accepted to grant German citizenship on revocation to the "deutschstämmigen" Luxembourger who had joined the Volksdeutsche Bewegung with their families.

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64 Quoted by Dostert, ocit., 185.
65 "dass entsprechend dem Standpunkt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in Luxemburg, Gauleiter Staatsrat Simon, von der Einführung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg bis auf Weiteres abzusehen ist" (*Dr. Münzel, Vermerk über die in der Zeit vom 5. bis 6. Juni 1942 in Berlin durchgeführten Besprechungen*, ANLux, CdZ-A-4352, *Staatsangehörigkeit für Luxemburger sowie die Einführung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg*, 33–34).
66 "dass (der CdZ) vielmehr, und zwar mit grossem Erfolg, die Werbung von Freiwilligen für die Wehrmacht der pflichtweisen Einberufung vorgezogen habe, dass bereits jetzt 1500 freiwillige Meldungen zur Wehrmacht vorliegen und dass dies mit Rücksicht auf die Bevölkerungszahl und deren ausserordentlcih starken Einsatz in der kriegsentscheidenden Rüstungsindustrie sowie in der Landwirtschaft einen ausserordentlich starken Prozentsatz der auch bei der Einführung der allgemeinen Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg für die Einberufung infrage kommenden Volksgenossen darstelle" (Ibid.)
67 Ibid.

All these discussions ultimately led to the "Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg" of 23 August 1942. On 30 August 1942, Gauleiter Simon promulgated these ordinances for his Luxembourg area, at the same time as the ordinance on compulsory military service of the same date for those born between 1920 and 1924. Here, too, Simon was initially against the conscription of those born in 1920, only accepting after Alsace and Lorraine had conscripted those born in 1920. According to the Gauleiter, miners, skilled workers in the iron and steel works, many in agriculture, prisoners of war and foreign civilian workers were also not to be conscripted. The day after, on August 31, the publication of the Verordnung caused several strike movements in Luxembourg, and a subsequent severe repression through the introduction of a Standgericht, sentencing 21 people to death. The Verordnung provided for the following graduated naturalization of selected groups of people:

I. The members of the following groups of German origin acquire German citizenship:
   1) Volunteers of the German Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS
   2) Members of the Volksdeutsche Bewegung who are accepted into the NSDAP
   3) Members of the German Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS who are called up due to compulsory military service
   4) Members of the Reichsarbeitsdienst who are part of the permanent staff
   5) Members of the police who take the oath to the Führer
   6) Persons whom the head of the civil administration recognizes as proven Germans because of special merit to the German cause

   The deutschstämmige members of the Volksdeutsche Bewegung acquire German citizenship upon revocation.
II. The acquisition of nationality generally extends to the wife and minor children, unless this is excluded in individual cases.[68]

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68 "I. Die deutschstämmigen Angehörigen folgender Gruppen erwerben die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit:
1) Freiwillige der deutschen Wehrmacht und der Waffen-SS;
2) Mitglieder der Volksdeutschen Bewegung, die in die NSDAP aufgenommen werden;
3) Angehörige der deutschen Wehrmacht und der Waffen-SS, die auf Grund der Wehrpflicht einberufen werden;
4) Angehörige des Reichsarbeitsdienstes, die zum Stammpersonal gehören
5) Angehörige der Polizei, die den Eid auf den Führer leisten;
6) Solche Personen, die der Chef der Zivilverwaltung wegen besonderer Verdienste um die deutsche Sache als bewährte Deutsche anerkennt.

Die deutschstämmigen Angehörigen der Volksdeutschen Bewegung erwerben die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf.

A RMdI circular of 26 August 1942 specifies, in paragraph 7, that in principle one can be considered to be of German descent if one has at least two German grandparents; all those who were born in Luxembourg, Lorraine, Alsace or the German Empire were considered German.[69]

Nonetheless, paragraph I.6 and the conceptual vagueness of “deutschstämmig” still left Gauleiter Simon a wide latitude when it came to the importance of both race and commitment to Germanness.

The Nationality/Ties of Luxembourgers after August 1942

According to a report of 28 August 1942, following the decree of 30 August 1942, the vast majority of Luxembourgers, estimated at about 200,000, thus became – by political and administrative decision of the CdZ – German citizens upon revocation (the 80,000 members of the VdB along with their family members). 2,200 members of the NSDAP and around 1,500 volunteers of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS, an unknown number of RAD-“Stammpersonal”, Luxembourg policemen and proven Germans acquired German citizenship without restrictions. About 10,000 recruits, “who are called up on the basis of compulsory military service” were to follow in the next few years. That made a total of around 215,000 people, out of a population of approximately 290,000.

The nationality of the roughly 20,000 remaining former Luxembourgers considered as “Volksdeutsche” who fell into neither category now had, as was stated in some identity cards/foreign passports, an undetermined nationality, “Staatsangehörigkeit ungeklärt, früher Luxemburg”. They still had to be treated as “deutsche Volkszugehörige”, people of German descent with the right to legal protection. They thus had a kind of intermediate status, clearly differentiated from the “fremdvölkische inhabitants” of Italy, Belgium and France, as well as of those of “Schutzangehörige” originating from the eastern territories. On 29 August 1942 the Reich Ministry of the Interior wrote to the CdZ of Luxembourg that this intermediate status was a “Schwebezustand”: “Schutzangehörige are not regularly created in the western territories, since the inhabitants of the western territories are all of German origin. Only persons of non-German origin who cannot be expected to remain

II. Der Erwerb der Staatsangehörigkeit erstreckt sich, soweit dies nicht im Einzelfall ausgeschlossen wird, grundsätzlich auf die Ehefrau und die minderjährigen Kinder.”

69 *Der CdZ an das Gericht der Kommandantur der Befestigungen Eifel und Saarpfalz, Zweigstelle Trier,* 1. August 1944, ANLux, CdZ-A-4620, *Luxemburger in der Wehrmacht.*

in the Reich territory in the long term are regularly declared to be Schutzangehörige. I consider it right to allow the state of suspense (Schwebezustand) to continue for the time being with regard to the Luxembourgers, who will become neither citizens nor citizens upon revocation, but for this very reason I would like to refrain from making special mention of their legal status in the implementing decree."[70] As specified in the same correspondence, the Gauleiter emphasized that "the entire group of people (the stateless people of German origin in Luxembourg) will ultimately receive German citizenship because of their German origin".[71]

On 18 November 1942, the head of the Reichsinnenministerium des Innern, Ministerialrat Hans Globke, Referent für Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen, and the Oberregierungsrat Günther of the CdZ agreed with the interpretation that the decree of 23 August 1942, namely that "in principle, all Luxembourgers living in the Reich should be regarded as Staatsangehörige auf Widerruf, unless there are concerns about their German origin in individual cases".[72] However, a clear distinction had to be made between the mass of these "Staatsangehörige auf Widerruf" and the "bewährte Deutsche" who demonstrated an exemplary political attitude.

At the same time, the RMdI and the CdZ also agreed to grant German citizenship on revocation to Luxembourgers who had emigrated or resettled in France (21,286 people in July 1942), Belgium (11,407 people in July 1942) or in the Altreich, or from April 1943 throughout the Reich, but always "with examination of the individual case with regard to German origin and appraisal".[73] The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) in particular had raised reservations for military reasons

70 "Schutzangehörige werden regelmäßig in den westlichen Gebieten nicht geschaffen, da die Bewohner der Westgebiete durchweg deutschstämmig sind. Zu Schutzangehörigen werden aber regelmäßig nur nicht deutschstämmige Personen erklärt, mit deren Verbleiben im Reichsgebiet auf die Dauer nicht zu rechnen ist. Ich halte es für richtig, hinsichtlich der Luxemburger, die weder Staatsangehörige noch Staatsangehörige auf Widerruf werden, den Schwebezustand vorläufig fortbestehen zu lassen, möchte aber gerade deswegen davon absehen, ihre Rechtsstellung in dem Durchführungserlaß besonders zu erwähnen." (*Abschrift von Auszug aus dem Fernschreiben des Reichsministerium des Innern vom 29. August 1942 an den Chef der Zivilverwaltung in Luxemburg*, ANLux, CdZ-A-4256, 2)

71 "der gesamte Personenkreis (der deutschstämmigen Staatenlosen in Luxemburg) wegen seiner Deutschstämmigkeit letzten Endes die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit erhalten wird".

72 "grundsätzlich alle im Reichsgebiet wohnenden Luxemburger als Staatsangehörige auf Widerruf angesehen werden sollen, soweit nicht im Einzelfall Bedenken gegen ihre Deutschstämmigkeit bestehen" (Vermerk betr.: Staatsangehörigkeitsverordnung, 23 August 1942, 18 November 1942, ANLux, CdZ-A-4256, 24.)

73 Ibid.

("abwehrmäßige Gründe") against a general granting of citizenship to the Luxembourgers, Lorraines and Alsatians residing abroad.[74]

Likewise, the "deutschstämmige" Luxembourgers – just like the Lorraine and Alsatians – who were resettled in the Altreich and known as "Absiedler", received the "deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf" from 1 August 1943 by Runderlass of 9 July 1943, provided that they were assessed for racial suitability by the SS Race and Resettlement Main Office (RuSHA, Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS).[75] This decision again points out the contradictions in the codification of citizenship legislation by National Socialist administrations on different levels. These "Absiedler", consisting of approximately 4,000 Luxembourgers, were in fact resettled in Lower-Silesia, Sudetenland and in the Hunsrück because they were considered to be politically unreliable in Luxembourg, Lorraine and Alsace: the family members of strikers, resisters, deserters and "Kriegsdientsverweigerern". They were replaced in Luxembourg by ethnic German resettlers ("Ansiedler"), mainly from South Tyrol, Bosnia, Croatia, Bukovina and Transylvania. As Sarah Maya Vercruysse shows,[76] granting the Luxembourg "Absiedler" "German citizenship on revocation" was seen as contradictory even by the Reich Chancellery. She quotes from a memorandum by the Reichskanzlei from 12 April 1943 to Himmler: "it is in itself paradoxical that people who are resettled here because of political unreliability are granted German citizenship, while this is otherwise precisely a reason for not granting it to them."

The importance of "blood" considerations is again illustrated by this example. According to Gosewinkel, this was Himmler's concern; but Gosewinkel also states that it represented a possibility for the RMdI, who were traditionally in charge of questions of citizenship, to regain normative power. He illustrates this with a quote from RMdI concerning the Deutsche Volksliste:

"For entry in the Deutsche Volksliste, it is essential that no German blood is lost and can be made available to foreign people. Active engagement for Germanness is therefore not a prerequisite for entry in the Deutsche Volksliste. Even an indifferent or bad German remains a German, and it must be prevented – if not for his sake, then for his children's sake – from pushing him against his will into

74 Ibid.

75 BArch, R 59/61, 6.

76 See the article *"Desertion leads to resettlement" – The consequences of desertion and draft evasion on the families of Luxembourgish soldiers (1942–1945)* by Sarah Maya Vercruysse (p. 241–278).

the non-German camp and thereby feeding it with German blood. In the Eastern regions no German may be denied access to the German Volksgemeinschaft."[77]

On the other side, as "Abgesiedelte" were only granted German citizenship upon revocation, their citizenship could be taken away from them within ten years in cases where their Germanization in the Altreich did not succeed and they proved themselves unworthy of acquiring full citizenship. The German 'citizens upon revocation' remained a "discriminatory status on probation" (Gosewinkel), a "second-class-citizenship" (Stiller).

As military constraints grew stronger following the setbacks of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern and Western Fronts, other new groups would be granted German citizenship. The Führererlass of 15 May 1943 granted German citizenship to the "deutschstämmigen Ausländern" who belonged to the Wehrmacht, the Waffen-SS, the German police or the Organisation Todt. During 1943 and 1944 in Luxembourg, this led to a search for "deutschstämmige" Fremdenlegionäre and "deutschstämmige" stateless persons who could be recruited for the Wehrmacht.[78] From 1943 onwards, the archives contain entire lists of stateless persons, but under the denomination of "ehemalige Angehörige anderer Staatsangehörigkeit". The aim of these lists, created by the CdZ, was to recruit for the Wehrmacht the stateless who were formerly German, but also Russians, Lithuanians, Poles, and Yugoslavs, as long as they could also be racially considered as Volksdeutsche, giving them the possibility of a double nationality.

This evolution must be viewed in the broader context of the plans for a "großgermanischen Europa", as Gosewinkel states: "In the Rassenkrieg, it was no longer nationality but racial affiliation that was decisive for the recruitment of the German Reich's European armies. At the peak of resource mobilisation in the last phase of the war, 13 percent of the German army consisted of foreigners."[79]

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77 "Für die Eintragung in die Deutsche Volksliste ist wesentlich, daß kein deutsches Blut verloren geht und fremdem Volkstum nutzbar gemacht werden darf. Aktive Betätigung für das Deutschtum ist daher nicht Voraussetzung für die Eintragung in die Deutsche Volksliste. Auch ein gleichgültiger oder gar ein schlechter Deutscher bleint Deutscher, und es muß – wenn schon nicht seinetwegen, so doch seiner Kinder wegen, verhütet werden, ihn gegen seinen Willen in das nichtdeutsche Lager abzudrängen und diesem dadurch deutsches Blut zuzuführen. In den Ostgebieten darf keinem Deutschen der Zugang zur deutschen Volksgemeinschaft verwehrt werden." (Gosewinkel, 408).

78 See ANLux, CdZ-E-0351, *Wehrbezirkskommando Luxemburg – Bestimmungen und Schriftwechsel betreffend Einberufung ehemaliger französischer Fremdenlegionäre sowie Klärung ihrer Staatsangehörigkeit*; CdZ-A-4304; CdZ-A-4274, *Erfassung der Staatenlosen der Geburtsjahrgänge 1884– 1927 – Kreis Grevenmacher und Esch.*

79 "Im Rassekrieg war nicht mehr die Staatsangehörigkeit, sondern die rassische Zugehörigkeit ausschlaggebend für die Rekrutierung der europäischen Armeen des Deutschen Reiches. Auf

Conclusion

Gauleiter Simon had planned to solemnly hand over a certificate that he would personally sign to the 3–4,000 people who were granted the deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit by the Verordnung of 30 August 1942, namely the members of the NSDAP, volunteers of the Waffen-SS and the Wehrmacht – the so-called "bewährten Deutschen". When Gauleiter fled from Luxembourg in September 1944, those certificates had still not been signed or handed over.

This perfectly symbolizes the changes, contradictions and failures of the National socialist ethnicity and citizenship policy in occupied Luxembourg from 1940 to 1944. In 1940, the propaganda and legal regulations had initially concentrated on historical and cultural criteria like German descent, language and consciousness. Then, in 1941, defining 'Germanness' ethnically and racially made it to the top of the National socialist agenda. However, the National Socialist ethnic policy failed due to three main reasons: the Luxembourg counter-model of an ethnically mixed immigration and emigration country stood in opposition to the idea of an ethnically homogeneous population; the opposition of resistance groups and large parts of the population to this "völkische Politik"; and the power shift in the war, to the detriment of Nazi Germany.

After a fiscal census in December 1940 questioning Staatsangehörigkeit, the census of October 1941 intended to obtain information not only on Staatasangehörigkeit but also on Volkszugehörigkeit and Muttersprache. The failure of this "Personenstandsaufnahme", and its reversal by resistance movements and the Luxembourg population into a "Volksabstimmung" for Luxemburgertum and against Deutschtum, opened a coercive phase in which a Kartei des femden Volkstums was established. This endeavor was organized in 1942–1943 by the RKF, VoMi officials, and CdZ in Luxembourg; however, this would never be completed.

At the same time, as the balance of power in the war shifted, military imperatives led to the granting of full German citizenship from August 1942 to a minority of Luxembourgers who were considered "bewährte Deutsche": members of the NSDAP, volunteers in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS, and forced recruits of the Wehrmacht, ultimately, no more than 15,000 people from a total population of 290,000. The majority of the population who had formerly held Luxembourg citizenship, some 200,000 people, along with their families, and who became members of the Volksdeutsche Bewegung were granted German citizenship upon revocation – a "second-class-citizenship" (Alexa Stiller). The citizenship of a mi-

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dem Höhepunkt der Ressourcenmobilisierung in der letzten Kriegsphase bestanden 13 Prozent der deutschen Armee aus Ausländern." (Gosewinkel, *Schutz und Freiheit?* . . . ; ocit., 273–274).

nority of about 20,000 people remained unclarified, also acknowledged in official documents as "ungeklärte Staatsangehörigkeit (früher Luxemburg)". In this respect, the Germanization of the Luxembourg population appeared to be a highly fragmented endeavor.

More research will be necessary to analyze the National Socialists' assessment of the racial suitability of the population in Luxembourg on an individual basis for the period of 1943/1944, as well as the classification of the roughly 1,000 Poles in the German Volksliste.

It should here be noted that on 30 August 1945, the Allied Control Council for Germany proclaimed Law N° 1 in Berlin which repeals the political and discriminatory laws of the defeated Nazi regime (Kontrollratsgesetz Nr. 1 betreffend die Aufhebung von NS-Recht, short form: Kontrollratsgesetz Nr. 1). But, as David Fraser and Frank Caestecker have shown for German Jews, this lead to a complicated situation: "At first blush, it might appear obvious that liberal governments, as part of their victory over totalitarianism, and within the legal framework of the immediate abrogation of Nazi anti-Jewish laws by the Allied Occupation Authorities, would chose to restore the former German nationality of these Jews as evidence of their complete rejection of Nazi policies legalized practices of racial, ethnic, and religious persecution. However, the actual political and legal situation "on the ground" did not necessarily lend itself to such a seemingly principled liberal legal solution consistent with the dominant framework of the state/citizen modus operandi of international law. Many individual Jews challenged the automatic restoration of their former nationality, and demanded a less obvious straightforward solution to the legal consequences of the persecution they had suffered."[80] More research has also here to be done on the surviving Jews who returned or tried to return to Luxembourg after the war and who had become stateless. Statelessness was also a challenge for many Polish immigrants in Luxembourg before, during and after the war.

Finally, it will also be important to analyze the influence that these Nazi ethnicity and citizenship policies had, along with their accompanying racial theories on Luxembourg administration and politicians, both before, during and after the war. In my former research on Luxembourg citizenship policy, predominantly within my doctoral thesis on the history of the Luxembourg nationality in the long run, I pointed out that the 1930s saw a breakthrough in the Luxembourg parliamentary and governmental sphere of ethnic nationalist theories influenced by

80 Fraser, David and Caestecker, Frank, "Jews or Germans? Nationality Legislation and the Restoration of Liberal Democracy in Western Europe after the Holocaust." *Law and History Review*, 31/2 (May 2013): 393–394.

racial theories, which were used to analyze immigration through the language of biology. This was not only the prerogative of the Nazis in Germany after 1933. In France, racial themes were raised by hygienists, who in the 1920s attempted to legitimize their function as salaried doctors by raising the question of foreigners. They focused on this "social peril", to the extent that historian Gérard Noiriel speaks of "Les origines républicaines de Vichy", the republican origin of exclusionary measures, which would culminate under the Vichy régime with the denaturalization of French Jews who were naturalized between 1927 and 1940.[81]

In Luxembourg, medical-racial language became established in the 1930s, as can be seen in the observations of the special commission set up by conservative Prime Minister Joseph Bech in 1936, who wrote in his opinion on the law of Luxembourg nationality that: "Every normally conditioned mixture must be made in reasonable proportions; if foreign substances are added in too large quantities, they can no longer be assimilated and they dominate".[82]

The issue of foreigners continued to be brought up after the war, as questions of "Überfremdung" and "assimilation" that were expressed in biological units of "foreign bodies" ("Fremdkörper"). The influence of National Socialist ethnicity and citizenship policies on these theories during the occupation of Luxembourg and the lasting effects after the war are undeniable.

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81 Noiriel, Gérard, *Les origines républicains de Vichy*, (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Zalc, Claire, *Dénaturalisés. Les retraits de nationalité sous Vichy*, (Paris: Seuil, 2016).

82 See Scuto, *La nationalité luxembourgeoise*, ocit., 191f.

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Klemen Kocjancic

Fighting for the Enemy: Recruitment and Mobilisation of Slovenians for the Waffen-SS During the Second World War

Introduction

During the Second World War, the German military machine required many more personnel that Germany itself could supply. This also caused problems between the regular German military (Wehrmacht) and the political army (Waffen-SS) regarding access to the German pool of potential military recruits. To alleviate this personnel problem, Waffen-SS started to recruit from abroad, first targeting Germanic/ Nordic countries and members of German minorities across Europe. But as the fighting grew and casualties rose, they also expended the recruiting pool to the population of conquered and occupied territories, especially those neighbouring the Third Reich itself. Part of current-day Slovenia, then a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was among the territories that were occupied by Germany in 1941.

In this article, our focus group are Waffen-SS soldiers who are connected to current-day Slovenia, either through nationality or residency. Thus, the group is composed of several subgroups: Slovenians (which here refers to all residents of Slovenia, then part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, of Slovene and German nationality, Yugoslav citizens or just residents, living in Slovenia) and foreign citizens of Slovene origin (mainly members of the Slovene minority in Austria). As conflicts can occur between ethnicity (based on ancestry, heritage, and self-declaration) and nationality (as a legal identity), especially due to the ethnically mixed population and turbulent history of the country, these groups are inseparably intertwined and thus examined as one group in this article.[1]

1 See Janez Cvirn, *Trdnjavski trikotnik: Politična orientacija Nemcev na Spodnjem Štajerskem (1861–1917)* (Maribor: Obzorja, 1997); Mitja Ferenc, *Nekdanji nemški jezikovni otok na Kočevskem = Die ehemalige deutsche Sprachinsel im Gottscheerland = Former German linguistic island of Kočevsko region* (Kočevje: Pokrajinski muzej, 2018); Hans Gerstner, *Das Deutschtum in Krain: Ohne das Gottscheer Land* (Wien: Schutzverein 'Landmannschaft', 1979); Štefka Vavti, Wofgang Pöllauer, and Helmut Guggenberger, *Ethnische Identitätsbildung in der slowenischen Minderheit Kärntens: Bericht zur Studie* (Klagenfurt: [s. n.], 1994).

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Slovenian historiography has, in the past few decades, made progress in research regarding the Slovenians who served in German (para)military organisations during the Second World War, but most of this research is dedicated to the Wehrmacht.[2] Based on fragmented archival documents, (post)war literature and a few remaining ego documents, this article attempts to confront a lesser-known part of Slovenian military history – that of Slovenians who served in the Waffen-SS, and how they came to serve their occupier, especially the political army, subordinated to the Nazi party, which was trying to destroy Slovenian culture, nationality, presence. Furthermore, it confronts a common misconception that Waffen-SS soldiers were only volunteers of German(ic) origins. Through the life stories of Slovenians and people of Slovene origin, this article will show that, while at first those who joined the Waffen-SS were volunteers, soon afterwards different methods were used to get people to enlist, including deception and force.

Early History of Waffen-SS

After the end of the First World War and the dissolution of the German Empire, in 1919 Adolf Hitler, who was still employed by the *Reichswehr*, joined the German Workers' Party (*Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*; DAP) and in less than a year became the president of the party, which had in the meantime changed its name to NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*).[3] Due to violent clashes, in the same year (1920) the NSDAP formed an informal group to secure and guard their meetings, which was later formally organised and (finally) renamed as *Sturmabteilung* (SA). In 1923, a group was formed inside the SA that was exclusively

2 See Jože Dežman et al., *Po sili vojak II: prisilno mobilizirani Gorenjci in Korošci v nemško vojsko 1943*–1945 (Kranj: Gorenjski muzej, 2020); Sabine Buchwald, "Recipročnost individualnega in kolektivnega spomina. Pisma nemškega vojaka iz druge svetovne vojne," *Ars & Humanitas* 1 (2019): 65–77; Monika Kokalj Kočevar, *Mobiliziranci v nemško vojsko z Gorenjske v letih 1943–1945* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017); ibid, "Prisilno mobilizirani v nemško vojsko iz medvojne občine Tržič," *Kronika* 3 (2020): 643–658; Igor Slavec and Franci Globočnik (ed.), *Landsbergerji* (Kranj: Združenje mobiliziranih Gorenjcev v redno nemško vojsko 1943–1945, 2003).

3 Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf. Die Geschichte der SS* (Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag, 1998), 19–27; Robin Lumsden, *Himmler's Black Order: A History of the SS, 1923–45* (Sparkford: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 5–6.; Dietrich O. Orlow, "The Organizational History and Structure of the NSDAP, 1919–23," *The Journal of Modern History* 37(2) (1965): 208–210.

responsible for the protection of Hitler; in 1925, it was renamed to *Schutzstaffel* (SS).[4] In the years before the 1933 elections, the SS grew from the initial group of eight men to more than 50,000 in January 1933.[5]

On January 30, 1933, Hitler assumed the position of Chancellor of Germany, formally integrating the SS into state structures. In March of the same year, the first fully armed company, *SS-Stabswache*, was formed, tasked with the close protection of Hitler.[6] In 1935, the SS was tasked with forming militarised units, *SS-Verfügungstruppe* (SS-VT), as a paramilitary organisation of the NSDAP. The following year, SS-VT was proclaimed an organisation in service of the country, and officially subordinated (also) to the German interior ministry.[7] On 1 December 1939, the Waffen-SS was officially formed, involving the reorganisation of SS-VT, *SS-Totenkopfverbände* and other militarised parts of the SS into a single formation.[8]

With growing needs for military personnel, the Waffen-SS was also tasked with increasing the recruitment of new men. At first, SS-VT and Waffen-SS were all volunteers who needed to meet strict criteria (in terms of physical condition, racial origin, and political mindset).[9] Only in July 1940 was service in the Waffen-SS equated to regular military service (in Wehrmacht).[10] To accomplish better recruitment, an independent system was formed; at first only three recruiting stations (*Ergänzungsstellen*) covered the whole of Germany, but in December 1939, each military district (*Wehrkreis*) had its own Waffen-SS recruiting station.[11] Each

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4 Bruce Campbell, *The SA Generals and the rise of Nazism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 19–20; Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 228.

5 Hans Buchheim, "Die SS in der Verfassung des Dritten Reiches," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 3 (2) (1955): 130.

6 Buchheim, "Die SS in der Verfassung des Dritten Reiches, 130;" Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf*, 80–81.

7 Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf*, 128; Franz Seidler, *Avantgarde für Europa: Ausländische Freiwillige in Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS* (Selent: Pour le Mérite, 2004), 31; George H. Stein, *Geschichte der Waffen–SS* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2000), 6–8.

8 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), RG 242, T175 Records of the Reich Leader of the SS and Chief of the German Police, R36, Frame 5973, Verfügung des OKW, 8 March1940 betr. "Wehrdienstverhältnis und Wehrüberwachung der Angehörigen der Waffen-SS während des Krieges"; Stein, *Geschichte der Waffen-SS*, 44–45.

9 Kurt Mehner, *Die Waffen-SS und Polizei 1939–1945: Führung und Truppen* (Norderstedt: Militar-Verlag Klaus D. Patzwall, 1995), 274–275; Charles Messenger, *Hitler's Gladiator. The Life and Wars of Panzer Army Commander Sepp Dietrich* (Washington: Brassey's, 2001), 54.

10 Seidler, *Avantgarde für Europa*, 31–33.

11 Jan Hatheway, *In Perfect Formation: SS Ideology and the SS-Junkerschule-Tölz* (Atglen: Schiffer Military History, 1999), 87.

of these stations had between 26 and 30 officials, who were divided into six different sections.[12]

The German pool of potential military recruits was already limited for the Waffen-SS (due to restrictions and selection criteria), so in 1940 they turned to recruiting Germanic (Nordic) volunteers (firstly from Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands).[13] At the same time, voluntary recruitment became less and less voluntary, with more and more pressure placed on military conscripts to "volunteer" for the Waffen-SS.[14] Later in the war, they started to also recruit Slavs and other ethnic groups from Eastern Europe (Soviet Union), Southern, Southeast Europe etc., including those of Muslim faith.[15] This presented a clear deviation from the initial ideological stance, namely that only Germans are "pure" enough to serve in the paramilitary formation of the Nazi party; during the war, the Waffen-SS started to recruit undesirables, those who were previously labelled as unworthy and "natural" enemies of Germans, such as Slavs.[16]

Anschluss and the Slovene Minority in Austria

After the 1918 dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, new countries were formed within its former territory. Current-day Slovenia (minus the western part, which belonged to Italy) became a part of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which merged with the Kingdom of Serbia into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and

12 Gerhard Rempel, "Gottlob Berger and Waffen-SS Recruitment: 1939–1945," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen 1* (1980): 110.

13 Seidler, *Avantgarde für Europa*, 47–75. See also Mark P. Gingerich, "Waffen SS Recruitment in the 'Germanic Lands,' 1940–1941," *The Historian 59*(4) (1997): 815–830.

14 Jean-Luc Leleu, "From the Nazi Party's Shock Troop to the 'European' Mass Army: The Waffen-SS Volunteers," in: C. G. Krüger and Sonja Levsen (ed.), *War Volunteering in Modern Times* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 231–247.

15 For more, see: Jochen Böhler and Robert Gerwarth (ed.), *The Waffen-SS. A European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Stefan Petke, *Muslime in der Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS. Rekrutierung, Ausbilding, Einsatz* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2021), 263–410; Franziska Anna Zaugg, *Rekrutierungen für die Waffen-SS in Südosteuropa: Ideen, Ideale und Realitäten einer Vielvölkerarmee* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2021).

16 For more, see: Valdis O. Lumans, "Recruiting Volksdeutsche for the Waffen-SS: From Skimming the Cream to Scraping the Dregs," in *Scraping the Barrel: The Military Use of Sub-Standard Manpower*, ed. Sanders Marble (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012), 197–224; Valdis O. Lumans, "The Ethnic Germans of the Waffen-SS in Combat: Dregs or Gems?," in *Scraping the Barrel: The Military Use of Sub-Standard Manpower*, ed. Sanders Marble (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012), 225–253.

Slovenes. In 1929, the country was renamed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.[17] The newly established national borders split the population, which had been unified until 1918. Slovenes thus became the majority population in the province *Dravska banovina*, where a significant portion of the population was also of German/Austrian origin; by the start of the Second World War, there were less than 30,000 people that declared themselves to be Germans.[18] At the same time, a Slovene minority in Austria, about 45,000 strong, was cut off from the rest of the Slovene nation.[19]

In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria (Anschluss), which was followed by the incorporation of Austrian armed forces (*Bundesheer*) into the Wehrmacht, while the Austrian territory was divided among the newly formed *Wehrkreise XVII* and *XVIII*. Austrians became citizens of Germany, and males also became subject to mandatory military service.[20] Members of the Slovene minority in Austria (Carinthian and Styrian Slovenians) thus also faced serving in Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS,[21] although they faced forced assimilation both before and after the Anschluss.[22]

Due to the fact that Austrian Slovenes were (newly made) German citizens, and that the ethnicity of recruits wasn't recorded in the German military recruitment system, the research on such members is very limited. Based on his Slovene surname and place of birth, one such member is *SS-Hauptscharführer* Hugo Vehovc. Born in August 1914 in Stattegg (near Graz), he left Austria for Germany in 1933, and joined the SS. As a member of the Waffen-SS, he was awarded the Ger-

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17 For more, see: John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as history: Twice there was a country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *The Improbable Survivor: Yugoslavia and its Problems, 1918–1988* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988).

18 Mitja Ferenc, "Das Schincksal der deutschen Sprachminderheit in Slowenien," *Linguistica* 60(2) (2020): 229.

19 Janko Pleterski, *Avstrija in njeni Slovenci: 1945–1976* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, 2000), 181.

20 Peter Gschaider, "Das österreichische Bundesheer 1938 und seince Überführung in die deutsche Wehrmacht" (PhD diss., Universität Wien, 1967), 115–196; Thomas R. Grischany, *Der Ostmark treue Alpensöhne. Die Integration der Österreicher in die großdeutsche Wehrmacht, 1938–45* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2015); Othmar Tuider, *Die Wehrkreise XVII und XVIII 1938– 1945* (Wien: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1983).

21 Hellwig Valentin, *Der Sonderfall: Kärntner Zeitgeschichte 1918–2004* (Klagenfurt/Celovec: Verlag Hermagoras/Mohorjeva založba, 2005), 124–128.

22 Marjan Linasi, "Nacistična oblast na Koroškem 1938–1945 in njena politika do Slovencev," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino 37* (1997): 141–162; Avguštin Malle, "Koroški Slovenci po leti 1918," in *Temeljne prelomnice preteklih tisočletij. Zbornik referatov*, ed. Stane Granda et al. (Ljubljana: Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2001), 127–140; Avguštin Malle and Valentin Sima, eds., *Narodu in državi sovražni – Pregon koroških Slovencev 1942 / Volks- und Staatsfeindlich – Die Vertreibung von Kärntner Slowenen 1942* (Celovec/Klagenfurt: Založba Drava Verlag, Mohorjeva založba/Hermagoras Verlag, 1992).

man Cross in Gold (*Deutsche Kreuz in Gold*) in October 1944.[23] Another example is *SS-Oberscharführer* Simon Grascher, born in 1920 in Timenitz (near Klagenfurt) to a Carinthian-Slovenian mother. He joined the SS-VT in 1939 and was posthumously awarded with the *Ritterkreuz*.[24]

Alongside such Slovenians, Slovenia was already represented among SS-VT/Waffen-SS personnel through numerous Germans/Austrians that were born in Slovenian lands, but later moved to Germany/Austria (a majority of them after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire). Among these, who were early members of the armed SS, was Wilhelm Kos (1910–1995), born in Ljubljana. Kos later moved to Austria, where he completed his studies and joined the nationalist *Steirischer Heimatschutz* (1927), then the NSDAP (1930), the SS (1931), and in 1933 became a member of the *SS-Stabswache*. Just before the Second World War, he completed *SS-Junkerschule Braunschweig* and became a supply officer. As such, he served in the Waffen-SS during the entire war. After the war, he worked as a lawyer and was also elected to the Austrian Federal Parliament's National Council as a member of the right-wing and national-conservative Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*).[25]

However, the most well–known member of this group is *SS-Gruppenführer und Generalleutnant der Polizei und SS-Untersturmführer der Reserve* Odilo Globočnik. He was born in 1904 in the present-day Italian port city of Trieste, but moved to Austria after 1918 with his family. He joined the Austrian NSDAP in 1922, eventually becoming *Gauleiter* of Vienna, *SS- und Polizeiführer* in Polish Lublin, and then Higher SS and Police Leader of the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral. In Poland and OZAK, he led *Aktion Reinhard*, tasked with the systematic elimination of Jewish people. In 1939, he served almost a whole year in the VT-SS as punishment, after he was removed from the *Gauleiter* post due to several acts of malfeasance.[26] In his early days, he used the Slovene spealing of his surname

23 Axis History Forum (AHF), SS-Hscha. Hugo Vehovc (DKiG holder), 11 December 2003, http://forum.axishistory.com/viewtopic.php?t=37925 (accessed 18 October 2022); *Marburger Zeitung*, 2 January 1945, 6, "Das Deutsche Kreuz in Gold,".

24 Klemen Kocjančič, "Pripadniki Waffen-SS iz Slovenije in slovenskega rodu izven Slovenije," *Vojnozgodovinski zbornik* 26 (2006): 75.

25 Klemen Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave pod Alpami. Enote in ustanove Waffen-SS na Slovenskem med drugo svetovno vojno* (Ljubljana: Založba Inštituta za novejšo zgodovino, 2021), 245–246.

26 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 245; Marijan F. Kranjc, *Slovenska vojaška inteligenca* (Grosuplje: Grafis Trade, 2005), 78. See also Joseph Poprzeczny, *Odilo Globocnik, Hitler's Man in the East* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2004); Max Williams, *Odilo Globocnik: The Devil's Accomplice* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2010).

(Globočnik), but after moving to Austria and joining nationalistic circles, he switched to German spelling (Globocnik).[27]

In 1937, the first volunteer from the German minority in Slovenia left for Germany, volunteering for military service. By 1940, several hundred Slovenian Germans had left for the Third Reich, but the vast majority (perhaps all) were assigned to the direct-action unit of German military intelligence service (*Abwehr*), the so-called Brandenburg unit.[28]

April War and the Occupation of Slovenia

In April 1941, the Third Reich attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; the so-called *April War* ended on 17 April with the complete capitulation of Yugoslavia. The majority of Slovenian lands (Slovenian Carinthia, Lower Styria, Upper Carniola), an area of 10,261.09 km^2, were occupied by Germany.[29] Civilian administration of occupied territories was established on 14 April 1941; in terms of military organisation, the lands were added to the 18th military district (*Wehrkreis XVIII*), with a seat in Salzburg, on 30 April.[30]

While planning the complete annexation of occupied Slovenian territory, during the first stage of German occupation the authorities created two political parties in early May 1941: one for Lower Styria, (*Untersteiermark*) *Steirischer Heimatbund,* and another for Upper Carniola and Slovenian Carinthia, (*Oberkrain*) *Kärntner Volksbund.* These two parties, which were only legal political parties, were the first stage of integrating the local population. In *Untersteiermark*, during the second half of May 1941, 95% of the entire population, more than 320,000 people, applied to join the *Steirischer Heimatbund*, after a heavy propaganda effort, including direct threats. This was followed by a lengthy selection process, lasting three months

27 OeStA/KA, MEB MUR St. Pölten 1434, Klassenkataloge 1915/16, I Klassenkataloge 1916/17.
28 Lojze Penič, "Prostovoljci na slovenskem Štajerskem pred nemško mobilizacijo," in *Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v 2. svetovni vojni 1942–1945: Zbornik 2. posveta o nemški mobilizaciji Slovencev v 2. svetovni vojni*, ed. Ludvik Puklavec. (Celje, Maribor: Društvo mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1941–1945, Muzej narodne osvoboditve Maribor, 1994), 55–56.
29 Michael R. Barefield, *Overwhelming Force, Indecisive Victory: The German Invasion of Yugoslavia, 1941* (Fort Leavenworth: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1993), 16–23; Rolf Bathe and Erich Glodschey, *Der Kampf um den Balkan: Chronik des jugoslawischen und griechischen Feldzugs* (Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1942); Zdravko Klanjšček, ed., *Narodnoosvobodilna vojna na Slovenskem 1941– 1945* (Ljubljana: Vojaški zgodovinski inštitut Jugoslovanske ljudske armade in Inštitut za zgodovino delavskega gibanja, 1977), 48.
30 Klanjšček, *Narodnoosvobodilna vojna*, 54; Marjan Žnidarič, "Uvedba nemške civilne uprave v Mariboru leta 1941," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 2 (1982): 1–14.

(June-September 1941); the population was divided on several categories, according to (political/cultural) attitudes towards the German nation and racial characteristics. By October 1941, 250,000 people were given membership, while more than 70,000 were deemed unsuitable. The vast majority of the population received temporary membership, while only Germans and *Volksdeutscher* received permanent membership. A similar process was carried out in Upper Carniola.[31]

At first, the annexation of Slovenian territory was scheduled for 1 October 1941, but just days before it was postponed to 1 November of the same year (and later, on 10 February 1942, was delayed indefinitely). But in the meantime, on 14 October 1941, the citizenship of the German-occupied Slovenian territory was "resolved": all former Yugoslav citizens and stateless persons living there who were of full German origin were declared full citizens of the Third Reich, while a majority of the population ("of German or related blood" and being "homeland-faithful") became temporary citizens (*"die deutsche Staatsangehörigheit auf Widerruf"*). The third citizenship category were "state protectees" (*"Schutzangehöriger"*). All three citizenship categories were made in parallel to party membership. The final regulations regarding citizenship were only finalised in spring (Lower Styria), and autumn (Upper Carniola) of 1942.[32]

Newspapers, Posters, and Officials

Even before the April War was finished, Germans in occupied Maribor immediately started to promote and recruit for the Waffen-SS. In the 12/13 April issue of the local German language newspaper *Marburger Zeitung*, the first notice and advertisement (both in German) for the Waffen-SS were published. This also revealed the presence of *Dienststelle der Waffen-SS*, which was subjected to the *Ersatzstelle der Waffen-SS Alpenland*, located in Salzburg and covering the area of 18th military district; later, another office was opened in Bled (*Veldes*), covering Upper Carniola. In April, the first Waffen-SS recruitment posters were also put up

31 Tone Ferenc, *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika v Sloveniji v letih 1941–1945* (Maribor: Založba Obzorja, 1968), 744–759.

32 Deutsches Reichsgesetzblatt Teil I 1867–1945, 648–9; Verordnung über den Erwerb der Staatsangehörigheit in den befreiten Gebieten der Untersteiermark, Kärntens und Krains. 14 October 1941; Ferenc, *Nacistična raznarodovalna politika*, 762–3; Ludvik Puklavec, "Odločba o pridobitvi državljanstva," in *Prisilna mobilizacija na Štajerskem*, ed. Ludvik Puklavec (Celje: Zveza društev mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1941–1945, 2003), 9.

in Maribor.[33] In late May 1941, more advertisements, this time seeking musicians for the Waffen-SS, were published.[34]

Interestingly, it was only in late November 1941 that an announcement concerning the soon-to-be-visiting recruiting commission (*Annahme-Untersuchungskommision*) was printed. The first time, the recruiting commission only visited Maribor.[35] In April-May 1942, the commission(s) started to also visit other cities and towns across Lower Styria, such as Ptuj (*Pettau*), Celje (*Cilli*), Trbovlje (*Trifail*), Braslovče (*Fraßlau*) and Šoštanj (*Schonstein*); similar notices were also published for Upper Carniola. At first, the advertisements focused on recruitment for the Waffen-SS mountain troops (*Gebirgs-Truppen der Waffen-SS*), though they later also specified the possibility of serving in other military specialisations, like infantry, cavalry, artillery, tank units etc.[36] In June 1942, the first possibility of volunteering for (non-) commissioned officers of the Waffen-SS was published in the newspaper.[37] While the vast majority of published material (newspaper articles, advertisements and posters) were in German, the Waffen-SS also published a Slovene-language booklet "Pridi k Waffen-SS" (*Come to the Waffen-SS*), which was a translated version, similar to the standard German language booklet "Dich ruft die SS".[38]

These Waffen-SS recruitment commissions visited Slovenian towns once every couple of months, while in later years the time between visits grew longer.[39] The majority of responsibility regarding recruitment for the Waffen-SS thus fell on the local *Gendarmerie* stations. As of January 1942, these stations were not just tasked

33 *Marburger Zeitung*, 12/13 April 1941, p. 2, Waffen-SS: Anmeldung von Freiwilligen; *Marburger Zeitung*, 12/13 April 1941, p. 5, Die Waffen-SS in Marburg. Jože Urbanija, *Soldat Klement* (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva založba, 2011), 50–51; Marjan Žnidarič, *Do pekla in nazaj. Nacistična okupacija in narodnoosvobodilni boj v Mariboru 1941–1945* (Maribor: Muzej narodne osvoboditve, 1997), 62.

34 *Marburger Zeitung*, 22 May 1941, p. 8, Musiker, aller Instrumente für ein symphonisches Orchester der Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 23. 5. 1941, p. 8, Musiker, aller Instrumente für ein symphonisches Orchester der Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 24/25 May 1941, p. 12, Musiker, aller Instrumente für ein symphonisches Orchester der Waffen-SS.

35 *Marburger Zeitung*, 25 November 1941, p. 8, Annahme-Untersuchung für die Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 29/30 November 1941, p. 6, Annahmeuntersuchung für die Waffen-SS in Marburg.

36 Karawanken Bote, 22 April 1942, p. 7, Annahme-untersuchungen.; *Marburger Zeitung*, 4 Feburary 1942, p. 6, Die Waffen-SS stellt ein Freiwillige; *Marburger Zeitung*, 24 February 1942, p. 5, Annahme von Freiwilligen in die Gebirgstruppen der Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 4 March 1942, p. 7, Annahmeuntersuchung für die Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 9 April 1942, p. 5, Freiwilligen für die Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 18 /19 April 1942, p. 6, Eintritt in die Waffen-SS; *Marburger Zeitung*, 18/19 April 1942, p. 11, Annahmeuntersuchung für die Waffen-SS; SI AS 1602, t. u. 289, Annahmeuntersuchung für die Waffen-SS, 3 March 1942.

37 Marburger Zeitung, 11 June 1942, p. 7, Als Freiwilliger zur Waffen-SS.

38 *Pridi k Waffen-SS* (Breslau: NS-Druckerei, 1943?).

39 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 255–259.

with distributing propaganda materials among local population, including putting up posters before the visit of the recruitment commissions, but also with actively seeking potential recruits among the population, especially teenagers in high schools and gymnasiums. Stations also had to include their success rate regarding recruitment for the Waffen-SS (and *Polizei*) in their regular activity reports.[40]

Other officials that were involved in the recruitment for the Waffen-SS were also employees of the Employment Bureaus (*Arbeitsämter*), who targeted job-seekers, and regular military recruitment boards, who diverted military conscripts to the Waffen-SS.[41]

Volunteers

After April War, Germany also gained access to the German minority population in present-day Slovenia, around 40,000 people.[42] Immediately after the occupation and before the April War was ended, the Waffen-SS opened a recruiting office (*Dienststelle*), subjugated to the *Ersatzstelle der Waffen-SS* in Salzburg, in Maribor (then renamed *Marburg an der Drau*), tasked with the recruitment of German citizens and to extend the local *Volksdeutscher*.

For example, brothers Klement K. and Tone K., born in Rošpoh near Maribor, had together voluntarily joined the Waffen-SS in the first month of the occupation. Both were looking for a permanent occupational trade – Klement K. wanted to be a truck driver, while his brother Tone K. wanted to become a professional musician. Klement K. became a driver in the Waffen-SS and survived the war after serving for 49 months. Tone K., however, was killed in late 1944 or early 1945.[43] Interestingly, based on the currently known numbers of Waffen-SS personnel from Slovenia and/or of Slovene origin, the largest number joined the Waffen-SS in 1941; in later years, the number of volunteers started to drop, even among the Germans and *Volksdeutscher*.[44]

The best known Slovenian of German origin was Wilhelm Lampeter, who was born in the Gottschee region of Slovenia in 1916. He studied in Germany and then returned to Slovenia, where in 1939 he became leader of the paramilitary

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40 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 259–260.

41 SI AS 220, t. u. 5, "Organizacija in udejstvovanje delovnih uradov (Arbeitsaemter) na Spodnjem Štajerskem," undated.

42 Dušan Biber, *Nacizem in Nemci v Jugoslaviji 1933–1941* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1966), 14.

43 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 283.

44 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 325–326.

formation *Gottscheer Mannschaft*. After the April War, he was responsible for leading the transfer of the entire Gottschee German population from Gottschee, which was occupied by Italy, to German-occupied Slovenian territory. While accomplishing this, his later activities were deemed unsatisfactory and he was subsequently transferred to the Waffen-SS. After frontline service between 1942 and 1944, he completed a military officers' course at the *SS-Junkerschule Bad Tölz* and was promoted to officer rank. He was then assigned to *SS-Kraftfahr-Ausbildungs- und Ersatz-Abteilung*, later to *SS-Hauptamt*, and in December 1944, was sent back to Slovenia to organise *Volkssturm* among the Gottschee Germans. He survived the war and became a professor of agronomy in East Germany.[45]

During this early period of German occupation, some Slovenes, those who claimed German origins or had acquired (temporary) citizenship, also volunteered for service in the Waffen-SS. For example, Edvin D., born in 1920, joined in 1942 as an "enthusiastic nemčur" (Slovene: *Germanophile*) and served in the SS division *Totenkopf* until he became a Soviet prisoner of war in December 1944. He survived the Soviet prisoner-of-war camp, returned to Slovenia, and even became a member of the Yugoslav Communist Party. He was eventually dismissed from the communist party after his Waffen-SS service was revealed.[46]

Others joined for purely economic reasons – to escape poverty, as in the case of Gustav F., who wrote that he joined because of the extremely tough living and working conditions that he had faced until then: "You do not understand, because you were never starving for bread or digging hard clay for a few Dinars." But he stated that he will "be Slovene in my soul until the grave".[47]

There were also some Slovenes who were professional soldiers and simply continued to serve in the military. One such person was Oton Pečar (born in 1897), who started his military career in Austro-Hungary, fought against Austria in 1919, and remained in the military of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia until the April War of 1941. Afterwards, he joined the Waffen-SS as an artillery officer, survived the war and moved to Germany, where he lived for the rest of his life.[48]

45 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 250.

46 Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (ARS), SI AS 1931, t. u. 1055, file of Edvin D., 1953.

47 Marjan Toš, Vladimir Cerjak and Franc Lorber, *Slovenci v tuji vojski* (Celje: Zveza društev mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1941/45, 2002), 35.

48 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 301.

"Volunteers" by Deception and Force

When the issue of citizenship was resolved in German-occupied Slovenian territory, it created a path for the enforcement of labour and military service among citizens and protectees alike.[49] On 19 December 1941, all German citizens who were living in the occupied Slovenian territory and were subject to military service, i.e. born between 1894 and 1923 (as well as all military officers) and with permanent residency in Lower Styria, were instructed to report by 15 January 1942 to their nearest recruitment command or station.[50] However, the Slovene population (those with temporary citizenship) only became subject to military service (*Wehrpflicht*) and service in the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reichs' Labour Service; RAD) in March 1942 (Lower Styria),[51] and in July 1942 (Upper Carniola).[52]

As service in the Waffen-SS officially remained voluntary,[53] the general military obligation, and subsequent mobilisation drives, also affected recruitment for the Waffen-SS among the Slovene population; however, this time volunteering involved fraud or coercion.

In January 1943, the first cases of forced volunteering or fraudulent activities were recorded among Slovenian conscripts. Members of the RAD, who were immediately pressed into military service, faced various persuasion methods to make them volunteer for the Waffen-SS; from signing black documents, misrepresenting documents (application for the Waffen-SS presented as a request form for vacation), to being selected as "volunteers" by recruiting commissions or commanding officers. One such Slovenian member of RAD was selected, along with 100 others, due to their "Aryan look" and were "volunteered" for the Waffen-SS,

49 Marjan Žnidarič, "Prisilna mobilizacija v nemško vojsko v Mariboru 1942–1945," *Časopis za zgodovino in narodopisje* 2–3 (2002): 182–184.

50 Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in der Untersteiermark, Nr. 57 (1941), Bekanntmachung über die Wehrüberwachung in der Untersteiermark, 19 December 1941.

51 Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in der Untersteiermark, Nr. 75 (1942), Verordnung über die Einführung des Wehrrechts in der Untersteiermark, 24 March 1942; Verordnung über die Einführung des Reichsarbeitsdienstes in der Untersteiermark, 24 March 1942; Bekanntmachung über die Erfassung für den Wehrdienst und den Reichsarbeitsdienst in der Untersteiermark, 26 March 1942; Verordnung über die Sonderdienstpflicht von Schützenangehörigen in der Untersteiermark, 24 March 1942.

52 Verordnungs- und Amtsblatt des Chefs der Zivilverwaltung in den besetzen Gebieten Kärntens und Krains, Stück 16 (1942), Verordnung über die Einführung des Arbeitsdienstrechts in den besetzten Gebieten Kärntens und Krains, 7 July 1942; Verordnung über die Einführung des Wehrrechts in den besetzten Gebieten Kärntens und Krains, 7 July 1942.

53 Rudolf Absolon, *Wehrgesetz und Wehrdienst 1935–1945. Das Personalwesen in der Wehrmacht* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1960), 157–159.

eventually assigned to the 10th SS division. For this reason, Slovenes started to spread the warning that "we cannot sign anything from the Germans, because they could use the signature for recruitment into the SS."[54]

One case of mass false recruitment was related to the formation of a local paramilitary organisation, *SS-Selbstschutz,* in January 1943. This organisation received quite a lot of volunteers, as they were hoping to evade military service abroad. However, new volunteers realised that they had in fact joined the Waffen-SS and that they would be sent abroad, which resulted in a dramatic drop in new volunteers for the *SS-Selbstschutz* and the Waffen-SS alike.[55] Similarly, such false recruitment was also conducted among members of the (auxiliary) police, who were told that by volunteering for the Waffen-SS they would avoid service on the Eastern front, and thus remain in Slovenia – however, afterwards they were nonetheless sent to the front anyway.[56]

Another fraudulent explanation that was given to Gymnasium (underage) students was that by signing a document (in German), they would be sent to the East, where they "will receive huge estates, labour force there is almost free, and you will be wealthy men, landowners." But in fact, the documents were to volunteer for the Waffen-SS.[57] This method was usually tried among the Slovenes who did not know German, and thus could be deceived into signing documents. Another story presented to military conscripts for the Wehrmacht was that they must sign a document stating that they were not of Jewish origin/faith, which was in fact voluntary enlistment into the Waffen-SS.[58]

Pressure to join the Waffen-SS was also applied to opponents of the German occupation – members or supporters of the local resistance movement, or their family members. The first such case is Rudolf B., who was forced to volunteer for

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54 Franci Globočnik, "Landsberg združil številne prijatelje," in *Landsbergerji*, ed. Igor Slavec et al. (Kranj: Združenje mobiliziranih Gorenjcev v redno nemško vojsko 1943–1945, 2003), 10; Franc Gornik, "Trpljenje in krivda prisilno mobiliziranih," in *Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v 2. svetovni vojni 1942–1945: Zbornik 2. posveta o nemški mobilizaciji Slovencev v 2. svetovni vojni*, ed. Ludvik Puklavec (Celje, Maribor: Društvo mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1941–1945, Muzej narodne osvoboditve Maribor, 1994), 103; Bojan Tomažič, *Mobiliziranci: Pričevanja mobilizirancev v nemško vojsko v letih 1941–1944* (Maribor: Frontier, 1994), 132; Alojzij Žibert, *Pod Marijinim varstvom: Spomini Slovenca – nemškega vojaka na drugo svetovno vojno v letih 1941–1945: 2., dopolnjena izdaja* (Kranj: Gorenjski glas, 1995), 34.

55 ARS, SI AS 1622, t. u. 19, "Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 24 Dezember 1942 bis 23 Januar1943", Radovljica Gendarmerie District, 23 January 1943; ARS, SI AS 1622, t. u. 19, "Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 24 Januar 1943 bis 23 Februar 1943", Radovljica Gendarmerie District, 22 February 1943.

56 ARS, SI AS 1931, t. u. 683, interrogation of Franc S., 15 December 1944.

57 Tomažič, *Mobiliziranci*, 259.

58 ARS, SI AS 1827, t. u. 86, report Nr. Š-3331, 22 February 1946.

the Waffen-SS to save his parents. Both his parents were arrested and sent to Auschwitz as supporters of Slovenian partisans. Others refused such offers: Alojz O. and his two brothers were arrested and sent to prison in Begunje, where they received an offer of freedom if they volunteered for the Waffen-SS.[59] In other cases, local (political) functionaries objected to the voluntary enlistment of Slovenes (with temporary citizenship) into the Waffen-SS, as they were known for their anti-German sentiment and thus labelled as politically unreliable.[60]

Even though the official age requirement to join the Waffen-SS was 17 years, which was later lowered to 16 and a half years, Germans also recruited juveniles. This was done under the pretence that they could volunteer for the Waffen-SS even before reaching the age requirement, and would be called upon to serve later.[61] The parental consensus requirement for underage volunteers in the Waffen-SS was removed in early 1942, as per Hitler's order.[62]

Assigned and Transferred

Another "entry" way to the Waffen-SS was the transfer of either an individual, small groups, or entire units from other military branches and/or paramilitary organisations. This happened to Ferdinand T., born in 1924, who in January 1943 was a member of a RAD unit that was transferred to the Waffen-SS.[63] In some cases, a "selection" process was used. For example, in one RAD camp, a (Waffen-)SS recruitment commission divided the present group of RAD workers based on their height. All those present who were taller than 170 cm were told to sign "special papers", after which they were informed that they had just volunteered for the Waffen-SS.[64]

Some Slovenians were first members of the Wehrmacht but were subsequently transferred, individually or as a part of an entire unit, to the Waffen-SS. This happened to Josef T., who was born in Slovenia, but in 1938 moved to Austria and joined a Brandenburg unit that was tasked with unconventional warfare op-

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59 France Filipič, *Slovenci v Mauthausnu* (Ljubljana, Cankarjeva založba, 1998), 313; Nevenka Troha, "Hrastnik v letu 1942: Talci in njihove družine. '. . . ., ker mene več domov ne bo'," in *Nasilje vojnih in povojnih dni*, ed. Nevenka Troha (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2014), 65; Andrej Zorko, "Mobilizacija," in: *Okupacija, mobilizacija*, Gregor Jerman and Andrej Zorko (Trbovlje: Zasavski muzej, 2007), 91.

60 ARS, SI AS 1604, t. u. 908, notification of Kranj's *Landesrat*, 26 August 1942.

61 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 258–9.

62 NARA, RG242, T175, R11, "Werbung für den Eintritt in die Waffen-SS," 27 February 1942.

63 ARS, SI AS 1931, t. u. 1060, interrogation of Ferdinand T., 16 May 1946.

64 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 253.

erations. He remained with the *Brandenburger* until 1944, when the unit was disbanded, and was transferred to the SS division *Hitlerjugend*.[65]

Germans recruited also from (former) partisans or concentration camp (*Konzentrationslager, KZ*) inmates. Such is the case with Matevž I., born in 1921, who was a member of the Slovenian resistance, but was arrested in August 1941 and eventually sent to Auschwitz. Here he declared himself to be German and became first an interpreter and then *Unterkapo*. In June 1942, he was transferred to KZ Mauthausen, where he stayed until April 1945, when he was selected, along with other German inmates, to join the SS division Dirlewanger.[66] Even worse was the case of Ivan J., born in 1922, who was also a partisan until he was caught in August 1942. To save himself and his family, he agreed to cooperate with the Gestapo as an informant and guide. He served with the Gestapo in Slovenia until June 1944, when he was arrested for fraternising with a female resistance member; the next month he was assigned to the Waffen-SS, and eventually sent to the Western front.[67]

Another, similar group was formed from the personnel of the German administration that were no longer useful to them. This was mainly the case with interpreters who were attached to German police units and security service offices in Slovenia. One such case was Franc J., born in 1898. Between 1941 and 1944, he was an interpreter and an auxiliary policeman with the *Sicherheitspolizei* headquarters at Bled. In 1944 he was arrested, and as part of his punishment was transferred to the Waffen-SS.[68]

Deserters

Many Slovenes serving in the Waffen-SS either deserted or attempted to desert over to the Allies.

Ivan Č., who was from Lower Styria, served as a guard in the Mauthausen-Loibl concentration camp. He and three other guards of Yugoslav origin were planning to escape together and join the Slovenian partisans. When their plan was discovered, he committed suicide while on duty in the watch tower on 25 October 1944.[69]

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65 Kocjančič, "Pripadniki Waffen-SS iz Slovenije," 76–77.

66 Filipič, *Slovenci v Mauthausnu*, 163–164; Stane Šinkovec, "Monografija o koncentracijskem taborišču Dachau," in *Dachau: Zbornik*, ed. Bojan Ajdič et al. (Ljubljana: Borec, 1981), 166.

67 Institute of Contemporary History of Slovenia (INZS), box Nemška policija 81, interrogation of Ivan J., 19 May 1945.

68 ARS, SI AS 1931, t. u. 840, "Tolmači pri KdS Bled," undated.

69 Tišler and Rovšek, *Mauthausen na Ljubelju*, 331–335.

Thus far known, the highest-ranking Slovenian partisan who served in the Waffen-SS is Albin Miklič-Kolona, who was born in 1923 in an Italian annexed part of present-day Slovenia. Later he moved to Lower Styria, where he worked as a factory worker in Maribor before the April War. After the occupation, he was sent as a forced labourer to Germany, but he escaped and managed to return to Maribor. However, he was captured and in January 1943 was sent to the Waffen-SS, even though he was officially an Italian citizen. In early August of the same year, he deserted, reached Slovenia, and joined the Slovenian partisans. He rose to the position of commander of the Upper Carniola Detachment (*Gorenjski odred*) and later of the Jesenice-Bohinj Detachment (*Jeseniško-bohinjski odred*).[70]

There were also some cases of redefection, however, For example, Herman Š., born in 1924, was mobilised into the Waffen-SS in January 1943. He served in Poland, and then on the Normandy front. After being wounded, he was sent back home in August 1944 to recuperate, but he escaped and joined the partisan Carinthia Detachment (*Koroški odred*). After a disagreement with the detachment commander, he surrendered himself to the German authorities. He was sent to a penal unit to Prague, but survived the war and subsequent Soviet captivity; later, he returned to Slovenia.[71]

Very few cases of desertion among Slovenian Waffen-SS personnel to other Allied forces are known. Franc F., born in 1925, officially voluntarily joined the Waffen-SS in 1943, but deserted the same year to the Soviet Red Army. He was attached as a translator to a Soviet regiment until the end of the war. He survived the war, returned to Slovenia, but in 1947 escaped to Austria.[72]

Post-War Fate

After the Second World War, the Waffen-SS was proclaimed a criminal organisation due to its involvement in numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. Accordingly, this impacted "all persons who had been officially accepted as members of the SS including the members of the *Allgemeine SS*, members of the Waffen SS, members of the *SS Totenkopf Verbände*, and the members of any of the police forces who were members of the SS". However, the entire membership of the "so-called SS riding units" (*Reiter-SS*) was excluded. Interestingly, the Nuremberg Trial

70 Mile Pavlin, *Jeseniško-bohinjski odred* (Ljubljana, Odbor Jeseniško-bohinjskega odreda in Partizanska knjiga, 1970),143–144.

71 ARS, SI AS 1931, t. u. 1060, questionnaire form of Herman Š., 1962.

72 ARS, SI AS 1931, t. u. 1055, questionnaire form of Franc F., 3 March 1962.

also explicitly excluded “those who were drafted into membership by the State in such a way as to give them no choice in the matter and who personally committed neither war crimes nor crimes against humanity”. The court also found that “about a third of the total number of people joining the Waffen SS were conscripts”.[73]

While some Slovene members of the Waffen-SS (and most likely all those of German/Austrian origin) remained in Germany, Austria and even Western Europe, the majority of Slovenes returned to Slovenia after being prisoners of war (some returned in 1945, while others remained POWs until the 1950s). As members of the Waffen-SS, they were faced with the seizure of their wealth. Immediately after returning to Slovenia, they were faced with interrogation (as were all other returning POWs); some were (re)interrogated several times, as late as the 1960s. The majority of them returned to regular life, with very few facing persecution. Currently, only two members of the Waffen-SS from Slovenia are known to have been prosecuted because of their wartime service. Jože Vavpotič, who was a guard during the war in KZ Mauthausen-Loibl, managed to join the Yugoslav National Army and the Slovenian Communist Party until his past was revealed in 1957. He was sentenced to 10 years of “hard prison”, and an additional three years of the loss of his civil rights.[74] In 1947, a Slovenian *Volksdeutscher*, Josef Lukan, also a guard in KZ Ebensee, was sentenced to 20 (later reduced to 15) years in prison, as part of the so-called Dachau trials in Germany. In 1955, he was released from prison.[75]

After Slovenia gained independence in 1991, Slovenes who had been forcibly mobilised into the German Wehrmacht started to form associations with the goal of pursuing compensation for damage inflicted due to their service (from Germany). However, this was not the case for Slovenian veterans of the Waffen-SS, who were not welcomed into the Slovenian Wehrmacht veterans’ societies, and thus faced even more discrimination than the Wehrmacht veterans.[76]

Due to their association with the (para)military organisation (voluntary for some, forced for the majority), which was declared as criminal organisation after the war, combined with living in a socialist (communist) country, the majority of veterans who survived the Waffen-SS destroyed any personal belongings and (ego) documents that could reveal their Waffen-SS service. Thus, researching this

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73 George Ginsburgs and V. N. Kudriavtsev, *The Nuremberg Trial and International Law* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1990), 244.

74 Janko Tišler and Jože Rovšek, *Mauthausen na Ljubelju: Koncentracijsko taborišče na slovensko-avstrijski meji* (Celovec, Ljubljana: Slovenska prosvetna zveza in Mladinska knjiga, 1995), 75–77.

75 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 332.

76 Zorko, “Mobilizacija,” 94.

part of Slovenian history is hampered by comparison to the recruitment and mobilisation for the Wehrmacht, where such primary sources are more plentiful.

Conclusion

The exact number of Waffen-SS personnel from Slovenia and/or of Slovenian origin is not known, and will most likely be never known. Currently, almost 500 members were individually identified, of whom more than 160 were killed or went missing during the Second World War. One estimation for the total number of Slovenes, Germans from Slovenia, and people of Slovene origin within the Waffen-SS is around 1,000 people.[77] By comparison, the current estimate for the number of Slovenes who served in the various German (para)military organizations is around 70,000 persons.[78]

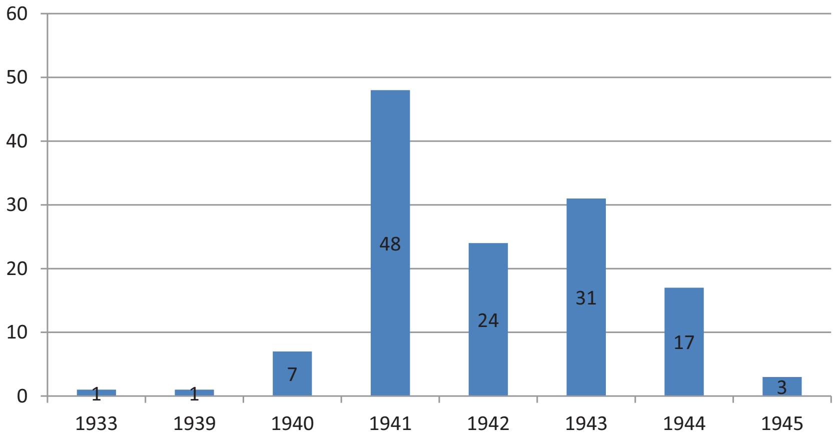
Of the almost 500 Waffen-SS soldiers from Slovenia or of Slovene origin who have been identified, the year of entry into the Waffen-SS is known for 132 individuals. Numbers show (see Graph 1) that the largest cohort joined in 1941, which we can attribute to the post-April War volunteering by Slovenian Germans and some Slovenes. In later years, when the mandatory mobilisation was in effect, yearly contingents never reached the 1941 peak.

The majority of volunteers that came from Slovenian territory were local Germans and *Volksdeutscher*, but among them were also Slovenes. While for Germans (Yugoslav nationals and residents alike), we can assume that they willingly joined the Waffen-SS, the same cannot be said for *Volksdeutscher* and Slovenes, including those from the Slovene minority in Austria. Indeed, although some of them joined of their own volition, the cases presented here show that many were coerced or deceived into volunteering by various means and methods. These included misrepresenting documents that they were signing, threatening them or their family members with imprisonment, and even with recruiting concentration camp inmates. Others voluntarily joined other (para)military formations and were then transferred to the Waffen-SS in a bid to bolster its dwindling personnel numbers.

The stories presented here thus directly contradict common myths regarding the Waffen-SS, especially that all Waffen-SS personnel were volunteers who were entirely committed to the Nazi cause, but also regarding the ethnic and racial background of the political soldiers who represented the “elite of the Third

77 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 262–328.

78 Božo Repe, *S puško in knjigo. Narodnoosvobodilni boj slovenskega naroda 1941–1945*(Ljubljana 2015), 54–55.



Graph 1: Slovenian Waffen-SS soldiers by year of entry.[79]
Presented short biograms of Waffen-SS soldiers from Slovenians and/or those of Slovene origin, showing the reason why they joined.

Reich". Furthermore, they also contradict a common opinion, created in Slovenia after the Second World War, concerning those who served in the Waffen-SS, which views Slovenian Waffen-SS personnel as a homogenous entity, without considering the various reasons why such people ended up in the Waffen-SS, often against their will.

All this reveals a need for further research into this part of Slovenian and European (military) history, in order to grant new insights and further shed old misconceptions.

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79 Kocjančič, *Red mrtvaške glave*, 325.

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Part 2: **Exploring War Experiences Through Ego Documents**

Nina Janz

The War Experience of Non-German Soldiers in the Wehrmacht – The Luxembourg Case

1 Introduction

The Second World War witnessed the recruitment of over 18 million men into the German Wehrmacht, a substantial portion of whom lacked indigenous Reich German citizenship by birth. An estimated half a million individuals from various nations were compelled to wear the Wehrmacht's grey uniform and serve in Hitler's extensive army.[1] This chapter undertakes a comprehensive examination of the experiences of non-German soldiers in the Wehrmacht, with a specific focus on those of Luxembourgish origin. By delving into primary sources such as war letters, this study aims to unravel the unique challenges faced by these soldiers and their individual perspectives on military service.

Luxembourgers, like other non-German soldiers, were forcibly recruited as "*Volksdeutsche*" based on their Germanic ethnicity and were fully assimilated into Hitler's army as German Wehrmacht soldiers. In a bid to develop a comprehensive understanding of Luxembourgers' complex experiences in the German military, this study employs a qualitative approach to explore their perceptions and understanding of military service. Despite the dearth of knowledge about their front-line experiences, this study contributes significantly to existing scholarship, aiming to capture individual perspectives on the war experience based on war letters.

Over 10,000 Luxembourgers were conscripted into the German Army, and their post-war memoirs, interviews, journals and testimonies serve as valuable resources. While they commonly discuss the injustices of conscription, their narratives are intertwined with reflections and contemporary discussions about their role in the war.

1 In addition to the 10,200 Luxembourgers, approximately 130,000 French citizens, including Alsace-Lorraine residents, were subjected to mandatory enlistment. Moreover, 90,000 men from Upper Carniola and Lower Styria, 8,500 men from Eastern Belgium, and between 375,000 and 500,000 Silesians were conscripted, see Pierre Rigoulot, *L'Alsace-Lorraine pendant la guerre 1939–1945*, (Paris: Presses univ. de France, 1997), 64; Kranjc, Gregor. "Fight or Flight: Desertion, Defection, and Draft- Dodging in Occupied Slovenia, 1941–1945." Journal of Military History, no. 81 (January 2017): 133–62; Peter M. Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen": Eupen-Malmedy Und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2008), 6; Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polen in der Wehrmacht* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), 25.

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The present study primarily utilises wartime documentation, especially personal letters from the front, to offer insights into soldiers who self-identified as non-German. The examination encompasses their biographical trajectory in the military, their motivations, their experiences as soldiers, and their encounters with comrades, superiors and the local population, with the aim of unravelling how they identified themselves, particularly in their role as soldiers.

Post-war narratives predominantly adhere to the victimisation theory, offering limited details about soldiers' military service. This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on personal wartime letters, emphasising the importance of this neglected source in understanding Luxembourgers' military service and frontline encounters. It aims to evaluate the feasibility and significance of personal letters as historical artefacts during wartime, utilising the war correspondence of two brothers, Albert and Nicolas Pierrard, as a central focus. The siblings' exchange of letters while they were actively serving in the military offers a unique window onto their perceptions of military service. The primary objective of this research is to ascertain whether these letters can yield valuable insights into the cultural context, specific challenges, and unique circumstances encountered by Luxembourgers serving within the German military. Crowdsourced during the WARLUX project, albeit limited in scope, these letters nonetheless offer valuable insights into the military experiences of this particular group, presenting varied perspectives. The study recognises the inherent subjectivity in the expression of letters but emphasises their capacity to enhance our understanding of Luxembourgers' engagement in the German military. While this is a preliminary endeavour, these letters serve as a foundation for future research efforts that could leverage larger datasets and employ textual analysis to unravel the intricate facets of Luxembourgers' experiences in German uniform during wartime.

Luxembourgers in the Wehrmacht as German Soldiers

Following the occupation and establishment of the occupation administration under Gauleiter Simon, both male and female Luxembourgers were recruited for various Nazi services. After the imposition of mandatory labour service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*, RAD) for men and women on 23 May 1941,[2] men were called up for

2 Verordnungsblatt (VBl.) Chef der Zivilverwaltung (CdZ) Luxemburg, Verordnung über die Reichsarbeitsdienstpflicht in Luxemburg, 23 May 1941 (Luxembourg, Regulation on compulsory national labour service in Luxembourg), p. 232.

military service on 30 August 1942.[3] The policy initially applied to those born between 1920 and 1924, but the latter year was later extended to 1927. When conscription was officially announced in 1942, it applied to men aged between 18 and 22. The announcement of conscription triggered strikes in Luxembourg, which were met with ruthless persecution, a state of emergency, and death penalties for those involved. In this climate of fear and force, the first recruits were transported by train to military training camps in October 1942.[4]

Prior to the occupation, Luxembourg did not maintain its own military force or mandate compulsory military service for its male citizens. Although the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg had maintained its neutral status since the 1867 Treaty of London and abstained from implementing universal military service, Luxembourgers did engage in various foreign armies, including the French Foreign Legion and a small contingent for the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army.[5] Since 1881, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg had kept a modest volunteer company known as the *Freiwëllegekompanie* for the defence of the homeland. However, the company's size never surpassed 1500 men, which was later integrated into the German forces during the occupation.[6] In addition to the approximately 10,200 conscripted soldiers, some Luxembourgers also joined the Wehrmacht voluntarily, as well as the Waffen-SS and the SS. However, determining accurate numbers is challenging, with estimates ranging from 1,800 to 2,000 volunteers for the Wehrmacht and around 300 for the Waffen-SS.[7]

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3 VBl. CdZ Luxemburg, Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg, 31 August 1942 (Regulation on compulsory military service in Luxembourg), p. 253.

4 Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe: die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940– 1945*, 176.

5 Vincent Artuso, *La collaboration au Luxembourg durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, 1940–1945 Accommodation, Adaptation, Assimilation* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 331; Ulbe Bosma and Thomas Kolnberger, "Military Migrants: Luxembourgers in the Colonial Army of the Dutch East Indies," *Itinerario* 41, no. 3 (2017): 555–80, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115317000687.

6 Michel R. Pauly, "Die Freiwilligenkompanie unter dem Hakenkreuz," in *Militärgeschichte Luxemburgs: Grundzüge einer transnationalen Entwicklung von Militär, Krieg und Gesellschaft = Histoire militaire du Luxembourg : principales caractéristiques d'un développement transnational de l'armée, de la guerre et de la société*, ed. Kolnberger, Thomas (Esch-sur-Alzette: Universität Luxemburg, 2022), 257–70.

7 Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe. Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945*, 169, 171. Most men who joined the Waffen-SS volunteered. However, in some cases it is difficult to distinguish whether a person was forcibly conscripted or actually volunteered. If the entry date into the Wehrmacht was before August 1942, when compulsory military service in Luxembourg began, it typically indicates a clear volunteer. However, other cases are more challenging to discern. The line between volunteering and coercion can be blurred and must be investigated on a case-by-case basis.

"Volksdeutsche" Soldiers

Conscription during the Second World War was justified based on the ethnic origin of men from Luxembourg and Alsace-Lorraine (as with other similar groups such as Silesians and men from Carniola and Lower Styria), who were granted Reich German citizenship (*Staatsbürgerschaft auf Widerruf*) as a result.[8] Luxembourgish soldiers were classified within the Wehrmacht as equal to Reich German soldiers who had been conscripted based on the Reich German Military Conscription Law of 1935.[9]

The Wehrmacht issued guidelines in February 1943 on the treatment and training of new recruits from annexed territories such as Alsace, Lorraine and Lower Styria.[10] These guidelines emphasised the need to integrate Luxembourgers carefully and to encourage a conviction that serving in the German army was an "honourable" duty to the German people. The document emphasised the importance of being fair and considerate towards the new recruits, who were likely to be reserved and have negative expectations. Another directive from May 1943 issued by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces (Armed Forces High Command Staff) instructed that Luxembourgers should not be treated differently from Reich German soldiers, but highlighted the importance of paying special attention to their training as they may initially lack some of the prerequisites required to fulfil their duties as German soldiers. The directive expressly forbade any jesting or mockery concerning the soldiers' language or accent so that the Luxembourgers would not take offence. This initial stipulation highlights an

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The author is currently conducting a study on the war experiences of Waffen-SS volunteers from the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg). This study, funded by a Marie Sklodowska-Curie Grant (Horizon Europe), is being carried out at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam (https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101063708).

8 Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg (Regulation on Conscription in Luxembourg), in: Verordnungsblatt (VBl.) Chef der Zivilverwaltung (CdZ) Luxemburg, 31 August 1942, p. 253; Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg (Ordinance on Nationality in Alsace, Lorraine, and Luxembourg), in: VBl. CdZ Luxemburg, 23 August 1942, p. 254.

9 Wolfram Wette, "Deutsche Erfahrungen mit der Wehrpflicht 1918–1945. Abschaffung in der Republik und Wiedereinführung durch die Diktatur", in *Die Wehrpflicht: Entstehung, Erscheinungsformen und politisch-militärische Wirkung* (Munich, 1994), 100.

10 Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres, Chef des Ausbildungswesens im Ersatzheer, Richtlinien für die Behandlung der Elsässer, Lothringer, Luxemburger und Untersteirer, 12 February 1943, Bundesarchiv (BARch) RH 14/123.

awareness within the Wehrmacht of potential linguistic and cultural differences, particularly in the case of Luxembourgish soldiers. Nevertheless, the Wehrmacht insisted on treating Luxembourgers as equals alongside German soldiers.[11]

Approximately 10,211 young Luxembourgish men complied with the conscription order and joined the Nazi forces.[12] Some individuals evaded military service by hiding or joining the resistance, while others deserted during their leave and did not return to their regiments. Recent studies show that Luxembourgers proportionally deserted more frequently than *Reichsdeutsche* soldiers: an estimated 2,300 Luxembourgers deserted and 1,200 evaded military service, accounting for approximately 34.5% of Luxembourgers recruited.[13]

After receiving their training and preparation for front-line service, Luxembourgish soldiers were deployed to various branches of service and fronts. However, despite guidelines promoting equal integration, restrictions were placed on the use and deployment of Luxembourgers from the start. In December 1942, the Chief of Army Armament and Commander of the Reserve Army,[14] General Army Office, issued a ban on deploying soldiers from the German-administered territories in the West (Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg) in France, Belgium and the Netherlands.[15] Exceptions were made for war volunteers whose political reliability was beyond doubt, who could serve in Western theatres. In May 1943, the High Command of the Wehrmacht announced that in the Reserve Army, the distribution of soldiers from Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg should not exceed

11 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Nr. 1956/43 geh.WFSt/Org (II), Behandlung und Verwendung von Wehrpflichtigen aus den deutsch verwalteten Westgebieten (Elsässer, Lothringer, Luxemburger), 19 May 1943 (copy), BArch RH 10/12.

12 The numbers vary depending on the source and publication. Official figures are still cited today, with references to 10,211 conscripted men and 3,614 women. See André Hohengarten, *Die Zwangsrekrutierung der Luxemburger in die deutsche Wehrmacht. Eine Dokumentation.*, ed. Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur l'Enrôlement forcé, vol. 1, Histoire & Mémoire. Les Cahiers Du CDREF (Luxembourg: Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur l'Enrôlement forcé, 2010), 13.

13 Hohengarten, 1:23; Norbert Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen' und 'Malgré-nous' und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Die anderen Soldaten : Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1997), 171; Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen". Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 115.

14 Chef der Heeres Rüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres, Allgemeines Heeres Amt.

15 Chef H Rüst und BdE/AHA/IaVIIII Nr. 5619/42 g. K., 1 December 1942, see mentioned in OKW Nr 1956/43 geh.WFSt/Org(II), 19.05.1943, Behandlung und Verwendung von Wehrpflichtigen aus den deutschen verwalteten Westgebieten (Elsässer, Lothringer, Luxemburger), BArch RH 10/12.

8% as a rule, but could exceptionally (and temporarily) go as high as 15%, with a limit of 5% for fighting troops.[16]

This was intended to prevent the formation of groups and promote better integration, possibly leading to the Germanisation of Luxembourgers in the military. Leave bans[17] and deployments that were mostly in the East were implemented in response to an increase in desertion rates among soldiers from Luxembourg and Alsace-Lorraine. Nevertheless, the integration of Luxembourgers into the Nazi military was initially quite seamless, with the Nazis hoping to shape them into brave and obedient soldiers who would follow orders without question. They were expected to fully embrace Nazi ideology and the notion of serving the "*Fuehrer, Volk und Vaterland*" and to act as German soldiers.

Historiography

The enrolment of *Volksdeutsche* soldiers in Hitler's army has been relatively overlooked in scholarly discussions, particularly in comparison to studies on non-German volunteers in the Waffen-SS.[18] While there is a wealth of research on non-German soldiers, especially volunteers from Western and Northern European countries,[19] smaller nations like Luxembourg have received limited attention.[20] Studies exploring the conscription of *Volksdeutsche* soldiers from various

16 Abschrift OKW Nr 1956/43 geh.WFSt/Org(II), 19.05.1943, Behandlung und Verwendung von Wehrpflichtigen aus den deutschen verwalteten Westgebieten (Elsässer, Lothringer, Luxemburger), BArch RH 10/12.

17 A leave ban was imposed from December 1943 onwards for recruits from Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg, Lower Styria and Carniola, see Chef CdZ im Elsass to Chef of OKW, Keitel, 21.01.1944; on the leave ban for *Volksdeutsche* from CdZ-Regions, BArch NS19/2179.

18 David Stahel, *Joining Hitler's Crusade: European Nations and the Invasion of the Soviet Union, 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Jochen. Böhler and Robert. Gerwarth, *The Waffen-SS: A European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Hans Werner Neulen, *An Deutscher Seite. Internationale Freiwillige von Wehrmacht und Waffen- SS* (Munich: Universitas, 1985).

19 To name just a few, Geir Brenden and Tommy Natedal, *Norwegian Volunteers of the Waffen SS = Die Norwegischen Freiwilligen in der Waffen-SS* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion et Company Solihull, West Midlands, 2016); Aline Sax, *Voor Vlaanderen, volk en Führer : de motivatie en het wereldbeeld van Vlaamse collaborateurs tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog, 1940–1945* (Antwerpen: Manteau Antwerpen, 2012); Evertjan van Roekel, *Veldgrauw Nederlanders in de Waffen-SS* (Amsterdam: Spectrum, 2019).

20 Few scholars mention Luxembourgers, merely that they were probably part of the "Wiking" Division, see J. Lee Ready, *The Forgotten Axis Germany's Partners and Foreign Volunteers in World War II. 1 Part One: Part Two (Chapters 9–23)* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Jefferson, NC,

nations into Hitler's army remain scarce and are mostly confined to a national-level perspective.[21] Recently published collections of studies have delved into different cohorts of *Volksdeutsche* soldiers conscripted from occupied and annexed regions, such as Alsace, Lorraine, Silesia and Slovakia. Works by Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar in 2021, along with those by Peter M. Quadflieg and Frédéric Stroh in 2017, offer valuable insights into the enlistment of the non-German soldiers who underwent a process of naturalisation following annexation.[22]

Luxembourgish historiography initially addressed the subject of forced recruitment primarily through popular histories centred on personal experiences that incorporated Luxembourgish recruits into the national narrative of sacrifice.[23] The prevailing narrative of forced recruitment has predominantly centred on the victim theory, particularly focusing on "our boys" (*Ons Jongen*) who were forcibly taken by the Nazis to serve in German uniform. Luxembourgers killed in action while serving in German uniform were attributed the status of "Mort pour la patrie" ("Died for the homeland").

From the 1980s onward, scholars such as Paul Dostert, Gilbert Trausch and André Hohengarten produced comprehensive research on the topic, but this remained primarily within the national context.[24] In scholarly discourse, forced re-

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2012), 297. Other sources, particularly post-war trial files from the Luxembourgish authorities who tried SS volunteers upon their return to the country and sentenced them for treason and collaboration with the Nazis, indicate that Luxembourgers were also part of Waffen-SS units such as the "Das Reich" Division, the "Totenkopf" Division, and the "Hohenstaufen" Division.

21 For example in the case of Silesian and Polish conscripts, see Kaczmarek, *Polen in der Wehrmacht*; Jerzy Kochanowski, "Polen in die Wehrmacht? Zu einem wenig erforschten Aspekt der nationalsozialistischen Besatzungspolitik," *Forum Für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte in deutscher Sprache* 1, no. 6 (2022): 59–82.

22 Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar, eds., *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht. Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive* (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021); Frédéric. Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg, *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945. Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten 1939–1945.* (Strasbourg: PU, 2017); Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen' und 'Malgré-nous' und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg."

23 Gilbert Trausch, "Die Bedeutung des Zweiten Weltkrieges und der deutschen Besatzung für die Geschichte des Grossherzogtums Luxemburg," *Hémecht* 3, no. 39 (1987): 360.

24 Hohengarten, *Die Zwangsrekrutierung der Luxemburger in die deutsche Wehrmacht. Eine Dokumentation.*; Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe. Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940– 1945*; Trausch, "Die Bedeutung des Zweiten Weltkrieges und der deutschen Besatzung für die Geschichte des Grossherzogtums Luxemburg.".

Klos and Quadflieg also focused on the post-war period, on veterans' organisations, compensation and the return of forced recruits. Eva Klos, "Umkämpfte Erinnerungen. Die Zwangsrekru-

cruitment has been part of broader research on World War II, as exemplified by Paul Dostert's work. The groundbreaking study by Peter M. Quadflieg on forced recruitment in Eupen-Malmedy and Luxembourg was the first to approach the subject from a comparative perspective, including conscripted former Belgian nationals in Eupen-Malmedy.[25] While Quadflieg explores the recruitment process, the WARLUX research project (2020–2024) at the University of Luxembourg focused on the biographical profiles of those affected, their social networks, motivations, and personal experiences. This article is one of the outcomes stemming from this project. Other studies on this topic have mainly concentrated on the post-war experiences of this demographic within their respective home nations. Eva Klos, in particular, has made noteworthy contributions by illuminating the challenging quest for acknowledgment (and compensation) by victims of the Nazi regime in post-war Luxembourg, Alsace and East Belgium.[26]

War Experiences Based on Letters and Other Personal Accounts

A significant body of research has explored the wartime experiences of German soldiers, drawing upon sources like war letters and personal accounts. Until the 1980s, this realm remained relatively unexplored in German historiography. However, there has been a growing scholarly engagement with the subject, initiated by scholars like Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Sterz.[27] Wolfram Wette further advocated for an examination of military history "from below", emphasising the perspective of the "Kleinen Mannes", the average man.[28] Subsequent scholars, such as Stephen Fritz, Klaus Latzel and Martin Humburg, have em-

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tierung im Zweiten Weltkrieg in Erinnerungskulturen Luxemburgs, Ostbelgiens und des Elsass (1944–2015)" (Luxembourg, 2017); Peter M. Quadflieg et al., "Mal Blumenstrauss, mal Handschellen: Luxemburgische und ostbelgische Wehrmachtrückkehrer zwischen gesellschaftlicher Teilhabe und sozialer Ausgrenzung", in *Identitätsbildung und Partizipation im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Luxemburg im europäischen Kontext*, Études luxembourgeoises / Luxemburg-Studien (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), 293–307.

25 Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen". Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg.*

26 Klos, "Umkämpfte Erinnerungen. Die Zwangsrekrutierung im Zweiten Weltkrieg in Erinnerungskulturen Luxemburgs, Ostbelgiens und des Elsass (1944–2015).".

27 Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhild Sterz, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges. Deutsche Feldpostbriefe 1939–1945* (Munich: Beck, 1983).

28 Wolfram. Wette, *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich and Zürich: Piper, 1995).

braced and expanded upon this approach.[29] Moreover, "Feldpostforschung" (research on field post) across wars is continuing to gain traction, not only within historical studies – see for example the 2011 edited volume by the Feldpostarchiv in Berlin from 2011[30] – but also across various disciplines.[31] This sustained interest reflects the enduring significance of personal letters as invaluable historical artefacts that offer unique insights into the experiences and perspectives of individuals during wartime.

Nonetheless, a notable research gap exists regarding the experiences of Luxembourgers (and other non-Germans) in the German forces during World War II. This study seeks to fill this void by examining personal experiences in the private realm. Despite the existence of several memoirs, articles in newspapers and magazines, and collections of testimonies (often in the form of interviews), the research has not extensively explored the personal testimonies of Luxembourgers during this period.[32] Although valuable, veterans' memoirs and personal accounts have frequently portrayed a narrative of victimhood, as seen in titles such as "Opfer in Feldgrau" ("Victim in Field Grey").[33] While anthologies or letter collections have been published sporadically,[34] a comprehensive scholarly examination

29 Stephen G Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995); Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941– 1944* (Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998).

30 Veit Didczuneiet, Jens Ebert, and Thomas Jander, eds., *Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2011).

31 To name just a few studies here: Vogel, Detlef and Wette, Wolfram, eds., *Andere Helme - Andere Menschen? Heimaterfahrung und Frontalltag im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Ein internationaler Vergleich*, *Schriften der Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte* (Tübingen: Klartext, 1995); Marko Neumann, *Soldatenbriefe des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts: Untersuchungen zu Syntax und Textstruktur in der Alltagsschriftlichkeit unterschiedlicher militärischer Dienstgrade*, Germanistische Bibliothek, Band 68 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019). An up-to-date bibliography on this topic is consistently provided by the Feldpostarchiv: http://www.feldpost-archiv.de/english/e5-literatur.html.

32 Georges. Even, *Krichserliefnisser 1940–1945. Luxemburger Zeitzeugen erzählen* (Luxembourg: Edition Guy Binsfeld, 2003); Georges Even, *Ons Jongen a Meedercher die gestohlene Jugendzeit* (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2012).

33 Leo Schuller, *Opfer in Feldgrau* (Luxembourg: Luxemburger Genossenschaftsdruckerei, 1951).

34 Nico Everling, *Liebe Jett: Feldpost eines luxemburger Zwangsrekrutierten* (Luxembourg: Martine Everling, 2013); Norbert Hostert, "Briefe eines luxemburger Zwangsrekrutierten in der Wehrmacht," *Hémecht: Zeitschrift für luxemburger Geschichte = Revue d'histoire Luxembourgeoise* 56, no. 3 (2004): 241–71; Marie-Thérèse Feider-Wenkin, *Trei Der Hemecht! Alphonse Wenkin - Zwischen den Fronten. Briefe eines Zwangsrekrutierten, Vermisst in Russland seit Januar 1944* (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2004); Camille Robert, "Briefe an Valerie," in *Beetebuerg Am Laf Vun Der*

has yet to be conducted, with the exception of a linguistic study on Luxembourgish war letters by Melanie Wagner, which will be explored in more detail later.[35]

2 Approach and Dataset

When exploring the personal experiences of Luxembourgers in the German army, war letters stand out as a pivotal source. This choice arises because of the absence of individual records of Luxembourgers in the Wehrmacht containing evaluations of individual roles or performance. Given the dispersion of Luxembourgers across various units, a unit-based approach is impractical. Consequently, war letters provide a unique and comprehensive glimpse into the experiences of Luxembourgers in German uniform.

In the post-war years, personal testimonies or ego-documents such as letters, diaries and memoirs about wartime experiences proliferated. However, these accounts, produced years after the event, often involved reflections and adaptations of memories. This study, in contrast, focuses on contemporaneously conveyed wartime experiences, particularly in letters written during the war itself. This approach aligns with Katerzyna Wozniak's methodology in her study on Polish forced labourers, showcasing the efficacy of using wartime documents to capture the immediate feelings, self-image and momentum of individuals.[36] Wozniak's work emphasised that concentrating on the wartime period can avoid relapses into national narratives. Similarly, this chapter leverages contemporary war testimonies to gain insights into individuals' immediate experiences during the war, adopting a perspective from below, as conceptualised by Wette.[37] This approach centres on studying the experiences and perspectives of ordinary soldiers, emphasising their daily lives, their attitudes towards war and violence, and the impact that military service had upon them. Analysing personal accounts, such as letters and diaries, promises valuable insights into soldiers' experiences on the front lines.

Zäit: Notizen Iwwer Dgeschichtlech Entwécklung vu Beetebuerg, Fenneng, Hunchereng, Näerzeng an Obeler (Bettembourg, 2014), 17–221.

35 Melanie Wagner and Gilles, Peter, "Private Literacies in the Period of World War II. Strategies for Writing Luxembourgish," in *Linguistische und soziolinguistische Bausteine der Luxemburgistik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 203–28.

36 Katarzyna Woniak, *Zwangswelten. Alltags- und Emotionsgeschichte polnischer "Zivilarbeiter" in Berlin 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Brill | Schöningh, 2020), 2.

37 Wette, *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes : Eine Militärgeschichte von unten.*

War Letters as Source

War letters, often referred to as front or soldier letters, are fundamentally private correspondences. For this analysis, they are defined as letters sent during German military service, including those from training camps, rear areas, or front lines. These letters contain subjective perceptions of wartime events. Rather than addressing the objective reality of war, they focus on the experiences of contemporaries as conveyed in private communications. This gives the letters personal relevance within the sender-receiver relationship, making it crucial to understand to whom the soldiers were writing.[38] The narrative is crafted from select details chosen by the writers, highlighting how soldiers frequently engaged in discussions about non-lethal aspects of war. They described their official responsibilities, work environments, and experiences concerning basic necessities like food, drink, and sleeping arrangements—mundane yet essential aspects of their lives. Despite their subjective nature, war letters offer valuable insights into the events experienced, their processing, and the consequences of war.[39]

The use of ego-documents, such as letters, has limitations. Writers sent letters via the official "Feldpost Service" of the Wehrmacht, with the possibility of being opened and read by censorship officers. The letters were subject to numerous regulations, such as not revealing the location of the troops or other military tactical information.[40] Censorship officers were required to investigate serious offenses by identifying the writer and his unit through the field post numbers and then handing him over to the respective disciplinary authority or military court.[41]

A notable case involves Albert Gaviny, a forced conscripted Luxembourger who faced conviction based on his letters. Gaviny expressed intentions to desert and persuade friends to join him, while his parents prepared hiding spots. His correspondence was intercepted, resulting in his arrest and subsequent military court trial. He was executed on October 20, 1944.[42] Soldiers were keenly aware of

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38 Katrin Kilian, "Die anderen zu Wort kommen lassen. Feldpostbriefe als historische. Quelle aus den Jahren 1939 bis 1945. Eine Projektskizze," *Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 60, no. 1 (2017): 163, https://doi.org/10.1524/mgzs.2001.60.1.153.

39 Klaus Latzel, "Vom Kriegserlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 56 (1997): 4.

40 Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*, 27.

41 Vogel, Detlef, "Der Kriegsalltag Im Spiegel von Feldpostbriefen (1939–1945)," in *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes : Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, ed. Wolfram Wette (Munich: Piper, 1995), 208.

42 WARLUX Collection University of Luxembourg, Collection Degrell-Konsbrück. See for more information about this case a blog post on https://digiwarhist.hypotheses.org/588.

the necessity to adhere strictly to these regulations, understanding the potential risks involved. This vigilance extended to refraining from criticizing military leaders, the NSDAP, and Hitler, given the widely acknowledged repression of the Nazi regime and the pervasive fear of consequences. Numerous instances demonstrate evidence of intercepted letters, often with sections redacted or removed.[43]

Reports from the Wehrmacht "Feldpostbriefestelle" (field post letter office) and censorship officers' records indicate that soldiers from newly annexed territories, such as West Prussia or Silesia, who were granted German citizenship through the Deutsche Volksliste, had their letters deliberately monitored, opened, and reported upon.[44] Although similar documents have not been preserved in the same collections for soldiers writing from Luxembourg, it is likely that Luxembourgish front-line correspondence underwent similar scrutiny. The fact that letters were indeed opened did not encourage soldiers to freely share their thoughts and experiences from the front on paper.

External censorship by military and state authorities was not the only force that limited the information conveyed in letters, as internal or self-censorship also played a role. Self-censorship refers to the conscious or unconscious decision by letter writers to withhold certain information, thoughts, or feelings. This can occur for various reasons, such as fear of consequences, a desire to protect the recipient, or an effort to present a certain image of themselves. Recognizing and accounting for self-censorship is crucial in letter research, as it can affect the understanding of the writers' authentic experiences and views. Self-censorship may lead to letters presenting a filtered or adjusted version of reality, rather than a complete picture.[45] This limitation is especially important when investigating perceptions of war topics, such as violence and killings, and the involvement of Luxembourgers in the Nazi war of extermination and atrocities.

In letters written by Luxembourgers during the war, references to atrocities are rare, likely due to self-protection and the censorship imposed by German authorities. Wartime correspondence does not always accurately convey the true nature of warfare. These letters differ significantly from those written during peacetime, as

43 Léon Beckius (born 1923) was forcibly conscripted but evaded military service and survived the war. He later published a memoir recounting his and others' experiences of evasion. In his memoir, Beckius includes a letter from his friend Louis Krass, who served in the Wehrmacht. This letter was evidently censored, with several paragraphs blacked out, see Léon Beckius, *Vergessen? Verzeihen? Schicksalswege von Refraktären und Flüchtlingen 1940–1945* (Luxembourg, 2011), 49.

44 Feldpostprüfberichte, 1944, BArch RH 13/49.

45 Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944*, 100.

some experiences, such as killing or the destruction of villages, are difficult to articulate. Soldiers may also choose not to disclose these details to spare their families from the harsh realities of war, or to alleviate their own trauma.[46]

Despite these limitations, the chosen dataset offers new perspectives, enriching our understanding of the experiences and roles of Luxembourgers during the war. Before delving into the dataset, it is crucial to clarify the concept of experience. These documents provide insights into individuals' self-perception as well as their specific cultural, linguistic, material, and social contexts.

Experience – Term and Definition

The term "experience" is multifaceted and can be defined as an "actual observation" involving "facts or events", according to the Oxford English Dictionary.[47] It encompasses carefully chosen and contemplated observations of events, perceived individually and variably by each person. These perceptions are influenced by personal history, previous experiences, as well as social and cultural backgrounds and upbringing. Situational observations thus undergo a personal interpretation or sense-making process.

This contribution proposes to extend the term "experience" beyond the events themselves to encompass soldiers' subjective interpretations and meaning-making. This construct aligns with the concept of "Erfahrungsraum" coined by German historian Reinhart Koselleck, which emphasises the role of historical events in shaping human perception and experience.[48] The implication is that soldiers not only encounter events, but also engage in a subjective reality or experience production.[49] For instance, a soldier marching through Russian streets experiences a multitude of sensations, from physical discomfort to encounters with landscapes, villages, cities and comrades, eliciting various emotions. The interpretation of these experien-

46 Humburg, 196.

47 "Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles. A-M." (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 899.

48 Reinhart Koselleck, ed., *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 757 757 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 349–75.

49 Klaus Latzel, "Wehrmachtsoldaten zwischen „Normalität" und NS-Ideologie, oder: Was sucht die Forschung in der Feldpost?," in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Müller, Rolf-Dieter and Volkmann, Hans-Erich (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 579, https://doi.org/10.1524/9783486852028.

ces, the sense-making, and the resulting narratives can vary significantly from one soldier to the next.[50]

Latzel emphasises that war experiences, like all other experiences, are shaped by individuals, although not solely on an individual level.[51] According to his perspective, individual experiences and the meaning constructed within them are intertwined with self-images, external images, prejudices and judgments, all of which contribute to societal knowledge and are often preserved linguistically. Similarly, he emphasises that each soldier, including Luxembourgers, carries a unique cultural and personal background that significantly shapes their wartime experiences.[52] Furthermore, Latzel stresses the importance of distinguishing between external factors that shape the overall military scenario and the subjective, personal viewpoint of those engaged in military and front-line service. Luxembourgers in particular bring distinct observational "lenses" compared to Reich Germans who were raised within the framework of the Nazi system. This cultural and personal divergence contributes to unique perspectives on the war and military service among Luxembourgish soldiers.

The War Experience in Letters

War letters, particularly prevalent in modern wars with a significant emphasis on the 20th-century World Wars, serve as rich sources. This private correspondence provided soldiers with a unique outlet to grapple with their experiences, offering us an invaluable window onto their perspectives. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, while these letters are valuable, they may not comprehensively mirror the soldiers' inner feelings, and their reliability can be questionable. Collectively, they might not present the full spectrum of soldiers' internal states.[53] Despite these limitations, letters illuminate the soldiers' perspectives, presenting their experiences and viewpoints through direct quotations and statements in their original language.

50 Latzel, "Vom Kriegserlebnis tur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen," 13.

51 Klaus Latzel, "Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle," in *Verbrechen Der Wehrmacht: Bilanz Einer Debatte*, ed. Jureit, Ulrike, Hartmann, Christian, and Hürter, Johannes (Nördlingen: beck.sche reihe, 2005), 177.

52 Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*, 125, 126.

53 Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg: Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege", 2011, p. 121

Rather than offering direct answers to questions about the actual wartime reality, the letters, as demonstrated in studies based on wartime or front-line correspondence, often document mundane aspects of soldiers' daily lives, such as the weather and food.[54] Additionally, they include brief and reassuring messages to loved ones. Instead of focusing on comprehensive accounts of wartime events, the letters concentrate on situations witnessed and conveyed through private communication. This holds personal significance within the sender-receiver relationship, with personal and private communication centred on the sender and receiver playing a crucial role in these letters. The sender actively shapes what the recipient should know and how they should perceive it.[55]

Examining these different levels – what soldiers saw, what they thought and what they chose to write – requires a detailed and careful approach during a close reading of the letters. Understanding more about the background of the writers, the Pierrard brothers, their role and their journey into the military is essential. Official documents of Luxembourgers serving in the Wehrmacht will be considered when introducing the letters and discussing individual moments within the brothers' war experiences.

While it is important to recognise the value of these sources, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that they might not represent the overall Luxembourgish wartime experience. Instead, they provide a glimpse into how individuals personally perceived and understood the military aspects. The research process involving these letters is complex due to factors such as subjectivity, censorship, internal censorship, and the need to contextualise the information they contain, regardless of its perceived accuracy. Notably, there are gaps that must be considered, as soldiers experienced much more than what they explicitly stated in their letters. But despite their limitations, letters offer a unique insight into the subjective experience of an event, capturing the emotions and thoughts of the writer at the time.

The term "war" is inherently broad and complex, encompassing various facets. Although Luxembourgers directly experienced the Second World War with the beginning of the occupation in May 1940, their exposure to the challenges posed by neighbouring Nazi Germany commenced as early as September 1939. This exposure encompassed difficulties in travel, economic impacts, diplomatic challenges, and the personal fear of events unfolding across the eastern border. When referring to the war experiences of Luxembourgers in German military

54 Nina Janz, "Between the Front and Home – War Letters of Luxembourgers in Nazi Forces and Organisations during WWII as a Source to Study Their Individual War Experiences", Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C^2DH), University of Luxembourg, 2021.

55 Kilian, "Die anderen zu Wort kommen lassen. Feldpostbriefe als historische. Quelle aus den Jahren 1939 bis 1945. Eine Projektskizze," 163.

uniform, the focus is specifically on their time served as soldiers in the German Wehrmacht (1942–1945). This includes periods not only directly at the front-lines but also in various military functions, including training camps and rear areas.

The Letters by the Pierrard Brothers

Numerous war letters, particularly those from Luxembourgers serving in the German Wehrmacht, have survived, though often in a fragmented state.[56] To address this archival gap, the WARLUX project at the University of Luxembourg launched a call to contribute war letters in 2021. This call specifically targeted ego-documents, such as diaries and letters from the families of former forced conscripts, both male and female. The primary aim was to enrich the archival record and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Luxembourgers' experiences in the German Wehrmacht during wartime. Coordinated by the author, the collaborative efforts of the research team successfully curated a highly insightful collection of approximately 5,000 war letters, including some diaries, from Wehrmacht soldiers of Luxembourgish origin.

The material used for this article, namely the letters from the Pierrard brothers, is drawn from this crowdsourced collection established by the WARLUX team.[57] This article predominantly relies on the significant collection generously provided by the Pierrard family, comprising a total of 150 letters. The majority of the collection consists of correspondence exchanged between brothers Nicolas and Albert Pierrard, who consistently communicated with family and friends throughout the war.

The transcription process was facilitated using handwritten text recognition with Transkribus (by ReadCOOP).[58] Subsequent qualitative-hermeneutical research employed a meticulous approach involving close reading. As the WARLUX project was a pilot initiative focused on the letters of forcibly conscripted soldiers, this contribution serves as the first overview and article from this collection, with the expectation of more to follow. Larger scale text analysis methods, such as topic modelling and text mining, were not applied due to the dataset's limited

56 A Centre for Documentation and Research on Forced Enlistment (Centre de documentation et de recherche sur l'enrôlement forcé – CDREF) was established in 2005 within the Ministry of State (Ministère d'État) but was dissolved in 2016.

57 Nina Janz, "The Participatory Aspect Of Creating A Collection On WWII Collecting Ego-Documents From Luxembourgish Recruits And Their Families," *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* XXV, no. 2 (2023): 81–103.

58 https://readcoop.eu.

size. Nevertheless, for the analysis of the now machine-readable letters, a relational database ("nodegoat") was used primarily to store the data, including metadata such as author, recipient, date, place, unit information, and family details.[59]

The author conducted a qualitative text analysis, drawing on the work of German author Klaus Latzel, who conducted a comparative study of German soldiers' letters from the First and Second World War.[60] The author adapted Latzel's category set, focusing particularly on aspects of the war itself, such as deployment, front-line events, aspects of cohesion and integration into the Wehrmacht, and signs of exclusion. Attention to language, code-switching, and the use of German terms or names was crucial in this context. The text was annotated, and tags were set following Latzel's framework. Although this may appear to be a simplified approach, this is a conceptual study aiming to explore the value of letters

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59 The WARLUX project included a detailed case study on the town of Schifflange, examining the impacts of war experiences on individuals and their families. A relational database (Nodegoat by Lab 1100: https://lab1100.com) was created to "map" the lives of these individuals, covering their military service, cases of relocation, resistance, and internment, along with short biographies. This database also served as a repository for data and metadata for researchers. Due to archival restrictions and data privacy regulations, only parts of the database are available online: https://warlux.uni.lu/?language=en. For more about the data model and the procedure of mapping the lives of the conscripted men, see Nina Janz, "Mapping Biographies in a Relational Database. Biographies of Luxembourgish Soldiers in the Second World War," ed. Eero Hyvönen et al., *Biographical Data in a Digital World 2022*, 16 January 2024, https://doi.org/doi.org/10.3986/9789610508120_3.)

The database and website provide short bios, linking networks and deployments of these individuals. Alongside the Schifflange case study, WARLUX developed a crowdsourced digitised war letters collection. Although the majority of the letters are not accessible to the public yet, the online collection (https://warlux.uni.lu/letters?language=en) contains 163 letters, which are fully text searchable and can be filtered by the name of the sender, recipient, type of service (Wehrmacht service or Reichsarbeitsdienst), type of letter (home to front, front to home, POW camp to home), and location of the front. These letters include those from men featured in the Schifflange case study and other collections, such as the Pierrard brothers' letters (only part of the Collection Pierrard is published (https://warlux.uni.lu/letters.p/0.m/embed.v/viewer.p|1|2202|filter|8122_OD_22208_8068-OR:8068-9664021|grid|?language=en).

60 Latzel's category set:

A. Military and War without Combat, **B.** Intra-Military Relationships, **C.** Foreign People, Countries, and Resources, **D.** Combat, Death, Enemy, **E.** Jews and Persecution of Jews, **F.** External Situation, **G.** Personal Situation; Meaning of War, **H.** Political-Military War Goals, Meaning or Meaninglessness of War and One's Own Role in It, **I.** Border Front – Home leave, **K.** Personal Relationships in War, **L.** Left Behind Self-Employed Professional Existence, **M.** Air War, **N.** Expectations for the Post-War Period, see Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*, 116.

from non-German soldiers and to identify potential differences compared to other established literature on soldiers' subjective war perceptions.[61]

A larger dataset is necessary to extend the project and apply advanced analytical methods, such as topic modelling and text mining, to obtain more detailed and comprehensive results.

The Pierrard Brothers

The Pierrard family, originally hailing from Rambrouch near Diekirch in northern Luxembourg, constituted a middle-class household with five children – Joseph (born 1917), Adolphe (born 1919), Albert (born 1922), Nicolas (born 1923), and Catherine (born around 1925). The father, Jean-Pierre, earned a living as a tailor, while the mother passed away in 1931. After the start of the Nazi occupation, Jean-Pierre continued his tailoring work, while some of his children were compelled to join various labour and front services. Following the enactment of the conscription law on 30 August 1942, initially applicable to the birth cohort 1920–1924 and later extended to 1927, Albert and Nicolas were conscripted, while the elder sons were exempt.[62]

The comprehensive collection encompasses approximately 200 letters, primarily correspondence between the brothers and their family, but also some letters exchanged with friends. Interestingly, a discernible shift in language and content is noted within the collection, particularly when the brothers wrote from RAD or military training camps and from the front. The letters addressed to their father (and other family members) tend to adopt a more generalised tone, whereas those directed to Catherine in particular emphasise topics related to food, cooking specifics,

61 For this article, the author utilized a category set primarily based on Latzel's framework, while also making modifications. In **A**, "Military and War Without Combat," the author included specific regulations for non-German soldiers, integration efforts for Luxembourgers, and punishment. In **B**, "Intra-Military Relationships," the author added encounters with other non-German soldiers, interactions with Reich Germans, considerations of group cohesion—including integration and exclusion—and signs of adaptation. For **G**, "Personal Situation," the author specifically included aspects of identity as Luxembourgers, questioning or doubting military service, and acts of rebellion and aversion toward military service. In **I**, "Front – Home," the author focused on the situation at home in occupied Luxembourg and family attitudes toward the occupation. Additionally, the author introduced two new categories: **O**, "German Identity and Culture," and **P**, "Language," which examined the use of language (German or Luxembourgish), code-switching, and the use of German terms.

62 Although Catherine was theoretically required to serve in the RAD, the author's examination of the documents did not provide clarity on whether she was indeed called up. The correspondence with her contains no information regarding her conscription status.

and requisitions for additional provisions such as saccharin, cookies, or equipment like warm gloves.[63] For this preliminary conceptual study, the primary focus lies on the letters exchanged between the two brothers, although consideration is also given to other correspondence and communication with family members and friends.

Limited information is available about the Pierrard brothers before the onset of the occupation. Nicolas attended a boarding school in Luxembourg City, while Albert likely contributed to his father's tailoring business before joining the Labour Service/RAD in Hanover, Germany, in April. Subsequently enlisted with the first cohort in September 1942, Albert underwent training in Denmark during the winter of 1943, specialising as a radio operator, and was later deployed to the Eastern Front.

Aged 17 at the start of the Nazi occupation, Nicolas continued his education, maintaining regular correspondence with his family. Conscripted into the RAD in late 1942 and subsequently into the Wehrmacht, Nicolas served in artillery, specialising in operating machine guns. Following a training camp in Lubiatowo (*Lübtow*), today Poland, in July 1943 he was sent to Belarus for further training. After completing their training, both brothers served in combat units at the Eastern Front. Nicolas, assigned to the 4th Field Replacement Battalion 178, later transferred to the Grenadier-Ersatz-Battalion 145 Konstanz, where he met his demise on 6 March 1944 in Brody, Belarus.[64] Albert served in Belarus and survived the conflict.[65]

The brothers, along with their siblings, were raised by their father in a small rural town, receiving a church-based education, which is reflected in their letters. If Luxembourg had not been occupied, they likely would have pursued occupations in tailoring, mirroring their father, and would have married, had children and enjoyed life's simple pleasures. The stability provided by their father's work as a tailor would have shielded them from concerns about war and military service, given Luxembourg's neutral stance. The country did not have mandatory military service, meaning that the brothers would not have been obliged to enlist. When Nicolas was conscripted, Albert, as the elder sibling already in the military, expressed in letters to his younger brother, who was serving in the RAD, his hope that Nicolas would not be sent to Russia.

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63 Given that the collection predominantly features letters from the wartime period, the completeness of the collection is uncertain. It is likely that the brothers wrote more letters which may not have been preserved. Although there may be additional letters, the surviving collection was maintained within the family, particularly by the brothers' niece, the daughter of Joseph Pierrard, who gave the letters to the University and engaged in informative discussions with the author regarding her family and the brothers.

64 BArch B 563–1 KARTEI ZA P-1051/109.

65 No military documentary sources about Albert Pierrard are available in the former Wehrmacht Archive (*Wehrmachtauskunfstelle*), now the Bundesarchiv Berlin.

Analysing the nuances in communication, it is clear that the letters between the Pierrard brothers exhibit distinct patterns depending on the recipient. When corresponding with their sister or father, the content often revolves around general well-being, food, and requests for additional parcels. Notably, Albert shares with Nicolas details about encountering attractive girls during his travels. Consistent in their reassurances to their father and sister, the letters convey a sense of security and the overall well-being of the brothers.

Scrutinising the letters provides insights into their military service, offering a multifaceted view. The content reveals aspects of military discipline, conduct, and the dynamics of relationships within the military realm. Additionally, the letters shed light on the complexities of navigating a dual identity as both Luxembourgers and soldiers in German uniform. This exploration encompasses considerations of integration, potential special treatment, advantages, prejudices, or instances of exclusion within the Wehrmacht. Further detailing their military roles, Nicolas, assigned to artillery and operating heavy machine guns, clearly had a specialised combat role. In contrast, Albert's service as a radio operator in the infantry signifies a crucial communications function. These distinctions underscore the diversity of experiences within the military. Nicolas did not return, succumbing to the rigours of war. After the conflict, Albert continued in the family tradition, becoming a tailor and establishing his own business. However, his life was cut short by illness, and he passed away at the age of 53 in 1975.[66]

3 The Luxembourgish War Letters

Before delving into the specific letters written by the Pierrard brothers, various themes emerge as reflections on the Wehrmacht, the war and the front, contributing to a broader discourse on military service. This investigation aims to delineate the narrative landscape within the letters, focusing on key aspects such as the soldiers' identity, linguistic expressions, perspectives on the military institution, and temporal experiences as German soldiers. The primary focus of this analysis is directed towards the military domain and the temporal dimension encapsulated within the epistolary expressions, considering the contextual framework that places these letters within the period of the brothers' active military service.

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66 Avis de décès 3 Page 6. In *Luxemburger Wort*, 128. vol., no. 74 (29.03.1975), p. 6. [Digitised by the National Library of Luxembourg, https://persist.lu/ark:70795/xhvg2mcb2/pages/6/articles/DIVL2387]

In a world devoid of war, mandatory military service would not have been a typical part of the brothers' life plans. When the war began, alternative possibilities, such as joining the French Foreign Legion, may have been contemplated. Their father, Jean-Pierre (born circa 1898), who had experienced the First World War, the occupation of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the presence of German troops, may have shared his experiences with his children, influencing their views on the notion of war, although this is uncertain. Nevertheless, the brothers were not mentally or physically prepared for war, unlike their neighbours in Nazi Germany.

Although they were aware of their country's recent history, most Luxembourgers did not consider military deployment, except in cases of voluntary enlistment. The prospect of military service and the life of a soldier were likely to have been distant considerations for the average young male adolescent, whose life path would have been shaped by routine civilian pursuits. Perceptions of conscription and military service varied significantly between the German community, which had become militarised and viewed serving the "Reich and the Führer" as an honour, and Luxembourgers, who perceived the situation as "forced recruitment" and an obligation imposed upon them against their will.[67]

The War and Military Service – Expectations and Prior Knowledge

Understanding wartime experience necessitates delving into the expectations, knowledge and cultural background that moulded Albert and Nicolas before they entered the military. Analysing their mental "baggage" and their understanding of what awaited them, along with their perception of military service as discussed by scholars like Ute Frevert, reveals a sense of societal duty, patriotic commitment or obligation. This sheds light on their clear understanding of why they engaged in such actions, even though they might not have explicitly shared these motivations.[68] According to Latzel, war experiences are shaped by societal knowledge, including in this case the lack of military service and the constructed meaning imposed by society, culture and individuals.[69]

Anticipation and expectations regarding military service were moulded by the knowledge and influences that Albert and Nicolas carried with them. Albert,

67 Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe. Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945*, 146.

68 Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

69 Latzel, "Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle," 178.

part of the first cohort, may have had certain insights, and others in their social circle who volunteered before mandatory conscription may have contributed to their collective understanding of what lay ahead of him. However, it is important to note that since the beginning of the occupation in 1940, the brothers would have been exposed to relentless propaganda. Ongoing attempts to recruit volunteers for the Waffen SS and the Wehrmacht, even preceding mandatory conscription, would have left an indelible mark on their awareness. These recruitment efforts were prominently displayed on posters and featured in newspapers.[70]

Their exposure to propaganda, combined with two years of awareness of the Nazis, inevitably influenced their perspectives. Nicolas, having attended a Germanised and Nazified school, would have been particularly immersed in this ideology. Moreover, the brothers were not insulated from the repercussions of the occupation. They experienced a strike movement in September 1942 (as a reaction to the conscription of young men) and subsequent repressive measures, including death penalties for those involved in the strike and Nazi restrictions in Luxembourg.[71] This background undoubtedly coloured their expectations and perceptions as they approached military service during a tumultuous period marked by the complex dynamics of the German occupation.

The announcement of mandatory RAD service in May 1941 marked a crucial juncture. Having been called up in early 1942, Albert became the first member of the Pierrard family to experience Nazi methods and establishments. Following the announcement of conscription in August 1942, he promptly arrived at the training camp in October of the same year. In a poignant reflection on military attire, Albert expressed his dismay and potential shock at having to wear the German uniform when he wrote to his family in German:

70 Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe: Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945*, 167.

71 The General Strike in Luxembourg in 1942 was a significant labour protest against the German occupation during the Second World War. On 1 September 1942, Luxembourgish workers protested against the policies imposed by the Nazi occupiers. The strike was prompted by forced conscription of Luxembourgish men into the German military, economic exploitation, and overall oppression by the Nazis. In response, the German authorities took severe measures, arresting and deporting many striking workers to concentration camps. The Nazi regime also suppressed the resistance movement in Luxembourg, causing additional hardships for the local population. Georges Büchler, Paul Dostert, and Marc Gloden, *"Generalstreik" : Streikbewegung in Luxemburg, August–September 1942 = "Grève Générale": Mouvements de Grève Au Luxembourg, Août - Septembre 1942*, Musée National de La Résistance Esch-Sur-Alzette 10 10 001074696 (Esch/Sauer: Op der Lay, 2017).

> When I saw the hat next to the steel helmet in my wardrobe a few days ago, my heart became heavy. But I told myself, it won't be for much longer, and: Everything passes, etc.[72]

At this point, Albert was already a member of the Wehrmacht, whereas Nicolas was initially called up to RAD service. Informed by Albert's letters detailing the military training camp and insights into the German armed forces, Nicolas harboured the optimistic notion that his service in the RAD might be extended, sparing him from immediate induction into the Wehrmacht. In a letter to Albert during his RAD service in Greece in March 1943, Nicolas revealed uncertainties about his return, acknowledging the potential prolongation of his deployment:

> I was supposed to come home at the end of March. But things are very uncertain, and the operation may well take longer. Yes, as long as I am here, I don't have to join the Wehrmacht. I have been lucky in a way; otherwise, I would already be with my other comrades in the Wehrmacht.[73]

As conscriptions proceeded, friends, classmates and neighbours were enlisted one by one. A friend, Nicolas Gollignan, corresponded with Nicolas in July 1943, expressing apprehension as individuals were conscripted into the Wehrmacht. The prevalent fear of impending conscription and circulating (albeit false) rumours about conscription for those born from 1910 onward were palpable among friends, highlighting the pervasive anxiety in the community. The friend wrote to Nicolas Pierrard:

> I am already afraid of it. Today, many went off to the Wehrmacht, including Isidor Provost. There is much talk that they will conscript all age groups from 1910 onward.[74]

The residents of Luxembourg were acutely aware of the realities of military service, the associated dangers and the pervasive fear of being the next to be conscripted. The close-knit and well-informed community shared collective experiences and diverse opinions. Thus, Nicolas was well informed about the impending circumstances, primarily through Albert who, as the elder brother and the first family member to don the German uniform, imparted his experiences to others, fostering a shared hope that the challenging chapter might soon draw to a close.

While undergoing training, Albert wrote a letter to his family in which he provided a glimpse of his upcoming deployment and the significant challenges awaiting him on the Eastern Front. A noteworthy moment transpired during his interaction

72 Albert to Jean-Pierre and family, 24 October 1942, *WARLUX-Collection, University of Luxembourg, Collection Pierrard.*

73 Nicolas to Albert, 1 March 1943, Collection Pierrard.

74 Nicolas Gollignan to Nicolas Pierrard, 5 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

with a non-commissioned officer (*Unteroffizier*) serving as his trainer. Albert's trainer, having first-hand knowledge of the Eastern Front, shared poignant observations with him, highlighting a solemn pre-battle practice among soldiers:

> The non-commissioned officer was in the East last winter and mentioned that he had seen some soldiers before the battle. They would go behind a wall and fold their hands in prayer.[75]

This revelation suggests that the soldiers turned to prayer, potentially as a personal and ritualised act. Such a practice could signify a profound means of seeking solace, summoning courage or deriving spiritual support before confronting the myriad challenges and uncertainties inherent in combat. This practice underscores the severity and emotional toll of fighting in the East. Albert undoubtedly harboured a sense of reluctance and fear about his impending deployment to this challenging theatre of war. This insight provides a glimpse of the arduousness and adversity that characterised deployments to the Eastern Front during this period.

The militarisation of educational settings and leisure activities (including those organised by the Hitler Youth) began as early as the onset of the occupation in May 1940. The school system imposed on the country, encompassing both German language studies and exposure to German media, contributed to this expectation. Albert's prior engagement in the RAD further exposed him to external indoctrination, facilitated by German media.[76] In December 1942, merely weeks after the start of his own service in the Wehrmacht, Albert corresponded with Nicolas, discussing acquaintances who had already enlisted in the Wehrmacht. The interconnectedness of the Luxembourgish community was made possible by the country's compact size and the efficient operation of military postal services. This efficiency enabled the prompt delivery of letters: it sometimes took just a week for correspondence to travel from Belarus to Luxembourg.

When it was Nicolas' turn to enlist in the armed forces in the summer of 1943, Albert sought to uplift his younger brother, demonstrating acceptance and adaptability while also expressing hope for a return to normality in their professional and civilian lives.

> Yeah, Nikla, I believe that this military service is now somewhat damned. I know what it was like for me during training. You just have to sing to yourself: In life, everything passes, even the hardship and the drill of military service. You can believe me, Nikla, I'm starting to like it again with time. Hopefully, both of us can soon return to civilian professions.[77]

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75 Albert to Jean Pierre and family, 22 November 1942, Collection Pierrard.

76 He mentions going to the cinema during his RAD service, Albert to Jean-Pierre and family, 28 June 1942, Collection Pierrard.

77 Albert to Nicolas, 15 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

Deployment and War/Front

Information about the war, killings and fighting is notably scarce in the letters, a trend observed by various scholars. Instead, the brothers predominantly discuss the day-to-day experiences of being a soldier, encompassing topics such as travelling, marching, boredom, food, weather and the unsanitary conditions in the barracks, including issues with lice. Both brothers found themselves deployed to the Eastern Front, primarily in Belarus.[78] Regarding their deployment, their correspondence focuses mainly on interactions with local resistance and guerilla groups,[79] commonly referred to as "partisans" (*Partisaneneinsatz*) by the Wehrmacht.[80] In a letter from July 1943, Nicolas, still undergoing machine gun training for his artillery unit, wrote to Albert:

> We didn't have much contact with the partisans. They fired about half a dozen grenades first, and then we also fired some. We felt too weak and immediately returned home. This is how one company after another slowly 'hobbles along' without being able to achieve much. We have to intimidate them here and there a bit because these bands make it a kind of amusement to almost derail the train almost every day.[81]

78 Finding information about the exact unit and deployment location of soldiers can be challenging. The individual Wehrmacht records may not always provide details about subsequent assignments. Alternatively, the *Erkennungsmarke* (individual soldier's ID) can offer a pathway for more in-depth research.

79 The warfare against partisans in Belarus during the Second World War was marked by extreme brutality and high casualties. German forces conducted widespread and violent anti-partisan operations, resulting in significant destruction and loss of life among both combatants and civilians, see more Ben H. Shepherd, *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674043558; Richter, Timm C., "Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion," in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Müller, Rolf-Dieter and Volkmann, Hans-Erich (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012), 837–56, https://doi.org/10.1524/9783486852028.

80 Nicolas to Jean-Pierre and family, 13 February 1944, Collection Pierrard. The exact details of Pierrard's deployment and the specific unit he served in are not known. His letters only indicate that he was in Belarus. His personal dossier at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin (formerly the Wehrmachtauskunftstelle, now part of Department PA) contains only information about his initial reserve unit and the confirmation of his death (BArch B 563–1 KARTEI ZK P 1051-109). Although his unit could potentially be traced starting from his reserve unit in the Reich using his Erkennungsmarke (soldier's ID tag) number, this was not possible during the research period. The relevant lists (Erkennungsmarkenverzeichnisse) were being digitised at the time, which prevented access to this information. Consequently, detailed context about his deployment remains unknown. It is crucial that this information be obtained in the future to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Pierrard's service.

81 Nicolas to Albert, 24 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

Later on, during his service, in February 1944, Nicolas complained about the "partisans" in a letter to his father:

> We have to monitor a road for a length of 10km. One patrol goes out before midnight, and another goes after midnight. The bandits cause various problems. Just the other night, they went and sawed down eighty telephone poles along the road. (They were still standing during the first patrol, but they were lying around during the second.) They cause all sorts of mischief, but they rarely engage in combat. They seem to be somewhat afraid of the German machine gun. However, we endure many sleepless nights. During the day, we can rest for a few hours, then it's back to duty. For me, it's not so bad[82]

Nicolas expressed frustration with the local "bandits" who disrupted daily life and posed a threat to him and his comrades. Initially questioning the purpose of his duty in the Soviet Union, like many soldiers, he eventually adapted to his sense of duty. Nicolas viewed the local resistance fighters in Belarus as a danger to him and his unit, as seen in his use of the term "bandits". This raises the question of whether Nicolas is praising the effectiveness of German machine guns or is simply relieved to be protected by them, given that his grey Wehrmacht uniform makes him a clear target for partisans. Nicolas found himself in a relatively calm section of the front, expressing annoyance at the disruptions caused by the local armed resistance. However, he appeared to be content, considering that Albert's unit was facing daily losses and injuries; Albert reported the deaths and injuries of their compatriots in a letter to their father in April 1943.[83]

Signs of Adaptation

The brothers also expressed signs of adaptation, or acceptance. Nicolas tried to see the positive aspects, writing the following while he was in artillery training, stationed at the former Red Army School in Belarus.

> The service here in the army school has been quite enjoyable lately. Every morning, we head out to the training facility, engaging in war simulations. We practice attacks, counterattacks, and occasionally, strategic withdrawals. I am paired with a soldier from Lorraine at the heavy machine gun. We always use blanks and make it sound like gunfire is coming from the barrels. Lately, the weather has been favourable; though cold, it has been mostly dry. One tends to get used to it. However, one thing is quite bothersome – we often have to march through swamps, and it's rare to return in the afternoon without wet feet. We console ourselves by saying: 'Don't get upset, just marvel!' In the afternoons, we have sports sessions,

82 Nicolas to Jean Pierre and family, 17 February 1944, Collection Pierrard.

83 Albert to Jean-Pierre and family, 13 April 1943, Collection Pierrard.

> sometimes formal training, and once a week we go for a swim. Following these activities, we clean our weapons, and then the day comes to an end. As you can see, it's bearable.[84]

Just as Nicolas describes the situation as becoming "bearable", author Elke Scherstjanoi concurs that an extended duration at the front-line often initiated a process of habituation. Over time, soldiers would become accustomed to their surroundings, perceiving things with less intensity and adopting a more relaxed outlook. The constant presence of death became more normal, and as a result, soldiers became less communicative. Consequently, the letter writer would assess this change in perception for the impact it would have on communication, tailoring the information according to the intended recipient and the purpose of the communication.[85]

Nicolas adapts and appears to accept the circumstances imposed by the military service, finding a sense of pride in evolving as a German soldier within the ranks:

> We are now back together with new recruits. We mostly have work duty while they undergo training. It reminds us of our own training when they lie down and crawl on the ground. Sometimes we have to participate to avoid forgetting what we've learned. Nevertheless, we are treated more leniently because we are already counted among the 'Landser' out there in the trenches.[86]

Nicolas notes that they are treated more leniently, as they are already considered as experienced soldiers ("*Landser*") who have been through trench life. The tone suggests a mixture of reminiscence and recognition of their current position in the military hierarchy. He continues about the improvement of his service as he rose up through the hierarchy:

> My service is getting better from now on. I am now so 'self-important' that I am allowed to help with training. So, I play the role of assistant instructor. Can you imagine that, when a bunch of men aged 36 to 39 stand before me? (About turn, march, march! – Form up in line, march, march.) Typical Wehrmacht. Looking back, I've truly been fortunate. Many of my comrades have already fallen or been wounded. I heard about one yesterday (Gaston Loser, Reckange) that lost a leg. I was with him throughout my entire training, and we were together in the partisan deployment. At least I am still lucky enough to go on leave before being thrown into the mud up front.[87]

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84 Nicolas to Jean-Pierre and family, 24 October 1943, Collection Pierrard.

85 Elke Scherstjanoi, "Als Quelle nicht überfordern!: Zu Besonderheiten und Grenzen der wissenschaftlichen Nutzung von Feldpostbriefen in der (Zeit-)Geschichte," in *Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, ed. Veit Didczuneiet, Jens Ebert, and Thomas Jander (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2011), 123.

86 Nicolas to Jean-Pierre and family, 28 November 1943, Collection Pierrard.

87 Nicolas to Jean-Pierre and family, 13 February 1944, Collection Pierrard.

He shares that their military service has evolved, and they now serve as assistant instructors, contributing to training efforts. There is a palpable sense of pride or self-importance in this role. Nicolas perceives himself as a trained and experienced soldier, appearing even conceited, yet he also acknowledges that many of his comrades have lost their lives, considering himself fortunate. There is a sense of fatalistic acceptance of his own destiny, coupled with an awareness of his luck, knowing that it could also be over for him at any time, that death is a constant possibility.

Nicolas' positive portrayal of his military service can partly be attributed to the potential for censorship and a reluctance to cause undue concern to his family at home. The Pierrard brothers carefully avoided overtly expressing dissatisfaction with their service or questioning their roles as soldiers in the Wehrmacht. Although they did raise concerns about issues such as lice and poor food and expressed a desire for home leave, they never hinted that they may have wished to desert or abandon their unit. This does not necessarily imply exemplary military conduct; rather, it suggests a deliberate choice to adhere to established rules and regulations, demonstrating a keen awareness of the potential risks associated with non-compliance.

A recurring theme in the brothers' communications is their shared anticipation of home leave and a fervent desire for the conclusion of the war.

> I had a partisan patrol early this morning, and now there's no point in lying in bed for another hour. The weather outside is beautiful at the moment. It gets terribly warm during the day. Tomorrow, the course I'm participating in will end. Whether I'll go on leave immediately afterward is not determined yet. I would have gone next week but, as you've probably heard in the military report, the Russians have been causing trouble in our area for a week now. Our sergeant told me yesterday that I won't be allowed to go home soon because radio operations need to be reinforced. If I have to stay longer, it's tough luck. The temperature is always around 14 degrees Celsius. At this time, radio operators are returning from leave. I hope that I can go on leave soon and that there won't be a leave ban. If that's not the case, I won't make it on the 4th of the month. If I go next week, I'll find out on the first day of that month; in that case I'll inform you directly. Dear Nikla, I wish you could be home then. That would be nice. But I believe the war will end soon because victory is within reach.[88]

Albert expresses uncertainty about taking leave immediately afterward because of renewed fighting and disturbances caused by the Soviets in the area, as reported in the military report, which affected plans. Interestingly, Albert does not contemplate the consequences of a Nazi victory, such as the continued occupation of his home country. Instead, he expresses a desire for victory solely for the pur-

88 Albert to Nicolas, 29 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

pose of returning home, and he expresses a belief that the war will end soon because victory is imminent.

Integration into the Military Community

Both brothers write about their fellow soldiers and their "career" in the Wehrmacht. In July 1943, Albert shared news of his promotion with his younger brother Nicolas, revealing a sense of conflicted emotions. He conveyed the news in German, stating:

"I have been promoted to private with effect from 01.07.43!" before switching to Luxembourgish and humorously adding, "You must be thinking: He must be a good Prussian." In a more serious tone, he then switched back to German and said, "But no, you know how it works."[89]

Here, Albert begins to switch languages, a topic we will delve into in more detail in the next section.

This blend of emotions in Albert's message mirrors the intricate realities faced by Luxembourgish soldiers in the German army. His use of humour and self-deprecation suggests a desire to play down his promotion, possibly anticipating criticism. Concurrently, his recognition that the promotion was dictated by either the system or the Wehrmacht conveys a sense of resignation about the circumstances he was thrust into. This highlights the fact that the brothers were integrated into the army and were serving as regular soldiers. In a military context, Albert's promotion was a way of fostering trust in Luxembourgers, treating them as ordinary German soldiers, and providing opportunities for learning and leadership responsibilities.

Nicolas specifically mentioned being appointed as an assistant trainer, a role indicative of trust in his abilities. Determining the sincerity or sarcasm within Nicolas' statements about increased responsibilities is challenging. Nevertheless, the fact that he was assigned crucial tasks, such as training new soldiers despite being of Luxembourgish origin, indicates that he was highly regarded and experienced enough within the unit to effectively instruct and guide new recruits.

The trajectories of the Pierrard brothers illustrate the seamless integration of Luxembourgers into the military community, where they earned promotions and recognition from their fellow soldiers. Although there were varying attitudes to-

89 Albert to Nicolas, 17 July 1943, Collection Pierrard. In German "Preuße", in Luxembourgish "Preis", Prussian was the notion of "German people".

ward military service among Luxembourgish soldiers, they experienced no apparent discrimination or disadvantage compared to their German counterparts, as long as they adhered to the rules – although of course they had to grapple with the inherent risks associated with being a soldier. However, the significant rise in desertion rates among Luxembourgers (and men from Alsace-Lorraine), particularly during home leave, prompted the implementation of a ban on leave for Luxembourgers and individuals from Alsace-Lorraine starting from December 1943 onward.[90] Desertion was met with severe consequences, including capital punishment, of which the brothers were highly aware. Additionally, the families of deserters faced forced resettlement in Luxembourg. The apprehension regarding these potential repercussions was well founded, as evidenced by the brothers' discussions in their letters. They acknowledged that resettlement served as a punitive measure for various infractions, from political opposition to desertion or conscription evasion.[91]

Exclusion as a Group vs Cohesion

The Pierrard brothers frequently discussed the composition of their unit in their correspondence, often mentioning the number of soldiers from Luxembourg and Lorraine serving alongside them and recounting their encounters with them. This served to reassure them that they were not alone among Reich Germans but were accompanied by fellow Luxembourgers and Lorrainers. In a letter to Nicolas, a friend emphasised this sense of camaraderie, acknowledging the shared experience of entering military training camp.

"How are you, dear Nikla? You have many Luxembourgers and Lorrainers with you. That is a small consolation," the friend said in his letter to Nicolas.[92] Albert also acknowledged and envied Nicolas, stating in one of his letters, "But you are lucky to have so many Luxembourgers with you. And the Lorrainers are also not to be dismissed".[93]

90 Chief of the Alsace civil administration, Robert Wagner, to the chief of the High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW), Wilhelm Keitel, about the leave ban for ethnic Germans from the CdZ regions, 21 January 1944, Barch NS 19/2179. This ban affected recruits not only from Luxembourg but also from Alsace-Lorraine, Lower Styria and Carniola.

91 See the article *"Desertion leads to resettlement" – The consequences of desertion and draft evasion on the families of Luxembourgish soldiers (1942–1945)* by Sarah Maya Vercruysse (p. 241–278).

92 Nicolas Gollignan to Nicolas Pierrard, 5 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

93 Albert to Nicolas, 20 June 1943, Collection Pierrard.

In the event that a single Luxembourger found himself isolated within a company, he would seek out other like-minded individuals from Lorraine or Alsace to associate with.[94] Nicolas even mentioned activities like cooking together and sharing goods, emphasising the importance of forming bonds with individuals from similar backgrounds:

> The Luxembourgers on our staff are staying here, we've been given a break for a while as if we were home. This morning, we received some potatoes with bacon. I've organised with another Luxembourger two portions for tonight. For a small packet of saccharin, six eggs went over the counter, and then it was enough for the bread. I cut a few slices of bacon from my piece and into the pan they went, together with a bit of butter afterward. We baked a nice pan full of potatoes and then scattered eggs on top. The delicacy is in the oven now. I have to say it how it is: I have been living the good life. That's something to enjoy. We bake ourselves a pan of potatoes every Sunday evening if we only have the ingredients. What one doesn't have, the other does.[95]

Being together cheered Nicolas up until after the training camp, when he found himself more alone:

> I have indeed lost most of my Luxembourgish comrades, now we are still seven Luxembourgers and four Lorrainers. We are assigned to a company in the Army School where almost everyone is Bavarian. However, I feel that I get along well with them, even though they are quite stubborn. There is also a Berliner company here, and they are always having arguments with them. They accuse them of wanting the war, while 'we Bavarians', on the other hand, wanted nothing to do with it. Today is a splendid Sunday. In the morning, I went with two Luxembourgers to a beautiful lake just behind the barracks. To my delight, one of them had a camera. So we immediately took some beautiful photos. We might take some more this afternoon. We have a pass. Then we will meet up with several Luxembourgers again, because a few hundred metres up, there is another barracks with many Luxembourgers and Lorrainers.[96]

Self-confirmation and identity play a significant role in the letters of both brothers. They consistently reassure each other that they are not alone in their military service and are serving alongside fellow Luxembourgers and men from Lorraine. In June 1943, Nicolas had the opportunity to watch a football match with his fellow Wehrmacht soldiers (still in training in Germany):

94 Marc Trossen, *Verluere Joëren - Zwangsrekrutierte, Refraktäre, Deserteure, Resistenzler, aber auch Kollaborateure, Kriegsfreiwillige . . . . (3 Volumes),* ed. Les Amis de l'Histoire Luxembourg / Geschichtsfrënn Lëtzebuerg asbl (Luxembourg: Imprimerie Centrale, 2015), 1108.

95 Nicolas to Jean-Pierre and family, 25 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

96 Nicolas to Jean-Pierre and family, 25 September 1943, Collection Pierrard.

> The four companies are competing for the championship. So far, we have it. Our team consists of five Luxembourgers, three Lorrainers and three from Saxony. It is the one with the most Luxembourgers playing. You should hear the roar when we cheer our people on.[97]

Although it was a leisure activity, Nicolas emphasised the significance of acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of the players and supporting his team. The Pierrard brothers were aware of the presence of regional patriotism, pride and group cohesion among Reich German soldiers. This awareness extended to an understanding of how the soldiers hailed from various regions, each characterised by distinct cultural identities.

Nicolas did not mention any personal conflicts or close friendships in his correspondence. Having spent months, if not years, within the German military, Luxembourgers had to develop personal relationships with their fellow soldiers and superiors in order to survive and cope with the challenges they faced. This raises the question of whether they experienced conflicts with Reich Germans or developed camaraderie among themselves.

The Pierrard brothers, intertwined with their comrades, including Reich Germans, particularly in perilous situations, exemplify Felix Römer's concept of a "compulsory community".[98] The concept characterises the military milieu that is founded on cohesion and obedience. The demands of being in enemy territory accentuated the repercussions of individual detachment, resulting in social exclusion and heightened vulnerability. In contrast, integration into the group not only bestowed recognition but also provided crucial protection, proving indispensable for survival amid the challenges of wartime.

Compared with other troops, Luxembourgish soldiers were relatively young when they were conscripted: most Reich German troops were born between 1911 and 1915, followed by those born between 1916 to 1920, according to Christoph Rass' age pyramid.[99] So when the first Luxembourgers (initially those born between 1920 and 1924) were conscripted in October 1942, they were younger than most other soldiers in the units. Luxembourgers had strong connections with their compatriots and found a sense of belonging, also with non-Luxembourgish soldiers. This bond not only counteracted the negative aspects of war, it also provided valuable knowledge for new arrivals and inexperienced soldiers. Through their interactions with their more experienced comrades, Luxembourgers gained

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97 Nicolas to Albert, 14 June 1943, Collection Pierrard.

98 Felix Römer, *Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht von innen* (Munich: Piper, 2012), 160.

99 Rass, Christoph, "Das Sozialprofil von deutschen Kamfpverbänden des deutschen Heeres 1939 bis 1945", in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945. Politisierung, Vernichtung, Überleben*, vol. 9/1 (dva, 2004), 677.

practical skills essential for their survival on the battlefield. Furthermore, camaraderie, especially with their compatriots, served as a crucial source of emotional support for Luxembourgers who found themselves far from home, grappling with the challenges of war.

Language

The theme of language difference has been hinted at several times. Use of language was another noteworthy factor shaping the integration or exclusion of Luxembourgers in the military community. Although German was the predominant language, many soldiers opted to write in Luxembourgish or added greetings and expressions of affection in their native tongue when corresponding with their families.[100]

Nicolas subtly hints at his Luxembourgish identity and the linguistic diversity he shares with his compatriots: "We Luxembourgers, it cheers us up and we can only laugh when we hear someone swear in French from time to time."[101] His remark not only emphasises his familiarity with the French language, it alludes to cultural and linguistic distinctions between Luxembourgers and Reich Germans. It also highlights Nicolas' assertion of his Luxembourgish identity and the potential lack of understanding of French among Reich Germans. These references emphasise the unique perspectives and experiences that Nicolas and his compatriots brought to the military community.

Albert Pierrard frequently switched between German and Luxembourgish in his communication. As previously quoted in his letter from July 1943 about his promotion (see Integration into the military community), he announced his promotion in German but then added an aside in Luxembourgish to Nicolas, explaining that this is the way the Wehrmacht functions. He also said that it was not his

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100 Luxembourgish has been classified as a dialect of the German language. However, perceptions of the language began to change at the beginning of the 20th century, with Luxembourgers starting to view Luxembourgish as their native language. During the Second World War, self-identification changed as Luxembourgers sought to distinguish themselves from Nazi Germany. Resistance movements used flyers to encourage people to resist the occupation, asserting that Luxembourgish was their language, not German. According to Wagner and Davies, Luxembourgish helped promote self-identification and "patriotism" against the Nazis, and the war proved to be a turning point in the use and perception of the language. See Melanie Wagner and Winifred V. Davies, "The Role of World War II in the Development of Luxembourgish as a National Language", *Language Problems and Language Planning* 33, no. 2 (2009): 117–18, https://doi.org/10.1075/lplp.33.2.02wag.

101 Nicolas to Albert, 5 July 1943, Collection Pierrard.

intention to be given this promotion, suggesting an apology to Nicolas for an "undesired" promotion and implying that the decision was imposed by the Nazis. This information in Luxembourgish indicates that he wanted Nicolas to have this insight exclusively, possibly to avoid the censorship officer's scrutiny if the letter were to be opened.

In a letter to Nicolas, Albert discussed the static nature of the front lines and the defensive stance of the Wehrmacht. In German he wrote, "You know, here the front doesn't shift back and forth much," and in Luxembourgish he added, "At most, maybe once backward, but forward definitely not." This could imply that his unit was not making progress and that the fight seemed challenging or even hopeless. By using his native language as a truth filter, he may have been expressing the gravity of the situation rather than directly addressing the overall war scenario.[102]

Using Luxembourgish in personal communication during the war was a powerful symbol of trust and resistance against the oppressive regime of National Socialism, as noted by Melanie Wagner in her study on Luxembourgish war letters.[103] Albert may have reverted to his native language for personal information as it held strong associations with home and family, while German was associated with the enemy and the war effort.[104] This linguistic choice demonstrated a willingness to resist the imposed regulations and maintain a sense of identity and autonomy.

The phenomenon of shifting between languages is referred to in linguistics as code-switching. It denotes the dynamic practice of employing more than one language within a single communicative episode, whether spoken or written, as observed in various linguistic interactions, including written forms such as letters. As defined, "code choices can index both solidarity and power, include and exclude others, and speakers can use code-switching to index social class consciousness, political-ideological or ethnic affiliations, and preferences".[105] This linguistic strategy can be motivated by specific topics or directed towards particular addressees, serving as a means to emphasise, elaborate or evaluate a point within

102 Albert to Nicolas, 20 June 1943, Collection Pierrard.

103 Melanie Wagner, "Private Literacies – Strategies for Writing Luxembourgish in World War II", 2011, 21.

104 Wagner and Gilles, Peter, 9.

105 Arja Nurmi and Päivi Pahta, "Social Stratification and Patterns of Code-Switching in Early English Letters", *Multilingua – Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 23, no. 4 (1 January 2004): 419, https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.2004.23.4.417; Carol M. Eastman, "Codeswitching as an Urban Language-contact Phenomenon", *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 13, no. 1–2 (January 1992): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.1992.9994480.

the discourse, as exemplified by Albert's change in greeting at the end of a letter in German in March 1943 to his family.

In German, he writes:

> For today, I've told you all the news.
> Many greetings to everyone,
> Albert
> Just keep your spirits high!

And in Luxembourgish: "And a hello to the neighbour Jeng, and he should also drop a line. We feel that it is time. Don't worry, I will be back soon because the war will be over in a few months."[106]

For Albert Pierrard and numerous other Luxembourgers during the war, Luxembourgish served as a more comfortable and familiar means of expression, despite their proficiency in German. In the military community, German was ubiquitous and inescapable, yet in personal communication, they often reverted to their mother tongue. However, as evidenced in our case study and Wagner's research, language use during the war varied, highlighting the individual agency of soldiers and their families.

Moreover, Luxembourgers were frequently the sole representatives of their nation in their units, immersed in a German-speaking environment day and night. This required them to navigate and adapt to the linguistic landscape for practical survival in their role as soldiers. While retaining their native language for personal and emotional reasons, proficiency in German was also essential for practical purposes. The use of language during wartime thus emerged as a complex issue shaped by practical, emotional and identity-based considerations.

As demonstrated in the Pierrard brothers' letters, solidarity among Luxembourgers was strong, and they sought each other's company. Luxembourgers often expressed in their letters a desire to converse in Luxembourgish or French, perceiving language as a "mirror" reflecting their identity or self-description. Linguistic studies emphasise the symbolic value of writing,[107] as reflected in Albert Pierrard's deliberate choice of Luxembourgish to convey his feelings, connect with home and differentiate himself from his Reich German comrades. Although German dominated wartime communication, many Luxembourgers also incorporated their native language in asides or expressions of love within their German

106 Albert to Jean-Pierre and family, 18 March 1943, Collection Pierrard.
107 Wagner and Davies, "The Role of World War II in the Development of Luxembourgish as a National Language," 121.

letters. The choice to write in Luxembourgish held symbolic significance, representing notions of home and resistance against Nazi oppression and regulations.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

In conclusion, this chapter has endeavoured to explore the experiences of Luxembourgish soldiers in the Wehrmacht during the Second World War through the lens of the Pierrard brothers' correspondence. The letters primarily document everyday aspects such as travel arrangements, living conditions, updates from home, and personal exchanges, illustrating the routine challenges faced by frontline soldiers, which is not uncommon in such correspondence.

An intriguing aspect of these letters is the brothers' portrayal of their service in the Wehrmacht. Their tone often conveys endurance and pragmatic acceptance, with Albert reassuring Nicolas that their trials will eventually pass—a reflection of resigned adaptation rather than a wholehearted embrace of their military role. Moreover, despite their cultural and linguistic background, the brothers found acceptance and even promotion within the Reich German ranks, a theoretical equality amidst practical instances of exclusion and occasional feelings of alienation.

Their adept use of German military terms and assimilation of language from the military milieu, as suggested by Römer, reflects their skill in navigating the military structure. As they collectively expressed hope for the war to end, their desires were simple: a return home and an end to the tumultuous circumstances they were facing. The prevailing sentiment was not to extensively ponder the consequences but to yearn for a swift conclusion to their wartime ordeal.

However, these are the events and emotions that the brothers chose to convey to each other or their family back home. It is likely they experienced far more than what is documented in their letters, such as their involvement in "Partisaneneinsatz." Did they take lives? Witness atrocities? Participate actively? Were they gripped by fear or exhaustion? What were their perspectives on Nazi ideology, the enemy? Did they feel compassion, or did they develop resentment towards locals and the Red Army, influenced by Nazi ideology and "anti-Bolshevism"? These questions remain unanswered, as the brothers chose not to disclose such thoughts in their letters, highlighting the complexities of external and self-imposed censorship.

Furthermore, the correspondence highlights intriguing aspects of language and identity. Albert and Nicolas Pierrard emphasised their Luxembourgish heritage, exchanging news from their homeland and forming connections with fellow soldiers from Luxembourg and Lorraine. Language played a pivotal role, func-

tioning as a symbol of trust in their home community and resistance against the oppressive Nazi regime. The soldiers adeptly employed German military terminology to effectively communicate within their unit and with German soldiers and officials, recognising the necessity of linguistic adaptation. Despite this adjustment, the letters underscore the soldiers' unwavering resilience and commitment to maintaining their Luxembourgish identity amidst challenging circumstances. Language thus served as a powerful tool for reaffirming their sense of self and resisting the influences of the Nazi regime. Overall, the letters depict Luxembourgers navigating a dual identity, skilfully managing their roles as German soldiers while maintaining a strong desire to connect with their compatriots.

Their experiences, as suggested by Latzel, imply that Albert and Nicolas may have witnessed more than they chose to reveal. Their backgrounds before the war—lacking military training, growing up in a rural environment shaped by church and family values, and devoid of exposure to militarized lifestyles—likely influenced how they processed and conveyed their experiences. Despite these factors, their primary message in the letters emphasised resilience and pragmatism. This approach likely influenced their decision not to openly criticise the Reich Germans and Nazis in their correspondence, given the severe risks of prosecution and strict censorship measures in place at the time.

Acknowledging the constraints imposed by external and internal censorship pressures, this study acknowledges its preliminary nature. Understanding the usability and significance of these letters requires contextualizing them as limited communication sources between soldiers and their families. Future research with larger datasets, including more crowdsourced WARLUX letters, could further enrich our understanding, particularly through comparisons with other collections of letters from forcibly recruited soldiers, such as those from Silesians and Slovenes. This study opens avenues for deeper investigations into wartime experiences, identity negotiation, and the broader socio-cultural impacts of military service on postwar identity narratives.

Luxembourgers forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht likely grappled with feelings of alienation and internal conflict, serving in a military representing an occupying power with an ideology they did not necessarily support. Struggling to reconcile their duty with personal beliefs, they likely experienced isolation within the military community, leading to feelings of loneliness and detachment. Nonetheless, as a survival strategy, they managed to maintain their Luxembourgish identity by staying connected with compatriots in Wehrmacht uniform and with their families at home, as revealed in the letters. The letters illuminate the complexities of Luxembourgish soldiers' experiences in the Wehrmacht and their efforts to reconcile their national identity with their role in the broader German military community.

Although the letters offer only a fragment of the soldiers' likely experiences and reflect their selective sharing with families (whether truthful or not) of what they took from their experiences, these sources provide a glimpse into the lives of Luxembourgers scattered throughout Hitler's vast army.

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Philippe Beck

East Belgians in the *Wehrmacht* and the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, 1940–1945. *Biographical Turning Points* and *Adaptive Stances* in the Beck-Peissen Family

1 Historical Context

On 10 May 1940, the German Army invaded Belgium. Within the next few weeks, Nazi Germany annexed the territory of Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith, as well as ten other Belgian municipalities, which had never been part of Prussia. From 1 September 1940 on, German laws were applicable.[1] The inhabitants of this area, whom the Nazis considered to be *Volksdeutsche*, were given German nationality one year later and were henceforth recruited for the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) and the *Wehrmacht* – as was the case in Luxembourg, Alsace and Moselle.[2] However, the state of war did not revoke their Belgian nationality, so the inhabitants in fact had two valid nationalities, often without being aware of this.

1 For further context see Martin R. Schärer, *Deutsche Annexionspolitik im Westen: Die Wiedereingliederung Eupen-Malmedys im zweiten* [*sic*] *Weltkrieg* (Bern: Herbert Lang/Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1975); Carlo Lejeune, Christoph Brüll and Peter M. Quadflieg (ed.), *Grenzerfahrungen: Eine Geschichte der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens*. Vol. 4: *Staatenwechsel, Identitätskonflikte, Kriegserfahrungen (1919–1945)* (Eupen: GEV, 2019) and the virtual exhibition *Time Strata: Prospecting an In-Between: East Belgium 1920–2020*, by Philippe Beck, Christoph Brüll, Andreas Fickers and Vitus Sproten, in collaboration with Carlo Lejeune (Belval/Eupen: C²DH/ZOG, 2020), online: timestrata.be (31 August 2023).
2 For further context see Peter Quadflieg, *„Zwangssoldaten" und „Ons Jongen": Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aachen: Shaker, 2008); Philippe Beck, Christoph Brüll and Peter M. Quadflieg, "Weltkriege in der Region. Militärdienst und Kriegserfahrungen als Lebenserfahrungen," in *Grenzerfahrungen*, ed. Lejeune, Brüll and Quadflieg, 140–169; Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg (ed.), *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich, 1939–1945/Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten, 1939–1945* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016); Nina Barbier, *Malgré-elles:Les Alsaciennes et Mosellanes incorporées de force dans la machine de guerre nazie* (Paris: Tallandier, 2022).

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In 1940, around 86,600 people lived in Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith, with a gender ratio of 50/50.[3] During the war, 2,661 men served in the Belgian army,[4] whereas around 880 volunteered for the *Wehrmacht*, SS or other Nazi organisations. From 1 October 1941 on, approximately 8,000 men were conscripted into the German Army. Between 3,200 and 3,400 of them, i.e. 39%, died or were reported missing.

Resistance was rather low in Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith compared to Alsace, Moselle, Luxembourg or the 10 other Belgian municipalities annexed by Nazi Germany.[5] Fewer people were refractory to German military service and a smaller proportion of the population joined an actual resistance movement. Historian Carlo Lejeune has suggested there were 430 draft dodgers from Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith, and 624 for the other 10 annexed Belgian municipalities, including Kelmis/La Calamine, where 96 soldiers refused to wear a German uniform.[6] The number of soldiers from East Belgium who deserted from the German Army over the course of the war is unknown to this date. Based on the available source material, this is hard to verify and needs further investigation.[7]

Several factors explain these numbers. First, it must be noted that the territory had only become part of independent Belgium in 1920, after 105 years of being part of Prussia, which itself had been preceded by a French period of 20 years.[8] The exacerbated nationalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had left profound marks on many families, where men had fought in the German imperial army in 1870/71 and during the First World War.[9]

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3 Schärer, *Deutsche Annexionspolitik* 1974, 86.

4 See Carlo Lejeune, *Die Säuberung*, vol. II: *Hysterie, Wiedereingliederung, Assimilierung* (Büllingen: Lexis Verlag, 2007), 180, and Beck, Brüll, Fickers and Sproten, *Timestrata.be*, https://zeitschichten.be/en/perspectives/wie-erlebten-die-ostbelgier-den-krieg (31 August 2023).

5 Frédéric Stroh, "Refus et résistance face à 'l'incorporation de force' à l'Ouest et leur répression: Eupen-Malmedy, Luxembourg, Alsace, Moselle", in *L'incorporation de force*, ed. Stroh and Quadflieg, 41–60, 47.

6 See Lejeune, *Die Säuberung*, vol. II, 180, and Beck, Brüll, Fickers and Sproten, *Timestrata.be*, https://zeitschichten.be/en/perspectives/wie-erlebten-die-ostbelgier-den-krieg (31 August 2023).

7 New insights may be provided by the recently discovered files of the district of Verviers, which retrace the whereabouts of over 5,000 people who disappeared or died. In fact, half of the files concern *Wehrmacht*-soldiers from Eupen-Malmedy-Sank Vith, some of whom were executed by German forces, because they deserted or were part of a resistance network.

8 Between 1794 and 1815, Eupen, Malmedy and Sankt Vith were districts within the Ourthe Department. Before 1794, these territories had been part of different entities within the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands.

9 After 1920, the memory of the 'Great War' was, to some extent, a problem in the area. See Beck, Brüll and Quadflieg, "Weltkriege in der Region"; Max Neumann, *Gestorben für das Vaterland. Die Kriegerdenkmäler des Ersten Weltkriegs in den Kantonen Eupen, Malmedy und Sankt Vith (1918–1940). Zeugen eines Identitätskonflikts* (Brussels: General State Archives, 2017); Philippe

Second, the entire period between the two world wars was deeply marked by tensions between two poles in East Belgium. On the one hand, there were those who contested the so-called 'public expression of opinion', which had sealed the cession of the Prussian *Kreise* of Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium. They advocated for a real referendum, and many hoped for a return to Germany. On the other hand, there were the inhabitants who had accepted their fate within the new fatherland for a series of different reasons, whether ideological, political, economic, cultural or personal in nature. Some were deeply disappointed by the aggressive politics of war led by the Empire. Many soldiers had died or come home wounded, shell-shocked, and disillusioned. Some had become proud Belgians. For some people, it was a clear advantage not to be part of a country which had lost the war and was being held responsible for millions of deaths. The majority of the inhabitants of Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith, however, did not choose a "side"; they simply wanted to get on with their lives. If necessary, they took *adaptive stances*, in order to be able to continue their lives without too much trouble.[10]

Adaptive stances also dominated the population's reactions on 10 May 1940. Some fled. Many stayed. Some were arrested. Some died in custody. A significant number cheerfully welcomed the German Army, but many others remained silent observers.

When men and women were conscripted into the RAD and the *Wehrmacht*, few decided to dodge or join the Resistance. In this context, it must be noted that conscientious objectors and resistance fighters were exposed to great danger and had to live hidden underground. Indeed, the *Kriegssonderstrafverordnung* on the *Zersetzung der Wehrmacht* and the Führer's Decree of 14 April 1940 demanded the death penalty in cases of desertion, and often also for conscientious objection to military service.[11] In many cases, Belgian resistance organisations and various networks of priests offered protection.

Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland. Selbst- und Fremdbilder bei Josef Ponten und Peter Schmitz, 1918–1940* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2013), 157–180; Andreas Fickers, „Gedächtnisopfer: Erinnern und Vergessen in der Vergangenheitspolitik der deutschsprachigen Belgier im 20. Jahrhundert," in *zeitenblicke* 3 (2004), Nr. 1.

10 See also Andreas Fickers and Christoph Brüll, "Ein Experiment kollektiver Gewissensprüfung. Situativer Opportunismus und kumulative Heroisierung", in *Grenzerfahrungen*, ed. Lejeune, Brüll and Quadflieg, 8–39.

11 See Dieter Knippschild, "Deserteure in der Deutschen Wehrmacht", in Norbert Haase and Paul Gerhard (ed.), *Die anderen Soldaten. Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), 123–138, here 127–128; Stroh, "Refus et résistance", 54.

Nevertheless, the proportion of resistance movement members was higher in the ten other annexed municipalities, in Kelmis and also in Malmedy, than in the German-speaking municipalities of the Belgian Eifel and the district of Eupen. Language skills can partly account for this situation, for poor proficiency in French could have easily foiled a flight towards territory in the west.[12]

Many East Belgian *Wehrmacht* soldiers were sent to the Eastern front, mainly out of military 'necessity'. Following the arrival of allied troops from overseas, September 1944 saw the liberation. With the Battle of the Bulge, however, the war returned to the area of Malmedy and Sankt-Vith. The territory was eventually reintegrated into Belgium at the end of the war theatre in Europe.

2 Methodological Approach

This short overview shows that the period between 1919 and 1945 is a key chapter in the history of East Belgium, which has been the subject of numerous publications and research projects.[13] Yet the individual perspective, which gives a more personal insight into people's lives, has not always been given credit.[14] Not until 2017 did academic research take a serious interest in a biographical approach to this period. For volume 4 of the book series *Grenzerfahrungen* (2014–2023), the authors, including the author of the present contribution, decided to delve into their own family histories.[15] From a methodological point of view, historians Andreas Fickers and Christoph Brüll refer to Uwe Schimank's concept *situativer Opportunismus* ('situation-based opportunism')[16] to explain the actions, reactions and non-actions of individuals at certain turning points of history or in their lives. Because of the negative connotations of the word 'opportunism' in everyday

12 Stroh, "Refus et résistance", 48.

13 A critical overview is given by Christoph Brüll and Carlo Lejeune in "*Geschichtsschreibung als Spiegel des Zeitgeists. Von der Vereinnahmung der Geschichte zur Europäisierung der Erinnerungskultur,*" in *Grenzerfahrungen*, ed. Lejeune, Brüll and Quadflieg, 366–389.

14 Pioneers in the 1980s were journalists Maurice De Wilde (*De Kollaboratie*, BRT, 1985) and Heinrich Toussaint, editor in chief of the newspaper *Grenz-Echo* (*Verlorene Jahre* [Eupen: GEV, 1987]; *Bittere Erfahrungen* [Eupen: GEV, 1988]), who collected individual testimonies. Over the years, several documentary films and theatre plays followed depicting or largely integrating individual war experiences (Dietrich Schubert, *Verzeihen ja, vergessen nie*, 1994 and *Mathi Schenks letzte Reise nach Polen*, 2002; Christoph Bohn, *The Boy's Gone*, 2012; Serge Demoulin, *Le Carnaval des Ombres*, 2012; Julien Kartheuser, *Backes*, 2024).

15 The stories are presented and contextualised in Brüll and Fickers, "Ein Experiment".

16 Uwe Schimank, *Die Entscheidungsgesellschaft. Komplexität und Rationalität in der Moderne*, (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005), 242–244.

language, we prefer the phrasing *adaptive stances* or *strategies*. The concept can help to explain the different attitudes of many towards the *Wehrmacht* and RAD in the different border areas annexed by Nazi Germany.

Research for the present contribution is based on ego-documents from the author's own family archives. Complementary information was gathered from personal files at the Archives Service for War Victims in Brussels, at the Belgian Armed Forces documentation centre in Evere, at the *Bundesarchiv*, documents kept at CEGESOMA, and at the Resistance Museum in Brussels.

The personal files of the Archives Service for War Victims are a relevant source regarding the case studies of soldiers from East Belgium. These files were created after the war by the Ministry of Reconstruction and later the Ministry of Public Health. They consist of applications by citizens (among them former conscripts, prisoners or remaining family members) to obtain a particular status: as a political prisoner, a resistance fighter, or a person forcefully conscripted into the German army or labour service, to name but a few.[17] Obtaining a verified status was sometimes linked to financial compensation. The files typically contain official documents, testimonies and other elements of proof, which allowed the commissions in charge to evaluate the different requests and to reach a decision. In the case of former soldiers from the German army, the files often include an excerpt from the *Wehrstammrolle* from the *Deutsche Dienststelle* (WASt).

Further useful sources related to the Beck family were the personal military files kept at the Belgian Armed Forces documentation centre in Evere, as well as the archives of the resistance newspaper *Bec et Ongles* kept at CEGESOMA and the Resistance Museum in Brussels. Finally, the German federal archives and the US-National Archives were also contacted.

When the aforementioned editorial group of East Belgian historians decided to analyse their own family histories, they admittedly had rather poor knowledge of their respective ancestors' whereabouts and actions during the war. In most cases, silence had been, for many decades, the key to implicitly maintaining *social peace*. This was also the case within the Beck-Peissen family from Eupen, which will be at the centre of this contribution.

The following section will provide a deeper look into the lives of Matthias Beck (1922–2002) and Hildegard Peissen (1924–2007) with the help of a photo album created by the couple, containing photos of their respective war and RAD experiences between 1941 and 1944. Art historian Petra Bopp and historian Sandra Starke gathered a considerable number of such *Wehrmacht* photo albums, parts of which

17 A critical overview of this source material is given in *Papy, était-il un héros?* dir. Fabrice Maerten (Brussels: Racine, 2018).

were presented in the exhibition *Fremde im Visier* and the accompanying catalogue.[18] Cultural studies scholar Helmut Lethen's reflections in his contribution about the transfer of private photographs from an album into a public space were also of interest. Anke Kramer and Annegret Pelz's *Album. Organisationsform narrativer Kohärenz* and Martha Langford's *Suspended Conversations. The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* were helpful to give a general context. Finally, delving into family memory also bears important sociological aspects, which have been the focus of Harald Welzer's and his colleagues' studies, and which will be referred to later.[19]

3 The Photo Album *Unsere Dienstzeit*

3.1 General Context

It was common for recruits of the *Wehrmacht* and the RAD to create a photo album or diary documenting their time of service. Such albums are collections of personal memories, which in their organisation also helped to construct meaning.[20] They are, as Petra Bopp states, "individually constructed spaces of memory for an entire generation". Even though "memories are incomplete and always historically inaccurate, [. . .] they reveal the visual testimonies of a generation, their view of the war, their mentality, and the way they lived."[21]

The album presented below is one such example, with at least two singularities: (1) it combines in one album photos from a couple, which (2) came from an annexed border territory. We shall see below to what extent it fits into the general collection of albums analysed by Bopp, and in which other aspects, apart from the two singularities just mentioned, it stands out.

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18 Petra Bopp, *Fremde im Visier – Fotoalben aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bielefeld: Kerberverlag, 2012 [2nd ed.]).

19 Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall, *„Opa war kein Nazi"*. *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2021 [10th ed.]); Harald Welzer (ed.), *Der Krieg der Erinnerung: Holocaust, Kollaboration und Widerstand im europäischen Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007).

20 Anke Kramer and Annegret Pelz (eds.), *Album. Organisationsform narrativer Kohärenz* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013); Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations. The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal: McGill-Quenn's University Press, 2021).

21 Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 10.

3.2 History of the Album and Family Background

The album was created by the couple Matthias Beck and Hildegard Peissen at the end of the war, or shortly after it had ended. Both came from parents who adopted a critical stance towards National Socialism and had a positive attitude towards Belgium. Nonetheless, both children accepted their recruitment into the *Wehrmacht* and the RAD. What was their scope of action? Did they take an adaptive stance?

Matthias was 18 years old when his hometown was annexed by Nazi Germany. One year later, he was among the first East Belgians to be recruited by the *Wehrmacht*, as the photo album documents. As a member of an anti-aircraft unit, he was sent to the Eastern front, and in 1944 to Normandy, where he deserted. He eventually managed to join his parents, who had fled to Brussels. These are the elements of Matthias' war time story that were published in 1982 by local historian Guillaume Massenaux, in a short text about Nikolaus Beck.[22] His wartime experiences will be further analysed below in relation to the photo album.

Matthias was the only child of Maria Breuer (1895–1971) and Nikolaus Beck (1896–1966). His father had been a German soldier in the First World War[23] before becoming a Belgian citizen in January 1920 under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. From this moment on, he started working for the city administration.[24] In the 1930s, Nikolaus and his wife sent their son, Matthias, to school in Dolhain and Verviers, so that he could improve his second language skills. The parents hoped that a high degree of proficiency in French would open up better job opportunities. It is not known whether they also had any ideological reasons for this choice.

In 1938, Nikolaus Beck joined the newly founded party *Demokratischer Heimatblock*, whose programmatic goal was to "unite the 'true' *Heimat* loyalists," as the *Grenz-Echo* reported.[25] This referred to the citizens who stood up "for a peaceful development of [their] *Heimat* under the present state regime and for the most diligent cultivation of [their] inherited culture". In this sense, the party stood for the safeguarding of German culture and language in Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith, but openly positioned itself against the *Heimattreue Front*, which was

22 Guillaume Massenaux, *La résistance à Baelen et Membach: 2 des 10 communes illégalement annexées pendant la guerre 40–45: les réfractaires à la Wehrmacht* (Baelen: Administration communale de Baelen, 1982), 27.

23 Massenaux, *Résistance*, 27. Massenaux mentions that Nikolaus Beck was "*invalide*", which means that he must have been injured. However, no further information regarding his First World War experience is known.

24 "Botenmeister Nikolaus Beck tritt in den Ruhestand", in *Grenz-Echo*, 1 June 1961, 3.

25 "Ein Demokratischer Heimatblock", in *Grenz-Echo*, 10 December 1938, 2.

supported by the NSDAP and fought for a return of the territory to Germany. In March 1939, after a close election result (*DH*: 3,723 votes; *HF*: 3,922 votes, out of a total of 8,925 votes), both parties had to work together within the city council. As this project became difficult, the *DH* addressed a letter to the mayor, repeating its desire for a peaceful and "brotherly" collaboration of citizens for the sake of the *Heimat*, no matter which party they belonged to.[26]

Following the annexation of the border region by National Socialist Germany in May 1940, Nikolaus Beck resigned from his position at the municipality. As a consequence, the family had to give up their council flat opposite the town hall. After a spell in Welkenraedt, the couple decided to move to Brussels, where Nikolaus worked at the Ministry of the Interior.[27] According to various testimonies in his personal file at the Archives Service for War Victims, he was recruited by a colleague in January 1942 for a resistance group, whose monthly underground journal *Bec et Ongles* he then secretly printed in his office and helped to distribute until the liberation in September 1944.[28] The editors confirm in the final issue that the journal was printed inside the Ministry.[29] Within that issue, it is also revealed that a collaborator handed over stolen copies of the periodical to the Gestapo: "The most serious alarm was caused by the handing over to the Gestapo of several issues stolen from the post office by a sinister Rexist. Moreover, this traitor had announced that he knew where the 'stuff' came from."[30] This may explain the anecdote told by Nikolaus Beck and published by Massenaux: one day, his of-

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26 State Archives in Eupen, inventory Stadt Eupen Neuzeit, classification number 22/17/8, letter of the *Demokratische Heimatblock* to the mayor, 29 March 1939, signed by. H. Cormann, R. Weisshaupt, J. Bartholemy, K. Weiss, E. Schlembach, A. Michel.

27 "Botenmeister Nikolaus Beck".

28 Archives Service for War Victims [ASWV], PC608609/348, III-Enquête, personal file Nikolaus Beck (born 31/05/1896 in Eupen) to obtain the status of "*Résistant par la Presse Clandestine*"; *Bec et Ongles*, n° 30, September 1944 ("*Numéro d'adieu*"), 3, available online: https://warpress.cegesoma.be/fr/node/40115 (31 August 2023). As his personal file of "*Résistant par la Presse Clandestine*" indicates, he was part of a consistent resistance network. His close collaborators were: Lt. Josef Otten (Welkenraedt, founder and editor in chief of *Bec et Ongles*, who worked at the Ministry of the Interior 1940–1944); Martin Gilles (clerk in the Ministry's office, where the paper was printed); Jacques Wasteels (Ministry, member of the *Armée Secrète*); Joseph Neumann (Eupen, „membre de la [*sic*] S.R.A." [= Service de Renseignements et d'Action, 'Intelligence Service']); and Rodolphe Luts (Eupen, Municipal secretary, worked 1940–1945 for the governor of the Province of Brabant in Brussels) (Source: ASWV, PC608609/348). Further research revealed that Jean Joseph Otten was adjutant of the "Janvier" intelligence service and Joseph Neumann a member of the intelligence service "Luc-Marc", see *Memorial volume intelligence and action agents*, ed. Roger Baron Coekelbergs et al. (Antwerpen: Apeldoorn/Maklu, 2015), 656 and 665.

29 *Bec et Ongles*, n° 30, 3.

30 *Bec et Ongles*, n° 30, 3.

fice was surprisingly inspected by Flemish collaborators. He yelled at them in German with a commanding tone: “What do you want?” Taken aback, the ‘black’ inspectors asked no further questions and withdrew.[31]

In August 2023, their granddaughter Irmgard shared with the author the memory that the couple had had “a good life” in Brussels.[32] They were not alone, for they had fled along with other people from Eupen, among them the former mayor Hugo Zimmermann. Her grandmother enjoyed reading Flemish magazines, such as *Het rijk van de vrouw* (‘The domain of the woman’), which contained recipes and household tips, and she even continued her subscription when they returned to Eupen after the war. Her husband was then offered a better position, due to his resistance activity. However, he refused, asking for a decent position for his son in exchange, who then became a registrar at the municipality of Eupen, where he remained in service until his retirement.[33]

Hildegard Peissen was 15 years old when German troops invaded Belgium. Her father Heinrich (1887–1948) was a plumber and died shortly after the war, leaving behind a wife and three children. According to family memory, he was also known for his critical stance towards National Socialism.[34] This regularly caused conflicts with his German brother-in-law, Martin Zillessen from Erkelenz. When Zillessen came to visit his relatives in Eupen and saluted *“Heil Hitler!”*, Heinrich Peissen deliberately replied *“Guten Tach!”*. He took pleasure in provoking the committed National Socialist: he bought himself a Jewish hat, which he put on during another visit, in order to annoy his brother-in-law. Later, Heinrich Peissen kept a small suitcase ready at the back window, so that he could escape as quickly as possible in case of emergency. He feared denunciation (by his brother-in-law or by others) because of his resolutely anti-Nazi stance. Another explanation for his increasingly cautious behaviour may be that he feared being recruited by the Wehrmacht. In fact, he had been examined in September 1943 for military service. However, on 15 April 1944 he was deemed “unfit for service”.[35]

On the basis of this story, handed down orally, we may assume that Heinrich Peissen did not appreciate his 18-year-old daughter leaving for forced labour on 30 April 1943. Like many other young men and women, it was the first time that

31 Massenaux, *Résistance*, 27.

32 Zentrum für Ostbelgische Geschichte [ZOG], AZS – 021, Interview with Irmgard Wintgens-Beck (born 1946) conducted by Philippe Beck on 29 August 2023.

33 Memory shared by Irmgard Wintgens-Beck in 2007 and written down in Philippe Beck, “Beck-Peissen” (Brussels/Eupen, 2017–2023), unpublished document.

34 The following story has been told several times by his granddaughter Irmgard Wintgens-Beck and written down in Beck, “Beck-Peissen”. It was shared again in ZOG, AZS – 021.

35 ASWV, d48984, personal file Heinrich Peissen (born 12th December 1887).

she left home. For their *Pflichtjahr* ('compulsory year'), the women were generally transferred to remote areas of the "*Reich*". Their experiences were multifarious: "Some were thrilled by the experience of being far away. Others had a hard time. Some had fanatical National Socialists as superiors. Others had surprisingly humane encounters."[36] For others still, this was a welcome adventure, which they enjoyed. But Hildegard Peissen was not the adventurous type.

The photo album was at first kept in a drawer with other family photos. Daughter Irmgard remembered in an interview with the author that she must have first seen it as a teenager.[37] However, she did not remember her parents commenting on the photos. At a later moment, the album was transferred to the attic, where the grandchildren discovered it as late as 2007.

3.3 Family Narrative and Positionality of the Author

Beyond the family background, it is relevant, from a sociological point of view, to consider the family narrative as it has been shared over the generations, and as pointed out in the critical study, *"Opa war kein Nazi"*.[38]

All remaining family members agree that there was hardly any "conversational remembering"[39] as such. Regarding Matthias' war experience, two aspects have been handed down to the children and grandchildren: Everyone remembers the scar on his head and the story of his desertion in Normandy. Several grandchildren remember their grandfather showing them the scar, the result of a piece of shrapnel which had pierced his helmet. The story of his desertion, which his daughter Irmgard had long known of, was told to the author as late as 2007 by Hildegard, five years after her husband's passing. She said that he had kept his Belgian identity card with him,[40] which had worried her a lot at the time. She remembered that she was afraid he might get into trouble for this. According to her, as he was fluent in French, he was asked by his superior to go looking for food. One day he did not return to his unit. He had deserted and found sanctuary in a convent, where he did some gardening for two months. He was eventually able to return home with the help of Belgian troops. She finished the story from

36 "New duties as citizen of the Reich" in Beck, Brüll, Fickers, Sproten, *Zeitschichten*, https://zeitschichten.be/en/perspectives/wie-erlebten-die-ostbelgier-den-krieg (31 August 2023).
37 ZOG, AZS-021.
38 Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, *„Opa war kein Nazi“*.
39 Compare Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, *„Opa war kein Nazi“*, 18.
40 He was not the only East Belgian to do so. See e.g. the story of Jakob Bosch in Heinrich Toussaint, *Verlorene Jahre* (Eupen: GEV, 1987), 75–79.

her perspective as a fiancée waiting at home: "On 17 September [1944], the day of Saint Hildegard, the bell rang. I went to open the door, and there he was. At first, I did not recognise him. He had gained weight. When he told me his story, he said that the nuns had fed him well: 'When I asked for a second beef steak, they gave me one.'"[41]

In the interview conducted in 2023, Matthias' daughter stressed that his desertion had been a "very brave" act.[42] But she also shared a third aspect of his war story, which had not been handed down to the grandchildren: "He has seen some of his comrades practically torn to shreds on the battlefield," which had had a traumatic impact on him.

Regarding Hildegard's RAD experience, most family members remember her mentioning that she had to go east for a year of forced labour, that leaving home had been difficult for her, and that she had broken her arm. The RAD had always remained a traumatic memory: "As a young girl I had to go far away into a foreign country all alone! No, my boy, this was not fun . . . "[43]

Memories concerning the Second World War have not been prevalent within the Beck-Peissen family. In the eyes of the five grandchildren, the image of their grandparents for this period contains just the few elements mentioned. Conversations about this period were very scarce, and the photo album was never discussed before the deaths of their grandparents. Compared to the German families interviewed by Harald Welzer and his colleagues for their study *"Opa war kein Nazi"*, the Beck-Peissen family narrative is much thinner. Yet, the comparison has its limits because that study focuses on selected stories linked to the memory of the Holocaust and its actors – aspects, which are absent from the Beck-Peissen family. Hence, it is not surprising that this East Belgian couple has not been the object of "cumulative heroism", as is the case for many German grandparents in the above-mentioned study.[44]

Regarding "outside triggers" mentioned in the same study,[45] i.e. books or films which may have influenced the plot of the family narrative, it must be said that none of the grandchildren recalls any war literature or films their grandparents were interested in. Only daughter Irmgard remembers two films from 1959: *So weit die Füße tragen*, a six-part television film based on the novel of the same name by Josef Martin Bauer about a German prisoner of war who escapes from

41 Beck, "Beck–Peissen".
42 ZOG, AZS-021.
43 Beck, "Beck-Peissen".
44 See also Harald Welzer and Claudia Lenz, „Opa in Europa: Erste Befunde einer vergleichenden Tradierungsforschung", in Welzer (ed.), *Krieg der Erinnerung*, 7–40, here 34.
45 Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, „*Opa war kein Nazi*", 105–110.

an East Siberian prison camp after the war, and *Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben*, based on the eponymous novel by Fritz Wöss, which focuses on the Battle of Stalingrad. It is worth noting that the latter focusses on the German soldiers of the 6th Army as victims and that it contains critical stances towards the war in general. But it can also be viewed as a depiction of the "innocent *Wehrmacht*"-myth and as an example of a "seduction narrative", according to which "the Germans were seduced and betrayed by Hitler and his elite".[46] In any case, scenes like those of the railway track demolitions by partisans, of heavy bombings or of severely wounded comrades must have echoed Matthias' experience. However, it is not known how he perceived the film. We can only say that the few elements of his story as it has been handed down have been confirmed by the archive material. In this case, the war experience was not interpreted in the light of fiction.

Nevertheless, the oral family story can be labelled as a "victim/hero narrative": Matthias Beck and Hildegard Peissen were both recruited against their will and injured during their service, and Matthias eventually deserted. Since this paper deals with the author's own grandparents and since the (unconscious) "loyalty ties" within a family can be very strong,[47] we shall pay particular attention to aspects which might challenge this narrative. Analysing this photo album, which was obviously destined for personal use only within the family or between the couple themselves, might *render visible* as yet unknown aspects of the war on the Eastern front, in a similar way as the private photos that were made public in the framework of the *Wehrmacht*-exhibition did. Here, they are taken out of the *family frame* (Marianne Hirsch).[48]

3.4 Presentation and Visual Analysis

The Beck-Peissens compiled an album themselves, instead of purchasing one of the types that were sold in stores, often displaying NS insignia on the cover and containing a quote by Hitler, Göring or some other Nazi personality on one of the first pages. The reasons for this were presumably both ideological and financial. Also, it did not contain a handwritten *Führereid*, added by many soldiers.[49]

46 See Michael Elm, "The Making of Holocaust Trauma in German Memory: Some Reflection about Robert Thalheim's Film 'And Along Come Tourists'", in Haim Fireberg and Olaf Glöckner (eds.), *Being Jewish in 21st–Century Germany* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2015), 33.

47 Welzer, Moller and Tschuggnall, *„Opa war kein Nazi“*, 64.

48 Helmut Lethen, "Schrecken und Schatten des *family frame* in Brieftaschen, privaten Sammlungen und öffentlichen Ausstellungen", in Kramer and Pelz (eds.), *Album*, 156–167, here 158.

49 Compare Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 29, 36–39.

Their photo album is entirely handmade, 26 x 16 cm, totalling 36 pages with 118 small photos, most of which are standardised 9 x 6 cm in size. Only three are post-card-sized (p. 1 and p. 27). All photos can clearly be dated to between October 1941 and the summer of 1944.

Picture 1: Cover of the photo album "Unsere Dienstzeit".

Hildegard Peissen created the album from scratch. The cardboard cover is wrapped in black cloth, the title embroidered in red: *Unsere Dienstzeit* ('Our period of service') (Picture 1). The same red thread was used for the binding. The inside consists of thin paper; coloured threads are sewn around the borders of every page, each of which contains several photos. Some of these are accompanied by a short comment or description (sometimes covered by the picture itself). Some photos have a caption at the back, which has been taken over or adapted in the album. The latter were written by both Matthias and Hildegard, as comments in the first person and slightly different handwritings in each part of the album indicate. From this we may conclude that the couple compiled the album together.

The first and larger part of the album is dedicated to Matthias' military service in the German army. Presumably, several soldiers took pictures and shared them among comrades afterwards. This is evidenced by the fact that various kinds of photo paper and black and white tints are visible, and the fact that Matthias is himself depicted in most of the photos.

The first photo shows Matthias Beck wearing a *Luftwaffe* uniform, as the flying eagle patch on his chest indicates (Picture 2). Indeed, he was part of an aircraft defence unit. The rear indicates: "Am 1. Oktober 1941 wurde ich Soldat." ('I became a soldier on 1 October 1941.'). This means that he was among the first conscripts from Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith. By decree of the Reich Ministry of the

Picture 2: Album page 1.

Interior of 23 September 1941, the inhabitants of the annexed region had been granted German citizenship, and one of the immediate consequences of this was the conscription into the RAD and the *Wehrmacht*.[50]

The second photo depicts Matthias Beck with a friend from his hometown. On the next page we see a group photo of his unit, taken on their 'first day of leave' (*Erster Ausgang!*) (Picture 3). The next images show the soldiers exercising in Lübeck. We see anti-aircraft-guns, soldiers digging trenches, as well as landscapes and moments of spare time and relaxation. These pages, depicting the soldiers' everyday lives, are typical of such albums.[51]

Picture 3: Album pages 2–3.

50 See e.g. Beck, Brüll, Quadflieg, "Weltkriege", 140–169.

51 See Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 33.

Picture 4: Album pages 6–7.

The following pages show Matthias and other soldiers in pyjamas near the Niendorf hospital, "*Kurz nach der Genesung*" ('shortly after recovery'), where some had a visit from their comrades and enjoyed free time at the beach (Picture 4). Everyone seems to be in a good mood in the photos, suggesting that their injuries or illnesses had not been too serious.

Occasionally, the soldiers would go for a photo shoot with a professional photographer, as the quality and setting of certain pictures clearly reveal. Prints of these photos were sometimes sent back home to the family, or to friends, creating "a bridge between front and *Heimat*",[52] just as letters and books did. But they were also of interest to create personal visual memories.

When Matthias Beck returned to his unit in the winter of 1943, he was sent east, as the handwritten captions reveal (e.g. "*Polotzk* [today Belarus] *im Winter 1943*", see Picture 5). The photos suggest a difficult and probably tiresome journey through mud and snow. At some point, the soldiers dug trenches and disrupted electrical cables and lines of communication (the caption reads "*Leitungsstörung*").

They were fulfilling their duty as German soldiers. We also see one result of their activities as an anti-aircraft-unit: a shot-down Douglas-Boston, with the soldiers posing on the plane wreck (Picture 6). Other photos and comments indicate that they were on the lookout for partisans (Picture 8). These photos will be analysed more closely below.

In between these photos of warfare, other pictures give insights into the soldiers' free time: when the weather was good, they took a swim in the river Dniester,[53] went on a motorbike tour, or visited a cemetery of honour.

52 Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 17.

53 The album indicates "Dnjester". However, the Dniester does not run through Belarus. The river may well be the Dnieper.

Picture 5: Album pages 14–15.

Picture 6: Album pages 18–19.

Picture 7: Album pages 16–17.

Some photos are of interest because they are traces of the soldiers' encounters with the local population, i.e. with people from a culture and language unknown to them (Picture 7). The corresponding handwritten comments are testimonies of the soldiers' integration of foreign words into their native language: The young women are labelled as "*Panjenkas*", a word meaning "Miss" (used by Germans at the time, though more often with the meaning "girl"). It was of course a typical and easy word to be picked up by the German soldiers.[54] The caption for a photo of a woman with a headscarf reads: "Eine holde Fee aus Russlands-Steppe [*sic*]", 'A lovely fairy from Russia's steppes'.

One picture shows a young boy, who is labelled in the caption as "*Ein kleiner Iwan!*". "Iwan" was a typical Russian first name commonly used by Germans to designate Russians.[55] It did not necessarily have a negative connotation, even in the general context of war. In specific cases though, it could be used derogatively to designate the Russian "enemy". As Katherina Filips emphasises: "In some instances, the same word assumed a new importance and took on a new emotional if not lexical significance, depending on the circumstances." Words are always bound to their context. In this case, it is unlikely that a young boy was viewed by the photographer or the creators of the photo album as an enemy. Moreover, the back side of the picture says: "*Was hältst Du von diesem kleinen Stromer? Ich finde ihn reizend*", 'What do you think of this little toddler? I think he's lovely'.

It should be mentioned that the soldiers generally had only stereotypical knowledge of the people they encountered, and they were confronted with a rural lifestyle that seemed 'poor' and 'primitive' to them.[56] Moreover, Nazi propaganda presented Russians as a 'primitive' and 'uncivilised race'. From the photos and their comments, it is not possible to conclude if the soldiers from this particular FLAK-unit viewed the local population in such terms.

In comparison to other albums analysed by Bopp, we can note that the depictions of Russian village life in the album do not contain any explicitly derogative elements or cynical comments.[57] Matthias seems to have met the local population with a certain "ethnographic" curiosity. There are no traces of racism, anti-Semitism, or feelings of superiority.

54 Katherina Filips, "Typical Russian Words in German War-Memoir Literature" in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter 1964), 407–414, 409.

55 Filips, "Russian Words", 412.

56 See Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009), 127–128.

57 See Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 69–94.

Other photos and their comments give insight into the perception of manhood at this time: it was important for a man to become a soldier, to wear a uniform, to work and not to complain about the difficulties encountered. Hence, they look proud in their uniforms, doing hard physical work. Men who tried to escape military service were often considered to not be “real men”, as cowards, no matter what personal or ideological motives drove them to escape. The photos also convey a sense of adventure linked to the last stage of coming-of-age. Most of these young men were leaving their homes for the first time, and discovered new territories and cultures.

The slightly humorous tone perceived in some comments was something Matthias Beck was known for within the family and among friends and colleagues. A good example is the comment below the last picture of the first part of the album, a postcard of the *Maison du Sacré Cœur* in Deauville, Normandy (Picture 8):

Picture 8: Album pages 26–27.

“*Hier war ich zwei Monate versteckt nachdem ich mich in Frankreich dünn gemacht habe*” (‘Here I was in hiding for two months after I silently escaped in France’), the caption reads. This is the only page that refers to his desertion, which will be discussed in detail below.

What follows are three photos of the young couple as fiancés (Picture 9). They were taken in front of Hildegard’s father’s shop on Bergstraße 46 (named Adolf-Hitler-Straße at that time) and at the viewing platform *Moorenhöhe* in Eupen. The gorget patches on Matthias’ uniform indicate that these photos were taken before the photos on the previous pages;[58] they thus disrupt the chronology (probably) respected so far. The photos of the young couple were placed here to create a link between the two parts of the album.

58 See *Handbook on German Army Identification* (Washington: War Department, 1943), 38.

Picture 9: Album pages 28–29.

The second part of the album is dedicated to Hildegard Peissen's experience as a "maid" of the RAD. The first photos show the camp of Grodden (Grodziczno, south of Gdansk) and a portrait of her 'After eight days', in which she wears the RAD-brooch (Picture 9). The following photos depict the obligatory flagpole, the *Lagerführerin* and the other *Arbeitsmaiden*.

Picture 10: Album pages 32–33.

Gardening and water pumping were clearly the main tasks of the group of women working there (Picture 10). The RAD service also included so-called *Außendienst* ('field service'), which Hildegard completed serving on a large farm in Löbau (Saxony). The last photo documents a broken arm, probably due to a work accident (Picture 11).

These last pages contrast with most of the other albums that Bopp analysed. She observed that "[t]he individuality of the war narratives and the personal fates often become manifest on the last album pages. Death, injury or imprisonment bring the

pictures to an abrupt end, leaving empty pages. The group picture with the family symbolises the return home; photos of reunions with comrades prolong the war album into the 1950s."[59]

It is not known whether Hildegard's broken arm put an end to her RAD service. In Matthias's case, his desertion – something barely mentioned in other albums – and the postcard of his hiding place mark the end of his photographic memories. The reunion photos of the couple chronologically precede his desertion. There are none at the end, which might indicate that they considered their times of service as a thing of the past. There are no photos of reunions with comrades, either. These most likely did not take place, due to the particular situation in East Belgium, where returning *Wehrmacht* soldiers had to face different forms of purges, and often imprisonment.[60] Finally, there are no empty pages. Paper was expensive after the war, and the couple had most likely calculated the number of sheets for the album.

Picture 11: Album page 36.

3.5 The Photo Album as a Historical Source

As with any other source material, these photos must be critically reviewed.[61] First of all, within an external source criticism, the following questions must be asked for each photo:

59 Bopp, *Fremde im Visier*, 11. My translation.

60 See Lejeune, *Die Säuberung*.

61 The following questions have been expanded on from the base delivered by Benoît Majerus, "L'utilisation de la Photographie dans la Wehrmachtsausstellung: Rendez-vous Manqué entre l'histoire et la Photographie", in *CHTP-BEG*, n°8 (2001), 367–384, here 371

- Is it an original print?
- Is it an unaltered print from the original negative?
- Who was the photographer?
- Where was the photo taken?
- Is the caption contemporary?
- Who has been keeping the photo?

Within the internal source criticism, we need to answer the following questions:
- What do we see in the photo?
- For what reason was the photo taken?
- Were the people depicted aware of being photographed?
- Does it convey a message intended by the photographer?
- Is the photo objective?

In the present case, we may assume that most photos contained in the album are original and unaltered prints from the negatives. In fact, the small size, the quality of the photos, and the context of the shots all indicate that most of the photos were taken with a small and easy-to-use camera, and that no enlarger was used for the prints. As mentioned above, the various soldiers and RAD women were probably the authors, and exchanged prints afterwards. There are two exceptions: the settings of a few photos (on pages 1, 11, 29 and 31) indicate that they were very likely taken in a photo studio, whereas the photo of the *Sacré Cœur* convent (Picture 8) is a postcard (the front side mentions Edition G. Petitpierre, Trouville). It was probably either bought by Matthias or given to him. Having deserted, it is only logical that he did not take a photo of his place of hiding.

The two photos showing the FLAK-unit posing on the plane wreck (Picture 6) seem to have been cropped. They are the only ones without white borders, and their edges are uneven, indicating cutting. Were these photos only cropped to "zoom in" on the soldiers depicted? Or was there something to hide? Or were the borders just slightly cut, so that the photos could fit into the album (or into a wallet, before they ended up in the album)? There is no answer to these questions.

The different shooting locations are generally mentioned in the handwritten captions, which were added when the album was compiled. In most cases, they were copied from the notifications on the backs of the photos, which were probably added shortly after the prints were received from the corresponding soldiers or RAD maids. One photo (Picture 2) contains an imprint with the name of a photo studio in Eupen. The very first photo (Picture 2) has two comments on the rear, written with two different pens. One comment indicates that the photo was first (meant to be) sent to a friend: "*Zur Erinnerung an meine Dienstzeit / Dein Freund Mathieu Beck*", 'In memory of my military service / Your friend Mathieu

Beck'. Matthias eventually did not send the photo, or retrieved it later adding a message now destined to himself and his family: "*Ich wurde Soldat am 1. Okt. 1941*", 'I became a soldier on 1 Oct. 1941'.

A description of the photos has already been provided in the previous section. At this point, it should be added that most pictures were staged: the people depicted pose, or are at least aware of being photographed. The aim of these photos was to create memories. They were primarily intended for the soldiers and RAD women who shot them and for their family, friends and comrades, to whom they sent some of them. They contained the implicit message that they were alive and well, and, moreover, indicated or explicitly revealed their whereabouts. In this sense, they also had the purpose of documenting this period of their lives. As for the album as a whole, it was primarily intended for the creators themselves. They might have shared it with their parents, and possibly select friends and former comrades, but not with their grandchildren, as mentioned above. It was kept in the Beck-Peissen's home until 2007, after which it became part of the private archive of Irmgard Wintgens-Beck.

The question of whether the photos are "objective" requires further discussion, because taking, developing, printing, displaying and archiving photos all imply various selection processes. A photo is not simply or necessarily a reflection of reality, although it always shows a "fragment of truth", as Siegfried Kracauer once put it. It shows something that was in front of the photographer's lens at some point. One of the main purposes of photography is to document reality and life, and to attract attention to things that are hardly (consciously) visible or difficult to access for the general public.[62] In this sense, a photo generally draws attention to the elements depicted. Yet, each photograph shows only what is contained in the frame, i.e. what the photographer decided to frame at a given moment in time. This is a *first selection*. It is, in fact, a double selection, for the photographer also decides on the exact moment that will be captured. A *second selection* is operated when the film is developed: not all films are eventually processed. Many are forgotten or lost, some are damaged and involuntarily exposed to light. The printing process is linked to a *third selection*: not all photos are printed, and some are printed several times, in some cases with (slight or major) alterations. The persons archiving the photos make a *fourth selection*, for they might, for various reasons, not keep all the photos that were on the film. They might leave some out, and add others from other sources (friends, comrades) – which was obviously the

62 See André Rouillé and Jean-Claude Lemagny (ed.), *Histoire de la photographie* (Paris: Larousse-Bordas, 1986); André Rouillé, *La Photographie, entre document et art contemporain*, "Folio Essais" (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

case for this photo album. This leads us to the *fifth and final selection*, which is operated by the person(s) compiling the photo album. Not only do they choose which photos will make it into the album, they also organise them, thus creating associations and possibly new meanings. Sometimes, the author of the album adds captions, which will allow the identification of persons, places or events. In this way, photo albums are conscious creations of memory.

The photos within the Beck-Peissen album are memorial documents of their lives between October 1941 and August 1944. They document travels, military actions, everyday life, encounters with the local population, work, illness, injury, desertion. Some implicitly convey a sense of adventure, curiosity, and discovery.

3.6 Challenging the Victim Narrative

Due to the inherent nature of photography, many things are not shown. These are, of course, hard to guess. Yet, some photos give rise to questions linked to the soldiers' actions. A good example are those of the shot–down plane. We see the soldiers proudly posing on the wreck. But what happened to the pilot(s)? Did they manage to eject and open their parachute in time? Did they survive? Were they made prisoners? And what was cut away from the photo?

Regarding the photos of the soldiers with the local population, we wonder: how did they interact? How did the young soldiers behave towards the local women?

Two photos entitled "*Auf Partisanenjagd*", 'Hunting partisans' (Picture 12) raise further questions about the soldiers' relations with the local population. The first photo shows a group of soldiers in civilian clothes standing next to a raised hide. The second photo shows one of the soldiers next to the same hide and a train. The caption '*hunting* partisans' indicates that the 'enemy' was, in line with typical war propaganda, dehumanised and considered as an animal to be hunted down. In the specific context of partisan warfare (see below), we must wonder to what extent the soldiers had been influenced by war propaganda, and, more specifically, Nazi ideology.

Neither the location nor the date of these two photos are known. Below them is a portrait of Matthias with the caption 'Witebsk cemetery of honour'. It is impossible to tell if the two photos above were taken in the same area and during the same period. Some photos on the previous pages were taken in winter, whereas the 'hunting partisans' photos show very lightly-dressed soldiers, indicating warm temperatures. They must have been taken at another moment.

Picture 12: Focus on album page 26.

Nevertheless, these photos need particular attention, given the context of the partisan war in the Soviet Union.[63] Following the German invasion, Stalin had called on the population in the occupied territories to organise a full-scale war in the enemy's Hinterland.[64] Between 1941 and 1944, over half a million Soviet civilians joined the war against the *Wehrmacht* and its allies. With numerous acts of sabo-

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63 See *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2021 [3rd ed.]), chapter "Partisanenkrieg"; Lutz Klinkhammer, "Der Partisanenkrieg der Wehrmacht 1941–1944", in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität,* Sonderausgabe, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012), 815–836; Timm C. Richter, "Die Wehrmacht und der Partisanenkrieg in den besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion", in *Die Wehrmacht*, ed. Müller and Volkmann, 837–856; Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009); Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Verbrechen 1939–1945*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2022); Majerus, "Photographie"; Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2002).

64 The following short overview is based on Thomas Jander, "Der Partisanenkrieg in der Sowjetunion", in Lebendiges Museum Online (LEMO/DHM), 15 May 2015, https://www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/der-zweite-weltkrieg/kriegsverlauf/partisanenkrieg-im-osten.html (31 August 2023).

tage committed during the Rails War,[65] the partisans considerably impaired the lines of communication and, thus, the supply of personnel and equipment to the German troops. Massive-scale German retaliatory measures, mostly led and executed by the SS and HSSPF, and sometimes assisted by local auxiliaries and *Wehrmacht* troops, resulted in an estimated 300,000–350,000 deaths in Belarus.[66]

The voluminous catalogue of the exhibition *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht* includes long lists of German "*Großaktionen*", 'large-scale operations' against partisans, which took place in 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944 in Belarus, several times mentioning the cities of Polotsk and Witebsk,[67] which are the only two Belarusian place names mentioned in our photo album. However, as some of the pictures are undated, no clear conclusions can be drawn. The second photo might indicate that the soldiers did take part in counter sabotage operations during the Rails War.

If they were indeed involved in the partisan war, it is worth noting that, as German soldiers, the members of this FLAK-unit would have lived in constant fear of partisan attacks when moving into new territory, and had to act accordingly to protect their own lives.

Ultimately, the following questions remain unanswered: did they find any partisans? If so, did they shoot them? Did they hang them? Did they take them prisoner? Did they surrender? Were they disarmed and dismissed? What room for manoeuvre did the soldiers have? Why were these photos included in the album? Out of pride? Or does their presence simply indicate that nothing tragic happened? In any case, these photos challenge a simplistic victim or hero narrative.

3.7 Challenging the Hero Narrative

Matthias' personal files at the Archives Service for War Victims provide details about his military career, his injury and, eventually, his desertion. The documents confirm that he began his service as a gunner in an anti-aircraft unit[68] in Barth/

65 The "Rails War" refers to a series of operations carried out in 1943 by partisans in German-occupied Belarus and Ukraine with the intention of disrupting German logistics by destroying rail lines, thus preventing the arrival of new equipment and manpower to the front. See e.g. Geoffrey Jukes, *World War II: the Eastern Front, 1941–1945* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2010), 51–52.

66 *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht*, 429, 429–505.

67 *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht*, 454–455.

68 Allocation according to WASt data in ASWV, IF670090, personal file Matthias Beck (born 1 February 1922) to obtain the status "Dienstverpflichteter in der Deutschen Armee" ('Forcefully conscripted into the German Army'). German text: *1 October 1941: Stabsbatterie / Leichte Flak Ersatzabteilung 91; 21 March 1942: 4. Batterie/Flak-Artillerie-Schule II; 7 April 1942: Reservelazar-*

Pomerania, with which he was dispatched to Belarus.[69] The gorget patches indicate that Matthias rose over the years to the rank of corporal (*Gefreiter*) and, finally, to lance corporal (*Obergefreiter*).[70] The files do not mention any German military decoration. He appears to have been automatically promoted over time. An excerpt from the *Wehrmachtauskunftstelle* (WASt) indicates the different stages of the first part of his service[71]:

01.10.1941	Staff Battery / Light Flak Replacement Division 91
21.03.1942	4th Battery/Flak Artillery School II
07.04.1942	Reserve hospital II Lübeck. Shell splinters in the shoulder and back of the head
24.04.1942	Niendorf reserve hospital
06.06.1942	Discharge from the military hospital. 3 months garrison

On 28 March 1942, Matthias was injured during an air raid. With shell splinters in his left shoulder and in the back of his head, he was admitted to Lübeck's Reserve Hospital II on 7 April. At the end of the month, he was transferred to the Niendorf reserve hospital. These spells in hospital are documented by corresponding photos (see above). According to family history, the shrapnel could not be removed and would remain for the rest of his life, sometimes causing severe headaches.

The WASt also indicates that his first home leave was in June 1943, which is the moment the three photos with his fiancée were taken, i.e. shortly after she had started her labour service.

His desertion is also attested: after the war, around 1948, Matthias Beck had introduced a request for the official status of "Refractory Soldier of the German Army", in the hope of receiving some kind of recognition of his situation and compensation from the Belgian state for his years of service in the *Wehrmacht*. As his own testimony reveals, he knew that he was not precisely a "refractory soldier", but a "deserter". The category for "Forcefully recruited by the German Army" did not exist until 1974. Thus, he took an adaptive stance and introduced the request for a status that came closest to his actual situation. When interrogated by the

ett II Lübeck. Granatsplitter in der Schulter und am Hinterkopf; 24 April 1942: Reservelazarett Niendorf; 6 June 1942: Entlassung aus dem Lazarett. 3 Monate Garnison.

69 ASWV, R536858/24495, personal file Matthias Beck (born 1 February 1922) to obtain the status "Refractory soldier of the German Army".

70 Career according to collar patches on the photos. See *Handbook on German Army Identification*, 38.

71 Allocation according to WASt data in ASWV, IF670090.

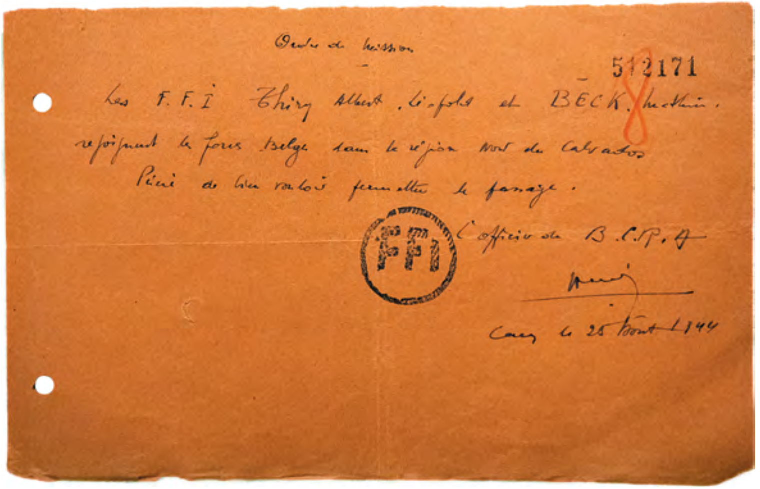
police in 1952, he explained that he protested on three occasions against his conscription in 1941, and that he eventually deserted in January 1944:

> It is true that I asked at the time, I think around 1948, for recognition as a Wehrmacht refractory. In fact, I am not a refractory in the sense of the word, but a DESERTER. In fact, when I received an order to join, I wrote to the Wehrmacht Oberkommando and to the Montjoie recruitment office, and even to the American Consulate in Cologne, claiming to be born Belgian. I tried to get the latter to intervene because in 1941, there was no Belgian consulate in Germany. As a response, I received a formal summons to carry out my order to join under penalty of more serious sanctions and prosecution. I then entered the service of the Wehrmacht in the first days of October 1941, which represented the very first contingent of draftees from our region. I was assigned to the *air defence*. After six weeks of instruction, I was sent to the Russian front, where I stayed for three years.[72] In January 1944, our company was sent to France. At the first opportunity, i.e. 8 days after my arrival in France, in January 1944, I deserted. I made contact with the F.F.I. [Forces françaises de l'intérieur], with whom I lived for a few months in the countryside. After the landing, I waited for the Liberation by taking refuge in the sisters' convent in Trouville-Deauville. After the passage of the allied troops, in this case the Belgian troops, I followed them into Belgium, all the way to Brussels. I then went to see my parents, who were in Brussels at the time, where they had taken refuge in 1941. I would like to add that after my desertion, I was sentenced to death by a German Feldgericht. As a witness I quote the name ZIMMERMANN, Henri, who reported this fact to me on his return [. . .].[73]

72 It was rather around two and a half years, according to the dates indicated in different other sources. Moreover, this period does not match, if he was sent to Normandy in January 1944.

73 ASWV, R536858/24495, testimonies Matthieu Beck and Henri Zimmermann, Pro-Justitia, police station Eupen, 21 February 1952. Original text: "Il est exact que j'ai demandé en son temps, je crois vers 1948, la reconnaissance comme réfractaire de la Wehrmacht. Au fond, je ne suis pas réfractaire au sens du mot, mais bien DESERTEUR. En effet, au reçu d'un ordre de rejoindre, j'ai par écrit fait valoir ma qualité de Belge né à l'Oberkommando de la Wehrmacht et au bureau de recrutement de Montjoie, et même auprès du Consulat américain à Cologne. J'ai voulu faire intervenir ce dernier du fait qu'il n'y avait pas en 1941 de Consulat belge en Allemagne. Comme toute réponse, j'ai reçu une sommation formelle d'exécuter mon ordre de rejoindre sous peines de sanctions et poursuites plus graves. Je suis alors entré au service de la Wehrmacht dans les premiers jours du mois d'octobre 1941, ce qui représentait le tout premier contingent d'incorporés de force de notre région. J'étais versé à la D.C.A. [défense contre l'aviation]. Après 6 semaines d'instructions déjà, on m'expédiait au front russe, où je suis resté pendant 3 ans. En janvier 1944 notre compagnie fut envoyée en France. À la première occasion qui fut m'offerte, c.à.d. 8 jours après mon arrivée en France, soit donc en janvier 1944, j'ai déserté. J'ai pris contact avec les F.F.I. [Forces françaises de l'intérieur], avec lesquels j'ai vécu pendant quelques mois en campagne. Après le débarquement, j'ai attendu la libération en me réfugiant au couvent des sœurs à Trouville-Deauville. Après le passage des troupes alliées, en l'occurrence les troupes belges, j[e les] ai suivis jusqu'en Belgique à Bruxelles. Je me suis alors rendu chez mes parents, qui se trouvaient alors à Bruxelles, s'étant réfugiés eux aussi en 1941. Je tiens à ajouter qu'après ma désertion, j'ai été condamné à mort par un Feldgericht allemand. Comme témoin je cite le nomme ZIMMER-

His desertion and the contact with the FFI and allied troops were indeed confirmed by a document from the FFI entitled "*Ordre de mission*" ('mission order'), (Picture 13), as well as by Henri (Heinrich) Zimmermann, who was also interrogated by the police: "*Durch diese Desertation wurde BECK ohne weiteres zum Tode verurteilt.*" ('As a result of this desertion, BECK was sentenced to death without further discussion.') He added: "*Diese Entscheidung wurde dem Bataillon ganz öffentlich und feierlichst bekannt gemacht.*" ('This decision was made known to the battalion publicly and most solemnly.')[74] Unfortunately, there is no archival trace of the written protests sent to the recruitment office in Montjoie, to the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, and the US consulate in Cologne.[75]



Ordre de mission

512171

Les F.F.I Thiry Albert, Léopold et BECK Mathieu rejoignent les forces belges dans la région nord du Calvados.
Prière de bien vouloir permettre le passage.

FFI

L'officier du B.C.R.A

Caen le 25 Août 1944

Picture 13: "Ordre de mission" from French resistance signed by an intelligence officer of the *Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action* (BCRA) ('Central Bureau of Intelligence and Operations') in Caen and dated 25 August 1944, stating that Matthieu Beck was part of the FFI (ASWV, R536858/24495, photo: Philippe Beck).

MANN, Henri, qui m'a d'ailleurs rapporté ce fait à son retour [. . .]." All capitalised words are as such in the original text.

74 ASWV, R536858/24495, testimonies Beck and Zimmermann, 21 February 1952.

75 An in-depth search on Invenio (*Bundesarchiv*) did not yield any results regarding these documents. David A. Langbart from the US National Archives at College Park, MD kindly replied to my request on 17 November 2022 with the following mail: "RG 84: Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State includes the extant files of the U.S. embassy and consulates. We searched the files of the U.S. consulate in Cologne relating to the protection of foreign interests. We located no files on or references to any person with the name Matthias/Matthieu Beck."

Apparently, Matthias Beck deliberately chose to give his testimony in French, his second language, probably because it was the native language of the interrogating police officer. Matthias might also have wanted to come across as a 'good Belgian' in this period of suspicion after the war, or he chose French because he had mastered the language and was simply pleased to speak it – or all three of these reasons. As his own testimony already foreshadowed, he did not obtain the status "Refractory soldier of the German army", as he had worn a German uniform and, hence, did not fulfil all the requirements. In 1978, he did, however, fulfil all the conditions to obtain the status of "Dienstverpflichteter der deutschen Armee", 'Forcefully conscripted into the German army', which had eventually been created four years before.[76]

On closer examination of the available source material, Matthias' testimony from 1952 is problematic. As mentioned above, the comments written on the back of some photos in the album are difficult to access, because they have been glued onto the pages. Nevertheless, the back of one picture indicates: (Picture 14): "Feuerstellung an der . . . Orscha-Smolensk während der 5. Abwehrschlacht im März 1944", 'Firing position at the . . . Orscha-Smolensk during the 5th defensive battle in March 1944'. The date is readable. This means that either the indication behind the photo is incorrect, or that Matthias provided the police with wrong information. The location of the *91. leichte Falkersatzabteilung* in January-March 1944 could not be traced.[77] The only indication present in one of Heinrich Zimmermann's files at the Archives Service for War Victims is in the report written by his doctor in 1970 (!), which states that the division was moved to Normandy on 6 June 1944.[78] Whether they were moved on D-Day is questionable. The files state that Zimmermann, still in German uniform and involved in the Battle of the Bulge, was taken prisoner by American forces and was not released until 1 August 1945, and that he claimed to have light, long-term injuries due to the rough climate in Russia and his custody in the open-air prison camp.[79]

In fact, in a previous document, i.e. an enquiry form to obtain the status of "Refractory Soldier" dated 1 July 1949, Matthias Beck had indicated 12 May 1944 as

76 See ASWV, IF670090 and "Loi du 21 novembre 1974 portant sur le statut de l'incorporé de force dans l'armée allemande et de ses ayants droit", in *Pasinomie* 1974, 1084–1087, available online: https://zeitschichten.be/en/documents/424 (31 August 2023). For the context of creation of the law see zeitschichten.be/en/explorations/forced-recruits (31 August 2023).

77 Karl-Heinz Hummel only gives information from the summer of 1944 on, when the *91. leichte Flakersatzabteilung* was based in Zingst. See *Die deutsche Flakartillerie, 1935–1945: Ihre Großverbände und Regimenter* (Zweibrücken: VDM, 2010), p. 454–455.

78 ASWV-p500609, Heinrich Zimmermann (born 1 December 1922).

79 ASWV-d264395, ASWV-IF 672039, ASWV-p500609. He mainly complains about nightmares (post-traumatic stress disorder) and a loss of strength in his wrists.

the date of his desertion,[80] which in the light of the photo album analysis seems more plausible than January 1944. Why then did he communicate a different date to the police in 1952? The most likely explanation is that he hoped to gain a better chance to obtain compensation from the state. As mentioned above, there was no solution for the *Wehrmacht* soldiers from East Belgium until 1974.

Picture 14: Album pages 22–23. Page 22: Below the photo on the left is written “Winter 1943–44”. Page 23: the photo in the top right has a handwritten comment on the back dating it to March 1944.

4 Ego-Documents from East Belgian RAD Women

The 1974 law creating the status of “Dienstverpflichteter der deutschen Armee” also took into account the women who had fulfilled their labour service. Hildegard Peissen obtained this status in 1982.[81] However, the file is rather thin, and the information therein has presumably been copied from the photo album. Here too, the album was a complementary source, which (subjectively) reveal elements beyond her personal file at the Archives Service for War Victims.

A comprehensive collection of memories of conscripted women from Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith, like the one entitled *Malgré-elles* by French author and director Nina Barbier[82] for Alsace and Moselle, does not exist. However, there are a few ego-documents, such as the ones presented here, as well as audiovisual testimonies

80 ASWV, R536858/24495, Formulaire de Renseignement, Demande de reconnaissance de la qualité de Réfractaire à la Wehrmacht, Eupen, 1 July 1949.
81 ASWV, IF672105, personal file Hildegard Peissen (born 26 June 1924) to obtain the status “Dienstverpflichtete in der Deutschen Armee”.
82 Barbier, *Malgré-elles*.

recorded in recent years by the Centre for East Belgian History (*Zentrum für Ostbelgische Geschichte*).[83] More ego-documents might be found in personal archives.

Inge Gerckens-Schmitz (1923–2019) from Eupen mentioned that she had mixed memories of her RAD service, which began in October 1941. She was also among the first conscripts from her town, and is yet another example of a young woman from an openly "pro-Belgian" family. Her father was the antimilitarist writer and journalist Peter Schmitz, who had been active for allied secret services until his untimely death in 1938.[84] In her unpublished memoir "Grenznah", written at the end of the 1990s, she complains about the strict discipline and about fanatical National Socialist women, but she also highlights humane encounters. Presumably due to the activities of her father, she was subjected to an extended period of service until the end of the war, when she witnessed the bombing of Nuremberg in 1945:

> We squatted in our barracks. I was so frightened I choked with fear, and then it happened. A firebomb hit our wooden barrack, which immediately went up in flames. Marthe and I rushed outside – no alternative but to go for it. Marthe was hit by a burning wooden plank; she was killed instantly. The embers burned my hair (which never grew back!). The girls ran screaming to the gate. This was hell![85]

The journal of Bertha Ludwigs (1927–2018), on the other hand, kept at the State Archives in Eupen, is an example showing that labour service could also be a positive experience. In a photo album and diary created by the young woman in 1941, she wrote in anticipation of the "first flag salute": (Pictures 15–16): "Der erste Mai rückt heran. Heute soll Lagereröffnung sein. In den Abendrunden der vorhergegangenen Tage übten wir schon tüchtig darauf, damit dieser Tag recht festlich würde."[86] ('May Day is approaching. The camp is to open today. We practised hard during the evening rounds the previous days to make sure this day would be quite festive.') On the flag salute, she writes:

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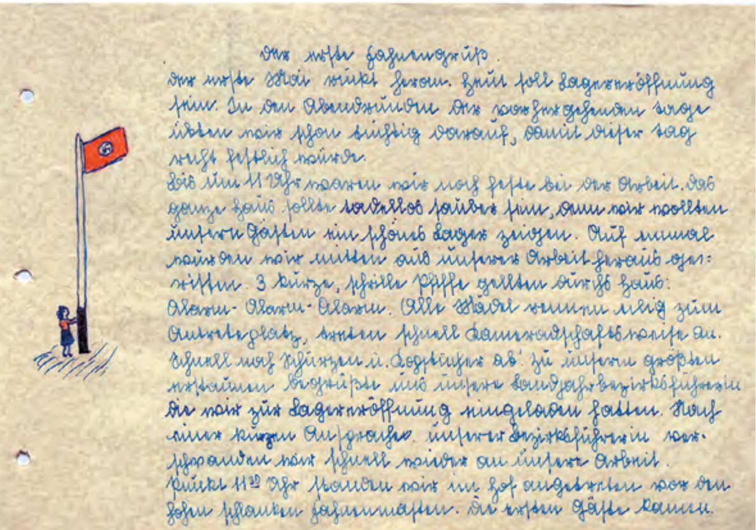
83 For an inventory of audiovisual testimonies see the website of the *Zentrum für Ostbelgische Geschichte*: www.geschichte.be/zeitzeugen (31 August 2023).

84 See Beck, *Umstrittenes Grenzland*, 383–420, or Philippe Beck and Etienne Verhoeyen, "Agents Secrets à la Frontière Belgo-Allemande: Des Services de Renseignements Alliés et Allemands entre 1920 et 1940 dans la Région d'Eupen", in *Cahiers d'histoire du temps présent = Bijdragen tot de eigentijdse geschiedenis*, n° 21 (Brussels: CEGES/SOMA, 2009), 93–134.

85 Inge Gerckens-Schmitz, "Grenznah" (Eupen, 2000). Original text: „Wir hockten in unserer Baracke, vor Angst hatte ich ein Würgen im Hals und dann geschah es: Unsere Holzbaracke wurde von einer Brandbombe getroffen, sie brannte lichterloh. Marthe und ich stürzten nach draußen, nichts wie weg. Marthe wurde von einem brennenden Holzplanken getroffen, sie war sofort tot. Die Glut versengte meine Haare, (die nie mehr nachwuchsen!) schreiend liefen die Mädchen zum Tor, es war die Hölle!"

86 State Archives in Eupen, Souvenir album of Bertha Ludwigs (1927–2018).



Pictures 15–16: Souvenir album of Bertha Ludwigs (1927–2018) (State Archives in Eupen).

A song was belted out: Where we stand, loyalty stands . . . ! Poems and slogans followed, intended to tell us what the flag means to all of us. And then came the command: Attention! Hoist the flag! And we looked up to the flags with bright eyes, as they rose for the first time in the fresh morning wind. Our district leader puts this day in our hearts with serious, admonishing words, telling us how proud we can be that we are RAD maidens and that we can do our

> bit for the big picture. A brief address by the mayor of the village and national songs brought the first flag salute to a close. It was probably the most beautiful day we had in the camp.[87]

Here, a further look into the family history and the war victim files would be required to provide a broader context. The examples presented here show that the experiences of East Belgian RAD women need further investigation on the base of the available source material.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Biographical Turning Points, Scopes for Action and Adaptive Stances

The annexation of East Belgium by Germany in 1940 and the conscription of Matthias Beck in 1941 had direct consequences for the family. On 10 May 1940, the *historical turning point* coincides with a *biographical turning point*. The parents, as well-known "pro-Belgians", chose to abandon their home and move to occupied Brussels, where Nikolaus became active in a resistance network. This also marks the separation from their only child, Matthias, who was prevented from crossing the border.

1 October 1941 is another clear biographical turning point for Matthias Beck and Hildegard Peissen. As Matthias is conscripted into the *Wehrmacht*, their wedding projects are put on hold. According to the memories of their daughter, he said back then to his fiancée: "Who knows whether I'll come back."[88]

Not until the liberation of Brussels on 3 September 1944 was Matthias able to reunite with his parents. In mid-September, the family finally returned to Eupen, where Matthias went to see his fiancée two days later. They finally celebrated their wedding in August 1945. Hence, the historical turning point of the liberation also had a direct impact on the biographies of the family members.

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87 Original text: "Ein Lied klingt auf: Wo wir stehen steht die Treue . . . ..! Gedichte und Sprüche folgen, die uns sagen sollen, was die Fahne uns allen bedeutet. Und dann kommt das Kommando: Achtung! Hisst Flagge! Und mit leuchtenden Augen sehen wir zu den Fahnen auf, die sich nun im frischen Morgenwind zum erstenmal emporschwingen. Mit ernsten, mahnenden Worten legt uns unsere Bezirksführerin diesen Tag ans Herz, sagt uns, wie stolz wir sein dürfen, daß wir Landjahrmädel sind und daß wir ein ganz klein wenig zum großen Ganzen beitragen dürfen. Eine kurze Begrüßung durch den Bürgermeister des Dorfes und die Nationallieder beenden den ersten Fahnengruß. Das war wohl der schönste Tag, den wir im Lager erlebten."

88 Beck, "Beck-Peissen".

The method of combining ego-documents, other archive sources, and family history has given a deeper insight into the scope the various protagonists had and which adaptive stances they took when they had to face major turning points:

- As a consequence of the annexation, Nikolaus Beck refused to continue his work at the municipality. Moreover, he and his wife decided to move to Welkenraedt, and eventually to Brussels, where he chose to join a resistance group. The motivation behind these decisions was clearly ideological. As a member of the *Demokratischer Heimatblock*, he was an opponent of National Socialism and wanted Eupen-Malmedy-Sankt Vith to remain a part of Belgium.
- Matthias Beck's attempt to follow his parents to Brussels failed, and his attempts to avoid conscription into the *Wehrmacht* were in vain. Under pressure, he took an adaptative stance and eventually complied. He might have hoped for a short war, just like many others did, but ended up living the life of a German soldier for over two and a half years. Based on the photo album, he seems to have behaved like a regular German soldier on the Eastern front. As member of an anti-aircraft-unit, he formed part of a group that shot down planes and defended German positions. The men also seem to have been confronted with the presence of partisans in their area, as one photo caption shows. How much scope did the soldiers have in this situation? Were they actively involved in the partisan war? These questions must remain unanswered. Nevertheless, they challenge a simplistic victim/hero narrative.
- In 1944, Matthias finally seized the occasion to desert in Normandy, even though, if caught, the consequence would have been the death penalty.[89] His scope was different now: such an act would have been much riskier in the east, where he did not speak the language and where he was far from home, whereas in northern France, he was much closer; he spoke French and had proof of his Belgian citizenship. Moreover, he might have seen beforehand the possibility of contacting the French resistance. The circumstances were clearly different and more favourable for desertion in 1944.[90]

  The apparently contradictory information regarding the date of his desertion, as revealed by the photos and one of his personal files at the Archives Service for War Victims, may also reflect an adaptative stance; since there was no status and compensation for former East Belgian *Wehrmacht* soldiers

89 The fate of certain executed deserters and resistance fighters is documented in Philippe Beck and Nicholas Williams, *Gerettete Erinnerung: Vergessene Kriegsschicksale aus der Provinz Lüttich/ Mémoire sauvée: Destins de guerre oubliés de la province de Liège*, Eupen, ZOG, 2022. Online version: https://gerettete–erinnerung.geschichte.be (31 August 2023).

90 See also Stroh, 46 and 52.

after the war, he decided to try to obtain the status of refractory soldier, even if this implied stretching the truth a bit.

– For Hildegard Peissen, there are no known acts of resistance in any form. The family assumes that she was afraid of legal consequences. She, too, took an adaptative stance towards the circumstances, travelling hundreds of kilometres into unknown territory. After the war, she became in some way an archivist, in the sense that she created a photo album of these "years of service". The creation of the album can also be considered as a sign of a biographical turning point, a point where the Second World War had become history, where these photographic memories could be archived and put in a drawer.

5.2 Challenging the Base Narrative

The "base narrative"[91] of East Belgium's history during the annexation had long been dominated by stories of victims: victims of the annexation, forcefully recruited men and women, fallen soldiers, victims of the Battle of the Bulge . . . Less convenient elements, such as active participation in the National Socialist system or involvement in any kind of killing, had generally been cut out. Not until the late 1980s and early 1990s did historiography in various European countries shed a more differentiated light on this part of history.[92] This has also been the case in East Belgium.[93] Today, the so-called "forcefully recruited" by the *Wehrmacht* are no longer solely seen as victims. This literature has opened the path for more differentiated views on both individual and family biographies. The present study has shown that a critical analysis of a photo album can provide new insights, and that it may challenge, on a collective level, the "base narrative", but also, on the individual level, the simplistic victim and hero narratives that run through families.

As mentioned at the beginning of this contribution, there was neither "family storytelling" nor collective remembering within the Beck family regarding these war experiences. According to Massenaux, Nikolaus Beck gladly told the anecdote of when he rid himself of the collaborators who wanted to check on his activity at the Ministry in Brussels. However, his granddaughter and great-grandchildren only

91 Welzer and Lenz, "Opa in Europa", 17.

92 Welzer and Lenz, "Opa in Europa", 17–27.

93 For a critical overview of scientific literature see Lejeune and Brüll, "Geschichtsschreibung als Spiegel des Zeitgeists", 366–391.

know this story from Massenaux's publication. Only then did it become part of very occasional family storytelling. Granddaughter Irmgard stressed that he never boasted about his resistance activity,[94] nor was it mentioned during the funeral service or in the local newspaper, as it has frequently been the case for former resistance members in the rest of the country. While, especially in the French-speaking part of Belgium, families stress their ancestors' membership in the Resistance and decorate graves accordingly with a commemorative element, such features are almost absent in East Belgium.

In 2007, Irmgard Wintgens-Beck shared her memory with the author that Heinrich Toussaint, editor-in-chief of the *Grenz-Echo*, had wanted to include Matthias' story in his articles and books about war destinies published in the 1980s,[95] but that her father had refused. According to her memory, this was because one of his comrades from Eupen had wanted to desert with him and was closely watched after his friend's disappearance. This can only have been the above-mentioned Heinrich Zimmermann, for he was the only other soldier from Eupen in this division. It is all the more plausible, as the latter had been traumatised by his further war experience and his imprisonment. Matthias might not have wanted to stir up his comrade's painful memories. Another further, possible explanation of Matthias' refusal is that he remembered his false testimony (if this was indeed the case) from 1952 – which had been confirmed by Zimmermann's testimony testimony, something he did not want to stir up either.

The analysis of the Beck-Peissen photo album sheds new light on the family history, and on the war experience of East Belgian soldiers in general. A victim or hero narrative is often not as simple as it is remembered. In particular, the photos referring to the presence of partisans on the Eastern front raise questions regarding the participation of East Belgian *Wehrmacht* soldiers in war crimes. They contribute to challenging the commonly spread narrative of East Belgian soldiers as victims.

Regarding East Belgian RAD women, the case of Hildegard Peissen shows that women could also obtain the status "Dienstverpflichteter der deutschen Armee", a fact which has been overlooked in this field so far and which opens up new research perspectives. These can be all the more interesting when there is other source material available, such as the ego documents presented above.

94 ZOG, AZS – 021.

95 Toussaint, *Verlorene Jahre*; *Bittere Erfahrungen*.

5.3 Many Different Stories

The destinies presented here are just a few among many different stories. Some men and women from East Belgium were proud to follow their conscription orders. They had German-nationalist feelings, felt they were doing their duty, or wanted to correspond to common images of manhood or womanhood at the time. For some, it was a welcome adventure allowing them to see other parts of the world. Others escaped from the German army or labour service and went into hiding. Some deserted. A small number became members of a resistance network. Others still adapted their stance in order to avoid problems, or were forced to do so and tried to manage their situation as best as possible. The latter presumably represent the majority among the conscripts from the various border regions that are the subject of research in this volume.

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Monika Kokalj Kočevar

Slovenians Forcibly Conscripted into the Wehrmacht – Analysis of Diaries of their Wartime Experiences

1 Introduction

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, with a Slovenian population of around 1,200,000 in the north, within the so called Dravska Banovina, was invaded on 6 April 1941. After the division of the Slovenian territory by German, Italian, and Hungarian forces, as well as the Independent State of Croatia, a German civil administration was set up in the northern part, in Gorenjska (Upper Carniola), some municipalities in Carinthia, and in Spodnja Štajerska (Lower Styria). The territory was incorporated into the XVIIIth Military District.[1] Terror and a strong suppression of national identity were already present in the first months of occupation. The German occupation authorities Germanised the population and banned the public use of the Slovenian language. More than 63,000 Slovenians were expelled to Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and into the Third Reich; ethnic Germans from Italian occupied territory, Bukovina, and Bessarabia were settled in their homes. Most catholic priests were also expelled to Croatia. Almost 22,000 Slovenians were deported to Nazi concentration camps. Many were imprisoned or sent into forced labour. Occupation units executed more than 3,000 hostages, and mass executions were carried out during large-scale military operations. The Jewish community from the German occupied territory of Slovenian Prekmurje was deported to Auschwitz concentration camp in 1944. Many members of the Roma community also lost their lives during the war. In Upper Carniola, the German authorities built a branch of Mauthausen concentration camp, Ljubelj-south concentration camp, and near Trieste, a concentration camp in the former rice factory, Rižarna, was established. Its formal legal annexation to the Third Reich was postponed, until after the end of the war.

After the population was given probationary German citizenship in 1942, forced conscription into the German army began. The first Slovenians from Lower Styria were conscripted in July 1942. In Upper Carniola and Carinthia, this began half a year later, in January 1943. Men born between 1908 and 1928 were called up

1 Zdravko Klanjšček et al., *Narodnoosvobodilna vojna na Slovenskem* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga), 31–73. Tone Ferenc, "Okupacija slovenskega ozemlja," in *Slovenska novejša zgodovina 1848–1992*, ed. Jasna Fischer (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2005), 581.

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from Lower Styria, and those from Upper Carniola between 1916 and 1926.[2] Slovenians fought on the Eastern Front, North African battlefields, the Western Front, in the far north, and elsewhere. It is estimated that 60,000 to 70,000 Slovenians were forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht between 1942 and 1945. This represented more than 8% of the population of German occupied Slovenian territories.

Over 11,000 Slovenians died as German soldiers on the battlefield and as POWs, and over 15,000 returned as invalids.[3] Many returned home as late as the 1950s.

The situation in post-war socialist Yugoslavia excluded those forcibly conscripted from claiming the status of victims of war, and those that died were not included in the WW2 casualty figures.[4] They were often treated as second class citizens, dependent on the control and manipulation of the local communist authorities. Many were arrested, sent to prison or interrogated by the secret police as late as the 1960s.[5] Former Wehrmacht soldiers and even their family members had problems enrolling in high schools, getting better jobs, were unable to get bank loans, etc. They were also not allowed to organize their own societies or associations, and those who initiated such societies were imprisoned. Only a few arranged their status abroad and acquired compensation in Germany, which the Yugoslav authorities did not approve of, to the point of restricting the possibility of obtaining Yugoslav archival documents to apply for such financial support. Forced conscription into the Wehrmacht was not discussed in public and many individuals and their personal stories were consigned to oblivion. It was only in 1995 in the Republic of Slovenia that former forcibly conscripted persons acquired the status of victims of the violence of war. The Association of Societies of Slovenians Conscripted into the German Army 1941–1945 was also only founded in 1995. The right to a lifetime monthly annuity was granted in 2009. The Act on War Invalids and War Veterans, however, still excluded invalids among those formerly forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht. Only in 1991 was public interest in this subject in the Republic of Slovenia awakened, as the first expert studies offered an insight into the lives of those forcibly conscripted during the Second

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2 Marjan Žnidarič, "Nemška mobilizacija na slovenskem Štajerskem 1942–1945," in *Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v drugi svetovni vojni,* ed. Ludvik Puklavec (Maribor: Zveza društev mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1942–1945, 2001), 13–154.

3 Monika Kokalj Kočevar, Mobiliziranci v nemško vojsko z Gorenjske 1941–1945 (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017).

4 Alojzij Žibert, "V prizadevanju za priznanje žrtev vojne, in *Mobilizacija Gorenjcev v nemško vojsko 1943–1945*" in *Gorenjski kraji in ljudje 11*, ed. Jože Dežman (Kranj: Združenje mobiliziranih Gorenjcev v redno nemško vojsko v času 1943–1945, 1998), 367.

5 Jože Dežman, "Niso se predali," in *Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v drugi svetovni vojni,* ed. Ludvik Puklavec (Maribor: Zveza društev mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1942–1945, 2001), 161–522.

World War. Very often, it was already too late for them. Many had passed away in the preceding decades while waiting for their status to be resolved, and the only association of former forcibly conscripted Wehrmacht soldiers still currently active is that in Upper Carniola.

After returning home, many former Slovenian conscripted soldiers hid or got rid of all documents and other personal material that could show that they had been in the Wehrmacht, because they could have caused them serious trouble. The rare documents and items of former conscripts into the Wehrmacht have only recently started to be collected, mainly through museums and private collectors. There are only a few former soldiers still alive, and families often do not even know the fates of their fathers and grandfathers during the Second World War. Photos, mostly from the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) – the state labour service – or from the hinterland, as well as letters and, rarely, personal items such as parts of uniforms, badges, military equipment, rucksacks, mess tins and cutlery are still to be found. Letters have predominantly been gathered by private collectors, usually for the stamps or seals they bear. The contents of the letters have only recently become of interest.[6] The war diaries of Slovene conscripts are the rarest items. It is difficult to estimate how many diaries were written, since there is still little research into this topic; only a few have ever been published.[7]

Selected diaries of the Slovenian conscripts will be discussed and analysed in this article, including how they differ, if at all, from the diaries of their German comrades-in-arms and what is specific about the diaries of Slovenian soldiers.

2 War Diaries

A diary is a collection of subjective snapshots, which can also be characterized as Augenblickfotografien – Photos of the Moment. These are snapshots of life, as Herman J. Kuprian expressed it.[8] Diaries offer observations and describe experiences in a chronological order. Following the development of events, they show the rela-

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6 Monika Kokalj Kočevar, "Vojna pošta–dopisovanje slovenskih prisilnih mobilizirancev v nemško vojsko," in *Po sili vojak II,* ed. Jože Dežman (Kranj: Gorenjski muzej 2019), 206–247.

7 The first diary to be published was: Alojzij Žibert, *Pod Marijinim varstvom* (Kranj: Gorenjski glas, 1991).

8 Hermann J.W. Kuprian, *Karl Auserhofer: Das Kriegstagebuch eines Soldaten im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Methodische und quellenkritische Überlegungen: Das Tagebuch als gegenstand der Forschung, 5–20. Open Edition Books: accessed 6 October 2022. https://books.openedition.org/iup/1399. Although the text refers to the First World War, it can also be applied to the diaries of the Second World War.

tionship between the individual and society. Brigitte Semanek noted that diaries show materialised time,[9] also noting that a diary, as an act of writing, means more than the text of the diary itself.[10] Keeping a diary was an established habit, often a daily routine, a regular and recurring constant, which gave the soldier a sense of support and normality in his daily survival. The individual had been torn away from his everyday, normal life, isolated and thrust into a new way of life, which he had to process, along with extreme daily events and sentiments.

Soldiers also chose what they wrote about in their diary, so the diary is also part of the selection mechanism, as soldiers wrote down things that seemed important to them at a particular time.[11] There was also self-censorship. The authors of diaries used language and shades of meaning that were familiar to them. It is thus a specific context that frames the different values of words. Since they have no addressee, they are most comprehensible to the person who wrote them.[12] The specific function of a diary could vary greatly, even for the soldier himself.

Contact with his family was an important source of support for the soldier, which was maintained mainly through letters. Writing letters was strongly encouraged by the German army, and the so-called Feldpost functioned almost without delay. There were even written instructions for soldiers on how to create good letters.[13] It was forbidden to write too much specific information, such as the name of the unit, ranks, the names of places, descriptions of difficult situations, and even negative moods. Direct censorship was also effective. A diary was a supplement to letters, an outlet for all the sentiments that they couldn't or didn't want to include in their letters. Soldiers also didn't write a great deal about their experiences at the front within their letters. They often didn't want to burden their relatives with descriptions of tense events and upset their loved ones. Diaries, on the other hand, expressed many personal feelings and other details. The main actors in the diaries were the authors themselves and their comrades, who wrote more because they felt that there was no censorship. Although the German military authorities encouraged the writing and exchange of letters, it was not considered desirable for ordinary soldiers to write diaries.

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9 Brigitte Semanek, "Diskursanalyse und Tagebuchforschung:Politik im Tagebuch von Rosa Mayreder 1918–1937". Wiener Linguistische Gazette, 75 (2011):141–160, accessed 6 October 2022. https://wlg.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_wlg/752011/Semanek__Brigitte._Diskursanalyse_und_Tagebuchforschung.Politik_im_Tagebuch_von_Rosa_Mayreder_1918-1937..pdf

10 Semanek, "Diskursanalyse," 143.

11 Kuprian, *Das Kriegstagebuch*, 5–20.

12 Kuprian, *Das Kriegstagebuch*, 5–20.

13 Ralf Schoffit, "Väter und die Wahrnehmung der Vaterrolle im Spiegel von Feldpostbriefen 1939–1945" (Doctoral diss., Tübingen, 2009), 27, https://d-nb.info/1009573551/34, accessed 2 February 2019.

Letters or diaries were also an attempt to retain the personal identity of the soldier, as Paul Fussel[14] writes about – and thus to counter the pressures of anonymity. At the same time, the diary represented personal property.

When soldiers wrote of their feelings, thoughts and worries, they used their diaries as a way of distancing themselves from everyday military life. In reading various descriptions of their moods, a fragmentary understanding of the character of the soldier can be gained. By describing emotions, the diary takes on a private character. Despite the subjective colouring of the writing, the diaries are important documents for the reconstruction of everyday life at the front.[15]

3 The Slovenian Authors of the Diaries

The six diaries written by Slovenians forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht discussed in this article are kept by the National Museum of Contemporary History, Slovenia, and the families of former forcibly conscripted soldiers. The narratives mainly cover the period from 1942 to 1945.[16] They lived in Upper Carniola, and five men served on the Eastern Front; two were also in France. Two were captured on the Western Front and returned in early 1945 from POW camps in Britain, before joining the Yugoslav Partisans. The men were born between 1919 and 1926, and thus were among the youngest conscripts into the Wehrmacht. They were the sons of farmers; only one soldier already had a family of his own.

Franc Rozman was born in 1926 near Kranj, Upper Carniola. As a 17-year-old man, he was conscripted into the RAD on 2 August 1943. He was sent to Saalfelden and Salzburg, Austria. Rozman donned his military uniform on 17 March 1944 in Taus in the Czech Republic. From Grafenwöhr, Germany, he was assigned, to-

14 Paul Fussell, Wartime: Understanding and behaviour in the Second World war (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 72.

15 Kuprian, Das Kriegstagebuch, 5–20.

16 The author of this article has met the author of one of the diaries, Valjavec, while making oral history recordings and a film on forcible conscription into the Wehrmacht, seventeen years ago. While preparing a temporary exhibition on forced conscription in 2017, Petek's widow sent a diary by post. The museum obtained the last, longest set of diaries from Štern's daughter half a year ago. The author also contacted relatives of former mobilised soldiers, and two further diaries came to light. All the authors of the diaries also possessed other material from WW2. The families of Petek and Valjavec own various items, while Ambrožič's family owns an album of photographs, as does Rozman's, and they also have letters from the front. The families of Rozman, Petek, and Valjavec prepared their fathers' diaries for publication: Franc Erce, ed., *Utrinki pred pozabo II: Dnevnik Franca Rozmana in zgodbe drugih prisilnih mobilizirancev v nemško vojsko,*(Kranj: Združenje mobiliziranih Gorenjcev v redno nemško vojsko 1943–1945, 2020).

gether with another 24 Slovenians, to the 544th Motorized Infantry Division, at the front near Reichshof (Rzeszow) in Poland. While there, Rozman gained his first experience of the front, as a machine gunner. After the defensive battles at Debica, Poland, Rozman's unit was withdrawn to the rear, to Mahovo, Poland, then returned to the front again at the end of November. In January 1945, due to the Russian winter offensive, they began a 500 km retreat. While moving through Polish villages in Silesia in difficult winter conditions, on 30 January 1945, near the town of Kety, Rozman was wounded and taken to Vienna from where, in mid-April 1945, he escaped home.

Born in 1919, Milan Emil Valjavec, a trained tailor from Brezje near Tržič, Upper Carniola, was sent to Ingolstadt, Germany, and then to the Eastern Front. In February 1944, he returned to Germany. After a furlough, he was sent to France. He and his friends deserted during fighting at Cherbourg. He was sent to a POW camp in England in July 1944. Before New Year 1944, together with several thousand Yugoslavs, he was sent in a convoy via Gibraltar to Bari, Italy, and from there to Split on the Yugoslav coast, where the 5th Partisan Overseas Brigade was formed. After heavy fighting, he arrived in Slovenia in April 1945.

Bogdan Ambrožič, born in 1921, from Ljubno in Upper Carniola, was assigned to the 82nd Pioneer Battalion in Salzburg in April 1944. In May 1944, he was at Dunkirk and later in central France. He deserted on 26 August 1944. In October, he arrived at the POW camp in Cherbourg and was transported to another POW camp in Leigh-on-Sea, England. On 31 December 1944, he joined the Yugoslav Partisan Army. On 27 January 1945, the convoy sailed from Glasgow and anchored in Naples on 7 February 1945. On 18 February, he arrived in Split, Yugoslavia, and with the 5th Partisan Overseas Brigade in Slovenia on 16 April 1945.

Mihael Petek, born in 1922, from Podbrezje, Upper Carniola, was conscripted on 29 March 1943 and assigned to an artillery unit in Küstrin (Kostrzyn, Poland), which was then moved to Genoa, Italy. When they returned to their home barracks in December 1943, they were transferred to the Eastern Front near Kirowograd (Kropyvnytskyi, Ukraine), where fierce fighting was taking place. In April 1944, the unit retreated across Romania, and in October he surrendered to the Romanian army. He was taken to Feldiora POW camp near Kronstadt (Brasov, Romania). In January 1945, a member of the Yugoslav Commission came to the camp recruiting for the Yugoslav Partisan Army. In February 1945, however, Petek contracted typhus and therefore remained in the camp. He left in May 1945 and arrived in Subotica, Yugoslavia. He returned home on 1 June 1945. His entire family were greatly surprised, their joy made all the greater because he had been considered missing since October 1944, and the family had even been sent a German war decoration in February 1945.

Martin Štern was born in 1919 in Šmartno near Cerklje, Upper Carniola. The Second World War began while he was serving in the Royal Yugoslav army in

Serbia. He was captured and taken into captivity in Romania, then Hungary, and finally to Austria. He was also in Stalag XVII B and A. In June 1942, he was released and sent home. In March 1943, he was conscripted into the German army. He was transferred from Frankfurt, Germany, to Denmark, then to Mühlhausen, France. In March 1944 he was sent to the Silesia Front, later to Romania, and then to the Black Sea. The long retreat of the German army to Hungary followed. He was at the front until March 1945, when he was captured by the Western Allies. He returned home on 13 September 1945.

Less is known about Andrej Roblek from Lom, Upper Carniola. He was born in 1923 and was conscripted on 12 January 1943. From the RAD camp in Hengsberg near Graz, Austria, he was transferred on 20 April 1943 to Munich to serve in the Adolf Hitler Kaserne, and arrived in Chambery in southern France on 1 May 1943. He was sent to southern Poland on 14 January 1944 and later fought in the area of the Narew river, where he fell on 13 October 1944.

4 Style and Content Analysis

All the diaries are written in the Slovenian language, with either ordinary or purple pencil; some parts of the text are thus barely readable. Dialect words and many Germanisms are used, such as štelunge (Stellung – front line position) etc. There are also many German words, particularly words related to military life—Wache, Kaserne etc. The abbreviations are also German, such as RKW – Raketenwerfer (missile launcher), HVP. – Hauptverbandplatz (army field dressing station), Uffz. – Unteroffizier (non-commissioned officer), Cgm. – Zugmachine (artillery tractor), Inftr. – Infanteri (infantry) etc. Geographical names are often misspelled, and many places were renamed after the war. A few wrote the exact unit in which they were serving, although this was forbidden, as only the FPN (*Feldpostnummer*) was supposed to be given. The most frequent words[17] the soldiers used in the diaries are: Rozman—trenches, front line position, weapon, machine gun, grenades, bunker, guard duty; Štern–cannon, planes, front line position, Russians, rainy, bread, potatoes, guard duty, snow; Ambrožič–cold, mud, guard, rest, rain, wet; Valjavec–city, night, infirmary, soldiers, train, food, front; Petek–frontline position; Roblek–frontline position. *Ivan* is the most common word for designating enemies within the diaries of the soldiers who served on the Eastern Front. The nickname *Toni* is also used for Churchill.

17 Voyant Tools, a web-based reading and analysis environment for digital texts, was used. https://voyant-tools.org/

Analysing the texts at the macro-structural (themes, connections and writings) and micro-structural (rhetoric, sentence length, sentence art, rhetorical forms, word count, abbreviations) levels,[18] the diaries differ in length and style of writing, but the descriptions of the frontline, experiences and personal feelings, psychological tension, destruction, fear, living under conditions of extreme stress, the misery of retreat, and bonds of comradeship are present in all of them.

Key moments in the diaries are baptisms of fire, the moment of surrender, and their return home.

Daily textual entries range from a few sentences to entire pages. Two diaries are quite extensive; one by Štern has 90,000 words, and the other, by Rozman, has 50,000. They each wrote a diary both before and after the Second World War, and were proficient writers. Ambrožič recorded important daily events in short sentences, and his diary has 2,500 words. Petek also prepared shorter notes. In his less than 1,000-word diary, Roblek wrote in full sentences yet only wrote a sentence or two every fourteen days to a month, primarily to describe the fighting.

Six destinies are chronologically followed. Štern's diary covers the period from 1 January 1941 to 21 September 1945, although the periods from August 1942 to June 1943 and March 1945 to August 1945 are missing. Ambrožič kept a diary from 2 January 1944 until 1 June 1945, making notes almost every day, sometimes every two days. Rozman wrote entries from 26 July 1944, when he was at the training ground in Grafenwöhr, until 9 May 1945. Valjavec recorded events from 25 December 1943 to 26 January 1946. Petek reported from 27 August 1943 to 27 May 1945, when he left the repatriation base in Subotica, Yugoslavia. Roblek started writing on 13 January 1943 when he was conscripted, and the final entry is on the very day that he was killed, 13 October 1944. It is believed that all except Roblek brought their diaries back home themselves; it is not known how Roblek's diary was returned to his family. Petek mentioned in his memoirs that when he surrendered to Romanian soldiers, while being searched they did not find his little notebook, which he had hidden behind his knee in his leggings.[19]

Based on a comparison of events on the same date, 26 July 1944, in different diaries, Rozman was in Grafenwöhr in Germany for training, while Valjavec was already in captivity in a POW camp near London, England, and a few days later on his way to a POW camp near Edinburgh. Štern was on the march through Estonia to Pleskau in Russia, Ambrožič was training in Ghyvelde in Flanders, and

18 Semanek, "Diskursanalyse,"145.

19 Mihael Petek, "Moja vojna pot," in: *Utrinki pred pozabo II*, Kranj: Združenje mobiliziranih Gorenjcev v redno nemško vojsko v času 1943–1945, 260.

Petek had left for a new posting, through Vaslui, Romania, to help farmers with the harvest. On the same day, Roblek reported heavy fighting near the River Bug.

4.1 Slovenian Language in the Diaries and in the Wehrmacht Units

Language presented a considerable problem. The majority of Slovenian conscripts did not speak German; before they were forced to start learning it, this was initially a significant issue in understanding orders, in conversation with other soldiers, and in everyday life. Slovenians, however, discussed with each other in private in Slovenian, and wrote their letters home and their diaries in Slovenian. As they wrote in Slovenian, believing that even if someone found the diary, they wouldn't be able to read the content, Slovenians also dared to write more.

It is important to emphasise that the Slovenians who joined the German forces were already victims of the German occupation and the policy of suppressing their nationality. From 1942 onwards, in Upper Carniola and Lower Styria, personal names had to be Germanised. Thus, as Emil Waliawetz, Franz Rosman, Michael Petek, Gottfried Ambroschitsch, Martin Stern and Andreas Roblek, they found themselves in the German army with Germanised names. These names were already written in the enlistment lists, including the Wehrbuch and the Soldbuch. Many Slovenians fell during the war, and their names are still written in Germanised form on graves and in lists of the dead all over Europe and beyond.

Unlike their German comrades, Slovenians were forcibly mobilised into the German army. On 24 March 1942, the head of the civil administration in Lower Styria, Dr. Sigfried Uiberreither, issued an order introducing military duty, while in Upper Carniola, Gauleiter Dr. Friedrich Rainer introduced the so-called duty of state labour service and military duty on 7 July 1942.[20]

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20 By an agreement between the head of the civil administration and the SA group Südmark, in the summer of 1941 *Wehrmannschaft* units subordinated to the SA group were organized into Upper Carniola and Lower Styria. After organizing the headquarters and establishment of units, recording men between the ages of 18 to 45 years followed. Although the decree introducing the service established in 1939 was voluntary, in Upper Carniola it was an obligatory duty. *Wehrmannschaft* units in Upper Carniola, unlike the units of *Wehrmannschaft* in Styria, performed only half their military service, exercises, participation in various events and fundraising for different formations and groups. From early spring, *Wehrmannschaft* men were included in the various units of local guards, provincial guards, and self-defence units, as well as in units of the technical assistance *Technische Nothilfe*. They were also transferred to gendarme units and helped as auxiliary policemen. In January 1942, the Nazi party NSDAP in Gorenjska was founded. From spring 1942, the *Wehrmannschaft* men were urged to voluntarily join the Waffen SS, but there was very little response.

Because of their lack of German language skills, Slovenians immediately had to attend German language courses in their units. Štern mentions that: "we have a very strict Hauptwachtmeister and he despises us because we don't speak German. He told us that we would have to study German every evening from 6.00 to 8.00."[21] Štern was also not allowed to speak Slovenian in public to other Slovenians: "Stane and Ciril came to visit me in the evening, we were allowed to speak in our own language, although the *uffr.* was next door."[22] Štern was also not allowed to write letters in Slovenian, so he tried to write in German: "I tried hard, and with the help of the book[23] it somehow worked out."[24]

The fact that Slovenians were not considered equal to other German soldiers is also mentioned by Valjavec, when many Slovenians were being organised in the unit in Kempten, preparing for the front. The superior sighed: "*Mein lieber Lauter, nur Auslander* (Oh dear, only foreigners)!"[25]

Some Slovenians, however, spoke good German and this impressed their superiors. Štern's comrade from Kamnik: "(. . .) answered firmly and was especially praised because he was not German but spoke their difficult language so accurately and clearly."[26]

4.2 Families, Slovene Comrades and Comradeship

When Slovenian men were forcibly mobilised into the German army, the Gauleiter of Carinthia, Dr. Friedrich Rainer, issued an order on 8 January 1943 that:

> Insubordination, or failure to respond to the draft, will result not only in the conscript being punished, but also in his family being deported and his property confiscated. However, those who are forcibly taken away by the Partisans and who take the first opportunity to escape will not be punished.[27]

21 Martin Štern, 7 February 1944.

22 Martin Štern, 23 April 1944.

23 The book was a dictionary.

24 Martin Štern, 3 May 1944.

25 Milan Valjavec, 19 June 1944. When they were taken to Paris on 25 June 1944, and later also to Versailles, in his memoirs, which he compiled after the war, Valjavec says: "We chased away boredom by singing, we got partisan songs from our homeland. One day we sang a song to the tune of Lili Marleen: 'There in the Upper Carniolan forests the machine guns are singing, the German soldier's afraid. What will you do in the Reich, you'll get a wooden cross on your grave, Lili Marleen'. Because the tune was German, we sang it together with the Germans."

26 Martin Štern, 2 November 1943.

27 Archive of Republic of Slovenia (ARS), AS 1603/ 829/1, Proclamation of Dr. Friedrich Rainer, 8. January 1943.

Conscripts preferred to go into the army rather than expose their families. Those who decided to join the Partisans anyway, despite the intimidation of conscription, made arrangements with the unit in order to protect their families. Partisan units carried out fake forced mobilisation to make it look as if they had been taken by force.

The diaries also speak of the distress and pain of fighting for a foreign country, whose soldiers had occupied the Slovenian homeland and for whom they were forced to fight. Rozman wondered: "Today a colleague, but tomorrow maybe me! And for whom are we dying in these foreign lands? Home, parents, our sacrifices are heavy and our future is bleak if we win – God forbid!"[28] He was particularly upset when he learned that his father had been imprisoned by the German authorities back home:

> At dinner I get a letter from home. I am surprised to read that my father has been arrested. And by the Germans! It hurts me badly. I am gripped by a fierce anger that I direct at Scholtz. As if it were all his fault because he's also German. I shed blood for you, and you thank me by imprisoning my parents. I shout at him. You, Fritz, are to blame for all the woes here! A bunch of swear words followed, which he had to swallow. I demand that we go to the commander's headquarters first thing in the morning. He also promises me this, bewildered by my eagerness. Once again I send all to hell and go to sleep. There is no guard for me this night, I tell them, and they really leave me alone all night.

His superior officer did in fact send a letter to the local authorities in Upper Carniola, and the father was released two weeks later.

The German authorities at home in Upper Carniola and Lower Styria also monitored the conscripts, and Štern mentions that: "In the afternoon we had *Geländedienst* until 4.00, then they picked us up, the ones who understood a little German, and we went to the barracks, where the Styrian gauleiter came and gave a speech about how it was going at home and that we shouldn't give up too much."[29]

Families are mentioned frequently only during the first phase of mobilisation, when family members still came to visit the young soldiers to be. When they were at the front, the most important contact with families was letters, which the authors also recorded in their diaries in terms of when they were sent and received. Because Štern did not receive any mail from home for two months, his superior inquired about the situation in Upper Carniola. On 18 January 1945,

28 Franc Rozman, 27 August 1944.

29 Martin Štern, 16 July 1944.

Štern finally received a letter and commented: "It is much easier for me to live, because I know that everything at home is about right."

Rozman remembered that the Slovenian fathers had fought in Poland in the same area in the First World War:

> Broken carts and the remains of horses lying by the road. Sometimes the crowd thins out and we move on faster for a short time, but then it gets stuck again and there is no going forward or back, just shouting everywhere – it looks like we'll be retreating across the Carpathians and we too, like our fathers on the Carpathians, will shed blood for foreigners.[30]

Petek's father also fought in the East Front in 1914: "The track across the Bug and Dniester was broken several times. I am writing to my father (. . .) I am an interpreter between the Germans and the Russians (. . .) it is necessary to get up several times and go to the cannon, because I am in the artillery (. . .) he probably experienced more because he was in the front position."[31]

On the front lines, the so-called military family became of ever greater importance. Life in the midst of terror and uncertainty often seemed bearable only because of the intense feelings of camaraderie.[32] As Fritz states in his study of German soldiers in *Frontsoldaten, Landser* felt a profound sense of duty, responsibility and mutual obligation to their fellow frontline fighters.

The soldiers had a special bond because they knew that their comrades would be with them at the front, and would be the ones with whom they would share the most difficult and critical moments, which brought them very close together. Rozman wrote about his friendship with fellow Slovenian comrade, Rogač, before he left for the front: "I rely on Rogač, a quiet boy of medium stature, I'm sure that he won't let me down in the event of an accident, while I don't get on very well with the other nine."[33]

Because of forced mobilisation, destroyed personal identities, and their lack of knowledge of the German language, Slovenians felt especially vulnerable and wanted to stick together in the units, also for the atmosphere of shared culture. Rozman reported the great joy when Slovenians met: "When I hear the Slovenian language in front of me, a real childish joy reigns among us and the tiredness is over. We have a lot to say to each other, because a month on the front is a long time." He also mentioned that they sang Slovenian songs, while the Germans sang their own marching songs. When they became more familiar with the German

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30 Ibid.

31 Mihael Petek, 10 March 1945.

32 Stephen G. Fritz, Frontsoldaten, The German Soldier in World War II (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 156.

33 Franc Rozman, 29 July 1944.

language, he commented that: “They don’t understand us, but they can’t sell us anymore (we understand what they say).”

Ambrožič listed by name all thirteen Slovenian comrades who were with him in FN 05235 in Dunkirk.

Štern met Slovenian comrades in Romania:

> Towards the evening, I met three Slovenians who are riding with us, the only difference is that they are *Jäger*. We talk for a while, and a soldier comes by and says *wo gibts ‘voda’ (where is water)*. And one says, come here, I will give you water. By my soul, are you Slovenians? Of course. This is how we are lost in the world, and this is how we Slovenians, German soldiers, find ourselves in foreign Russian places, weighed down by military marches and fighting.[34]

Rozman and the Slovenians in the nearby units felt a special connection: “Only eight out of 24 Slovenians are still at the front. Since we rarely see each other, I suggest that on nights when we are bored or take a nap, we greet each other with three consecutive rafals.”[35] Thus, in the dark of the night, Rozman listened to the rafals knowing that his Slovenian comrades were still alive and greeting one another.

The soldiers’ socialising was even more local, grouped not only by nationality but also by province, e.g., the soldiers from Upper Carniola tried to stay together, as did the Lower Styrians. In Rozman’s unit there were two Slovenian soldiers from Upper Carniola, two from Lower Styria, and one *Schwaba* (German). German diarists also write about such gatherings. Replacements never travel to their units as individuals, as the army attempted to recruit and keep together men from specific regions, and even to supply replacements from the same area of the country.[36]

In the Silesian-Sudeten division where Otto Will was, there were three German soldiers from Hessen, one *Pfälzer*, and one from Niedersachsen in his unit, and he reported that: “Are we a minority despite or precisely because of this, we get on so well with each other.”[37]

The units were mixed in nationality, so they were always in contact with soldiers of other nationalities. Quite often, however, ordinary soldiers of different nationalities looked down on each other. The soldiers of German nationality looked down on the Slovenians, who did not speak German and were considered inferior because of their nationality. Slovenian soldiers often referred to their German colleagues as “*Swabians*”. In the records, they started with a generic address, i.e., Germans, connected with general descriptions of everyday general events, before

34 Martin Štern, 20 March 1944.
35 Franc Rozman, 28 August 1944.
36 Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 157.
37 Otto Will, Tagesbuch eines Ostfront-Kämpfers, Mit der 5. Panzerdivision im Einsatz 1941–1945 (Selent: Verlag für Militärgeschichte, 2010), 115.

moving on to the more contemptuous form, *Švabi* (*Schwaba*), in the context of their actions or of their own Slovenian status and situation. At the same time, the plural form of verbs with the personal noun *WE* is repeatedly used to describe actions in which Slovenian soldiers also took part, which nevertheless expresses a certain loyalty and belonging to a unit. Slovenians reported occasional clashes, fights and the exchange of harsh words between soldiers of different nationalities.

The names of German superiors, and sometimes comrades of other nationalities, are also noted, but they are usually only designated by nationality: French, Pole, etc. As Štern writes:

> Cloudy. (. . .) Noon at B. stelle. 3, one *Elsecer (*from Alsatia), Jenzen and I carried the food. A difficult and tiring path through the forest and mud. Ivan fired at us with a *Granatwerfer* (mortar), nothing happened, 15 meters away from us. We go back and discuss all our problems.[38]

In his diary, Rozman wrote the names of his superiors, the non-commissioned officers Scholz and Beutsch, in the Slavicised form, Šolc and Pejč. This sounded more familiar to him.

Štern's diary also records non-military matters in which soldiers were involved. Štern and his colleagues caught a pig to eat: "It was caught by three soldiers of three nationalities, a Slovenian, a Frenchman and a German. We were cheerful because we had eaten and many a joke was told."[39]

Petek made friends with two German comrades, Siegfried Smidt and Alfred Finkend, in the hospital in Liguria: "Smidt wanted to know everything about Upper Carniola and Styria, and was particularly interested in our anti-occupation movement. He came from a city family with good standards and did not care for the war Hitler had started. I gave him my address and asked him to write to me after the end of the war."[40]

Štern also recalled the superiors with whom they had good relations: "A very good and popular Wachtmeistr Smidt from our battalion, fell. He was at the observation post. At 23.00 at night we had a meeting and the commandant said a few words about the fallen man. We stood still as candles. God be his mercenary, he never gave me a harsh word in half a year."[41]

38 Martin Štern, 7 December 1944.
39 Martin Štern, 6 August 1944.
40 Mihael Petek, 22 September 1944.
41 Martin Štern, 18 July 1944.

4.3 Landscape

The diaries also contain a lot of descriptions of the countries in which the soldiers were and the people they met there. Many names of the places, villages and towns that the soldiers passed through are mentioned. It was strictly forbidden to write this in the letters, but in their diaries the Slovenians add the names of the towns and villages, sometimes phonetically or as they heard them spoken by other comrades, and at other times in their Germanised form. Many Slovenian conscripts had never left their home district. Becoming a part of the German army was the first time that they had travelled any distance. Štern was sent to Denmark in August 1943 and, as a farmer, he was amazed by the countryside:

> It's a beautiful country, though, all flat land, beautiful wheat fields, cattle in the open, in fenced pastures, and what beautiful dairy cows, here only brown or black and white. There are a lot of windmills, too (. . .). Their cattle stay out all night and in the morning the women come by bicycle to milk them. They behave very differently to people back home.[42]

Later in his military life, Štern saw a colourful mix of people at the railway station in Iasi in Romania:

> 18 March 1944. Eleventh day of the journey . . . At 11.00 we arrived in Iasi. We stayed here until the evening. Received soup, coffee. There's a German Red Cross here, also a Romanian one. The railway station is big, there are so many people that they're all running around and there are a lot of soldiers, Romanian and German. The Romanian soldiers are very badly dressed, old clothes, and they are of darker tan.

However, as the soldiers approached the front as replacements for the fallen and wounded, they were confronted with the reality. At the same railway station, Štern noted: "In the meantime, a Red Cross train passed by, wounded soldiers, a sad sight, I was shaken looking at them, and again another train of soldiers, dirty, hairy, lightly wounded etc. This is what awaits me, my dears, it is sad, it is very sad."[43] His military fate took him to Russia: "There is so much mud that you can hardly drag your feet out, we're in Russia. The houses are bad, single storey, most of them mud-brick, and in some places the roads are knee-deep in mud. A lot of this was actually caused by the war, but it's clear to see that it was also very bad before. I had no idea that Russia was so badly laid out."[44] Four months later, Štern entered Lithuania: "The houses are wooden, the countryside is quite overgrown with forests; there are a lot of meadows, but there is a lot of scrub in be-

42 Martin Štern, 14 August 1943.
43 Martin Štern, 18 March 1944.
44 Martin Štern, 27 March 1944.

tween. Here and there is a plot of potatoes or rye, but it grows poorly. There is only livestock farming, so it is mostly meadows."[45]

Roblek, also from a farmer's family, was brief with his account when the unit arrived in Chambery, France: "Southern France is a beautiful country. Grapes and fruit but little work, a fine life."[46]

4.4 Civilians and Slovenian Wehrmacht Soldiers

Štern quickly noticed that the people of Denmark did not like German soldiers, and at first was not sufficiently aware that the Slovenians, together with the German army, came there as occupiers: "People, I have noticed, look at us quite unpleasantly and nobody even waves goodbye to us, whereas in Germany it is different.[47] (. . .) I was amazed, because people were almost bumping into us, and they were just honking, and somebody spat at us."[48] It was hard for the Slovenians to realise that people thought they were Germans; they were themselves victims of Germanisation and its terror, and somehow expected a different attitude towards them. In contacts with locals, they were eager to explain that they were not Germans, that they had been forcibly mobilised and their country was facing almost the same situation as in Denmark. Later, they also learnt the Danish language: "Again in another shop. We go in and speak Danish. The two women liked it very much because we knew a little Danish and they soon understood who we were and before we left we were given apples as a gift because we were not Germans and they were so kind and invited us in."[49] As young men, they also noticed many pretty girls: "As for the girls, the Danes are so afraid for them that policemen walk with them when they return from work. Nevertheless, one of our boys fell in love with one and wanted to marry her, but we advised him against it, saying that he lived too far away and she was of another religion, so then he gave up."[50]

When the Slovenians were sent to Eastern Europe, although with an occupying army, they all felt more at home among the Slavic peoples.

45 Martin Štern, 9 July 1944.
46 Andrej Roblek, 17 September 1943.
47 Ibid.
48 Martin Štern, 22 August 1943.
49 Martin Štern, 22 August 1943.
50 That was probably the same boy who stayed in contact with a Danish girl, who followed him to Argentina in 1950, where he settled, after being in a POW camp in Italy. He published his book: Pavel Jelovčan, *Deseti paradiški otrok*, Naklo 2008.

Rozman's unit stayed with farmers near the Polish town of Kety, and were warmly welcomed:

> I feel at home among these people. When they discover that I had had a name day a few days ago, they send me their greetings and wish me to spend the next name day with my family. It looks rather bad for now, because I don't see a way out of this. I show them pictures from home and tell them that we also have a nice farm. . . . Over a bottle of spirits and some bread, we talk in a mixture of German, Polish and Slovenian.

On the same occasion, Rozman explains that they hadn't eaten under normal conditions for a long time: "After six months, we're back to eating at the table and eating off plates. Our lunch is so rich, the gravy and potatoes are so rich, that our hostess laughs at our appetite. I am grateful to the good woman who made my 19th name day – surely the most difficult of my life – a little brighter."[51]

Štern was in Lubei in Romania for Easter 1944: "We get on well with the people in whose house we are staying, they speak Russian. They soon realised that we were 3 Slovenians. At noon he invited us to have soup, just us, and gave easter eggs and a bit of cake for each of us."[52] Štern notes that only Slovenians were invited.

It is often because of their Slavic origins that the Slovenians had more success in contact with the locals in the Eastern countries. This was often a source of resentment for the other soldiers: "The Germans look at us badly. They despise us. But to me it is a fest, the same for the locals. We are of one blood. But they are not."[53]

The soldiers also describe the burning of villages along the way and the attitude of the units towards the population. Rozman watched:

> Because the houses obstruct the view, they provide good cover for the Russians for quick attacks. The Germans evacuate the villagers and then burn the houses. The weak Russian shelling does not hinder the arsonists. The snake of fires, stretching for about a hundred metres, looks terrible. The wooden field houses, which usually have only a chimney, are burning like torches. The fire illuminates the imposing brick church above the village. I am transfixed by this, the most beautiful building I have seen in Poland, which seems to float above this inferno of flames and smoke. The mooing of cattle and the squealing of pigs are drowned out by the cries of people saving the remains of their possessions. To keep the peace, men are mobilised to dig positions. The schoolmaster brings us three men and orders two of them to dig a bunker of some kind, which will also serve as a bedroom, and the third to cut the wheat that is blocking our view.[54]

51 Franc Rozman, 29 January 1944.

52 Martin Štern, 16 April 1944.

53 Martin Štern, 3 November 1944.

54 Franc Rozman, 8 August 1944.

Petek also saw burning villages when retreating with the artillery across the Bug River, north of the city of Tiraspol: "(. . .) we see villages which were burnt by the SS."[55]

Roblek reports violence against the inhabitants and was aware of inner recognition of the brutality of their own actions:

> Fighting again. But because the Russians are not very strong, we're holding them back. We retreat for the night and come to a small hill in the morning and, at the foot of the hill, in the ripe wheat itself, there is a nice little village. But the order comes to burn it down, as well as all the wheat, as much as we can destroy. How much do you think the people are suffering, because the village was not empty, all the people were still in it, and when they get up in the morning, unsuspecting, and suddenly pack everything, and all the houses are already on fire, that's inhuman.[56]

4.5 Accommodation Conditions

After arriving at the front, the soldiers' first accounts reported long marches, patrols, guard duty and preparing trenches and bunkers.

Rozman regretted leaving the military training centre of Grafenwöhr when, while preparing for leaving for the front, he had to send his civilian clothes and some of his personal belongings back home. He had taken many photos by that point: "I can hardly part with my camera, which has long been my constant companion."[57]

Units were occasionally stationed in villages in the rear of the positions. When the retreat began at the Bug River, Štern's unit settled in:

> The Russians were bombing very close to us and we were a bit scared. We walk another kilometre and in a village whose name I don't know we stop and go into the house looking for beds. We slept very tightly. But there is so much mud that you can almost get stuck in it. Tracks are made all over the field and a lot of land is destroyed (. . .). Here and there across a wide flat field the army itself is moving, many dead horses are lying. People are living in the open, behind heaps of straw in the field, because the army has occupied all the spaces in the village.[58]

Rozman's unit, on its way across a tributary of the Sana River, was stationed in a nearby village: "For a quieter position, we can arrange a place in a house, from where we take turns to march to the position every two hours. In the house we

55 Mihael Petek, 10 April 1944.

56 Andrej Roblek, 314.

57 Over 100 photos are still kept by his family.

58 Martin Štern, 22 March 1944.

cook potatoes, wash ourselves and do our laundry. We enjoy a relatively comfortable frontline life, which we have not been used to so far."[59] Staying in a proper house also offered the soldiers contact with normal civilian life again, which was sorely missed by everyone and was good for boosting morale.

When the advance stopped and the soldiers stayed in the same positions for a longer period of time, they dug bunkers and prepared shelters. Rozman reported:

> The dug-out bunker (our bedroom) serves us perfectly. After sitting and squatting all day, it's nice to be able to stretch our aching limbs in the evening. Our organiser, Oto, brings a large door from the village, which we tie over the hole in the bunker. We pour soil on it and then mask it with potato plants, which dry quickly. To keep the situation as invisible as possible, every morning I have to plant fresh.[60]

Rozman continued:

> At the end of the week, our bunker is finished. We are proud of it because it is nicer than the field houses. It has a strong door with a glass window, a brick stove that serves its purpose perfectly, a folding table, chairs, bunk beds and many hooks on which to hang our equipment. The walls and floor are boarded. In the evenings, it feels very cosy and is like a kind of substitute home. The only thing missing is a candle. (. . .) During the day we continue to do various jobs around the bunker. As the bunker is quite deeply buried and the heavy roof makes it sink in a little, we make folding stairs at the entrance. Then we dig trenches to the left and right of the bunker, connecting both sides to the main trench that runs in front of the bunker.[61]

As Fritz states in *Frontsoldaten,* the *Landsers* were indefatigable in their skill and inventiveness in building, making bunkers seem almost like home. In the same book, Harry Mielert reported that when the soldiers came 'home' to their warm bunker, they 'just feel utterly happy'.[62]

In bad weather, the bunkers would fill up with water; there was mud everywhere, and the soldiers were all muddy from the clay, making the colour of their clothes quite similar to those of the Ivans, as they called the Soviet soldiers. Ambrožič associated marches with rain and mud. Boredom and bad weather while waiting for the fighting to start also affected the men's morale.

59 Franc Rozman, 5 August 1944.

60 Franc Rozman, 8 August 1944, Poland: a bunker is mentioned 149 times.

61 Franc Rozman, 8 August 1944.

62 Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 131.

4.6 Armaments

Another important item of information was the arms they used. Rozman mentioned his machine gun 150 times in his diary: "Only those who have experienced it know how long a night on the march with a machine gun on your shoulder is. A machine gun, even though it weighs only twelve kilograms, its weight makes you feel pressed to the ground no matter whether you're carrying it on your shoulder or in a hunting manner."[63] Rozman was at first assisted by his Slovenian comrade, Rogač, who carried the rack, and four other Styrians. Soldiers had a special personal connection with their weapon. While it represented a greater risk of being shot at, especially with bigger guns, it also meant the possibility of survival, and a functioning weapon increased that possibility. This is certainly one reason why soldiers took good care of their weapons. And as Rozman wrote: "For me, the rain is a great nuisance because I have to cover the machine gun with a shelter quarter to prevent it from rusting – even in dry weather, it 'gilds' every morning from the dew if I don't wipe it off well."[64] He later reported: "I get soaked on guard duty, even though I have a shelter quarter. I cover my machine gun with another one."

Roblek became *Schütze 1* with the machine gun, and Štern was a member of a cannon crew, as was Petek. Štern's poem in his diary described the situation: "*Here in the East the sun rises, the dawn breaks, the thunder of canons surrounds us, here, dear ones, it's no good.*"[65]

4.7 Promotions and Decorations

In the absence of a credible positive ideology, motivation was always a problem, as Fussel noted.[66] Motivation was, however, boosted by the awarding of decorations, which provided additional propaganda.

Slovenians were not allowed to hold a higher rank than Private – *Gefreiter*. After 16 months at the front, Štern became an *Oberkannonier,* and after 18 months a *Gefreiter*. On 24 November 1944, when Štern, together with a Slovenian comrade, became Gefreiters, he commented, without enthusiasm: "Well, yes, after 18.5 months I earned a *winkel* on my sleeve. We reported to the chef and he gave

63 Franc Rozman, 12 January 1945.
64 Franc Rozman, 9 August 1944.
65 Martin Štern, 6 May 1944.
66 Fussell, *Wartime*, 145.

us tobacco – I got one pack."[67] Štern noted that Germans already advanced after a year in the unit. After being wounded, in Estonia he received the badge of a wounded soldier.

On July 22 1944, in Vaslui, Petek found out that he had become a *Gefreiter*, which he was not at all happy about. "Just more responsibility", he stated.[68]

Roblek became *Gefreiter* and 1st gunner on a machine gun. He was later awarded an *EKII* after the heavy fighting near the River Bug, and then after a month of trench fighting, a *Sturmabzeichnung,* about which he makes no comment.

In major joint actions, soldiers were usually decorated, but not Slovenians. They didn't really care, however, and never complained about not being decorated. Štern mentioned that three men from his cannon group were decorated, but not himself. Rozman had the same experience: the unit kept shooting during an attack until they had used up all their ammunition. Their non-commissioned officer would be awarded the *Sturmabzeichen*: "We shot for so long that we used up all the old ammunition. Pejč will get the Sturmabzeichen, which he wanted so much, because this is his third time, and we will get new ammunition, which we also wanted."[69]

4.8 Food

Soldiers reported a relatively good supply at the front. Roblek had enough food, even during the worst marches when the Russian troops were following them.

Soldiers were delivered a hot meal at the front on a fairly regular basis but the situation did not always allow them to enjoy the food. So Štern reported in Estonia: "Lunch good, greasy. We ate in panic because grenades were going off."[70]

Rozman noted that they found themselves in the rear of the Polish Front eating relatively relaxed, which they were not used to: "Some are even making pancakes with eggs from nearby farms."[71] He recounted in his diary that he had sent home a letter that he had written on a Knäckebrot cover, which had a postcard printed on the back. But he was not satisfied with the daily food supplies: "The usual food that comes once a day, half a kilo of bread, potatoes or peas with stinking tinned goulash, a flask of coffee and a piece of margarine or salami. It's not enough for our stomachs, and if you eat it all in one go, you have nothing left for

67 Martin Štern, 24 November 1944.
68 Mihael Petek, 22 July 1944.
69 Franc Rozman, 14–21 September 1944.
70 Martin Štern, 2 August 1944.
71 Franc Rozman, 5 August 1944.

later."[72] As the days at the front continued, the daily rations became less. Štern reported that in Latvia they ate bread with margarine and jam for three days.

On various days in July 1944, Štern mentioned what his daily ration was: (. . .) I received dry food, 4 cigarettes, a little butter and artificial honey, but no bread (. . .) then another 6 cigarettes, a tin and bread (. . .) from the supplies 100 cigarettes and a glass of schnapps each. And then another half litre of schnapps each (. . .) for breakfast, bread and onions (. . .) evening food: butter, cheese, tea (. . .) dinner: a piece of sausage, margarine, coffee.

However, during the retreat in the autumn, Štern reported that a loaf of bread was divided among six soldiers. Later there was no more bread, only margarine, sugar and cigarettes.

In addition to their official supplies, the soldiers organised their own food. Especially on the Eastern Front, the soldiers dug various vegetables from the fields and prepared additional meals, although this was usually roast potatoes. They occasionally confiscated supplies from the population. Rozman mentioned that the locals in Poland were more afraid of the Russians than of them, because they had greater needs – "we are satisfied with their chickens and leave their cattle alone".[73] Soldiers also saved some food from the ten kilo parcels they received from home. From time to time they sent their families stamps for one kilo parcels, so that they were able to send more to the soldiers.

While passing through countries in the east, the soldiers were often in contact with the local population. Štern's comrades exchanged handkerchiefs, thread, socks and various other items for eggs, wine, speck, and sausages, which were brought by the Romanians or by the Russians to the train. Štern added: "I also sold some home-made cider for 8 eggs, which I then fried on our stove."[74]

There are also many reports about food supplies in the diaries of the German soldiers. Otto Will wrote in a diary on the Eastern Front:

> The village is surrounded by fertile farmland with huge potato fields whose end is not in sight. Whether they can ever be harvested by the population remains to be seen. For us, however, it's a welcome affair. Without a doubt, fried potato fever has broken out among the staff. On this evening, there is certainly no neighbourhood that doesn't smell of fried potatoes.[75]

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72 Franc Rozman, 9 August 1944.

73 Franc Rozman, 7 August 1944.

74 Martin Štern, 20 March 1944.

75 Otto Will, *Tagesbuch eines Ostfront-Kämpfers*, 14.

Will also continued:

> We are assigned his farmhouse as our accommodation. The Russian inhabitants are friendly people. In the evening, we sit together and sing over a sooty petrol candle. I write a letter home. Then we roast potatoes. As a result of the supply difficulties, bread rations are still scarce. We have to share a loaf with three men, often four. To compensate for this, we often get chocolate – today we each got six bars of milk chocolate.[76]

As stated by Fritz in *Frontsoldaten,* a feast could indeed lift the spirits, providing both a sense of physical comfort and a psychological uplift. A German soldier, Guy Sajer, remarked how a large meal produced an almost unbelievable sense of well-being, and raised the spirits to a remarkable degree.[77]

Wounded soldiers were given extra. Valjavec was in hospital for an extended period, and for Christmas received a so-called Führer's greeting: 24 cigarettes, a quarter of schnapps, a packet of biscuits and a packet of candies. Petek also traded with locals: "June 2, 1944 in the Carpathians. I sell cigarettes and buy eggs. I can help myself with Russian, Italian and our language: čeber, škaf, klešče[78] are the same in Hungarian as with us."[79]

Rozman wrote of the severe punishment of a comrade for stealing food and horses and selling them to civilians in exchange for vodka: "A strange scene, Feldwebel tied to a tree, a dozen soldiers about to execute him."[80] Otto Will also reports of punishment for stealing: "I was punished with three days of aggravated arrest for requisitioning a hen in enemy territory."[81] On the Eastern Front, the water was often undrinkable and the soldiers were given special powder to add to the water.

Food and hunger were the most common descriptions of the conditions in POW camps, and Ambrožič reported that: "Boiled apples are also good".[82] After 14 days, he wrote of a worsening situation: "I cooked wheat, as I sometimes did at home for the cows."

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76 Ibid.

77 Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 115.

78 Sedge, box, tongs.

79 Mihael Petek, 2 June 1944.

80 Franc Rozman, 10 September 1944.

81 Otto Will, *Tagesbuch eines Ostfront-Kämpfers,* 20.

82 Bogdan Ambrožič, 5 September 1945.

4.9 Alcohol and Cigarettes

Fussell states that in wartime, there's an understanding that in view of the violence and the risk to life, drinking is abundant and natural.[83]

Rozman wrote about dealing with the despondency that haunts the soldiers as they ride east on the train, haunted by the thought that they are on their way to the slaughterhouse: "Drink helps us out of our stupor and gives rise to wistful songs of return."[84] After five months at the front, he was more precise: "We are all aware: today they brought us a drink, tomorrow could be the day we die, so it's no wonder we reach for a drink to banish our worries."[85]

Štern illustrated that soldiers often received alcohol to overcome hard situations: "In the evening, the four of us received a bottle of schnapps, many were drunk. We learned that the Russians had penetrated 2 km in front of us. At 9.00 American planes bombed Stargard. Terrible drumming. Even the duty officer did not stand still. A restless night – they like to get drunk."[86]

Cigarettes were also a comfort item when boredom set in, and German soldiers were often given cigarettes during tense events. Rozman illustrated: "We laid down in frontline positions with helmets on our heads, stones and soil were falling on us (. . .) I breathe dusty air. We smoke cigarettes to calm down."[87] Rozman regularly said that he only smoked when it was drumming around his head, to calm down a bit. He also sent cigarettes and tobacco to his father since he noted that every smoker had enough supplies at the front.

Cigarettes were also a medium of exchange, with soldiers trading cigarettes between each other and with locals. Štern mentioned that in Romania, they sold 48 cigarettes to the locals for RM 10.

4.10 Free Time

As well as writing letters and their diaries, soldiers tried to find other activities to entertain themselves and relax between the fighting. Visiting the cinema is mentioned quite often in the first months, when soldiers were still in RAD or at the rear. No matter how short the daily notes were, Ambrožič always conscientiously noted the titles of the movies he had watched at the rear. Thus, in the first three

83 Fussell, *Wartime,* 97.
84 Rozman, 29 July 1944.
85 Franc Rozman, 1 November 1944.
86 Štern, 20 February 1945.
87 Franc Rozman, 31 August 1944.

months of 1944, from January to March, he watched eleven films: Unsichtbare Ketten, Mit dir durch dick und dünn, Der weisse Traum, Die grosse Nummer etc. Štern also mentioned playing cards and board games. After a year, he also started drawing images from everyday life.

In studying diaries and letters of German soldiers, Stephen G. Fritz states that the Wehrmacht men were engaged in the familiar and comforting celebration of Christmas, to forget the war, death, and destruction.[88]

For the soldiers, celebrating traditional feast days was an attempt to get away from everyday military life, and they tried to follow the traditions from home in order to think of family and home. On 24 December 1943, Štern wrote in Denmark that they decorated the Christmas tree, listened to the radio, drank brandy and thought about people at home: "On Christmas Eve we heard on the radio loud ringing of the bells from Paris and Strasbourg. The song Silent Night was on the radio all night, and we were on guard duty, two Slovenians and Lux (Luxembourgian). Our thoughts were with our loved ones."

A year later, in Saldus, Latvia, Štern wrote almost the same:

> I made some decorations for the Christmas tree and decorated it in the afternoon, after choir. We received *kuhn* (*Kuchen*, cakes), chocolate, sweets, cigarettes, schnapps. In the evening, the chief himself visited us and was very pleased with our simple decorated display on the holy evening. (. . .) We sang Silent Night and we also had a mouth organ to accompany it. The Front was still during the night, while all day they attacked terribly, but not in our section. I thought of home a lot.[89]

Rozman was especially pleased by the rich presents for Christmas: "Everyone got a bottle of brandy, two bottles of wine, a Christmas white loaf with raisins, biscuits and other sweets, and on top of that, two hundred cigarettes, a few cigars, four packs of tobacco, razors, soap, letters, pencils. It just makes us laugh that, after a long time, our bags are full again."[90]

Petek described midnight Christmas mass in Aleksandrow, Russia:

> The army curate held it in the stable, which was a proper metaphor for the real holy night, except that instead of a donkey and a bullock, there were army horses, which were strangely calm at that time. We also went to communion. In the evening, a friend and I opened a parcel he had received from home for the holidays.[91]

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88 Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 73.
89 Martin Štern, 24 December 1944.
90 Franc Rozman, 25 December 1944.
91 Mihael Petek, 25 December 1943.

Ambrožič also mentioned Christmas celebrations in a POW camp in England:

> 24 December. I don't want such a bad holy evening again, and God hope it will be the last. Outside the tent, there is a cold, dense fog. I miss the warm stove of home. We sadly wish each other a happy holiday. A nice sunny day comforts us a little. Queen Mary gave every Yugoslav smoker 30 cigarettes.

Soldiers of German nationality also often reported about Christmas celebrations. Otto Will went to the nearby forest with a comrade and fetched a beautiful Christmas tree: "We put it up in the parlour and decorated it with candles and home-made tree decorations. (. . .) we sang Christmas carols and played chess, Skat and Doppelkopf."[92] Another German soldier, Willy Peter Reese, wrote: "New Year's Eve started with brandy and bold conversations, and at midnight they organised a firework display of all weapons."[93]

Other Catholic feasts were not celebrated so much, but Slovenians tried to spend them traditionally. Štern and his comrade played a traditional Easter game with eggs: "After eating soup, we sat down on straw and Stane and I competed in breaking Easter eggs. Mine was stronger. So it was a bit of a memory . . . that's how Easter passed, there was no procession, we didn't dress up, we just killed the lice a bit."[94]

While others report celebrating Easter Sunday, Roblek is very brief in his report after the fighting for Grodno, Belarus in 1944: "Easter Sunday, cold, and snow, a lot of work, bad life. The whole atmosphere is explained in a few words."

Comrades also sometimes remembered birthdays and name days. Štern mentioned his comrade Bogo sixty times, noting: "We visited Bogo, it is his birthday (29 years old). Received a little cider. Made Bogo a nice greeting card, his present was biscuits."[95]

Petek himself remembered his name day: "29 September 1944. At Torenburg (Turda) we dug into holes. I celebrated name day, i.e. St. Michael, who has protected me perfectly so far."

4.11 Furlough

All soldiers were promised leave after their training had been completed. Most of them were given it, except the Slovenians. Thus Štern complained:

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92 Otto Will, *Tagesbuch eines Ostfront-Kämpfers,* 41.

93 Willy Peter Reese, Mir selber seltsam fremd: Russland 1941–1944. Ed. Stefan Schmitz (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 2021),133.

94 Martin Štern, 9 April 1944.

95 Martin Štern, 7 January 1945.

> The commander praised us very highly and promised us leave. We were also told that we should all write leave applications immediately. On the second day they already read out which ones were going. The Luxembourgers were the first to go, then the Germans, who left on 6 and 7 November. So we stayed, the Slovenians, we were good for everything, but now we are separate. How we were angry, but nothing helps.[96]

In January 1945, Štern was given leave, but the Slovenian soldiers were only allowed to go as far south as Klagenfurt in Austria, because in 1943 the Slovenian area had been declared a *Bandengebiet*. Nonetheless, the soldiers found a way. These were often linked to family members who brought them civilian clothes, and they would then secretly made their way home on leave."[97]

On 3 March 1944, Valjavec was also given leave and left Seidenberg for Klagenfurt:

> Here I first found an inn where I arranged my accommodation and food, then I reported home that I was in Klagenfurt. After a few days, I received a message saying that my father would come to see me the very next day and would bring me my civilian clothes and documents to try to get home. (. . .) My father came and, after a long consultation, he and I decided to take the evening train to Gorenjska. We got into our own carriage in the train, so that I would not be recognised and reported to the police by any of the people I knew or the locals. I left my military clothes and equipment in Klagenfurt.[98]

He was then back to the convalescent unit in Lindau on Lake Constance. Many Slovenians took the opportunity of leave and deserted to partisan units in Slovenia. When Štern came back from leave, he learnt that only 20 out of the 30 Slovenians had returned to the unit. Rozman also reported on the consequences of not returning: "The other Slovenians are happy that I'm back, because otherwise they would have had problems with leave, but now two of them have been able to go."

4.12 Baptisms of Fire and Continuous Fighting

> The boys are gathering
> across the German countryside,
> they ride
> to the eastern fields.
> If my mother had only known,
> where her son was going,
> she would have prayed for me a lot,

96 Martin Štern, 9 November 1943.
97 Franc Rozman, 24–31 March 1945.
98 Milan Valjavec, 3 March 1944.

> and begged God for mercy.[99]

As the soldiers faced their first battles and the fighting continued for months, their diaries contain more records of their primary concerns – the war, fighting, destruction, and death – as well as their secondary concerns, like hunger, cold, heat, sickness, and lice.[100]

As Stephen G. Fritz states in his book *Frontsoldaten* about German soldiers, “they waited uneasily for their baptism of fire, the stress increased by the uncertainty of what was to come and the fear of their reaction to it. In combat they experienced a wide range of emotions.”[101]

In the first month of fighting, Rozman miraculously survived:

> A blow to the chest throws me back. A comrade comes to my rescue, but he is very surprised because he sees no blood. But when I shake the bullet out of the split *gasplan* (gas cape bag) hanging from my chest, we both laugh. I kiss the wad of paper that had saved my life and kept the bullet as a memento.[102]

He summarized his feelings about his baptism of fire:

> I keep my eyes on the water so that the Russians don’t surprise me with their boats. There is nothing to be seen, only the thunder of cannons and the crackling of shells gets louder and louder. Around eleven, my baptism of fire reaches its peak. When the sky splits open, it glows in the distance when Stalin’s organ is played. A hail of grenades is already falling around us, so I close my ears and sway behind the oak as if I were on the waves of the sea. To top it off, they start loading machine guns and rifles with explosive bullets, which the Russians use a lot and they smash us terribly. When they touch the wheat, they explode and I feel like I’m being bombarded with dog bombs. It’s no wonder that my nerves gave up in this thundering and crashing, that I flew away as if I were on springs. A non-commissioned officer shouts from the hole: *Rozman was ist los?* (What’s the matter, Rozman?) I stare at the water, deafened by the infernal band when Ivan begins his attack, but I don’t see him. I get a shift at midnight, when the band is winding down. Nervously, I lie down in a frontline position in my restless sleep, the shells continue to crackle. If your stomach was full, your pants would be full. Because we are fasting, this did not happen.[103]

Ambrožič was involved in his first fighting in France on 25 August 1944: “A few hours rest after two days, ate a little again and then into attack. Baptism of fire. A

99 Martin Štern, 6 March 1944.

100 These topics are researched through Feldpost letters in Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges*, Wiesbaden, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998, 129.

101 Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 33.

102 Franc Rozman, 26 August 1944.

103 Franc Rozman, 31 July 1944.

hail of grenades. Being dug in overnight. Wet though to the skin, sleep in the trench. Cold. All day in the woods. Above the artillery. Fire. Slept in holes."

Štern's unit was attacked by aircraft on 21 July 1944:

> Friday, hot. The Russians attacked in the morning with such force that I thought everything would die. Airplanes fired for an hour. One fell again at the observation point to where we were ordered last night, but we didn't like to move our position. One of them is badly wounded, his hair is on fire and he will surely die. At about 09.00 we started shooting. I could hardly stand it, my head hurt and I was all battered. At 4.00 there was a chorus and a farewell to the one who had fallen. It was a sad sight, all bloody and dirty. He was buried here. And all around there were Russian grenades.[104]

Rozman mentioned how they fell under their own grenades, and also made a joke about the Germans not being organised:

> Suddenly we hear a grenade from the German side, hitting a field only about ten metres from us. We are listening tensely to see if the Russians are anywhere nearby. It does not even occur to us that our own artillery could have mistaken us for Russians. But it is true! Not even a quarter of an hour has passed when a hail of heavy 21-centimetre shells is already falling on us. Deafening explosions, the breaking of mighty trunks and a million [pieces of] shrapnel whizzing around us, and we cling to the ground as if we had grown into it. A mighty shell falls right next to me, making me flinch. Nothing happens to me and I jump back over the impact pits and the dead amidst general screams. Above us is the second batch of grenades. It all repeats with a terrible crashing, dust and shouting. Two more batches of grenades fall between us before we are back in the valley. Miraculously, we Slovenians all make it back together, torn, some of us slightly wounded, but still without losses. The Germans, on the other hand, scattered like a flock of chickens when a vulture strikes, splitting from all sides, and with quite a few dead.[105]

Roblek also writes about unnecessary deaths: "We go to *Spehtrupp* and on our way back we encounter our own mines. One dead, three seriously and one lightly wounded."[106]

Slovenians mentioned both direct combat and active participation. Rozman described a battle: "At sunset, a new bloody dance begins. In a hail of grenades, concentrated on the opposite bank, Ivan is already firing with about a hundred men. Since our position is dangerous for the riflemen, a Russian machine gun fires towards us, but it fires into a void. I shoot at Ivan, who in a rush sweeps through our positions on the opposite bank and approaches the woods."[107]

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104 Martin Štern, 21 July 1944.

105 Franc Rozman, 3 August 1944.

106 Andrej Roblek, 21 April 1944.

107 Franc Rozman, 26 August 1944.

Soldiers got used to military life, and as German Willy Reese states: "Almost every day there were dead and wounded along the way. But good humour and a calm mind remained with us. Danger became part of everyday life, and what we encountered on the march hardly touched us now . . . Life went on, but death remained our daily bread."[108]

4.13 Mental State, Religion, Faith and Promises

Extreme conditions deepened the soldiers' faith, and helped many of them to find comfort and strength in their struggle for survival.

Slovenians were deeply religious. Even in the army, Štern adhered to local customs: "Faithful souls. I woke up early and prayed 3 rosaries in bed as at home and as religion teaches us."[109]

When retreating, Rozman starts from the ditch with the words: "God and the holy cross of God, as is the habit of old people."[110]

Štern described a Catholic outdoor Mass somewhere near Bromberg, West Prussia, (Bydgoszcz, Poland) on their way to the front:

> At half past eight, a Catholic outdoor mass in some bushes. They also gave us a general dispensation. During the mass singing, getting song books. After mass, got holy images to remember and gave voluntary donations for the church. Gave 5 Rk for a happy return.[111]

After severe fighting, when his unit was heading towards Pleskau (Pskov), Russia, in July 1944, Štern confessed:

> There are lots of forests, it's flat. Oh, where am I going? Where, when, how I'll get back, I don't know. At 3.00 we were standing on a hill again. They don't know where to take us. We had dry food in the evening, 4 cigars, a little butter and artificial honey, but no bread. But will I eat just that? This is the frontline food of a German soldier, famous all over the world (for collapsing). I am getting nervous, my nerves are in shreds, it often occurs to me that I prefer to be alone. I go away from the others and lose myself in difficult, unresolved thoughts. I can hardly believe that I have become deaf, or that I really have, I hear so badly. With a cannon, one breaks down under such pressure. Even my watch stopped from the air pressure when the grenades were fired.[112]

108 Willy Peter Reese, Mir selber seltsam fremd, 116.
109 Martin Štern, 4 December 1944.
110 Franc Rozman, 1 August 1944.
111 Martin Štern, 9 July 1944.
112 Martin Štern, 26 July 1944.

Štern made a promise on the same day that he reported his mental state:

> Dear God, Mary, the Mother of God, give me enough strength and have mercy on me that I can endure everything happily and return to my beloved parents, daughter and Francka. The first week, if I return, I will go on foot to Brezje[113] and Francka and also Metka, to thank Mary for help. I will do what I promised![114]

Štern reflected on his fate and future on 10 August 1944, when an attack continued for several days:

> We were squatting in a bunker, waiting to die. At about 06.00, a grenade was so close that a strong poplar tree was cut by the grenade and fell right in front of the bunker. The bunker shook. At 07.00 we see that our cannon is broken, hit by shrapnel. I prayed repentance and prepared myself for everything, or God spare me, hear my humble prayer and the prayers of my family.

In August 1944 Rozman faced death about 1,300 km to the south, near Debica, Poland: "We cover our ears. Ivan is scattering a hail of heavy grenades around us, which are exploding with a terrible roaring and crashing (. . .) I have a prayer on my tongue, but my mind is at home, waiting for death, which is laughing in my face."[115] A few days later, he made a comparison with his former civilian life: "Such is war. At home I would have mown the grass nicely, but here people are being mowed down – until they mow me down too. Even though I'm a non-smoker, I light a cigarette to calm my nerves."[116]

Roblek's feelings of loneliness and despair are felt from his words in Belarus on 16 July 1944: "Janez is wounded, and some of my other comrades are not coming back either, nobody knows what happened to them, so I am left all alone, all my comrades are lost."

The death of close comrades had a tremendous impact on the soldiers, as multiple feelings intertwined. The sight of dead and wounded often frightened men more than being wounded themselves.[117]

Rozman wrote when his friend was killed:

> That's when I hear groans from the field and soon after the desperate voice of Rogač: "Rozman, help! Water!" My blood rushes to my head, I grab the machine gun and cut through the forest standing up. I'm looking for victims to avenge my colleague who, after so many dangers we've been through together, meant more than a brother to me. Ivan soon falls si-

113 Brezje is a pilgrimage centre in Upper Carniola.
114 Martin Štern, 26 July 1944.
115 Franc Rozman, 24 August 1944.
116 Franc Rozman, 27 August 1944.
117 Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 141.

> lent because my machine gun is pounding non-stop. "Medic" I shout towards the forest and I listen with horror to the fading voice of Rogač: "I can't, Francelj! *Po – ma – gaj! Vo – de!"* (Help me, water!) This terrible "*vo – de*" (water) makes me fear that the boy is wounded in a main artery and that he has already lost a lot of blood. A paramedic and an officer appear at the edge of the forest. Since Rogač is still moaning, we quickly come to an agreement: I chain Ivan to silence with bursts, and the two of them jump to Rogač and drag him into the forest. I light a cigarette because I'm shaking with nervousness and then another until Oto arrives. The look on him tells me everything. "He's dead! He lost too much blood because he was shot three times above the knee and once in the arm, and he died during the bandaging", says Oto. I am suddenly overcome with a desperate sense of loneliness. (. . .) I write a letter to his folks that evening, because that's what we agreed, and add a packet of cigarettes and a few little extras.[118]

Rozman confessed his emotions on visiting the grave of his comrade Rogač the next day:

> At noon, I set off for the hillside and arrived in the forest, where I visited Rogač's grave. What a difference! Here is a beautifully covered mound with a birch cross, while the Ivans are still lying scattered in the wheat field with their weapons. I am grateful to the orderly who gave my comrade a decent burial. Of course, the farewell to him was not without silent tears.[119]

After Rogač's death, Rozman became more friendly with another Slovenian comrade, Smerkolj. They promised each other that if one of them was wounded, the other would help him, but if he was dead, the other would write to his family. Smerkolj fell five days later, on 26 January 1945. Rozman wrote sadly:

> The bullets are hissing around my head, I want to strike back at Ivan, but I see that he has disappeared. I hear a moaning behind me. I look round and am horrified to see Smerkolj lying at my feet, his eyes full of astonishment, blood pouring from his temples. A slight movement of his head and my last friend among the Slovenians is dead. Death have mercy on me, that I may see no more of this disgusting pool of blood. Tears well up in my eyes as I take his papers from him to fulfil his last wish and my promise to tell his family the sad news. God willing, of course.

When later the same day his unit was encircled, Rozman wrote: "The tanks have come behind our backs, we are surrounded. The hour of vengeance has come, we're aware of that. I'll make a cross on Smerkolj's forehead, it's the only thing I can offer to a dead comrade. (. . .) I often see Smerkolj's astonished, dead-eyed look in front of me, which I cannot forget."

118 Franc Rozman, 27 August 1944.
119 Franc Rozman, 29 August 1944.

Štern writes about the death of a young German comrade near Pleskau: “His home was near Dresden, a young, strong boy of 19. He had to leave the world in the bloom of his youth and is laid to rest abroad, where he will never be visited by a local acquaintance with flowers and prayers. God grant you eternal mercy, Comrade Mayer (Hanz).”[120]

Otto Will learned that his friend August Salomon had died on 16 September 1942 in the heavy fighting near Laptewo, on the Wasusa: “The news hits me hard and makes me very thoughtful. He was an extraordinary person with a sincere character and a loyal and extremely reliable comrade at all times.”[121]

Soldiers also commented on everyday situations. When morale fell in the face of defeats, the soldiers did not write less, but there was more and more critical complaining about the situation and more prayers and pleas for survival.

In autumn 1942, in the forests near Rschew, 200 km away from Moscow, German Reese considered his destiny: “We found the ditches swampy and often flooded. The makeshift bunkers and primitive foxholes leaked water and the horses collapsed on the paths. A horse was more valuable than its soldier, but we accepted our fate as it came, lived in our memories and thought about our return home.”[122]

The conscripts did not use the word fear often, but rather ‘concern’ or ‘worry’. They felt restless and anxious about the difficult situation. Štern asked himself: we are all worried, what if we get caught by those whom we’re shooting at? The term worry, in place of fear, is also considered by Martin Humburg when analysing soldiers’ letters.[123]

The soldiers were at least partly aware of what was happening back home, and knew the political situation. As Fritz states, the July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler seemed to actually bind many *Landsers* tighter to the Führer and the Nazi regime.[124] Slovenians learnt of the attempt, but did not comment upon it. On the occasion, Štern wrote:

> Tuesday, nice. Up at 5.00, received coffee, semolina, some chocolate, followed shortly afterwards by some wine and a shot of schnapps. There was choir. The chief spoke, saying that the assassination on 20.7 (. . .) had failed and that it was supposedly carried out by old offi-

120 Details of this soldier are given on the Volksbund internet site: https://www.volksbund.de/erinnern-gedenken/graebersuche-online/detail/9322431393cae6cbdb55159575466948

121 Otto Will, *Tagesbuch eines Ostfront-Kämpfers,* 112.

122 Willy Peter Reese, *Mir selber seltsam fremd,* 115.

123 Martin Humburg, Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtsoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944 (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher verlag, 1998), 242.

124 Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten,* 216.

> cers, and that on the proposal of Göring, who would probably be the deputy, we now greeted each other only with the German salute – a raised arm.[125]

On 25 August 1944, Štern heard that the Romanians had laid down their arms and that the American armies were entering Paris. The Germans were getting more and more nervous. On 5 September, however, Štern wrote that Finland had capitulated. He mentioned the sad news from home that several of our young boys were already buried in the east.

As they spent more time at the front, they also became more critical and cynical. Thus Štern commented: "Sad news. 29 October then read the news and lies. 10 November 1944 (. . .) yesterday I changed clothes, got something new, but everything is bad, it's not going well anymore, 6th year of the war."[126] However, he also added: "Tuesday, nice weather. I dozed off and watched the retreating German army, which is indescribable."[127]

Willy Reese, a German, also no longer believed the news: "We believed the newspapers as little as the forbidden books we sometimes received."[128]

4.14 Severe Weather Conditions

In addition to the fighting, many more 'enemies' awaited the soldiers. As Stephen G. Fritz stated in *Frontsoldaten*, the most elemental natural conditions – rain, mud, cold, snow, heat, and dust – formed a leitmotif of the entire war for many soldiers.[129] Everyone on the Eastern Front reported the bitter cold, from September to May, and early snow. Rozman reported turning their clothes so that they were white on the outside. They wore a short coat, jacket, sheepskin inside, camouflage smocks with a pattern outside, and white snowsuit over all this. He also wrote that with the approaching winter they would be given coats and blankets, though he remained sceptical: "The old soldiers say that you don't have to be afraid of the cold in the German army because you get enough different things to protect you. We shall see, I thought. Well, on guard duty a coat would be useful."[130] He always had problems with footwear. Because he had quite big feet, he rarely got the right size of boots: "I never have any luck with footwear. Until now, I've been walking

125 Martin Štern, 24 July 1944.
126 Martin Štern, 29 October 1944.
127 Martin Štern, 18 July 1944.
128 Willy Peter Reese, *Mir selber seltsam fremd*, 102.
129 Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 104.
130 Franc Rozman, 14–21 September 1944.

for quite a while with my heels off, but now I've been given two left boots."[131] In the week from 16 to 23 December 1944, they were given winter clothing, but there was not enough for everyone; up until that point, they had only had a sleeveless rabbit-skin jacket, but they had also been given jackets and padded trousers. Rozman received a cap with rabbit-skin ear covers. They were also given boots made of felt, which only worked in the dry cold, as the snow soaked them. Deep cold affected them greatly. Rozman described how soldiers helped themselves; for example, he and his comrade Smerkolj helped each other to take off frozen boots:

> The thick skin on the sole has turned into a smelly white substance because of the constant wet. Every sock is torn, and I feel as if I am walking on needles all over the sole because the thawed skin has become so sensitive. Since there is no other help, we remember Kneipp's remedy. We run barefoot in the snow twice around the house. We feel terrible pain, but our feet cool down and hopefully harden, and then we go back into the house and put our feet back in our boots. I put two pairs of socks on my feet, then two pairs of rags, and then a towel on top. My boots are really huge. The others are a little better off, because most of them have already got boots from the fallen from other units. We really have become a strange army.[132]

Petek also reported severe cold:

> January 10, 1944. When I am on night watch in the village, I have to put on special straw shoes with at least five cm thick soles over my boots, so that my feet are protected as much as possible from the poisonous cold, which is especially nasty at night and in the freezing cold . . . my head and face are protected with a particularly long cap that covered the whole head, leaving only the face exposed to the harsh Russian winter wind.[133]

Rozman had previously written, during the first month of fighting on the Eastern Front: "From now on, we'll have another enemy to carry with us. We burn the nits with a candle and we're constantly picking off lice, hundreds of them every day but none of it helps."[134] At the time, he was angry with another 'enemy': "The mice are a new nuisance and they squeak happily at night, this vermin has become quite familiar since they come right to the table to dine with us. We store the bread in an iron ammunition box, because in the end bread is more important than bullets."[135]

Weather entries are often included in descriptions of the front, since they affected the fighting. Words for weather concepts such as rain, wind, duty or cold

131 Franc Rozman, 5–12 October 1944.
132 Franc Rozman, 21 January 1945.
133 Mihael Petek, 10 January 1944.
134 Franc Rozman, 16–23 December 1944.
135 Franc Rozman, 23–30 December 1944.

appear with higher frequency than terms such as sunny and warm. Štern always started his daily entry with the weather conditions, while others described it only occasionally. Ambrožič is in general concise, yet he uses a relatively large number of words to describe the weather: rain, mud, wet. Often these descriptions are in connection with activities such as service, guard duty, and patrols.

4.15 Self-Injury and Desertions

Stephen G. Fritz gave numbers that of the roughly 20,000 German soldiers executed by the end of the war, 75–80 percent had been deemed guilty of the political crimes of desertion and undermining the fighting spirit of the troops.[136]

In crucial situations, many broke down and tried to escape. Rozman knew of soldiers who had deliberately injured themselves: "We're already familiar with the veterans' practice. You put army bread on a gun barrel and a hand on top, so that the gunpowder remains in the bread, and the bullet passes through your hand."[137] He also talked about others who deliberately shot themselves and have even faced the death penalty for it.

Rozman also reported how two of his Slovene comrades shot each other:

> Two Slovenes were wounded by the machine gun. One of them went to the emergency at night and was shot in the hip, the other in the arm when he went to rescue him. When this happened, Oberführer Kempel was not in position. I know what time it is! First Jereb shot Kozma in the hip and bandaged him, then they switched roles – of course, they shot each other through the comis-military bread. This was later confirmed by the third Slovenian in their group. A good way to get out of this hell.[138]

Rozman also thought several times about helping himself to get to the rear, most of all when his friend died, but he failed:

> In the evening, Šolc moves in with me. I don't like that, because I intend to help myself to get to the rear at night. But later I think: a gun would make too big a traitor hole, and a machine gun would not be practical for such "ventures" – especially not with a sleeping Šolc by my side. So I change my mind at night and give in to fate.[139]

136 Stephen Fritz, *Frontsoldaten*, 90.
137 Franc Rozman, 1 August 1944.
138 Franc Rozman, 13 August 1944.
139 Franc Rozman, 27 August 1944.

Rozman also wrote about an interesting experience of his Slovenian comrade Jereb:

> He had already been wounded during his first days at Debice. When Ivan was firing, the partisans hit the third company in the rear and destroyed a couple of positions. He was lying with his side shot off behind a tree. Because he had addressed them in Slovenian, the partisans took him with them as they retreated back into the forest. He soon recovered because they were well supplied with medicine and food. When the Germans drove the partisans away with cannon fire, though, they left him in a bunker. The Germans found him there and sent him to hospital. Jereb drove it well between the two fires.[140]

The soldiers were threatened with severe consequences if they deserted. Štern wrote on 9 August 1944 that their superior officers warned them that anyone who deserted or tried to escape to Germany without permission would be court-martialled and shot. Nevertheless, Rozman recorded several desertions: "Four Germans deserted to Ivan. The boys had given up on life at the front and had chosen captivity instead. Ivan's propaganda promises white bread, but I don't trust it and I prefer to stick to black bread."[141]

The Soviets dropped leaflets to persuade German soldiers to desert, and many Slovenians did take the opportunity, but Štern remained unresponsive: "Countless leaflets have been launched by the Russians, lying here and there, telling us not to fight but to give up, if we have anything to live for; we'll be cut off anyway. We'll see."[142]

Rozman reported that Russian soldiers also played music at night, and dropped leaflets from airplanes, saying that Romania had capitulated and how this was affecting their situation. The leaflet was supposed to encourage soldiers to desert to their side. Rozman kept one in his notebook as a memento.[143]

Mihael Petek thought of deserting in September 1944 when he was in France, but was transferred to another group: "Our trip to Maquies did not materialise, even though we had everything ready."[144]

In critical situations, soldiers trusted each other less and less. Rozman went with his Slovenian comrade to look for food in the field kitchen:

> The Germans are firing from behind, because they think we want to run to the Russians, and the Russians fire too, because the front is on the hill behind us. Missiles whistle around us as if pulled by the wind. We crawl through the potato fields until we reach a little cover in the valley. The Germans realise that we want to go back, so now they shoot at Ivan, allow-

140 Franc Rozman, 21 October–1 November 1944.
141 Franc Rozman, 12–19 October 1944.
142 Martin Štern, 28 July 1944.
143 Franc Rozman, 21–26 September 1944.
144 Mihael Petek, 3 September 1944.

> ing us to retreat. The bullets are still whizzing around us, though, since the Russians are reluctant to let the loot out of their hands. Soaked with sweat and dirty, we continue to search for our position and only finally find it towards evening. The comrades all make a fuss of us, wondering where we have walked for so long, and immediately rush for the food. Some of them are already fainting from thirst, and they are as angry as hungry wolves. Only when they realised the situation and see our soiled clothes, do they let us tell what we have been through. But there is an invisible wall of mistrust between us. Disappointed with my fellow prisoners, I roll into my position.[145]

Štern, too, hoped that he would be able to surrender or desert, as he mentions: "I am diligently reading the German-English dictionary that Gajser lent me, and in this way I am passing time. We are both hoping that one day we will just move to the West (there are rumours of this), where we would quickly surrender to the Allies."[146]

Two of the diary's authors deserted to the Western Allies. Ambrožič wrote about his desertion in the longest entry in his diary: "August 26, 1944. Salvation Day. Attack in the evening. With Osterman, we immediately ran across. An excellent first impression of the US military. We learned from comrades who arrived later that the company had been almost wiped out. The cursed German society is finally over."

After his initial good impression, Ambrožič reported on the conditions in the POW camp:

> 31 August 1944. Sleeping together, me, Osterman and Presra. We made coffee and cocoa. Just the gypsy way. A fight for water. In the afternoon, new columns were brought in. 1 September 1944. Hot coffee – half a life. In the afternoon by car about 20 km. Dumped by the road in some meadow. 2 September 1944. Chilled at night from the cold and during the day from the wind. The promised tents did not arrive. Less food. What have we done to be persecuted like this?

Petek surrendered in Romania:

> 22 October 1944. I gave the leader of the Romanian soldiers a surrender leaflet, handed over my rifle (. . .) then they searched me (. . .) they also took my bayonet and ammunition, and my gas mask, in which I had a sewing needle and thread, as well as shaving accessories and double military glasses. I still had some Romanian change in my pockets and gauze for bandaging. I have already steamed the *Gefreiter* patch and thrown it away. I also had a lot of letters, which I was allowed to keep, as well as a photo of my parents and brother, a prayer book, a rosary and the small piece of the Slovenian flag.

He later reported: "The Yugoslav commission came to us. The Montenegrin captain knew how to speak and inspired us to participate in the liberation army,

145 Franc Rozman, 2 August 1944.

146 Franc Rozman, 14–21 September 1944.

bringing tears to our eyes. We were guaranteed a trip to Yugoslavia, better food and a trip home."[147]

4.16 The Retreat

When German troops were withdrawing from the Eastern Front, the Slovenian soldiers accepted the knowledge that they were going to their final battles, but still hoped for a happy return home.

After heavy fighting in August 1944, Rozman's unit retreated:

> And we, poor military couples who can be pounded on by friend and foe alike, are pilgrimaging up the hill again, but not for long. A shower of rain comes down from the sky, but from behind the trees above us comes a hail of Russian bullets and the attacking Russians with a loud "hooray"! We scatter, because the command "in position – fire" does not come, but we run down and along the opposite bank, as far as we can. The rain soaks us and the ground, which becomes slippery and sticky, so that it sticks to our shoes. The machine gun is getting heavy, but we can't lag behind, because behind us, death is singing its song. I can feel my heart running in front of me so it is still beating. (. . .) I look to my left and see two Russians running parallel and firing at us. I would have loved to turn around and fire at them, but our leader is among the first to run and, as a superior, hasn't a clue about fighting. We stop beyond the edge, when Ivan can no longer be seen, and we are in front of the village itself. Completely drenched with sweat and rain, at the end of our strength, we stagger into the village. There, a couple of officers from the battalion came up to us and shouted why have we not taken the hills, why are we coming back like rabbits, they promise to court-martial the NCOs.[148]

Rozman wrote again in January 1945:

> With tears in our eyes, we leave the bunker, our home, which we have built and defended with our own hands. We are leaving on a cold, snowy and windy night. Our march to an uncertain future begins – a march to life or death. Happy will be those of us who survive this and return alive to our homeland.[149]

Ten kilometres from Krakow, Poland, on 19 January 1945, he learnt that the city had already been occupied by Soviet troops:

> Tired and hungry, we drag our feet behind us, they just don't obey us anymore in those damned boots. In the morning we pass through the town of Scuha, which looks like it is dying. One hundred kilometres are already behind us! We are exhausted, but the knowledge

147 Mihael Petek, 11 January 1945.
148 Franc Rozman, 3 August 1944.
149 Franc Rozman, 14 January 1945.

> that we are moving in the right direction – towards our homeland – gives us the will and the strength.[150]

Štern's unit retreated in April 1944 towards Tiraspol, in eastern Moldova: "Every day we are running away, we have lost all our cannons, I don't know how we are going to defend ourselves against the enemy."[151]

Štern also admitted that he was afraid of being caught by those he was shooting at: "My heart ached from the constant banging and a little from fear."[152]

In August 1944, however, he was ready to be taken prisoner, so he did not fire a shot: "It was raining heavily. We stopped in a nearby forest. Then the Russians started to come at us with a hooray. A few shots from us, none from me. I was ready to be taken prisoner. Then the order with the Zugmaschine to get out of the woods and quickly away."[153] He was again prepared to be caught after four days[154]: "I changed into better clothes yesterday in case something suddenly comes up. Everything is receding. No hot food, no kitchen. (. . .) God knows if we'll get through, we'll surely be caught soon."[155]

Roblek had no intention of surrendering. On 9 July 1944, his unit was surrounded in front of the town of Pinsk: "The Russians have us almost surrounded. The Russians have me almost in their clutches, but because of the darkness I still manage to escape through the grain."

4.17 Wounded and Dead

After the deaths of his friends, Rozman reflected on his readiness and resignation to death: "I am preparing myself with dinner quite calmly. I really don't want to go to the next world hungry and tired to death."

Many Slovenians were killed or wounded on the front, including the authors of the diaries. Štern was wounded on 21 September 1944:

> We jump off the cgm. (*Zugmaschine,* artillery tractor) and as if someone had stabbed me, I fall down. There was whimpering all around me. My good comrade Ciril and two Germans pick me up and carry me to the first shelter and bandage me. I was covered in blood but I didn't know where I was wounded. Ah, on the neck, the shrapnel is inside, like a pig I was wounded by that damned Russian.

150 Franc Rozman, 19 January 1945.
151 Martin Štern, 4 April 1944.
152 Martin Štern, 29 July 1944.
153 Martin Štern, 10 August 1944.
154 In fact, his turn came only in March 1945.
155 Martin Štern, 14 August 1944.

He was taken to *Feldlazarett 193*, 20 km from Riga. He missed his Slovenian comrades again: "Oh how many wounded there are, but only of our blood, I am alone, I no longer hear a Slovenian word. I remain silent, lost in my thoughts, praying for a happy return and the desired peace. Sleep nothing, doze in my seat and it was very cold. Yes, this is really a service for the frontline wounded – hungry soldiers."[156]

Rozman was shot in the face while he was grabbing a German comrade, who did not help him during the attack:

> I feel a blow on my cheek, which makes my head spin. Dizzy, I let go off the German. I realise that I'm wounded in the head, but not badly. Blood trickles down the German, which totally confuses him. He runs down the trench as if he's the one who has been wounded, but I quickly grab him by the shirt. I push him towards the machine-gun, because he's my second-in-command, and I say to him, "*Jetzt könnst du schüssen oder schlafen, was du willst, mein lieber Fritz*!" (Now you can shoot or sleep, whichever you want, my dear Fritz!). I laugh at this coward then, who is shaking with excitement and fear. I crawl behind the house and unwrap the bandage (. . .) a medical orderly (. . .) sloppily bandages my head. He tells me that the wound on my cheek is quite large, as I sensed when I felt a piece of hanging flesh on my face. I feel that the bones and the eye are all right but at the same moment I'm afraid that it's only a scratch, not enough to have me sent me to the rear as one of the wounded. (. . .) Then I hear the report of my machine gun. Majer has obviously decided not to sleep.[157]

Roblek died on 13 October 1944 near the River Narew. The day before, he reported attacks and Soviet soldiers crossing the river with boats: "The fire from our machine guns discourages them, so they turn around and go back, but to the left of us they manage to get into our positions. We have to withdraw in the evening."[158]

4.18 Last Records in the Diaries

As the soldiers brought the diaries home with them, the last entries, with the exception of Roblek's, are from their hometowns, where some of them described the current post-war situation.

Rozman wrote of the political situation:

> 29 May 1945: On the night from Thursday to Friday, (. . .) But it is known that the bells rang because it came out that a treaty had been concluded in Ljubljana between Rupnik, King Peter and two western countries. I think that Tito is leading King Peter a little too much, and if *Toni* supports Peter and not Tito, then *Ivan* and *Toni* will still have to agree on what will happen to Yugoslavia. Of course, Rupnik will try to use all the lifelines he can now that

156 Martin Štern, 27 September 1944.
157 Franc Rozman, 30 January 1945.
158 Andrej Roblek, 12 October 1944.

> the water's already running down his throat. So they were in too much of a hurry to ring the bell, since it was a bill without an innkeeper.

Štern went back to everyday tasks: "21 September 1945. In the morning I went to my home in Šmartno with Metka. We talked for a long time, then I took a shower, changed my clothes and rang the noon church bell."

Ambrožič wrote of a big public protest in the capital: "10 May 1945. Joy in Ljubljana. Together with the family again."

Valjavec thought of his lost years in the army and as a POW: "13 May 1945: Home again, after 2 years and 7 days."

Petek had still not reached his hometown: "27 May 1945, we are in Subotica[159] for a commission. Have a good life. On Sunday the 27th, we were given a ticket and are accompanied by the gypsy band to Bačka Topola (Serbia). Lots of bacon."

Roblek died on 13 October 1944 near the River Narew. His last entry in the diary was: "The Russians are right behind us in large numbers and the fighting goes on from morning onwards."

5 Conclusion

Among the Slovenian authors of diaries, no-one wrote about why they were keeping a diary. Whether the soldiers continued to read their diaries afterwards is also not known. Although general topics within the diaries of German soldiers and those of Slovenians do not differ a great deal, it is necessary to look at the records of Slovenian soldiers in light of the events in their homeland, before their arrival in the German army.

The content of the Slovenian soldiers' diaries mainly differ in terms of the conditions under which they were mobilised, namely their forced mobilisation, the status and loss of their identity, and being forced to speak in German.

As non-Germans, they were often treated with contempt and arrogance by their German superiors, and this was often also the attitude of their German comrades in the units. Slovenians also could not attain higher ranks, and were rarely decorated. Due to the denial of their nationality and contemptuous attitude of others towards them, they often felt like second class soldiers.

Even more than others, they stuck together as Slovenians and, because of their Slavic roots, they had better contacts with the locals, and were tolerated by the population. At the same time, soldiers went through a great deal of self-questioning on

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159 Subotica, Vojvodina, today part of the Republic of Serbia.

how to cope with their role in the German army, in a foreign land, fighting for a foreign occupier. Many Slovenians died as German soldiers for the Third Reich, far from home and with a Germanised name inscribed on their grave.

Precisely because of their own situation, Slovenian soldiers were more likely to mention other nationalities within the German army, including Poles, French, Luxembourgers, etc. German diaries, by contrast, almost do not mention them.

Nonetheless, the main theme is the same, and in this sense Slovenian diaries do not differ greatly from the diaries written by German soldiers, as they all had just one desire – to survive, and return home.

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Inna Ganschow

Ink and Paper in the Camp. Ego-Documents of Luxembourger Conscripts in Soviet Captivity

Introduction

At the centre of research on camp literature sits the genre of memoirs concerning the Nazi concentration camps, or 'Holocaust literature', the pioneer of which was the US-American literary scholar and Holocaust survivor Cernyak-Spatz.[1] Russian studies scholars define the genre more broadly, analysing memoir texts about German as well as Soviet camps, whereby the authors of the (mostly autobiographical) texts experienced both types of camps. Especially at the end of the Second World War and in the immediate post-war period, in the years 1944–1945, very few former Soviet so-called 'Ostarbeiter' (forced laborers from the East, meaning the USSR and Poland) and prisoners of war went directly home from the German camps, because their stay in enemy countries brought them under suspicion of espionage by the Soviet security services.[2] An elaborate system of collection, transit, filtration, and other state security camps shifted people from the German 'total institution'[3] to the Soviet one.

In addition to the works of Soviet classics such as Solzhenitsyn[4] and Shalamov[5] or the Pole Herling-Grudziński,[6] who expressed their camp experiences in literary

1 Susan E. Cernyak-Spatz, "German Holocaust Literature" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1985).

2 S. Nikita Petrov's paper on the persecution of Eastern workers in the postwar period: Nikita Petrov: "Die staatliche Überprüfung sowjetischer Repatrianten und ihre rechtlichen Folgen (1944–1954)", in *Forced Labor in Hitler's Europe: Occupation, Work, Consequences*, ed. Dieter Pohl and Tanja Sebta (Berlin: Metropol 2013), 311–326.

3 Term used by sociologist Erving Goffman to describe closed institutions such as convents, armies, prisons, camps, etc., whose main characteristic is the correction of identity, personality, and behaviour. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (London: Paperback, 1991).

4 Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The GULAG Archipelago* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974 [written 1973]).

5 Varlam Shalamov, *Through the Snow: Kolyma Tales* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980 [written 1958–1968]).

6 Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, *A World Apart: Imprisonment in a Soviet Labor Camp During World War II* (London: Heinemann, 1951 [written 1949–1950]).

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form, there are many far lesser-known testimonies from camps that were never intended for publication. These include texts by foreign prisoners[7] that describe life in the Soviet Gulags. Some of these were even written in the camps. A large part of the non-Soviet camp inmates came to the GUPVI camps[8] after 1939 as a result of the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland, and finally after 1941 as prisoners of war (POW). The latter group included Luxembourgers who documented their experiences in secretly written diaries and letters, or took home poems memorized from deceased comrades. Such textual testimonies give us direct access to the memories and experiences of everyday life in the camps, authentic reflections on one's own fate, and the processing of arrest, imprisonment and punishment.[9]

Review of POW Literature from Other Nationals in Soviet Captivity

Before focusing on the texts produced by Luxembourgers, either in Soviet camps or immediately after their return, it is important to briefly introduce the research conducted in other countries in order to address the gap in the field of camp life documented by Luxembourgers.

When comparing the experiences of non-German nationals in Soviet captivity, it is noteworthy that the most recent and comprehensive research on Italian POWs, conducted by Giusti,[10] focuses on reconstructing the camp conditions and analysing the reasons behind the high death rates among POWs. Giusti refers to later written memoirs and personal interviews that reflect on the camp experience. The analysis explores the lives of Italians in Soviet camps, particularly in

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7 For detailed statistics on foreign civilians in various camps and prisons in the USSR in the 1930–1950s, see Pavel Polian, *Soviet Repression of Foreigners: The Great Terror, the GULAG, Deportations, in Reflection on the Gulag* ed Elena Dundovich, Francesca Gori, Emanuela Guercetti (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 2003), 61–104.

8 GUPVI – Glavnoe upravlenie po delam voennoplennykh i internirovannykh (State administration in the matter of prisoners of war and internees). On this camp system see Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI: Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956* (Berlin: Oldenburg, 1995).

9 On war literature and front letters of the forced recruits, see the chapter by Sandra Schmit, "'Ons Jongen' – frühe Luxemburger Frontberichte", in *Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration* ed. Claude D. Conter et al. (Mersch: CNL, 2020), 532–579.

10 Maria Teresa Giusti, *Stalin's Italian Prisoners of War* (New York: Central European University Press, 2021).

Tambov,[11] (Fig. 1) including aspects such as nutrition, death rates, and their ideological treatment in the camp, which had the intention of fostering an anti-fascist attitude. While Italian captivity memories are used as material for reconstruction, they are not the primary research object.

Similarly, in the case of Japanese POWs in Soviet captivity, the texts primarily consist of memoirs rather than ego-documents, which were used for historical reconstruction purposes. The texts produced by former Japanese POWs fall into two groups. The first are Japanese citizens who embarked on a journey after the defeat of the Kwantung Army in 1945. The path of these POWs led mostly north to camps in Siberia, the Far East, and the Middle East, while civilians fled south from the territory of Manchukuo, the state created by Japan from 1932 to 1945. These memories form a distinct genre that is known as 'repatriation literature'[12] in Japan, but the research draws on the memories of witnesses, rather than including ego-documents from the camp.

The German experience may appear to be the closest comparison to the Luxembourgish due to the linguistic, cultural, and geographic proximity between the POWs, but these are only superficial similarities. The victim-hero-perpetrator triangle proposed by Wienand[13] does not apply to Luxembourg. Wienands analyses the experiences of German POWs using a diachronic approach, seeking to identify changing dynamics. In my selected collection, drawing on published and mostly unpublished sources, I aim to use a synchronous approach to examine what was happening both within the camps and immediately afterwards in order to elaborate on common survival techniques. The most notable differences between the German and Luxembourgish experiences, which they had to process narratively in a broader sense, are as follows: first, the length of captivity, as Luxembourgers were some of the first to return from Tambov in 1945 (prior to these, only the French had returned earlier, in July 1944); second, Germans returned to two dif-

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11 Unfortunately, there are no indications in the researched documents as to why the camps around Tambov were chosen for the accumulation of Luxembourgers. However, a detailed source-critical monograph provides a deeper insight into camp life in Camp 188 near Rada, where most of the Luxembourgers were held, Camp 64 near Morshansk and Camp 56 near Khobotovo. Yurii Mizis, Vladimir Diachkov and Vladimir Kanishchev, *Tambovskie Lageria dlia Voennoplennykh: Istoriia, Kontingent, Sotsial'no-psikhologicheskie Aspekty Vzaimootnosheniy Vnutri i Vovne 1943–1946* gg. (Prisoner of war camp in Tambov. History, contingent, social-psychological aspects of relations inside and outside 1943–1946) (Tambov: TGU, 2022).

12 "Hikiage bungaku" (Jap.), s. Sherzod Muminov, *Eleven Winters of Discontent: The Siberian Internment and the Making of a New Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2022).

13 Christiane Wienand, *Returning Memories: Former Prisoners of War in Divided and Reunited Germany* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015), 4.

ferent countries, Federative Republic of Germany (FRG) and German Democratic Republic (GDR), where memory culture was defined differently, impacting their autobiographical activities; third, the efforts of Luxembourgish individuals to process their experiences were integrated into collective efforts, such as the publishing activities of the Association of Former Tambovians (Amicale des Anciens de Tambow). Finally, the experience of German captivity can be contextualized within the framework of historical German captivity, whereas Luxembourgian POWs were integrated into a foreign occupational army and could not be considered within the framework of 'Luxembourgian captivity' because they had no such historical context due to the lack of their own army.

In the next paragraph, I will classify the rare published and the unpublished ego-documents from the captivity period, as well as the very first published works after their release,[14] utilising a more philological approach rather than one based solely on memory studies. I am interested in individuals who wrote during captivity or immediately after their release in order to categorise survival techniques through narrative. Therefore, the mechanism of narrative production, the relationship between the text and the individual, the function of the text, the recurring themes, and the systematic nature of common experience will be the central areas of focus for this paper.

Texts by Luxembourgers in Soviet Camps

Luxembourg camp literature has its literary roots in the prisoner and prisoner of war literature of World War I. During their Soviet imprisonment from 1943 to 1953, the Luxembourgish forced conscripts continued a tradition of documentary

14 Most of the published memoirs on the Second World War are reflections of the Labor service and the experience at the front. The non-fictional writings by former POWs in Luxembourg are collective works edited by the Association of the former Tambovians (five editions from 1963 to 2021) and self-published editions in small quantities for friends and family (eight books or brochures from 1946 to 2019). The poetry of Pierre-Dominique Bausch was printed by a publishing house in 2001 (see below), along with several books containing collected captivity testimonies by Georges Even (e.g., Georges Even. *Deemools am Krich, 1940 – 1945. Schicksale in Luxemburg – Menschen erzählen: 14 Zeitzeugen berichten* [Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2005]). Additionally, the 85 war testimonies, including those from captivity, were collected by Marc Trossen and published by two NGOs (Marc Trossen, *Verluere Joëren. 85 Luxemburger Zeitzeugen des Zweiten Weltkriegs berichten: Zwangsrekrutierte, Refraktäre, Deserteure, Resistenzler, aber auch Kollaborateure, Kriegsfreiwillige* . . . [Redingen/Attert: Les Amis de l'Histoire Luxembourg, Union des mouvements de résistance luxembourgeois]). The collected stories by Even and Trossen are biographical in nature but cannot be considered as writings from or in captivity.

Fig. 1: Prisoners of war in camp 188 in Rada near Tambov, ca. 1943–1944. Photographer unknown. Private archive Evgeni Pisarev.

writing that did not seek to create fictional narrative worlds, but rather focused exclusively on what they themselves had experienced. A large part of the texts is literature that was not written for a larger audience. These texts were often published by the authors themselves, sometimes decades later – autobiographies, memoirs, or volumes of poetry (Faber,[15] Bausch,[16] Schauss[17]). A fictional play by the former prisoner of war Joseph Schmit[18] remains unpublished.

Numerous ego-documents, as contemporary history researchers now call them – private, handwritten texts of a personal nature – have also been preserved. The range of Luxembourgish texts from the Soviet camps that are examined in this paper extends from 'smuggled-out' notes and letters that released comrades brought back to Luxembourg, to diaries, speeches, and homemade dictionaries, to poems and stories that were written partly in the camp and partly directly after returning from Tambov and other Soviet camps (Fig. 16). In addition to written materials, there also are drawings.

15 Ernest Faber and Pierre Bausch, *Tambow* (Mersch: Fr. Faber, 1946).
16 Pierre-Dominique Bausch, *Poésies = Gedichte* (Esch/Alzette: Schortgen, 2000).
17 Ernest Schauss, *Pickegen Drot. D'Leide vun engem Lëtzeburgeschen Zwangsrekrutéierten an Naziaffer* (Luxembourg: ed. and self-published by the author, 2000).
18 Joseph Schmit, *Das Labyrinth: Drama in Four Acts with Frame Story by Costa Faber* (Esch/Alzette: typed manuscript at Centre National de Littérature, 1952), CNL AU-34.

The first step in approaching this material is to sort through the valuable papers from the years 1943 to 1946. The texts in which their authors recorded camp life can be viewed and analysed from various perspectives. In the foreground of the present study is the thesis of Auschwitz survivor Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and neurologist from Vienna, which attempts to give meaning to life in the camp through specifically determined actions – logotherapy – which can have a self-healing effect and increase the chances of survival.[19] This analysis includes texts written by Luxembourgers in Soviet camps in Russia, as well as in the Soviet Occupation Zone in Germany (SOZ),[20] and will analyse how writing must have helped to give meaning to the authors' suffering and fate. The focus is on the leitmotifs, images, and topoi that the authors of the texts consciously or unconsciously drew upon to find spiritual support and (re)gain a sense of control over their own lives.

Inventory: Documents and their Function

The texts analysed can be divided into two categories, according to formal criteria or genre. One group includes poems, song lyrics, and narratives, as well as – if we define the term 'text' more broadly – camp life narrated in drawings, which can be considered 'artistic narratives'.

The other group can be categorized as 'ego-documents', and includes letters, speeches, diaries, and self-made dictionaries which had a concrete addressee and a function that lies outside the literary-artistic realm. Both groups of texts have in common the place, time, and origin of the authors, as well as the circumstances under which they were created. Thus, the material they process is the same, but the methods used are different.

If we organise the texts according to their function, considering the targeted readers, four groups emerge:

– Personal texts for an addressee: letters and poetry/dedications
– Texts for other prisoners: speeches and songs
– Texts for abstract readers: short stories and camp scene drawings
– Texts for personal use: dictionaries and diaries

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19 Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006 [written 1946]).

20 SOZ, the Soviet Occupation Zone (russ. Sovetskaya okkupatsionnaya zona Germanii) was one of the four zones into which Germany was divided after the war. It existed from 1945 until the founding of the GDR in 1949.

Fig. 2: Cover of the diary of Arthur Ollinger 1941–1946. Private archive of the Ollinger family.

We are especially interested here in analysing the textual leitmotifs with which the forced recruits practiced logotherapy after Viktor Frankl: does the sense of life in linguistic communication lie on the level of the sender (*I put my camp life into words, for myself*) or on the level of the receiver (*I address someone through my writing to overcome isolation*)? Apart from the expected leitmotifs of longing, homesickness, and nostalgia, special attention should be paid to the representation of the new world of experience – (Soviet) Russia as a country, as a stranger, as a source of bondage, as a former military enemy, as a barrier, etc. In some texts it can be seen as a replacement for Germany, which had previously evoked the same associations in the forced recruits.

A total of sixteen authors can be identified, each with one to eight texts, written either in the camp itself or immediately afterwards, during the first months after

their return (Fig. 15). Accordingly, the genres of the texts can be organised as following:

- Letters: Joseph Steichen, Julien Coner, Jean Sprunck
- Poetry: Pierre Bausch, Constant Woltz, Aloyse Lang, Gaston Junck
- Speeches or letters: Ernest Schauss, collective letter to Stalin from several senders
- Song lyrics: André Kettenhoffen
- Short stories: Ernest Faber, Jos Bailleux, Jos Zeimetz
- Drawings: Jos Zeimetz, René Leopard, Paul Hamtiaux
- Dictionaries: Ernest Schauss
- Diaries: Ernest Schauss, Julien Coner, Arthur Ollinger, François Adams, Metty Scholer

This paper will focus on those texts which were written in the camp: three diaries, three letters, fourteen poems, one dictionary, and one collective letter.

Diaries: Hunger, Waiting, Riding

Currently, there are three Luxembourgish diaries that were almost certainly written during Soviet captivity, although later corrections or possible completions cannot be ruled out. It can be assumed that, although logging the camp's daily life was forbidden,[21] keeping a diary was possible – depending on the relations with the guards or the skill of the prisoner – despite the lack of paper and the ban on ink (Fig. 3). Julien Coner wrote from the camp in northern Segescha in Karelia, where he worked in a wood and paper factory and crafted his own diary, from April to June 1945. Later he was transferred to Tambov, where he continued writing until October 1945, although in French.[22] Arthur Ollinger ended up in a Soviet camp in the SOZ in the spring of 1945 before being passed on to the Belgians and Americans in Belgium.[23] Erny Schauss began his diary when he boarded the train from Tambov to Luxembourg in the fall of 1945.[24] From all three diaries, one can discern a main theme or leitmotif that connects all the entries.

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21 Yurii Mizis et al., *Tambovskie lageria*, 246–457.

22 Coner's diary is published in Georges Even, *Deemools am Krich: 1940–1945*. (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2005), 219–240.

23 The typed manuscript of Olinger's never-published diary was kindly provided by his descendants.

24 Schauss' diary is printed in Ernest Schauss, Josy Zeimetz, Paul Colette and Jean Weyrich, *Tambow 1943–1945* (Luxembourg: Amicale des Anciens de Tambow, 1990), 157–163.

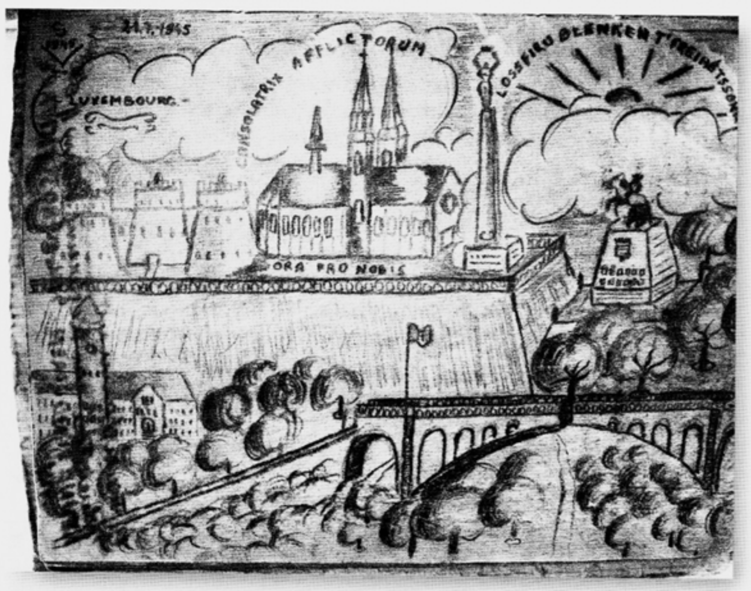
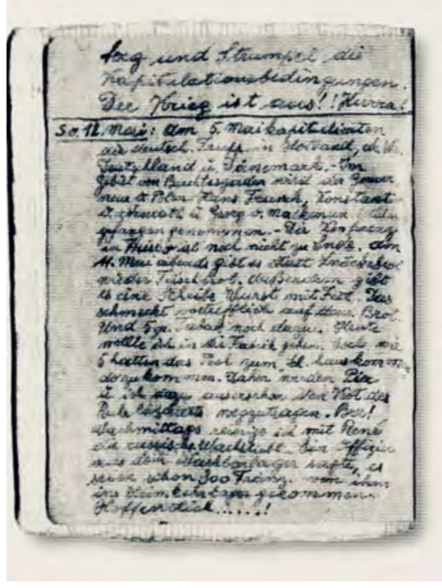


Fig. 3: Drawing by Julien Coner, ca. 1943–1945. Private archive of the Coner family.

Julien Coner

Coner's diary, which could have been discovered and confiscated at any time by the camp guards, reports neutral things for which the guards could not have accused him of espionage, and accordingly punished him. He finds his logotherapeutic consolation in the daily description of his diligent work and the supposedly sufficient food ration he received for exceeding the working quota. He strives to describe his monotonous camp life on paper in as varied a manner as possible, documenting the weather, leisure activities in the camp, and mentioning other comrades from Luxembourg. In June 1945, he switches to French and describes, among other things, his survival strategy on the way to the Tambov camp – he traded 'luxury items' for food: soap for milk and tobacco for rusks. Deliberately giving up something in order to obtain something else also has a logotherapeutic effect, because in the camp one is expropriated from their possessions, both in terms of material objects and one's identity, privacy, or freedom of choice. In the Tambov camp, after the departure of the French prisoners ("and many Luxembourgers with French passports" like René Wendling and Alfred Busch), Coner manages to get a job as a cleaner in the canteen, which also increases his rations. On the way from Tambov to Luxembourg, he ob-

serves Russian life and documents not only the joy of his reception by the Luxembourg Red Cross on the other side of the border, but also from food and drink. Apart from the actual diary, his drawings are also preserved, with views of various localities of Luxembourg (the hometown of Düdelingen and the Capital), which Coner conjured from his memory to remind himself that he was going home, where many people were waiting for him. Besides the daily routine events, he also found space for reflections about prisoners, morality and human dignity:



Der Krieg ist aus! ! Hurra!

So. 12. Mai: Am 5. Mai kapitulierten

Nachmittags

Fig. 4: Excerpt from the diary of Julien Coner, 1945. Private archive Coner family.

> September 2, 1945, Tambov:
> Yesterday and the day before yesterday they performed 'Faust' at the theatre. I cannot say why, but I was reluctant to go and see it. Is it the primitive means of supervision or more generally the circumstances in which we find ourselves which prevented me from going there? But interest in something! Does it know any bounds? Is it weariness on my part?
>
> October 5, 1945, en route to Luxembourg:
> It is curious that those who in the camp had enough to eat (occupations in the refectory, kolkhozes), who boasted and laughed at those who languished for soup and who therefore boasted of never leaning on those who eat, it is precisely those who also roam the fields, around the kitchen of the transport, etc. Lamentable facts! This is humanity!!! Where is the noble man? What is a man when he is hungry? Something worse. What a beast! Indeed. Oh! I know these apostles. Who is a friend; who a comrade? Answer! . . . We must see with superiority on these things and also at first sight act with superiority. . . . (exchange of thoughts between Pierre Frieden and me).

Ernest Schauss

The diary of Erny Schauss begins, as previously mentioned, in September 1945 with the departure of the train that is taking him home. Schauss brought around fifteen ego-person documents and objects with him to Luxembourg, which are now preserved in the Musée National d'Histoire Militaire, including two hand-made dictionaries (Russian-French and Italian-French), the text of a patriotic anti-fascist speech, and his diary (Fig. 5, Fig. 6).

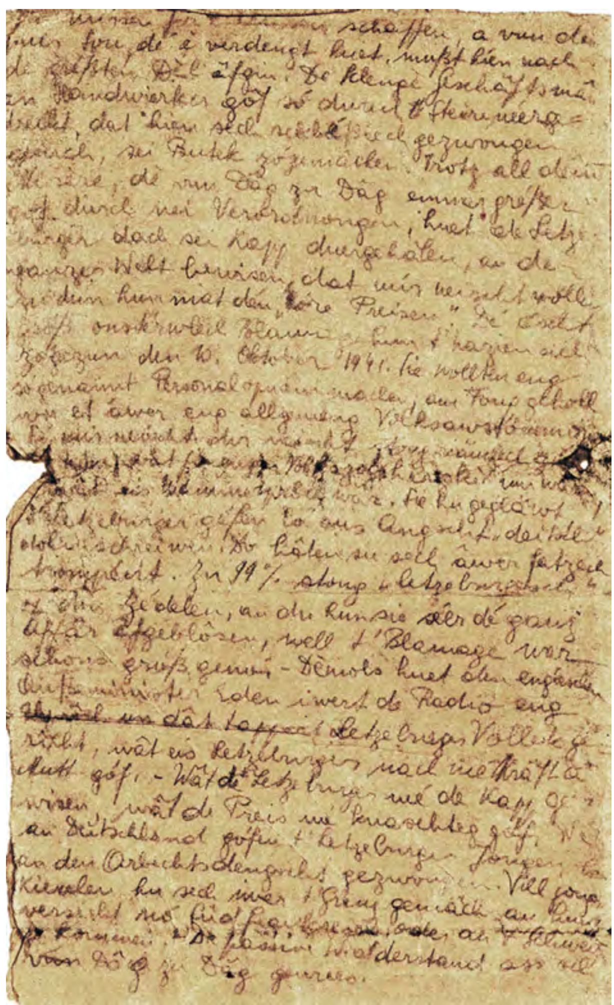


Fig. 5: Excerpt from Ernest Schauss's speech, ca. 1943–1945. MNHM, Diekirch.

Similar to Coner, Schauss chooses his words carefully but writes in Luxembourgish without regard for potential Soviet censors, who would only understand German or French. His excitement is hard to hide, because he keeps the diary as a free man since he is released from the camp. He enthusiastically documents Russian life along the railroad, the architecture of the Orthodox churches whose golden domes he can see from the train, and above all his impatience to finally arrive home:

> October 21, 1945, in transit camp 69 in Frankfurt/Oder:
> Today, Sunday, it seems that something has begun to change. We seem to be provided with a train. The latter are ready. We are marching out the gate – to return to the camp again in the early evening.
>
> How many deceptions still need to be endured in order to become free people again? Truly free, not dependent on anyone?

Schauss learns some Russian during his captivity and is able to communicate with his guards as well as with other Russian men (and Russian women). He meets them not only in the Soviet Union, but also in Germany, when his train stops at the neighbouring track with former Eastern workers who are also being repatriated, but in the opposite direction. The young women came rom a forced labour camp in Esch/Alzette and seem less happy about their return:

> October 9, 1945 [. . .] Russian girls coming from the west under guard ask us: “Where are you going? To Luxembourg?” They themselves travel from Luxembourg, from Esch. There are no happy ones among them, nothing good awaits them. Maybe even Siberia? Their crime is that they saved their lives and had to work as prisoners for those who wanted to raze their homeland to the ground. With tears in their eyes, they wish us a happy journey and say hello to those who helped them in Luxembourg or tried to make their captivity as humane as possible.

Capturing this scene is one of the methods of logotherapy – putting one’s situation into perspective, recognising that it is certainly not as bad as it could be.

Schauss’s Russian-French dictionary gives an insight into his vocabulary and the areas he wanted to talk about. It is a manuscript book (7 cm x 5 cm x 1 cm) sewn together with thick white thread and is made of rough paper, not very thick, now yellowed but probably white at the beginning, half the size of a male palm. The dictionary consists of 81 pages and has no cover. On the back of the last page is the name of the owner written in red ballpoint pen: Erny Schauss. The vocabulary entries were obviously written in ink.

The dictionary is structured thematically (unlike its French-Italian ‘brother’ which is composed alphabetically) and therefore resembles a phrasebook. The chapters are arranged in the following order (the numbers indicate the number of words in each chapter): Question words – 12, Prepositions (places) – 18; Adverbs (time) – 30; School – 82; Plural – 9; Year (including week, month, seasons, etc.) – 53; Alphabet –

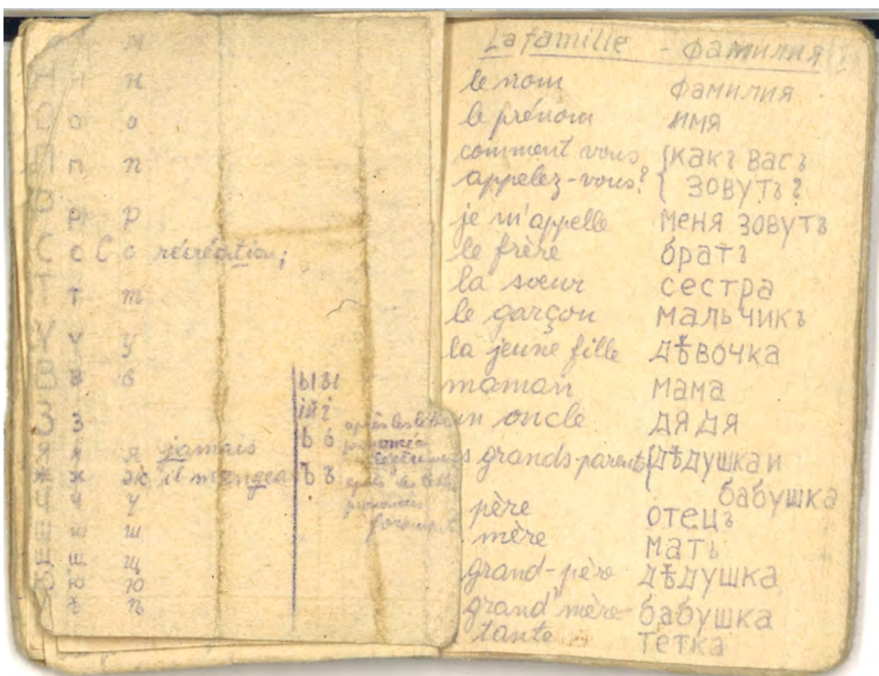


Fig. 6: Excerpt from the Ernest Schauss dictionary, ca. 1943–1945. MNHM, Diekirch.

21; Family – 44; Names – 34; Home – 43; Man –31; Garden – 15; Flowers – 8; Colours – 11; Farm – 41; Orchard – 25; Food – 66; Clothes – 35; Sleep – 16; Weather – 26; Adjectives – 82; Verbs – 160. A total of 862 entries were made in the dictionary, with vocabulary that easily exceeds the elementary level of knowledge of the language (A1 with about 780 words) and allows communication on everyday topics.

If we do not consider grammar sections such as 'Adjectives' or 'Verbs' and compare only lexical chapters, we can better understand how logotherapy worked for Schauss. The largest vocabulary relates to learning itself (82 words), then to food (66), then to the year or time-keeping (53), and finally to family (44) and home (43). We see that what is most important to Schauss is what he wanted to talk about in Russian: learning a new language, food (whether in the camp or at home), times he would return home, and who was waiting for him there. His girlfriend, however, as we know from his diary (probably in later entries), gave up waiting and remarried. His mother also died before his return from captivity, as Schauss added later. The belief that someone wanted to see him again at any cost made Schauss try hard to stay alive at all costs. Had he known that he was no longer present in the life of his girlfriend or mother, this kind of logotherapy either would not have

worked or he would have needed other meaning-giving mechanisms for his life and to motivate him to keep on living.

Arthur Ollinger

The diary of Arthur Ollinger, who was captured by the Soviet Army in Germany on May 2, 1945, began later. As he notes, he intended to defect to the English. From the end of February 1945 to March 1946, he writes with varying intensity in his small notebook. During his first months in Soviet custody in the special camp Ketschendorf, he makes entries in French in order to clearly distance himself from the Germans. When he is transferred to the British occupation zone, he switches to English, probably so that the guards who censor his diary or check it for espionage are able to understand it. At the end, he makes his notes in Luxembourgish because he finds the attitude of the French-speaking Belgians offensive. With this change of language, one sees Olligner's conflict between his ability to adapt and his ability to resist in an ever-changing environment. His logotherapy consists of finding a spark of hope, which he wishes to strengthen with religious components.

The main motive for Olinger's entries is faith in himself, in God and in his own spirit, which fluctuates with the improvement or deterioration of his conditions of imprisonment (Fig. 2, Fig. 7). He checks and records his own mental state daily to see how the hope of his imminent return (or its disappearance) affects his morale. Meaning in life happens through writing, because Ollinger no longer appears able to trust his own feelings without precise analysis and control. He constantly and consistently writes down how he prays, how he wants to go on, and how he is seized by apathy after every rumour about the day of return.

According to the testimonies of his descendants, Ollinger was neither a churchgoer nor otherwise religious in the postwar period. He also never kept a diary again, but both were necessary for him in the exceptional situation of the camp.

> June 21: Holy Mass. Word that the foreigners leave for another camp, from where they will be liberated (I do not believe it).
>
> June 23: I return to camp, find Nic. Schilling, but the others all went east. (more confidence)
>
> June 24: The day I wanted to be home, I have no more confidence in the morning; but in the afternoon an Austrian told me that in 4 weeks we would be at home, and I regained my confidence.
>
> [. . .]
>
> July 1: Holy mass, we put class 4, the young and the old in a company together. And we believe that they will be released on Tuesday, July 3; I always pray and regain confidence; but I am afraid to submit to a visit to the Russian commission.

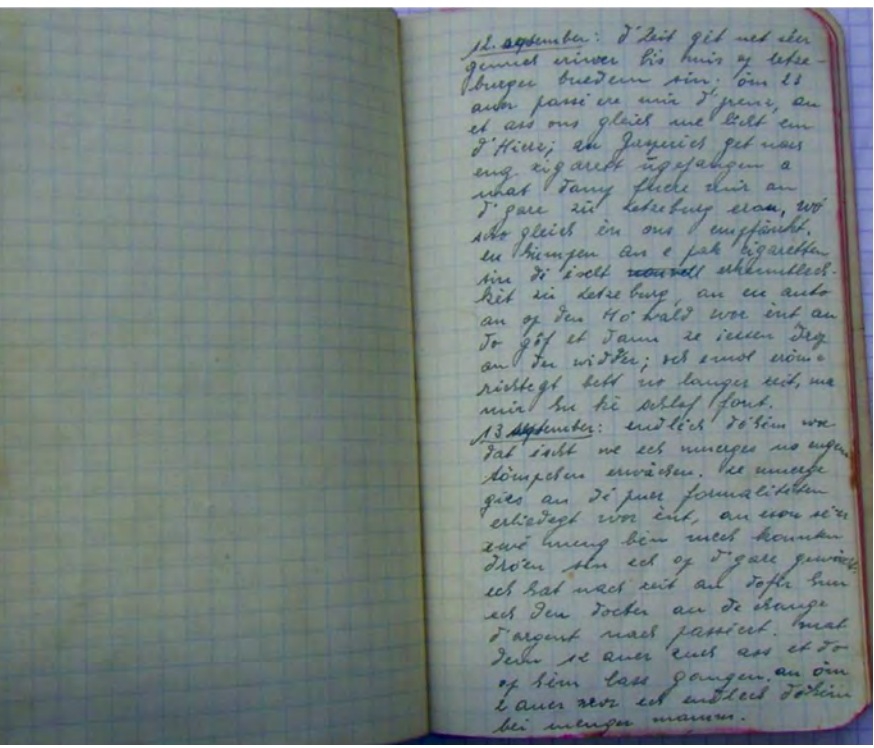


Fig. 7: Excerpt from the diary of Arthur Ollinger, 1945. Private archive Ollinger family.

> July 5: they steal my blanket, they find it; but the police leave it to this Prussian; always bad weather; my confidence remains quite good, because I always say to myself 'in God's name'.
>
> [. . .]
>
> July 16: From 8 to 12 1/2 h 'Bible hour' and we pray 3 rosaries, in the evening I eat the rest of the bread; we are waiting for the Potsdam conference.

The last entry, in French, concerns the Belgians treating the recently arrived Luxembourg prisoners as war criminals because of their German uniforms:

> September 9: We arrive in Brussels in the morning; we are taken first to the reception centre to eat something, and then by tram to a reception house, 'rue du Vautour 68.' There the Belgians do a check and they do not believe that we were forced into the German army. In the evening we are transported to the foreign police where we go through a new check and they leave us until the night in two floors in the cellar, among German women, etc.
>
> The Belgians treat us like the Germans treated us, much worse than the Russians, but we don't lose courage in this cellar; and after a while I have a fit of anger. They treat us like criminals, or even like cattle; we still need the Belgians to beat us. It is now that we are

> right to shout, 'Long live Luxembourg, but shit on Belgium!' In the night we are transported to the prison 'au petit château' where we have to pass a number of checks.
>
> September 11: In the afternoon, suddenly you leave the cell and the prison guard can look for us Luxembourgers for a check-up. We are amazed when we see a lieutenant (Jaquemart) from Luxembourg in charge. They have their personal details and promise to transport us here the next day.
>
> [. . .]
>
> September 13: Finally home, my first thought after I woke up in the morning after a nap. The next morning, the few formalities were completed, and as fast as my legs could carry me, I went to the train station. I still had time and passed the doctor and the money exchange. At 12 o'clock the train was there and I was off with it. And at 2 o'clock I was finally home with my mother.

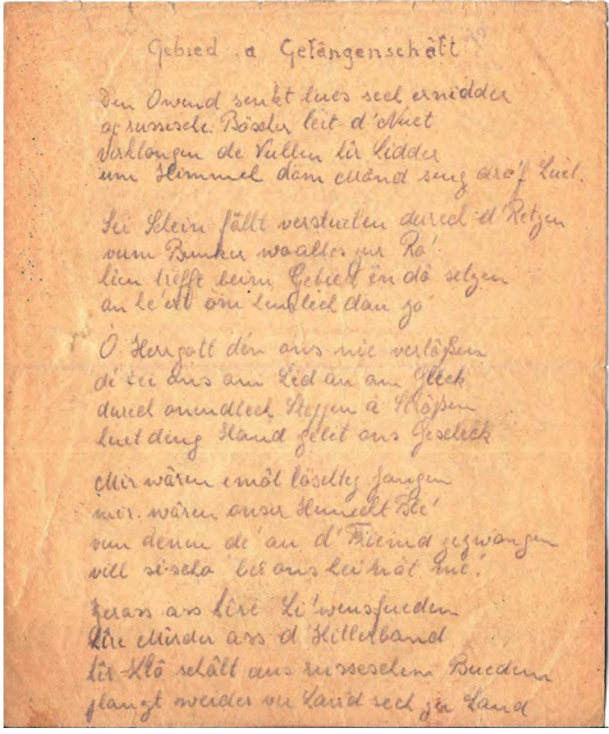
In all three diaries, on the level of logotherapy, we find the perception of Russia, which can be described as the 'Orientalisation of the foreign'. Among the European-looking Russian men and Russian women, they notice the eastern traits that represent a stereotypical (distorted) image of Russia: the 'Mongolist' Betscherek at Coner's, who works with him in the paper factory; the Russian market at the train station at Schauss' ("like the gypsies"); or the realisation that their treatment in the very foreign Russian camp in the SOZ was better than what they received from their familiar Belgian neighbours. The diarists perceive the foreign and the exotic, and shift their attention from their own physical wasting away to spiritual enrichment. The exotic stands out, and the unfamiliar and the daunting is emphasised. That foreign Russia could simultaneously also be perceived as fascinating can be seen from the lyric poetry of the forced recruits, which was written in the Tambov camp.

Poetry: Big Russia, Small Luxembourg

Many of the poems deal with Russia or mention Russian realities. The shift of attention from the horror of captivity to the observation of nature and people seems to obey the same logotherapeutic mechanism as in the diarists' texts. They draw from new realities, a foundation of meaning in life, although here by means of poetry.

While most of the poems selected for this paper were already published by Bausch and Faber in the anthology "Tambow" in 1946, there are also unpublished texts, such as the poems of Gaston Junck (1923–2018) or the handwritten dedication by Constant Woltz to Metty Scholer exhibited in the Musée National d'Histoire Militaire (Fig. 9). The poems of Contant Woltz and Aloyse Lang, who died in Tambov,

had presumably been memorised by their comrades, since corresponding written notes are missing from the museum's collection of written documents brought back from Tambov.



Gebied a Gefängenschàft

Fig. 8: Excerpt from Gaston Junck's poem "Prayer", 1944. Archive of the Association of Former Tambovians.

Among the 'bright' topoi of the poems are the same leitmotifs that are typical of letters written by Wehrmacht soldiers on the Eastern Front:[25] Comradeship and friendship, love for their girl and their mother, adoration of Our Lady and later of Grand Duchess Charlotte, who established herself in the national consciousness as a symbol of resistance in the role of saviour, protector, and guardian of all Luxembourgers. These topoi are directly linked to opposing motifs: loneliness and aban-

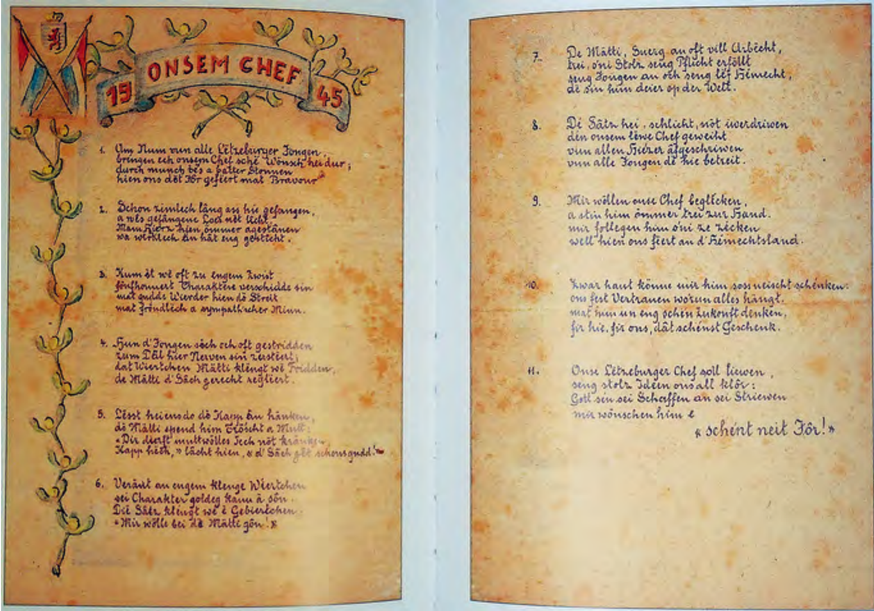
25 Sandra Schmit, "'Ons Jongen' – frühe Luxemburger Frontberichte", in *Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration* ed. Claude D. Conter et al. (Mersch: CNL, 2020), 532–579.

donment, homesickness and nostalgia, hatred and hunger, disease and death. Russia and everything Russian takes on grim features and self-pity comes to the fore, for example in a song lyric by André Kettenhofen (Fig. 10):

> in the bare Russian land / land that is bare and damp / the cold gets to all our bones here, no sun shines on us here / no one has mercy for us here, there is no justice / no one has compassion for us people / because, we are prison in clothes.

Pierre Bausch

In Pierre Bausch's poetry, which uses many toponyms (for example the poems Night Song in Kirsanov, Spring in Kirsanov, Tambov in the Rain, Evening in Tambov, The Pond near Rada, The Steppe and the Prisoner, Russian Nocturnes, Sister Nina), one also finds the combination of exotic and at the same time stereotypical images. In the new and strange, which always seems potentially dangerous, he finds what is familiar and thus what defuses the threatening, especially because all Russia-related images in his work are almost exclusively feminine ('Russia' is also feminine in Russian, 'Rossiya'): "Gloomy shrouds the steppes, The Russians sing – stars flash"; "the night enigmatic, silent"; "the tendrilous birches"; "Katia sings, fac-


ONSEM CHEF
1945

1. Am Num vun alle Lëtzeburger Jongen,
bringen ech onsem Chef sché Wönsch hei dur;
durch munch bës a batter Stonnen
hien ons dët Ir geféiert mat Bravour.

2. Schon ziemlech láng ass hie gefangen,
a wéi gefángene Loos net licht.
Mam Hierz hien ömmer agestánen
wa wierklech än hät eng gebrécht.

3. Kum ët wé oft zu engem Zwist
fönfhonnert Charaktère verschidde sin
mat gudde Wierder hien dë Streit
mat Fröndlich a sympathescher Minn.

4. Hun d'Jongen sëch ech oft gestridden
zum Dël hier Nerven sin zerstiert;
dat Wiertchen Mätti klengt wé Fridden,
de Mätti d'Sâch gerecht reglíert.

5. Lësst heiensdo dë Kapp ën hänken,
dë Mätti spend him Tröscht a Mutt:
«Dir dierft mutlwölles Iech nët kränken,
Kapp héch,» lächt hien, «d'Sâch gët schons gudd!»

6. Verännt an engem klenge Wiertchen
sei Charakter goldeg kann ä sön.
Dëi Sâtz klengt wé ë Gebiertchen:
«Mir wölle bei dë Mätti gön!»

7. De Mätti, Sueg an oft vill Arbécht,
trei, óni Stolz seng Pflicht erföllt
seng Jongen an och seng léf Heimecht,
dë sin him deier op der Welt.

8. Di Sâtz hei, schlicht, nët iwerdriwen
dën onsem léwe Chef geweiht
vun allen Hierzer âfgeschriwen
vun alle Jongen dë hie betreit.

9. Mir wöllen onse Chef beglécken,
a stin him ömmer trei zur Hand.
mir follegen him óni ze zécken
well hien ons féiert an d'Heimechtsland.

10. Zwar haut könne mir him soss neischt schénken:
ons fest Vertrauen wo'run alles hängt.
mat him un eng schén Zukonft denken,
fir hie, fir ons, dât schénst Geschenk.

11. Onse Lëtzeburger Chef soll liewen,
seng stolz Ideen ons all klôr:
Gott sën sei Schaffen an sei Striewen
mir wönschen him e
«schént neit Iôr!»

Fig. 9: Dedication for Mathias Scholer by Constant Woltz. 1945. MNHM, Diekirch.

ing the steppe"; "the birches, the light-green shrouded, twinkle"; "the storm howls from the white Volga"; "snowy steppe"; "Nina, brunette Kyrgyz girl".

Gaston Junck, Constant Woltz, André Kettenhofen

Gaston Junck takes a similar approach in his *Prayer in Captivity* (Fig. 8): his "endless steps and roads" apply to the overwhelmed Russia, whereas the homeland is referred to as "small Luxembourg" (which probably reflects the self-perception of helplessness in captivity). Even though the lines do not contain a poetic metaphor, but reflect real facts about the size of the countries, this juxtaposition in a poem is particularly striking. In Constant Woltz's *Ode to the Fatherland*, there is likewise a comparison with other countries, which probably helps him to emphasize, this time, not the greatness but rather the defiant will for independence of his homeland:

"You Luxembourg, you beautiful country, How I love you!"; "My little country"; "What better country does the sun shine on"; "Come from France, Belgium, Prussia, / we would show you our pride, / Ask around on all sides, / We never wanted to be Prussian (empty space after the slash and before)"; "a little and free Luxembourg".

Gaston Junck also reflects on his own country and the situation in which his imprisonment has placed him, and, similar to André Kettenhofen, he finds the culprit "out there," in an abstract stranger who can just as easily be German or Russian: "From then you're forced into the foreign [. . .] And therefore we are all imprisoned." The poetry of the forced recruits from Tambov is dominated by their self-perception as victims, which on a logotherapeutic level means that they felt unfairly treated and wanted to rectify this situation. The urge for justice turns out to be something on the other side of resigned indifference – the real end.

Despair is dramatically expressed in the lyrics of Aloyse Lang, who died in Tambov: "Or should you always understand that I am – / Lost, caught in the foreign?"; "O mother, I feel I must die, / If I stay longer in this foreign land". Pierre Bausch sounds less bitter, but also sad: "Tears of despair, / of anguish and sorrow"; "at the barbed wire / with the loneliness I keep watch". Bausch uses particularly interesting literary devices to suggest, between the lines, his existence as a stranger in the new culture. He thus resorts to translingual wordplay, crossing Russian words with German or French homophones: "Mein Auge ist Glas" (Russian 'glass' – German 'eye'); "Sur un tombeau morose" (Russian 'moroz' – French 'froid'), etc. Whether they are resigned and despairing or attentive and observant, the authors write because their minds are searching for an explanation and their imprisoned existence demands a higher meaning.

Fig. 10: Musical notes of the song "Les Sacrifies" by André Kettenhoffen, ca. 1943–1945. Archive of the Association of Former Tambovians.

Letters: Home and to Stalin

A particularly striking textual testimony from the camp is an open letter to Stalin written in French. The five–page document, dated October 13, 1944, can be viewed as one of the survival strategies of the forced recruits in Tambov, 286 of whom

signed it as "anti-fascists." In this letter, written in October 1944 (whether it left the camp is uncertain), they asked Stalin to give them the opportunity to go to the front and fight together with the Red Army against Nazi Germany. This opportunity, after all, would have been given to the French. The fact that the Alsatians and Lorrainers had already been released from the camp in July 1944 led to bitterness and reproaches against their own government in exile[26] among the Luxembourgers, which can still be heard today among the descendants of the forced recruits.

Apart from the overall stylistics of the letter, which is based on Soviet propaganda language, on a lexical level the adjectives and adverbs are especially noticeable, as they are primarily intended to clarify that the Luxembourgers were distancing themselves from the Wehrmacht: "glorious Red Army"; "Grand Marshal Stalin"; "brutally torn from our home country"; "Hitlerian cannibals"; "fascist sadists"; "the fiercest enemy"; "the heroic struggle"; "we, the Luxembourg prisoners of war, hostages of these imperialist brutes", etc.[27]

The original letter, preserved in the Russian State Military Archives RGVA, remained unanswered and most-likely went unheeded (Fig. 11); the forced recruits thus sat in the camp for another year. The increased death rate in the winter of 1944–1945 (120 people perished among the Luxembourgers) was associated by the prisoners, among other things, with the fact that any hope of return had been extinguished.[28]

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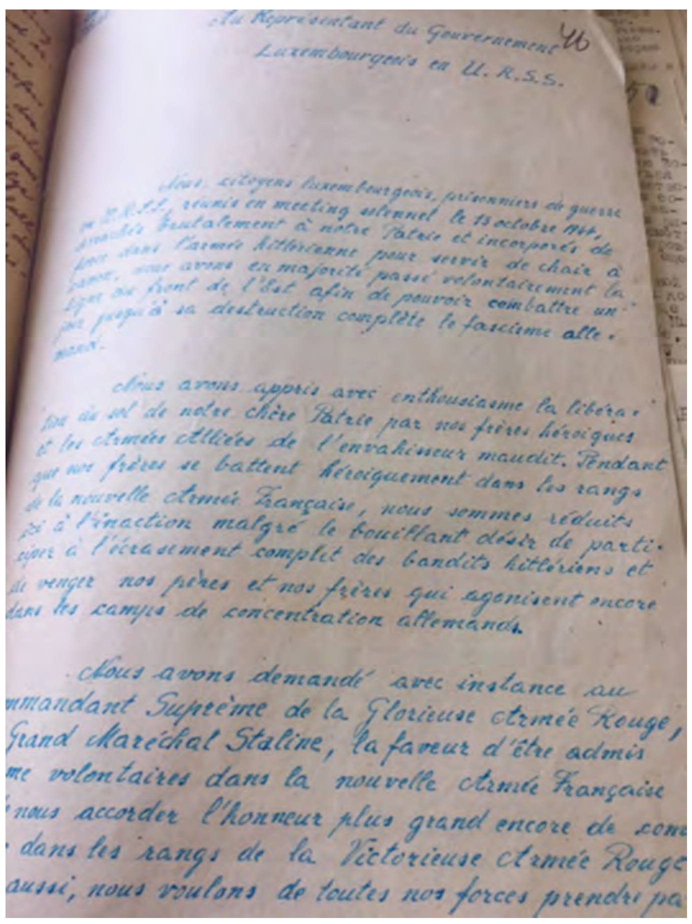
26 The Grand Duchess Charlotte (1896–1985) and the Luxembourgish government left Luxembourg on the day the country was occupied by German troops on 10 May 1940. Until its liberation they remained in London, where they carried out their diplomatic work. The Grand Duchess Charlotte gave her moral support to the country on BBC radio, speaking to her subjects in Luxembourgish.

27 Daily life under the totalitarian regime is explored in Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (London: University of California Press, 1995), where he argues that Stalinism is not only a political system but also a way of life. In this regard, the language used in the media can be seen as a form of daily communication, not solely propaganda, particularly during the 1930s–1940s when the new Soviet state was still defining its features in the process of "building communism." However, Goldman perceives a disconnect between the public rhetoric of the Stalinist era and the private daily practices, resulting in a phenomenon known as "dual-mindedness", which was rooted in the fear of state terror. Wendy Z. Goldman's book *Inventing the Enemy: Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) supports this viewpoint and discusses it in detail (p. 304). Additionally, the meticulous study of Soviet diaries by Hellbeck sheds light on the utilisation of official propaganda language in private diaries. He explains that the authors employed the language of reflection and self-expression "simultaneously as they learned to read and write". Jochen Hellbeck's work, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2009), delves into this topic (p. 7).

28 "It cannot be denied that moral depression contributed substantially to the fact that some sick people who had finally lost courage could not get out of bed," details the report of Roger Thillen, one of the first Luxembourgers released from Tambov, to Luxembourg's Foreign Minister,



Au Représentant du Gouvernement
Luxembourgeois en U.R.S.S.

Nous, citoyens luxembourgeois, prisonniers de guerre
en U.R.S.S., réunis en meeting solennel le 13 octobre 1944,
arrachés brutalement à notre Patrie et incorporés de
force dans l'armée hitlérienne pour servir de chair à
canon, nous avons en majorité passé volontairement la
ligne au front de l'Est afin de pouvoir combattre un
jour jusqu'à sa destruction complète le fascisme alle-
mand.

Nous avons appris avec enthousiasme la libéra-
tion du sol de notre chère Patrie par nos frères héroïques
et les Armées Alliées de l'envahisseur maudit. Pendant
que nos frères se battent héroïquement dans les rangs
de la nouvelle Armée Française, nous sommes réduits
ici à l'inaction malgré le bouillant désir de parti-
ciper à l'écrasement complet des bandits hitlériens et
de venger nos pères et nos frères qui agonisent encore
dans les camps de concentration allemands.

Nous avons demandé avec instance au
mmandant Suprême de la Glorieuse Armée Rouge,
Grand Maréchal Staline, la faveur d'être admis
me volontaires dans la nouvelle Armée Française
nous accorder l'honneur plus grand encore de com
dans les rangs de la Victorieuse Armée Rouge
aussi; nous voulons de toutes nos forces prendre pa

Fig. 11: Excerpt from the letter of the Luxembourg prisoners of war in Camp 188 to J. Stalin, October 13, 1944. Military Archives of the Russian Federation RGVA.

Among the dead was Jean Sprunk (1923–1945), who had been captured just as the French were being released – in July 1944. Shortly before that, he had sent a letter home from the German Eastern Front on, for lack of paper, birch bark (Fig. 12). In it, he reported that they were getting the *Luxemburger Wort* in the Wehrmacht and that he had thus kept abreast of the situation. "Here it's raining cats and dogs almost

24 June 1945. A Russian translation can be found in the Archives of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, forwarded to the Soviet Foreign Ministry by Renè Blum, head of the Luxembourg Mission in Moscow. Inv. 4, Reg. 1, fol. no. 14, folder 102. 011 – "Notes from the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to the Luxembourg Mission," 73–79, here: p. 79.

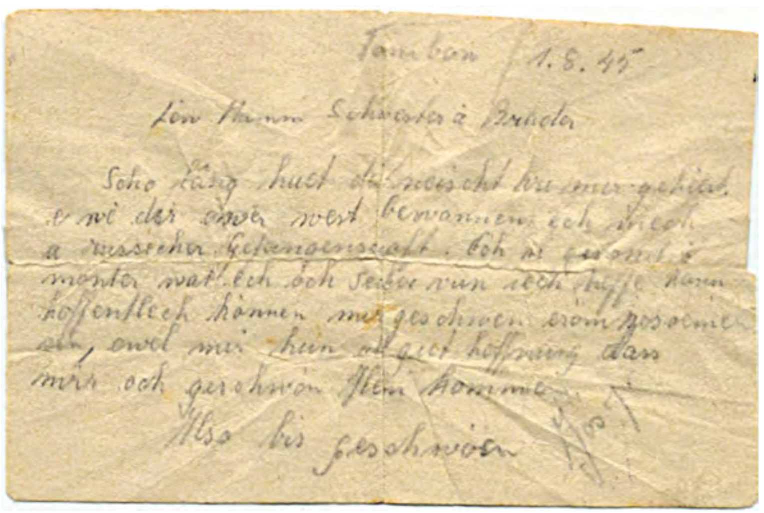
Fig. 12: Excerpt from Jean Sprunck's letter of May 11, 1944. Archives of the Association of Former Tambovians.

every day. When another four months are over, it will already be winter again, and hopefully it will be over by then," Sprunck wrote. He concluded the letter with "Onward, soldiers of Christ!" Four months later, it was indeed over for him at the front – he arrived at Camp 188, where he died in June 1945. Jean Sprunck was neither a poet nor an artist; he literally lived by correspondence. Without the opportunity to correspond, he was deprived of the logotherapeutic axis. Without contact, home became less and less real and the hope of return diminished. It is precisely hope, however, that remains one of the strongest motivations for survival in captivity.

On October 8, 1945, a small group of 146 sick people were released and transported back to Luxembourg. Through his friend Jos Zeimetz, Jos Steichen sent a short note to his family (Fig. 13). Three out of four sentences include the word 'hope': "[I] hope you are well [. . .] I hope we will come home soon [. . .] I hope to see you soon."

Jules Coner also managed to send a letter home (Fig. 14) after the end of the war through René Wendling from Esch/Alzette, who was released from the Tambov camp along with the French:

> Tambov, July 24, 1945.
> Dear parents!
> You certainly haven't received such a truncated letter from me yet. But it is from Russian captivity, and I think it is worth more than all the other letters put together. Your prayers and requests were not in vain. We all trusted in the Mother of God and she also helped us.



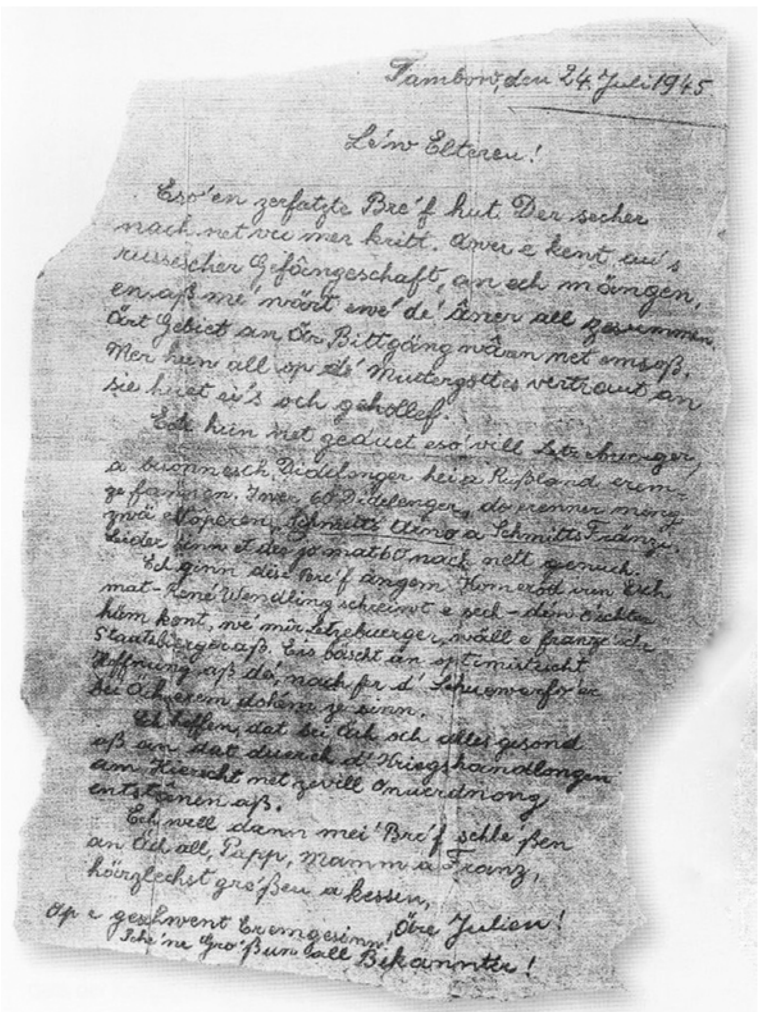
Tambov 1.8.45

Léiw Mamm Schwester a Bruder

Scho laang hutt dir [illegible] gehéiert e wi der ower wert bewannen [illegible] a russescher Gefangenschaft. Ech si gesond a monter [illegible] hoffentlech kënne mir geschwënn [illegible] ewell mir hun [illegible] Hoffnung dass mir och geschwënn Heem kommen.

Also bis geschwënn

Fig. 13: Letter from Joseph Steichen from Camp 188, August 1, 1945. Archives of the Association of Former Tambovians.



Tambow, den 24. Juli 1945

Léiw Elteren!

Esó'en zerfatzte Bré'f hut Der secher nach net vu mer kritt. Awer e kent aus russescher Gefângeschaft, an ech mängen, en aß me' wäärt wé' de' ânere all zesummen. Ârt Gebiet an Är Bittgäng wâren net ëmsoß. Mer hun all op d' Muttergottes vertraut an sie huet ài's och geholleef.

Ech hun net geduet esó'vill Letzebuerger a besonnesch Diddelenger hei a Rußland erem-zefannen. Iwer 60 Diddelenger, do rennen meng zwä Nopeschen, Schmitts Arno a Schmitts Fränz. Leider sinn et der jo mat 60 nach nett genuch.

Ech ginn dése Bré'f ängem Hunneröd vun Ech mat – René Wendling schreiwt e sech – dén Echter hém kont, wé' mir Letzebuerger, wäll e franzé'sch Staatsbierger aß. Eis bäscht an optimistescht Hoffnung aß de', nach fir d' Schueberfouer [illegible] bei Ärch doném ze sinn.

Ech hoffen, dat bei Äch och alles gesond aß an dat duerch d' Kriegshandlungen am Hierscht net zevill Onuerdnong entstânen aß.

Ech well dann mei' Bré'f schlé'ßen an Äch all, Papp, Mamm a Fränz, häerzlechst gré'ßen a kessen,

Ären Julien!

Op e gesfhwent Ewerngesinn! Sché'ne Gré'ßen un all Bekannter!

Fig. 14: Letter from Julien Coner from Camp 188, July 24, 1945. private archive Coner family.

When Coner writes about how much his letter would mean to his parents, he is primarily projecting[29] onto it his own need for a letter from home. A message from home was the most expensive currency – one fought for it in the camp, and

29 On projection as a defence mechanism in which one ascribes to the other (or to something external) the same thing that one feels inside oneself (psychically, psychologically), see Anna Freud, *The Ego and Defense Mechanism* (Bern: Paperback, 1984).

with it one could extort edibles from one another. Coner writes about this in his diary:

> 12.06.1945 [. . .] 40 men are working in the sawmill today. We load logs onto a lorry and unload them by the water. Mail is said to have been answered from Vienna and Dresden. When will our letters arrive home?
> 13.06.1945 The sky is cloudy, but the sun is shining. At noon I lie in the sun on a few boards that I have laid out. Already at 4:00 p.m. we had fully met our quota, i.e., to transport 24 logs. What happens is like this; one sits down, writes a letter with a camp address, then says to a comrade: 'What will you give me if I deliver a letter from your wife'? The latter gives him a portion of bread! The swindler is in prison, the other in a military hospital.

Although neither Soviet POW in Germany nor interned Wehrmacht soldiers in the Soviet Union were allowed to correspond during the war, at the end of the war, the Soviet government decided to use prisoners' correspondence for propaganda purposes. The Red Cross distributed so-called 'Postcards of the Prisoner of War' in 1943; however, Soviet authorities did not forward them to the addressees, but instead published them in the press and printed them in leaflets at the end of the war.[30]

Conclusion

In the current political context and the war on the European continent, the meaning of situations of distress and danger in which someone would find the strength to write poetry, keep a diary, and jot down trivialities such as 'today I feel fine' becomes more understandable. Such earlier (supposedly) inexplicable actions lead us back to the initial question of this small insight into the corpus of Luxembourgish POWs texts produced in Soviet camps: what gave meaning to life in captivity?

Writing was unquestionably one of the best survival strategies. Apparently, writing itself manifests the desire to not give in to a vegetative existence. Writing poetry, keeping a diary, sending notes home, or writing open letters to Stalin – a palette of strategies becomes visible, which the authors consciously or unconsciously resorted to in order to provide themselves with the necessary mental support and to (re)gain a feeling of control over their own lives.

Among those who kept diaries, one can see the confrontation with everyday life, the attempt to not lose one's mind in the monotony, to give meaning to the trivial by documenting one's existence. They wanted to write a document and

30 Yurii Mizis et al., *Tambovskie lageria*, 477.

Fig. 15: Prisoners of war in camp 188 in Rada near Tambov, ca. 1944–1945. photographer unknown. Private archive Evgeni Pisarev.

acted as chroniclers of their captivity. The poets perceive the foreign as a poetic challenge – they receive the nature and the land, they look for the familiar, i.e. the stereotyped and the unknown. The letter writers speak above all to themselves, of courage and of hope. Writing in the camp turns out to be not only one of the few available intellectual activities, but also a 'clean' activity that made one forget about lice, stench, rags, and dirty dishes for a few minutes a day.

We can summarise the strategies of logotherapy in a few key words: escapism (the escape from reality in Bausch's poetry); positivism (finding the good within the bad in the diaries of Schauss and Coner); religion (a belief in God, but even more in oneself, in Ollinger's diary); and patriotism (declarations of love for one's homeland in the poetry by Junck, Woltz, and Lang, although this strategy proved ineffective for the last two, as they died in the camp).

Many diaries did not make it to Luxembourg; the postcards sent got stuck in dossiers of the camp administration. Nor did every author survive, as Lang and Woltz prove. The few surviving yellowed pieces of paper are all the more precious. They had a logotherapeutic function, not only for the authors themselves, but also for their comrades and their descendants. The memory of the deceased fellow-sufferers, preserved in the printing of their texts, in the publication of their own memoirs, or in the singing of camp songs, also communicates something about the life of these POWs to later generations of children and grandchildren. This is the case even for those whose fathers brought home nothing from

Fig. 16: Luxembourg prisoners of war returning to Luxembourg on November 5, 1945. 1st from left is Jos Steichen. Archives of the Association of Former Tambovians.

the Eastern Front, or who never wanted to talk about their time as Wehrmacht soldiers. In their sparse diaries and naïve poems lies a testimony of the past, an entry into the conversation about experience, and a lesson for the generations who would follow.

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Part 3: **Desertion and Draft Evasion: Impact on Families and Communities**

Sarah Maya Vercruysse

"Desertion Leads to Resettlement" – The Consequences of Desertion and Draft Evasion on the Families of Luxembourgish Soldiers (1942–1945)

1 Introduction

"When a man excels, he is rewarded and so is his family. And if a man is unfaithful in the Reich, he is punished and so is his family. This is in an ancient Germanic law. The clan is liable for each and every one of its own."[1] With these words the *Reichsführer-SS* Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945) encapsulated the principle of familial responsibility (*Sippenhaftung*) in National Socialist politics in July 1944, following the assassination attempt on Hitler. The Nazi regime used *Sippenhaftung* as a means of pressuring and punishing the extended families of resisters for any act of opposition to the Third Reich.[2] This involved confiscating their property and depriving them of their liberty. Even though the identification of actual cases of *Sippenhaftung* is challenging, the principle helps to understand the punitive measures inflicted on the relatives of Luxembourgish deserters and draft evaders from the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) and Wehrmacht during the occupation of the country. As a deterrent measure to enforce compliance and secure the political objectives of the Nazi regime in the region, thousands of family members endured forced resettlement (*Absiedlung*[3]) to German regions such as Lower Silesia, Sudetenland and the Hunsrück, as well as having their assets confiscated.

1 "Wenn ein Mann sich auszeichnet, wird er belohnt und zugleich seine Familie. Und wenn ein Mann in diesem Reich untreu ist, wird er bestraft und seine Familie. Das ist in ein altes germanisches Recht. Die Sippe haftet für jeden einzelnen der ihren." Quotation from a speech by the *Reichsführer-SS* in Grafenwöhr, 25 July 1944, BArch, R 19/4015.

2 Johannes Salzig, *Die Sippenhaft als Repressionsmassnahme des nationalsozialistischen Regimes: ideologische Grundlagen, Umsetzung, Wirkung*, Schriftenreihe der Forschungsgemeinschaft 20. Juli 1944 e.V 20 (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2015), 47–48; Robert Michael and Karin Doerr, *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi-German: An English Lexicon of the Language of the Third Reich* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 374.

3 The terms "*Umsiedlung*" and "*Absiedlung*" have been used interchangeably in the sources and literature related to the subject in Luxembourg. "*Zwangsumsiedlung*", or forced resettlement, primarily refers to the forced "repatriation" of German minority groups from South, East, Central,

Note: "Desertion führt zur Absiedlung," *Escher Tageblatt* 291 (11/12 December 1943), 4.

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This chapter examines the impact of desertion and draft evasion on Luxembourgish families at home and explores the punitive measures imposed on them by the National Socialist administration. It analyses the decision-making process and mechanisms behind these measures, highlighting the key actors, the methods of enforcement, and their strategic use for political purposes. By contextualising the measures within Nazi Germany's wider policies towards its occupied territories, the chapter seeks to contribute to the comprehension of the regional variations in the Nazi regime's treatment of deserter families and ethnic German population groups.[4]

The Second World War, and more precisely the history of the "forced conscription"[5] of young men into the German armed forces, holds a central place in Luxembourg's collective memory and historiography. In the post-war period, draft evaders and deserters were given an important role in the country's master narrative as "those who opposed the occupying forces". This perspective was also prevalent in public discourse and scholarly publications. However, the impact of deserters' choices on their family members has been largely overlooked. Current understanding of the experiences of these families is primarily based on personal experiences of witnesses, or short chapters in more general studies on the Second World War, or the forced resettlements in general.[6] Internationally, the experiences of the families and communities of ethnic German deserters and draft evaders

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and Southeast Europe, directing them back within the borders of the Greater German Reich, mostly in the newly annexed eastern territories. On the other hand, "*Absiedlung*" represents a distinct form of forced resettlement, where individuals and families from occupied regions were forcibly moved within Germany's original borders, mainly for political reasons, with economic motives. In Luxembourg, the most accurate term to indicate the resettlement of these families is therefore "*Absiedlung*"; Alexa Stiller, *Völkische Politik: Praktiken der Exklusion und Inklusion in polnischen, französischen und slowenischen Annexionsgebieten 1939–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2022), p. 1313; Transcript from the confidential information of the Party Chancellery, September 1943, Archives Nationales du Luxembourg (ANLux), CdZ-A-4556-04.

4 Given the limited scope of the study, this chapter does not provide a detailed cross-national comparison of how various ethnic German deserter families were treated within the German Reich. This is however an interesting topic for future research.

5 Considerable debate arises concerning the diverse range of meanings this term encompasses and the numerous implications it carries. For more information see Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg, eds., *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich: 1939–1945* (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016).

6 With the exception of Gilles Kartheiser's quantitative study on the forced resettlements of Luxembourg families. This study does not focus on the families of deserters but nevertheless provides an important basis for this research; Gilles Kartheiser, *Die Umsiedlung Luxemburger Familien 1942–1945: von der numerischen und namentlichen Erfassung bis zur Beschreibung des Lagerlebens anhand von Zeitzeugenberichten* (Saarbrücken, AV Akademikerverlag, 2013).

in the German services, as well as the treatment of ethnic Germans by the Nazi regime in general, have been the subject of numerous publications, which were crucial to this research.[7]

The study uses administrative and judicial documents from both civil and military authorities during and after the war. These include interrogation files from the local police, military court files, witness statements from post-war trials, and a limited number of personal records. While ego-documents such as memoirs and letters provide insights into life during resettlement, they offer only brief mentions of the underlying processes, and are thus less relevant here. This chapter presents findings from a broader doctoral research project focusing on the social environments of Luxembourgish soldiers and recruits during World War II, based on a case study of resettled families from Schifflange, an industrial town in southern Luxembourg.[8] By examining private and official documentation related to this specific group, the chapter seeks to critically examine policy guidelines, procedures and objectives by comparing them to the experiences of these resettled families.[9]

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7 See among others Leopold Steurer, Martha Verdorfer, and Walter Pichler, *Verfolgt, verfemt, vergessen: Lebensgeschichtliche Erinnerungen an den Widerstand gegen Nationalsozialismus und Krieg, Südtirol 1943–1945* (Bozen: Edition Sturzflüge, 1993); Maria Fritsche, "'. . . haftet die Sippe mit Vermögen, Freiheit oder Leben . . .'. Die Anwendung der Sippenhaft bei Familien verfolgter Wehrmachtsoldaten", in *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz. Urteilspraxis – Strafvollzug – Entschädigungspolitik in Österreich*, edited by Walter Manoschek (Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2003); Kerstin von Lingen and Peter Pirker, eds. *Deserteure der Wehrmacht und der Waffen-SS: Entziehungsformen, Solidarität, Verfolgung* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023); Salzig, *Die Sippenhaft als Repressionsmassnahme des nationalsozialistischen Regimes*; Alexa Stiller, *Völkische* Politik; Lothar Kettenacker, *Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik im Elsaß* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1973).

8 This doctoral research is part of the project "WARLUX – Soldiers and their communities in WWII: The impact and legacy of war experiences in Luxembourg" (2020–2024) at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C^2DH) at the University of Luxembourg; see also Sarah Maya Vercruysse, "Families of Luxembourgish Wehrmacht recruits during the Nazi occupation and the impact of local authorities and National Socialist organisations on their everyday lives", last updated 05 October 2022. https://haitblog.hypotheses.org/category/sonderreihen/doktorandenforum-demokratie-und-diktaturforschung-im-20-und-21-jahrhundert-individuum-und-organisation-in-autoritaeren-und-demokratischen-gesellschaftsordnungen

9 In accordance with archival regulations and GDPR, the author has opted to pseudonymize the names of contemporaries, unless they were already openly published, or the individual held a public position.

2 Luxembourgers: In German Territory, in the Wehrmacht, and as Deserters

On 10 May 1940, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which had a population of around 290,000 people,[10] was invaded by Germany and placed under a military administration. In early August 1940, a civil administration (*Zivilverwaltung*, CdZ) was established under the direction of Gustav Simon (1900–1945), who held the positions of Head of the Civil Administration and *Gauleiter*[11] of the Koblenz-Trier administrative division. Just like the *Gauleiters* of Alsace and Lorraine, Simon reported directly to Hitler and held a position of significant authority.[12] One of his main concerns was to Germanise and Nazify the country, as well as to protect and promote the German "people's community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*) living there. As in other occupied regions, German laws were applied, public life was brought under German control, and connections to French culture were removed, as can be seen, for example, in changes to family and street names. The Luxembourgish population was considered to be ethnic German (*Volksdeutsch*) – German descendants by blood – who had to be reintegrated into the German Reich as part of the new administrative district *Gau Moselland*.

While the civil administration originally thought this reintegration would be welcomed by the population, rising protest made it clear that this would not simply be accepted. Following the establishment of compulsory labour service for young men and women between the ages of 17 and 24 on 23 May 1941, the central administration introduced compulsory military service for young men born between 1920 and 1924 – later extended to 1927 – on 30 August 1942.[13] The "Ordinance on citizen-

10 Gérard Trausch, *La croissance démographique du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg du début du XIXe siècle à nos jours: les mouvements naturels de la population*, 2. ed. (Luxembourg: Imprimerie Victor S.A. Esch-sur-Alzette, 1973), 46.

11 *Gauleiters* served as the leaders of regional administrative districts known as *Gaue*, established by the Nazi Party. They held supreme authority within their designated territories, playing a pivotal role in the party's regional governance structure. Their position in the party hierarchy ranked higher than district leaders (*Kreisleiter*) and local group leaders (*Ortsgruppenleiter*); Michael, *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi-German*, 176.

12 Marc Schoentgen, "Arbeiten unter Hitler. NS-Sozialpolitik und Herrschaftspraxis im besetzten Luxemburg 1940–1944" (PhD thesis, University of Luxembourg, 2017), 38.

13 Verordnung über die Reichsarbeitsdienstpflicht in Luxemburg in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 23 May 1941, 232; Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 31 August 1942, 253.

ship in Alsace, Lorraine, and Luxembourg", dated 23 August 1943, granted German citizenship to ethnic German conscripts of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS from these areas.[14] The announcement of military service was followed by a wave of strikes throughout the country. Despite the opposition, in total more than 10,000 young men were conscripted into the Wehrmacht over the course of the war. It is estimated that around 3,500 of them deserted or hid before the draft could reach them. Approximately 3,000 died at the front or never returned home.[15]

From mid-1943 onwards, the German military noticed a steady rise in desertion rates following the initial wave of enlistment that took place between August and October 1942, the training period and the first leave permits.[16] Historian Stefan Kurt Treiber's survey on Luxembourg revealed that the majority of desertion cases involved soldiers who failed to return after being granted home leave.[17] *Gauleiter* Simon attributed this increase to the powerful resistance movement in the country, which helped conscripts obtain false passports and escape across the border, as well as to the "lenient" sentencing of deserters by some military courts.[18] He asked Hermann Passe (1894–1977), who was responsible for matters regarding the Wehrmacht at the Party Chancellery, to enforce the harshest measures against the deserters from Luxembourg and to rule out pardons for deserters sentenced to death.[19] In accordance with the well-known statement by the Führer, he wrote in February 1944 that "[. . .] no deserter from the CdZ area of

14 Nonetheless, naturalisation was only conferred after their enlistment in the military; more information on this subject can be found in the article of Denis Scuto in this volume, *Citizenship, Naturalisation and Military Service during the Second World War: The case of occupied Luxembourg;* Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 23 August 1942, 254.

15 Ministère de l'Interieur, *Livre d'or des victimes luxembourgeoises de la guerre de 1940 à 1945* (Luxembourg: Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1972), 18; Paul Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe: die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945* (Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1985), 181; Peter M. Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen". Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der Deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Aachener Studien zur Wirtschafts- Und Sozialgeschichte 5 (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2008), 115.

16 For more information on the desertion of the Luxembourgish forced conscripts and how the civil and military administration dealt with this, please consult Sarah Maya Vercruysse and Nina Janz, *The "long arm" of the military justice of the Wehrmacht – A case study on Luxembourgish desertions*, which will be published by De Gruyter in 2024–2025.

17 Stefan Kurt Treiber, *Helden oder Feiglinge? Deserteure der Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag GmbH, 2021), 204.

18 *Gauleiter* Simon to *Generaloberst* Friedrich Fromm on the treatment of Luxembourgish deserters, 8 February 1944, BArch, NS 19/2179.

19 Letter from *Gauleiter* Simon to Hermann Passe, 16 July 1943, BArch, NS 19/1163.

Luxembourg may survive this war".[20] Draft evaders and deserters were both seen as traitors, and were subjected to severe punishments, including death or lengthy prison terms. The number of Luxembourgers prosecuted by the German military justice system during World War II is not known because of a lack of reliable data. Nevertheless, it is estimated that approximately 2,300 Luxembourgers deserted, while 1,200 evaded the draft, accounting for roughly 34.5% of the total number of Luxembourgers recruited.[21]

3 General Consequences of Desertion on Families and Communities

The act of desertion by any soldier from the Wehrmacht had immediate consequences, not only for the person in question but also for their family members at home. If a unit noticed that a soldier was missing and suspected that he was absent without leave[22] or had deserted, it had to immediately inform a whole series of authorities, who would launch search operations. This included the respective military court, the local commandant's office, the Reich Criminal Police Department *(Reichskriminalpolizeiamt*), and the local civilian and police authorities "in all possible places of residence".[23] According to military protocol, if a soldier failed to return from leave, a fugitive report, containing the details of his closest relatives, had to be submitted within 14 days of the expected arrival time.[24] An

20 "[. . .] dass kein Fahnenflüchtiger aus dem CdZ-Bereich Luxemburg diesen Krieg überleben darf." Quotation from BArch, NS 19/2179.

21 André Hohengarten, "Die Zwangsrekrutierung der Luxemburger in die deutsche Wehrmacht", *Histoire & Mémoire. Les Cahiers du CDREF* 1 (2010), 23; Norbert Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen', 'Malgre-Nous' und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg", in *Die anderen Soldaten. Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, edited by Norbert Haase and Gerhard Paul (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), 171; Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen"*, 115.

22 *Unerlaubte Entfernung*: anyone who left or was absent from his unit or post without authorisation and was intentionally or negligently absent for more than three days – or for more than one day in the field – was to be punished by imprisonment or detention for up to ten years (§ 64 Militärstrafgesetzbuch).

23 In certain instances, the State Protection Police and the Luxembourg military district command (*Wehrbezirkskommando* Luxemburg) were aware of the desertion of a soldier on leave before the unit and initiated the desertion investigation; Leaflet for processing cases of absence without leave/desertion, 27 January 1944, BArch, RH 26/1023:3.

24 Leaflet for processing cases of absence without leave/desertion, 27 January 1944, BArch, RH 26/1023:3.

analysis of local police investigations and military court files regarding Luxembourgish deserters reveals that the timeframe for launching investigations varied, ranging from a few days to several months after the suspected desertion.[25] This delay was considered unproductive and detrimental to the military's efforts to implement effective countermeasures.[26]

Upon receipt of the report, the local police in the fugitive's home community launched a local investigation by conducting house searches, confiscating the deserters' personal belongings, and interrogating close family members who may have hosted or been in contact with him.[27] Post-war testimonies reveal that families often had considerable knowledge about the deserters, but did not always cooperate as effectively as the official documents would have us believe. Relatives made false statements and fabricated evidence in an attempt to mislead investigators.[28] For example, some wrote letters to the deserters' units, expressing their concern and seeking news of their missing sons or husbands, while being very well aware of the situation. A few even openly refused to collaborate with these investigations. The father of X.B. declared, for instance, "However, I must state that in the future, if I were to become aware of the whereabouts of my son X., I would not reveal them."[29] The mother of J.B. stated, "I cannot provide any information about his field post number because I didn't memorise it and I burned all

25 Local police investigations against deserters and draft evaders in the Esch/Alzig region, Lëtzebuerg City Museum, collection Kreisleitung N.S.D.A.P. Esch-sur-Alzette (at the moment this article went to printing, these documents were transferred to the National Archives of Luxembourg under reference numbers CdZ-G-15291; CdZ-G-15292; CdZ-G-15290; CdZ-G-15293; CdZ-G-15291; CdZ-G-15292; CdZ-G-15290; CdZ-G-15282); Military court file, J.W., BArch, Pers 15/128200; Military court file, J.D., BArch, Pers 15/152095; Military court file, J.D., BArch, Pers 15/152759; Military court file, R.G., BArch, Pers 15/128567.

26 Leaflet for processing cases of absence without leave/desertion, 27 January 1944, BArch, RH 26/1023:3.

27 Local police investigations against deserters and draft evaders in the Esch/Alzig region, Lëtzebuerg City Museum, collection Kreisleitung N.S.D.A.P. Esch-sur-Alzette; Maria Fritsche, *Entziehungen: Österreichische Deserteure und Selbstverstümmler in der Deutschen Wehrmacht* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2004), 72.

28 Marc Trossen, *"Verluere Joëren": 85 Luxemburger Zeitzeugen des Zweiten Weltkriegs berichten*, vol 1., *Zwangsrekrutierte, Refraktäre, Deserteure, Resistenzler, aber auch Kollaborateure, Kriegsfreiwillige . . .* (Redange/Attert: Les Amis de l'Histoire – Luxembourg, 2015), 552; Aimé Knepper, *Les réfractaires dans les bunkers* (Luxembourg: Éditions Saint-Paul, 2004), 44 and 61.

29 "Auf Vorhalt muss ich jedoch sagen, dass ich in Zukunft den Aufenthalts meines Sohnes X. nicht verraten würde, wenn mir dieses bekannt werden sollte." Quotation from the interrogation file of J.B., 24 February 1944, Lëtzebuerg City Museum, collection Kreisleitung N.S.D.A. P. Esch-sur-Alzette, folder II.

of his mail.[. . .] Additionally, I don't possess a photograph of my son J. that I could attach to this interrogation."[30]

On 6 May 1943, the father of Rudi Scheuer, a labour service recruit who had deserted on 22 February 1943, provided the following statement to the local police officer of Schifflange, "My son Rudi did not send me any messages after his disappearance from the RAD camp in Zobten. I have also not heard anything about his whereabouts from other people. I have searched for him among all relatives and acquaintances, but I have not been able to find anything."[31] However, according to the memoirs of Ady Schoux (one of Rudi's comrades) as documented in the publication *Verluere Joeren*, Rudi and the other deserters travelled to Düsseldorf, where they spent several days at Rudi's uncle's residence before returning and going into hiding in the area around their home town for the remainder of the war. The father's statement includes contact details for a relative in Düsseldorf, and in a post-war questionnaire, Rudi himself asserts that his father was hiding him at the time of the interrogation. Although the accuracy of this last claim could not be confirmed, a comparison of the source material strongly suggests that it is unlikely that Rudi's father had no additional information about his son's whereabouts in May 1943, especially considering that Rudi was in hiding with relatives and had been residing in the same town as his parents since March that year.[32]

The investigations involved close collaboration between the local police, the local administration, the Security Police (*Einsatzkommando der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD*), the deserter's unit, and the competent military court, as evidenced by their extensive correspondence. Military court records, for instance, provide insights

30 "Angaben über seine Feldpostnummer kann ich nicht machen, weil ich mir diese nicht gemerkt und alle seine Post verbrannt habe. Ich habe sie verbrannt, weil ich keinen Wert darauf legte, sie längere Zeit aufzubewahren. Auch habe ich kein Lichtbild meines Sohnes J. im Besitz, welches ich dieser Vernehmung beifügen konnte." Quotation from the interrogation file of T.K., 24 February 1944, Lëtzebuerg City Museum, collection Kreisleitung N.S.D.A.P. Esch-sur-Alzette, folder II.

31 "Mein Sohn Rudi liess mir nach seinem Verschwinden aus dem RAD-Lager in Zobten keinerlei Nachricht zukommen. Auch durch andere Leute habe ich bisher noch nichts über seinen Aufenthaltsort erfahren. Ich habe bei sämtlichen Verwandten und Bekannten nach ihm geforscht, habe jedoch nichts entdecken können." Quotation from the interrogation file of "Kaspar" Scheuer, 6 May 1943, Lëtzebuerg City Museum, collection Kreisleitung N.S.D.A.P. Esch-sur-Alzette, folder III.

32 Interrogation file of "Kaspar" Scheuer, 6 May 1943, Lëtzebuerg City Museum, collection Kreisleitung N.S.D.A.P. Esch-sur-Alzette, folder III; Marc Trossen, *"Verluere Joëren": Luxemburger Zeitzeugen des Zweiten Weltkriegs berichten*, vol. 3, *Peenemünde und die Verdienste der Luxemburger Resistenz,* (Redange/Attert: Les Amis de l'Histoire – Luxembourg, 2018), 701; see information sheet of Rudi Scheuer for the "Ons Jongen" Ligue des réfractaires et déportés militaires Luxembourgeois, 29 August 1946, Musée National de la Résistance et des Droits Humains.

into how courts sought updates on cases and conducted further investigations within the deserters’ communities. They also reveal the use of parents’ statements, confiscated letters and pictures as part of the assessment process for deserters, as well as during the trial.[33]

In addition to the search measures, desertion could also have consequences on the financial and material situation of a family. The National Socialist regime offered material and financial support for the dependents of labour service recruits and conscripted soldiers to provide for their basic needs while the conscripts were away serving in the military or the labour service. Under the “Deployment Family Support Act” of 26 June 1940, provision was made to allocate financial assistance to the families of military and labour service personnel in order to cover essential living expenses, including housing, food, clothing and medical care.[34] As naturalised Germans, Luxembourgish conscripts were also entitled to this support. Yet it remains to be investigated whether this support had a significant financial impact. However, if a conscript was absent without leave, deserted, or was arrested, he lost his eligibility for military service and his entitlement to this financial aid, leaving his family without the financial assistance.[35] In the case of family support file nr. 2891, which pertains to a family from the Schifflange research sample, it was observed that the monthly payment of 47 RM, which the family had been receiving since 15 February 1943, was stopped in August 1944 following the soldier’s desertion and arrest at the end of June 1944.[36] Additionally, the Nazi Party’s Welfare Organisation (*Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*, NSV) had the authority to deny deserters’ families access to any social welfare services, as indicated in a Nazi Party

33 For more information on this topic, see the article by Sarah Maya Vercruysse and Nina Janz, *The “long arm” of the military justice of the Wehrmacht – A case study on Luxembourgish desertions*, which will be published by De Gruyter in 2024–2025; Military court file, R.G., BArch, Pers 15/128567 Military court file, J.D., BArch, Pers 15/152095.

34 Einsatz-Familienunterhaltsgesetzes vom 26. Juni 1940 in: Reichsgesetzblatt, part I, 28 June 1940, 911–912.

35 It is notable that the law provided for family support to be continued if a soldier went missing in action, was imprisoned, or voluntarily returned to his unit; Verordnung zur Durchführung und Ergänzung des Einsatz-Familienunterhaltsgesetzes vom 26. Juni 1940 in: Reichsgesetzblatt, part I, 28 June 1940, 912–918; Treiber, *Helden oder Feiglinge*, 280; Fritsche, *Entziehungen: Österreichische Deserteure und Selbstverstümmler in der Deutschen Wehrmacht*, 72.

36 In accordance with Luxembourg archival legislation and the agreements made with the National Archives during the inspection of this file, this information had to be anonymised and cited as follows: ANLux, CdZ-G-12843.

circular from the district leader (*Kreisleiter*) of the Luxembourgish district Esch/Alzig, Wilhelm Diehl (1889–1965), and highlighted by historian Robert Loeffel.[37]

Beyond these investigations and the overall repercussions potentially experienced by relatives of all types of deserters, the families of ethnic German conscripts faced the additional threat of forced resettlement, which involved displacement and the confiscation of their belongings. To understand the full scope and context of these repressive measures, they must be viewed within the broader political, economic and ethnological frameworks in which various levels of the National Socialist civil and military authorities operated, interacted and pursued distinct interests.

4 From Resettlement to the Confiscation of Assets

4.1 Resettling Ethnic Germans: a Historical and Contextual Overview

With the aim of reorganising Europe based on National Socialist ideology and racial principles, commonly referred to as the New European Order,[38] the National Socialist regime carried out large-scale expulsions and population transfers in occupied territories from the late 1930s onwards. Within the framework of the *Volkstumspolitik*, the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (*Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*, RKF), operating under the authority of Heinrich Himmler, orchestrated the removal of individuals deemed "harmful" to the German people and the German community, including Jews and Poles. The focus was primarily on the incorporated eastern territories and annexed western Poland. Simultaneously, the regime resettled (*Umsiedlung*) ethnic German minorities from regions such as the Baltic, Russia or South Tyrol into these territories, aiming to repopulate and Germanise these areas. As Alexa Stiller noted, the RKF's ethnic politics (*Völkische Politk*) exhibited a symbiotic relationship, interconnecting the reinforcement of Germanification efforts in the occupied and annexed territories with the expulsion and mass murder of undesired groups. She estimates

37 Robert Loeffel, "Sippenhaft in the Third Reich: Analysing the 'spectre' of family liability punishment against opposition in Nazi Germany 1933–1945", (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2004), 70.

38 Michael, *Nazi-Deutsch/Nazi-German*, 153.

that some 12 million individuals from the eastern, western and south-eastern annexed territories were affected by this.[39]

For the practical implementation of the forced resettlements of ethnic Germans, the Reich Commissioner enlisted the support of numerous entities such as the different Reich ministries, the Wehrmacht, as well as existing SS offices or entities affiliated to the SS.[40] These included, among others, the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (VoMi), which was responsible for housing the new settlers in temporary resettlement camps, and the *Deutsche Umsiedlungs- und Treuhandgesellschaft* (DUT), a private company which was responsible for the collection, administration and exploitation of their property. The RKF also delegated tasks within a widespread network of offices and encouraged middle and lower authorities to take on executive tasks in order to increase its influence in various areas while maintaining control.[41]

While the ethnic politics initially centred on the eastern territories, it later also extended westwards to the civil administrations in Lorraine, Alsace and Luxembourg, where it took on a distinct form.[42] Following initial discussions between Himmler and Robert Wagner (1895–1946), the head of the civil administration of Alsace, Hitler decided in early August 1942 on the policy of resettlement for per-

39 Alexa Stiller, "Völkisch Capitalism: Himmler's Bankers and the Continuity of Capitalist Thinking and Practice in Germany," in *Reshaping Capitalism in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, edited by Moritz Föllmer and Pamela E. Swett, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 286–287; Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 11; Markus Leniger, *Nationalsozialistische "Volkstumsarbeit" und Umsiedlungspolitik 1933–1945 – Von der Minderheitenbetreuung zur Siedlerauslese* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013), 11 and 15; Detlef Brandes, *Lexikon der Vertreibungen: Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 682.

40 A detailed examination of the general functioning of the RKF and its policy of forced resettlement can be found in Alexa Stiller's study *Völkische Politik*.

41 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 257; Michael Fahlbusch, Ingo Haar, and Alexander Pinwinkler, eds., *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), 1941–1942.

42 The RKF initially had no jurisdiction in the western occupied areas. It was gradually able to increase its influence there by working together with the civil administrations and having them assign roles to RKF personnel within their administrative systems. In Luxembourg, *Gauleiter* Simon was designated as "Commissioner for the tasks of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood" (*Beauftragten für die Aufgaben des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums*) on 20 December 1940. Subsequently, the Higher SS and Police Leader "Rhein" was assigned as the *Gauleiter*'s representative and also served as the deputy representative of the RKF. This allowed the RKF to consolidate its power in the region. It was not until September 1942, with the start of the forced resettlements, that a regional office of the RKF was established in Luxembourg. For more information see *Stiller, Völkische Politik,* 146; *Dostert, Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe*, 206 and 212.

sons who were considered unreliable in those three territories, but who did not require permanent elimination as they were deemed acceptable based on their race. Nevertheless, they were still considered to be a nuisance and not politically reliable enough to be placed in the newly annexed eastern territories. The territory east of the Rhine, within the original borders of the Reich, was seen as an ideal place to settle these "troubled" residents, as they would not negatively affect the Germanisation policy in the East and would be easily assimilated with the local German population. Despite Gustav Simon's initial reservations about implementing this measure in his area of jurisdiction, he eventually revised his stance shortly thereafter.[43]

In response to the considerable resistance encountered after the introduction of military service at the end of August 1942, the civil administration in Luxembourg hardened its policy and decided to resettle Luxembourgers who were believed to be uncontrollable. On 9 September 1942, the press publicly announced that, in order to safeguard the integrity of the western border region of the Reich and its ethnic German community, "unreliable elements" were to be removed and resettled.[44] The resettlement process was to be carried out by the offices of the RKF on behalf of the civil administration, under the direction of the Higher SS and Police Leader, *SS-Obergruppenführer* Theodor Berkelmann (1894–1943). The procedure was presented as a politically necessary and expedient measure, which should not be seen as a punishment but rather as an opportunity for "re-education".[45] With a view to their gradual integration into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the Reich Ministry of the Interior issued a circular on 9 July 1943, granting "German citizenship upon revocation"[46] to individuals from Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg who had been resettled after 23 August 1942, provided that they were assessed for racial suitability

43 Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe*, 211; Isabel Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut: Das Rasse– und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003), 324; Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 181.

44 "Umsiedlungsaktion für Luxemburg", *Luxemburger Wort* 252 (9 September 1942), 3.

45 "Umsiedlungsaktion für Luxemburg"; classified report on the first meeting of the CdZ regarding the start of the "*Umsiedlung*", 11 September 1942, ANLux, CdG-003; Letter from *Gauleiter* Simon to the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, 6 July 1943, BArch, NS 19/1163.

46 This meant that they received German citizenship with reduced rights for a ten-year probationary period. This remained a discriminatory form of citizenship which did not give many rights. For more information see the article of Denis Scuto in this volume: National Socialist Ethnicity and Citizenship Policy under growing military pressure in occupied Luxembourg (1940–1944).

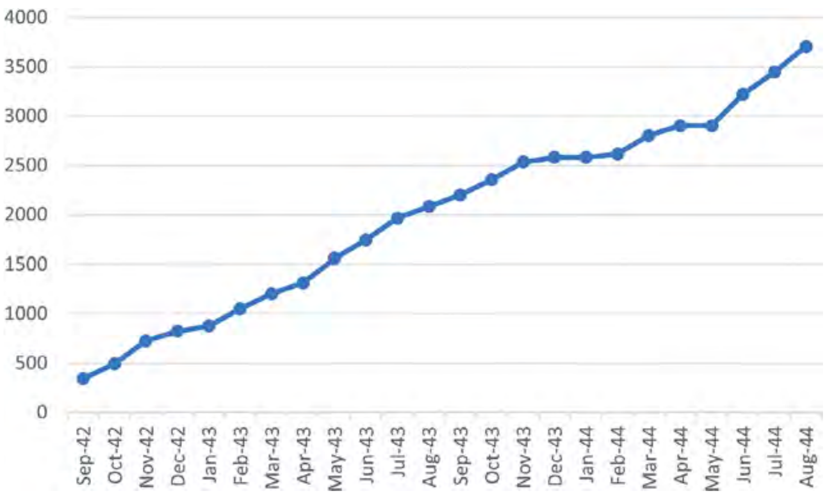

Fig. 1 (1): Total amount of Luxembourgish individuals resettled from Luxembourg. (Statistical tables of the CdZ Luxembourg, BArch R 49/622)[47]

and “Germanisability” by the SS Race and Settlement Main Office.[48] During the prior discussions, the Reich Chancellery recognised the national and security policy reasons behind this but commented internally to Himmler that “it is in itself paradoxical that people who are resettled here because of political unreliability are granted German citizenship, while this is otherwise precisely a reason for not granting it to them. However, since the granting is considered necessary from ethno-political and police-related perspectives, there seems to be no reason to object from our standpoint.”[49] Between the end of September 1942 and August 1944,

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47 During the analysis of these statistics, counting errors regarding the last transports were noted for at least 100 families and five individuals. The author has chosen to present all figures as they appear in the statistics, without any corrections.

48 This citizenship was officially granted as of 1 August 1943; According to a letter from the RKF main office (*Stabshauptamt*), *Absiedler* who were racially unsuitable, but of German origin or racially unsuitable and not of German origin were to be treated as foreign workers; Letter of the RKF *Stabshauptamt* to the head of the civil administration, acting as the representative of the RKF, 24 September 1943, BArch 49/2070; Letter of the Reich Ministry of the Interior to the Representative for the four-year plan, 4 January 1945, BArch, R 59/61; Heinemann, *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*, 326.

49 “Es ist an sich paradox, dass hier Leuten, die wegen politischer Unzuverlässigkeit umgesiedelt werden, die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit verliehen wird, während diese sonst gerade ein Grund für ihre Nichtverleihung ist. Da jedoch aus volkstumspolitischen und polizeilichen Gesichtspunkten heraus die Verleihung für notwendig erachtet wird, dürfte kein Grund bestehen, von hier aus zu widersprechen.” Quotation from a memorandum of the Reich Chancellery, 12 April 1943, BArch, R 43/II/137, 92.

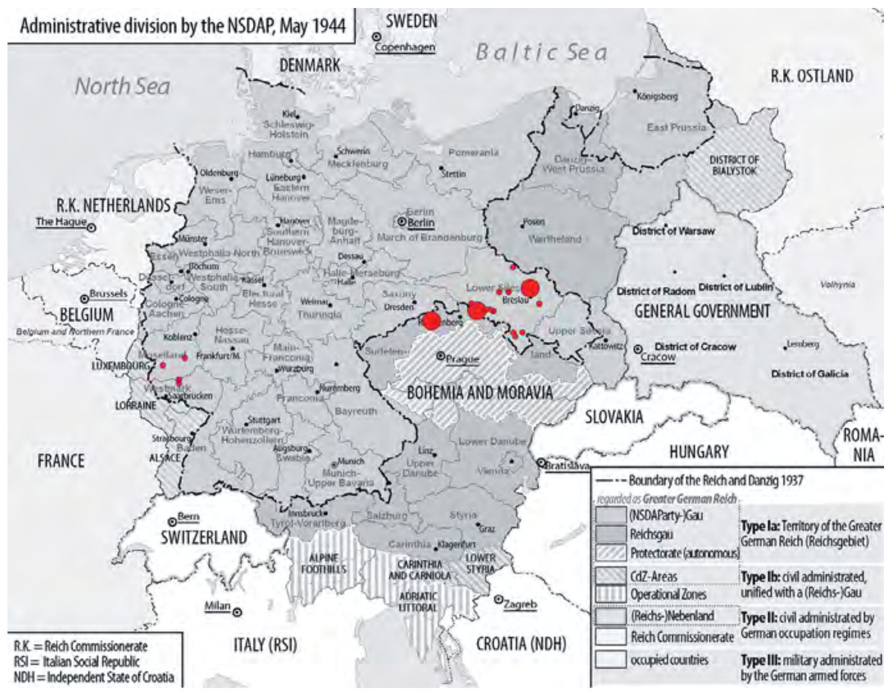

Fig. 1 (2): Map depicting the German Empire in May 1944, with additional points showing resettlement camps containing Luxembourgers.
(Bennet Schulte/Wikipedia)[50]

approximately 4,000 Luxembourgers from all over the country were forcibly resettled to resettlement camps in Lower-Silesia, Sudetenland and the Hunsrück and put to work there (Fig. 1(1)-1(2)).[51] The resettlements to this last region, situated west of the Rhine, started only in the Spring-Summer of 1944 driven by economic

50 "Greater German Reich NS Administration 1944", Wikimedia Commons, Accessed 27 July 2023 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greater_German_Reich_NS_Administration_1944.png.

51 The available source material presents varying figures. According to the official statistics from the civil administration, 3,705 individuals were permanently resettled, from a total of 1,310 families. Gilles Kartheiser's research, which combines lists from the war and post-war period, reports a total of 4,165 individuals; Kartheiser, *Die Umsiedlung Luxemburger Familien 1942–1945*, 78; Statistical tables of the CdZ Luxembourg, BArch, R 49/622; Marc Gloden, "Zur 'Wiedereindeutschung' ins Reich: die Umsiedlungen von 1942–1945 – Une rééducation au cœur du Reich: les transplantations de 1942 à 1945", in *Le Luxembourg et le Troisième Reich: un état des lieux – Luxemburg und das Dritte Reich: eine Bestandsaufnahme*, edited by Musée National de la Résistance et des Droits Humains (Luxembourg: Op der Lay, 2021), 625.

and political imperatives of the *Gauleiter*, which will be discussed later. Official figures from the civil administration indicate that 30.85% of the total resettled individuals came from the central district of Luxembourg, 30.4% from the northern district of Diekirch, 28.26% from the southern district of Esch/Alzig, and 10% from the less populated eastern district of Grevenmacher.[52]

The forced resettlements served the consolidation and Germanisation policies of the *Gauleiter* in the border region, with the aim to fully integrate the territory into the Reich once the Germanisation process was completed. "Uncontrollable" individuals were removed and replaced by ethnic German resettlers (*Ansiedler)* from Bosnia, South Tyrol and Bukovina, who would infuse "new German blood" into the area, cultivate the newly available agricultural lands, continue to run companies that had been vacated, and ultimately enhance the Germanisation of the region.[53] According to the official numbers provided by the civil administration, by July 1944 approximately 432 individuals from South Tyrol, 659 from Bosnia and Croatia, 134[54] from Bukovina, and 62 from Transylvania had been settled in Luxembourg, as well as a small number of individuals from the Baltic, Russia and the current Kočevje region of Slovenia (formerly *Gottschee*) (Fig. 1(3)).[55] Additionally, the civil administration used the measure to create a climate of fear with the aim of maintaining order and compliance within the population. Only a limited number of individuals were chosen to serve as examples, as the measure was not meant to be implemented extensively, following orders from Hitler and Himmler.[56] This decision was made, among other factors, to prevent resistance from the population and to avoid any disruption to war production.

At first, those targeted were mainly family members of strike participants, but this quickly expanded to include other individuals deemed to be "agitators and disturbers of the peace". This group encompassed senior civil servants, members of the Luxembourgish elite, and business owners who were perceived to have marginalised the leading members of the *Volksdeutsche Bewegung*, a Luxembourgish National Socialist organisation, in their dealings. Interestingly, a significant exception was made for parents of soldiers. According to the report of a meeting held

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52 Statistical tables of the CdZ Luxembourg, BArch, R 49/622.

53 Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe*, 109–110; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, 180.

54 This number represents the situation from April 1944. However, RKF statistics indicate that 241 ethnic Germans from Bukovina had moved to Luxembourg by June 1944. Wolfgang Schumann and Ludwig Nestler, eds., *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz*, vol. 4. *Belgien, Luxemburg, Niederlande* (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1990), 222.

55 Statistical tables of the CdZ Luxembourg, BArch, R 49/622.

56 Letter from Heinrich Himmler to *Gauleiter* Simon, 3 May 1943, BArch, R 49/2768; Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe*, 211; Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 613.

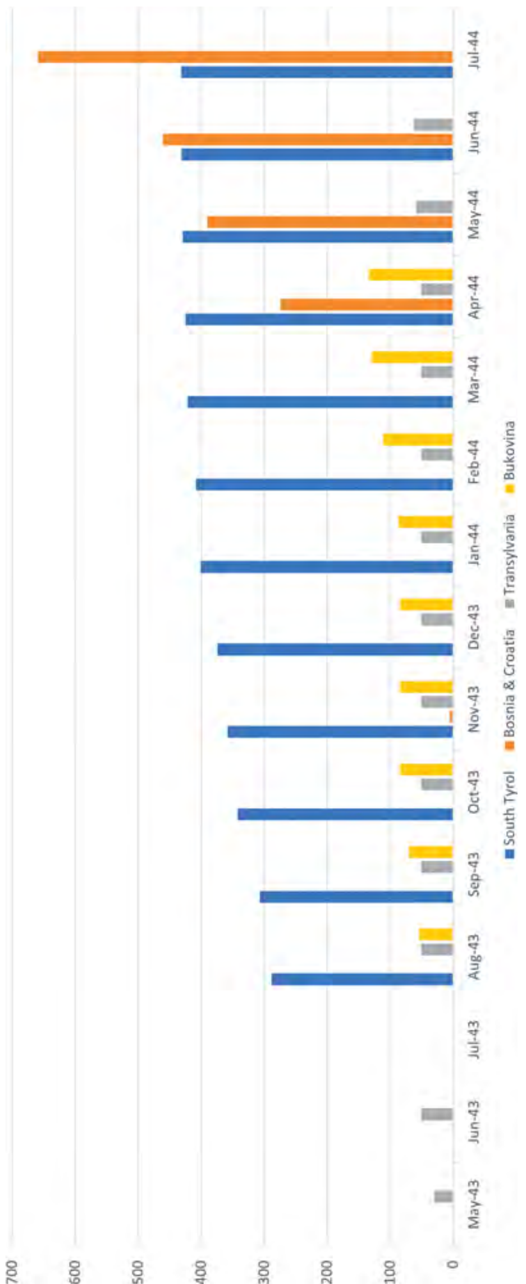

Fig. 1 (3): Total amount of ethnic German individuals settled inside Luxembourg. (Statistical tables of the CdZ Luxembourg, BArch R 49/622).

on 10 December 1942, Berkelmann and *Gauleiter* Simon decided that "parents of volunteers currently serving in the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS should not be subjected to resettlement".[57] An additional report from that meeting – written a few days later in the district of Esch/Alzig – went even further, emphasising that "soldiers' parents are to be treated as gently as possible. Even if they exhibit anti-German sentiments, they are to be resettled only as a last resort. First of all, attempts should be made again and again to make the point of view clear to them and to offer them the opportunity to change their political views. They should always be given a probationary period."[58] This study cannot confirm the accuracy and direct application of these criteria, as no such cases were found in the researched town of Schifflange. However, these directives can be seen as potential indicators of the unique role and position of the military service in the public sphere in Luxembourg.[59]

4.2 The Resettlement of Families of Deserters: Implementation and Regional Dynamics

As the number of deserters continued to rise, the civil administration faced mounting pressure, leading to changes to the directives regarding the treatment of soldiers' families, particularly those of deserters.[60] Following a meeting with *Gauleiter* Simon, Bruno Jung (1886–1966), the district administrator (*Landrat*) of Esch/Alzig, clarified in May 1943: "The resettlement of soldiers' parents must be avoided under all circumstances. On the other hand, the families of deserters must

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57 "Dass Eltern von z. Zt. bei der Wehrmacht oder Waffen-SS dienenden Freiwilligen nicht zur Absiedlung kommen sollen." Quotation from the report of the meeting held on 9 December 1942 about resettlements in Luxembourg, 10 December 1942, ANLux, CdG-003.

58 "Soldateneltern sind möglichst schonend zu behandeln. Selbst bei deutschfeindlicher Gesinnung sind sie erst in letzter Linie umzusiedeln. Zunächst soll immer wieder versucht werden, ihnen den Standpunkt klarzumachen und ihnen die Möglichkeit zu bieten, sich politisch umzustellen. Man soll ihnen immer noch eine Bewährungszeit lassen." Quotation from the report of a meeting with the *Gauleiter* on 9 December 1942 regarding resettlements and the related confiscation of assets, 16 December 1942, ANLux, CdG-003.

59 This is also exemplified by the statement by the German Military High Command that conscripted individuals who had been resettled were also to be called up for active military service without any restrictions and could not be deferred for reasons of resettlement; Letter from the OKW on the military service of *Umsiedler*, 17 April 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

60 While a significant portion of the procedure was identical for both political resettlements and resettlements due to desertion, this chapter will specifically concentrate on the resettlements resulting from desertion.

be resettled under all circumstances."[61] This directive aimed to exert pressure on fugitives and discourage conscripts from deserting and fleeing by directly targeting their relatives with punitive measures. Consequently, by the end of the war, this group constituted a significant portion of the total resettled population.[62] The research also indicates that parents of volunteers who deserted during their service were not exempt from these repercussions. The parents and five siblings of N.K., who was a volunteer in the Wehrmacht for six months, were resettled to Lower-Silesia in July 1943 after his desertion in May 1943.[63]

The imposition of responsibility on the families of deserters was not exclusive to Luxembourg. In fact, between 1942 and 1945, relatives of ethnic German deserters and draft evaders from occupied and annexed regions such as Alsace, Lorraine, Upper Carniola, Lower Styria and South Tyrol faced similar consequences, including forced resettlement, imprisonment and confiscation of property. However, German military law did not provide for such actions. There were no clear guidelines for the application of familial responsibility until the German Military High Command initiated its codification on 19 November 1944 with a decree on measures against defectors, extending the threat to all soldiers within the Wehrmacht, not only to ethnic Germans.[64] Although this comparison requires further study, it's worth noting that the regulations and measures varied considerably from region to region. Nevertheless, they did share some common features, such as exerting pressure on and controlling the local population, and preventing further desertions.[65]

61 "Die Umsiedlung von Soldateneltern muss unter allen Umständen unterbleiben. Dagegen sind Familien von Deserteuren unter allen Umständen umzusiedeln." Quotation from the report of a meeting held in Luxembourg on 6 May 1943, chaired by the *Gauleiter*, regarding resettlements, 10 June 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

62 Unfortunately, owing to the absence of detailed statistics differentiating between so-called political and Wehrmacht resettlements, no exact percentage can be provided.

63 War compensation file of family K., ANLux, DG2DOS-02481 nr.24642; *Affaire Politique* against N.K., ANLux, CT-03-01-01123.

64 According to Johannes Salzig, although all Wehrmacht soldiers were threatened with family liability at the end of the war, this remained the exception rather than the rule; Order by the OKW WFSt/Qu. 2/NSF/W no. 09395/44 dated 19 November 1944, quoted in Rudolf Absolon, "Das Wehrmachtstrafrecht im 2. Weltkrieg: Sammlung der grundlegenden Gesetze, Verordnungen und Erlasse" (Kornelimünster: Bundesarchiv Abt. Zentralnachweisstelle, 1958), 97–98; Salzig, *Die Sippenhaft als Repressionsmassnahme des nationalsozialistischen Regimes*, 458 and 475.

65 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 597, 603, 675–76; Brigitte Entner, "Slowenische Soldaten: Organisierte Flucht innerhalb der Reichsgrenzen?" in *Deserteure der Wehrmacht und der Waffen-SS: Entziehungsformen, Solidarität, Verfolgung*, edited by Kerstin von Lingen and Peter Pirker, Krieg in der Geschichte 122 (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023), 51–64; Martha Verdorfer, "Desertion in der mehrsprachigen Grenzregion Südtirol" in *Deserteure der Wehrmacht und der Waffen-SS: Entziehungsformen, Solidarität, Verfolgung*, edited by Kerstin von Lingen and Peter Pirker, Krieg in der

With the "Regulation on measures against draft evasion" of 10 July 1943, the civil administration in Luxembourg stated that it could "impose property confiscation or other appropriate measures on relatives of deserters or people who evade military service or compulsory labour service, as well as on relatives of other disturbers of the peace".[66] The legislation was to be implemented retrospectively from the introduction of the military service in August 1942, and legalised a practice that had already started several months earlier. In comparison to a similar law in Alsace, which defined which relatives would be considered for forced resettlement, the regulation in Luxembourg did not mention this, nor did it clarify who was considered as a relative, which left the door open for interpretation.[67]

The participation of family members in the desertion was evident to the German authorities. In a newspaper article dated 16 July 1943, the regime justified the new legislation by stating that "One must assume that they [deserters] are typically victims of a narrow, false, and anti-people atmosphere within their families and thus live in an environment that consciously induces and promotes this cowardly and unmanly attitude. [. . .] Consequently, harsh action against the relatives of deserters and those who fail to comply with the conscription into the Wehrmacht and the labour service is justified in every way."[68] Interestingly, in comparison with

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Geschichte 122 (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023), 65–80; Martha Verdorfer, "Nein zum Krieg: Widerstand und Verweigerung in Südtirol 1939–1945 – Überlegungen zu einem Oral-History-Projekt", *Storia e regione*, 1 (1992), 120–128.

66 "Der Chef der Zivilverwaltung kann gegen Angehörige von Fahnenflüchtigen oder solchen Personen, die sich der Wehrpflicht oder Arbeitsdienstpflicht entziehen, sowie gegen Angehörige sonstiger Friedensstörer Vermögensbeschlagnahme und Vermögenseinziehung oder andere geeignete Maßnahmen verhängen." Quotation from Verordnung über Maßnahmen gegen Wehrpflichtentziehung in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 15 July 1943, 152; Interestingly this law was issued one day after the circular of the Ministry of Interior about granting German citizenship upon revocation to resettled individuals.

67 Internal communications and post-war declarations, however, specify that the concept of family was defined as all the individuals living together in a household, commonly referred to as the "hearthplace" or "hearth site" (*Herdstelle*); Classified report on the first meeting of the CdZ regarding the start of the *Umsiedlung*, 11 September 1942, ANLux, CdG-003; Testimony of the district leader of Luxembourg, Adolf Schreder, on the resettlements, ANLux, CdG-003; Kettenacker, *Nationalsozialistische Volkstumspolitik im Elsaß*, 228; Frédéric Stroh, "Refus et résistance face à l' 'incorporation de force' à l'Ouest et leur répression: Eupen-Malmedy, Luxembourg, Alsace, Moselle", in *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich – Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten*, edited by Peter M. Quadflieg and Frédéric Stroh (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016), 55.

68 "Man muss deshalb annehmen, dass sie in der Regel das Opfer einer engeren, falschen und volksfeindlichen Atmosphäre bei ihren Angehörigen sind und so in einer Umgebung leben, die bewusst diese feige und unmännliche Haltung hervorruft und fördert. [. . .] Infolgedessen ist ein scharfes Vorgehen gegen die Angehörigen der Fahnenflüchtigen und jener, die den Einberufenen

the article from 9 September 1942, the press here acknowledges the punitive nature of the measure.[69] Consistent with the measures implemented across Nazi Germany, individuals who could be proven to have participated in or been aware of the criminal act were convicted as accomplices (*Beihilfe*) by the German special civilian court (*Sondergericht)* and sent to prison or concentration camps.[70] This was the case for the family of H.G., a young man who attempted to evade the draft in February 1944. Two days after his arrest, two of his sisters were arrested, deported to concentration camps and later convicted as accomplices. On the day of the sisters' sentencing, the mother was also arrested and deported. Shortly after, another sibling was sent to a resettlement camp in Boberstein (Bobrów).[71]

In the case of the resettlements, the families were punished under the pretext of providing help, as the sources lack any proof of their involvement and contain no indications of judicial inquiries, which again points to the principle of *Sippenhaftung*. The testimonies of the Luxembourg district leaders during their post-war trial also suggest that the *Gauleiter* rejected any connection between resettlements and legal or quasi-judicial proceedings.[72] The assessment forms of resettled families, prepared by the Luxembourg resettlement commissions and the RKF, remain equally vague, as exemplified by the form concerning H.K's family: "It can

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zur Wehrmacht und zum Arbeitsdienst keine Folge leisten in jeder Weise gerechtfertigt." Quotation from "Jeder Deserteur siedelt seine Angehörigen oder seine Sippe um", *Escher Tageblatt* 164 (16 July 1943), 4.

69 „Diese Maßnahmen sind aber nicht ausschließlich strafender Natur, sie sind im Gegenteil besonders dazu bestimmt, die Angehörigen und die Arbeitsdienst- und Wehrpflichtigen vor einem Schritt zu bewahren, der sie ins Unglück und in Schande führen würde [. . .]." Quotation from "Jeder Deserteur siedelt seine Angehörigen oder seine Sippe um", *Escher Tageblatt* 164 (16 July 1943), 4.

70 See Artikel 49 on the participation in crimes in: A. Grosch, *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich vom 15. Mai 1871: Mit einem Anhang von wichtigen Bestimmungen des Gerichtsverfassungsgesetzes und der Strafprozessordnung. Zum Gebrauch für Polizei-, Sicherheits- und Kriminalbeamte*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1907 – reprint 2020), 16; Verordnung über das Sonderstrafrecht im Kriege und bei besonderem Einsatz (Kriegssonderstrafrechtsverordnung) vom 17. August 1939 in: Reichsgesetzblatt, part I, 26 August 1939, 1455–1457; Verordnung über Maßnahmen gegen Wehrpflichtentziehung in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 15 July 1943, 152; Lena Haase, "Verfolgung – Verhaftung – Verschleppung. Die Deportation von Luxemburgerinnen nach Flußbach und Ravensbrück", in *Le Luxembourg et le troisième Reich: un état des lieux – Luxemburg und das Dritte Reich: eine Bestandsaufnahme*, edited by Musée national de la Résistance et des Droits Humains (Luxembourg: Op der Lay, 2021), 661.

71 War compensation file of H.G., ANLux, DG2DOS-613 dossier 70099.

72 Report of the first appearance of Wilhelm Diehl at the district court, 10 December 1948, ANLux, CdG-003; Post-war interrogation of Adolf Schreder, 9 November 1948, ANLux, CdG-003.

be assumed that the parents approved of their son's defection. Therefore, the family is unsuitable for the border region of Luxembourg."[73]

The findings of the research indicate that far from all of the deserters' families were subjected to this repressive measure. In Schifflange, around 32% of the desertions and draft evasions known to the authorities at the time led to the resettlement of close relatives (Fig. 2(1)).[74] Despite the impression given through official communication channels and the legal framework that this measure was systematically applied, its actual implementation was less extensive, with many underlying criteria influencing the selection process. In May 1943 – two months before the publication of the law – the civil administration had already issued internal guidelines stating that only the most politically unfavourable families of deserters could be selected for resettlement.[75] On 27 November 1943, the *Gauleiter* wrote a confidential circular to the district leaders, stating "if it is certain that the parents neither instigated nor supported the desertion and, on the contrary, are politically reliable, resettlement should be avoided".[76] In December he went even further by stating that "political passivity alone would not suffice as a reason for resettlement".[77] Families who had another son serving in the military, or who was expected to be drafted into the labour service or the military in the foreseeable future, were also to be exempted.[78]

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73 "Es ist anzunehmen, dass die Eltern die Flucht ihres Sohnes gutgeheißen haben. Die Familie ist somit für das Grenzland Luxemburg untragbar." Quotation from the assessment form of H.K, BArch, R 49/93.

74 The research, conducted as part of the WARLUX project, identified approximately 300 male labour service and military recruits residing in the municipality during the war, born between 1920 and 1927. Analysis of wartime sources – such as deserter registries – revealed that around 22% of them, totalling 67 individuals, were pursued by the police and military justice system for draft evasion, absence without leave, or desertion. In total 38 families from Schifflange were resettled between September 1942 and August 1944. Within this group, 28 families could be linked to 21 individual deserters or draft evaders, representing approximately 31.8% of their total number.

75 Generally, individuals over 65 years old were also excluded from resettlement; Confidential letter from Dr. Münzel to all district leaders with regard to Luxembourgish deserters, 13 May 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

76 "Sofern aber feststeht, dass die Eltern die Desertion weder veranlasst noch unterstützt haben, sondern im Gegenteil politisch zuverlässig sind, muss die Umsiedlung unterbleiben." Quotation from an extract of a circular from *Gauleiter* Simon to the district leaders in Luxembourg, 27 November 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

77 "Eine politische Passivität allein genüge nicht als Absiedlungsgrund." Quotation from notes of a meeting held with *Gauleiter* Simon on 10 December 1943 with regard to resettlements in Luxembourg, 16 December 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

78 In the file of the family of deserter E.B. from the deserters' register (*Fahnenflüchtigen-Kartei*) it was noted: "Protected, the brother K.B. is still with the Wehrmacht" see the deserters' registry at the Musée National de la Resistance et des Droits Humains (MNRDH) in Esch-sur-Alzette; Extract of

These guidelines imply a progressive narrowing of instructions from the civil administration, with a certain degree of vagueness to allow for interpretation. Luxembourg historian, Vincent Artuso, noted that the original will of the civil administration to hit desertion with harsh measures was quickly reduced, owing to the complexity of the situation and to avoid opposing the sentiments of pro-German Luxembourgers.[79] However, it is important to note that in practice, different logics conflicted, revealing a discrepancy between the official doctrine and the practical realities on the ground. The decision-making power rested at the regional administrative level, resulting in variations and deviations from the prescribed guidelines. These variations were influenced by local dynamics (especially in light of the evolving war effort), individual circumstances, and personal judgements.

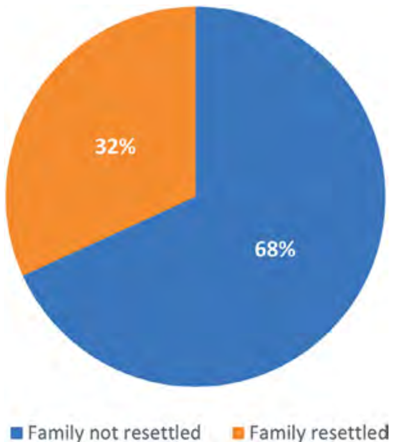

Fig. 2 (1): Proportion of desertions and draft evasions leading to family resettlement in Schifflange between September 1942 and September 1944.

In each district, a specific commission had the task of identifying and investigating individuals for resettlement. Led by the district leader, the commission consisted of officials such as the *Landrat*, a representative from the Gestapo,[80] the district medical officer, and in some cases the district farmer leader or the district master crafts-

a circular from *Gauleiter* Simon to the district leaders in Luxembourg, 27 November 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

79 Vincent Artuso, *La collaboration au Luxembourg durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, 1940–1945: accommodation, adaptation, assimilation*, Études luxembourgeoises / Luxemburg-Studien 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2013), 250.

80 The Gestapo informed the commissions of any records and data they held on the individuals. If a person targeted for resettlement fled to avoid resettlement, the Gestapo would launch a search operation; Chapter XVI on "Umsiedlung" during the postwar trial against the members of

men.[81] From 1943 onwards, the leader of the *Volksdeutsche Bewegung*, along with a special representative for personnel matters from the civil administration, were also involved.[82] The district leadership gathered lists and information on deserters and draft evaders from sources including the local police offices, the Security Police, and the *Wehrbezirkskommando*.[83] They instructed local group leaders (*Ortsgruppenleiter*) of the *Volksdeutsche Bewegung* to communicate the political stance of the families in question and to investigate the military or labour service of other relatives, as well as these relatives' specific political connections.[84] For this, the local group leaders made use of the extensive information they had already gathered on the inhabitants through their surveillance networks and through denunciations from neighbours and other locals. Based on this information, they also proposed certain individuals and families for resettlement to the district leaders. The district leaders, in turn, decided which cases to present to the commission based on these assessments. Once a final decision was made, the commission notified the representative of the RKF in Luxembourg, Leonard Motz, about the selected cases. Motz then compiled the transport lists, coordinated transportation, and informed other RKF entities, including the VoMi, responsible for the camps, and DUT, responsible for the confiscation of assets.[85]

This regional selection process was characterised by ambiguity, potential for abuse, and personal motives. District leaders held significant influence, not only in determining which cases would be presented to the commission but also during the voting process. An illustrative example is seen in Diehl's claim of personally intervening to prevent the resettlement of a deserter's family based on the father's physical disability (he only had one leg).[86] Additionally, local group leaders, despite

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the *Einsatzkommando der Sicherheitspolizei un des SD* in Luxemburg and Gestapo, ITS Arolsen (online archive), 9029900, 213–216.

81 These commissions existed only in the territory of Luxembourg and were allegedly set up by the *Gauleiter* as a precautionary measure to prevent arbitrary resettlements.

82 Kartheiser, *Die Umsiedlung Luxemburger Familien 1942–1945*, 68.

83 Post-war testimony of district leader Wilhelm Diehl, ANLux, CdG-003; Letter from the *Wehrbezirkskommando* Luxemburg regarding non-compliance with the conscription order for 24 February 1944, 24 February 1944, ANLux, CdZ-G-15182.

84 See the files assembled as part of the political trial against the local group leader of Schifflange Peter Anheuser, ANLux, CT-03-01-05421; Post-war testimony of district leader Wilhelm Diehl, ANLux, CdG-003; Post-war testimony of J.K., former clerk at the *Kreisleitung* of Luxembourg, ANLux, CdG-003; Report of post-war interrogation of Leonard Motz, 24 June 1948, ANLux, CdG-003; Benoît Majerus, "Faiblesse, opportunisme, conviction . . . : les degrés de l'implication dans la collaboration avec l'Allemagne nationale-socialiste à travers l'exemple des Ortsgruppenleiter luxembourgeois" (Master diss., Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1999), 104.

85 Report of post-war interrogation of Leonard Motz, 24 June 1948, ANLux, CdG-003.

86 Post-war interrogation of Wilhelm Diehl, 30 June 1948, ANLux, CdG-003.

not being members of the commissions themselves, possessed first-hand knowledge of the families involved and exerted significant influence in the decision-making process through their evaluations.[87] The commissions failed to offer clear explanations for their resettlement decisions, and kept no record of their meetings. As a result, affected families often remained unaware of the precise reasons for their displacement, even post-war.[88] In a post-war statement, Motz acknowledged this and provided examples demonstrating how resettlement orders were sometimes based on trivial matters and personal conflicts.[89] Regional disparities, linked to the local economic situation, also played a role in the selection process. For instance, despite numerous desertions in the northern agricultural district of Diekirch, the district leader refused the forced resettlement of 150 farmers from this region in mid-December 1943 because of a shortage of *Ansiedler* to replace them on their farms.[90] Directors from the mining industry could also object to specific resettlements if certain workers were deemed indispensable for their jobs.[91] Due to the numerous influences and differences at play, it is almost impossible to determine why certain families were chosen for forced resettlement while others were not. The family M. from Schifflange is illustrative of this: between November 1943 and May 1944, three members of the same household, two sons and a son-in-law, deserted while on leave.[92] Contrary to what might be expected, the study did not uncover any evidence of reprisals against this family, nor was it able to identify any reason for their exemption from such measures.

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87 Post-war testimony of J.K., former clerk at the *Kreisleitung* of Luxembourg, ANLux, CdG-003; Majerus, "Faiblesse, opportunisme, conviction . . .", 104.

88 Wartime documents included multiple reasons for the resettlements such as non-membership in Nazi organizations, connections with opponents and political passivity. Post-war testimonies from descendants of affected families suggest that active resistance activities were the main contributing factor.

89 Report of the post-war interrogation of Leonard Motz, 24 June 1948, ANLux, CdG-003.

90 The study by Gilles Kartheiser also shows large regional differences in the country and reveals that at the end of the war, percentage-wise more people were resettled from the northern regions of the country; Kartheiser, *Die Umsiedlung Luxemburger Familien 1942–1945*, 85; Notes of a meeting held with *Gauleiter* Simon on 10 December 1943 with regard to resettlements in Luxembourg, 16 December 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

91 Whether this was taken into account is a separate matter; Letter from the Vereinigte Hüttenwerke Burbach-Eich-Düdelingen to the civil administration with regard to the forced resettlement of J.D., BArch, R49/3661; Directives from the Moselland District Personnel Office Leader (*Gaupersonalamtsleiter*) regarding the compulsory employment of Luxembourgish skilled workers within the *Gau Moselland*, 22 February 1944, ANLux, CdG-003.

92 See files on E.M., J.M. and F.M in the deserters' registry (*Fahnenflüchtigen-Kartei*) at the Musée National de la Résistance et des Droits Humains in Esch-sur-Alzette.

Familienkarteì

Umsiedler Nr. Lux. 833
20

Name: Scheuer
Vorname: Caspar
Geb. Datum: 27.11.01
Ort: Differdingen Kreis: Esch
Staatsangeh.: Volksdeutscher Luxbg.
Herkunftsland: Luxemburg
relig. Bekennt.: kath.
Familienstand: led. verh. verw. gesch.
Beruf erlernt: Hüttenarbeiter
jetzt: Hüttenarbeiter, Werk Schiffl. Angestellter selbst. Beamter
Letzter Wohnort: Schifflingen
Strasse und Nr.: E. Mayrischstr. 132
Ehefrau: Oppermann Lina (Mädchenname)
Geb. 9.7.06 Ort: Differdingen Kreis: Esch

Kinder:

Kopfzahl der Familie:	unter 15 Jahren: männl.	unter 15 Jahren: weibl.	über 15 Jahren: männl.	über 15 Jahren: weibl.
3			1	1

V. D. B. Nein
seit:
Nr.:

833

Besitztum: in Miete
Arbeitgeber: Werk Schifflingen Hüttenarbeiter
Ort:
Abgesiedelt am: 3.12.1943
nach: Mittelsteine

Namentliche Aufstellung der Kinder unter 15 Jahren:

Name:	Vorname:	Geb.	Ort:
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			

Vorgang: Der Sohn Rudi Scheuer geb. am 20.4.24 in Differdingen hat sich am 22.2.43 unerlaubt vom RAD. entfernt und ist flüchtig. Die Familienangehörigen sind abzusiedeln.

Der Kreisleiter Landrat Vertreter d. Stapo der SD Der Kreisbauernführer bezw. Kreishandwerksmeister

Fig. 2 (2): Resettlement card of the Scheuer family signed by the members of the resettlement commission.(BArch R 49/3751).

The research findings strongly support the notion that the civil authorities in Luxembourg held primary responsibility for implementing punitive measures. The RKF acted at the request of the civil administration and had little to no control

over the criteria for expulsions, as is also corroborated by Stiller's findings.[93] Once the process had been initiated, however, the RKF and the entities it appointed took charge of managing the individuals; this involved transportation, settlement, employment and asset acquisition. Furthermore, no evidence was discovered to suggest active involvement of the military or military tribunals in the procedure, as indicated in the author's prior study.[94] This research showed that the military courts were somewhat passive observers of the resettlements, only interested in them in the context of their own investigation of the deserter. The resettlements also often took place before the conclusion of the trial or the pronouncement of the sentence, showing that they were not linked to the conviction of a deserter.

In early 1944, *Gauleiter* Simon ordered that skilled workers who could no longer stay in Luxembourg because of their "anti-German attitude", such as the families of deserters, were to be transferred to the Hunsrück – a region in the eastern part of his administrative division – and forced to work rather than be resettled. This measure was intended to strengthen war production in the region and address the immediate labour shortage in the local industry.[95] In collaboration with the *Gauarbeitsamt Moselland* and the main industry players – particularly the Arbed steel plant – a procedure was established in mid-1944 for transferring a large workforce outside the usual resettlement process, without the involvement of the RKF.[96] This primarily affected the male members of families, particularly the heads of households, while other family members were resettled to nearby camps such as the camp in Nohfelden. This does not only highlight the economic motivations behind the punitive measures, but also underscores the dominant role of the *Gauleiter* and the civil administration in the policy of penalizing families of deserters, demonstrating their capacity to adapt existing procedures to suit their own political and economic agendas.

93 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 613.

94 See the article by Sarah Maya Vercruysse and Nina Janz, *The "long arm" of the military justice of the Wehrmacht – A case study on Luxembourgish desertions*, which will be published by De Gruyter in 2024–2025.

95 This also concerned individuals and families who had already been resettled to Lower Silesia. Despite the difficulties and risk of repercussions for industry in Lower Silesia, the VoMi agreed with this transfer and supported the *Gauleiter*'s action; Letter from Gustav Simon to *SS-Obergruppenführer* Lorenz of the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, 21 February 1944, ANLux, CdG-003; Letter from the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* to the *Reichsführer-SS*, June 1944, BArch, R 59/59.

96 Directives from the Moselland District Personnel Office Leader (*Gaupersonalamtsleiter*) regarding the compulsory employment of Luxembourgish skilled workers within the *Gau Moselland*, 22 February 1944, ANLux, CdG-003.

4.3 Confiscation of Assets

A crucial and underexamined aspect of this policy was the imposition of economic measures on the families through the confiscation of their belongings by the DUT. This company was designated by the RKF for the collection, management and exploitation of the assets of resettled individuals within the Reich from 1939 onwards.[97] Based on the available source material, it is not possible to discern a distinction in the confiscation of belongings between families of deserters and other forcibly resettled individuals in the case of Luxembourg.[98] This topic is characterised by significant ambiguity, and the available sources often present contradictory information depending on the individuals or services providing the data and the context in which it was shared.[99]

The civil administration of Luxembourg issued a total of five regulations concerning forced resettlement and the associated confiscation of assets. The "Regulation on resettlement in Luxembourg" dated 13 September 1942 and the "Regulation on the seizure of assets in the event of resettlement in Luxembourg" dated 9 January 1943 laid the foundations for these confiscations. According to these regulations, the RKF and the bodies it appointed were responsible for handling property-related tasks following the resettlements and had full authority to take control of and manage these assets. The latter regulation was specifically designed to prevent asset withdrawal by individuals anticipating resettlement.[100] The "Regulation on the pre-emptive rights of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood in the sale of commercial and agricultural enterprises or properties" of 9 January 1943 focused on the pre-emptive rights of the head of the civil adminis-

97 The DUT had a central office in Luxembourg but appointed local representatives in the different districts to communicate directly with local authorities. In March 1944 the company started transferring tasks to the regional district administrations (*Landrat*) and municipal mayors (*Amtsburgermeister*) because of the evolving war situation; 1943 semi-annual report of the DUT, 10 August 1943, BArch, R 49/460; Transcript of the proposal to transfer tasks from the DUT to managing bodies of the civil administration, ANLux, CdG-003.

98 It is also important to highlight that some deserter families had their property confiscated without being subjected to forced resettlement. This was for example the case for those who were older than 65 years of age. The decision was taken by the settlement commissions during their meetings.

99 In addition, important source material on the subject, such as the post-war compensation files, is very difficult to access due to the sensitive nature of these files and the strict archival legislation in Luxembourg, which restricts access and involves lengthy procedures to obtain special permission for access. Further research is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of these dispossessions. It is hoped that this research will be possible in the near future.

100 1943 semi-annual report of the DUT, 10 August 1943, BArch, R49/460.

tration, acting as the representative of the RKF, in these specific property transactions. However, the RKF had the power to delegate the tasks related to exercising this right to another body. The "Regulation for the implementation of the regulation on resettlement in Luxembourg" dated 21 April 1944, which followed the aforementioned regulation of 10 July 1943, provided practical details for the implementation of property-related measures during resettlement, including the filing of claims, the suspension of payment obligations, and legal proceedings. Interestingly, there was no specific legislation regarding the resettlement of the families themselves; instead, these instructions were communicated through internal orders. The legal framework focused primarily on implementing measures for the confiscation of property, underlying the importance of this aspect in the eyes of the civil administration.[101]

On the day of their transportation, families were allowed to take as much as was "easily transportable", with a maximum of 50 kilograms per person.[102] In order to determine the property of the families, the heads of the households were required to provide the DUT with a detailed inventory of their belongings, categorised into private assets, business operations, urban real estate and property ownership, agricultural operations, and claims and debts.[103] The company would record this information, seal the house, and take over the administration of the goods through a trust on behalf of the RKF. The items would then be appraised to determine their estimated value. Bank accounts, securities accounts or other deposits held or admin-

101 Verordnung über die Umsiedlung in Luxemburg in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 17 September 1942, 277; Verordnung über die Sicherstellung von Vermögenswerten bei der Absiedlung in Luxemburg in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 29 January 1943, 9; Verordnung über das Vorkaufsrecht des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums bei Veräußerungen von gewerblichen und landwirtschaftlichen Betrieben oder Grundstücken, 29 January 1943, 10; Verordnung über Maßnahmen gegen Wehrpflichtentziehung in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 15 July 1943, 152; Durchführungsverordnung zur Verordnung über die Umsiedlung in Luxemburg in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 21 April 1944, 67.

102 Classified report on the first meeting of the CdZ regarding the start of the *Umsiedlung*, 11 September 1942, ANLux, CdG-003.

103 In March 1944, in the district of Esch/Alzig, district leader Diehl instructed the local mayor (*Amtsbürgermeister*), Dr. Josef Kohns, to place 144 notices on the doors of deserters' families prohibiting the sale of any property. Furthermore, a comprehensive inventory of the furniture was made to ensure that no items were removed from the houses. Many of these families were later resettled; Guidelines for the resettlement commands, September 1942, ANLux, CdG-003; Letter from district leader Diehl to *Amtsbürgermeister* Kohns, 3 March 1944, ANLux, CdG-003.

istered by banks were commonly declared seized and blocked by the DUT, as indicated in an internal memo of the *General-Bank Luxemburg* in January 1943.[104]

The administration of both movable and immovable property, including companies, houses and furniture, was closely controlled by the DUT, the RKF and Gustav Simon as "Commissioner for the tasks of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood". To ensure the continuity of confiscated enterprises of public interest, temporary administrators were appointed and made accountable.[105] *Ansiedler* were assigned to take over vacated enterprises and farms, and were given priority in acquiring residences, furniture or household items from those who had been displaced.[106] A circular dated July 1943 also stated that certain proceeds from the remaining Jewish assets were to be used for the benefit of the South Tyrolean settlers.[107] On the instructions of Gustav Simon, confiscated houses and buildings were also made available to civil servants or party leaders or for official party purposes, even though they were not allowed to officially acquire property of any kind without his personal approval.[108] Specific items, such as works of art and objects of cultural value, were to be sold to Luxembourg museums or to "politically reliable individuals in the *Gau Moselland*".[109] Houses not required by the administration or new settlers were handed over to the local housing office to be put on the housing market.[110] Items that were not

104 The funds on these accounts could also be used to cover the former owners' debts, or for continuing industrial or commercial operations; Record note from the *General-Bank Luxemburg* following a visit to the DUT, ANLux, CdZ-B-0351; "Die DUT und die Umsiedlung für Luxemburg", *Luxemburger Wort* 261 (18 September 1942), 3.

105 Information sheet from the DUT Luxembourg regarding the *Absiedlung* in Luxembourg, September 1943, ANLux, CdG-003; Transcript of the proposal to transfer tasks from the DUT to managing bodies of the civil administration, ANLux, CdG-003.

106 Notes of a meeting held with *Gauleiter* Simon on 10 December 1943 with regard to resettlements in Luxembourg, 16 December 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

107 Circular of the CdZ of Luxembourg, Nr.4, July 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

108 By instruction of 12 July 1943, the *Gauleiter* forbade houses of *Abgesiedelten* from being used for official purposes as they were to remain available to cover the housing shortage; Article 2 of General Order (*Allgemeine Anordnung*) no. 13/42, 24 October 1942, ANLux CdZ-A-1423; Article 7 of General Order (*Allgemeine Anordnung*) no. 14/42, 9 November 1942, ANLux CdZ-A-1423; Article 3 of General Order (*Allgemeine Anordnung*) no. 5/1943, 9 August 1943, ANLux CdZ-A-1430.

109 Report of the meeting on 9 December 1942 with regard to resettlements in Luxembourg, 10 December 1942, ANLux, CdG-003; Marie-Madeleine Schiltges, *Die Umsiedlung in Luxemburg 1942–1945* (Ettelbruck: Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1988), 20; Fabio Spirinelli, "Staging the Nation in an Intermediate Space: Cultural Policy in Luxembourg and the State Museums (1918–1974)" (PhD thesis, University of Luxembourg, 2020), 393–394.

110 Giving war wounded and bombing victims priority; letter from the *Landrat* of Esch/Alzig to district leader Adolf Schreder, 16 July 1943, ANLux, CdG-003; Notes of a meeting held with *Gaulei-*

needed, as well as certain personal objects, were returned to representatives of the resettled families – often appointed relatives acting under a power of attorney – to cover the most urgent needs.[111] In the case of the resettled family of deserter Rudi Scheuer, his grandmother, acting as the representative, managed to transport most of the furniture to her house in Niederkorn.[112]

Throughout the war, the National Socialist administration maintained an ambiguous stance regarding the true nature of the confiscations and the potential compensation of Luxembourgish resettled families. When looking at the general *modus operandi* of the DUT in the eastern parts of the Reich, a procedure of property compensation, also called "*Vermögensausgleich*", was applied in the form of a restitution in kind. For each resettled family, the DUT kept a separate account of the value of the property they had to leave behind. Once a family had permanently settled in the German Reich, they would be compensated with goods confiscated from undesired local populations such as Jews or Poles. The aim was that the resettled families should live in conditions similar to those they would have lived in had they not been resettled, without the administration having to use cash resources from the Reich budget.[113]

In Luxembourg, the German authorities gave the impression that resettled families would also receive compensation. It used the threat of uncompensated confiscation to discourage incomplete inventories or acts of resistance.[114] The legislation left room for interpretation stating that claims for damages could be considered if the RKF decided to do so on an individual basis.[115] District leader Diehl also testified in June 1948 that "according to Simon's explicit instructions, the resettled individuals were not supposed to incur any financial harm. The value of

ter Simon on 10 December 1943 with regard to resettlements in Luxembourg, 16 December 1943, ANLux, CdG-003.

111 If no representative was assigned by the resettled family, the administration of the property would immediately be assigned to the *Landrat*; Confirmation of receipt by J.W., ANLux, CdZ-G-00685; Declaration by Frau N., 25 April 1944, ANLux, CdZ-B-0352; Post-war interrogation of Ludwig Metzger, IfZ München, ZS 1222.

112 War damage file of S.-O. G., ANLux, DG2DOS-02534 file 47590.

113 Stiller, "Völkisch Capitalism", 292–93; Robert Lewis Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy, 1939–1945 – a History of the Reich Commission for the Strengthening of Germandom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 98.

114 "Die DUT und die Umsiedlung für Luxemburg"; Empty form for the declaration of assets, ANLux, CdG-003.

115 Verordnung über die Umsiedlung in Luxemburg vom 13. September 1942 in: Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg, 17 September 1942, 277.

the confiscated items was to be credited to the resettled individuals.”[116] Ludwig Metzger, the former head of the legal and organisational department of the DUT in Luxembourg, also stated after the war that the value of the sold items of forcibly resettled Luxembourgish families was recorded in order to determine how this value would be returned to them after the war.[117] The accuracy of these statements is questionable, as no clear records of these accounting books were ever found.[118] The legal advisor to the post-war Sequestration Office also testified that the DUT files, which the affected families could consult after the war, did not contain detailed and truthful inventories of the confiscated assets. He concluded that there was no provision for compensation by the German administration.[119] Internal wartime documentation of the DUT also shows that no compensation was foreseen by the end of the war. A report regarding the closure of the DUT offices in the West, dated two days after the liberation of Luxembourg on 9 September 1944, states that “a furniture compensation claim of the *Absiedler* does not exist”.[120] Furthermore, a note from the company in December 1944 states that “the establishment of a proper asset registry, as originally planned, is unnecessary, as the asset equalization is not to be carried out for the time being”.[121]

Between 1942 and 1944, the DUT amassed substantial funds in Luxembourg through the liquidation and rental of properties of forcibly resettled families. Of the multiple accounts used to transfer funds from and to the DUT Luxembourg, three could be examined in the accounting books of the civil administration in Luxembourg, revealing large transfers of money during this period. Two of these accounts were held by the *Bank der Deutschen Arbeit*, with a total revenue of 102,912 RM at the end 1942 and 1,306,697 RM a year later, coinciding with the in-

116 “Gemäß den ausdrücklichen Anordnungen Simons persönlich sollten die Abgesiedelten keinen finanziellen Schaden haben. Der Wert der beschlagnahmten Sachen sollte den Umgesiedelten gutgeschrieben werden.” Quotation from the post-war interrogation of Wilhelm Diehl, 30 June 1948, ANLux, CdG-003.

117 Post-war interrogation of Ludwig Metzger, IfZ München, ZS 1222.

118 Despite numerous inquiries, the existence of these files could not be confirmed by the archivists of the Luxembourg National Archives. No trace of these files could be found in the files of the Sequestration Office, or in the war damage files.

119 Post-war declaration of lawyer E.N., 21 July 1948, ANLux, CdG-003.

120 Note regarding the closure of the DUT offices in the West, 11 September 1944, BArch, R 1702/1018.

121 “Die Aufstellung einer ordnungsgemäßen Vermögenskartei, wie sie ursprünglich vorgesehen war, erübrigt sich, da ohnehin der Vermögensausgleich bis auf weiteres nicht durchgeführt werden soll.” Notes of a meeting between the DUT and members of the former branch office of Luxembourg, 1 December 1944, BArch, R 1702/1018.

creasing pace of resettlements.[122] According to Stiller, the DUT's total balance was approximately 245 million RM at the end of 1942 and 420 million RM at the end of 1943.[123] Another bank account, numbered 447785 at the *General-Bank Luxemburg*, contained 200,000 RM in early August 1944, but was almost entirely emptied a few days before the arrival of the Allied forces.[124] The funds were transferred to a bank account in Mühlhausen in Thuringia, to which the Luxembourg and Strasbourg offices of the DUT had been transferred.[125] The subsequent destination and use of these financial resources, as well as the role of the other bank accounts, require further investigation for clarification (Fig.3).

122 Unfortunately, the account statements for the year 1944 could not be located; Account statements from 1943 for account numbers 7509 and 7523 belonging to the DUT at the *Bank der Deutschen Arbeit*, ANLux, FIN-18143; Account statements from 1942 for account numbers 7509 and 7523 belonging to the DUT at the *Bank der Deutschen Arbeit*, ANLux, FIN-18266.

123 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 197.

124 Account statements from July-September 1944 for account number 44785 belonging to the DUT at the *General-Bank Luxemburg,* ANLux, SEQDOS-0064 no. 1644.

125 At the end of the Summer of 1943, the central accounting office of the DUT had moved from Berlin to Mühlhausen; Correspondence between the DUT central accounting office and the DUT branch in Luxembourg, August-September 1943, BArch, R 1702/155.

Account nr.	Account name	Initial communication date
216	*Postcheckkonto*	5.11.1942
30114 / Lux: 7509	*Bank der Deutschen Arbeit, Luxemburg, Laufendes Kontos (7509)*	5.11.1942
30115 / Lux: 7523	*Bank der Deutschen Arbeit, Luxemburg, Sonderkonto (7523) / für Mietzahlungen*	5.11.1942
5029	*Verrechnungskonto Strassburg bei der Verbindungsstelle Luxemburg*	5.11.1942
675	*Grundstückverwaltungskonto. Absiedlung Luxemburg (Strassburg)*	17.11.1942
88010	*Erlöskonto Luxemburg*	20.11.1942
88011	*Nahrungs- und Genussmittel, Luxemburg*	20.11.1942
88012	*Garten- und landwirtschaftliche Erzeugnisse, Luxemburg*	20.11.1942
88013	*Viehverkauf, Luxemburg*	20.11.1942
88014	*Möbel, Hausrat und Sonstiges, Luxemburg*	20.11.1942
5033	*Verrechnungskonto Berlin bei der Geschäftsstelle Luxemburg*	17.12.1942
5125	*Verrechnungskonto Luxemburg bei der Zentrale Berlin*	17.12.1942
6448	*Transportspesen, Lagermiete, Verpackungsmaterial und sonstige Kosten w/ Absiedlung Luxemburg*	17.12.1942
6637	*Schätzungs- und Bewertungskosten Luxemburg w/ Ferdinand Schumann*	17.12.1942
219	*Postscheckkonto Luxemburg / Sonderkonto Grundstücksverwaltung*	21.01.1943
6449	*Umzugskosten wegen Absiedler Luxemburg // Übernommene Kosten für Dritte*	2.03.1943
6638	*Schätzungs-Bewertungskosten Luxemburg w/ Architekt Gabel*	2.03.1943
6639	*Schätzungs-Bewertungskosten Luxemburg w/ Johann Schwartz*	2.03.1943
6640	*Schätzungs-Bewertungskosten Luxemburg w/ Karl Ruppert*	2.03.1943
6450	*Umzugskosten für Absiedler aus Luxemburg*	12.03.1943
6710	*Sammelkonto für Verwertung landwirtschaftlicher Objekte Luxemburg*	11.05.1943
6456	*Versicherungsspesen und andere Kosten wegen kommissarisch verwalteter Betriebe Luxemburg*	11.05.1943
10119	*Postscheck-Konto Luxemburg*	N/A
822	*Postscheck-Konto für Mietzahlungen Luxemburg*	N/A
4478	*Deutsche Umsiedlungs-Treuhand-Gesellschaft G.m.b.H. Nebenstelle Luxemburg (General-Bank Luxemburg)*	N/A

Fig. 3: Table of DUT bank accounts linked to the forced resettlements in Luxembourg. (BARch, R 1702/155; ANLux, SEQDOS-0064, n°1644).[126]

126 These bank accounts were communicated by the DUT's central accounting office in Berlin to the branch in Luxembourg between 1942–1943. Account 6449 was previously reported as being designated for "*Transportwesen, Lagermiete, Verpackungsmaterial und sonstige kosten w/Absiedlung Elsass*". It remains uncertain whether this account truly pertains to Luxembourg or if this was an error. Apart from the three investigated accounts, the others could not be subjected to further examination in this study.

5 Conclusion

The consequences of desertion and draft evasion on the families of Luxembourgish soldiers during the occupation of the country had profound and enduring consequences. As highlighted by Norbert Haase, over the course of the war, the measures taken by the Nazi civil authorities, the Wehrmacht, the Gestapo, and the police intertwined to discipline the population.[127] In Luxembourg – as in other occupied regions such as Alsace, Lorraine, South Tyrol, Lower Styria and Upper Carniola – the forced resettlement and asset confiscation of certain families emerged as potent tools wielded by the occupying forces to assert dominance, instil fear, and undermine resistance from the ethnic German population.[128] They were also used as threats and means of pressure to secure loyalty from soldiers, relying on the deterrent effect of exemplified cases.[129] With their families serving as hostages of the state, deserters were compelled to (re)consider their actions, thereby showing the complex interplay between actions occurring in the military sphere and their repercussions within society.[130] The extent to which this deterrent strategy actually influenced soldiers remains unverifiable.

The sanctions imposed on the families of deserters were mainly the responsibility of civilian authorities, ranging from those in Berlin to the local administrations in Luxembourg. However, these authorities had varying motivations and exerted different levels of influence on the process. The civil administration in Luxembourg played a central role and exercised considerable authority over the implementation of the measures. It acted as an overseer and instigator, issuing directives, while the RKF carried out the resettlements and confiscations on its behalf.[131] Both the civil administration and the RKF benefited from this, but pursued distinct objectives and interests. The politically unreliable individuals were removed from Luxembourg and replaced by more reliable ethnic Germans, who were intended to influence the local communities and strengthen the border area. At the same time, the resettled Luxembourgers, due to their favourable ethnicity, were "reused" in other regions of the Reich as a valuable labour force. These actions supported the *Gauleiter*'s efforts

127 Norbert Haase, "Justizterror in der Wehrmacht am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges", in *Terror nach Innen. Verbrechen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, edited by Cord Arendes, Edgar Wolfrum and Jörg Ziedler, Dachauer Symposien zur Zeitgeschichte 6 (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2006), 82.
128 Salzig, *Die Sippenhaft als Repressionsmassnahme des nationalsozialistischen Regimes*, 479.
129 Salzig, *Die Sippenhaft als Repressionsmassnahme des nationalsozialistischen Regimes*, 492.
130 Haase, "Justizterror in der Wehrmacht am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges", 93.
131 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 613.

towards “pacification” and Germanisation, as well as the RKF’s racial and settlement policies in line with the New Order framework, and its aim to increase its influence in the Western regions.[132] Although both bodies worked together, it can be concluded that the measures were not driven by a centrally directed German settlement policy, but were more closely linked to *Gauleiter* Simon’s regional policy of Germanisation and Nazification of the country. The alignment with Stiller’s observations in Lorraine further supports this understanding.[133] Furthermore, the study shows that considerable power was held at the regional and local levels, including district and local group leaders, as well as representatives of the industry, who determined which families were to be resettled and in what numbers. In practice, different, at times conflicting logics were at play, leading to a discrepancy between the official directives and the realities on the ground.

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132 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 605; Haase, “Justizterror in der Wehrmacht am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges”, 93.

133 Stiller, *Völkische Politik*, 612.

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Konrad Graczyk

Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in der Rechtsprechung der deutschen Sondergerichte in den besetzten Gebieten Polens (1939–1945)

Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit der Frage der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht aus der deutschen Wehrmacht und basiert auf den Ergebnissen einer Recherche im Bereich der Rechtsprechung der deutschen Sondergerichte, die während des Zweiten Weltkriegs in den besetzten polnischen Gebieten tätig waren – sowohl in den so genannten eingegliederten Ostgebieten als auch im Generalgouvernement. Die Akten der Sondergerichte sind in unterschiedlichem Zustand und Umfang erhalten geblieben und befinden sich derzeit in deutschen, polnischen und ukrainischen Archiven. Das Archivmaterial wurde nach der rechtlichen Qualifikation der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht durchsucht, da diese Handlung in die Zuständigkeit der Sondergerichte fiel, während das Militärgericht (Kriegsgericht) für die Fälle der Fahnenflucht selbst zuständig war. Die gesammelte Rechtsprechung wurde im Hinblick auf die Täter, die Form der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht, die Beziehung zwischen den Helfer:innen und dem Deserteur und das Strafmaß analysiert. Dieser Beitrag versucht, die Ergebnisse der in der Literatur verfügbaren Teilrecherche über die Rechtsprechung des Sondergerichts in Kattowitz in Fällen der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht zu verifizieren sowie die Frage zu beantworten, ob die anderen Sondergerichte – in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten und im Generalgouvernement – in dieser Art von Fällen die sich aus der geltenden Gesetzgebung ergebenden Richtlinien für die Strafzumessung angewandt haben, die eine reduzierte Strafe bei Beihilfe vorsahen.

1 Einleitung

Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, die Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in Fällen zu untersuchen, die von deutschen Sondergerichten in den besetzten polnischen Gebieten während des Zweiten Weltkriegs entschieden wurden. Ich habe mich in der Vergangenheit mit dieser Frage im Zusammenhang mit der Rechtsprechung eines der Sonderge-

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richte in den dem Dritten Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten – des Sondergerichts in Kattowitz – beschäftigt. Ich habe die Ergebnisse meiner Recherchen auf Deutsch[1] und Polnisch[2] veröffentlicht und einige Auszüge daraus in diesem Beitrag verwendet, in dem ich meine Recherchen fortsetzen möchte. Dies, indem ich ihren Gegenstand auf die anderen Sondergerichte in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten und im Generalgouvernement ausweite. Auf diese Weise möchte ich die Schlussfolgerungen, die auf der Grundlage des Vermächtnisses des Kattowitzer Gerichts gezogen wurden, überprüfen, nachdem ich sie mit der Rechtsprechung anderer Sondergerichte in Fällen von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht konfrontiert habe. Ein weiteres Ziel besteht in der Beantwortung der Frage, ob die anderen Sondergerichte in den besetzten polnischen Gebieten die Richtlinien für die Strafzumessung in Fällen der Beihilfe mit Strafminderung angewendet haben. Ich habe festgestellt, dass 24 Urteile dieser Art vor dem Sondergericht Kattowitz 1943–1945 gesprochen wurden. Nachdem ich diese Urteile untersucht hatte, gelangte ich zu dem Schluss, dass die Mehrheit der Verurteilten wegen Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht Frauen (85%) waren, gefolgt von Männern (15%). Des Weiteren stellte sich heraus, dass Personen mit deutscher Staatsangehörigkeit (90%) häufiger vertreten waren als Personen mit polnischer Staatsangehörigkeit (10%), unabhängig davon, ob sie mit dem Deserteur verwandt waren oder nicht. Was das Strafmaß in diesen Fällen betrifft, bewegte sich das Gericht in Kattowitz im unteren Bereich und verhängte Zuchthausstrafen von bis zu fünf Jahren. In den meisten Fällen wurden jedoch Gefängnisstrafen von weniger als einem Jahr verhängt. In meiner Forschung werde ich untersuchen, wie die Rechtsprechung des Gerichts in Kattowitz in Bezug auf Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht mit der anderer Sondergerichte im besetzten Polen zusammenhing.

Ich habe mich auf Strafsachen mit Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht nach dem Strafgesetzbuch konzentriert. Das bedeutet, dass ich bestimmte Fälle ausgeschlossen habe, bei denen die Handlungen als Beihilfe zur unerlaubten Entfernung qualifiziert wurden (sie wurden vor Sondergerichten in den ins Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten verhandelt), sowie Fälle von schwerwiegenderer Natur, die nach der Kriegssonderstrafrechtsverordnung als Wehrkraftzersetzung eingestuft wurden.[3] Solche Fälle – z. B. wegen Wehrdienstverweigerung und Untergrabung der Manneszucht in der

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1 Konrad Graczyk, „In einem Gewissenskonflikt ... Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in der Rechtsprechung des Sondergerichts Kattowitz," *Zeitschrift für Neuere Rechtsgeschichte* 1/2 (2021): 65–83.

2 Konrad Graczyk, „Pomocnictwo do dezercji w orzecznictwie Sądu Specjalnego w Katowicach (Sondergericht Kattowitz) 1939–1945,". In: *Studia z historii najnowszej Polski . Tom 2,* Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2020): 11–28.

3 Verordnung über das Sonderstrafrecht im Kriege und bei besonderem Einsatz (Kriegssonderstrafrechtsverordnung) vom 17. August 1938. RGBl. 1939, S. 1455.

Deutschen Wehrmacht – gab es sowohl vor Sondergerichten in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten als auch vor Sondergerichten im Generalgouvernement.[4] In diesen Fällen wurde sogar die Todesstrafe verhängt, wie im Urteil vom 1. Februar 1944 des Sondergerichts in Lublin gegen einen 22-jährigen Volksdeutschen, der einem schreibunkundigen Bekannten geholfen hatte, einen an Soldaten gerichteten Brief mit kommunistischem Inhalt zu verfassen, in dem zur Fahnenflucht aufgefordert wurde.[5] Dazu kann ich noch zwei andere Beispiele aus der Rechtsprechung des Sondergerichts in Graudenz anführen. Zwei Frauen, Mutter und Tochter, die in die deutsche Volksliste eingetragen waren, schickten dem Ehemann der Tochter, der sich in der Wehrmacht befand, ein gefälschtes Telegramm, in dem stand, dass seine Frau schwer krank sei. Ihr Ziel war es, dem Soldaten einen Urlaub zu ermöglichen. Jedoch wurde der Inhalt des Telegramms von den Vorgesetzten der Truppe als verdächtig eingestuft, und der Urlaub wurde nicht gewährt. Beide Frauen wurden nach § 5 Abs. 1 Nr. 3 der Kriegssonderstrafrechtsverordnung zu je einem Jahr Gefängnis verurteilt, da sie versucht hatten, einen Soldaten durch Täuschungsmittel vorübergehend vom Wehrdienst abzuhalten. Ihre Tat wurde als minder schwerer Fall angesehen, da sie nicht zum Erfolg führte.[6] Auch zwei Frauen, Mutter und Tochter, die in die deutsche Volksliste eingetragen waren, haben einen Soldaten, der sich dem Dienst in der Wehrmacht entzogen hatte und mit einer der Angeklagten verlobt war, wiederholt bei sich aufgenommen und versorgt. Sie wurden wegen Beihilfe zur unerlaubten Entfernung zu zwei Jahren bzw. zu neun Monaten Gefängnis verurteilt. Die Qualifikation ergab sich daraus, dass die Angeklagten nicht klar erkennen konnten, ob der Mann die Absicht hatte, sich dauerhaft dem Dienst bei der Wehrmacht zu entziehen. Es wurde berücksichtigt, dass die Tochter verlobt war und es für beide Frauen äußerst schwierig war, dem Verlangen der Polizei nachzukommen und das Auftauchen des Mannes zu melden.[7]

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4 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu (Staatsarchiv in Thorn), Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 362, Urteil gegen Stephanie Sielski und Andere vom 21. Mai 1943, Bl. 39–42; Wolfgang Form, *Politische Strafjustiz in Hessen – Verfahren des Reichsgerichts und des Volksgerichtshofs sowie der Oberlandesgerichte Darmstadt und Kassel während des NS-Regimes*, in *Politische NS-Justiz in Hessen: Die Verfahren des Volksgerichtshofs der politischen Senate der Oberlandesgerichte Darmstadt und Kassel 1933– 1945 sowie Sondergerichtsprozesse in Darmstadt und Frankfurt/M. (1933–34)*, hrsg. von Wolfgang Form und Theo Schiller (Marburg: Elwert, 2005), Bd. 1, S. 472.

5 Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), R 137 I/255, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Boris Mai vom 1. Februar 1944, Bl. 5–9

6 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 362, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Stephanie Sielski und Martha Frenzel vom 21. Mai 1943, Bl. 39–42.

7 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 613, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Marie Dreschler und Maria Dreschler vom 10. November 1944, Bl. 53–56.

Diese Tatbestände scheinen ähnlich zu sein, juristisch geht es jedoch hier um ganz andere Handlungen. Der Unterschied zwischen Fahnenflucht und unerlaubter Entfernung wird weiter erörtert. Bei Wehrkraftzersetzung geht es jedoch entweder um öffentliche Wehrkraftzersetzung oder um Aufforderung zur Fahnenflucht (oder eine andere Form der Untergrabung der Manneszucht) oder Wehrpflichtentziehung[8]. Juristisch waren es selbständige Handlungen, während die Beihilfe von selbst von der Haupttat (Fahnenflucht) abhängig war. Folge ist, dass der Täter der Beihilfe (Helfer:innen) ganz andere Vorsatz als der Täter z. B. der Wehrkraftzersetzung hatte. Die Helfer:innen wollten dem Täter zur Begehung der strafbaren Tat wissentlich Hilfe leisten. Bei der Wehrkraftzersetzung durch Verleitung zur Fahnenflucht bestand der Vorsatz darin, bei jemandem die Absicht zur Fahnenflucht zu wecken, während bei der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht eine Person selbst die Entscheidung zur Fahnenflucht trifft und der Helfer oder die Helferin lediglich vor oder während der Tat assistiert. Die Frage der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht wird ebenfalls weiter diskutiert. Die Vollstreckung der Urteile wurde hingegen nicht berücksichtigt, da dies in den Zuständigkeitsbereich der Staatsanwaltschaft fiel und nicht in den der Gerichte.

Die Quellengrundlage für die weiteren Überlegungen bildeten die in den Hinterlassenschaften der einzelnen Sondergerichte ermittelten Fälle von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht (maßgebend war vor allem der Inhalt des Urteils), wobei sowohl die Bestände des polnischen Staatsarchivs, des ukrainischen Staatsarchivs des Lembergers Umkreises als auch das Bundesarchiv in Berlin in die Recherche einbezogen wurden. Nach den Erkenntnissen der Literatur waren während des Krieges in den ins Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten 19 Sondergerichte tätig und im Generalgouvernement 10 weitere[9]. Was die Sondergerichte in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten betrifft, so fand ich für meine Recherchen nützliche Archive zu den Gerichten in Bromberg (poln. Bydgoszcz), Graudenz (Grudziądz), Lodsch/Litzmannstadt (Łódź) und Thorn (Toruń). Von den übrigen Sondergerichten in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten ist entweder überhaupt kein Quellenmaterial erhalten geblieben, oder es gab keine Fälle von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in den erhaltenen Quellen (Posen/Poznań, Konitz/Chojnice, Zichenau/Ciechanów, Kalisch/Kalisz, Bielitz/Bielsko, Schröttersburg/Płock, Leslau/Włocławek, Hohensalza/Inowrocław, Praschnitz/Przasnysz). Von den Sondergerichten des Generalgouvernements fand ich nützliches Archivmaterial in den Beständen des Sondergerichts in Warschau (Warszawa) und Krakau (Kraków). Auch bei den übrigen Sondergerichten im Generalgouvernement wurden entweder

8 W. Form, *Politische Strafjustiz in Hessen*, 472.

9 Ludwig Nestler, „Zum Aufbau und zur Tätigkeit der faschistischen Sondergerichte in den zeitweilig okkupierten Gebieten Polens," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte* 1974: 585.

keine Fälle von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht gefunden, oder der Erhaltungsgrad des Quellenmaterials ließ eine Recherche nicht zu (Częstochowa/Tschenstochau, Lwów/ Lemberg, Stanislau/Stanisławów, Tarnopol, Lublin, Kielce, Cholm/Chełm, Petrikau/ Piotrków, Radom, Reichshof/Rzeszów, Zamość).

Der gemeinsame Nenner der territorialen Reichweite der Recherche war die frühere Zugehörigkeit zur Republik Polen und die Tatsache, dass dieses Gebiet 1939–1945 vom Deutschen Reich besetzt wurde. In den von der Wehrmacht im Jahr 1939 besetzten polnischen Gebieten wurden spezielle strafrechtliche Sondergerichte eingerichtet. Die Bildung dieser Gerichte erfolgte nach dem Muster der Sondergerichte von 1933 im Altreich: sie sollten in einem vereinfachten Einzelinstanzverfahren und unter Beteiligung von drei Berufsrichtern entscheiden. Noch vor dem Krieg wurden die Ziele der Sondergerichte auf folgende Weise definiert: heimtückische Angriffe staatsfeindlicher Elemente auf Staat und Partei abzuwehren, die friedliche und planmäßige Aufbauarbeit des deutschen Volkes zu sichern, den inneren Rechtsfrieden zu gewährleisten und die Kraft der deutschen Volkswirtschaft zu erhalten.[10] Schon während des Krieges sagte Roland Freisler, der Staatssekretär im Reichsjustizministerium und spätere Präsident des Volksgerichtshofs, dass die Sondergerichte die „Panzertruppe der Rechtspflege" seien. Ihre Richter sollten sich an Panzersoldaten orientieren, die schnell und mit großer Kampfkraft handeln, den Feind mit großem Elan und Können suchen und eine durchschlagende Treff- und Vernichtungssicherheit besitzen.[11] Dazu muss noch hinzugefügt werden, dass in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten die Gerichte „Mitstreiter im Volkstumskampf" waren[12]. Im Generalgouvernement wurden die Aufgaben der Sondergerichte als „zunächst Sühne für bestialischen Mordtaten der Polen gegenüber Volksdeutschen" genannt, laut der Propaganda von Josef Goebbels. Darüber hinaus sollten sie auch das Banditentum bekämpfen.[13]

Als Hitlers Erlass vom 8. Oktober 1939 über die Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete in Kraft trat[14], wurde Großpolen, Pommern, Schlesien (zusammen mit

10 Herbert Schmidt, *„Beabsichtige ich die Todesstrafe zu beantragen": Die nationalsozialistische Sondergerichtsbarkeit im Oberlandesgerichtsbezirk Düsseldorf 1933– 1945* (Essen: Klartext-Verl., 1998), 37.

11 Konrad Graczyk, *Ein anderes Gericht in Oberschlesien: Sondergericht Kattowitz 1939–1945* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 29.

12 Becker, *Mitstreiter*, passim.

13 Konrad Graczyk, Hubert Mielnik, „Special Courts (*Sondergerichte*) in the General Government (1939–1945)", *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis/Revue d'Histoire du Droit/The Legal History Review* 91 (2023), 4.

14 Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete vom 8. Oktober 1939. RGBl. 1939, S. 2042.

einem Teil des westlichen Kleinpolens) und das nördliche Masovien dem Reich angegliedert[15]. Aus dem Rest der von den Deutschen besetzten polnischen Gebiete wurde das Generalgouvernement gebildet. Die Sondergerichte, die auf seinem Gebiet tätig waren, wurden zu den Sondergerichten des Generalgouvernements. Sie waren nach dem Muster der Sondergerichte im Reich geschaffen, aber im Generalgouvernement arbeiteten sie in einem anderen System und einem anderen rechtlichen Umfeld. Eine Erörterung dieser Frage würde den Rahmen dieser Studie sprengen, so dass es ausreichen sollte, darauf hinzuweisen, dass sowohl die Sondergerichte in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten als auch im Generalgouvernement deutsches Strafrecht anwendeten. Aus diesem Grund erfüllen die durchgeführten Analysen das wissenschaftliche Kriterium der Angemessenheit, trotz der Unterschiede im Rechtssystem zwischen den ins Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten und dem Generalgouvernement.[16]

Bevor ich auf die Bestimmungen des deutschen Strafrechts zur Fahnenflucht und zur Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht eingehe, möchte ich die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Situation der Nationalität in den ins Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten lenken. Bis zu einem gewissen Grad spiegelt sich dies in den Ergebnissen der Aktenrecherche wider, auf die sich der wichtigste Teil dieses Artikels stützt. In den ins Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten wurde im März 1941 die Deutsche Volksliste eingeführt. Das Ausmaß der Eintragung in die Volksliste beeinflusste indirekt die Zahl der Zwangseinberufungen zur Wehrmacht, ein Phänomen, das sich wiederum in Fahnenfluchten niederschlug. Die Volksliste teilte die Bevölkerung der eingegliederten Ostgebiete in vier Kategorien (Gruppen, Abteilungen) ein, abhängig vom Grad ihres Engagements für die deutsche Volkstumsbewegung. Zur ersten Kategorie gehörten Personen deutscher Nationalität, die am nationalen Kampf teilnahmen, sog. aktive Deutsche. Die zweite Kategorie bestand aus Personen deutscher Nationalität, die keine solche Aktivität nachweisen konnten, aber ihre nationale Identität bewahrten, sog. passive

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15 Czesław Madajczyk, *Die Okkupationspolitik Nazideutschlands in Polen 1939– 1945* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988), 24.

16 Mehr dazu, z. B. Andrzej Wrzyszcz, *Okupacyjne sądownictwo niemieckie w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939– 1945: Organizacja i funkcjonowanie* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2008); Hubert Mielnik, *Sądownictwo polskie (nieniemieckie) w dystrykcie lubelskim Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w latach 1939–1945* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie–Skłodowskiej, 2020); Diemut Majer, *„Non-Germans" under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Eastern Europe, with Special Regard to Occupied Poland 1939– 1945* (USHMM: Texas Tech, 2013); Gerd Weckbecker, *Zwischen Freispruch und Todesstrafe:Die Rechtsprechung der nationalsozialistischen Sondergerichte Frankfurt/Main und Bromberg* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1998); Maximilian Becker, *Mitstreiter im Volkstumskampf:Deutsche Justiz in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten 1939– 1945* (München: De Gruyter Oldebourg, 2014).

Deutsche. Zur dritten Kategorie gehörten „polonisierte“ Personen deutscher Abstammung, die dem Deutschtum gegenüber nicht negativ eingestellt waren sowie Personen fremder Abstammung, die eine Person deutscher Nationalität geheiratet haben und von ihr beeinflusst wurden. Die vierte Kategorie bestand aus „polonisierten“ Personen deutscher Abstammung, die politisch in pro-polnische Beziehungen involviert waren – sog. Renegaten.[17] Es ist zu betonen, dass in manchen Regionen – z. B. in Oberschlesien – die Anträge auf Aufnahme in die Volksliste zwangsmäßig waren. Beim Widerstand war die Gestapo zu benachrichtigen und die fragliche Person sollte in das Konzentrationslager gebracht werden[18]. Insgesamt wurden in den dem Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten mehr als 3.100.000 polnische Bürger in die Volksliste eingetragen[19]. Obwohl der Verlauf der Eintragung in die Volksliste von Region zu Region variierte, kamen die meisten der in die Volksliste eingetragenen Personen aus Oberschlesien und Danzig-Westpreußen.[20] In Oberschlesien wurden mindestens 80–90% der Bevölkerung als Deutsche und Fremde, die sich zur Eindeutschung eignen, klassifiziert. Für die übrigen eingegliederten Ostgebiete war dieses Verhältnis umgekehrt,[21] insbesondere niedrig war die Reichweite der Eintragung in die Volksliste im Warthegau.[22]

Die ersten massenhaften Einberufungen zur Wehrmacht erfolgten in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten im Frühling 1940. Da das Völkerrecht die Rekrutierung von Staatsangehörigen der besetzten Länder oder von Ausländern nicht zuließ (dies galt nicht für Freiwillige), war der Bezugspunkt für die deutschen Behörden das Ergebnis von Polizeizählungen aus den Jahren 1939 und 1940. Diese wurden zum Befehl Himmlers durchgeführt. Die Staatsangehörigkeits- und Muttersprachenerklärungen, die in den Polizeizählungen enthalten waren, wurden als Grundlage für die Behandlung der bereits eingezogenen Rekruten des Jahrgangs 1914 und

17 U. a.: Zygmunt Izdebski, *Niemiecka Lista Narodowa na Górnym Śląsku* (Katowice-Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Śląskiego, 1946), 51–58; Zofia Boda-Krężel, *Sprawa volkslisty na Górnym Śląsku* (Opole: Instytut Śląski w Opolu, 1978), 13–15; Romuald Rak, „Die deutsche Volksliste (1941) und ihre sittliche Beurteilung,“ *Oberschlesisches Jahrbuch* 7 (1991): 223–224; Robert Koehl, „The Deutsche Volksliste in Poland 1939–1945,“ *Journal of Central European Affairs* XV (1956)/4: 360–361.

18 Boda–Krężel, *Sprawa volkslisty*, 20–21, 39; Izdebski, *Niemiecka Lista Narodowa*, 52.

19 Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010), 412.

20 Bogdan Musiał, „Niemiecka polityka narodowościowa w okupowanej Polsce w latach 1939–1945,“ *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2 (6)(2004): 28.

21 Reinhold Jeske, „Hitlerowska polityka germanizacyjna na Górnym Śląsku i sąsiednich ziemiach polskich w czasie drugiej wojny światowej,“ *Studia i materiały z dziejów Śląska* V (1963): 514–515.

22 Czesław Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2019), Bd. I, 511.

jüngerer als Deutsche anerkannt. Eine Änderung in diesem Bereich erfolgte nach Einführung der Volksliste. Damals stellte sich heraus, dass die Reichsbürgerschaft nur die Personen bekamen, die in die erste oder zweite Kategorie der Volksliste eingetragen wurden. Die Personen aus der dritten Kategorie der Volksliste erhielten anfänglich keine deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft, später nur für 10 Jahre (mit der Möglichkeit des Widerrufs). Dies führte dazu, dass einige der Einberufungen überprüft werden mussten. Hervorzuheben sind auch die Massenrekrutierungen nach der Niederlage an der Ostfront im Jahre 1943, sowie nach der Eröffnung der Front in Italien und nach der Alliiertenlandung in der Normandie. Die Bedürfnisse der deutschen Wehrmacht erzwangen eine Liberalisierung des Systems der Reichsbürgerschaftsverleihung bezüglich der in die dritte Kategorie der Volksliste eingetragenen Personen, was zu einem raschen Anstieg der Zahl der in der Wehrmacht dienenden Polen führte. Laut einem von Ryszard Kaczmarek gefundenen Teilbericht vom Juli 1943 wurden in Oberschlesien bis zur Anfertigung dieses Berichtes 115.000 Männer einberufen, von denen 71.000 in die dritte Kategorie der Volksliste eingetragen waren.[23]

Ich möchte betonen, dass der Gegenstand meiner Recherche Fälle waren, in denen die Tat als Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht eingestuft wurde, nicht als Beihilfe zur unerlaubten Entfernung. Nach einer Wörterbuch-Definition ist die Fahnenflucht ein unerlaubtes Sich-Entfernen oder Fernbleiben von der Truppe mit der Absicht, sich dem Wehrdienst dauerhaft oder für die Zeit eines bewaffneten Einsatzes zu entziehen.[24] Ein Militär-Lexikon versteht unter diesem Begriff das unerlaubte Sich-Entfernen einer Militärperson von ihrer Truppe in der Absicht, sich der gesetzlichen oder von ihr übernommenen Dienstpflicht dauernd zu entziehen. Die juristische Literatur versteht Fahnenflucht als ein Verbrechen, das im Verlassen der Armee zwecks Vermeidung des Militärdienstes besteht, oder einfach als willkürliches Verlassen der Armee. Sie kann auf zwei Arten begangen werden: durch illegales Verlassen der Militäreinheit oder eines anderen Militärdienstortes, oder durch rechtmäßiges Verlassen der Einheit oder eines anderen Dienstortes und fehlender Rückkehr in die Einheit oder durch Nichterscheinen an einem anderen Dienstort zu einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt.[25]

23 Kaczmarek, *Polacy*, 89–97, 110, 114, 173–177.

24 G. Wahrig (Hrsg.), *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Gütersloh-Berlin-München-Wien 1973, 1198.

25 J. Castner, *Militär-Lexikon: Heerwesen und Marine aller Länder mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Deutschen Reichs, Waffen und Festungswesen, Taktik und Verwaltung*, Leipzig 1882, 108; J. Kaczorowski, *Dezercja (Szkic historyczno-prawny)* [Fahnenflucht (historische und juristische Skizze)]. In: Wojskowy Przegląd Prawniczy 1945, Nr. 3–4, 175; J. Muszyński, *Problematyka przyczyn dezercji w świetle badań kryminologicznych* [Problematik der Fahnenflucht im Lichte der kriminologischen Forschungen]. In: Wojskowy Przegląd Prawniczy 1967, Nr. 4, 405.

Die wesentlichen Elemente, die Fahnenflucht von der unerlaubten Entfernung unterscheiden, waren der Vorsatz und die Dauerhaftigkeit. Dieser Vorsatz entschied über den Richtungscharakter des Verbrechens der Fahnenflucht. Es bedurfte einer besonderen psychologischen Haltung des Täters, die sich in der Handlung „in der Absicht der dauerhaften Vermeidung" des Militärdienstes, d. h. in der Handlung des vorsätzlichen Fehlverhaltens, ausdrückte. In der Lehre wurde unter Bezugnahme auf den vom Gesetzgeber verwendeten Begriff „in der Absicht" darauf hingewiesen, dass es sich hierbei nicht um eine mögliche Absicht, sondern um einen Willen handelt, der durch eine dauerhafte Vermeidung der Wehrpflicht als Endziel (d. h. eine direkte Absicht) gelenkt wird. Deswegen war z. B. der Versuch eines Selbstmords als Versuch der Fahnenflucht nicht strafbar.[26]

Die Fahnenflucht während der Zeit des Dritten Reiches wurde im Deutschen Reichswehrstrafgesetzbuch von 1872 geregelt. Auf der Grundlage von § 69 dieses Gesetzbuches wurde wegen Fahnenflucht zur Verantwortung gezogen, wer sich der vorsätzlichen Flucht in der Absicht schuldig gemacht hatte, sich der gesetzlichen oder freiwillig übernommenen Militärpflicht dauerhaft zu entziehen. Der Unterschied zwischen Fahnenflucht und unerlaubte Entfernung besteht darin, dass im Falle der Fahnenflucht die Absicht besteht, sich dem Militärdienst dauerhaft zu entziehen. Es handelte sich also um ein vorsätzlich schuldhaftes Handeln. Eine Änderung in diesem Bereich erfolgte auf der Grundlage des Erlasses zur Neufassung des Militärstrafgesetzbuchs von 1940.[27] § 69 des neuen Wortlauts des Gesetzbuchs erhielt zwei Absätze: Auf der Grundlage des ersten Absatzes machte sich strafbar, wer in der Absicht, sich dauerhaft seiner Pflicht in der Wehrmacht zu entziehen oder die Beendigung seines Dienstverhältnisses zu erwirken, seine Einheit oder seinen Dienstort verlässt oder sich von ihnen fernhält. Auf der Grundlage des zweiten Absatzes wurde das Verhalten des Täters, der seine Einheit oder seinen Dienstort in der Absicht verließ oder sich von ihnen fernhielt, sich dem Dienst in der Wehrmacht oder den mobilen Teilen der Wehrmacht für eine Zeit des Krieges, der kriegerischen Bestrebungen oder der inneren Unruhen zu entziehen, der Fahnenflucht gleichgestellt. Nach der Änderung vom Oktober 1940 blieben die gesetzlichen Elemente des Straftatbestands der Fahnenflucht somit die Absicht, sich dem Mili-

26 W. Kubala, *Przestępstwo dezercji* z art. 304 § 3 k.k. [Verbrechen der Fahnenflucht nach Art. 304 Abs. 3 StGB] In: Wojskowy Przegląd Prawniczy 1971, Nr. 2, 156–157; E. Knap, *Dezercja w polskim ustawodawstwie wojskowym (rys prawno-historyczny)* [Fahnenflucht in der polnischen Militärgesetzgebung (rechtlicher und historischer Abriss)]. In: Wojskowy Przegląd Prawniczy 1972, Nr. 3, 298–299; M. Schlayer, *Heer und Kriegsflotte. Militärstrafrecht*, Berlin 1904, S. 40; Graczyk, „In einem Gewissenskonflikt", 70.

27 Verordnung über die Neufassung des Militärstrafgesetzbuchs vom 10. Oktober 1940. RGBl. 1940, S. 1347.

tärdienst zu entziehen, und die Beharrlichkeit dieser Absicht. Die Strafe für Fahnenflucht, wie sie in § 70 des Gesetzbuchs festgelegt ist, betrug mindestens sechs Monate Gefängnis. Im Falle von Fahnenflucht auf dem Schlachtfeld oder bei besonders schweren Vergehen, sah das Gesetz die Todesstrafe oder eine lebenslange oder zeitlich begrenzte Zuchthausstrafe vor. Im April 1940 wurden kurze Leitlinien zur Bestrafung von Fahnenflucht in Form eines Verweises im Militärstrafgesetzbuch selbst veröffentlicht. Diese Leitlinien wurden von Adolf Hitler erlassen.[28] Sie zeigen, dass die Todesstrafe geboten war, wenn der Täter aus Angst vor persönlicher Gefahr handelte oder wenn er aufgrund der besonderen Situation des Falles zur Aufrechterhaltung der militärischen Disziplin unerlässlich war. Darüber hinaus hielten die Leitlinien die Todesstrafe für angebracht in Fällen von wiederholter oder kollektiver Fahnenflucht oder bei Flucht oder Fluchtversuchen ins Ausland für angemessen, ebenso wie in Fällen, in denen der Täter zuvor in erheblichem Maße bestraft worden war oder während der Fahnenflucht kriminelle Handlungen begangen hatte. Die Leitlinien verpflichteten das verurteilende Gericht außerdem, unter Berücksichtigung der Gesamtheit der Umstände des Falles zu prüfen, ob die Todesstrafe oder eine Zuchthausstrafe angemessen ist. Sie hielten die Strafe einer Zuchthausstrafe für ausreichend, vor allem, wenn jugendlicher Leichtsinn, unsachgemäße Behandlung im Dienst, schwere häusliche Verhältnisse und andere nicht ehrenhafte Gründe für den Täter ausschlaggebend waren. Die Fahnenflucht unterlag natürlich der Rechtsprechung der Militärgerichte.

Beihilfe wurde durch das allgemeine Strafrecht geregelt, nämlich § 49 des Strafgesetzbuches des Deutschen Reiches von 1871[29], wo in Absatz 1 festlegt wurde, dass als Mittäter bestraft wird, wer dem Täter bei der Begehung eines Verbrechens oder Vergehens wissentlich durch Rat oder Tat Hilfe geleistet hat. Nach § 49 Abs. 2 des Gesetzbuches bestimmt sich die Strafe für einen Helfer oder einer Helferin nach dem Recht, das auf die Tat anwendbar ist, zu der er/sie wissentlich Beihilfe geleistet hat, muss aber nach den Vorschriften über die Strafe für den Versuch gemindert werden. Nach § 44 des Gesetzbuchs in seiner ursprünglichen (bis zum 15. Juni 1943 geltenden) Fassung sollte ein versuchtes Verbrechen milder bestraft werden als ein vollendetes Verbrechen. Wenn das begangene Verbrechen mit dem Tod oder lebenslänglicher Zuchthaus bestraft wurde, sollte im Falle eines Versuchs eine Zuchthausstrafe von nicht weniger als drei Jahren an dessen Stelle treten. In anderen Fällen kann die Strafe auf ein Viertel der für das begangene Verbrechen oder Vergehen vorgesehenen Mindeststrafe reduziert werden. Wenn demnach die

28 Richtlinien des Führers und Obersten Befehlshabers der Wehrmacht für die Strafzumessung bei Fahnenflucht vom 14. April 1940. RGBl. 1940, S. 1353.

29 Strafgesetzbuch vom 15. Mai 1871. RGBl. 1871, S. 127. Mitte 1943 kam es zur Änderung von § 49 des Strafgesetzbuches in Kraft, aber sie war rein redaktioneller Natur.

Verurteilung zu einer Zuchthausstrafe weniger als ein Jahr betrug, konnte sie in eine Gefängnisstrafe umgewandelt werden. Im Jahr 1943 wurde der Wortlaut von § 44 des Gesetzbuchs geändert, so dass der obligatorische Charakter der Strafminderung in einen fakultativen Charakter umgewandelt wurde.

Die Doktrin lenkte die Aufmerksamkeit in erster Linie auf den akzessorischen Charakter von Beihilfe. Voraussetzung war nämlich die Begehung einer Handlung durch eine andere Person, wobei die Haupttat nicht unbedingt abgeschlossen sein musste. Ihre wesentliche Prämisse war jedoch die Rechtswidrigkeit, so dass zum Beispiel die Beihilfe zur notwendigen Verteidigung nicht strafbar war. Der akzessorische Charakter der Beihilfe äußerte sich auch darin, dass die Strafbarkeit der Beihilfe entfiel, wenn beispielsweise der Täter der Haupttat unzurechnungsfähig war und das Verbrechen oder Vergehen daher nach dem Strafgesetzbuch nicht begangen wurde. Die Handlung eines Helfers oder einer Helferin wurde als jede rechtlich einklagbare menschliche Handlung verstanden, d. h. als die Verwirklichung des Willens, um eine Wirkung herbeizuführen. Aus diesem Grund kann die Beihilfe auch durch Unterlassen begangen werden. Die subjektive Seite der Beihilfe erforderte bewusste Beihilfe und damit eine Absicht, wobei eine mögliche Absicht ausreichend war. Der Wille des Helfers oder der Helferin war jedoch nicht – wie im Falle des Täters und des Anstifters – auf die Herbeiführung der Wirkung der Haupttat gerichtet, sondern auf die Beihilfe zur Begehung der Haupttat.[30] Der Helfer oder die Helferin musste die wesentlichen Elemente der vom Täter begangenen Tat erkennen, d. h. er oder sie musste wissen und wollen, dass und welche Art der Tat eines anderen er oder sie unterstützt.[31]

In § 49 des Strafgesetzbuchs werden ausdrücklich zwei Formen der Beihilfe genannt: durch Rat und durch Tat. Auf dieser Grundlage wurden in der Lehre zwei Formen unterschieden: die intellektuelle und die physische Hilfeleistung. Die intellektuelle Beihilfe bestand entweder darin, den Täter in seinem Entschluss, die Straftat zu begehen, zu bestärken, zur Fortsetzung der Straftat beizutragen oder ihn in seinem Entschluss zu unterweisen und anzuleiten.[32] Franz von Liszt, Professor für Strafrecht an der Universität Berlin, wies beispielsweise darauf hin, dass Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht darin bestehen kann, die später zu ergreifenden Maßnahmen anzuweisen.[33] Körperliche Hilfeleistung hingegen umfasste jede Art von möglicher Ak-

30 Ludwig Ebermayer, Adolf Lobe, Werner Rosenberg, *Reichs-Strafgesetzbuch mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rechtsprechung des Reichsgerichts* (Berlin-Leipzig: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 1929), 257–260.

31 Adolf Schönke, *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich: Kommentar* (München-Berlin: Beck 1944), 137.

32 Ebermayer, Lobe, Rosenberg, *Reichs-Strafgesetzbuch*, 262.

33 Franz von Liszt, *Lehrbuch des Deutschen Strafrechts*, Berlin 1899, 638.

tivität, die zur Unterstützung des Haupttäters nützlich war. § 49 StGB verlangte dagegen keinen Kausalzusammenhang zwischen der Handlung der Helfer:innen und dem vom Täter letztlich erzielten Ergebnis.[34] In Übereinstimmung mit der Rechtsprechung und der Lehre wurde es auch als unerheblich angesehen, ob und welche Tatbestandsmerkmale bereits verwirklicht waren, als die Beihilfe geleistet wurde.[35]

Den obigen Feststellungen zur Regelung der Fahnenflucht und der Beihilfe musste eine Analyse der Rechtsprechung (Praxis) vorausgehen, bei der ich unter anderem versuchen werde, die Frage zu beantworten, ob die deutschen Sondergerichte in den besetzten polnischen Gebieten die Strafzumessungsrichtlinien auf die Helfer:rinnen angewendet haben, welche Umstände mildernd angesehen wurden und wie verschiedene Faktoren das Strafmaß beeinflussten.

Ich habe die gesammelten Zahlen in der folgenden Tabelle 1 dargestellt. Zunächst möchte ich auf das Missverhältnis zwischen der Zahl der registrierten Fälle von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht bei den Sondergerichten in den dem Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten (61) und denen im Generalgouvernement (7) hinweisen. Insgesamt habe ich Dokumente für 68 Fälle gefunden, von denen 88% aus den eingegliederten Ostgebieten stammen. Diese Anzahl war auffindbar nach zur Verfügung stehenden Quellen. Es scheint, dass sich dies sowohl durch die dortigen Nationalitätenverhältnisse als auch durch das allgemeine Verhalten der Deserteure erklären lässt – sie desertierten oft nach ihrem Urlaub und versteckten sich in den ihnen bekannten Heimatstädten. Außerdem wurde in den ins Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten die Volksliste eingeführt und die Zwangseinberufung zur Wehrmacht vollzogen, was im Generalgouvernement aus offensichtlichen Gründen nicht der Fall war. Es ist aufgrund mangelnder Quellenlage nicht möglich, das Verhältnis dieser Zahlen zum allgemeinen Geschäftsanfall der einzelnen Sondergerichte präzise festzustellen. Bei den Sondergerichten des Generalgouvernements sind überall wenig Akten (z. B. keine Strafsachenlisten) geblieben, sodass es nicht möglich ist, eine Berechnung vorzustellen. Mutmaßlich nahm die Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht einen sehr geringen Anteil im Geschäftsanfall vor Sondergerichten im Generalgouvernement. Mehr ist in Bezug auf Sondergerichte in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten feststellbar. Gemäß der Forschungsliteratur ist darauf hinzuweisen, dass in Kattowitz 2394,[36] in Lodsch/Litzmannstadt 3182[37]

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34 Ebermayer, Lobe, Rosenberg, *Reichs-Strafgesetzbuch*, 262–263; Justus Olshausen, *Kommentar zum Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich* (Berlin: Vahlen, 1890), Bd. 1, 220–221.

35 Schönke, *Strafgesetzbuch*, 136.

36 Graczyk, *Ein anderes Gericht in Oberschlesien*, 334.

37 H. Schlüter, *„… für die Menschlichkeit im Strafmaß bekannt …“: Das Sondergericht Litzmannstadt und sein Vorsitzender Richter*, Düsseldorf 2006, 238.

und in Bromberg 1782 Strafsachen vorhanden sind[38]. Die polnische Archiv-Suchmaschinen zeigen zusätzlich 150 Strafsachen für Thorn[39] und 716 für Graudenz[40]. Im Vergleich mit den angeführten Statistiken erscheint die Anzahl der gefundenen Fälle von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht auch sehr niedrig. Generell ist festzustellen, dass Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht viel seltener vor den Sondergerichten auftrat, als andere Delikte, wie z. B. Diebstahl, Hehlerei, Unterschlagung, Erpressung, Körperverletzung, Betrug, Schleichhandel, Schwarzschlachtung, Abhören ausländischer Sender oder verbreiten ausländischer Rundfunknachrichten.

Von den identifizierten Fällen wurde 1940 einer gerichtlich verhandelt, 1942 zwei, 1943 vierzehn, 1944 fünfzig und 1945 einer. Diese Statistik entspricht den Teilergebnissen für Kattowitz, das im Jahr 1944 ebenfalls die höchste Zahl von Fällen aufwies.[41] Das lag natürlich an der verstärkten Tendenz zur Fahnenflucht nach der Niederlage von Stalingrad und an den Abläufen der Strafverfahren, bei denen zwischen der Einleitung des Verfahrens und dem Urteil eine gewisse Zeit vergehen musste. In den 68 untersuchten Strafverfahren wurden 128 Personen (36 Männer und 92 Frauen) angeklagt, von denen 109 (34 Männer und 80 Frauen) verurteilt wurden, während 14 freigesprochen wurden. Diese Daten bestätigen die Regelmäßigkeit des Geschlechterverhältnisses bei den Helfer:innen, die sich aus den Ergebnissen des Gerichts in Kattowitz[42] ergibt und auch im Gerichtsbezirk Köln[43] festgestellt wurde – es gibt ein klares Übergewicht von Frauen, die Deserteuren helfen, gegenüber Männern. Dies wird auch durch die Daten zum beruflichen Status bestätigt, der im Falle der Frauen in den Urteilen durch das Prisma des Familienstands beschrieben wurde: 42% der Angeklagten waren Ehefrauen oder Witwen, während die zweitgrößte Gruppe Arbeiter:innen waren (22%). Die Statistiken über die Nationalität sind ähnlich. Unter den Angeklagten überwogen eindeutig die Volksdeutschen (66%), vor Polen (25%),[44] Reichsdeutschen (8%) und Russen (1%). Die Nationalitätenstruktur der Verurteilten hat sich leicht verändert. Auch hier überwiegen die Volksdeutschen (64%) vor Polen (27%), Reichsdeutschen (8%) und Russen (1%). Die überwältigende Mehrheit der

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38 Weckbecker, *Zwischen Freispruch*, 447

39 https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/zespol/-/zespol/103313; Zugang am 6.6.2023.

40 https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/zespol/-/zespol/103931; Zugang am 6.6.2023.

41 Graczyk, In einem Gewissenskonflikt, 74.

42 Graczyk, In einem Gewissenskonflikt, 75.

43 Michael Löffelsender, *Strafjustiz an der Heimatfront: Die strafrechtliche Verfolgung von Frauen und Jugendlichen im Oberlandesgerichtsbezirk Köln 1939 – 1945* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 309.

44 Man darf nicht vergessen, dass in den Gebieten, die ins Reich eingegliedert wurden, haben die Gerichte ab Ende Dezember 1941 gegen die Polen statt einer Zuchthausstrafe ein verschärftes Straflager verhängt und statt einer Gefängnisstrafe, ein Straflager.

Tabelle 1: Statistik der Fälle von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht, die vor deutschen Sondergerichten in den eingegliederten Gebieten und im Generalgouvernement durch Urteil entschieden wurden. In der Auflistung fehlen die Sondergerichte, in deren Rechtsprechung kein einziger Fall mit dieser rechtlichen Qualifikation überliefert ist.

	Sondergericht	Anzahl der Fälle	Anzahl der Angeklagten		Anzahl der Verurteilten		Strafe			Anzahl der Freigesprochenen
			Männer	Frauen	Männer	Frauen	Todesstrafe	Zuchthaus	Gefängnis	
Eingegliederte Gebiete	Bromberg	2	4		4		0	0	4	0
			2	2	2	2				
	Graudenz	24	42		41		3	30	8	1
			15	27	15	26				
	Kattowitz	24	48		41		0	18	23	7
			8	40	7	34				
	Lodsch	10	23		18		0	3	15	5
			4	19	4	14				
	Thorn	1	1		1		0	1	0	0
			0	1	0	1				

Generalgouvernement	Krakau	2	3		3		0	3	0	0
			2	1	2	1				
	Warschau	5	7		6		0	3	3	1
			5	2	4	2				
Insgesamt		68	128		114		3	58	53	14
			36	92	34	80				

Volksdeutschen hatte die deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft auf Widerruf, die der dritten Kategorie der Volksliste angehörten. Unter den wegen Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht Verurteilten überwogen die Altersgruppen der 22- bis 30-Jährigen (29%) und der 31- bis 40-Jährigen (25%). Etwas weniger zahlreich waren die Altersgruppen der 41- bis 50-Jährigen (20%) und der 51- bis 60-Jährigen (19%). Am wenigsten zahlreich waren die älteste Altersgruppe – 61 bis 70 Jahre (3%) – und die jüngste Altersgruppe – 18 bis 21 Jahre (4%). Bei einem kleinen Teil der Verurteilten war es nicht möglich, ihr Alter zu bestimmen (3%).

Ein erheblicher Teil der Fälle betraf die Beihilfe für Familienmitglieder – Ehemann, Bruder oder Neffe. Was hingegen die Form der Hilfe anbelangt, so handelte es sich in den meisten Fällen lediglich um physische Hilfe durch die Bereitstellung von Unterkünften und Pflege, seltener um die Vermittlung von Briefen, die Ausgabe von Zivilkleidung, die Übergabe von Lebensmitteln, Dokumenten und Geld. Die Frage der Verwandtschaft wurde vor allem in Kattowitz zugunsten des Angeklagten ausgelegt. Bei anderen Sondergerichten kam dies nur sehr selten vor. Die Sondergerichte berücksichtigten zugunsten des Angeklagten auch die Intimität der Beziehung, die Straflosigkeit, die Kurzzeitigkeit der Unterschlupfgewährung sowie die Abhängigkeit von anderen Personen (z. B. der Ehefrau gegenüber ihrem Ehemann, der alten Mutter gegenüber ihren Kindern). Die erforschten Urteile haben keinen Anlass gegeben, die Einwirkung der Kategorie der Volksliste oder der sozialen Herkunft festzustellen. Dagegen war feststellbar die Einwirkung der Nationalität auf das Strafmaß: 54% der Angeklagten Polen wurden zum Zuchthaus (verschärften Straflager) verurteilt, während bei Volksdeutschen lag es bei 41% und bei Reichsdeutschen nur bei 27%. Hier lässt sich feststellen, dass die Rechtsprechung der Sondergerichte diskriminierend gegenüber Polen war, indem Polen öfter als Deutschen auf Zuchthausstrafe (verschärften Straflagerstrafe) verurteilt wurden sowie Deutschen viel öfter als Polen auf Gefängnisstrafen bis zu einem Jahr verurteilt wurden.

Im Falle der Sondergerichte im Generalgouvernement sind die wichtigsten Dokumente (Urteile) nur für sieben Fälle erhalten geblieben. Bei den Sondergerichten in Tschenstochau und Lemberg sind zwei Anklageschriften erhalten geblieben[45], es ist jedoch nicht bekannt, ob eine Verurteilung stattfand oder welche Strafe, wenn überhaupt, verhängt wurde, deswegen wurden diese Fälle versäumt. Dies lässt den Schluss zu, dass das Phänomen der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht auf dem Gebiet des Generalgouvernements völlig unbedeutend war. Dennoch möchte ich einige Beispiele aus der lokalen Rechtsprechung anführen. Im ersten Fall

45 Anfänglich scheinte es – nach dem Archivinventar – dass in Lemberg mehr Fälle bearbeitet wurden. Der Inhalt der Akten ergab jedoch, dass als „Fahnenflucht“ meistens die Arbeitsvertragsbrüche beschrieben wurden. Dierżawnij Archiw Lwiwskoj Obłasti (Staatsarchiv des Lembergers Umkreises), P-77 Sondergericht bei dem Deutschen Gericht in Lemberg, Archivinventar.

wurde ein 32-jähriger polnischer Arbeiter von der Anklage der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht freigesprochen. Sein Vergehen soll darin bestanden haben, dass er einen Zettel an sich genommen hat, den ihm ein deutscher Soldat zugeworfen hatte und auf dem er in polnischer Sprache um Zivilkleidung und ein späteres Treffen bat. Der Pole verteidigte sich mit der Behauptung, dass er die Aufforderung des Soldaten nicht befolgt habe und dies durch eine Kopfbewegung zum Ausdruck gebracht habe. Das Sondergericht in Warschau hat nicht festgestellt, dass er Beihilfe geleistet hat.[46] Dasselbe Gericht verurteilte im November 1943 einen 31-jährigen Schuhmacher aus Warschau wegen Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht, aber die in dem Fall erhaltenen Dokumente erlaubten es nicht, die Umstände der Tat zu ermitteln.[47] In Warschau wurden noch drei Strafsachen mit insgesamt fünf Verurteilten erkannt – das Sondergericht verurteilte zwei Personen zu zwei Jahren Zuchthaus und drei weitere zu Gefängnisstrafen zwischen sechs und fast acht Monaten[48].

Ein klassischer Fall von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht wurde vom Sondergericht in Krakau in einer lokalen Sitzung in Tarnów verhandelt. Das Urteil, das im Juli 1942 erging, zeigte, dass eine 27-jährige Polin einem deutschen Soldaten, mit dem sie seit einiger Zeit eine Beziehung hatte, geholfen hatte, militärische Ausrüstung und Uniform zu verstecken. Das Urteil lautete auf drei Jahre Zuchthaus. Aus dem Urteil geht hervor, dass der Deserteur vom Militärgericht zum Tode verurteilt wurde, was auch vollstreckt wurde.[49] Im letzten Fall wurden wegen Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht durch Sondergericht Krakau im Juli 1942 zwei polnische Geistlichen verurteilt: der 68-jährige Prior des Kamedulenklosters Bielany (5 Jahren Zuchthaus) und der 54-jährige Ordensbruder (3,5 Jahren Zuchthaus). Der wegen Fahnenflucht zum Tode verurteilte und hingerichtete Unterfeldwebel teilte mit, er habe sich monatelang im Kloster Bielany verborgen gehalten. Er hatte sich am 24. Juli 1940 von seiner Truppe entfernt und kam nach vier Tagen zum Kloster, wo er um Aufnahme gebeten hat. Der Prior stimmte es zu. Der deutsche Soldat

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46 Archiwum Państwowe Dokumentacji Osobowej i Płacowej w Milanówku (Staatsarchiv für Personal- und Lohnunterlagen in Milanówek), Sondergericht in Warschau, Az. 1571, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Mieczyslaw Malachowski vom 21. März 1944, Bl. 20–21.

47 BArch, R 137 I Gerichte im Osten/1044, Mitteilung der Aufnahme eines Gefangenen vom 5. August 1944, ohne Pagination.

48 Archiwum Państwowe Dokumentacji Osobowej i Płacowej w Milanówku, Sondergericht in Warschau, Az. 1178, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Viktoria Gimzinska und Tadeusz Iwaszkiewicz vom 30. November 1943, Bl. 42; Az. 1497, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Halina Romankiewicz und Johann Romankiewicz vom 10. Februar 1944, Bl. 49; Az. 1504, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Tadeusz Kalinowski vom 2. März 1944, Bl. 34.

49 BArch, R 137 I/1382, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Dorota Musial vom 13. Juli 1942, Bl. 24–25.

verließ das Kloster nach einem Monat, da er nach Ungarn gehen wollte. Der Prior gab ihm einen Mantel, Reiseverpflegung und Kleingeld. Nach einem Jahr wurde der Soldat in Ungarn verhaftet, ausgeliefert und nach Krakau überführt. In der Augusthälfte 1941 gelang es ihm, aus der Haftanstalt zu flüchten und fand wieder für einige Tage Unterkunft im Kloster. Als er dann das Kloster verließ, wurde er in Kürze erneut verhaftet. Das Sondergericht Krakau stellte fest, dass der Prior und der Ordensbruder dem Unterfeldwebel Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht durch Gewährung oder Duldung von Unterschlupf geleistet haben[50].

Selbst bei einer oberflächlichen Auswertung der gesammelten statistischen Daten wird deutlich, dass sich die in das Dritte Reich eingegliederten Ostgebiete in Bezug auf das Phänomen der Fahnenflucht und folglich auch der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht deutlich vom Generalgouvernement unterscheiden. Es gibt jedoch auch eine Differenzierung innerhalb der eingegliederten Gebiete selbst. Während bei den Sondergerichten in Kattowitz und Graudenz eine identische Anzahl von Fällen von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht auftrat (jeweils 24), waren es in Lodsch weniger Fälle (10), und geringfügig weniger in Thorn (1) und Bromberg (2). Der Fall von Thorn lässt sich durch den episodischen Charakter der Existenz des dortigen Gerichts erklären (es war von Januar 1942 bis Dezember 1943 tätig), aber dieser Umstand trifft nicht auf Bromberg zu. Selbst ein Forscher der Rechtsprechung des genannten Sondergerichts, Gerd Weckbecker, konnte keine Erklärung für dieses Phänomen liefern.[51] Stattdessen ist anzumerken, dass beide Fälle, mit denen sich das Sondergericht in Bromberg befasste, im letzten Quartal des Jahres 1944 verhandelt wurden,[52] Verhandlungen in zwei weiteren Fällen wurden für Januar 1945 anberaumt,[53] aber die Urteile wurden aufgrund der Kriegshandlungen nicht vollstreckt. Obwohl die gesamte Rechtsprechung des Sondergerichts in Bromberg in der Wissenschaft als terroristisch und exterminatorisch angesehen wird,[54] betrug das Strafmaß in Fällen der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht im Durchschnitt 18 Monate Gefängnis und war extrem niedrig im Vergleich mit Strafmaß der anderen Sondergerichten auf dem besetzten polnischen Gebiet.[55]

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50 Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie (Nationalarchiv in Krakau), Deutsches Zuchthaus Neu Wisnicz, Az. 88, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Jan Wyczesany und Andere vom 20. Juli 1942, ohne Paginierung.

51 Weckbecker, *Zwischen Freispruch*, 599–600.

52 Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy (Staatsarchiv in Bromberg), Sondergericht in Bydgoszcz, Az. 1091 i 1098.

53 Archiwum Państwowe w Bydgoszczy, Sondergericht in Bydgoszcz, Az. 1203 und 1204.

54 Edmund Zarzycki, *Działalność hitlerowskiego Sądu Specjalnego w Bydgoszczy w latach 1939– 1945* (Bydgoszcz: Bydgoskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2000), passim.

55 Weckbecker, *Zwischen Freispruch*, 600.

Die Sondergerichte in Kattowitz und Lodsch verhängten bei der Verurteilung wegen Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten häufiger Gefängnisstrafen als Zuchthausstrafen und wandten daher in diesen Fällen die sich aus den oben genannten Bestimmungen ergebenden Richtlinien für die Verurteilung wegen Beihilfe an. Die Rechtsprechung des Gerichts in Lodsch in dieser besonderen Kategorie von Fällen kann als völlig milde bewertet werden, da es nur dreimal zu einer hohen Zuchthausstrafe griff – es verurteilte zwei Personen zu einer dreijährigen und eine Person zu einer siebenjährigen, aber in diesem Fall erfolgte die Verurteilung neben der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht auch wegen Anstiftung zum Meineid. Die in Lodsch verhängten Gefängnisstrafen betrugen im Durchschnitt zwei Jahre und einen Monat (die geringste Strafe war sechs Monate, die höchste drei Jahre). Im Vergleich dazu waren es in Kattowitz durchschnittlich zehn Monate Gefängnis (mindestens drei Monate, höchstens zwei Jahre und zwei Monate), während die Zuchthausstrafe dort durchschnittlich zweieinhalb Jahre betrug (mindestens ein Jahr, höchstens fünf Jahre). Die detaillierten Urteilsstatistiken zeigen, wie sehr sich das Sondergericht in Graudenz in Fällen von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht unterschied. Es war nicht nur das einzige, das die Todesstrafe gegen drei Personen verhängte, sondern es griff auch deutlich häufiger zu Zuchthausstrafe als zu Gefängnis. In Graudenz betrugen die Gefängnisstrafen im Durchschnitt ein Jahr und eineinhalb Monate (mindestens sechs Monate, höchstens eineinhalb Jahre), während Zuchthausstrafen im Durchschnitt drei Jahre und acht Monate (mindestens eineinhalb Jahre, höchstens acht Jahre).

Um die Strenge der Entscheidung des Gerichts in Graudenz zu verdeutlichen, möchte ich zunächst die Fälle anführen, in denen die Todesstrafe verhängt wurde. Im ersten Fall wurde ein 33-jähriger Friseur verurteilt, der die Bekanntschaft eines deutschen Soldaten – eines Kunden des Friseursalons – gemacht hatte. Bei einem Besuch im Friseursalon bot der Friseur selbst Unterkunft und Verpflegung an, ohne dass der Soldat darum gebeten hätte. Zu den erschwerenden Umständen zählte das Gericht, dass die Tat im Januar 1944 begangen wurde, als die Abwehrkämpfe der Wehrmacht noch andauerten und als „antideutsche Elemente in den eingegliederten Gebieten begannen, auf die Wiederherstellung des polnischen Staates zu hoffen".[56] Das Todesurteil im zweiten Fall gegen einen 64-jährigen polnischen Landwirt wurde dadurch beeinflusst, dass er nicht nur Unterschlupf gewährt (Beihilfe), sondern auch einen deutschen Soldaten zur Fahnenflucht überredet hatte (Anstiftung). In diesem Fall wurden neben dem Landwirt auch seine Kinder wegen

56 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 495, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Konstantin Nowinski und Wanda Nowinski vom 8. März 1944, Bl. 31–35.

Beihilfe zu sechs und zwei Jahren Gefängnis verurteilt.[57] Im letzten Fall versteckte eine volksdeutsche Familie einen Deserteur, der sich ursprünglich als Partisan und Fallschirmjäger ausgegeben hatte, über einen Zeitraum von mehreren Monaten. Der Familienvater, der neben der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht auch wegen Hehlerei und eines kriegswirtschaftlichen Verbrechens angeklagt war, wurde zum Tode verurteilt, während die anderen Angeklagten zu Strafen zwischen zwei und acht Jahren Zuchthaus verurteilt wurden. In dem Urteil stellte das Sondergericht Graudenz fest: „Die Fahnenflucht stellt im Kriege ein todeswürdiges Verbrechen dar, da sie der Wehrkraft des Reiches einen im Einzelfall nicht wieder gutmachenden Schaden zufügt und den schwersten Treubruch des Soldaten gegenüber seinen Fahneneid bedeutet“[58]. Es sollte betont werden, dass alle Todesurteile, die in Graudenz wegen der Unterstützung von Deserteuren verhängt wurden, auch vollstreckt wurden.

Die Sondergerichte in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten bewerteten die Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht als höchst nachteiliges Verbrechen. Deshalb hieß es in einem Urteil aus Lodsch: „Wer Fahnenflüchtigen Unterschlupf gewährt, vergeht sich aufs schwerste gegen sein Volk“[59]. Dasselbe Gericht sah die Dominanz der Frauen und die Unwirksamkeit der bisher verhängten harten Strafen: „Die Unterstützung Fahnenflüchtiger durch Frauen hat trotz der schweren Strafen, die wegen solcher Taten bereits verhängt worden sind, nicht nachgelassen, wie die beim Sondergericht anhängig gewordenen Strafverfahren zeigen. Eine deutsche Frau, die einem Fahnenflüchtigen Hilfe gewährt, beschmutzt ihre Ehre ebenso, wie der ehrvergessene Soldat, der seine Truppe verlässt“.[60] Diese Wörter drücken eine besondere Verurteilung seitens des Gerichts sowohl gegenüber dem desertierenden Soldaten als auch gegenüber der Helferin aus. Dabei wurde auch Bedarf an strenge Bestrafung gesprochen. Das Problem der Beeinflussung der lokalen Bevölkerung, um Deserteure von der Unterstützung abzuhalten, wurde vom Sondergericht in Krakau in seinem Urteil hervorgehoben, in dem es hieß: „Andererseits musste die Strafe schwer ausfallen, damit die polnische Bevölkerung sehr energisch darüber belehrt wird, dass sie keinesfalls auf irgendeine Weise derartig pflichtvergessene Wehrmachtsangehörige in ihrem ehrlosen Treiben unterstützen darf“[61].

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57 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 591, Urteil gegen Bernhard Ukomski und Andere vom 29. September 1944, Bl. 1–8.

58 BArch, R 3017 Oberreichsanwalt beim Volksgerichtshof/40939, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Theofil Draim und Andere vom 26. April 1944, Bl. 19–27.

59 Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi (Staatsarchiv in Lodsch/Litzmannstadt), Sondergericht Lodsch/Litzmannstadt, Az. 8634, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Paul Werner vom 2. Juni 1944, Bl. 32–34

60 Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, Sondergericht Lodsch/Litzmannstadt, Az. 5545, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Irma Kabza und Andere vom 25. Juli 1944, Bl. 60–62.

61 BArch, R 137 I/1382, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Dorota Musial vom 13. Juli 1942, Bl. 24–25.

In zwei Urteilen des Sondergerichts in Graudenz wurde betont, dass Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht hart bestraft werden sollte, da die Bevölkerung in den dem Reich eingegliederten Ostgebieten dazu neigte, Deserteuren zu helfen.[62] Ähnliche Aussagen wurden in Dokumenten staatsanwaltschaftlicher Provenienz gefunden. Mitte März 1944 wies der Oberstaatsanwalt in Graudenz in seiner negativen Stellungnahme zur Frage der Begnadigung von der Todesstrafe darauf hin, dass in der Bevölkerung, die in der dritten Kategorie der Volksliste eingetragen war, und in der polnischen Bevölkerung „antideutsche Elemente" aufgetaucht waren, die eine Veränderung der Situation anstrebten. Dies äußerte sich insbesondere in der Unterstützung von flüchtigen Soldaten – zu diesem Zeitpunkt verurteilte das örtliche Sondergericht innerhalb von fünf Monaten mehr als 15 Personen wegen der Unterstützung von Deserteuren.[63] Dies zeigt, dass die Justizbehörden in Pommern die Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht als ein Problem ansahen, dem mit der Verhängung der Hauptstrafe begegnet werden sollte. Im Vergleich dazu wurden in den Dokumenten, die zur gleichen Zeit in Lodsch oder Kattowitz erstellt wurden, keine solchen Themen gefunden.

Zusammenfassend, das untersuchte Quellenmaterial zeigt, dass die Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht deutlich häufiger von Frauen als von Männern begangen wurde. Oft war diese Hilfe an die verwandtschaftliche Beziehung zu dem flüchtigen Soldaten gebunden. Die Frage der Verwandtschaft wurde vor allem in Kattowitz zugunsten des Angeklagten ausgelegt. Bei anderen Sondergerichten passierte es sehr selten. Zugunsten des Angeklagten haben die Sondergerichte auch andere Umstände bemerkt, wie z. B. das intime Verhältnis oder Kurzzeitigkeit der Unterschlupfgewährung des Deserteurs.

Die Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht hat sowohl im Gebiet des Generalgouvernements als auch in den eingegliederten Ostgebieten stattgefunden, aber im ersteren Fall vereinzelt, während im Fall der eingegliederten Ostgebieten die Zahl der Fälle bei einundsechzig lag. Die erforschten Urteile haben keinen Anlass gegeben, der Einfluss der Kategorie der Volksliste oder der sozialen Herkunft festzustellen. Dagegen war feststellbar die Einwirkung der Nationalität auf das Strafmaß. Die Rechtsprechung der Sondergerichte war diskriminierend gegenüber Polen, indem Polen öfter als Deutschen auf Zuchthausstrafe (verschärften Straflagerstrafe) verurteilt wurden sowie Deutschen viel öfter als Polen auf kurze Gefängnisstrafen (bis zu einem Jahr) verurteilt wurden.

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62 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 601, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Wanda Smeja vom 27. Oktober 1944, Bl. 45–47; Az. 602, Urteil in der Strafsache gegen Margarete Sandach vom 27. Oktober 1944, Bl. 52–53.

63 Archiwum Państwowe w Toruniu, Sondergericht Graudenz, Az. 495, Schreiben des Oberstaatsanwalts in Graudenz an Reichsminister der Justiz vom 15. März 1944, Bl. 7–8.

Die Rechtsprechung der deutschen Sondergerichte in beiden Regionen des besetzten Polens lässt den Schluss zu, dass sich die deutschen Richter der erheblichen Schwere der Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht und ihrer Bedeutung für die deutschen Kriegsanstrengungen bewusst waren. Daher versuchten sie, durch die Härte der verhängten Strafen eine präventive Wirkung auf die lokale Bevölkerung zu erzielen. Trotzdem wendeten die meisten Sondergerichte Strafzumessungsrichtlinien an, die im Falle der Beihilfe eine Strafminderung vorsahen, und verhängten in der Regel eine Gefängnisstrafe, seltener eine Zuchthausstrafe. Vor diesem Hintergrund fällt das Sondergericht in Graudenz negativ auf, das in Fällen von Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in der Regel eine hohe Zuchthausstrafe und in drei Fällen die Todesstrafe verhängte, die auch vollstreckt wurde. Die dortigen Strafverfolgungsbehörden waren besorgt über die Haltung der in der dritten Kategorie eingeschriebenen Volksdeutschen und der polnischen Bevölkerung, die auf die Wiederherstellung des polnischen Staates hofften und dazu neigten, Deserteure zu unterstützen.

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Tobias Kossytorz

Alsatian Conscription Evaders in Switzerland

During the night of 11 February 1943, 182 young men from Alsace crossed the Swiss border near the village of Bonfol, situated in the Canton of Jura, approximately thirty-five kilometres southwest of Basel.[1] When interrogated by Swiss Armed Forces personnel, all refugees cited their imminent conscription into the German Armed Forces as the motive for their escape. The incorporation of birth cohorts from 1914 to 1919 had been mandated ten days earlier, on 1 February 1943. Investigations conducted by Swiss military intelligence revealed the existence of a widespread and organized network, with local branches in numerous Alsatian villages along the border, orchestrating the mass flight event. The men assembled in a forest not far from the border before departing, armed with a dozen revolvers and a rifle. As they approached the border, they encountered two German sentinels. Supposedly overwhelmed by the nearly two hundred men, the sentinels refrained from opening fire and instead vanished into the night.[2] The night after witnessed another mass flight event near the village of Rodersdorf in the Canton of Solothurn, where eighty-seven Alsatians crossed the border.[3] However, another attempted escape by eighteen Alsatians was met with violent resistance from German border guards. In the ensuing shootout, four Alsatians and one German border guard lost their lives. The remaining fourteen conscription evaders were apprehended by German border guards and subjected to a show trial in Strasbourg on 16 February 1943. They were executed the following day.[4]

In the following days, only a few Alsatians succeeded in crossing the border into Switzerland. The mass departure of conscripts was promptly halted by the German authorities, who resorted to draconian measures. Swiss military intelligence reported Gestapo patrols along the roads in the restricted-access border region immediately following the initial mass flight. Additionally, *Feldgendarmerie* units were dispatched to various villages along the border.[5] Intelligence reports documented the deportation of families associated with conscription evaders mere days

1 The Canton of Jura was only created in 1979 when it separated from the Canton of Berne.

2 Swiss Federal Archives (BAR), E5716#1000/938#3*, Az. 1, Grenzmeldungen des Nachrichtenoffiziers, 1939–1945.

3 BAR, E5716#1000/938#4#2*, Az. 1, Nachrichten-Bulletins, Teil 2, 1941–1943.

4 *“Wer seinem Volk in den Rücken fällt, ist des Todes!”*, Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten, 17.02.1943.

5 BAR, E5716#1000/938#4#2*, Az. 1, Nachrichten-Bulletins, Teil 2, 1941–1943.

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after their escape to Switzerland. Over the following months, border crossings by Alsatian conscription evaders occurred sporadically, but never reached the levels witnessed in February 1943. The influx of Alsatian border refugees saw a slight increase again in September and October 1943 following the German Civil Administration's declaration of incorporating birth cohorts from 1908 to 1913. A census conducted by the French *Commissariat aux Prisonniers, Deportés et Réfugiés* indicated a total presence of 1,500 Alsatian conscription evaders in Switzerland by September 1944.[6] The majority of Alsatian conscription evaders were repatriated to France via the country's western border by November 1944 and subsequently integrated into the French liberation army.

This article will retrace the lives of Alsatian conscription evaders in Switzerland, from their arrival in Switzerland until their ultimate repatriation. It is based on a case study of the refugee files of one hundred Alsatian conscription evaders, compiled by the Swiss Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP). These files document all interactions between the refugees and public authorities, as well as all major events related to their presence in Switzerland. The one hundred conscription evaders in this case study were men born between 1908 and 1928 who crossed the Swiss-Alsatian border between 9 February 1943, and 27 September 1944. The duration of their stay varied between less than two months and more than two years. Since the experiences of each conscription evader depend on various individual factors, this paper attempts to provide a broad overview of the general experiences of these men during their stay in Switzerland, as well as illuminating to what extent it contrasted with the experiences of other refugees.

In the first section, this paper will delve into the perception of Alsatians by the Swiss public authorities, particularly focusing on key decision-makers within the FDJP, namely the Federal Councillor (minister) Eduard von Steiger, the head of the FDJP's Police Section, Heinrich Rothmund, and his deputy, Robert Jezler. I will argue that the attitude of these influential figures towards these Alsatian refugees could best be described as 'benevolent indifference.' Their primary concern appeared to be managing public opinion by controlling the narrative, rather than actively preventing additional conscription evaders from crossing the Swiss border. Alsatian conscription refugees were, in practice, treated as civil refugees and granted a tolerated status. Subsequently, this paper will explore the internment conditions of Alsatian refugees in Switzerland, contrasting the two primary modes of internment: labour camps and individual internment in agriculture. Through

6 French National Archives (AN), F/9/3366, Correspondance diverse ; octobre 1944–juillet 1945, 1940–1945.

the latter, I argue, the experience of the Alsatian conscription evaders differed from that of other refugees, who were mostly housed in some form of collective accommodation. Nonetheless, the experience of Alsatian conscription evaders did not differ starkly from that of other refugees in that it showed the same pattern of occasional conflicts vis-à-vis the local population and among the refugees themselves. In fact, the majority of interned Alsatians experienced periods marked by relative uneventfulness.

I Alsatian Conscription Evaders in the Eyes of the Public Authorities

The refugee policy of the Swiss Confederation during World War Two has been a topic of recurring domestic and international controversy, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s.[7] In 1996, the Swiss refugee policy faced renewed scrutiny following the discovery of unclaimed bank assets belonging to Jewish victims of the Holocaust, which had remained dormant in Swiss bank accounts. The subsequent international controversy over the restitution of these assets, coupled with pressure from the United States, prompted the Swiss Federal Council to reassess the country's role during World War Two. In response, the Federal Council appointed an Independent Commission of Experts (UEK), led by historian Jean-François Bergier, to investigate various aspects of Switzerland's wartime policies and actions, including its refugee policy. Given its mandate, the commission primarily focused on victims persecuted by the German National-Socialist regime, particularly Jewish refugees, with limited discussion of other refugee groups such as foreign soldiers.[8] Consequently, the historiographical reassessment of different refugee groups, including Alsatian refugees, remains underdeveloped. Broadening the scope of the category 'refugee' by including conscription evaders provides a more nuanced perspective on Switzerland's refugee policy during World War Two.

The interwar period in Switzerland was characterized by an increasingly stringent immigration policy regime. Following World War One, concerns about 'foreign overpopulation' ("Überfremdung"), a notion which comprised both the fear of cultural estrangement and the fear of demographic replacement, led to

7 A comprehensive summary of the controversies is provided in: Thomas Maissen, *Verweigerte Erinnerung: Nachrichtenlose Vermögen und die Schweizer Weltkriegsdebatte 1989– 2002* (Zürich: Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2005).

8 Guido Koller, *Fluchtort Schweiz: Schweizerische Flüchtlingspolitik (1933–1945) und ihre Nachgeschichte*, (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2018), 165.

the implementation of stricter immigration legislation.[9] Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, Swiss legislation regarding immigration and the entry of foreigners grew progressively stricter in response to international events. Federal Councillor von Steiger's portrayal of Switzerland as a "heavily occupied small lifeboat with limited capacity" in 1942 encapsulated the Swiss refugee policy of the time.[10]

The refugee policy in Switzerland was subordinate to immigration policy; refugees arriving in Switzerland were not categorized as refugees by law, but simply as foreigners, thereby subjecting them to treatment as illegal immigrants.[11] Before the war, Switzerland lacked a comprehensive legal framework for asylum, aside from the ambiguous notion of a 'political refugee'. The definition of this category evolved over time, with recognition being granted very sparingly.[12] Jewish refugees in particular were explicitly excluded from the designation of political refugees. Between 1933 and 1945, only a scant number of individuals, barely exceeding 600, were officially recognized as political refugees.[13]

The onset of war expedited the tightening of this legal framework. Following the announcement of a general visa requirement for all foreign nationals on 5 September 1939, the Federal Council instituted a partial border closure on 29 September. This effectively prohibited border crossings away from main border posts and established the practice of pushbacks. Significant influxes of refugees prompted the Federal Council to strengthen security measures, as was the case in 1938 when numerous Austrian Jews arrived at the border following the German annexation of Austria. Similar measures were taken in 1942 when the number of Jewish refugees from France surged. In a confidential circular issued to the directorates of cantonal police forces on 13 August 1942, the FDJP enacted a practical full border closure and widespread pushbacks. Although amended after only ten days, the directive of 13 August 1942 remains one of the most notable legal documents regarding Swiss refugee policy during World War Two, ingrained in public memory.[14] The border closure effectively mandated border guards and soldiers to turn away Jewish refugees. The directive's stringent policy

9 Georg Kreis, "La crise des années 1930 et la hantise de la « surpopulation étrangère »," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 93, no. 1 (2009): 13–22.

10 Kristina Schulz, "Asylland im Zeitalter der Weltkriege," in *Schweizer Migrationsgeschichte: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, by André Holenstein, Patrick Kury, and Kristina Schulz (Baden, Schweiz: Hier und Jetzt, 2018), 258.

11 Unabhängige Expertenkommission Schweiz – Zweiter Weltkrieg (UEK), Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus, (Zürich: Veröffentlichungen der Unabhängigen Expertenkommission Schweiz – Zweiter Weltkrieg, vol. 17, 2001), 76.

12 Schulz, "Asylland im Zeitalter der Weltkriege", 261.

13 UEK, *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, 34.

14 Koller, *Fluchtort Schweiz*, 33.

on border pushbacks was reaffirmed in a subsequent circular on 26 September 1942, which essentially defined the border policy until July 12, 1944.[15]

Army deserters and conscription evaders were generally allowed entry into Switzerland. Active combatants were interned under the 1907 Convention respecting the Rights of Neutral Powers and persons in Case of War on Land. Alsatians who deserted while on furlough were therefore regarded as military refugees and interned under the authority of the Federal Commissariat for Internment and Hospitalization (EKIH), a branch of the Federal Department of Defence. This practice had precedence, dating back to the Franco-Prussian War when an entire French army crossed the border to be interned in Switzerland.[16] Active combatants were also interned on Swiss soil during World War One, and following the German invasion of France in 1940. However, conscription evaders were not considered military refugees per se. As they had typically only received their conscription notice, they did not meet the criteria set by the authorities requiring military refugees to be actively mobilized and fully uniformed.[17] Thus, they fell into the broader category of 'civil refugees', a notion that appeared in administrative practice in 1942 but did not change refugee policy; it was merely a new designation.[18] Although the official policy dictated that all civilian border crossers be immediately pushed back, exceptions were made. Notably, the circular ordering a full border closure on 13 August 1942, exempted "deserters, escaped prisoners of war, and military personnel, provided they could prove their identity by means of uniform items, prisoner numbers, a pay book or any other form of identification."[19] The non-refoulement principle for conscription evaders was reaffirmed in a subsequent circular on 26 September 1942.[20] Consequently, while crossing the border remained *de jure* prohibited, Alsatian conscription evaders, unlike other refugees, were not pushed back at the border and were granted refuge in Switzerland. The conscription order they could produce at the border was considered sufficient proof for entry.

15 Koller, Fluchtort Schweiz, 40.

16 Jürg Stadelmann and Selina Krause, *"Concentrationslager" Büren an Der Aare 1940–1946 : Das Grösste Flüchtlingslager Der Schweiz Im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Hornerblätter (Baden: hier jetzt Verlag für Kultur und Geschichte, 1999), 14.

17 BAR, E4260C#1995/54#6, Az. N.43/150, Das Flüchtlingswesen in der Schweiz während des zweiten Weltkrieges und in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit (1933–1950): Bericht des Eidg. Justiz- und Polizeidepartements, 1950.

18 Simon Erlanger, *"Nur ein Durchgangsland": Arbeitslager und Interniertenheime für Flüchtlinge und Emigranten in der Schweiz 1940– 1949* (Zürich: Chronos, 2006), 173–74.

19 Carl Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz seit 1933 bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Federal Council of the Swiss Confederation (Bern: H. Lang und Cie, 1957), 205.

20 Koller, *Fluchtort Schweiz*, 40.

This relative leniency was not extended to refugees in similar situations. For instance, young French fleeing the *Service de Travail Obligatoire* (STO) were to be sent back at the border.[21] The situation of Alsatian conscription evaders was advantageous compared to other refugee groups, particularly Jewish refugees, for whom border pushback often meant a death sentence. The Independent Commission of Experts (UEK) documented 24,000 registered pushbacks at the Swiss border,[22] while a more recent assessment by Guido Koller estimated 25,699 registered pushbacks.[23] The precise number of unregistered pushbacks, however, remains unknown. Among the one hundred Alsatian conscription evaders in this case study, only one, Pierre Certelet, was initially denied access to Switzerland because he lacked valid identity papers. He entered Switzerland illegally near Boncourt, in the Canton of Jura, on 18 February 1943, but was expelled the next day. After obtaining his family register, Certelet successfully crossed the border again on 27 February and presented himself at the customs office in Boncourt. He was then taken to the nearby prison in Porrentruy to begin the refugee admission process.[24] Once in Switzerland, Alsatian conscription evaders were not officially recognized as political refugees, and were merely tolerated. Upon arrival, the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) ordered their internment. However, this *de facto* protection did not confer an official protection status in Switzerland. Official records only stated that "deportation [of the refugee] was temporarily not feasible,"[25] indicating that repatriation was intended once conditions changed in the refugee's country of origin.

Throughout 1942, illegal crossings along the Swiss-Alsatian border remained insignificant. The introduction of military service in August 1942 initially affected only the birth cohorts 1920 to 1924, comprising young men who had not previously served in the French Armed Forces. It was not until February 1943, with the extension of conscription to the birth cohorts 1914 to 1919, that a significant increase in illegal border crossings occurred, culminating in the mass flight event of 11–12 February 1943. Federal Councillor Eduard von Steiger, head of the FDJP, was informed about the mass flight on February 12 but the incident was not discussed during the Federal Council meeting that day. Presumably, the FDJP was

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21 Guido Koller, *"Entscheidungen über Leben und Tod, Die behördliche Praxis in der schweizerischen Flüchtlingspolitik während des Zweiten Weltkrieges,"* Studien Und Quellen, Zeitschrift Des Schweizerischen Bundesarchivs 22 (January 1, 1996), 37.

22 UEK, *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*, 37.

23 Koller, *Fluchtort Schweiz, 87*.

24 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13852, Az. N09039, CERTELET, PIERRE, 14.03.1923, 1943–1945.

25 Internment order included in all refugee files of Alsatian conscription evaders, see BAR, E4264#N [series], Niederlassungsangelegenheiten von Ausländern, Aus- und Wegweisungen, Ausweisschriften für Flüchtlinge, Internierungen, 1904–2018.

notified only after the session, which began at 9:00. The topic was brought up during the subsequent Federal Council session on 16 February, but it was not treated as an urgent matter. Instead, the Federal Council deliberated on a press release proposal by the FDJP aimed at informing the public, including the international press, about the events. The primary concern of the FDJP was managing public relations to address potential domestic unrest. After 16 February 1943, Alsatian conscription evaders were never again discussed in the Federal Council.[26]

The immediate reactions of Swiss public authorities do not indicate any concerted effort to curb or prevent border crossings by Alsatian conscription evaders; at least, no such objective was explicitly articulated. On 13 February, the FDJP, the Department of Defence and the Customs Administrations jointly concluded that no changes to existing border surveillance were necessary. Five hundred servicemen stationed in the region were made available to assist border guards upon request, but their role was strictly limited to escorting refugees to the next border guard or police station.[27] Despite an alarmist report from the Bernese police command on the day of the events, which predicted the imminent arrival of thousands of additional conscription evaders and even speculated about an armed uprising in Alsace,[28] the reactions from the FDJP and the Federal Council were composed. Military intelligence in the border region warned of rumours circulating among the local Swiss population, including beliefs that church bells were used as a secret language to inform young men about their departure.[29] Other rumours echoed the alarmist tone of the Bernese police command's report, predicting the arrival of thousands of Alsatian men and even suggesting an impending insurrection or revolution in Alsace. The local newspaper *Le Jura* portrayed the massive influx of refugees as a danger to the region and criticized the perceived inaction of public authorities.[30]

The FDJP's primary concern was to address and manage the rumours circulating about the situation and to get ahead of the story. Federal Councillor von Steiger tasked Robert Jezler, deputy head of the Police Division within the FDJP, with exploring the possibility of issuing a press statement to calm the situation. Jezler understood that such a statement would require delicate political manoeuvring regarding potential reactions from Germany. Revealing conscription evasion as the

26 E1004.1#1000/9#13846*, Beschlussprotokoll(-e), 12–16 February 1943.

27 BAR, E2001D#1000/1553#5625*, Az. B.41.11.F.2, Situation der Elsässer in der Schweiz (Ausweispapiere), 1941–1945.

28 Ibid.

29 BAR, E5716#1000/938#4#2*, Az. 1, Nachrichten-Bulletins, Teil 2. 11 November 1941–28 August 1943, 1941–1943.

30 Ibid.

cause of the mass flight could strain relations with German authorities, who might perceive it as an affront, since such a statement would also be reported in the international press. Therefore, the statement had to avoid giving the impression that Swiss authorities were "promoting tendentious Allied reports on the situation in occupied territories."[31] The press statement likewise needed to refute rumours circulating in the border regions, which claimed that thousands of Alsatians had fled to Switzerland, with more to follow. Crafting the wording of the statement was a delicate balance between providing enough information to quell public agitation and divulging too much. Although there were rumours of potential violent unrest in Alsace, the FDJP decided it was necessary to withhold certain details, such as the fact that some Alsatians were armed and that a group had returned to Alsace to prepare further escapes, as reported by military intelligence. Robert Jezler also favoured withholding the information that border forces had been reinforced. In his opinion, it would "not be necessary to deploy additional troops to the border because of a few hundred conscription evaders." Such information would, Jezler concluded, only strengthen the rumours since the deployment of troops would be interpreted as an anticipation of violent unrest in Alsace.[32] Ultimately, the FDJP drafted a statement that vaguely mentioned the reinforcement of border guards, despite Jezler's reservations. The statement was approved by the Federal Council on 16 February 1943, and promptly released via the Swiss Telegraph Agency.

> *In the last few days 380 young Alsatians have crossed the Swiss border as refugees to avoid being called up for military service for Germany. The refugees were interned in a militarily guarded reception camp. The border protection has been reinforced.* – Press statement approved by the Federal Council on 16 February 1943.[33]

At the suggestion of the FDJP, the Federal Council agreed to include a confidential statement alongside the official press release. This statement was not intended for publication but aimed to inform press officials about the true events, specifically that the Alsatians were accompanied by armed men who later returned to Alsace. However, the publication of these details was strictly prohibited.[34] This addition of a confidential statement was a novel approach and was well received by representatives of the Swiss press, who often found themselves navigating between information-poor official statements and at times exaggerated rumours.

31 BAR, E2991D#1000/1553#5625*, Az. B.41.11.F.2, Situation der Elsässer in der Schweiz (Ausweispapiere), 1941–1945.
32 Ibid.
33 BAR, E1004.1#1000/9#13846*, Beschlussprotokoll(-e), 12–16 February 1943.
34 Ibid.

The central committee of the Swiss Press Association even lauded it as a "prime example" of communication between the FDJP and the press in a letter addressed to the FDJP.[35]

II Internment in Switzerland

During 1942, there was a significant increase in refugee arrivals. Consequently, on 12 March 1943, the Federal Council mandated the internment of all civil refugees in Switzerland. This decision formalized and expanded existing practices. The temporary internment of refugees in camp structures had begun in 1938, and became institutionalized in spring of 1940 when the first labour camps for foreigners were established, although it was not yet systematic.[36] The internment applied to all civil refugees who had entered the country since 1 August 1942.[37] This decision laid the legal groundwork for the internment of Alsatian conscription evaders in Switzerland.

By 1943, Switzerland had established two systems of labour camps and homes. In addition to the network of internment camps for military refugees overseen by the Federal Commissariat for Internment and Hospitalization (EKIH), the FDJP operated numerous labour camps and homes to accommodate civil refugees. Upon arrival, Alsatian conscription evaders were temporarily interned in a reception camp in Büren an der Aare, in the canton of Berne. This camp, the largest Swiss refugee camp during the war, served multiple purposes as a transit, quarantine, reception, and work camp, both for military and civil refugees, until it was closed in June 1946. It had initially been set up by the EKIH to permanently intern mostly Polish soldiers who had served in the French Armed Forces before fleeing to Switzerland in June of 1940 to avoid war captivity.[38] Living conditions in the camp were often inadequate and the attempt by the EKIH to permanently 'concentrate' the Polish military internees in one location proved to be a failure. As a result, over the course of 1941, most Poles were relocated to different camps.[39] However, the camp regained significance in 1942 when an increasing number of non-military refugees, particularly Jewish refugees including women and children, required accommodation, and thus were placed in the camp. Since it was not a permanent solution for

35 BAR, E4001C#1000/783#2546*, Az. 0702.13, Elsässer-Flüchtlinge, 1943.
36 Erlanger, *Nur ein Durchgangsland,* 71–114.
37 Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz seit 1933 bis zur Gegenwart*, 274–75.
38 Stadelmann and Krause, *"Concentrationslager" Büren an Der Aare 1940–1946*, 119.
39 Ibid., 70–71.

these civil refugees, they too were eventually relocated. In February 1943, the camp in Büren experienced an exceptional surge in activity when the first wave of Alsatian conscription evaders arrived.[40] The Alsatians remained in Büren until they were assigned to a more permanent location.

Typically, Alsatian refugees arriving in Switzerland were initially placed in reception camps for a three-week quarantine period. However, in practice this quarantine often lasted much longer, with some refugees spending between fifty and one hundred days in quarantine.[41] Following the quarantine, civil refugees fell under the jurisdiction of the FDJP, while military refugees such as deserters and prisoners of war were managed by the EKIH. Civil refugees were then transferred to labour camps or labour homes. Upon arrival, refugees underwent examination by a military physician who assessed their ability to work on a scale from one to four. Those categorized as 'one' were deemed fit to work without restrictions, while those in category 'two' were directed to labour homes for less physically demanding tasks. Categories 'three' and 'four' indicated that refugees, aged 16 to 60, were unfit for work and were consequently sent to recovery homes or similar facilities.[42] All one hundred Alsatian conscription evaders were assessed as physically fit for work.

Although the Federal Council's decision on 12 March 1943 mandated the internment of civil refugees in labour camps or homes, exceptions allowed for refugees to be assigned work outside these facilities, if approved by cantonal authorities and deemed to be in the national interest. However, for the Alsatian conscription evaders, this exception became commonplace. A minority of them were temporarily employed in the regular labour market, although regulations favoured Swiss nationals over refugees. For instance, Joseph Greder, who entered the country just one day after receiving his conscription order on 25 July 1943, worked temporarily as a runner in a bakery in the canton of Solothurn. However, he occupied this role for only three months, as his employer was instructed by the FDJP to prioritize hiring Swiss nationals.[43] Another Alsatian, Germain Rapp, worked as a labourer in a wood-shipping business.[44] Most of the Alsatian conscription evaders, however, were assigned to work as farmhands in agriculture. Out of the one hundred Alsa-

40 Stadelmann and Krause, "Concentrationslager" Büren an Der Aare 1940–1946, 90.

41 AN, F/9/3352, Procès-verbaux des assemblées générales: séances du comité, bureau et petit bureau; 1 January 1943–September 1944.

42 Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz seit 1933 bis zur Gegenwart, 276–280*.

43 BAR, E4264#1985/196#17806*, Az. N11868, GREDER, JOSEF, 29 July 1920; GREDER, ROSALIE, 12 May 1922, 1943–1954.

44 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13592*, Az. N08836, RAPP, GERMAIN, 1 December 1919, 1943–1955.

tian refugees, seventy-two were placed in agricultural work, with fifty-eight exclusively working in this sector during their stay in Switzerland.

Indeed, immediately after the initial transfer of the Alsatian men to the reception camp in Büren an der Aare, local peasants sought their labour. The Polish internees who had previously occupied the camp had also been engaged in local agriculture.[45] As early as 16 February, the possibility of involving the newly arrived Alsatians in agricultural work was discussed within the FDJP. Federal Councillor von Steiger, head of the FDJP, welcomed the idea in principle but doubted that refugees engaged in agriculture could permanently leave the internment camp. However, the Federal Council's decision on 12 March 1943 permitted the internment of civil refugees outside of labour camps and homes, enabling this possibility.[46] Many Swiss farmers and farmhands were themselves mobilized into the armed forces, leading them to readily house and employ refugees. Despite Switzerland not being directly involved in the war, its armed forces were mobilized throughout the conflict. At the peak of mobilization in June 1940, one third of the male working population was serving in the armed forces. This led to a significant labour shortage, particularly in agriculture, which still supported twenty percent of the population.[47] The situation worsened due to the country's reliance on food imports, especially after the German invasion of France. Concerns about being cut off from food imports prompted the Federal Council to launch the *Plan Wahlen*, which aimed to boost agricultural output and triple the arable land in the country.[48]

Achieving the ambitious targets of the *Plan Wahlen* was challenging given the substantial portion of the agricultural workforce who had been mobilized. The Alsatian men arriving in Switzerland from February 1943 onwards thus emerged as ideal replacements for the mobilized agricultural workers. Mostly hailing from small villages near the Swiss-Alsatian border in the Sundgau region, they had rural backgrounds, with many coming from families engaged in agriculture. Of the one hundred refugees, forty-two were still employed in agriculture before their escape, while twenty-eight were craftsmen. This unique socio-economic profile made them highly sought-after for agricultural labour. In fact, Alsatian conscription evaders constituted the majority of civil refugees working in agriculture from 1943 to 1944. Their numbers steadily increased, reaching 1,100 in October 1943, and peaking at

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45 Stadelmann and Krause, *"Concentrationslager" Büren an Der Aare 1940–1946*, 59.
46 BAR, E4001C#1000/783#2456*, Az. 0702.13, Elsässer-Flüchtlinge, 1943.
47 Unabhängige Expertenkommission Schweiz – Zweiter Weltkrieg, *Die Schweiz, der Nationalsozialismus und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Schlussbericht* (Zürich: Pendo-Verlag, 2002), 67.
48 Ibid., 67–86.

1,780 in October 1944, before declining to 826 by year's end.[49] The FDJP's final report on Switzerland's refugee policy during World War Two attributed this decline mainly to the repatriation of Alsatian refugees, which began in the fall of 1944.[50]

By April 1943, the FDJP, in coordination with the national federal employment office, had established a mechanism to allocate the Alsatian refugees among the cantons. Farmers wishing to employ an Alsatian refugee had to submit a request to their respective cantonal employment offices.[51] In the ensuing weeks, the Alsatian conscription evaders were assigned to their individual internment locations, primarily to farms in the western part of German-speaking Switzerland, particularly in the cantons of Schaffhausen, Bern, Aargau, and Zurich. Generally, this agricultural assignment provided a degree of stability for the refugees. While some reallocation within cantons occurred, only two Alsatian conscription evaders permanently working in agriculture were transferred to another canton. Many refugees remained at the same location until their repatriation to France. The individual work placement in agriculture was a unique feature of the Alsatian conscription evaders' experience, setting them apart from other refugees in Switzerland. First, they were all able-bodied adults and therefore capable of working. Second, unlike other refugees who mostly resided in some form of collective accommodation such as work camps or refugee homes, they were placed with Swiss peasants on a more permanent basis.

However, Alsatians leaving the camp system and assigned to work as farmhands were still legally interned and subject to FDJP regulations. Internment included the seizure of all cash holdings, including any foreign currency brought into the country by the refugees. These holdings were placed under the management of a public fund and returned to the refugees upon repatriation.[52] Their salaries were also deposited in a trust fund, with refugees receiving only a monthly allowance of thirty Swiss francs, despite earning two to five times higher salaries. Before starting work on a farm, refugees had to sign a declaration acknowledging their legal obligations. This declaration required refugees to "behave discreetly and correctly at all times and everywhere, which is the position of a refugee who

49 BAR, E4260C#1995/54#6, Az. N.43/150, Das Flüchtlingswesen in der Schweiz während des zweiten Weltkrieges und in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit (1933–1950): Bericht des Eidg. Justiz- und Polizeidepartements, 1950.

50 Ibid.

51 BAR, E4001C#1000/783#2546*, Az. 0702.13, Elsässer-Flüchtlinge, 1943.

52 Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz seit 1933 bis zur Gegenwart*, 275.

enjoys the right to hospitality in Switzerland."[53] Internment also significantly restricted their personal freedoms, and they were prohibited from leaving the municipalities to which they were allocated without written approval from the FDJP. Additionally, they were barred from visiting entertainment venues such as taverns, dances, or gambling establishments. A curfew was enforced, preventing them from leaving their internment location between 22:00 and 4:00. Lastly, to honour Switzerland's tradition of neutrality, they were strictly forbidden from engaging in any political activity, to the extent that they could not gather in groups larger than five, nor raise any suspicion of political assemblies.[54]

The spirit of the declaration reflected the internment conditions of civil refugees within the camps, where refugees could be effectively controlled in a space surveilled by guards and demarcated by fences. However, enforcing these rules for refugees placed in agriculture was nearly impossible. Many of the legal obligations imposed on civil refugees were simply unrealistic. For example, leaving the municipality of internment was quite easy, given the small size of rural Swiss municipalities. This restriction also conflicted with the refugees' religious needs. Since the Alsatians were predominantly Catholic but interned in mostly Protestant-majority cantons where many villages had no Catholic church, refugees could request permission to participate in Catholic services at the nearest Catholic church. Catholicism, particularly through the efforts of a Catholic priest named Sigismond Kueny, played a significant role in the lives of the Alsatians during their stay in Switzerland. Kueny's work was eventually acknowledged in the FDJP's final report on the country's refugee policy, which highlighted "a Catholic clergyman from Alsace [. . .] who knew perfectly how to strengthen his compatriots morally [. . .] and to influence them in a favourable way."[55] Kueny himself was a conscription evader who entered Switzerland on 16 February 1943 by hiding in the brakeman's cabin of a freight train. Initially, he served as a priest in the camp in Büren an der Aare before being accommodated by a Swiss priest in Aristau, in the canton of Aargau.[56]

53 *„Erklärung des unterzeichnenden Flüchtlings"*, document included in all refugee files of Alsatian conscription evaders. See BAR, E4264#N [series], Niederlassungsangelegenheiten von Ausländern, Aus- und Wegweisungen, Ausweisschriften für Flüchtlinge, Internierungen, 1904–2018.
54 Ibid.
55 BAR, E4260C#1995/54#6*, Az. N.43/150, Das Flüchtlingswesen in der Schweiz während des zweiten Weltkrieges und in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit (1933–1950): Bericht des Eidg. Justiz- und Polizeidepartements, 1950.
56 BAR, E4264#1985/196#12982*, Az. N08371, KUENY, JOSEF, 2 May 1914; KUENY, SIGISMUND, 2 May 1915; KUENY, XAVIER, 8 Janaury 1920, 1943–1961.

Kueny provided multifaceted support to his fellow refugees, creating a sense of community among the Alsatian refugees working in agriculture throughout the German-speaking part of Switzerland. With support from the Swiss Caritas, Kueny sent regular circular letters to his fellow Alsatians, reaching 600 refugees in September 1943.[57] In his letters, he addressed various concerns of daily and religious life, as well as serving as an information source for his peers. For instance, he shared instructions for requesting additional salary disbursements from the FDJP and provided updates on recent events in Alsace, such as bombing raids, successful and unsuccessful flight attempts, and death notices of Alsatians who had fallen while serving in the German Armed Forces. On 9 January 1944, Kueny hosted a meeting for approximately sixty fellow conscription evaders, although without approval from the FDJP or the cantonal authorities. Two undercover policemen from the cantonal police of Aargau attended the event, having been made aware of it after intercepting one of Kueny's invitation letters. Kueny was subsequently interrogated by the police but was eventually let off with a warning, citing the religious character of the event and his exemplary conduct thus far.[58]

The relationship between the Alsatian refugees and their employers was not always frictionless. The FDJP received complaints from both the refugees and their employers. Refugees sometimes complained about their working conditions, lamenting overly long working hours and inadequate nutrition. Some Alsatians petitioned the FDJP to be relocated, a request that was mostly denied. In two cases, Alsatian refugees were eventually relocated after the FDJP investigated the allegations they made against their employers. One of them, Louis Schmitt, was apprehended by the cantonal police after fleeing from his employer. During the police interrogation, he testified that he was being mistreated by his employer, a claim that was corroborated by the employer's wife. Schmitt was subsequently assigned to a new employer.[59] In the case of Alphonse Meister, an investigation by the cantonal employment office also confirmed his allegations against his employer, leading to his relocation.[60] Complaints filed by the employers mostly accused their Alsatian farmhands of laziness. Some Alsatian conscription evaders also came into conflict with the law. Bernard Scherrer, interned in the canton of Solothurn, was arrested twice by the cantonal police: once for assaulting locals while intoxicated, and once for escaping from his place of internment. He was

57 AN, F/9/3317, Correspondance avec le Commissariat fédéral à l'internement et à l'hospitalisation (colonel PROBST) concernant les évadés de guerre; October 1943–September 1945.

58 BAR, E4264#1985/196#12982*, Az. N08371, KUENY, JOSEF, 2 May 1914; KUENY, SIGISMUND, 2 May 1915; KUENY, XAVIER, 8 January 1920, 1943–1961.

59 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13396*, Az. N08682, SCHMITT, LOUIS, 31 March 1919, 1943–1958.

60 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13632*, Az. N08870, MEISTER, ALFONS, 3 April 1916, 1943–1959.

subsequently sent to a disciplinary camp for three months.[61] In the town of Siblingen, in the Canton of Schaffhausen, two Alsatian conscription evaders were accused of engaging sexually with two young local maids, who were considered "morally endangered" and under the guardianship of the canton. A member of the local municipal council forwarded the accusation to the cantonal police, suggesting that both would "behave properly again if they were handled a little harshly." Both offenders were subsequently sentenced to five days of "harsh detention."[62]

Although complaints and conflicts with the law did occur, their significance should not be overstated within the broader picture. First, it is inherent to the nature of the FDJP's refugee files to overrepresent certain types of documents such as police reports and written complaints, as they left a trace in the archives. However, these files only offer a limited window into the daily reality of Alsatian conscription evaders in Switzerland. Therefore, one should also consider the absence of complaints as an indicator of 'things proceeding as usual' without the need for complaints from either side. Secondly, reports about refugees disobeying the rules of internment can in fact indicate both a good relationship between the internees and their employers and a successful integration into the local community. A case in point is the experience of Antoine Tschamber. Tschamber, who worked for a farmer in Büren an der Aare, was apprehended by the cantonal police on 23 April 1944 for breaking curfew at 23:50. During questioning by the police, he admitted to breaking curfew with a fellow Alsatian conscription evader to visit a tavern in the small town. He also confessed to leaving the municipality on multiple occasions to attend church services in Biel/Bienne and to visit his fiancée's cousin in Allschwil near Basel. He stated that his employer had always been informed about his absences. He remarked, "I feel like I'm at home here, which contributed to the fact that I did not take it so exactly with the rules. [. . .] I have no complaints about the treatment in Switzerland; on the contrary, I am very satisfied with everything." Eventually, Tschamber was let off with a warning and promised to follow the regulations more strictly in the future. His employer likewise pledged to abide by the regulations, expressing fear that the internee would be taken away from him. He further stated that he "had been very satisfied with him [Tschamber] until then, which is why I had given him greater freedom. He was someone he could rely on."[63]

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61 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13399*, Az. N08685, SCHERRER, BERNARD, 15 April 1908, 1943–1962.

62 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13233*, Az. N08544, GRIENENBERGER, PAUL, 10 February 1919, 1943–1953; E4264#1985/196#13395*, Az. N08681, SCHLICKLIN, EUGEN, 2 December 1914, 1943–1953.

63 BAR, E4264#1985/196#13714*, Az. N08930, TSCHAMBER, ANTON, 21 January 1920, 1943–1944.

The case of Tschamber, along with the various complaints, also point to the broad range of potential attitudes by public authorities towards the Alsatian refugees. Once the Alsatians were placed in individual households, administrative responsibility was shared between the FDJP and the cantonal authorities. Given the number of different interlocutors involved, the spectrum of decisions and attitudes towards the refugees were likely as numerous as the number of interlocutors and actors involved. This shared authority reflects the federal and geographically rather small-scale political and administrative organization of Switzerland. A global appreciation of more localized actors is therefore barely possible. As a result, general assertions about the attitude of the state authorities towards the Alsatian refugees are difficult to make. Instead, it is useful to consider the range of possible attitudes, ranging from petty-minded and suspicious to pragmatic and lenient, depending on the interlocutor. Additionally, the prevailing absence of complaints by either side in the files implies a rather uneventful experience for many Alsatian refugees.

III Internment in Labour Camps

Unlike the Alsatian conscription evaders, other groups of refugees were more commonly interned in labour camps and homes. However, in reality the labour camp system only accommodated a small share of the civilian refugees. Switzerland officially registered 55,018 civilian refugees during the war, yet – at its peak capacity in March 1945 – the labour camp and home system accommodated only 12,574 civilian refugees.[64]

Among the one hundred Alsatian conscription evaders in this case study, twenty-one were permanently interned in labour camps, and eighteen were interned in labour camps at least temporarily. The labour camp system was initially established with the dual objective of providing work for the many refugees and improving the country's infrastructure. Some Alsatian refugees, for instance, were sent to the canton of Valais where they participated in road construction and landscaping operations. In theory, the camps were supposed to be financially self-sufficient, with the work performed by the refugees covering the camps' expenses. The refugees should thus ideally have contributed to the costs of their accommodation in Switzerland. However, both objectives were ultimately not achieved. First, refugees in the work camps were often not qualified for the required type of work.

64 Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz seit 1933 bis zur Gegenwart,* 318–319.

Second, the camp system was created with the unsolvable paradox that operations should be cost-neutral without competing with Swiss private businesses.[65]

At its peak, the FDJP's labour camp and home system consisted of 104 facilities, but only thirty-three of these facilities were labour camps in the strict sense. The remaining facilities were homes for women, children, and families, as well as recovery homes for sick and frail refugees.[66] For instance, one Alsatian conscription evader, Joseph Enderlin, was transferred to the sanatorium and recovery home in Leysin, in the canton of Vaud, as he was suffering from "open lung affection" (supposedly tuberculosis) in the fall of 1944. He ultimately stayed there until his repatriation on 5 September 1945.[67] Although all civil refugees should have interned in labour camps or homes, only a minority did so. Unlike the Alsatian conscription evaders, many civil refugees were not considered able-bodied or were simply exempted from work in the national interest because they were minors, seniors, or mothers with children below the age of six. Certain refugees could also be housed outside the camp and home system, for example in hotels if they had the means, or in private accommodation. Family reunifications, however, were not envisaged by the laws regulating the presence of civil refugees in Switzerland.[68] Like other refugees, Alsatian conscription evaders could join their relatives only under exceptional circumstances. Eighty of the one hundred Alsatians were unmarried; a very small number of these refugees fled together with their families or had family members who later followed them to Switzerland. Madeleine Heinis, for instance, crossed the border together with her two children two weeks after husband Jean had fled to Switzerland. A family reunification request was, however, declined by the FDJP. Madeleine and the children were then sent to a family camp in Lausanne. Later, the children were accommodated by families in Basel and Allschwil, while Madeleine was sent to live with a family in Büsserach, in the canton of Solothurn, where her husband Jean was working as a farmhand, although for a different family.[69]

Certainly, the notion of a 'labour camp' carries negative associations, especially in the context of World War Two. However, the Swiss labour camps were

65 André Lasserre, *Frontières et camps: le refuge en Suisse de 1933 à 1945* (Lausanne: Payot, 1995), 239–241.

66 Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz seit 1933 bis zur Gegenwart*, 318–319.

67 BAR, E4264#1985/196#1321212.01.1945, Az. N08525, ENDERLIN, JOSEPH, 14.10.1914; ENDERLIN, JULIA, 09 August 1888, 1943–1945.

68 UEK, *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 211–213.

69 BAR, E4264#1985/196#17810*, Az. N11871, HEINIS, JOHANN, 10 January 1914; HEINIS, JOHANN CLAUDE, 13 June 1939; HEINIS, MADELEINE, 25 January 1921; HEINIS, ROBERT, 04 May 1943, 1943–1961.

very different in nature. First, they were not penal institutions – internees in labour camps were paid, enjoyed paid holidays, and had regulated work hours. Besides room and board, they received one Swiss franc per day. From January 1, 1942 onward, internees received one franc and eighty cents after 270 days of work. Weekly work hours were limited to forty-four.[70] Every six weeks the internees were granted three days of leave, which they had to spend in proximity to the camp. Leave to more distant locations was only granted in exceptional cases. During regular work weeks, internees had the right to leave the camps on Sunday and after work on weekdays for a few hours, respectively. Alsatian refugees in the camps likewise received assistance from the *Aide fraternelle aux réfugiés français en Suisse*, a state-recognized private relief organization. The *Aide fraternelle* was founded in February 1943 with the objective to "provide the French refugees in Switzerland, [. . .] particularly the Alsatians-Lorrainers, with moral and material aid."[71] Starting in March 1944, the relief organization granted a monthly allowance of twelve Swiss francs for refugees in labour camps.[72] In addition, the *Aide fraternelle* set up a clothing depot to procure clothing for refugees, and provided not only material but also moral support. For instance, the *Aide fraternelle* organized the presence of clerics in the camps, provided newspapers, and organized festivities for important holidays such as Christmas and the Fourteenth of July.

From August 1943 onward, the *Aide fraternelle* was also accredited by the FDJP to visit and inspect the labour camps. The organization's rapporteur, Jacques Blech, found that conditions in the camps were not homogeneous and largely depended on the leadership in charge.[73] For instance, he deplored the lack of discipline in the camp Grangès, in the Canton of Valais, where refugees only worked in the morning and were allowed to leave the camp in the afternoon to hire themselves out to local farmers.[74] Blech's reports also hinted at friction between the groups of refugees in the camps. The director of the labour camp in Egetzwil, in the Canton of Zurich, complained about tense relations between Alsatian refugees and former French resistance fighters from the *Maquis*, who treated the Alsatians

70 Lasserre, *Frontières et camps*, 236–241.
71 AN, F/9/3352, Procès-verbaux des assemblées générales: séances du comité, bureau et petit bureau; 1 January1943–September 1944.
72 AN, F/9/3317, Correspondance avec le Commissariat fédéral à l'internement et à l'hospitalisation (colonel PROBST) concernant les évadés de guerre; October 1943–September 1945.
73 AN, F/9/3352, Procès-verbaux des assemblées générales: séances du comité, bureau et petit bureau; 1 January1943–September 1944.
74 AN, F/9/3356, Comptes-rendus de visites de camps de réfugiés, 1940–1945.

as “second-class Frenchmen.”[75] A similar atmosphere also reigned in camp Burg, in the Canton of Aargau, where a small group of four French internees agitated against Jewish and Alsatian internees, whom they called “*boches*” behind their backs.[76] This tension somewhat naturally concerned the linguistic particularity of the Alsatian refugees, who spoke to each other in the Alsatian dialect. In the Visp labour camp, in the Canton of Valais, the Alsatians formed a large group together with a few Lorrainers. Blech described them as “very united, very decided, with generally accentuated Gaullist tendencies, in any case very anti-Vichy, and whose common language is the local dialect.” They also displayed the “qualities and faults of Alsace: a lot of tenacity at work, a strong sense of fairness, civic and patriotic modesty.”[77] In this regard, the Alsatians differed starkly from other French refugees in the camp, including STO evaders, intellectuals, and students who, according to Blech, did “not clearly measure the duties they have towards the nation that welcomes them, who try to figure out their way to have advantages that elude their comrades, who are often not used to living together acquired in the regiment or in youth camps, [and] who would like to be treated as tourists.”[78] Nonetheless, the Alsatian internees were very much affected by being uprooted from their home region and by the fate of their relatives who, as a consequence of the men’s escape to Switzerland, were often deported into the interior of the Reich. Blech concluded that the Alsatians were “the most physically strong, yet morally damaged group in the entire camp.”[79]

One recurring complaint in Blech’s reports was the internees’ dissatisfaction with the food they were provided in the camps. Internees repeatedly complained that the food rations were not sufficiently adapted to their needs. Yet, camp internees received the same food rations as the general Swiss population – at least on paper.[80] According to food provision lists, refugees in the camps received two warm meals per day and, every second day, even coffee, which was a rare luxury given the context of the war.[81] Nonetheless, complaints about food rations and quality were a shared feature of the refugee experience, and featured among all refugee groups and camps.[82] Globally, the *Aide fraternelle* was nonetheless very sat-

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75 AN, F/9/3356, Comptes-rendus de visites de camps de réfugiés, 1940–1945.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 AN, F/9/3352, Procès-verbaux des assemblées générales: séances du comité, bureau et petit bureau; 1 January 1943–September 1944.
81 AN, F/9/3356, Comptes-rendus de visites de camps de réfugiés, 1940–1945.
82 Erlanger, *Nur ein Durchgangsland*, 142–146.

isfied with the conditions in the camps. The sanitary conditions, the nutrition – although sometimes monotonous – and the personal equipment provided to the refugees were to the full satisfaction of the representatives of the *Aide fraternelle*.[83]

IV Conclusion and Epilogue

The reaction and attitude of the Swiss authorities, especially the FDJP, to the mass arrival of Alsatian conscription evaders can be characterized as one of benevolent indifference. The relative clemency extended to the conscription evaders was the result of a benevolent interpretation of the country's own legal obligations regarding the internment of military refugees. As such, conscription evaders, although not in uniform and only with a conscription order, were granted protection. Yet, when compared to other groups of refugees, especially Jewish refugees, Alsatian conscription evaders held a privileged position with regard to Swiss border policy. Once on Swiss territory, it could be said that the Alsatian conscription evaders were seen as 'useful' refugees – useful to the Swiss public authorities by replacing the agricultural workers who were called up for active duty, and thus helping to fulfil the ambitious requirements of the *Plan Wahlen*.

Although the refugee files of the FDJP contain sporadic accounts of complaints and conflicts, overall it is the absence of these that is more noticeable. Many files, in fact, contain very few documents other than those concerning the refugees' border-crossing, internment, possible reallocation, and repatriation. This relative archival silence indicates a certain degree of uneventfulness that marked the experience of many Alsatian conscription evaders in Switzerland. In the context of the raging war in the rest of Europe and the war experience of their fellows, uneventfulness certainly carries a positive connotation. Nonetheless, their escape to Switzerland had tragic consequences for the families they left behind in Alsace, who were often deported by the German authorities. It is therefore not surprising that mostly unmarried men attempted to escape to Switzerland. Finally, their ultimate incorporation into the French Liberation Army set them apart from their fellow Alsatians, who were forcibly incorporated into the German Armed Forces and who, after the war, had to fight for public recognition as victims of Nazism and were often regarded as traitors by parts of the French public.

The conscription evaders' eventual repatriation and ensuing incorporation into the French liberation army were made possible by the relief organization

83 AN, F/9/3356, Comptes-rendus de visites de camps de réfugiés, 1940–1945.

Aide fraternelle aux réfugiés français en Suisse, from which they received support during their stay in Switzerland. From its establishment in February 1943, the *Aide fraternelle* provided assistance to French refugees who had received none from the officially recognized government in Vichy. The organization was predominantly French, which raised suspicions at the FDJP. Heinrich Rothmund in particular, director of the FDJP's police section, expressed his concerns over the Gaullist political orientation of several notable members of the association.[84] Over the course of its existence, the organization in fact received more than one million Swiss francs in funding from the *Comité français de libération nationale* (CFLN).[85] After the establishment of the French Provisional Government and its recognition by the Swiss authorities, the mission of the *Aide fraternelle* as a recognized private organization became obsolete, and it was dissolved on 29 September 1944. The structure and personnel of the *Aide fraternelle*, however, were maintained and integrated into the French *Commissariat des Prisonniers, Déportés et Réfugiés*, whose main purpose was the repatriation of French refugees in Switzerland. The negotiations between the FDJP and the Commissariat were still ongoing in the fall of 1944 when the Alsatian conscription evaders received individual conscription notices from the *Groupe Mobile d'Alsace* (GMA), a branch of the French resistance, via the channels of the *Commissariat* and its operational predecessor the *Aide fraternelle*. Although the conscription orders were deemed illegal by the FDJP, they had created a fait accompli for the Alsatian refugees in Switzerland. Hundreds of Alsatians consequently demanded repatriation. Overtaken by events, the FDJP practically gave in and, after the representative of the Commissariat assured that the GMA had ceased to operate in Switzerland, organized the repatriation of Alsatian conscription evaders.[86]

Despite the questionable legality of the conscription notices, the refugees' incorporation into the French Liberation Army was not merely 'another' act of forced incorporation. The Alsatian conscription evaders were not conscientious objectors; most of them had, in fact, served in the French Armed Forces prior to their demobilization in 1940. Five of the one hundred conscription evaders did not even wait for their formal repatriation, instead choosing to leave Switzerland clandestinely to join the French Forces. Resistance to their incorporation was minimal, and some Alsatians were only reluctant because they feared for relatives, who had either been forcibly incorporated into the German Armed Forces,

84 BAR, E4320B#1990/266#862*, Az. C.16-00670, Aide fraternelle aux réfugiés français en Suisse, 1945–1955.

85 AN, F/9/3352, Procès-verbaux des assemblées générales : séances du comité, bureau et petit bureau ; 1 January 1943–September 1944.

86 BAR, E2001D#1000/1553#5917*, Az. B.41.41.F.1, Heimschaffung franz. Staatsangehöriger, 1940–1945.

or been deported into the interior of the Reich as a retaliatory measure. Charles Emmelin petitioned the FDJP to suspend his repatriation until his deported parents had returned to Alsace. However, the FDJP's response letter, explaining the procedure to request an extension, never reached Emmelin.[87] He was repatriated on 27 October 1944, the same day the FDJP sent the instructions to extend his stay. Only one Alsatian conscription evader among the one hundred, Alphonse Gredy, was granted an extension by the FDJP in accordance with the French Commissariat, since he had two brothers serving in the German Armed Forces. In a letter to the FDJP, the cantonal police of Schaffhausen attested that Gredy "performed to the best satisfaction of his employer and to this day has never given cause for complaint in any way." He left Switzerland on 31 May 1945.[88]

List of Abbreviations

CFLN	Comité français de libération nationale
FDJP	Federal Department of Justice and Police
EKIH	Federal Commissariat for Internment and Hospitalization
GMA	Groupe Mobile d'Alsace
UEK	Independent Commission of Experts
STO	Service de Travail Obligatoire

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87 Swiss Federal Archives, E4264#1985/196#13210*, Az. N08523, EMMELIN, KARL, 1 March 1920, 1943–1954.

88 Swiss Federal Archives, E4264#1985/196#13234*, Az. N08545, GREDY, ALFONS, 28 May 1914, 1943–1961.

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Part 4: **Prisoner of War Captivity and Re-Enlistment**

Machteld Venken

Conflicting Loyalties Among Soldiers Fighting Both in the German Army and the Allied Forces

When Allied soldier Wacław fought in the battle of Falaise in 1944, his section hit a German tank. The battle was especially bloody for Wacław's unit, the 1st Polish Armoured Division fighting under Canadian command. Allied forces surrounded the Wehrmacht "like it was a bottle", as British Army Officer Bernard Montgomery would later say,[1] and the division was the cork through which the German army wanted to escape. The victory cleared the path to Paris, and is considered the division's greatest success.[2] Sixty-six years after he had taken part in the action, Wacław articulated his experience:

> On the hill at Falaise I was right there just when the attack happened. It went off like this: cannon, tank, cannon, tank. Artillery firing, suddenly one tank gets hit, the crew jumps out, one guy runs straight for me, straight at our cannon. I look up and this is my brother-in-law. (laughs) Listen, such things only ever happen in the movies![3]

Wacław had attacked his brother-in-law, and his account blurs our understanding of war. We are used to thinking that two clearly defined sides encounter each other on a battlefield. The logic of warfare is based on the legitimisation of all actions against a defined opponent.[4] This requires soldiers to be faithful to their commitments and the orders of their superiors. Soldiers like Wacław knew, or could guess, that there were family members and friends battling on the other side. Their descriptions of existential chaos and a struggle for survival are characterised by a lack of the usual orientation framework that war discourse offers: the loyal fight against a clearly defined opponent.

This article offers a collective narrative portrait of the soldiers who fought on both sides of the Western Front. Over the course of the war, the possibility of non-Jews being included into the German *Volk* increased. In East Upper Silesia, a

1 Bernard Law Montgomery of Alamein, *Inwazja na Europę* (Warszawa: Pantheon, 1948), 48–49.
2 Tim Ripley, *Die Geschichte der Wehrmacht 1939–1945* (Wien: RM-Buch-und-Medien-Vertrieb, 2003), 309.
3 *W. Galios. Interview transcription*, 11. All cited transcriptions and recordings of interviews are archived in the History Meeting House in Warsaw.
4 Sönke Neitzel, Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: Over vechten, doden en sterven,* trans. René van Veen, Marten de Vries and Marcel Misset (Amsterdam: Ambo, 2012), 387.

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region that switched sovereignty from German to Polish after the First World War, and was annexed by Germany at the beginning of the Second World War, 90 percent of the local population that held Polish citizenship were treated as if they were Germans.[5] The degree of loyalty of soldiers like Wacław to the Wehrmacht, as well as their possibility to change their front lines, varied. Nonetheless, it is a fact that one-third of the men enrolled in the Polish Allied forces who fought for the liberation of Western Europe had a history in the Wehrmacht.[6] In order to understand how people like Wacław gave meaning to their war experiences, twelve life interviews were conducted within a broader research project about ex-combatants within the Polish Allied Forces.[7] Although the testimonies display their own logic, they are also examples of individual strategies aimed at placing experiences within collective frames of memory.[8] On the basis of examples from the testimonies, a pattern can be discerned in most of the interviewees.

Postwar Historical Research and Memory

In postwar narratives on war memory, soldiers' conflicting loyalties and their diverse profiles were, for a long time, silenced or marginalised. In West Germany, one at first acted as if National Socialism had never happened. Later, historians proved the wartime condemnation of deserters to have been unjust, and the German Parliament rehabilitated those who were condemned.[9] In Austria, the domi-

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5 National categorisation appeared once again extraordinarily flexible after the war, when the region came under Polish sovereignty and most of these so-called Germans were rehabilitated as Polish citizens (Maria Wanda Wanatowicz, *Od indyferentnej ludności do śląskiej narodowości? Postawy narodowe ludności autochtonicznej Górnego Śląska w latach 1945–2003 w świadomości społecznej* [Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004], 52–53).

6 Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010), 322.

7 Between 2009 and 2011, thirty-three interviews were collected with all surviving ex-combatants of the 1st Armoured Polish Division who were still able and willing to talk. The twelve ex-combatants with experience on both sides of the Western Front were born between 1920 and 1926 and spoke for between 1.5 and 12 hours. The interviews were conducted and archived by professional oral historians working for the Polish organisations KARTA and Dom Spotkań z Historią (The History Meeting House). The ex-combatants knew they were being interviewed as a group of last survivors and saw it as a unique chance to speak for the first time at length.

8 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 28.

9 Hannes Heer, Ruth Wodak, "Introduction: Collective Memory, National Narratives and the Politics of the Past- the Discursive Construction of History", in *The Discursive Construction of History: Remembering the Wehrmacht's War of Annihilation*, ed. Hannes Heer et al. (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9; Benjamin Ziemann, "Fluchten aus dem Konsens zum Durchhalten: Ergeb-

nant narrative has long been that Nazism was imposed on the country from outside, and thus Wehrmacht soldiers bore no responsibility for war crimes. For this reason, the stories of Wehrmacht deserters were difficult to hear for many people.[10] In the United Kingdom, the country's notion of itself as a liberal world power has started to be reconsidered thanks to research focusing on the widening definition of British national identity and racial attitudes towards the recruitment of enemy nationals, such as second generation Italian immigrants and Jewish refugees.[11]

In Poland, it took a long time for the stories of soldiers who fought for both sides to be heard. The first books on the history of the 1st Polish Armoured Division were written by former officers of the division itself, who were interested in spreading the message that loyal soldiers had fought united against National Socialism and for the liberation of Europe.[12] Under communism, some historical studies based on archival research already showed how the soldiers who had fought for both sides were treated once they returned to Poland. They were not always aware that many of them would have their national categorisation checked as part of their rehabilitation procedure – they considered their identification to be obvious, because they had served in the Polish army.[13] A local Silesian mayor sitting on a rehabilitation commission wrote about soldiers like Wacław:

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nisse, Probleme und Perspektiven der Erforschung soldatischer Verweigerungsformen in der Wehrmacht 1939–1945", in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller, Hans-Erich Volkmann (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1999), 592; "Gesetz zur Aufhebung nationalsozialistischer Unrechtsurteile." Deutscher Bundestag, accessed on October 20, 2023. www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2012/39010668_kw20_kalender_17mai2002/208558. (voted on in the German Parliament on May 17, 2002.

10 Alexander Pollack, *Die Wehrmachtslegende in Österreich: Das Bild der Wehrmacht im Spiegel der österreichischen Presse nach 1945* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2002), 11. The first Memorial for those persecuted by Nazi military justice was inaugurated in Vienna in October 2014.

11 Gavin Schaffer, "Re-Thinking the History of Blame: British Policy and Attitudes towards Immigrants and Minorities during the Second World War", *National Identities*, 8, 4 (2006): 401–420; Wendy Webster, "Enemies, Allies and Transnational Histories: Germans, Irish and Italians in Second World War Britain", *Twentieth Century British History*, 25, 1 (2014): 63–86.

12 Pierwsza Dywizja Pancerna, *1. Dywizja Pancerna w Walce* (Bruksela: La Colonne, 1947); Stanisław Maczek, *Od podwody do czołga* (Edinburgh: Tomar Publishers, 1961).

13 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 381. There were nearly 230,000 soldiers in the Polish Armed Forces in the West in July 1945; 105,000 decided to return to Poland: Jerzy Adam Radomski, "Losy formacji polskich na Zachodzie po zakończeniu Wojny" in *Walki formacji polskich na Zachodzie 1939–1945*, ed. Witold Biegański (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony, 1981), 746.

> Penetrating the soul of this man, while at the same time understanding the desirability of the provisions of rehabilitation, is a difficult *salto mortale* of reasoning.[14]

Initially, a Silesian ex-combatant organisation functioned as a go-between to protect ex-Wehrmacht soldiers from expulsion, but later, diversity in how the Polish People's Republic remembered the war became impossible.[15] The official narrative on war memory centralised General Berling's army, which had fought together with the Red Army, and silenced Polish Allied Forces.[16] Wacław experienced the consequences of this when he visited a commission to determine his war disability:

> I'm standing before the committee to determine disability. I get undressed, I'm in my underpants. Just over there there's a standing committee of two colonels and a doctor. The first question they ask is, 'And where did you serve? In the East or the West?' 'In the West,' I say. He looked at me and said, 'Please get dressed.' So that's how I reported to the committee and that was the test. If it had been in the East, it might have been different.[17]

No attempt was made to differentiate between Wehrmacht and Allied experiences. The communists considered themselves the only victors over Nazi Germany and accused the western world of enabling fascism. Following the Thaw of 1956, ex-combatants from the Polish Allied Forces could join the state-monopolised ex-combatant organisation. However, anti-German sentiments were rife among members, who were not promoted to decision-making positions.[18] Wacław entered the ex-combatant branch in 1969 to, as he explained it, receive financial benefits. After the collapse of communism, Polish soldiers who had fought with the Red Army experienced disaccreditation, whereas the ex-combatants of the Allied Forces were lionised as liberators of Europe. Ex-combatant associations multiplied, with Wacław in 2010 becoming a member of the Katowice branch of the Ex-Combatant Organisation of the 1st Armoured Division.

The subject of Polish former Wehrmacht soldiers played a decisive role in the 2005 presidential campaign. Facing Lech Kaczyński (who later died in the Smolensk air crash in 2010) in the run-off was Donald Tusk (a former President of the European Council). Accusations that his grandfather had served in the Wehrmacht are believed to have been a contributory factor in Tusk's losing the election, although this did not prevent him from becoming Prime Minister in 2007.

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14 Zofia Boda-Krężel, *Sprawa volkslisty na Górnym Śląsku* (Opole: Instytut Śląski, 1978), 91.

15 Henryk Rechowicz, *Związek Weteranów Powstań Śląskich* 1945–1949 (Katowice: Śląski Instytut Naukowy, 1966), 43.

16 Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969* (Warszawa: Trio, 2009), 168.

17 *W. Galios. Interview transcription*, 75.

18 Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć*, 169, 212, 224.

While Tusk said his grandfather had never told him about his past, sociological research revealed inhabitants in Western Poland had often heard Wehrmacht experiences being discussed in family contexts.[19] By the 2010s, veterans like Wacław could talk about their past in the Wehrmacht without losing their status as liberators. As the transformative moment between their two front experiences, desertion became a key narrative element in their story. Even former Wehrmacht soldiers without Allied experiences articulate how they had at least tried to desert.[20] On the back cover of Łucjan Jan Wesołowski's published memoir, for example, we read:

> As was the case with many Polish families the fate of my relatives was a tangled affair. Three of my brothers defended their homeland in the defensive war of 1939: one in Hel; the second in the 64th Infantry Regiment at Bydgoszcz, and then at Bzura; and the third in the 65th Infantry Regiment fought at Modlin, and then defended Warsaw. Following expulsion from Pomerania, I was forced, as a minor, from 14 January 1942 to serve in the Wehrmacht. In that army, among the many vicissitudes and dangers of life, I served until the end of the war.[21]

Information about Łucjan's own experiences in the Wehrmacht is only offered after that of his siblings, who had responsibilities within the Polish army. The author defensively stressed that he had only been a minor, he had been forced, and his life at the frontline had often been in danger.

Over the last two decades, historians have researched the contribution of the inhabitants of interwar Poland to the German Army. They revealed that although National Socialists were reluctant to include foreigners in service, they were also pragmatic. In the end, almost 20 percent of all soldiers in German forces were non-German,[22] and the dividing line between voluntary and forced enrolment was often crossed in practice.[23] From the Polish territories that Germany annexed

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19 Lech Nijakowski, "Regionalne zróżnicowanie pamięci o II wojnie światowej", in *Między codziennością a wielką historią*, ed. Piotr Tadeusz Kwiatkowski, Lech Nijakowski, Barbara Szacka (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2010), 236.

20 Barbara Szczepuła, *Dziadek w Wehrmachcie* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2007), 8, 86.

21 Łucjan Jan Wesołowski, *Gott mit uns?* (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, 1997), back cover.

22 Rolf-Dieter Müller, *The Unknown Eastern Front: The Wehrmacht and Hitler's Foreign Soldiers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 257.

23 Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5. Although some consideration was given to the possibility of allowing Poles from occupied territories to join the Wehrmacht as volunteers, this was never an option; see Jerzy Kochanowski, "Polen in die Wehrmacht? Zu einem wenig erforschten Aspekt der nationalsozialistischen Besatzungspolitik 1939–1945: Eine Problemskizze", *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, 1 (2002): 59–81.

at the beginning of the Second World War, an estimated 295,000 men joined the Wehrmacht, most coming from Upper Silesia and Western Prussia.[24] Recruitment numbers in the other European regions that Germany annexed remained significantly lower.[25] Having already started in 1939, recruitment increased after the introduction of the *Deutsche Volksliste* (DVL), a means of registering the so-called Germanness of people. By the end of the war, 90 percent of adult Upper Silesians had put their signature under one of the four categories the list offered. It was predominantly members of pre–war German minority organisations that signed up for the first and second groups, after which they received German citizenship. People considered to be of German descent, but who had cooperated with Polish authorities in the interwar years, were put in group four and could only be granted German citizenship in exceptional cases. The third group gathered people of German descent who had, for example, married Poles, or who were ascribed a regional identity. From 1942 onwards, they received German citizenship for a period of ten years, after which it could be taken away. Of the 3,124,000 people who had signed the list in the annexed territories by the end of 1942, 1,960,000 signed as part of group three. Mobilisation within the Wehrmacht was the most direct consequence of signing up for groups one, two and three.

Researching Conflicting Loyalties

Ryszard Kaczmarek's study was influential in unravelling how the definitions and practices of who should belong to group three widened over time; mobilisation increased massively after the German army lost the battle of Stalingrad, as new recruits were needed for the fronts in Italy and Western Europe.[26] Zdenko Maršálek's ongoing narrative analysis of former Wehrmacht soldiers' applications to join the 1st Polish Armoured Division points to "pragmatism" among applicants from Upper Silesia: "What looked like lukewarmness and lack of patriotism from Warsaw, Prague, Paris, Belgrade or Berlin, was thus only an expression of their own, re-

24 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 176.
25 This concerned, among others, an estimated 8,000 men in the Belgian-German borderlands and around 140,000 men in the French-German borderlands and Luxembourg (Peter M. Quadflieg, "Zwangsrekrutierte" und "Ons Jongen" *Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aachen: Shaker, 2008); Eugène Riedweg, *Les Malgré-nous; Histoire de l'incorporation de force des Alsaciens-Mosellans dans l'armée allemande* (Strasbourg: Nuée Bleue, 1995).
26 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 53–55, 110.

gional identity".[27] These newer studies belong to a body of scholarship that approaches the practices of inhabitants of Upper Silesia through the conceptual lens of multiple loyalties.

Multiple loyalties are here preferred over the concept of identity, which presumes an essential stable core of an individual's personality; loyalties are, by definition, "partial, mediated and contingent".[28] Loyalties are also relational. Mutual interdependencies among changing groups of rulers and the ruled appear at different moments in time. In addition, the motivations of the ruled to engage may be multiple. Interpreting their acceptance of a power strategy issued from above as an act of passive obedience reduces the potential for obstinacy among historical actors, who could give another meaning to their actions through their behaviour; accepting or distancing themselves from a power structure or power strategy are not necessarily opposing practices, but could appear simultaneously.[29] With reference to Upper Silesia, for example, Brendan Karch demonstrated that, despite the ardency of national activists, local inhabitants "weighed their decisions against other values and consequences". He saw multiple loyalties in "the accumulated choices that arise from such interpretations between nationalist activists and instrumentally minded Upper Silesians".[30]

Multiple loyalties become conflicting loyalties on the battlefield. One either shoots the enemy or is shot by him. Research has been carried out to determine what makes a soldier shoot. While some specialists are convinced that national socialist ideology is a major factor in explaining soldiers' practices of killing,[31] others have concluded that soldiers behaved according to how they believed they were expected to be loyal.[32] The historian Felix Römer, in turn, pointed to soldiers

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27 Zdenko Maršálek, "Identity change as a survival strategy: Forcibly mobilized *Wehrmacht* soldiers applying for the Allied armies-in-exile" (paper presented at the scientific conference *The impact of war experiences in Europe: The conscription of non-German men and women into the Wehrmacht and Reichsarbeitsdienst*, University of Luxembourg, October 27, 2022).

28 Martin Schulze Wessel, "'Loyalität' als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept: Zur Einleitung", in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik: 1918–1938: Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 10.

29 Alfred Lüdtke, "Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis", in *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis,* ed. Alfred Lüdtke (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 13–14 and 50; Machteld Venken, *Peripheries at the Centre: Borderland Schooling in Interwar Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), 63.

30 Brendan Karch, *Nation and Loyalty in a German-Polish Borderland: Upper Silesia, 1848–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 20–21.

31 Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

32 Neitzel, Welzer, *Soldaten*, 375.

having alternated between automatic and reflective practices.[33] Studies on Allied Forces have also indicated that the propagated ideology of fighting to defend liberty could make young men enthusiastic to enrol, but that these men soon became disillusioned on the battlefield. In the same way as in the Wehrmacht, the average American soldier fought not so much out of ideology or personal commitment, but because he wanted to be loyal to his fellow soldiers and he knew fighting would shorten the war.[34]

Researching Conflicting Loyalties through Oral History

Oral history interviews can bring us closer to an understanding of the way soldiers who fought on both fronts weighed their loyalties during and after the war. The way that interviewees expressed how they killed was broadly similar to how imprisoned German Prisoners of War (hereafter POWs) recalled having done so more than sixty years ago, when they were secretly taped in Great Britain. The German POWs expressed no emotion when they recalled killing,[35] something one can also at times observe during the interviews conducted within the research project. Kazimierz, for example, recalled fighting in Germany as an Allied soldier in 1945:

> We were ordered to shoot wherever possible. I remember one time a colleague, sitting in a tank, looking through his binoculars, says to me: 'Kazik, come here, get inside, grab the binoculars and take a look what's going on over there'. I take a pair of binoculars and look. There's a cow standing there. Two German soldiers go up to it with a bucket and start milking it. They want to drink some milk. We load our guns – not with the shells that only penetrate, but the high-explosive ones. Because we had both: the first would penetrate and fly off; the others hit their target and did some serious damage. The cow bellowed, they all fell, the cow, too. It was only the cow we felt sorry about.

The German Army's insistence that a soldier master his emotions had clearly been incorporated to a significant extent. With the basic reason for fighting on the frontline being to kill the opponent, Kazimierz's presentation of murder as a normal phenomenon should not surprise us, although our current norm of moral

33 Felix Römer, *Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht von innen* (München: Piper Verlag GmbH, 2012), 475.
34 John Whiteclay Chambers II, 'The American Experience of the Second World War', in *The American Experience of War*, ed. Georg Schild (Schöningh: Paderborn, 2010), 192.
35 Neitzel, Welzer, *Soldaten*, 94.

conduct may make it difficult to read his testimony. The most important difference when compared to German POWs, however, is that all the interviewees volunteered to join the Polish Allied Forces, which left the Americans and British with no reason to tape their conversations.

At many times in the collection of sources, feelings are articulated. Wacław, for example, stopped his description of the war routine to express his astonishment at discovering his brother-in-law: “Such things only ever happen in the movies!” The interviewees had often encountered situations of conflicting loyalties that also blurred the logic of war. While relating their lives, their current beliefs on moral conduct slipped into their stories about the war back then, leading to an emotionally loaded story they themselves considered meaningful at the time of recording.[36] Thanks to the reshuffling of dominant narratives on war memories over time, the interviewees could find the words to describe the conflicting loyalties they remember having felt.

Whereas the advantage of oral sources certainly lies in their revelation of practices and emotions related to the conflicting loyalties of the former servicemen who fought on both sides, their testimonies should nonetheless be interpreted with caution. It is somehow surprising that we hear interviewees recalling how they witnessed soldiers from the other army who they nevertheless sympathised with being mistreated or killed, or how they executed war orders against soldiers that their superiors considered enemies, orders they did not necessarily approve of. We only rarely hear, however, the interviewees narrating themselves as the main characters, conducting what was at the time considered a war crime, motivated by appeasing their conflicted loyalty. Are these articulations necessarily false because they are by definition unverifiable? The testimonies certainly do not always contain the truth but, as Alessandro Portelli has stated, even “wrong statements are still psychologically true, and this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts”.[37] As I wrote in an earlier publication: “Testimonies reveal that reality is not as clear-cut as it appears at a first glance”.[38]

This chapter walks us chronologically through the war experiences of soldiers who fought on both sides of the front, from joining the German Army over the recollections of interpersonal contacts within the German Army, to changing sides through desertion or captivity, everyday life within the 1st Armoured Divi-

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36 Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*: *Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart/Weimar: J.B.Metzler, 2005), 34.

37 Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?”, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 68.

38 Machteld Venken, *Straddling the Iron Curtain? Immigrants, Immigrant Organisations, War Memory* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 174.

sion in Great Britain before D-Day, the testing of loyalties on the battlefield, and finally operating as an occupying force in Northern Germany in the early days after the war. Through an analysis of fragments from the interviews, the text offers a reconstructed collective portrait of how the former servicemen recall having acted during and after the war. Wacław received a privileged place in the narration not because of the content of his war experiences, but because of his qualities as a storyteller.

Joining the German Army

All the interviewees portrayed their call to serve in the German Army in negative terms. Roman, for example, was sent for forced labour to Hamburg, a place he left once he was called up for service in 1944:

> I didn't know that my father had signed me up. I was underage, my father decided for me. When I went back in 1947, I even argued a little about this with him. "Why?" He said: "They would've killed you!" "Well, so they would have killed me, but they would've killed me as a Pole!" Because this patriotism stayed in me all this time and is still there today. [. . .] Whereupon my father explained that he wanted to protect me, from the beating, from the maltreatment, from being deported to Germany, because he already knew they'd take me away, so he began to try [. . .]. And so he signed me up for the third group.[39]

Roman stressed that his father had signed him up for the *Deutsche Volksliste*. Like many other interviewees, he presented himself as a minor who could not decide for himself and had not even understood his father's intentions.[40] Wacław was older, and signed the *Volksliste* himself:

> In 1942 I was conscripted to the German army. I had a choice to make . . . I reported to the committee with my ID card and there I wrote that I was Polish, my language Polish. A German comes in, reads it and says, "What? Poland?" There was a local sitting next to us. I hid it from him with my hand because he had a lilac pencil and crossed it out and hit me in the face. "Why did you hit him?" "After all, he is not German, he says, he was born here, he's Polish and speaks Polish". The German crossed it out and wrote *Deutsch*.[41]

39 *R. Lipiński. Interview transcription*, 15.
40 See also: Jacek Kutzner, Aleksander Rutkiewicz, *Polacy z Wehrmachtu w polskiej 1. Dywizji Pancernej gen. Maczka* (Warszawa, Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm 2011), 92; *W. Butowski. Interview transcription*, 4.
41 *W. Galios. Interview transcription*, 1.

Wacław said he was not given a free choice. Commissioners were entitled to categorise people based on a questionnaire applicants needed to fill in. Their request to sign it was formulated in ways that did not exclude verbal and physical violence. Enrolment in the *Wehrmacht* was a decisive factor during categorisation and the applications of young male adults were treated with more scrutiny than those of the elderly.[42]

In contrast to what the interviewees recalled, there is archival evidence that enrolment came to be seen as a normal phenomenon after the publication of the Decree of 2 October 1942, which required inhabitants included in the third group of the *Deutsche Volksliste* to enrol for military service,[43] with young men also considering it a way to explore the world.[44] Avoiding military service had become more difficult; whereas in 1941, employment in the coal mines, illnesses or being the sixth son in a family had offered the opportunity to refuse enlistment, two years later, these options were non-existent (with the exception of tuberculosis patients).[45] Interviewees, however, put aside all signs of ideological patriotism or opportunism and took great pains to distinguish themselves from the *Wehrmacht* soldiers who had been more enthusiastic than they recalled themselves to have been.[46]

Interpersonal Contacts within the German Army

Interviewees reported having felt torn between conflicting loyalties during their training, while fighting on the battlefield, and with reference to the Holocaust. Just like other recruits from pre-war Poland, Roman followed a mandatory program organised by the paramilitary association *Reichsarbeitsdienst*:

> We were mixed together with young Germans. I think it was deliberate, because the whole service lasted about three months and after it had finished the majority went home, in particular to Germany [. . .]. We, however, the unruly, were sent with orders straight to the German army.[47]

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42 E.M. Serwański, “Przymusowa służba Polaków z Górnego Śląska w armii hitlerowskiej (Studium z zakresu hitlerowskiej polityki narodowościowej)”, *Przegląd Zachodni*, 10, 1–4 (1954), 438.

43 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 16, 347.

44 Czesław Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce: okupacja Polski 1939–1945*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1970), 436.

45 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 144–148.

46 See for example: *A. Jedamski. Interview transcription*, 22.

47 *R. Lipiński. Interview transcription*, 4.

Afterwards, Roman followed a specific recruitment course which focused on shooting, war attack strategies, and ideology.[48] He was introduced to German military values such as bravery, determination and obedience, and learned that cowardice was contemptible. In addition to having an exemplary military attitude, soldiers without "an unlimited state affiliation" needed to be convinced politically by means of special courses, after which they swore an oath of honour to Adolf Hitler.[49] Interviews showed mixed responses to these courses. When Wacław was asked whether he had received political training, he answered:

> I was only trained in artillery there, they only gave us military training, how to handle a gun and so on. I didn't really know much German, so, well, I was with the horses.[50]

As political training was compulsory, it is very unlikely Wacław did not receive it. But because he did not understand German, he probably no longer remembered it, or did not want to talk about it. In the end, he was made to look after the horses so that he could get by without having to speak much German. Wacław's account offers a first sign of the pragmatism applied when including recruits from pre-war Poland. Soldiers speaking Polish were often dispersed throughout units where a majority of soldiers spoke German, in order to increase cohesion.[51] In other situations, they were encouraged to speak Polish. Kazimierz remembered his superior asked:

> 'Why weren't you singing?' 'I don't understand German.' 'And what do you understand?' 'Polish.' [. . .] 'Then sing in Polish.' I say: 'Lads, let's sing *Wojenko, wojenko* (War, little war).' [. . .] And in the next few days, he didn't tell the company to sing. Or say anything in German. He only said: 'Hey, *wojenko, wojenko*!' [. . .] [We were walking] from the suburbs of Hamburg. They [German civilians – MV] admired the way we sang. German troops singing Polish.[52]

Learning how to march while singing appeared more important than singing in German. *Wojenko, wojenko* was the song of the Polish Legions fighting under Józef Piłsudski in the First World War. It gained popularity in interwar Poland as a patriotic song and helped to make the Polish Legions a founding myth of Polish independence. Singing it under the command of a German superior unable to speak Polish, the content took on an ironic meaning:

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48 See also *B. Machalewski. Interview Recording, Nr 002*, min. 2.

49 *Dodatek do ogólnych postanowień (15.10. 1943)*, cited in Serwański, "Przymusowa służba Polaków", 467.

50 *W. Galios. Interview transcription*, 48.

51 Kutzner, Rutkiewicz, *Polacy z Wehrmachtu*, 119.

52 *K. Psuty. Interview transcription*, 13.

> Belief is marching, bloody sweat is pouring,
> One, two, step, my brother, one, two, step, my brother,
> Because Poland's heating up.[53]

Integrating recruits from Polish annexed territories remained problematic. In the autumn of 1941, a German Commissioner wrote that despite the potential military value of these recruits, bad experiences made further recruitment impossible. German and Polish speaking soldiers were reported to have been shooting each other.[54] By 1943, the necessary characteristics of a good German soldier were still to emerge in Polish recruits.[55]

That the interviewees focused on disobedience during the schooling process can be explained as follows. Most joined the *Wehrmacht* after the defeat in Stalingrad, when many soldiers lost their belief in victory.[56] That the Allies publicly demanded the capitulation of the German Army and announced they would punish war crimes could also have influenced their mood at the time. In addition, the interviewees were freed from the cultural role model of a good German soldier they were once required to fulfil. Individual voices nevertheless offered alternative meanings. Although an opinion that is much more difficult to articulate today, Wiktor said he felt accepted in the Wehrmacht.[57]

Wehrmacht soldiers from pre-war Poland remained under special control on the battlefield.[58] With the freedom in their sphere of action reduced to a minimum, their accounts consisted of dry descriptions of military actions. Drills appeared to have dehumanised the individual and reduced him to part of the machinery of killing.[59] Only Stanisław recalled trying to sabotage an attack manoeuvre. However, when a telephone operator warned him and his colleagues that they were endangering their own lives, they made sure to behave in a way that was above suspi-

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53 "Polish Patriotic Songs. Wojenka, English translation," Lyrics translate, accessed October 20, 2023, http://lyricstranslate.com/en/wojenka-little-war.html#ixzz3fraBf1I0.

54 *Raport o sytuacji na ZZ 10 (grudzien 1943 – styczen 1944)*, in *Raporty z ziem wcielonych do III Rzeszy (1942–1944)*, ed. Zbigniew Mazur, Maria Rutowska, Aleksandra Pietrowicz (Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 2004), 454–455.

55 Der Reichskommissar für die Festigung Deutschen Volkstums Stabshauptamt, Autumn 1941, cited in: Serwański, "Przymusowa służba Polaków", 451, 467.

56 Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Opladen: Westdeutscher 1988), 118.

57 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 212; "Ślaskie losy wojenne. Z Janowa do Wehrmachtu," Wykopalisko, accessed on October 20, 2023, http://www.wykop.pl/ramka/218187/slaskie-losy-wojenne-z-janowa-do-wehrmachtu/.

58 *Raport o sytuacji na ZZ 6 (do 15 VIII 1943)*, in: *Raporty z ziem wcielonych do III Rzeszy (1942–1944)*, 185.

59 Neitzel, Welzer, *Soldaten*, 35.

cion.[60] This behaviour is in line with what analyses of the letters the soldiers sent home showed. Offering insight into the various ways individual soldiers appropriated, integrated or distanced themselves from NS ideology, these sources display a prevailing degree of mental conformism.[61] Nevertheless, wartime controllers who checked the letters that soldiers wrote home reported that ethnic Poles fighting on the Eastern Front, in contrast to German soldiers, did not mention how impatient they were about waiting for a new gun. Nor did they write to express their faith in Adolf Hitler.[62]

The abundance of words that interviewees dedicated to their schooling and service contrasts with their silence about the Holocaust. This seems to correspond to the fact they fought on the Western Front, instead of performing their military service in a concentration camp.[63] The only reference to the Holocaust to be found in the interview collection, however, hints at something different. An episode that Stefan recalled about his Allied service indirectly reflects the opinions he claimed to have held before:

> When I was in Scotland, I'd keep hearing: 'Little one, you do it!' [. . .] They were pushing me around [. . .]. Finally, this one guy says: 'Listen to how they pick on you. At night take a poker and, this guy who's the worst, go and break his legs. You'll have peace of mind.' And so I did [. . .] I was even sitting for a week in jail, but . . . Afterwards this guy says: 'Look guys, give him a break, because I told him to do it. And if he doesn't, then I'll help him and I'll also do the same to you.' [. . .] I heard a joke about Jews. On the front there are two little Jews. [One] says: 'Isaac, am I already dead?' 'No, why?' 'Well, because I already smell!' [. . .] In the evening, I wanted to brag, to make people laugh. And then (. . .) I ask: 'Why did you speak up for me?' [Then he told Stefan he was a Jew. Stefan continued with a breaking voice – MV] I feel like crying today, as I remember this. I was so ashamed![64]

Although Stefan had heard the joke among his Allied colleagues, it is improbable that he did not hold anti-Semitic views when in the Wehrmacht.[65] While meticu-

60 *S. Galikowski. Interview transcription*, 12.

61 Klaus Latzel, "Wehrmachtssoldaten zwischen 'Normalität' und NS-Ideologie, oder: Was sucht die Forschung in der Feldpost?", in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller, Hans-Erich Volkmann (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1999) 580; Klaus Latzel, "Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle", in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte*, ed. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, Ulrike Jureit, Horst Möller, Jan Philipp Reemtsma (München: Beck, 2005), 179; Römer, *Kameraden*, 475.

62 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 240.

63 Walter Manoschek, "The Crimes of the Werhmacht in the Second world War", in ed. Heer a.o., *The Discursive Construction of History*, 21.

64 *S. Galikowski. Interview transcription*, 31.

65 Willem W. Hagen argues that: 'In their pre-World War II dynamics the Polish and German variants of political anti-Semitism displayed common features deriving from their embeddedness

lously pointing out differences during schooling, the interviewees did not mention even once that they had different opinions on Jews to those held by their colleagues in the German army. By internalising these opinions, the interviewees seemed to have adhered to social practices. Historical research has indicated such behaviour as being common among young *Wehrmacht* soldiers.[66] Stefan dared to mention his anti-Semitic views in describing himself as a person who had changed his frame of reference when fighting on the Allied side, a change triggered by a Jew who had supported his integration process into the 1st Polish Armoured Division. The fact that the collection only contains one fragment about the Holocaust shows that the former *Wehrmacht* soldiers from Poland interviewed within our project were less talkative than the former soldiers who, visiting a *Wehrmacht* exhibition in Austria, mostly accepted, yet tried to mitigate their role in (and thus responsibility for) the extermination of Jews.[67]

Changing Sides

There were two different ways for *Wehrmacht* soldiers from Polish annexed territories to change sides during the war: being taken captive or desertion. Wacław is one of the interviewed soldiers who deserted:

> I'm up one night and he's talking me into escaping. But I'm thinking, either you're testing me, to check who I really am, or you really want to get away. But I say: 'I'm a German soldier, I'm not running away.' And this stopped him in his tracks a little. Then we later meet in the camp. And he says: 'You were a smart-aleck.' So I ask: 'And are you a German? How can I know if you're being sincere?' He says: 'Yes. I'm a communist.'[68]

This fragment indicates that bonds of disobedience extended the close network of Wehrmacht soldiers from pre-war Poland. Wacław was considered a possible deserter by a communist, who only dared to reveal his political opinions after deser-

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in comparable patterns of socioeconomic development' ("Before the 'Final Solution': Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Interwar Germany and Poland", *The Journal of Modern History*, 68, 2 (1996), 351. On anti-Semitic traditions in interwar Poland and Nazi Germany see: Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 2002), 103–104; Stephanie Zloch, *Polnischer Nationalismus: Politik und Gesellschaft zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2010), 573.

66 Römer, *Kameraden*, 476.

67 Hannes Heer, "That is what is so terrible – that millions of soldiers were there, yet today they all claim they never saw a thing", in ed. Heer a.o., *The Discursive Construction of History*, 95.

68 *W. Galios. Interview transcription*, 48.

tion. Wacław said he pushed away his internal doubt and disciplined himself by referring to the ideal he had been trying to internalise: he was a German soldier. German soldiers are not supposed to surrender without fighting until the bitter end.[69] The episode also reveals that although the bonds between colleagues within the *Wehrmacht* were often so intense that they preferred being at the front to spending time with their families,[70] ideas about desertion appeared more delicate to share.

Out of a total of 17,300,000 *Wehrmacht* soldiers, the number of deserters is estimated to have been between 100,000 and 300,000 by the end of 1944. During the war, German military tribunals handled the cases of about 35,000 deserters, of whom 22,750 were sentenced to death, a measure which was carried out in about 15,000 cases.[71] Research based on court files revealed that the motives of the accused included political opposition, war-weariness, and soldiers who had previously been punished within the Wehrmacht aiming to avoid subsequent disciplining.[72] Particular scholarly attention has been devoted to cases involving political opponents, but the focus has also been on the alternative conceptions of masculinity that deserters referred to when giving their reasons for desertion, such as an inclination towards autonomy and the desire to survive.[73]

Desertion among ethnic Germans was higher because these soldiers had additional motives. They could wish to desert, for example, when the occupier had confiscated the property of their parents, or had seen a concrete opportunity to fall into the hands of the Allies. Polish Armed Forces in the West included 89,631 deserters and POWs from German forces. Figures from July 1943 tell us that of the 71,000 inhabitants of Upper Silesia who enrolled in the Wehrmacht under the third category of the *Deutsche Volksliste*, only 157 deserted.[74] Our interviewees, however, deserted later. One of them was Franciszek.

Franciszek was sent to the front in Holland. His unit was hiding in trenches when a German colleague of his shouted that he had seen an Englishman. After a first round of shooting, Franciszek recalled:

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69 Maria Fritsche, "Feige Männer? Fremd- und Selbstbilder von Wehrmachtsdeserteuren", *Ariadne. Forum für Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte*, 47 (2005): 61.

70 Müller, *Hitlers Wehrmacht 1935–1945*, 114.

71 Norbert Haase, Otl Aicher, *Deutsche Deserteure* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag 1987), 112; Guido Knopp, Mario Sporn, *Die Wehrmacht: Eine Bilanz* (München: Goldmann 2007), 237.

72 Ziemann, "Fluchten aus dem Konsens zum Durchhalten", 602.

73 Gerhard Paul, "'Die verschwanden einfach nachts': Überläufer zu den Alliierten und den europäischen Befreiungsbewegungen", in *Die anderen Soldaten: Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Norbert Haase, Gerhard Paul (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), 139–156.

74 Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie*, 309, 315–316, 322.

> There was a second round of shooting and there was probably then an order to withdraw, but I didn't hear anything, right? They stopped shooting, I take a look, stick my head out: there's nobody there! You know what idiotic thing I did then? Only today am I thinking healthily: when I saw that there was no one there, I took my gun, and fled towards the place where this *Englander* was supposed to be. And well, I ran straight at them![75]

Franciszek used the chaos on the battlefield to make his desertion look like a heroic deed in which he fought until the last bullet. While describing this, he was simultaneously belittling his past action as something silly, portraying himself as not thinking straight, thereby showing that his struggle to give meaning to his desertion was still ongoing. Franciszek continued by describing his encounter with a Polish woman who was likely on guard duty: "She asks, "A Pole? Fighting in the German army? How is this possible?" "Oh, thank God!" is all I can say. I could hardly speak with the emotion of it all." Only at this moment during the interview, did the interviewer interject and use the word that Franciszek had thus far been meticulously avoiding. "So you deserted from the Wehrmacht?", to which Franciszek responded, "I deserted from the Wehrmacht. If only the Germans had known!" Just after relating how speechless with emotion he had been while speaking in Polish on the Allied side, the interviewer precisely identified his behaviour as desertion, which, although something one could be proud of in Poland at the time the interview was conducted, Franciszek immediately indirectly contrasted his action with the German discourse on desertion during the war. Franciszek did not want to be portrayed as a coward. His narration then pointed to an even more complicated conflict of loyalty. Only a little while after Franciszek had his conversation in Polish, his story goes, he saw his entire *Wehrmacht* unit being taken into captivity: "I was so happy to see them again I almost soiled myself." His desertion did not mean he had completely emotionally distanced himself from his former comrades. While happy to see them, he was also scared they would find out he escaped.[76]

The Polish Government-in-exile believed that the enrolment of pre-war Polish citizens in the *Wehrmacht* was illegal; because of this, ethnic Germans with a *Volksliste* categorisation who deserted or found themselves in Allied captivity were not considered traitors, but could join the Polish Allied Forces. *Wehrmacht* soldiers needed to declare whether they considered themselves German or Polish in their application to join the 1st Polish Armoured Division. In this way, a separation was introduced into the camp among the *Wehrmacht* soldiers who had previously functioned as one social group. When soldiers said they were Poles, they

75 *F. Gdaniec. Interview transcription*, 22.

76 Ibid. See also *Z. Dąbrowski. Interview recording*, Nr 001, 00:58–2.10.

were often taunted as traitors by their former colleagues.[77] Jan remembered the difficulties he experienced in situating himself after being taken into captivity:

> I was imprisoned by the British and spent a week in the kitchen. There was a colonel there from the German air force. They'd locked him up in a barn. When I got there, I ripped off all the German stripes from my uniform. They gave me soup to serve to him. As I came up to him with the soup, he asks me what my nationality is. And I tell him: 'Silesian'. He started calling me names: pig, deserter, the worst.[78]

Despite having declared himself Polish when asked officially, in private contact with a German officer, Jan says he identified himself as Silesian, but this did not change his former superior's categorisation of him – he was now considered the worst kind of opponent. Such loyalty conflicts were not unique for soldiers from Polish annexed territories. Similarities were noted among second generation Italian migrants in Great Britain, who were at first interned because they were seen as enemies, but were later given the opportunity to join the British forces. Some decided not to join; most did, however, because until 1943, the British War Office exempted sending them to the battlefield, where they might find themselves fighting against relatives.[79]

Everyday Life in the Allied Forces Before D-Day

Wacław was among the first group of about 2000 deserters and POWs who reached Great Britain in the summer of 1943. He joined the 1st Polish Armoured Division, set up in February of 1942 in Scotland on the model of its predecessor, the 10th Mounted Cavalry Brigade, which had defended Poland during the September campaign in 1939. Its soldiers had fled the country and used various escape routes to France via Romania and Hungary. Many travelled over Yugoslavia, and took the boat to France.[80] From there, they made their way to Great Britain. The 1st Polish Armoured Division embarked for Normandy in August 1944 and during its journey through France, Belgium, the Netherlands and northern Germany, the number of

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77 *J. Garski. Interview transcription*, 6–7.

78 Kutzner, Rutkiewicz, *Polacy z Wehrmachtu*, 198.

79 Wendy Ugolini, *Experiencing war as the 'Enemy Other': Italian Scottish Experience in World War II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 160–162, 186–195.

80 Marian Wlodzimierz Żebrowski, *Zarys historii polskiej broni pancernej 1918–1947* (London: Zarząd Zrzeszenia Kół Odziałowych Broni Pancernej 1971), 414; Evan McGilvray, Janusz Jarzębowski, *First Polish Armoured Division 1938–47: A History* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books, 2022).

former *Wehrmacht* soldiers in its ranks increased.[81] Henryk, a division soldier without a past in the German Army, recalled his observations on former *Wehrmacht* recruits as follows:

> One thing you got with the Wehrmacht: discipline, obedience. In the Polish army this wasn't at all necessary. Such clacking of heels! Obviously, this was the fashion for a while but nothing like in the German army. This was the German rigor forced and taught. A soldier who was forcibly conscripted into the German army, carried out everything in the German way. There was iron in them, soulless discipline, which we did not need [. . .] However, a Pomeranian or Silesian soldier who had escaped from the German army was appreciated: well-trained, giving everything of himself, that you had to give them credit for.[82]

Superiors in the Allied forces indeed considered the experience of former Wehrmacht soldiers an asset. This is why Wacław, who had served in the Wehrmacht artillery, received a place in a corresponding unit in the 1st Polish Armoured Division. Once they had switched sides, recruits needed protection from reprisals and had to reorient their practices. As was the case with many enemy nationals in British Forces, pseudonyms were assigned to make them unrecognisable if they fell into the hands of the enemy.[83] Roman remembered having a hard time getting used to his:

> I had to give myself a surname, so as not to forget it. As a scout I had this friend in Toruń, her name was Modjeska. [. . .] Let it be Modrzejewski. [. . .] I was born in Warsaw, I had to remember the house number five, apartment number eight, on Solar Street. 'As in sun, so you don't forget.' [. . .] Because in the night they even woke me up and asked: 'What is your name?' 'Lipiński.' 'What? There's nobody with that name here.'[84]

Unlearning the practices that they had been drilled to perform also proved problematic. Stefan recalled:

> The army had already gathered and this useless lump turned up late, jumped up and did this [performed a Hitler salute – MV]. It was a drill and he just did it automatically, as a reflex. He couldn't help himself. I blushed with shame for him [. . .]. It was so pitiful. But there was no unpleasantness because of this. They understood.[85]

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81 Maczek, *Od podwody do czołga*, 130.
82 *H. Kątny. Interview recording*, Nr 003, min. 39.
83 Webster, "Enemies, Allies and Transnational Histories", 80.
84 *R. Lipiński. Interview transcription*, 35–36; see also *J. Prabucki. Interview recording*, Nr 002, min. 10.
85 *S. Galikowski. Interview transcription*, 29.

Stefan wanted to feel accepted by his new peers.[86] His shame for the behaviour of his colleague indicates how important it was for him to adhere to social expectations.

The former *Wehrmacht* soldiers moved from a totalitarian environment to an army based on democratic principles. A small detail in Roman's story reveals how he experienced that more human approach right at the beginning:

> Delousing, a bath, you come out on the other side, there are tables and a soldier: 'What shoe size are you?' I say: 'How am I supposed to know what my shoe size is?' With the Germans, they gave you whatever shoes they had and told you to wear them. And then you walked, no matter if they were half a metre too long or three metres too short. They just didn't care. You had shoes and that was that, you walked in them. 'Show me your feet! Seven!' They were all specialists. 'Uniform. What size? Stand here at attention! Number 1, 65–ish. Right, Number 1, 66.' [. . .] And then here you are, new uniforms, completely brand-new uniforms.[87]

Roman recognised that the Allies guaranteed soldiers more comfort by considering their individual needs. Notwithstanding the uniformity needed in all armies, joining the Allies appeared to be an individual emancipatory experience after having served under a totalitarian regime.[88] We hear this detail at the start of his career in the Allied Forces, but do not find any hint of ideological values such as individualism or freedom later in his interview, or in that of the other interviewees. At home, in 1947, Roman informed his father that he had fought out of Polish patriotism, but in their descriptions of the battlefield, interviewees did not refer to ideology. In this respect, their accounts are comparable to those of Canadian soldiers who reported a swift, disturbing transformation once they engaged in killing.[89]

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86 On the role of comradeship in the German Army and the Allied Forces see Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2006), 109; Whiteclay Chambers II, "The American Experience of the Second World War", 192.

87 *R.Lipiński. Interview transcription*, 23–24.

88 Lewis H. Carlson, *We Were Each Other's Prisoners: An Oral History of World War II American and German Prisoners of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), XXIII.

89 Jeff A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 284.

Testing Loyalty on the Battlefield

Interviewees described how they had felt ambiguous on the battlefield – not towards an anonymous collective opponent, but towards individual surrendering soldiers. Although they should have followed the Geneva Convention prohibiting reprisals, the testimonies reveal that the reality may have been somewhat different.[90] The oral accounts here diverge from what historiographical literature tells us. Most books about the division's activities in Germany only start the analysis after the Second World War had come to an end.[91] Jan Rydel mentioned that division soldiers liberated the concentration camp of Westerbork on the Dutch side of the Dutch-German state border, where they took the Dutch camp officers into captivity and transported them to a camp as POW.[92] Interviewee Kazimierz, in contrast, said he heard of a soldier who often volunteered to bring *Wehrmacht* POWs to camps in order to be able to shoot them himself, thereby taking revenge on the soldiers who had killed his family in front of his eyes.[93]

Interviewees often stated that their superiors used encounters with POWs to check their reliability. They were among the youngest soldiers, and many were added as ordinary soldiers on the bottom rung of the existing power hierarchy. Although the loyalty checks presented here cannot be considered a widespread phenomenon, interviewees recall these experiences as having been especially difficult. Franciszek said that when his army unit captured a German sniper, he was asked:

> 'Well, Franek, show us what you can do. Take care of it!' Good God! Here I am from a Catholic family and they're ordering me to murder. Killing a man in a war is one thing, but specifically to kill a prisoner? 'We didn't see you fighting much.' And this was one clerk, glasses, thick lenses: 'Give him here, I'll take care of it!' I think to myself: Shit, maybe it's possible to save him? 'Right, I'm off now.' And off we went, there was a forest nearby.[94]

While they were walking, the German sniper told him he was 35 and showed him pictures of his three children. Franciszek continued:

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90 "Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, 27 July 1929," International Humanitarian Law Databases, accessed on October 20, 2023, https://www.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/305?OpenDocument.

91 Wiesław Hładkiewicz, *Polacy w zachodnich stefach okupacyjnych Niemiec: 1945–1948* (Zielona Góra: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1982); Czesław Łuczak. *Polacy w okupowanych Niemczech: 1945–1949* (Poznań: Pracownia Serwisu Oprogramowania, 1993).

92 Jan Rydel, *'Polska okupacja' w północno-zachodnich Niemczech 1945–1947: Nieznany rozdział stosunków polsko-niemieckich* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2000), 48.

93 *K. Psuty. Interview transcription*, 56.

94 *F. Gdaniec. Interview transcription*, 30–31.

> I say: '*Weglaufen, aber schnell!*' He looks back and I say: '*Aber schnell!*' and fire in the air. [. . .] I was stupid, I didn't know what I was doing. It was disobeying an order.
>
> Interviewer: It's important what you're saying. Very important.
>
> Franciszek: But it wasn't courage, it was stupidity. On the one hand, courage, on the other, stupidity.

Franciszek articulated that he had problems figuring out which social norms he needed to adhere to. He had been asked to show his loyalty by carrying out a command that contravened the Geneva Convention, and expressed his discomfort back then by pointing to his Catholic belief, the German language connecting him to the sniper, and the personality of his victim. During the interview, he still called his disobedience a silly irrational act, and only after the interviewer introduced another moral perspective, that saving the life of a human being is "very important", did he start to evaluate whether bravery might also have had something to do with it. He did not arrive at a conclusion, probably because the interview was the first time he had put his experience into words. Franciszek presented his struggle with a changing frame of reference, in which Christian love of one's neighbour and the virtue of bravery were hesitatingly coming to the fore. Franciszek did not go so far as to say that his deed was motivated by loyalty towards a German soldier, who could have personified the army colleagues he had had in the *Wehrmacht*. Such expressions of loyalty we find in interviews where the POW encountered spoke Polish. One interviewee, whom we refer to anonymously, recalled:

> [The Wehrmacht soldier taken captive] says: 'Oh Jesus, Poles!' The [Polish Allied Army] Commander says: 'And how do you know that they're Poles?' 'Polish eagles.' 'And you, when you shot the driver, did you not see that hussar sign and PL written on the front of the tank? Only now you see that they're Poles?!' 'I left seven children at home, leave me alone, I want to be taken prisoner! I'm fed up with this war, I too am a Pole!' 'Where are you from?' 'Upper Silesia.' He said the Lord's Prayer! Half of it was in Polish, the rest in German. 'Some Pole! You can't even say a prayer?' He just looked and said that he couldn't be captured, he is SS. [. . .] 'Get down!' He threw himself to the ground. 'Driver, come here! First gear!' He guided the tank over him. I only saw how he turned his head in pain. Eyes closed, I say to myself: I do not want to see this, I'm following an order. Try to say you won't do it. They'd report you and that'd be that. You disobeyed an order. The order had to be obeyed. And so we ran over the Pole. A Pole ran over a Pole.[95]

Just like the interviewee, the POW came from Upper Silesia, but unlike the POW, he had a past in the SS and spoke German better than he did Polish. The POW is por-

95 *Anonymized interviewee. Interview transcription*, 62. See also: *Second Anonymized Interviewee. Interview Transcription*, 5–6.

trayed as hoping for the mercy of the Polish Allied soldiers, while at the same time despairing as to whether opting for captivity would be a good decision. For the Allied soldiers, however, he failed their Polish loyalty test: praying in Polish. That he said he was suffering from war weariness and had seven children, was apparently not considered important. The interviewee did not question the command to kill him, as if there were no Geneva Convention. Nevertheless, during the interview he provided insight into the emotions of conflicting loyalties that he recalled having back then.

The interviewee presented himself as the executor of a military command. Interviewees heard about or reported having seen how others decided the lives of POWs, but never presented themselves as decision-makers. We cannot know how interviewees acted back then, nor to what extent interviewees considered such experiences still too difficult to reveal when interviewed during the final years of their lives. Moreover, disentangling the emotions that the soldiers who fought on both sides felt when the situations they described in the interviews took place is impossible; nonetheless, their changing frames of reference at least enabled them to finally articulate these extreme cases of conflicting loyalty into speech, and show the doubts they encountered when giving them meaning.

Testing Loyalty as an Occupying Force

The 1st Polish Armoured Division ended the war in north Germany and operated as an occupying force until its dissolution in 1947.[96] Research on the cohabitation of the civil population and Polish Allied soldiers has shown that the number of reported infringements against fraternisation was on the same scale as that of other Allied soldiers.[97] Former soldiers who fought on both sides articulated the fear that German civilians initially are reported to have felt for what they called the Devil's Division, but they also helped to make the rules understandable for civilians by speaking German.[98] Soldiers commonly concentrated their infringements on symbols of national ideology, and often even took them home as war souvenirs.[99] Kazimierz described entering a house with a picture of Adolf Hitler hanging on the wall. When he found out the German husband was enrolled in the SS, Kazimierz started ordering his wife about:

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96 Samantha K. Knapton, *Occupiers, Humanitarian Workers, and Polish Displaced Persons in British-Occupied Germany* (London: Bloomsbury 2023), 50.

97 Rydel, *'Polska okupacja'*, 138, 270.

98 *R. Lipiński. Interview transcription*, 34; *J. Zagórski. Interview Recording*, Nr 004, min. 16.

99 Rydel, *'Polska okupacja'*, 136.

> 'First get on the chair, then on the desk and lower that portrait of Hitler to the floor.' She lowered it so gently that the picture didn't get damaged, the glass didn't crack, and Hitler stayed in one piece. I say to her: 'But you've still not come down from the desk.' I see that portrait of Hitler in one piece. 'Jump from the desk onto the Hitler.' Oh, how reluctantly she did it! What a face she pulled! She put up a little resistance, but I frightened her a little, because I had a gun. She jumped and only then did the glass break on this Hitler.[100]

Although Kazimierz frightened the woman with a weapon, civilians were not, by definition, his opponents. Kazimierz, in fact, like many other Polish Allied soldiers, had a German girlfriend, whom he described as:

> Her sympathies changed. When I first got talking with her, she viewed Hitler like a god and said she couldn't even imagine how it was possible to talk with a Pole. During our chat, though, she became convinced that we are not different people, we are like Germans. She had the same opinion as me.[101]

Her belief in Hitler did not prevent Kazimierz from getting to know her better. In Kazimierz's account, his girlfriend changed her opinion until she eventually shared his conviction that Poles were no different from Germans. Personal contact between Allied soldiers and German civilians played a pioneering role in the re–assumption of Germany's collective guilt,[102] and the soldiers who had fought on both sides held a privileged position, as they had experienced the German army from within.

Conclusion

This article analyses the conflicting loyalties of soldiers who fought on both sides of the Western Front. The interviewees were among the youngest recruits and were mobilised when the definition of the German *Volk* had reached its most elastic. Later, they deserted from the *Wehrmacht* or were taken into captivity, and all of them fought with the Polish Allied Forces. After the war, they were socialised in communist Poland, where their war experiences were most often silenced. In the final years of their lives, they were lionised as Europe's liberators. Shaping all these ambiguities into one coherent story that explains their autobio-

100 *K. Psuty. Interview transcription*, 38.
101 *K. Psuty. Interview transcription*, 61–62. See also *R. Lipiński. Interview transcription*, 69.
102 Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender and Foreign Relations 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2003), 79.

graphical self, interviewees constructed narratives that, despite their individual logic, do contain common tropes.

Soldiers who fought on both sides recalled having mostly behaved in a similar fashion to their colleagues on the battlefield, whether shooting at one side or another. Their shooting was not driven by political ideology, but rather their desire to be loyal to social expectations.[103] The interviews show that soldiers who fought on both sides did internalise some of the ideological values from each side. Anti-Semitic opinions were widespread among them, but when joining the Allies, they welcomed the individualist human approach that underpinned the democratic army environment.

Interviewees described most of their battlefield actions in collective psychosociological terms, but on the rare occasions when they found more room for individual action, ambiguous individual loyalty conflicts came to the fore. Desertion, for example, was not motivated by political conviction or the search for autonomy, as other *Wehrmacht* soldiers reported.[104] One interviewee escaped once he knew he would encounter a Polish Allied army, but did not attach any ideological meaning to this, and was still concerned about his former *Wehrmacht* colleagues. In addition, in articulating the tests of loyalty they were asked to perform by their Allied superiors when they encountered surrendering soldiers, interviewees externalised their internal dialogue with themselves, vocalising the evaluations of saving a life or killing that they made back then, as well as their ideas of moral conduct at the time the interview was conducted.

They felt most secure when talking about their time as occupying soldiers, because this was a situation in which their conflicting loyalties became an asset. Interviewees presented themselves as masters over their own evaluations of guilt, which varied from punishing civilians to falling in love with them, and allowing a transition period in which civilian loyalties could change. The soldiers who fought on both sides were neither acting entirely of their own volition, nor were they responding to peer pressure and the dictates of social expectations. They were conformists in situations where they had no other option, while at other moments, they made spontaneous decisions outside the normalised loyalty framework in which they were asked to operate. When they were interviewed at the end of their lives, they were still coming to terms with the choices that articulated their conflicting loyalties more than half a century ago.

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103 Neitzel, Welzer, *Soldaten*, 375.
104 Fritsche, “Feige Männer?”.

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Philippe Geny

Malgré-Nous: Men from Alsace and Moselle held as POWs by the Western Allies During WWII

Introduction

In June 1940, France's Alsace and Moselle regions were occupied by the Third Reich, and subsequently annexed to its territories by a decree issued by Adolf Hitler on 18 October. Alsace was annexed to the Gau Oberrhein (Upper Rhine district), and Moselle to the Gau Westmark (Western March district).

After two years of forced *Germanisation*,[1] some 30,000 French citizens from Moselle and 100,000 from Alsace – considered by the Reich to be ethnic Germans – were drafted by force into the German army. This initiative can largely be explained by the disappointing number of young men who volunteered to join the Wehrmacht and the SS (a couple of thousand in Alsace),[2] despite the active German propaganda deployed to support the enrolment campaigns, which were launched in October 1941. These 130,000 young men,[3] drafted by force into the German army, referred to themselves as "*Malgré-Nous*", an expression that can be roughly translated as "conscripted against our own will". This term emerged in France during the early twenties, when some former WWI veterans native to Alsace and Moselle wanted to emphasise that they had been forced to fight in the Kaiser's army and that they still felt French at heart, despite their territories having been a part of Germany since the treaty of Versailles in 1871.

Of these 130,000 men, around 50,000 were captured by the Western Allies and kept in POW camps. Their captivity can be summarised in the following terms: they were drafted against their will into the German forces, but nonetheless remained citizens of an Allied country, France, and not of Germany. However, they still shared and suffered the same fate as German POWs. Such a surprising paradox merits further investigation. In order to define the subject, it

1 Based on the orders of Gauleiter Josef Bürckel on 19 August 1942 for Moselle, and Gauleiter Robert Wagner on 25 August 1942 for Alsace.

2 Heller Kevin and Gerry Simpson. *The Hidden Histories of War Crime Trials* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 152; Rigoulot, Pierre. *L'Alsace-Lorraine pendant la guerre 1939–1945* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1997), 55–56.

3 In addition to the thousands of young girls and women incorporated into the German auxiliary services.

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is useful to begin by describing German military demographic flows, in order to contextualise the internment of the *Malgré-Nous* by the Western Allies.

As the war appeared to be won on the Western European front, the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS were assigned to the Eastern European front to support Operation Barbarossa. However, after the setbacks suffered in the Soviet Union and the Allied landings in the Mediterranean and then in Normandy, the troops of the Reich were redeployed in large numbers to conflict zones in Southern and Western Europe.

French men drafted by force into the Wehrmacht were overwhelmingly assigned to the Eastern European front, with about 80% being sent there from the outset and the remaining 20% dispatched to the Italian, Yugoslav, Albanian, Greek, Scandinavian and French fronts.[4] Later, the focus shifted towards the Southern and Western fronts for both *Malgré-Nous* and German troops.[5]

The number of German POWs held by the English-speaking Allies increased significantly during the conflict. From the outset, the military authorities mostly chose to transfer them away from the front lines, especially to North America – to the United States and, to a lesser extent Canada. This occurred in three successive waves, corresponding to the course of military operations: the first began in May 1943 following the surrender of the contingent of 150,000 men in the Afrika Korps at Cape Bon, Tunisia; the second followed the Allied landings in Italy, at a rate of 20,000 men per month; and the third wave began in June 1944 with the Allied landings in Normandy, as the monthly rate increased to 30,000 prisoners.[6]

The United States agreed to intern 380,000 German prisoners and thousands of "enemy aliens" within its territory to make up for the lack of internment infrastructure in Commonwealth countries, under the terms of the "50/50 Sharing Agreement".[7] This agreement, signed with the United Kingdom during the spring of 1943, stipulated that in any joint operation, the two countries would share prisoners on a 50/50 basis, regardless of which nation's army had captured the soldiers concerned. However, Britain's capacities were already over-stretched, and its government asked the US to take 130,000 prisoners in addition to its own

4 Rigoulot Pierre *L'Alsace-Lorraine pendant la guerre 1939–1945* (Editions Presses Universitaires de France 1997), 65;113.

5 Christophe Nagyos. Malgré Nous: L'incorporation de force en Alsace Moselle de 1942 à 1945. (Mulhouse: Editions L'Alsace, 2013), 22, 35.

6 Daniel Costelle, Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), 60–70, 95–99, and Prisonniers nazis en Amérique (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 60–70, 95–101.

7 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America (New York City: Stein & Day, 1979, and Scarborough House, 1996), 229 & 309.

share. The US government agreed on condition that they would be able to use the POWs as a labour force within the United States, and subject to Britain footing the bill for shipping the men back to Europe when the time came. Under this agreement, 175,000 German prisoners held in the United States were transferred back to the United Kingdom after the end of the conflict.

In total, nearly 425,000 POWs from the German army were dispatched to 666 camps throughout the United States between 1942 and 1946 – 155,000 to the main camps, and 511,000 in secondary camps.[8] The number of prisoners rose to 306,856 in the autumn of 1944, then to 371,505 by June 1945.[9] Nearly 400,000 German prisoners were detained in the United Kingdom, including 33,000 men repatriated from Canada and 79,000 from Belgium.

Census statistics on German POWs after the end of the war should be considered with caution, however, as data varies according to reference dates and geographical perimeters. Nevertheless, the number of German POWs detained by the Western Allies was much higher than the number detained by the Soviets.

At the beginning of the summer of 1945, out of a total of 8.6 million German soldiers detained, more than 2.1 million were in the hands of the Soviets, while 6.5 million were detained by the Western Allies: 51% by the British, 44% by the Americans, and 5% by the French.[10]

In terms of location, they were detained in Britain, United States and France, although at the end of the war the majority were held in territories over which these countries had military control – mainly Germany, Austria, Italy and Belgium.[11] We can safely assume that there were some *Malgré-Nous* among the German prisoners, as their assignment mirrored that of the German troops.

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8 Daniel Costelle, Prisonniers nazis en Amérique (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 11.

9 Laurent Kleinhentz and Edwin Neis, Malgré-nous, qui êtes-vous? Histoire d'Incorporés de Force Mosellans Guerre de 39–45 (Faulquemont: Editions Faulquemont, 1997), 290–94.

Daniel Costelle, Prisonniers nazis en Amérique (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 9, 10, 231.

10 Eugène Riedweg, Les Malgré-Nous: Histoire de l'Incorporation de Force des Alsaciens-Mosellans (Strasbourg: Editions du Rhin, 1995), 198–199. Judith M. Gansberg, Stalag USA (New York City: Thomas Y Crowell Company, 1977), 1.

11 On the treatment of German POWs by English-speaking belligerent powers, see also in the "Maschke Commission" history series two volumes of Herman Jung's *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanicher Hand: USA (vol. X, pt. 1,* 1972), and of Kurt W. Böhme's *Die Deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand: Europa (vol. X, Pt. 2,* 1973). See also Rüdiger Overmans' *Kriegsgefangenschaft im Zweiten Weltkrieg: eine vergleichende Perspektive*, Verlag: Ternitz-Pottschach: Höller (1999).

After the setbacks suffered in the Soviet Union, German troops were redeployed to the Mediterranean and to Normandy following the Allied landings. The fate of the *Malgré-Nous* prisoners was predominantly the same as that of the soldiers from the German army, even though a significant proportion of them surrendered of their own volition.

Indeed, many *Malgré-Nous* prisoners were detained by the Allies, as is testified by the many accounts in books and newspaper articles since 1945. This was confirmed – without being quantified, however – in 1976 by the French historian Jean-Paul Bled in his preface to Daniel Costelle's book,[12] in which he raises the following question about those detained at Camp Meade (Maryland): "Who were they, these non-German anti-Nazi prisoners wearing the uniform of the Third Reich?". He answered without ambiguity that the "nationals from the occupied countries were mostly those who had been incorporated into the Wehrmacht, either willingly or by force: Luxembourgers, Belgians, Alsatians and Lorrainers, to which could be added recruits from Upper Silesia in Poland, Styria and Upper Carniola in Slovenia".

The captives from Alsace and Moselle can be divided into three broad categories: men who surrendered on the battlefield, men who deserted, and men who refused to join the German forces, remaining hidden in their regions of origin. Most prisoners of war – about 50,000 men – met the same fate as the soldiers of the German army: they were held captive by the Western Allies in similar locations to the German prisoners.

Malgré-Nous: The Other, Invisible Prisoners of War

No source specifically deals with the captivity of citizens from Alsace and Moselle, drafted by force and then detained by the Western Allies, who were almost systematically assimilated – especially the Americans – as German POWs, at least until their surrender on 8 May 1945.

Nevertheless, research has revealed many insights – often as a result of what was not said – concerning how these prisoners were treated, which can help guide future research. Once the "German" POWs were in the hands of the Western Allies, the question of their ideological and national heterogeneity was inevitably raised. This in turn led to methods for "sorting" (or even "segregating") the

12 Daniel Costelle, *Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), 70.

prisoners, although these were often more along the lines of political differences within the German army, rather than by nationality.

The heterogeneity of "German" POWs was subsequently recognised. The Allies had to deal with the complex question of nationality, since article 9 of the Geneva Convention stated that combatants should, as far as possible, avoid bringing together prisoners of different races or nationalities in the same camp. The authorities were thus only too aware of the potential for political antagonism and an escalation of political violence within the prison camps.[13]

Prisoners with Nazi sympathies wanted to establish their ideological nationalist domination over the broader mass of German prisoners, and this was reflected in how camps operated in North America (United States and Canada) and in Great Britain. Put simply, this led to the establishment – especially in North America – of a parallel German administration to deal with organisation and discipline, applying punitive measures that fostered a climate of aggression, or even violence, between prisoners.[14]

This administration was characterised by the reapplication of National Socialist operating methods: leaders with a nationalist profile, often even fanatical Nazis, held a stranglehold over their fellow prisoners, imposing blind obedience based on respect for the military hierarchy and allegiance to the Führer. It also pursued the clandestine activities of the Gestapo, which terrorised non-Nazis by blacklisting the names of "guilty" prisoners, censoring correspondence, and mistreating those who complained to the Allied authorities. They even succeeded in having lists of alleged anti-Nazis sent to Germany, as reported by the magazine *The Atlantic Monthly* in November 1944.[15]

Finally, the actions of clandestine paramilitary courts, known as "kangaroo courts" or "courts of honour", must be mentioned. Composed of individuals of the highest ranks from the three military branches, they enforced military and ideological discipline, particularly by preventing attempts to collaborate with the enemy. They met to "judge" any behaviour viewed as traitorous to the Hitlerian cause and passed "sentences", which ranged from isolation to death by hanging or drowning. For anti-Nazi prisoners, whether alleged or real, this resulted in a series of abuses and persecutions entailing physical and mental harassment, from

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13 Judith M. Gansberg, Stalag USA (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 17–19, 141.
14 Arthur Smith, *The war for the German mind: re-educating Hitler's soldiers* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 1996), 61–62; 77.
15 James H. Powers, "What to do with German prisoners", published on 19/11/44 in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

bullying, beatings and mutilations to summary executions – indeed, 167 executions were reported on United States soil at the end of the conflict.[16]

For a long time, this situation was not officially confirmed by the United States Department of War. Two reasons can be put forward to explain this relative tolerance: in terms of principles, the Americans' hostility towards German "business" resulted in an indifference to inter-German conflicts; and at the operational level, maintaining Nazi discipline was in the Americans' interests since it facilitated the task of American commanders in these camps. Given this position, the American military hierarchy intervened only when the abuses committed by the Nazis became public, and/or when they affected the security of the camps. This is what happened when the phenomenon began to leak to the American press, which exposed the authorities' failings. According to Arthur L. Smith Jr, the journalists who interviewed German prisoners affirmed that:

"This system of secret terror is known. Its presence is often attested to in grim fashion – as when German prisoners of war were found hanged, apparently 'dead from suicide'. There have been more than a dozen instances of actual murder. Fellow prisoners of the victims as a rule offer no assistance to the military in probing these 'accidents'. Having seen what happened, they fear to testify."[17]

The American military authorities became concerned by this situation between the end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944, as the increasing number of dead and wounded caused them to realise something was wrong. Originally convinced that the anti-Nazis – who were often involved in unrest – were the problem, after listening to their testimonies, they eventually concluded that they were more victims than instigators. The phenomenon even reached the ears of President Roosevelt, whose wife directly informed him of the matter. Consequently, the military authorities decided that Nazis should be separated from other German POWs to avoid any[18] political trouble with non-Nazis.

16 Daniel Costelle, Prisonniers nazis en Amérique (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 79.

17 Arthur Smith, in his book *The war for the German mind (New York City: Berghahn Books, 1996)*, 62; 77, who referenced and quoted the following articles: James H. Powers, "What to do with German prisoners", published on 19/11/44 in *The Atlantic Monthly*, and "Editor says Nazis kill captives here", published on 24/02/44 in *The New York Times*; Paul Winkler, "Reeducating Germans propaganda in prison camps", published on 10/07/44 in *The Washington Post*; D. D. Bromley, "War prisoners include Nazis and anti-Nazis", published on 12/08/44 in the *New York Herald Tribune*.

18 Judith M. Gansberg, Stalag USA (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 138–142.

In the United Kingdom, members of parliament denounced the violence perpetrated by the Nazi military hierarchy, which led the authorities to deploy a programme of denazification and ideological re-education for German prisoners.[19]

Beyond the political antagonisms, there was also the embarrassing question of the heterogeneity of the "German" army.[20] As the fronts shifted, the ranks of German forces included soldiers who would have been considered nationals from other countries prior to March 1938. These men came either from conquered territories or allied nations, and had been recruited on a voluntary basis or through forced conscription. However, they were all considered *de facto* "German" because of the uniform they wore, in spite of their varied nationalities, which included Finnish, Dutch, Belgian, Luxembourgish, French, Austrian, Czech, Yugoslav, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Romanian, and even Georgian and Mongolian.

Maxwell McKnight, who oversaw the Special Projects Division responsible for the re-education of German prisoners, pointed out that these soldiers were considered to be German even though they were not, and English-German interpreters were the first to report cases of prisoners who barely spoke German. However, this situation was only dealt with to a very limited extent as, for various reasons, only two categories among all the detained nationals, received any public coverage: Austrian and Italian soldiers detained in the United States.[21]

Austrians

The Austrians' specific situation regarding the *Anschluss* raised the question of whether they should be separated from other German prisoners. There were two sets of arguments and initiatives in their favour: at a legal and diplomatic level, the *Anschluss* had never been ratified by either the United States government, as Secretary of State Cordell Hull pointed out on 27 July 1942, or by the Allies in general, as noted in a joint statement made in Moscow by Eden and Molotov on 1 November 1943, who considered this annexation to be null and void. In addition, article 9 of the Geneva Convention stated that combatants should, as far as possi-

19 Faulk, Henry, *Group captives: the re-education of German prisoners of war in Britain 1945–1948* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), 79–85, and Arthur Smith, *The war for the German mind: re-educating Hitler's soldiers* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 1996), 61–62; 77.

20 Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York City: Stein & Day, 1979, and Scarborough House, 1996), 3, 9, 15, 41, 149, 174,180–186.

21 David Fiedler, *The enemy among us: POWs in Missouri during World War II* (Jefferson City: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2003), 32–33.

ble, avoid bringing together prisoners of different races or nationalities in the same camp.[22]

At the political and media level, when the public became aware of the situation of German POWs, many supported the separation of Austrians, who were considered to be “redeemable”, from Germans, seen as definitively beyond redemption. *The New York Times* was flooded with letters demanding that this separation should be part of any re-education programme. The event was reported in articles published on 14 and 20 July 1944. Herman P. Eberharter, a member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania, advocated their case before Congress in a passionate speech, and the “Committee for National Morale” campaigned for the “rescue” of Austrian prisoners. Austrian prisoners themselves took the initiative to send several petitions to the Office of the Provost Marshal General (OPMG), the supreme military authority on prison camps, in which they expressed their aversion to everything related to the Reich. They also complained of the numerous discriminations and brutalities they had suffered at the hands of their German fellow prisoners. In addition, 14 prisoners from Camp Chaffee (Arkansas) publicly sent a petition to this effect in February 1944 to Archduke Otto von Habsburg, heir to the Austro-Hungarian crown, then in exile in New York.[23]

The position of Henry L. Stimson, the Secretary of War, gradually evolved over the course of these events. He was initially in denial, affirming on 29 April 1944 that article 9 of the Geneva Convention did not oblige the United States to separate prisoners of Austrian origin or nationality from the others. He then changed his mind, declaring on 24 July 1944 that “The War Department is entirely willing to give further consideration to the possibility of such segregation should cogent reasons appear for holding it to be politically advantageous.”[24]

However, there was obviously very little political advantage to be gained from segregating Austrian prisoners from their German counterparts at this late stage of the war, at least according to the position taken by Major Edward Davison, deputy director of the Prisoner of War Division of the OPMG, in August 1944. At the military level, Major Davison thought that the US army did not have sufficient human resources (in terms of manpower and skills) to identify and reliably select all prisoners who claimed to have Austrian nationality. Despite how complex it was to determine nationality, he did consider this selection process to be necessary, espe-

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22 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America (New York City: Stein & Day, 1979, and Scarborough House, 1996), 3, 9, 15, 41, 149, 174,180–186.
23 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America (New York City: Stein & Day, 1979, and Scarborough House, 1996), 182–183.
24 Arnold Krammer, Nazi Prisoners of War in America (New York City: Stein & Day, 1979, and Scarborough House, 1996), 3, 9, 15, 41, 149, 174,180–186.

cially with the ambiguous situation of Austrians who had lived and/or worked in Germany for most of their lives. However, Austrians were ultimately not separated from German nationals, with whom they remained mixed until the end of the war; this was despite isolated initiatives, such as one dated 26 May 1945 when a group of POWs of Austrian nationality located in Camp Ellis, Illinois, petitioned to join the American forces, work in defence plants, or donate their blood.[25]

A number of Austrians were also taken prisoner in Greece and transferred to Australia, along with Germans in the same situation. This created sporadic dissension between these groups, both for patriotic and political reasons, during the conflict and even after the surrender of Germany. For instance, some Austrians stuck together in the Graytown camp, where they left the camp orchestra in protest and openly displayed their nationalist resentment in several football matches.

On one occasion, when an Austrian stated that he "did not feel German", an officer stigmatised him in front of the other German prisoners, who shouted: "Hang him!".[26] As a consequence, Germans exerted psychological pressure on the Austrians through ostracism, publicly stigmatising them as traitors to their homeland, and even making death threats.

Given the shifting manner in which the issue of Austrian POWs' nationality was handled, the same question obviously arises for POWs from Alsace and Moselle, who also found themselves among "German" prisoners. Indeed, the situation of these soldiers shows similarities on three levels: on a military level, they had all been captured wearing the German uniform without any distinctive sign of their nationality; on a legal and diplomatic level, all were nationals from territories annexed by the Third Reich, finally, on a cultural level, they mostly all spoke Germanic languages. In this context, what were the reasons for the total absence of US initiatives in favour of the *Malgré-Nous* when it came to both sorting and repatriating them?

Italians

As Axis soldiers, Germans and Italians were initially both attributed the same POW status, as defined by the Geneva Convention.[27] This situation changed when Italy officially joined the Allies on 8 October 1943 after the government led by

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25 NARA, College Park, Maryland, USA, RG 389-BOX 1342.

26 Winter, Barbara., *Stalag Australia: German Prisoners of War in Australia.* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), 305.

27 David Fiedler, *The Enemy Among Us: POWs in Missouri During World War II* (Jefferson City: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2003), 385–409.

Field Marshal Badoglio declared war on Germany, then issued a proclamation on 11 October calling on Italian prisoners to actively cooperate with the Allies to put an end to the occupation of their homeland by the Germans.

This new situation, which turned Italy into a co-belligerent of the Allied powers, changed the status of the Italian prisoners, who then became what might be described as “guest prisoners”. From then on, they could be assigned tasks to support the war effort, from which the Geneva Convention had until then excluded them. This meant that the specific Italian Service Unit (ISU) programme could then be implemented, whose goal was to provide non-combatant support for the US army, and which lasted 18 months. The “candidates” were selected on a voluntary basis through a screening programme led by Captain Paul Neuland, assisted by four soldiers, including an Italian commander. Under the programme, 50,000 prisoners were interviewed over a period of four months, and any pro-fascist elements could be rooted out.[28]

Beginning in March 1944, nearly 30,000 Italian prisoners – more than half the total number of prisoners –left their camps and were sent to military installations, where they carried out missions previously attributed to American soldiers and civilians. They enjoyed more freedom, better pay, expanded responsibilities, less monotonous tasks, and opportunities to interact with civilian populations.[29]

Given this evolution in how the Italian POWs' nationality was dealt with, the same question arises for POWs from Alsace and Moselle: there is a similarity between the two situations, so why was France not considered a co-belligerent power of the Allies, as Italy was? Why did France not issue a proclamation to French prisoners in German uniforms to actively cooperate with the Allies? Such a status would have allowed the *Malgré-Nous* prisoners to be treated in a manner similar to the Italians. Since this was not the case, why were two groups of prisoners, both of whom were nationals from distinct Allied powers, treated differently? After all, Italian soldiers benefited from special treatment, while French nationals drafted by force into the German army remained interned and mixed with other prisoners until the end of the war.

In both the cases described above, there is no mention of any American initiative in favour of the *Malgré-Nous*, similar to those taken for the Austrians and the Italians. Nor is there any record of such an initiative in Canada or the United Kingdom, even though the British government were well informed about the overall situation of the Alsace-Moselle territories and the specific phenomenon of

28 See supra David Fiedler.

29 See supra David Fiedler.

forced enrolment deployed there by the Nazis.[30] This situation could be explained by the fact that both American public opinion and political leaders were less informed about these territories than about Austria and Italy, and five factors can be put forward as potential reasons for this.

The first is media, as news related to this topic appears to have been conveyed in a very limited, if not marginal, way to the public and the authorities. Only sparse information was provided about forced enrolment and the annexation of Alsace-Moselle, which remained less known than the *Anschluss*. Italy's shift to the Allied camp, by contrast, had not gone unnoticed by the public, and opinion was generally favourable to the idea of treating Italian prisoners in a more lenient manner.

The second factor is historical, as American politicians and media knew very little about the history of Alsace and Moselle, or even the fact they existed, with the exception of a few specialist historians. By contrast, Austria was a successor state of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a major European power until 1918, which may explain why part of the American public believed that Austrians should be separated from the other "German" prisoners. Italy, meanwhile, had a large immigrant community living in the United States, and thus its distinct status became known to the American public, media and political leaders.

There was also a legal and diplomatic factor, as Alsace and Moselle were not states but "merely" French administrative departments with no diplomatic relations. Their annexation by the Third Reich had thus not given rise to an official statement rejecting it as formally as the *Anschluss*. The rejection of the *Anschluss* was a major diplomatic-military event with international resonance, as was Italy's decision to join the Allies. The fourth factor was military, as the Americans believed their army would not be able to mobilise enough people with the skills needed to manage the complex process of identifying and individually screening "German" prisoners who claimed special status, such as Austrians and other nationalities drafted by force.

Finally, there was a demographic factor: there were only a limited number of *Malgré-Nous* prisoners, who were dispersed among various camps, which made coordinated initiatives such as writing petitions (as the Austrians had done) difficult.

It should be noted, however, that the French authorities, who were aware of the fact that Alsace and Moselle were virtually invisible to the American political establishment, had taken the initiative from the beginning of 1944 to raise aware-

30 Garnett, David *The secret history of PWE: the Political Warfare Executive, 1939–1945* (St Ermin's Press 2002), 11,13, 48–50, 75–76, 86, 91

ness among military authorities about the conditions faced by French soldiers who had been drafted by force. The leader of this initiative was General Alphonse Juin, who as chief of the French National Defense Staff (Chef d'état-major général de la défense nationale) was one of the principal figures in the French military. However, the aim was more to address the risk of Allied forces inflicting harm – incarceration or worse – on prisoners and escapees from Alsace and Moselle when liberating French territory, since these forces were unaware of the political and historical complexity related to their situation.

This overview raises two points about the fate of the *Malgré-Nous* among the German troops held in the United States: first, that General Juin's initiative went relatively unnoticed by the American military authorities; and second, that the French authorities restricted the initiative to prisoners and/or escapees from Alsace and Moselle in French liberated territories, without extending it to prisoners already on American soil. These subjects may thus be avenues for future research.

The deployment of the "separation" doctrine was the practical and logical consequence of the belated recognition of heterogeneity among "German" POWs. "Sorting", a compulsory step to deal with the ideological heterogeneity within the German army by separating prisoners, was only used on a very limited scale to separate prisoners of different nationalities.

Ideological sorting was an urgent priority, as the ideological struggles between anti- and pro-Nazis who sought to control prison camps grew in intensity. The abuses and acts of violence committed against anti-Nazi prisoners by Nazis to ensure their domination even escalated to actual murders, requiring the Allied authorities to take measures, albeit only at a relatively late stage.[31] The American military authorities did begin to carry out some sorting from autumn of 1943, but this remained local and sporadic in some camps where, "in the most unconcealable cases, enclosures had been set up to protect the unfortunate prisoners hunted down by the Gestapo"; this measure began to increase in pace from spring 1944.[32]

At the end of summer 1944, the British and the Canadians also introduced a structured process to select German prisoners,[33] enabling the British to deploy a denazification and ideological re-education programme between mid-1945 and 1948. The British authorities had previously asked the Canadians and Australians to adopt the terms of their political sorting, but when they tried to coordinate with the Americans, the War Department did not follow up on their multiple re-

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31 Arthur Smith, *The war for the German mind: re-educating Hitler's soldiers* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 1996), 68–71.

32 Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag USA* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 58–62.

33 Faulk, Henry, *Group captives: the re-education of German prisoners of war in Britain 1945–1948* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977), 79–85.

quests. The US thus proceeded on its own terms, convinced that the POW management programme should be American only and reluctant to be constrained by a system of agreements between Allies.

Consequently, while cases of ideological struggles were found among German prisoners detained by the various English-speaking Allied powers, the doctrines to handle them often differed in many respects, although there were certain common features related to the goals, processes, and results of the separation initiatives. One short-term objective was omnipresent: identifying and isolating anti- and non-Nazi elements to protect them from Nazi persecution. The separation processes were all structured around two approaches, which were at times applied separately and at others both at the same time in North America: individual interrogations conducted by intelligence officers (on their own if they spoke German, or else with interpreters); and/or written questionnaires.

Apart from the situation in Australia, this resulted in prisoners being classified into one of three categories based on their connection to Nazism: “White” for those who openly declared themselves to be anti-Nazi; “Black” for zealous Nazis; and “Grey”, a default category for those who did not fit into either of the two previous categories, who were considered as moderate German nationalists or showed no clear interest in / had no strong opinion about politics. Once the sorting process to identify the pro-Nazis had been finished, the prisoners were gathered and separated either into dedicated camps or specific enclosures within their original camps. However, separation initiatives also differed from one country to the next in many respects.

The Australian Doctrine of “Separation”

There were around 1,300 prisoners from the three German military branches – Heer (Afrika Korps), Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine – on Australian soil, having arrived in two main waves.[34] The first wave consisted of the 983 men captured by Australians in the Mediterranean during land and air battles in the Libyan and Egyptian conflict areas and, to a lesser extent, the Greek and Cretan areas. These were transported by sea, mostly on the RMS *Queen Elizabeth* liner, which docked in Sydney on 23 August 1941. The second wave consisted of 315 German sailors rescued by Australians from the *Kormoran*, an auxiliary cruiser of the Kriegsmar-

34 Winter, Barbara., Stalag Australia: German Prisoners of War in Australia. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986).

ine which disappeared off Western Australia on 19 November 1941 during an engagement against the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Sydney*.

Considering the diversity of nationalities within the German army, the absence of *Malgré-Nous* from Alsace and Moselle can be explained by the chronology of events: the vast majority of prisoners were captured between January and December 1941, whereas forced enrolment in Alsace and Moselle began in October 1942. Given the low number of prisoners, especially officers, Australian military intelligence had a fairly clear idea of who were Nazi sympathisers and who were not. However, from the moment the Allies crossed the Rhine in March 1945, it suspected them of categorising prisoners who had expressed doubts about the final victory of the Reich as "defeatists". The intelligence staff believed that lists had even been sent to Germany, so that reprisals could be exacted on the prisoners in question. They therefore identified about 60 Nazis categorised as "fanatical" at the Murchison camp, and about 20 at the Graytown camp.

An ideological sorting process was carried out by military intelligence, but at a late stage (in July 1945), at only two camps (Murchison and Marrinup), and in a haphazard manner. The prisoners there had to fill out a form designed to describe their military and political history, but this turned out to be so complicated, and was so poorly translated into German, that it was understood very differently from one person to another, making it almost useless.[35]

The Canadian Doctrine of "Separation"

Upon the request of the British authorities, the Canadian government hastily set up facilities to detain nearly 35,000 German POWs in a network of about fifteen camps managed by the army, located mainly in the provinces of Quebec, Ontario and Alberta. The lack of preparation by Canadian authorities explained the many "failures" and "weaknesses" found in the way these camps operated, in particular the intense efforts by Nazi prisoners to establish an ideological and nationalist grip over the prisoners. By the end of 1943, this situation had begun to worry the British military authorities: they considered that it compromised the prisoners' ideological re-education, which was necessary to (re)instil democratic values in them in preparation for their return to Germany. The Canadian government was also concerned about the issue: in 1943, it set up a Psychological Warfare Commit-

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35 Barbara Winter, *Stalag Australia: German Prisoners of War In Australia* (North Ryde, NSW, Australia: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1986), 4, 6–7, 11–13, 16, 44, 302–303, 305, 312–313, 386–388.

tee, then ordered a report to be sent to the Head of Canadian Intelligence Services. The report, dated 27 March 1944, confirmed the analysis outlined above.

On this basis, in August 1944 the Canadian authorities reacted by launching the classified programme "PHERUDA", named after the prisoner classification system. The selection method was based on a combination of two sets of information: the PHERUDA file, and an interrogation report.[36] The PHERUDA file was a method applied from 5 August 1944 by the Psychological Warfare Committee, and based on seven sets of questions, the first letter of each keyword forming the acronym PHERUDA:

P for their Political leaning, from democrat to exalted Nazi
H for their attitude towards Hitler: from anti-Hitler to fanatically pro-Hitler
E for their Education: from university to minimum
R for Religion: from devout Christian to neo-pagan
U for Usefulness for purposes of labour: from willing and skilled to refusing to work
D for Dependability: from dependable to undependable
A for their Attitude towards the Allies: from pro-Allies to anti-Allies

The interrogation report enabled the authorities to collect information on the prisoner's personal life through five sets of questions: socio-cultural background (education, work, hobbies, home life), history (attitude, work file, places of detention), political history (how politically oriented the prisoner was while in Germany), military history (attitude, units and fronts where assigned) and camp information, and examiner's remarks (personality, truthfulness, reliable).

By the end of September 1945, only slightly more than 9,000 prisoners out of a potential total of 35,000 had been classified under one of the three categories mentioned above. This extremely slow pace of categorisation can likely be explained by the complexity of the process and the lack of dedicated human resources.[37]

The British Doctrine of "Separation"

For the British, one main purpose of identifying and segregating anti-Nazi elements was to alleviate the acute shortage of manpower in the country by selecting reliable

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36 Martin Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front: German POWs and "Enemy Aliens" in Southern Québec, 1940–46* (Québec: Outremont, 2010), and *Prisonniers de guerre et internés allemands dans le sud du Québec* (Paris: Athéna Editions, 2010), 73, 140–43.

37 Yves Bernard, *Trop loin de Berlin: des prisonniers allemands au Canada 1939–1946* (Québec: Éditions du Septentrion, 1995), back cover, 7, 15, 265, 269–71, 281–285, 296–300.

profiles who would be suitable for work, but also to identify which prisoners would need ideological re-education before their repatriation to Germany. The method used was individual interrogations, but resources were initially limited, with just half a dozen officers assigned to the task, only two of whom had experience with such work. From April 1945, these "screening officers", as they were officially called, were systematically trained and continuously monitored. However, there was no doctrine to guide them aside from the main strategy: to separate reliable anti-Nazi elements from fanatical National Socialists.

In practical terms, the officers applied two selection criteria to the prisoners: attitude towards discipline, and ideology and attitudes as shaped by each prisoner's family and social history. The "separating operation" was carried out at several re-education centres, including the Wilton Park Estate in Buckinghamshire, which had been used as a prisoner of war camp during the conflict. More than 4,000 German prisoners attended re-education classes at Wilton Park between January 1946 and June 1948.[38]

The American Doctrine of "Separation"

The US War Department launched a "POW Program"[39] aimed at denazification, one of the aims of which was to differentiate between apolitical prisoners, ardent Nazis, and genuine or opportunistic anti-Nazis. To avoid stirring up conflicts between groups of prisoners, this initiative remained confidential until 1945, including for members of the House of Representatives. After inspecting the Papago Park camp, Arizona Congressman Richard F. Harles declared in April 1945 that the German prisoners were "spoiled, too well fed, fat as pigs, and it is a pity that the USA has not yet undertaken anything for their denazification".

The priority for the American authorities was to ensure the protection of anti- and non-Nazis by opting for a pragmatic "segregation" approach, which involved separating prisoners from each other. This was a "new policy adopted to physically divide the prisoners into three groups: Nazis, anti-Nazis and others", as presented by Major William F. Matschullart from Headquarters, 7th Service Command, at a conference held on 20 July 1944 by the OPMG.[40] The authorities

38 Arthur Smith, *The war for the German mind: re-educating Hitler's soldiers* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 1996), 68–71.

39 Laurent Kleinhentz and Edwin Neis, *Malgré-nous, qui êtes-vous ? Histoire d'Incorporés de Force Mosellans Guerre de 39–45* (Faulquemont: Editions Faulquemont, 1997), 290–94.

40 See No. RG 389, Records of the OPMG).

wanted to assess whether this doctrine, which had already been sporadically implemented since 1943 at a local scale, could be extended.

The separation process was based on two approaches. The first, oral interrogations, could last several weeks and were conducted by American officers, either on their own and in German for those who were Jewish or political emigrants, or with English and Russian interpreter officers.[41] The second approach was the completion of written questionnaires, although there was a fear that these would be sent to the German authorities. Daniel Costelle writes:

The anti-Nazi prisoners filled out a questionnaire about the circumstances of their capture, requesting it not to be transmitted to the German government, so that people in their country will not think they may have surrendered at the first opportunity. They are afraid of reprisals against their families . . . The pro-Nazis refused to fill out this questionnaire for fear of being regarded as anti-Nazis by the German government.[42]

The Americans gradually set up a basic process of sorting prisoners by gathering fanatical Nazi activists together, either in dedicated camps or specific enclosures within their camps of origin.[43] This approach was immediately criticised as insufficient in four respects. First, it was seen as being not direct enough, as the officers were trying to determine the prisoners' political orientations but were not authorised to question them directly on this very subject. It was therefore up to the prisoners to spontaneously express this themselves; however, since they were unaware that it had to be on their own initiative and may have been unsure how their interrogators would react, only the most hardcore anti-Nazis ventured to express their views while other prisoners remained cautiously silent. Many journalists who covered this topic in 1943 and 1944 saw this lack of foresight by the American authorities as the main cause of the deaths and injuries among the prisoners, and believed it prevented them from efficiently protecting potential Allies within the camps.[44]

The second criticism was of the lack of protection offered. The conditions in which oral interrogations took place did not guarantee that the exchanges would stay confidential: prisoners were interviewed face to face on tables close enough for them to hear the conversations held on the next tables, thus risking that a

41 Daniel Costelle, *Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), 89–90.

42 Daniel Costelle, *Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), 63 (cf. Military inspection report by Captain Maxwell S. McKnight, Camp McCain, Mississippi, 10 December 1945).

43 Daniel Costelle, *Prisonniers nazis en Amérique* (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 234.

44 Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag USA* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 58–62.

Nazi sympathiser would pick up on the words of an anti-Nazi, who would risk reprisals.

Third, the approach was seen as failing to anticipate and prevent the abuses from taking place before the segregation actually came into effect. In November 1944, the American magazine *The Atlantic Monthly* criticised the first results of the sorting process, pointing out "shortcomings in our present practice" and "other defects in the Army's procedure. One has to do with the screening of the prisoners as they arrive at the camps." It concluded: "Separation of identifiable Nazis from anti-Nazis [. . .] is urgently needed to ensure the safety of the prisoners themselves."[45]

Fourth, the approach was criticised as being insufficiently segmented, as its overly "binary" political nature compromised the separation results by failing to use arguments defined according to other criteria, and was therefore better targeted towards groups that could be identified more precisely by geographical origin, religion or socio-professional category. As journalist Paul Winkler wrote in the *Washington Post* on 10 July 1944:

The crude separation already set up between Nazis and anti-Nazis is far from enough. It is very unlikely that this separation was made in a precise fashion . . . In fact, they should be gathered according to other considerations than just political ones: region of origin, religion, depth of their faith, etc.

Arguments that would suit a Rhinelander could be insufficient in the case of a Prussian; your approach with a doctor may be different from the proper one with a blacksmith.[46]

Fort Eustis, an American Exception

There was a notable exception to the "binary" sorting mode described above, which was the initiative developed in late autumn 1945 by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davison, head of the Prisoner of War Special Projects Division (POWSPD), along with his team. The programme took place at Fort Eustis[47], a camp in Virginia housing a special "school" intended to train elements who were likely to support the occupation authorities once repatriated to Germany. Given the stakes, it naturally involved a much more sophisticated selection process than that described above. It took place in the following three stages:

45 James H. Powers *What to do with German prisoners* (The Atlantic Monthly 19 December 1944), 47.
46 Daniel Costelle, *Prisonniers nazis en Amérique* (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 235–236.
47 Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag USA* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 138–142.

Stage 1: Identification of Profiles in the Camps

Screening was carried out by intelligence officers stationed locally, who used two selection criteria: a detailed evaluation questionnaire (*Fragebogen*), and the existence of a proven track record of the prisoner's manifestly anti-Nazi position. This information was either provided by a camp commander, or found in the prisoner's file. The screening focused on the prisoners' attitude in captivity, during which they had to have demonstrated true democratic sensitivity by their actions, and/or during the period preceding captivity, if the prisoner had proven past membership to an anti-Nazi group or organisation of a political, union, religious or racial nature, and/or had been interned in a concentration camp. If these criteria were met, the prisoner was subject to the second screening test.

Stage 2: Subject Questioning

Questioning was led by two Americans, an officer and a non-commissioned soldier belonging to the POWSPD. Approved profiles were characterised by reliability, loyalty, willingness to cooperate, willingness to work, and mental stability; other categories were automatically excluded, including communists, career officers at or beyond the rank of major, members of a police or Nazi organization, prisoners not coming from an American occupation zone, and also – remarkably – any prisoner who could not be repatriated to Germany or Austria because he was a national from an Allied country or stated that he had a non-German nationality.

This provision was explicitly mentioned in an official American document,[48] which clearly proves that the American authorities were aware of the existence of non-German nationals that may have come from Allied countries, which implied an additional layer of sorting based on this criterion (see below). These non-German individuals in German uniform could have been volunteer soldiers or not, thus potentially citizens of Alsace and Moselle drafted by force. Their existence was therefore implicitly recognised by the Americans, who would perhaps have been in a position to identify and keep track of these prisoners.

48 US PMGO, Spec. Project. Div., "Screening of German prisoners of war" Projects II/III, 7 June 1945, p. 1, and "Special screening of cooperative German prisoners of war", Eustis Project, 4 April 1946, pp. 3–4.

Stage 3: Review of the Selected Files for Final Classification

The review was led by a member of the POWSPD, supported by a team of German prisoners.

The questionnaires were screened to identify any "inadequate" attitudes, and the files were then divided into three categories:[49]

"Black": unsuitable profiles since they were hardcore Nazis
"White": suitable profiles because they were proven anti-Nazis
"Grey": indeterminate profiles because they were apolitical and likely to obey authority; to be screened again for classification into one of the two previous categories
The "White" category eventually provided 23,147 prisoners, who attended the classes at Fort Eustis.[50]

As well as this ideological classification of German soldiers as Nazis – neutral or apolitical, and anti-Nazi – a second way to classify prisoners began to emerge. A difference had been sensed between "ethnic German" prisoners, who blended seamlessly into the German army, and others, who had been drafted or "persuaded" to join it; gradually, the authorities realised this distinction was needed. The intelligence services tackled this task step by step, sorting according to nationality to identify potential Allied profiles and separating them from Germans, but with very marginal results.[51]

Little information is available on this subject in the United Kingdom. We know only that the prisoner classification went further than sorting Nazis and non-Nazis, instead distinguishing prisoners of German nationality from other prisoners, in particular Austrians, who were seen as "easier to identify".

Several testimonies by the POWs from Alsace and Moselle mention their internment in a Scottish camp, probably Woodhouselee, where French recruiting officers questioned them in preparation for their engagement in the Free French Forces and their transfer for training in the Camberley camp, where they were allowed to gather and remain together "under a big tent".[52] It is not clear what

49 See supra Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag USA.*
50 Daniel Costelle, *Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), 66, 89, 90, 95, 234–236, and *Prisonniers nazis en Amérique* (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 95–101; 104–107.
51 Arthur Smith, *The war for the German mind: re-educating Hitler's soldiers* (New York City: Berghahn Books, 1996), 68–71, 78–79.
52 Mengus Nicolas *Entre 2 fronts Tome 2* (2008 Editions Pierron), 147–149.

doctrine and operational methods the British used to sort prisoners by nationality, and what the results were. These questions thus merit further research.

In Australia, despite a difficult situation in some camps as described above, the authorities considered the creation of specific detention zones to be unrealistic. The 97 prisoners who declared themselves Austrians in the Murchison camp and the 52 in the Marrinup camp therefore remained mixed with the Germans until the end of the war, just like in the United States.[53]

In the United States,[54] non-German soldiers captured in German uniform were immediately considered as German POWs, even though a significant proportion had surrendered on their first encounter with American troops. Once they were imprisoned, they nevertheless began to be sorted by nationality. The objective was to select prisoners that could be reassigned to Allied combat units on account of their nationality, even though they had worn the uniform of the Third Reich for various reasons. This mission fell to military intelligence, which identified non-German nationals from conquered countries who had been forced to join the Wehrmacht, rather than "German ethnic groups" from Germany, Austria and countries with German minorities such as Czechoslovakia, Poland and Slovenia.

Dutch, French, Estonian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Yugoslav, Luxembourgish, Russian, Hungarian, and Romanian soldiers were identified, all native to Allied territories or territories conquered by the Reich, which had pressured them to enlist at a time when they faced a shortage of manpower. Before they were allowed to be assigned to Allied combat units, prisoners were selected according to the following four criteria: they had to show values consistent with those of the Western Allies, to be physically combat-capable, to be genuine citizens of the country they claimed to be from, by birth or by descent, and to have been pressured to enlist in the German army. However, the last two criteria were difficult to enforce.

The citizenship by birth or ancestry requirement meant the prisoner had to prove his nationality, but also involved deciding whether this was legitimate or not. Indeed, given the territorial and national complexity of pre-war Europe, what nationality should be attributed to a soldier forced to serve in territories occupied by the Reich, if they were nationals from these (previously) non-German territories, had lived there, and were therefore claiming their former nationality?

It is worth noting that the term "drafted against their will" was used for the first time in this context by the American author Judith M. Gansberg.[55] Pressure to enlist in the German army was also difficult to demonstrate, given the vague-

53 Barbara Winter, *Stalag Australia: German Prisoners of War In Australia* (North Ryde, NSW, Australia: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1986), 304–306, 313; 320.

54 Judith M. Gansberg, *Stalag USA* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 17–19,141.

55 Ibid 18.

ness of this criterion. For instance, how could volunteers who collaborated with Nazi Germany be reliably identified and separated from citizens of Alsace, Moselle or Luxembourg who were genuinely drafted by force?

Considering this doubt, some countries made it known through their consuls in Washington that they refused to repatriate their nationals who had undeniably served Nazi Germany, even though they seemed to meet the four American criteria.[56] A group of Luxembourgers therefore had no choice but to send a request directly to the Grand Duchess to be allowed to fight alongside the Allies, after being kept as prisoners of war in the United States.[57]

With such complex sorting criteria, teams of carefully selected and trained examiners had to be called upon to individually question each "German" prisoner. Their productivity was therefore quite low, which may explain the modest results: 700 to 900 non-German and anti-Nazi prisoners were gathered and sent to Camp Butner (North Carolina), an international camp where a dedicated perimeter was set up for prisoners of a dozen nationalities including Belgians and Luxembourgers, as well as citizens of Moselle and Alsace who testified that they were interned there. Out of a total of nearly 380,000 prisoners in German uniform, only around 500 were repatriated to their national armies of origin, and among these it seemed there were no Frenchmen.[58]

Nevertheless, a few examples of more empirical sorting should also be mentioned. In June 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Edwards, deputy director of the Prisoner of War Division of the OPMG, asked the general in charge of the 4th national service whether two German sailors of Polish origin detained at Camp Blanding could be transferred to Camp Butner.[59] On 11 June 1944, the OPMG reported to the Department of State[60] complaints from POWs of Dutch origin detained at Camp Butner, who wanted to be freed to fight alongside Dutch forces; on 9 April 1945, the Department of State communicated to the Dutch embassy that 147 German POW of Dutch origin interned at Camp Butner were planned to be transferred to Curacao Island to join the Dutch forces.

In July 1945, Captain Dwight Field, who headed the Clewiston camp, listed 26 "German prisoners" who claimed to in fact be a mix of four other nationalities:

56 Judith M. Gansberg, Stalag USA (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 17–19, 141.
57 Ibid, 17–19, 141.
58 Ibid, 17–19, 141.
59 Robert D. Billinger, Hitler's soldiers in the sunshine state: German POW in Florida (University Press of Florida, 2000), xii, 54, 84, 261.
60 NARA, College Park, Maryland, USA, RG 389-BOX 1356.

16 Austrians, seven Czechs, two Italians, and one Pole.[61] However, all those who had not met the above-mentioned selection criteria, or had been rejected by their governments, remained detained with the Germans; they were then repatriated to the country corresponding to the uniform they were wearing when captured, in accordance with the terms of the Geneva Convention.[62]

We therefore observe that while the American authorities acknowledged that there were POWs of other nationalities wearing the German uniform, they do not seem to have provided themselves with the means to identify and handle them, and even less to repatriate them. Ultimately, if all English-speaking Allies proved able to identify German prisoners at the ideological level and then separate them, why did they not do the same, and on a comparable scale, with the criterion of nationality?

To answer this question, two sets of assumptions can be made, based on either indifference or powerlessness. The Allies might have shown indifference about this topic if they did not feel that it would give them a strategic advantage from a military and/or diplomatic standpoint, as may have been the case in the United States. Indifference could also be explained by inadequate information and/or lobbying from Free France towards the relevant authorities. Other explanations may be a failure by the prisoners themselves to take the initiative, or insufficient knowledge and/or visibility of the detained nationals.

An alternative, more likely explanation for not beginning sorting on a large-scale basis may be the powerlessness of the authorities, as a result of insufficient numbers and the inability of intelligence staff or inadequate doctrinal guidelines. Indeed, the only cases when Americans accepted to screen French POWs from Alsace or Moselle and separate them from other German POW occurred when Free France authorities took the initiative to ask for their release by providing specific individual information, including names, serial numbers and full addresses of the POW camps.[63]

In this context, it does not seem that many (if any) *Malgré-Nous* detained in English-speaking Allied countries successfully managed to secure recognition by the military authorities. As outlined above, there are many possible reasons to explain this: it may have been that nationality criteria were not applied, that interrogations were not led in such a way as to determine nationality, or there may have been a fear of reprisals.

61 Robert D. Billinger, *Hitler's soldiers in the sunshine state: German POW in Florida* (University Press of Florida, 2000), xii, 54, 84, 261.

62 Judith M. Gansberg, Stalag USA (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), 17–19, 141.

63 NARA, College Park, Maryland, USA, RG 389-BOX 2470.

Malgré-Nous: the prisoners of war treated like everyone else

Since there was no significant sorting by nationality that would have revealed their specific situation, some 50,000 *Malgré-Nous* were detained by the Western Allies both on their national soil and in the foreign territories they controlled. The English-speaking authorities and the German military hierarchy treated them in the same way as all the other prisoners.[64] In comparison to the grim events that occurred in the Soviet POW camps, particularly the Tambov camp, it can be assumed that the fate of the *Malgré-Nous* captured by the Western Allies was generally less appalling than what was inflicted on those who fell into the hands of the Russians, with a mortality rate of between 0.6 and 3% depending on the place and the period – much lower than the rate in Soviet camps.[65]

However, the *Malgré-Nous* prisoners were not all well treated – far from it. Authors like Eugène Riedweg have not hesitated to use strong terms such as “scandal” and “tragedy”. Riedweg evoked “ill-treatment”, even “suffering”, describing them as “victims”, questioning the relationship between the *Malgré-Nous* and the Western victors, and pointing to a liberator-jailer paradox. Although their conditions of captivity varied significantly on a material level, how they were physically and psychologically treated tended to be relatively similar.

In the United States, economic imperatives dictated the material conditions of captivity – away from the front, they were determined primarily by the state of the war effort. In terms of productive activities, from March 1943 the United States had to deal with a human resources shortage resulting from two opposing realities: more workers were needed both to ensure the continuity of agricultural and industrial production and to strengthen the latter in order to develop military equipment production; at the same time, the country was facing a decline in the domestic workforce following the progressive mobilisation of all available men.[66]

Where could this missing manpower be found? The answer was naturally sought among the hundreds of thousands of German and Italian prisoners held in the United States, who were used in non-military activities, as authorised by the Geneva Convention. The rules regarding material conditions were set by the manual *Enemy prisoners of war and civilian internees*, usually referred as “Manual 62”, published in early 1942 by the War Department. This kind of collective labour

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64 Gross, Joseph François, *Le génocide alsacien-mosellan* (Sarrebourg: Memo Lotharingiae, 1998), 41–43.

65 Eugène Riedweg, *Les Malgré-Nous: Histoire de l’Incorporation de Force des Alsaciens-Mosellans* (Strasbourg: Editions du Rhin, 1995), 198–204.

66 Laurent Kleinhentz and Edwin Neis, Malgré-nous, qui êtes-vous? Histoire d’Incorporés de Force Mosellans Guerre de 39–45 (Faulquemont: Editions Faulquemont, 1997), 290–294.

agreement set out in detail the working, employment and remuneration conditions for prisoners.[67]

In terms of remuneration, employers paid the usual salary given to the workforce at the War Department, which was in charge of paying each prisoner with vouchers amounting to 80 cents a day, or about $21 a month – similar to a GI's pay.[68] For working conditions, the maximum daily working time was set at ten hours, including return transport, and the maximum weekly working time at six days, with Sunday as the usual day of rest. An assessment made on 22 November 1944 showed that the vast majority of the available workforce (some 74,000 prisoners) were assigned to agricultural tasks; in 1945, this figure exceeded 115,000 prisoners.

Sports and cultural performances were the most popular "free" time activities among the prisoners. Camps set up football and handball teams, whose championships could be so interesting that American guards attended them with their families on Sundays. There were also theatrical performances, choirs and music ensembles. Each camp had its theatre, where actors or musicians could perform with instruments allocated by the camp management. For instance, the Trinidad camp (Colorado) was known for its performances of Goethe's *Faust*, as relayed by the newspaper *Kansas City Star*. The prisoners were also shown anti-Nazi movies produced in Hollywood between 1944 and 1946, such as *The Seventh Cross*, *Watch on the Rhine*, etc. Finally, each camp published its own newspaper, and there were English lessons for those who wished to attend.

Although the prisoners obviously needed some respite from their work, the temptation was great for allied authorities to also use this "free" time as a "discreet" denazification programme. Promoting sports and cultural activities, which were collective and "apolitical", was an opportunity to familiarise the prisoners with the leisure society model conveyed by the "American way of life" and to detach themselves from the influence of Nazism, which was still significant in some camps.

Within continental Europe, close to the combat zones, the material conditions of captivity imposed on POWs by the victors were very different from those in the camps on American soil. Conditions were much harsher, and sometimes deadly, both in the territory of the Reich and in continental France. Within Reich territory,[69] the German High Command had decided to turn over as many soldiers as possible to the Western Allies, who were thought to be more lenient than the So-

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67 Daniel Costelle, *Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), and Prisonniers nazis en Amérique (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 126–129.

68 Daniel Costelle, Prisonniers nazis en Amérique (Paris: Éditions Acropole, 2012), 127.

69 Eugène Riedweg, *Les Malgré-Nous: Histoire de l'Incorporation de Force des Alsaciens-Mosellans* (Strasbourg: Editions du Rhin, 1995), 198–204; Nicolas Mengus, *Comprendre l'incorpora-*

viets. During the last weeks of fighting in April 1945 and as hostilities continued on the Eastern Front, mass surrenders occurred on the Western Front, where more than five million German soldiers were captured in the British, American and French occupation zones. Having to absorb this considerable flow of prisoners within a very short space of time led to a deterioration in conditions of captivity, at least during the first weeks of detention. This situation can be attributed to a lack of anticipation regarding logistics, both in terms of accommodation and supplies. How could they immediately set up accommodation and deliver the daily rations of food required for POWs in accordance with the Geneva Convention?

However, there is room to doubt this idea, for two reasons: this lack of anticipation does not seem consistent with the general plan established by the SHAEF, which had scheduled the repatriation of 20 million people, including 2.5 million French nationals, to Europe with precision. Second, when hostilities ended, the Allies dispensed with the application of the legal status laid down for POWs in the Geneva Convention so that they could significantly reduce the dedicated food rations needed. They did this by inventing other statuses to replace it: *Surrendered Enemy Personnel* (SEP) for the British, and *Disarmed Enemy Forces* (DEF) for the Americans. On 10 March 1945, General Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief of US Forces in Europe, was therefore authorised not to release POWs captured on German territory and to keep them in captivity as DEFs.

This logistical and legal context had direct material consequences on the difficult conditions faced in detention, but was not a deliberate intention on the part of the victors to ill-treat German POWs. The solution adopted in the short term to manage sanitary and accommodation conditions consisted of makeshift camps, which were hastily set up on the banks of the Rhine: The *Rheinwiesenlager*, or Rhine Meadow Camps. These were enclosures surrounded by barbed wire in vast meadows in the countryside. Prisoners slept in the open air, crammed into spaces without shelter or basic hygiene facilities, creating breeding grounds for disease outbreaks where people "waded through mud and excrement, and where mortality was very

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tion de force 1: Les jeunes d'Alsace et de Moselle dans l'armée allemande (Strasbourg: Editions l'Ami du Peuple / L'Ami Hebdo Hors-Série, Eté 2012), 23, 72.

Nicolas Mengus, *Comprendre l'incorporation de force 2: Un abécédaire de la déportation militaire* (Strasbourg: Editions l'Ami du Peuple / L'Ami Hebdo Hors-Série, Automne 2012), 10, 56–57.

Jean Noël Grandhomme, *Les Malgré Nous de la Kriegsmarine* (Strasbourg: Editions Nuée Bleue, 2011), 363–373.

Jean Noël Grandhomme, *De la Baltique à la Crète*, (Strasbourg: Editions Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace / Saisons d'Alsace HS, mai 2012), 54.

high", as Prof. Jean-Noël Grandhomme wrote.[70] The American military authorities prohibited the Red Cross from inspecting these sites, since prisoners with DEF status did not benefit from the POW status laid down in the Geneva Convention.

The prisoners suffered from malnutrition, as they were given insufficient drinking water and food. An estimated average daily ration given in some camps amounted to 1,000 kcal, compared with 1,340 kcal in the Soviet camp of Tambov. We may compare this food situation with the German prison camp system run by the Americans in France, for example the camp of La Flèche, where *Malgré-Nous* deserters from the Wehrmacht had been incarcerated.[71]

This led to peaks of mortality in some places. For instance, the estimated number of deaths was reported at 3,800 over a three-month period (15 April – 15 July 1945), out of a total of 557,000 prisoners based in a series of six Rhine Meadow Camps (Büderich, Steinberg, Bad Kreutznach, Remagen-Sinzig, Remagen-Heidesheim, and Wickrathberg). James Bacque went much further, claiming that all these failings combined led to "the death of nearly one million individuals between April 1945 and mid-1946". He blamed these deaths less on insufficient food than on the sanitary and accommodation conditions and the "lack of hygiene and overpopulation in camps", meaning that "the majority of deaths were due to diseases such as pneumonia and dysentery". Most of these deaths occurred in the American camps, where "the mortality rate came close to 30% of the detainees".[72]

However, this position has been criticised by several authors who questioned both the author's personal point of view and his research methodology. On the French side, Gilles Karmasyn quotes Sélim Nassib, aided by the historian Henry Rousso[73] and Fabien Théofilakis.[74] From the American perspective, in 1990 the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans sponsored an international conference to examine Bacque's allegations. It systematically dismantled Bacque's argument, demonstrating numerous glaring errors in Bacque's research and conclusions. The authors showed that Bacque misinterpreted documents accounting for the disposition of German POWs, neglected important evidence that contra-

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70 Jean Noël Grandhomme, De la Baltique à la Crète, (Strasbourg: Editions Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace / Saisons d'Alsace HS, mai 2012), 54.

71 Nicolas Mengus, Comprendre l'incorporation de force 2: Un abécédaire de la déportation militaire (Strasbourg: Editions l'Ami du Peuple / L'Ami Hebdo Hors-Série, Automne 2012), 10, 56–57.

72 James Bacque, *Other losses* (Canada, Stoddart Publishing, 1989), and Morts pour raisons diverses (Paris: Editions Sand, 1990),17–19, 169–179, 203–233.

73 See Sélim Nassib, "En quête des camps de la mort pour soldats du Reich," Libération, 4 December 1989, 30–32.

74 See Fabien Théofilakis, "Les prisonniers de guerre allemands en mains françaises dans les mémoires nationales en France et en Allemagne après 1945," Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique 100, 2007.

dicted his theories, failed to account for the acute disruption of Europe's economy and distribution networks, and ignored the competing needs of millions of refugees, displaced persons, and hungry civilians, as well as the deployment of Allied resources to the Pacific, where the war was still continuing.[75]

In mainland France, the very strict directives from the SHAEF were implemented to varying degrees from one camp to another: there was a degree of "flexibility" in some camps (Marseille, for instance) but less leniency in others, where prisoners' living conditions and how they were treated were not always in compliance with the Geneva Convention. This was especially true in Thorée-les-Pins in the Sarthe department of north-western France, where *Malgré-Nous* deserters and those who had refused to be forcibly conscripted into the German military were interned.[76]

The US army tended to consider the Alsace and Moselle regions as hostile areas rather than former French territories to be liberated and managed accordingly. Consequently, it exerted administrative powers that should have fallen within the realm of French sovereignty, and this situation led to abusive practices, including arbitrary checks and arrests of *Malgré-Nous* deserters and those who had refused forced conscription.[77]

After being arrested, *Malgré-Nous* found themselves in one of two situations. Some were detained together with German POWs who were managed by US troops in *Central Prisoner of War Enclosures*, for example the Septèmes-les-Vallons camp (CPWE 404) in the Bouches-du-Rhône department in southern France, where some were held between March and September 1945, or even the Thorée-les-Pins camp (PWE 22), where they stayed for five months from December 1944 to May 1945. They were viewed as traitors by the guards, and ill-treatment was part of their detention conditions. They suffered sporadic mistreatment from the Americans – bullying that included beatings with batons – and recurrent abuses from the German command under which the Americans had placed them.

The conditions of detention were lacking in several respects: first, the accommodation was makeshift, in the cold and without heating, in unfurnished sheds

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75 Günter Bischof; Stephen E Ambrose, *Eisenhower and the German POWs: Facts against Falsehood*, (LSU Press, 1992).

76 Daniel Potron, *Le Pays Fléchois dans la tourmente: La liberté retrouvée* (Editions Daniel Potron Coconnier, 1993), 369–379.

Laurent Duguet, *Incarcérer les collaborateurs: Dans les camps de la Libération, 1944–1945* (Paris: Editions Vendémiaire, 2016), 84, 93–99.

Joseph François Gross, *Les Fléchards, Malgré-nous et évadés* (Sarrebourg: Memo Lotharingiae, 1997), 78–80.

77 Mengus, Nicolas. *Comprendre l'incorporation de force 2: Un abécédaire de la déportation militaire* (Strasbourg: Editions l'Ami du Peuple / L'Ami Hebdo Hors-Série, Autumn 2012), 28–29.

then under tents, where prisoners had to sleep on the ground on straw, without beds or blankets. Second, the hygiene conditions were described as mediocre, as evidenced by the presence of fleas and other parasites due to the overcrowding caused by the large number of prisoners held in limited spaces with minimum cleaning facilities. The third issue was medical care: infirmaries were disorganised and managed by Germans who refused to admit "deserters from Alsace-Lorraine", even if they needed care, for example if they had deserted while on sick leave. Fourth, even though the quality of the food was found to be "satisfactory overall", the quantity was insufficient. This last aspect can be explained by a combination of two factors: on the American side, efforts were made to give prisoners just enough calories in their rations to keep them alive, while on the German side the control they had over the kitchens allowed them to keep "the best pieces" for themselves.

Other *Malgré-Nous* were also detained along with French civilians who were suspected of collusion with the occupier, and who had been interned in *Centres de séjour surveillé* (CSS).[78] These camps were managed by the French authorities, which had been detaining tens of thousands of people in such centres throughout France since the first months after Liberation. From March 1945, the American authorities transferred 86 prisoners originally from Alsace and Lorraine to the Saint-Mitre CSS near Marseille. It should be noted that their transfer to the POW camp in Chalon-sur-Saône, which was to be carried out by the same authorities, only took place in September, even though during the same period they had repatriated 119 Hungarians, 13 Italians, and 16 Austrians who were formerly interned in the Aix[79] camp.

We cannot know with certainty why soldiers of different nationalities were treated so differently, but we may venture the hypothesis that the American authorities felt they had "free rein" to handle the matter of these nationalities, or at least more room for manoeuvre than with French detainees held on their soil, since the French government was closely monitoring how they were treated.

While the prisoners' material conditions varied significantly from one country of captivity to another, their physical and psychological conditions remained the same. Wherever the prison camps were located, the *Malgré-Nous* underwent the same physical and psychological mistreatment as all the other prisoners. The origin of this poor treatment is threefold. First, and unsurprisingly, the most serious mistreatment came from ill-meaning fellow German prisoners, both soldiers and officers, who were tasked with supervising them as required by the Geneva Convention.

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78 Laurent Duguet, *Incarcérer les collaborateurs: Dans les camps de la Libération, 1944–1945* (Paris: Editions Vendémiaire, 2016), 84, 93–99.

79 See Laurent Duguet, 84, 93–99.

However, it should be noted that, according to Daniel Costelle, the German military hierarchy seems to have been more or less neutralised on the British side by placing "all German prisoners on the same level with no regard for their rank", so that "the non-commissioned officers no longer have any power and the terrorists are immediately prevented from doing any harm".[80]

Moreover, the British authorities chose the prisoners' representatives from among anti-Nazis, following a process of identification and sorting. Unfortunately, the author does not provide any more details as to how this "neutralisation" of the military hierarchy worked in practice; this aspect remains to be investigated, and may be an avenue for future research.

The second source of ill-treatment was the American military authorities, who did not sort soldiers who wore a German uniform by nationality: they were all automatically considered as POWs and therefore detained in accordance with the Geneva Convention. In the Allies' defence, there were no visible, distinctive signs that would have enabled them to identify the prisoners' nationalities of origin at the time they were captured.

Moreover, despite a few isolated occurrences of generosity, the Americans' attitude towards them tended to fluctuate between contempt and indifference. They were inherently suspicious of the very concept of forced conscription, and thus sceptical as to whether non-German individuals could legitimately claim this argument or whether it was merely a trick to make people forget their cultural and nationalist proximity with their Germanic neighbours – or, even worse, their ideological convergence with National Socialism.[81] In defence of the Allied powers, it should be noted that a significant proportion of non-German soldiers (French from the Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism (LVF) or the Charlemagne division, Belgians, Ukrainians or White Russian "émigrés") had voluntarily fought in German uniforms in the Wehrmacht or the Waffen SS.

The third origin of ill-treatment was French: according to some writers, the authorities showed a lack of interest or were even powerless in this matter, as the limited results obtained by the initiatives undertaken seem to prove. Nevertheless, this claim may be tempered by objective evidence of specific efforts made to defend the *Malgré-Nous*.

Cases of ill-treatment were diverse. The physical abuse, including bullying and assault, has been outlined above. In addition, the *Malgré-Nous* held as prisoners by Western Allies were subject to psychological abuse and often felt betrayed,

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80 Daniel Costelle, *Les prisonniers: 380 000 soldats de Hitler aux USA* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1976), 63.

81 Eugène Riedweg, *Les Malgré-Nous: Histoire de l'Incorporation de Force des Alsaciens-Mosellans* (Strasbourg: Editions du Rhin, 1995), 198–204.

isolated and lost. They found themselves facing a double mental trauma due to the actions of both the American authorities and the authorities of Free France.

During the conflict, the Americans interned them in the United States like any other German soldiers and handed them over to the German authorities who were responsible for managing the camps. Their specific position was generally not acknowledged, except for a few rare testimonies indicating that *Malgré-Nous* had succeeded in gathering in some camps, which helped them to make their status known more easily and contributed to their commitment to the FFL. After Germany's capitulation, the *Malgré-Nous* in detention within the United States did not receive any particularly favourable treatment, and in most cases had to wait until the end of the summer to be repatriated to France.

In continental Europe, they remained cut off from their relatives and could not benefit from the psychological comfort provided by news or initiatives to release prisoners and return them from captivity. This was because the Allies had not recognised them as POWs, instead giving them the American status of DEF or the British status of SEP, and so they were not registered by the ICRC. This meant that no information would come up about them when their families approached the ICRC. Their specific situation was generally not recognised, with a few very rare individual exceptions recounted after the war by former prisoners. This happened mainly in France and Germany, during the first weeks and months after the end of the conflict.

The highest numbers of *Malgré-Nous* transferred by the Americans to the French or the British were recorded at the time of their surrender, or after their internment in prison camps in Europe. It seems that they were able to secure recognition for their situation more easily in Europe than on American soil. Two reasons might explain this fact: first, when they were in America the fighting had only just come to an end, and the Americans were still focused on military aspects; second, the *Malgré-Nous* may have felt more at liberty to make their identity known to the victors once released from the grip of the German hierarchy.

On the Free France side, the *Malgré-Nous* generally felt that their homeland had abandoned them to their fate regarding detention conditions. Those individuals who specifically refused to be conscripted into the German military felt betrayed, since they were interned by the Americans even though they had followed the directives of Free France, which advocated desertion as an act of resistance, through an active communication strategy based on radio broadcasts by the BBC ("*La France vous parle*") and millions of leaflets dropped by British and American aircraft.[82]

82 Joseph François Gross, *Les Fléchards, Malgré-nous et évadés* (Sarrebourg: Memo Lotharingiae,1997), 78–80, 103.

Conclusion

By the end of WWII, the captivity of the *Malgré-Nous* finally came to an end in the various different countries where they were detained. On the British side, the captivity of *Malgré-Nous* held as POWs ended when they voluntarily enlisted in the FFL, then after the end of the war they were demobilised and repatriated like any other French soldier. The main source for information on this comes from the testimonies of *Malgré-Nous* who reported their voluntary service in the FFL. Before 8 May 1945, this voluntary enlistment was favoured over outright demobilisation. The Camberley camp, in the county of Surrey near London, has frequently been mentioned as a place where the French individuals concerned were gathered and trained.

In America, captivity ended directly with demobilisation and repatriation. In all the territories militarily controlled by the Americans, the vast majority of German soldiers and almost all the *Malgré-Nous* remained prisoners until at least the end of the conflict, and were not demobilised before this point. Some rare exceptions of voluntary enlistment in the FFL were mentioned in personal testimonials. The US army was in control of these operations, and no other initiatives of significant scale in this area were reported, either before or after 8 May 1945.

Only a few of the *Malgré-Nous* were able to have their specific situation understood, as acknowledged and accepted by the Allied military authorities, according to Jean-Paul Bled. Three reasons can be put forward to explain the difficulties they faced: first, the role of the German hierarchy, which relayed propaganda messages stating that they would be ill-treated or shot on their return to their country for having worn the German uniform; the Germans also deliberately concealed certain *Malgré-Nous* from searches undertaken by the Allies to free them. Second, the American military authorities were unreceptive, as they had not been made aware of the subtleties of the European geopolitical situation. Third, the *Malgré-Nous* faced obstacles in communicating: beyond the linguistic and cultural barrier, they may also have been dissuaded from taking this step for fear of reprisal, either against themselves, given the pressure of the Nazi military hierarchy in the camps, or against their families, who remained under German authority.

On 19 May 1945, the US army expressed its clear intention to repatriate German prisoners to their homeland as soon as possible. To achieve this goal, they selected prisoners based on the outcome of the denazification programme, which classified them into two ideological categories: 50,000 “Nazis”, and 300,000 other

"model, useful, docile and harmless" citizens, to be repatriated first as politically more reliable than the Nazis.[83]

There was also an economic reason for their release: with the decline in coal production and stocks due to the war, qualified manpower was very much needed to extract fuel from French, Belgian and British mines, in preparation for a harsh winter in which increased heating resources would be required. Although the political criteria for this is uncertain, it was Belgians, Saarlanders, Luxembourgers and prisoners from Alsace and Moselle who were among the first returnees.

However, the lack of a real sorting process based on nationality, which would have enabled the *Malgré-Nous* to have their specific situation acknowledged, raises questions about the screening and selection methods used for these individuals from Alsace and Moselle. Given the fact that sources do not shed any light on their circumstances, this topic could thus constitute a future avenue for research. Most of the demobilisation and repatriation operations took place between June and October 1945, with the final repatriations occurring two years later, in October 1947.

The memory of this period of captivity, under the command of the British, Americans, Canadians and Australians, has been largely overshadowed by the tragic events in the USSR, particularly the incredibly harsh conditions in the Soviet POW camp of Tambov.

Abbreviations

CSS	Centre de séjour surveillé (French internment camp for civilians imprisoned on a temporary basis)
DEF	Disarmed Enemy Forces (special American status for German POWs)
FFL	Forces françaises libres (Free French army fighting under General de Gaulle alongside the Allied forces)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ISU	Italian Service Unit
LVF	Légion des volontaires français contre le bolchévisme (Legion of French Volunteers Against Bolshevism – French volunteers fighting in the Wehrmacht)
OPMG	Office of the Provost Marshal General
POWSPD	Prisoners of War Special Projects Division
PWE	Prisoner of War Enclosure
SEP	Surrendered Enemy Personnel (special British status for German POWs)
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force

83 Laurent Kleinhentz and Edwin Neis, *Malgré-nous, qui êtes-vous? Histoire d'Incorporés de Force Mosellans Guerre de 39–45* (Faulquemont: Editions Faulquemont, 1997), 290–294.

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Félix Streicher and Nina Janz

From One Uniform Into Another: Luxembourgish Men Between Nazi "Forced Conscription" and Post-War Military Service (1942–1946)

Introduction

Between 1944 and 1946, the Luxembourger Ernest Classen consecutively served as a soldier in two disparate uniforms: as a wartime "forced conscript" in the *Feldgrau* of the Nazi armed forces, and shortly thereafter as a draftee in the olive drab of Luxembourg's post-war army.[1] As bizarre as his wartime *parcours* may seem at first sight, Classen's military experience in fact mirrored that of 2,290 fellow Luxembourgish men who, in the transition from war to peace in the "long 1940s", were successively drafted into both the Nazi and the Luxembourgish military forces.

As members of the age cohort of 1925–1927, Classen and his Luxembourgish compatriots undoubtedly experienced a rather turbulent coming-of-age, indelibly marked and shaped by the humiliating occupation and annexation of their homeland by Nazi Germany, the suffering and hardships of war, the exuberant joy of American liberation, and the double militarization under two adversarial political regimes, which reached into the immediate post-war period.[2] Within the rather short period of four years, Luxembourg's male population was de facto mobilized and militarized twice. The first was on 30 August 1942, when the Nazi civil administration drafted all Luxembourgish men born between 1920 and 1924 (later to include all men born up to 1927) into the German armed forces and their

1 The research for this chapter was supported by the Luxembourg National Research Fund (Core FNR13714130 and AFR-PhD Grant 14581674).

2 A comprehensive history of Luxembourg in the Second World War still needs to be written. Overviews can be found in: Paul Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe: Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945* (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 1985); Guy Thewes, ed., . . . *et wor alles net esou einfach: Questions sur le Luxembourg et la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Contributions historiques accompagnant l'exposition* (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2002); Musée National de la Résistance et des Droits Humains, ed., *Le Luxembourg et le 3ème Reich: Un état des lieux / Luxemburg und das Dritte Reich: Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Sanem : Op der Lay, 2021).

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auxiliary branches.[3] The second was on 30 November 1944, when Luxembourg's post-liberation government announced the Grand Duchy's rupture with pre-war neutrality and the subsequent introduction of national military service under the Luxembourgish flag.[4] Even though societal reception of these two drafts could not have been more different – general hostility in 1942 and nationalistic euphoria in 1944/45 – the renewed call to arms still came as a profound shock to those who were again called on to serve. In fact, the young conscripts of the freshly baked Luxembourg Army of 1945 were none other than those who had already been "forced-conscripted" into the German armed forces in 1944. To these 2,290 men, the social reality of post-war military service amounted less to a simple change of uniform than to a continuation of their everyday experience and struggle as reluctant soldiers – albeit now in the ranks of a democratic country's army.[5] Remobilization – and not demobilization – was thus the order of the day.[6]

The political and societal impact of military service on modern societies has so far attracted a significant amount of scholarly attention, with numerous studies focusing on its everyday and social realities, the role it played in shaping the nation-state, and in consolidating masculine identity (and hegemony).[7] By contrast, the phenomenon of double mandatory military service (as opposed to voluntary service) in two different armies and under two opposing political regimes and systems has thus far drawn little interest from within the scientific community – despite, or perhaps because of, its historical peculiarity.[8] As such, the double draft of Luxem-

3 "Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxembourg," *Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg (VBl. CdZ)*, 31 August, 1942, 253.

4 "Arrêté grand-ducal du 30 novembre 1944 portant introduction du service militaire obligatoire," *Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* 20, 15 December 1944, 143.

5 This number is provided by: Jacques Leider, *L'armée luxembourgeoise d'après-guerre: structures, fonctions, fonctionnement* (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 1993), 246.

6 For a broader take on societal "demobilization" after conflicts: John Horne, "Demobilizations," in *Europe's Postwar Periods – 1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards*, ed. Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, and Henry Rousso (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 9–30.

7 Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Conscription, Military Service and Civil Society in Modern Germany* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); David French, Military Identities: *The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People c. 1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Annie Crépin, *Histoire de la conscription* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009).

8 Notable exceptions are the Czech case (Zdenko Maršálek, "Wieder auf 'unserer' Seite: Ehemalige Angehörige der Wehrmacht als Soldaten der tschechoslowakischen Exilarmee," in *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation – Widerspruch – Widerstand – Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Zdenko Maršálek and Jiří Neminář (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2020), 69–98) and the Belgian case (Christoph Brüll, "Entre méfiance et intégration: Les germanophones dans l'armée belge (1920–1955)", *Cahiers Belges d'Histoire Militaire* 4 (2006): 135–166). However, transnational war

bourgish men into the Nazi as well as the Luxembourgish armed forces between 1942 and 1946 represents a fascinating case study in order to explore this switch of uniforms with all its political, social, cultural and gendered implications in detail. In fact, the Luxembourgish example even sticks out as an exceptional case within the broader picture of post-war Europe: while other post-war armies (such as that of France) may have counted a minor percentage of former "forced conscripts" among their draftees, the Grand Duchy's post-war army consisted nearly entirely of conscripts with a wartime past in German uniform. In Luxembourg, the experience of double military service was thus a nationwide phenomenon, whereas it remained an odd particularity in other European armies.

The present contribution accordingly looks at the consecutive conscription of Luxembourgers into the Nazi armed forces and Luxembourg's post-war Army. By drawing on Reinhart Koselleck's concept of "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation",[9] this chapter analyses how the wartime experience of "forced conscription" in Nazi uniform shaped individual and societal expectations, as well as the actual day-to-day experience (and public discourse) of post-war military service in the Luxembourg Army. As a first step, the chapter therefore explores the ground-level experiences of Luxembourg's "forced conscripts" in German uniform. As a follow-up, it looks more closely at the lived experiences of the same men during their military service in the post-war Luxembourg Army. The overall thread running through both sections will be the individual experiences of the double-drafted Luxembourger Ernest Classen (1926–1982), as told through his military records and his personal letters written between 1944 and 1946, and from which more general observations can be extrapolated (Figs. 1–2).

Classen's letters were compiled, digitized, and analysed in the crowdsourcing campaign carried out by the WARLUX research project at the University of Luxembourg in 2021.[10] The collection of letters – now in the possession of Classen's descendants – comprises over 30 handwritten letters, postcards, and notes from his school years, his service in the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force), and his conscription into the post-war Luxembourg Army. They express both the dynamic experi-

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volunteering in different armies has been covered more extensively: Nir Arielli, *From Byron to bin Laden: A History of Foreign War Volunteers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Steven O'Connor and Guillaume Piketty, eds., *Foreign Fighters and Multinational Armies: From Civil Conflicts to Coalition Wars, 1848– 2015* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

9 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 255.

10 Nina Janz, "The participatory aspect of creating a collection on WWII: Collecting ego-documents from Luxembourgish recruits and their families," *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* 25, no. 2 (2023): 81–103.

Figs. 1–2: Ernest Classen in his *Luftwaffenhelfer* uniform (January 1944) and in the battledress of the Luxembourg Army (July 1945).
Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen (University of Luxembourg) & Luxembourg Army Archives.

ence of events as well as the writer's feelings and thoughts. The contents, style and tone vary with the recipient, as Classen reflects on what his addressees want to read, and how he wishes to portray himself.[11] The letters used for this chapter only offer a filtered impression of military service; nonetheless, they still provide a unique insight into personal strategies of coping with harsh experiences (and sense-making) in two different armies. In parallel, Classen's letters are counterbalanced by institutional sources from the Nazi civil and military administration and from the Luxembourg Army, as well as from newspaper records, parliamentary debates, and memoirs and testimonies from fellow recruits. As such, this

11 Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Sterz, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe 1939–1945* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982); Veit Didczuneit, Jens Ebert, and Thomas Jander, eds., *Schreiben im Krieg – Schreiben vom Krieg: Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Essen: Klartext, 2011); Katrin Kilian, "Die anderen zu Wort kommen lassen. Feldpostbriefe als historische Quelle aus den Jahren 1939 bis 1945. Eine Projektskizze," *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 60, no. 1 (2017): 153–166.

study transcends the divide between structural or social history and experiential history, taking into account both voices "from above" and "from below".[12]

The main assumption of this chapter, then, is that the experience of "forced conscription" under Nazi rule had a deeply negative impact on the individual as well as on the societal perception of post-war military service, thereby making it almost impossible for the Government and the army of the Grand Duchy to foster a "positive" military identity or public image of military service in Luxembourg after 1945. In this respect, this chapter also provides a differentiated view on personal adjustments in post-war transitions and post-conflict demobilization, as well as the longer legacies of Nazi rule concerning post-1945 European societies and their military communities.

1 "Forced Recruitment" into the German Armed Forces

The act of wearing a uniform has a powerful symbolic meaning that conveys both inclusion and exclusion. According to German historian Sönke Neitzel, it is an essential aspect of the "tribal culture" that characterizes military communities, including their distinctive dress, colours, rituals and chants.[13] Wearing a uniform, along with other external features such as military boots and a specific hairstyle, is a crucial part of the socialization process that military recruits undergo.[14] By donning a uniform, the recruit enters into an unfamiliar environment with new rules, codes, obligations, tasks and rituals.[15]

The young Luxembourger Ernest Classen probably never thought that he would have to wear a uniform. Born on 24 August 1926 to the housewife Marie Frank and the schoolteacher Joseph Classen in the tiny village of Huldange at the northern tip of Luxembourg, Ernest – or "Erny" – grew up in one of the few socie-

12 Marcus Funck, "Militär, Krieg und Gesellschaft: Soldaten und militärische Eliten in der Sozialgeschichte," in *Was ist Militärgeschichte?*, ed. Thomas Kühne and Benjamin Ziemann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2000), 173.

13 Sönke Neitzel, *Deutsche Krieger: Vom Kaiserreich zur Berliner Republik – eine Militärgeschichte* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2020), 42, 202.

14 Harald Welzer and Sönke Neitzel, *"Der Führer war wieder viel zu human, viel zu gefühlvoll": Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht deutscher und italienischer Soldaten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2011), 22.

15 Maja Apelt, "Militärische Sozialisation," in *Handbuch Militär und Sozialwissenschaft*, ed. Sven Bernhard Gareis and Paul Klein (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 29.

ties in Western Europe that had no specific military tradition. In Luxembourg, military conscription had been abolished in 1881, and for 60 years, Luxembourg's male adolescents grew up without ever having to worry about drill sergeants, fatigue duty – or mobilization for war. Unlike other European societies, their "horizon of expectation" was thus not clouded by unavoidable militarization.[16]

This was to change with the occupation and de facto annexation of Luxembourg by Nazi Germany on 10 May 1940. After the establishment of the Nazi *Zivilverwaltung* (civil administration), Luxembourgish men and women received orders for the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, mandatory labour service, on 23 May 1941.[17] Military service in the *Wehrmacht* was subsequently announced for all young Luxembourgish men born between 1920 and 1924 (later extended to 1927) on 30 August 1942.[18]

In line with Nazi ideology, which considered Luxembourgers to be of "Germanic" ethnicity (*Volksdeutsche*), approximately 15,500 male and female Luxembourgers were conscripted into the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and/or the *Wehrmacht* (or the *Waffen-SS*). The exact numbers vary depending on the source and publication. Official figures are still cited today, with references to 10,211 conscripted men and 3,614 women.[19] One-third of all conscripts avoided the draft or deserted during the war by not returning to their regiments after their leave. Of all the Luxembourgish soldiers who were recruited, an estimated 2,300 deserted and 1,200 evaded the draft. This amounted to a desertion and evasion rate of around 34.5%, higher than that of *Reichsdeutsche* soldiers.[20]

The conscription of non-German citizens during the Second World War was a clear breach of international law. Article 23 of the Regulations annexed to the

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16 The law of 16 February 1881 had abolished compulsory military service in the Grand Duchy. Between 1881 and 1940, Luxembourg's army was thus an all-volunteer force of ca. 300 men (Paul Spang, "La force armée luxembourgeoise de 1881 à 1940," *Hémecht: Zeitschrift für Luxemburger Geschichte* 33, no. 4 (1981): 295–323).

17 "Verordnung über die Reichsarbeitsdienstpflicht in Luxemburg," *Vbl. CdZ*, 23 May 1941, 232.

18 See Note 3.

19 André Hohengarten, "Die Zwangsrekrutierung der Luxemburger in die deutsche Wehrmacht," *Histoire & Mémoire: Les Cahiers du CDREF* 1 (2010), 13. Another number is provided by: Ministère de l'Intérieur, ed., *Livre d'or des victimes luxembourgeoises de la guerre de 1940 à 1945* (Luxembourg: Ministère de l'Intérieur, 1971), 500.

20 Hohengarten, "Die Zwangsrekrutierung," 23; Norbert Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen', 'Malgré-nous' und anderen: Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Die anderen Soldaten: Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Norbert Haase and Gerhard Paul (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1997), 171; Peter M. Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen": Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aachen: Shaker, 2008), 115.

Hague Convention IV of 1907 expressly bans compelling nationals of the opposing party to participate in military operations against their own country.[21] The Nazi administration, as well as German lawyers, were aware of this prohibition, given that the German conscription law of 1935 stipulated that only *Reich* Germans could be drafted into the *Wehrmacht*.[22] Prior to the conscription of Luxembourgers, legal issues regarding their nationality had to be resolved. The "Ordinance on Citizenship in Alsace, Lorraine and Luxembourg" issued on 23 August 1943 promised unrestricted German citizenship by revocation (*Staatsbürgerschaft auf Widerruf*) to *Volksdeutsche* conscripts of the *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS* from these regions.[23] However, naturalization was only granted after their enlistment in the army. Consequently, conscription in these regions was not a result of citizenship being granted, but rather citizenship was utilized as a means of legitimizing compulsory military service.[24] As *Volksdeutsche*, the Luxembourgers were considered to be regular soldiers in the *Wehrmacht*. They were distributed among the units on an equal footing with German citizens, the *Reichsdeutsche* soldiers.[25] They had the same duties (to fight and to follow orders, with disobedience punished by exe-

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21 "Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, 18 October 1907," *International Humanitarian Law Databases*, accessed 23 February 2023, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907/regulations-art-23#:~:text=A%20belligerent%20is%20likewise%20forbidden,the%20commencement%20of%20the%20war.

22 The "Law on the establishment of the Wehrmacht" (*Gesetz über den Aufbau der Wehrmacht*) of 16 March 1935 (RGBl. I.1935, 375), followed by the "Military code" (*Wehrgesetz)* of 21 May 1935 (RGBl. I 1935, 609–614) reintroduced military service in Germany, and renamed the *Reichswehr* into *Wehrmacht.* The duration of service was initially fixed at one year and extended to two years in August 1936.

23 "Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg," *VBl. CdZ*, 31 August 1942, 253; "Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg," *VBl. CdZ*, 23 August 1942, 254. Relevant here is Paragraph 1, subsection 1: "Shall acquire nationality by law all German-born Alsatians, Lorrainers and Luxembourgers who are or will be called up a) to the Wehrmacht or to the Waffen-SS [. . .]".

24 Peter M. Quadflieg, "Die 'Zwangsrekrutierung' im Westen: Eupen-Malmedy, Luxemburg, Elsass und Lothringen," in *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945 / Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten 1939–1945*, ed. Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2017), 33.

25 Order by the OKW Nr. 1956/43 geh. WFSt/Org(II), Treatment and use of conscripts from the German-administered western territories (Alsatians, Lorraine, Luxemburgers), 19 May 1943 (Copy), Bundesarchiv (BArch), RH 10/12.

cution), but they also had the same "rights" to supplies and medical treatment and were eligible for awards and promotions.[26]

The population of Luxembourg received the news of the introduction of compulsory military service with great indignation and a strong wave of rejection. On 31 August, the day after the announcement, a four-day strike was held, followed by the imposition of a state of emergency, and a court-martial was established to try those who had been arrested for going on strike. The court-martial imposed twenty death sentences, with those convicted being executed in a forest near the SS Special Camp and Concentration Camp in Hinzert.[27] The response of the population involved not only strikes and leafleting against the occupiers, but also support for young men awaiting military conscription. Through a network of supporters, thousands of men were either smuggled across the border into France or Belgium before they were drafted, or hidden in mines in the south of Luxembourg.[28]

Although 1,200 men evaded conscription,[29] the majority of Luxembourgers who donned German military uniforms did so in compliance with mandatory military service requirements. However, a smaller number, estimated to be around 1,500, volunteered for various branches of the German military and police forces.[30] Although prior attempts at voluntary recruitment were unsuccessful,[31] some Luxembourgers still chose to enlist. It should be noted, however, that the vast majority of Luxembourgers in German uniform were following orders related to their enforced military service.

In the Nazis' eyes, militarization was ideally meant to start even earlier in the lives of young men, as they were to be "formed" into a fighting community within the Nazi community (*Volksgemeinschaft*).[32] However, as the Grand Duchy of Lux-

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26 Chef der Heeresrüstung und Befehlshaber des Ersatzheeres, Chef des Ausbildungswesens im Ersatzheer, Richtlinien für die Behandlung der Elsässer, Lothringer, Luxemburger und Untersteirer, 2 February 1943, BArch RH 14/123; Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen"*, 151.

27 Jean Hansen, "Streik auf der Schifflinger Schmelz," in . . . *Wéi wann et eréischt haut geschitt wier!*, ed. Christiane Schmitz and Paul Lenners (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 1993), 77–86; Georges Büchler, "Streiktage: Ein chronologischer Überblick," in *"Generalstreik": Streikbewegung in Luxemburg, August–September 1942*, ed. Musée national de la Résistance (Esch-sur-Sûre: Op der Lay, 2017), 19.

28 Paul Dostert, "La résistance contre l'occupant allemand 1940–1944," in . . . *.et wor alles net esou einfach: Questions sur le Luxembourg et la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Contributions historiques accompagnant l'exposition*, ed. Guy Thewes (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2002), 108. For a highly detailed account of the individual escapes made possible through such assistance, see: Aimé Knepper, *Les réfractaires dans les bunkers*, 5th ed. (Luxembourg: Aimé Knepper, 2004).

29 Hohengarten, "Die Zwangsrekrutierung," 23; Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen' und 'Malgré-nous'," 171.

30 Dostert, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe*, 170.

31 Quadflieg, *"Zwangssoldaten" und "Ons Jongen"*, 98.

32 Neitzel, *Deutsche Krieger*, 115.

embourg was only occupied in May 1940, this was not applicable to the first generation of Luxembourgers destined to serve in German uniform. The Nazi system was geared towards educating young people for the *Volksgemeinschaft* from early on. Organisations such as the *Hitler-Jugend* (HJ, Hitler Youth), the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (DAF, German Labour Front) and others were considered agencies for "educating the *Volksgemeinschaft*".[33] Before they were conscripted into the German armed forces, the Nazi civil administration in Luxembourg thus tried to win over and integrate the country's youth into their *Kampfgemeinschaft* (fighting community).[34] "*Wehrertüchtigungslager*" (military fitness camps) were regularly set up for *Hitler-Jugend* members "to actively promote a love and inclination for the weapons of the army, especially the infantry, among young people".[35] However, not all young Luxembourgers complied with Nazi ideology. School pupils in Luxembourg City, Esch-sur-Alzette, Echternach and Diekirch,[36] for instance, joined in the strike and protest actions after 31 August 1942, and many refused to perform the daily "Heil Hitler" salute.[37] As a consequence, several pupils were apprehended on school premises or at their homes and were subsequently sent to Nazi re-education camps. While female pupils were sent to a youth hostel in Adenau, the male pupils (183 boys ranging in age from 16 to 19) were transported to Burg Stahleck on the Rhine.[38]

During the course of these events, Ernest Classen attended the Gymnasium in Diekirch, one of the country's largest secondary schools. Since all Luxembourgish pupils were forced to join the *Hitler-Jugend* from April 1941 onwards, we have to assume that Classen (at least nominally) also became part of the Nazi-organised youth movement.[39] By the time Classen was called up for military service, the

33 Welzer and Neitzel, *"Der Führer war wieder viel zu human"*, 59.

34 For the *Reichsdeutsche* see: Neitzel, *Deutsche Krieger*, 115.

35 Wehrbezirkskommando Luxemburg, Distribution letter "Cooperation between Wehrmacht and Hitler Jugend" by Stellv. Generalkommando XXII A. K. (Wehrkreiskommando XII), 25 May 1943, Archives Nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux), CdZ-E-0397.

36 Cécile Ries, "La résistance estudiante," in *Livre d'Or de la Résistance Luxembourgeoise de 1940–1945*, ed. Nicolas Bosseler and Raymond Steichen (Esch-sur-Alzette: H. Ney-Eicher, 1952), 511–525.

37 Robert Loewen, *Vom Straflager Stahleck ins Gefangenenlager Moskau* (Luxembourg: R. Loewen, 2002), 25.

38 Uwe Bader and Beate Welter, "Die Burg Stahleck – in der NS-Zeit nicht nur Jugendherberge," *Blätter zum Land Rheinland-Pfalz* 2 (2001), 4. For more details about the "re-education" measurements at Burg Stahleck see: Sandra Schmit, "'Ons Jongen' – frühe Luxemburger Frontberichte," in *Luxemburg und der Zweite Weltkrieg: Literarisch-intellektuelles Leben zwischen Machtergreifung und Epuration*, ed. Claude Dario Conter et al. (Mersch: Centre national de littérature, 2020), 539–544.

39 Philippe Victor, "Tentatives de nazification de la jeunesse luxembourgeoise sous l'occupation nazie (1940–1944)," in *Le Luxembourg et le 3ème Reich: Un état des lieux / Luxemburg und das*

Nazis had already been occupying the country for nearly four years. Classen and his peers were constantly exposed to Nazi rule in their daily lives, through the indoctrination of Nazi ideology in their school curriculums or the ubiquitous presence of swastikas on the streets. It is most likely that, given the close-knit community of Luxembourg, Classen and his family closely monitored reports about the conscription of older Luxembourgers. As a result, they were probably well aware of the deaths of other young men and may have had legitimate fears that Ernest, too, could be sent to the front.

Forcibly Conscripted into the Luftwaffe

Even before their conscription into the *Wehrmacht*, male Luxembourgish secondary school pupils born between 1926 and 1927 were conscripted into the *Heimatflakbatterien* (Home Air Defence Batteries), or *Flak* for short, from April 1943 on.[40] The first 135 pupils were called up on 14 October 1943,[41] and a total of 297 young men were drafted as *Luftwaffenhelfer* (air force assistants) up to 1 March 1944.[42] In contrast to the heterogeneous group of Luxembourgish *Wehrmacht* recruits, the *Luftwaffenhelfer* thus formed a rather homogeneous cohort of middle-class, secondary school-educated youngsters.[43]

The Nazi *Zivilverwaltung* accordingly remained deeply suspicious of these highly-educated Luxembourgish conscripts. A secret report from the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) from March 1944 warned that "the possible deployment of Luxembourgers in the *Heimatflak* is by no means a guar-

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Dritte Reich: Eine Bestandsaufnahme, ed. Musée National de la Résistance et des Droits Humains (Sanem: Op der Lay, 2021), 320.

40 "Dienst bei der Heimatflak – ein Ehrenauftrag," *Escher Tageblatt*, 16 April 1943, 4; André Heiderscheid, *Zwangsrekrutiert: Das deutsche Verbrechen an der luxemburgischen Jugend*, vol. 1 (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2012), 29.

41 Marcel Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen: Ein Luxemburger Schicksal im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Luxembourg: Kremer-Muller, 2000), 45. This was made possible by § 7 paragraph I of the Emergency Service Ordinance of 15 October 1938. The draftees were pupils in 6th and 7th grade from the 1926 cohort of the secondary schools of Luxembourg City, Diekirch, Echternach and Esch-sur-Alzette. Heiderscheid also includes the birth year 1925 (Heiderscheid, *Zwangsrekrutiert*, vol. 1, 29).

42 Nadine Piveteau, *Ein Luxemburger Gymnasiast unter deutscher Besatzung: Analyse von Briefen und Dokumenten aus den Jahren 1942–1944* (Zürich: Nadine Piveteau, 2010), 44.

43 Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation Under Arms, 1939–45* (London: Vintage, 2015), 345. On the *Luftwaffenhelfer* more generally see: Rolf Schörken, "'Schülersoldaten' – Prägung einer Generation," in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999), 456–473.

antee of positive results. [. . .] It is precisely the pupils at secondary education institutions who are most fanatically opposed to Germanness [*Deutschtum*].”[44] These words of caution were grounded in recent events: when the first series of *Luftwaffenhelfer* had been called up in mid-October 1943, an entire school class from the Goethe School in Luxembourg City had gone on strike and been sent to Burg Stahleck in Germany for re-education purposes – as had already happened in 1942.[45]

At the *Gymnasium* in Diekirch, however, the pupils complied with the mandatory military service requirements. Ernest Classen – wearing glasses and standing only 1.53m tall – received a draft card but was ultimately excused from both military and labour service as he was deemed “unfit”.[46] He subsequently passed the medical examination for the “*Kriegshilfseinsatz der deutschen Jugend in der Luftwaffe*” (Youth War Assistance Service in the Air Force), and then for military service as a *Luftwaffenhelfer* in January 1944.[47] Although anti-aircraft units were considered to be auxiliary services, the pupils were still part of the *Luftwaffe* (air force) and thus the German armed forces, which was clearly against international law as the pupils were minors and were not citizens of the conscripting power.[48]

Service at the *Flak* in Esch-sur-Alzette

In Luxembourg, most German anti-aircraft batteries were set up in the Minett region – the economic powerhouse in southern Luxembourg – to defend the steel plants (vital to the German war effort) from Allied air raids. Thirty anti-aircraft guns were thus placed around the ARBED steel works in the industrial towns of Esch-sur-Alzette, Schifflange and Differdange.[49]

On 14 January 1944, Classen and his fellow conscripted colleagues from the Diekirch *Gymnasium* boarded a train that took them to Schifflange, where – together with pupils from secondary schools throughout Luxembourg – he joined

44 Quoted in: Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 612.

45 Ibid., 45.

46 Entry in the *Wehrpass* of Ernest Classen, temporally unfit for service in the *Wehrmacht* and the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. Issued on 16 February 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen (University of Luxembourg).

47 Letter from the Landrat in Diekirch to Ernest Classen, 14 January 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

48 Heiderscheid, *Zwangsrekrutiert*, vol. 1, 25.

49 Ibid., 33.

the *Leichte Flakabteilung* 857(o)[50] with the service number L 52 264.[51] In Lallange the new conscripts moved into wooden barracks that had previously housed slave workers from Eastern Europe (*Ostarbeiter*).[52] Here, they were issued their new uniform. Marcel Staar – who shared his sleeping quarters with Classen – remembered this as a moment of disillusionment in his memoirs: "I felt miserable in my new outfit. The clothes weighed as heavily as armour. Even though we had swapped gear among ourselves, hardly anything fit properly. [. . .] Some had trousers that reached down to their ankles or wrinkled grotesquely at the back of their knees. [. . .] Some had steel helmets that hung low over their ears, while the helmets of others were far too small and sat like a crown on their heads."[53] In this new attire, the freshly minted recruits were sworn in on 30 January: "I promise to do my duty as a *Luftwaffenhelfer* at all times, faithfully and obediently, bravely and ready for action, as befits a member of the Hitler Youth."[54]

The particularity of the oath already points to the ambivalence of the militarization that Classen and his compatriots went through as *Luftwaffenhelfer*.[55] The young "forced conscripts" received summary military training (mostly drill and shooting exercises), and were given practical instruction on using anti-aircraft guns. Recruits had to attend training sessions on aircraft recognition, weaponry, ballistics and radio technology to familiarise themselves with their equipment. At the same time, however, they still had to attend weekly school classes given by secondary school teachers from Esch-sur-Alzette. For many young men, this hybrid deployment on anti-aircraft batteries was physically demanding: school lessons, homework, ideological instruction, marching drills and barracks maintenance during the day, and air raid alerts at night. Even though Classen's battery and the nearby steelworks were never directly targeted by Allied aircraft during his deployment, *Flak* duty still proved to be both stressful and exhausting (mainly because of the lack of sleep) (Fig. 3).

In his letters, the reluctant *Luftwaffenhelfer* Classen related his life in the barracks and on *Flak* duty to his parents. As he was stationed just 70km from his home town of Huldange, he repeatedly dreamed about simply returning home,

50 Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 57.
51 Letter from Ernest Classen to his family, 14 January 1944; Dienstelle L 52 265, Luftgau-Postamt (L.G.P.A. Frankfurt/Main), Personalausweis Luftwaffen-Helfer Ernst Classen, issued 25 January 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.
52 Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 99.
53 Ibid., 104.
54 Quoted in Piveteau, *Ein Luxemburger Gymnasiast,* 46.
55 On the hybrid status of the *Luftwaffenhelfer* see: Schörken, "'Schülersoldaten'," 456–458.

Fig. 3: The *Luftwaffenhelfer* crew of searchlight "Bruno" near Esch-sur-Alzette, early 1944. Classen (wearing glasses) is kneeling in the foreground.
Photographer: Jang Heuschling. Musée régional des enrôlés de force Dudelange, EF-01234.

and implored his parents to send him food provisions.[56] As the recruits from the *Flak* were forbidden from receiving such parcels, they had to depend on an elaborate network of local Luxembourgish residents who were willing to receive and safeguard their parcels and mail (this enabled the *Luftwaffenhelfer* to bypass military censorship).[57] During his daily leave, Classen thus visited various local widows who had agreed to receive his packages.[58] Through these daily encounters and interactions with civilians outside the barracks, Classen was also confronted with the realities of civilian wartime shortages and violent repression by the Nazi occupiers. For instance, one of the widows who had transmitted Classen's parcels and mail was "resettled" [*umgesiedelt*] by the Nazis in August 1944 (the measure

56 Letters from Ernest Classen to his parents, 17 May 1944; 6 July 1944; 11 August 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

57 Incoming and outgoing letters only went through official military postal service, and therefore were subject to censorship regulations: Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 105.

58 Classen and his classmates attempted to locate postal addresses, mainly of widows who lived near their barracks, so that they could visit them during their free time and collect their mail and packages. In a letter to his parents on 14 January 1944, Classen stated that he was unable to receive packages. However, in May, he found a widow in the neighbouring village of Belvaux, and as a result, he could receive parcels and letters without "getting into trouble" (as he stated in a letter to his parents on 17 May 1944), Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen

was meant to punish those who did not conform to the regime, although the reasons for this woman's resettlement remain unknown).[59]

In their free time, the young *Flak* conscripts were allowed to leave the barracks for activities such as attending church or the theatre, as recounted by Marcel Staar.[60] Most recruits enthusiastically embraced this opportunity, especially since the repetitive nature of military life in the barracks and at the *Flak* became increasingly boring as time passed. In June 1944, Classen let his parents know that he and his colleagues were "seriously fed up" [*haben alle die "Fläm" sehr*] with the overall situation in German uniform.[61] In fact, the incessant and often dehumanizing drill by their German instructors unnerved most recruits. Classen's compatriot Marcel Staar at times felt "like a robot". "The sweat flowed in streams, the breath whistled," he remembered in his memoirs. "It was terrible drudgery that led to complete physical and mental exhaustion. The coarse tone, the vulgar language and indecent insults [. . .] were an integral part of the military argot [of our superiors]."[62]

However, Classen's letters also testify to his gradual – albeit reluctant – militarization in the *Luftwaffe*. Despite the forced character of his recruitment and the ever-present boredom, Classen still forged a new self-identity in order to cope with his new role as an auxiliary soldier in the overall German war effort. On 18/19 January 1944, he began a letter to his sibling (ironically or wholeheartedly) with "many greetings from your brother from the *Flak*".[63] As he wrote about homesickness and boredom to his parents, Classen urged them to write to him more often, "for there is nothing more beautiful for a *Landser* [German infantry soldier] than a letter".[64] Even though it remains unclear whether these statements were written ironically or in earnest, they still show that Classen adapted to his new circumstances in uniform and at least partly self-identified as a soldier in the occupiers' armed forces. This is perhaps best shown through a letter to his parents on 11 August 1944 in which a frustrated Classen recounted a recent air

59 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 11 August 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

60 Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 120, 142.

61 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 9 June 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

62 Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 112, 117.

63 Letter from Ernest Classen to his brother Camille Classen, 19 January 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

64 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 25 January 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

raid: “Just now at 2 o’clock two ‘Mustang’ fighters flew over at low altitude.[65] They fired at something behind Schifflange. The *Flak* then fired at them, and they quickly bailed out.” Classen seemed genuinely upset about their escape, but he quickly spotted a second chance: “Just now there’s another alarm. Maybe we’ll have more luck this time and get one down.”[66]

In the end, these thoughts were thwarted by the rapid Allied advance across Western Europe in late summer 1944. Classen expected to be drafted into the *Wehrmacht* in July 1944 – as had been the case for many of his colleagues (Marcel Staar for instance)[67] – but his German superiors and instructors in the *Flak* unexpectedly fled the scene early in the morning of 1 September 1944.[68] With the U.S. Army crossing into Luxembourg, Classen removed his German uniform, “deserted” after eight months in the *Flak* and trekked back to Huldange. Here, he hid in a nearby forest until the final liberation of his home village on 11 September.[69]

At that time, military obligations were not a consideration for Classen, and he likely did not expect to face them again in the future. Yet Classen’s experience would soon be repeated – although this time in a different uniform.

2 Military Service in Luxembourg’s Post-War Army

On 30 November 1944, roughly two months after the liberation of Luxembourg by U.S. forces, the Luxembourgish Government proclaimed the introduction of compulsory military service. For the first time in over 60 years, the young male population of the Grand Duchy was to be called to arms – but this time under Luxembourgish colours. In the eyes of the country’s foreign politicians, the new army would contribute to the Allied war effort and assert Luxembourg’s foreign-policy interests by tak-

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65 Classen writes about “English” Mustang fighter aircraft. Although the Royal Air Force (RAF) of the United Kingdom did utilize the Mustang during the Second World War, it was originally designed and built by North American Aviation in the United States and primarily used by the United States Army Air Forces. Either Classen was mistaken or the Mustang really were flown by the British Air Force.

66 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 11 August 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

67 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 3 July 1944, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

68 Staar, *Waffenträger wider Willen*, 613.

69 According to Classen’s sister, he first tried to hide in a railway tunnel near Huldange, but was told by locals that it was already filled with German soldiers. Since he did not dare to contact his family, he then chose to hide away in the woods and was fed by a friend from Huldange (email from Arny Classen to Nina Janz, 12 May 2023).

ing part in the Allied occupation of defeated Germany.[70] In the heated atmosphere of early 1945, the measure was initially met with broad consensus within the hyper-nationalistic Luxembourgish society.[71] Serving under the Luxembourgish flag was seen as a patriotic and moral duty, as a recovery of masculine honour and – more broadly – as a symbolic restoration of the nation-state after the occupation.

Still, many of the young conscripts into the new army of 1945 received their draft orders with mixed feelings – for they had already been among the last "forced conscripts" of the German military machinery of 1944.[72] Their "space of experience" was still encumbered by their time in German uniform; many of them had only narrowly escaped death on the Eastern Front, had suffered for months in Allied captivity, or had deserted and hidden in makeshift hideouts until the Grand Duchy's liberation in late 1944. Shortly after their reintegration into civil society, they now faced a second round in uniform – albeit a Luxembourgish one. The latter at least provided some veterans with a certain contentment. For Marcel G., who had been forced to fight with the *Wehrmacht* until April 1945, swapping the German uniform for a Luxembourgish one was also an act of pride. "We were somewhat proud to serve in the Luxembourg Army, since we had previously experienced service under the Germans, which had not been to our liking", the former "forced conscript" remembered in an interview in 2016. "We told ourselves: Why not be in a uniform which belongs to us and our country for a change?"[73] While serving in a Luxembourgish uniform evidently constituted a sort of personal satisfaction or even symbolic triumph for some of these battle-worn men, the prospect of having to spend (or waste) yet another year of their youth under arms still caused a widespread feeling of disbelief and irritation among many other former "forced conscripts". "To a young man returning home from war and captivity, it is just grotesque to be forced into another uniform only to be made to play the fool as a recruit",[74] an anonymous "forced conscript" protested in late 1945.

As such, the delicate issue of post-war military service was of highest significance to the *Ligue Ons Jongen*, which had been set up as a veterans' association

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70 Paul Cerf, *Le Luxembourg et son armée: Le service obligatoire à Luxembourg de 1945–1967* (Luxembourg: RTL Edition, 1984), 23; Leider, *L'armée luxembourgeoise*, 46–50; Steve Kayser, "Joseph Bech aux Affaires Étrangères: de 1926 à 1954, la recherche de garanties internationales pour le Grand-Duché de Luxembourg," *Galerie: revue culturelle et pédagogique* 17, no. 4 (1999): 572–573.

71 Félix Streicher, "The Military Malaise: Towards a Social History of the Luxembourg Army (1944–1959)," in *Militärgeschichte Luxemburgs/Histoire Militaire du Luxembourg*, ed. Thomas Kolnberger and Benoît Niederkorn (Luxembourg: Capybarabooks, 2022), 343–344.

72 "Arrêté grand-ducal du 16 mars 1945 ayant pour objet la levée des classes 1925 et 1926," *Mémorial du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg* 13, 21 March 1945, 108–109.

73 Interview between Benoît Niederkorn, Félix Streicher, and Marcel G. (1926–2024), 16 August 2016.

74 Poilu., "Hallo! Hei schwätzt d'Armée," *Ons Jongen*, 15 November 1945, 3.

and interest group of Luxembourg's "forced conscripts" in late 1944. Although officially an apolitical organization, *Ons Jongen* rapidly developed into a powerful pressure group within the political landscape of post-war Luxembourg, managing to not only influence the Grand Duchy's memory politics for their own benefit, but also to persistently (and sometimes successfully) lobby the country's political circles.[75] On 23 December 1944, *Ons Jongen*'s eponymous newspaper (which boasted around 5,000 subscribers) tackled the burning question of military conscription. "We may regret that, but we cannot change anything about it and we have to act accordingly," the weekly stoically asserted. Yet, when it came to the question of *who* was to bear the burden, the *Ligue* was much less acquiescing in its expectations: "In general, the boys that have already had to serve under the Germans for a while should be spared, in particular if they have had little professional training so far."[76]

Even though it clearly tried to shelter its own veterans from a second military conscription, the initial standpoint of *Ons Jongen* towards military service in the new Luxembourg Army was nonetheless highly complex. While the *Ligue* openly condemned the renewed draft of the age group of 1925/26, it did not oppose the idea of military conscription *per se*. Quite the contrary: it even called on all reluctant draftees – provided they were not former "forced conscripts" – to wholeheartedly do their service as "true Luxembourgish patriots". In the context of the ongoing war, the *Ligue* also offered membership to all recruits of the new Luxembourg Army – even if they had not been "forced-conscripted" during the war. What may at first sight appear an oddity was in fact a clever political manoeuvre. By tying themselves to the new draftees of Luxembourg's post-war army and proposing to act as their mouthpiece, the "forced conscripts" of *Ons Jongen* in fact hoped to retroactively confer upon their plight in German uniform a gloss of self-sacrifice and patriotism. "[Accepting the recruits of the post-war army as new members] can in no way be considered paradoxical", *Ons Jongen* boldly asserted on 31 March 1945. "They will just swell the ranks of those that have already done

75 Eva Maria Klos, "Die Zwangsrekrutierung in Westeuropa: Deutungskämpfe in der Geschichtsschreibung von 1944 bis heute," *Hémecht: Zeitschrift für Luxemburger Geschichte* 69, no. 3–4 (2017): 359–361; Gilbert Trausch, "Mémoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale: Le long combat des enrôlés de force luxembourgeois," in *Du Particularisme à la Nation: Essais sur l'histoire du Luxembourg de la fin de l'Ancien Régime à la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, ed. Gilbert Trausch (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 1989), 407–428.

76 t., "D'Conscription ass do!," *Ons Jongen*, 23 December 1944, 6. For a similar view see: "Me' Logik wir erwënscht," *D'Unio'n*, 17 February 1945, 1.

what still lies ahead of them, that is serve their country on a military level, each in their own specific way."[77]

In order to do so, the editors of *Ons Jongen* – who considered themselves victims of German militarism – even sought to come up with arguments in favour of drafting Luxembourg's male youth. "Let us admit that besides serious drawbacks (for example financial ones), there are also undeniable advantages to military service, and that our male youth's physical fitness and sense of discipline will benefit from it as from a strengthening fountain of youth",[78] the weekly stressed in March 1945. On the same note, *Ons Jongen* presented a heavily romanticized account of the departure of draftees from their hometowns in June 1945: "To the sounds of the *Feierwon*[79] and the cheers of children and girls running behind the coaches [with the recruits], the boys are off on their way to the Walferdange barracks. What a difference from the tragic departures for the *Wehrmacht*!"[80]

Whether Ernest Classen experienced a similar farewell ceremony in his tiny village of Huldange, we do not know. Nor do we know his initial reaction to his renewed call to arms. On 26 April 1945, he was deemed fit for service – despite his poor vision – by a civilian doctor in Clervaux.[81] On the morning of 9 July 1945, he boarded a train in Troisvierges that took him across the tiny Grand Duchy to Dudelange, where together with two friends and 664 fellow recruits, he was integrated into the ranks of the 2nd Infantry Battalion.[82] "[Upon arrival] we have been divided into groups", he wrote to his parents in a rather sober, yet reassuring letter. "The three of us have been placed in the same barrack room. Then we have been clothed. The food is also very good." Yet, a final sentence tainted the overall picture: "[My friend] Pier has become very quiet, I think he had imagined things differently."[83]

In fact, Army life in Dudelange was a rather improvised affair. The barracks had been set up in a former Nazi labour camp for Russian and Belgian slave work-

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77 r., "La Ligue 'Ons Jongen' et le service militaire obligatoire," *Ons Jongen*, 31 March 1945, 3.
78 Ibid.
79 The patriotic song *De Feierwon* is commonly regarded as Luxembourg's unofficial national hymn.
80 Br., "Appel sous les drapeaux," *Ons Jongen*, 14 July 1945, 2. A similar account is given by: O. H., "Garde à vous! De Letzeburger Zaldot geschter an haut," *Revue: Letzeburger Illustre'ert* 1, no. 6 (1945): 55.
81 "Fiche matricule Provisoire", 9 July 1945, Luxembourg Army Archives (LUXARMY), Personnel File of Ernest Classen.
82 Personnel File of Ernest Classen, LUXARMY, "Livret Matricule Classen Erneste, N° Mle 00948, Classe 1945/26".
83 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 11 July 1945, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

ers, and the drill ground of the battalion was located on a former football pitch nearby.[84] The military uniforms and equipment (provided by the British Army) were outdated and often in poor condition. Most of the days were spent on basic instruction: drilling, marching, as well as occasional shooting.[85] Recreational or social activities, on the other hand, were scarce. As a consequence, boredom rapidly spread among the ranks.[86] Notwithstanding these shortcomings, public opinion still held the new Army in high esteem. Upon visiting the barracks in Dudelange and Walferdange, the press was full of praise. "We note the presence of a great many different talents, all of whom will contribute to making life in the barracks a stage of life that will later be remembered with contented satisfaction and a certain pride as well",[87] the conservative *Luxemburger Wort* noted on 17 July 1945. Military service was thus portrayed as a rite of passage; as a step towards adult age and "true manhood".[88] *Ons Jongen* did not disagree: "Anyway, it would certainly not harm anybody if they were exposed to physical hardships [*gudd gestritzt*] and forced to follow orders for some time."[89] Even the otherwise antimilitaristic *Tageblatt* could not hold back its enthusiasm and amazement for the new recruits: "We believe that the Germans will be left speechless once our battalions make their triumphant entry into Bernkastel [sic] as occupation forces."[90]

Private 2nd class Ernest Classen does not seem to have been particularly troubled by his new life as an army recruit. On 23 September, he and his company were detached to guard a contingent of nearly 1,000 German prisoners of war at a POW camp in Ettelbruck.[91] "No more drill; we just stand guard", he wrote in yet

84 Erny Thiel, *Düdelingen, Garnisonsstadt 1945–1946* (Dudelange: Stadtverwaltung und Kulturkommission Düdelingen, 1995), 57; Cerf, *Le Luxembourg et son armée*, 35–36.

85 "II. Bataillon: Journal d'unité du 9.7.45–21.11.45", LUXARMY, Folder "Correspondances 1945–1946".

86 Streicher, "The Military Malaise," 347–348.

87 = [Mathias Guillaume], "Die ersten Bataillone unserer neuen Armee," *Luxemburger Wort*, 17 July 1945, 2.

88 Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks*, 274–275; Odile Roynette, "La fabrique des soldats," in *Une histoire de la guerre du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. Bruno Cabanes (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2018), 267.

89 Poilu., "Hallo! Hei schwätzt d'Armée," *Ons Jongen*, 25 August 1945, 2.

90 P[aul] M[uller], "Eine Armee im Werden: General Prinz Felix inspiziert die neuen Truppen," *Escher Tageblatt*, 6 August 1945, 1.

91 Between 1945 and 1947, 4,393 German prisoners of war were employed in the reconstruction of Luxembourg's war-devastated regions: Louise Debugne, Olivier Felgen and Thierry Paulus, "Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Luxemburg: Wie aus Besatzern Landarbeiter wurden," in *Ons zerschloen Dierfer: Der Wiederaufbau Luxemburgs (1944–1960)*, ed. Louise Debugne et al. (Diekirch: Musée National d'Histoire Militaire, 2022), 95–105. For more information on the POW camp in Ettelbruck: Roger Hensel, "D'Krichsgefaangelager vun Ettelbréck," *De Reider: informatiounsblad vun der gemeng ettelbréck* 20 (1996): 25–28.

another reassuring letter to his parents. "Every second day, for three hours every six hours. On the days in between, we move out with labour units [*Arbeitskommandos*]. To Diekirch and surroundings. Apart from that, all in good health [. . .]."[92] In an (unsent) letter to his Belgian sweetheart, however, the tone was completely different. "As you can see, I am a soldier now", Classen wrote in a boasting, even cocky way. "We have a great life here. We are staying with the prisoners of war and we are going to watch them working."[93] This astonishing change of voice was not only due to the change of his recipient, but may also have reflected Classen's new self-image as a POW guard. To many former Luxembourgish "forced conscripts" who were now wearing a Luxembourgish uniform, the situation in the Ettelbruck camp exposed how thoroughly the positions of power had been reversed. In short, the former oppressors were now being ruled over by the once oppressed, and the latter unscrupulously abused their new positions of power to live out their personal desires for revenge and retribution.

To Ernest Classen and his fellow recruits, this dramatic reversal of roles must have become even more apparent when they re-joined the rest of their Battalion in the occupied German city of Bitburg on 7 January 1946. From 11 November 1945 on, the Luxembourg Army acted as a small Allied occupation power under French high command within large parts of the German districts of Bitburg and Saarburg.[94] "10 May 1940 [the German invasion of Luxembourg] has been splendidly avenged", the *Tageblatt* echoed. "Parts of the German territory are now under Luxembourgish military rule. The tables are turned: the former Nazis, the oppressors, now have to obey the former oppressed, the co-victors of today. Schadenfreude rises, whether you like it or not."[95]

However, once the new occupiers were confronted with the realities on the ground, the initial enthusiasm over this role reversal proved to be rather short-lived. The infrastructure in the Bitburg barracks (built for the *Wehrmacht* in 1936) was rudimentary at best. The city had been bombed twice in December 1944, when nearly

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92 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 29 September 1945, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen

93 Letter from Ernest Classen to Yvonne Walbrecq, 4 October 1945, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen

94 Frédéric Laux, "La participation du Luxembourg à l'occupation de l'Allemagne (1945–1955)," in . . . *et wor alles net esou einfach: Questions sur le Luxembourg et la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Contributions historiques accompagnant l'exposition*, ed. Guy Thewes (Luxembourg: Saint-Paul, 2002), 294–303.

95 P[aul] M[uller], "Luxemburgs historische Stunde: Mit dem 2. Bataillon im besetzten Bitburg," *Escher Tageblatt*, 13 November 1945, 2.

83% of its urban core had been razed.[96] “The roof of our building is completely gone, and the last floor can be used for ice skating”, Classen told his parents. “When it rained last week, we had to evacuate the water with buckets.”[97] Boredom also remained a dominant feature of army life in Luxembourg-occupied Bitburg. “In the evening, we go to the canteen or to a pub in Bitburg”, he commented in one of his letters. “This evening, there will be a cinema presentation. So far, I have not seen much of Bitburg, because we are only given leave in the evening.”[98]

Just two weeks after their arrival, the troops’ morale seems to have hit rock bottom. “Even though we have now settled in Bitburg, we would all be happy to leave it again”, Classen wrote to his parents on 18 January 1946. “We are all fed up with it, but since I am not allowed to write you that, this letter reaches you covertly through a friend who is on leave. It is just the same as in the Dudelange barracks, exercising, making the bed, locker inspections, rifle cleaning and the whole nonsense.”[99] In fact, what bothered many former “forced recruits” most were the “bodily techniques”[100] that the Army incessantly forced on them – the mechanical exercising, the rifle drills, the marching – as well as the draconic and humiliating punishments (or the constant threat thereof) that were so reminiscent of the dehumanizing drills in the Nazi armed forces. “The Germans are laughing when we are drilled here”, a former “forced conscript” in the Luxembourg Army wrote to *Ons Jongen*. “They rub their hands in glee and think: The Luxembourgers have learnt a lesson from us! And the boys born in [19]25 clench their teeth in anger at having to go through the whole circus again. Many of them had been up to their necks in dirt on all German fronts.”[101]

Such testimonies that played on the draftees’ loaded “space of experience” inevitably had a profound impact on public opinion. “We consider it anti-Luxembourgish if our young men were to undergo a kind of drill in our barracks whose occasional recklessness is only too reminiscent of the *Wehrmacht*”,[102] the Luxembourgish Social-

96 Félix Streicher, “Besetzte Räume: Alltag und soziale Interaktionen unter luxemburgischer Besatzung in Bitburg (1945–1955),” *Francia: Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 49 (2022), 399.

97 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 18 January 1946, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen

98 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 10 January 1946, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

99 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 18 January 1946, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

100 Marcel Mauss, “Les techniques du corps,” *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* 32 (1935): 271–293.

101 rbr. [Robert Bruch], “Hallo! Hei schwätzt d’Arme’,” *Ons Jongen*, 31 January 1946, 6.

102 “Die Stellung der Arbeiterpartei zu den Problemen der Zeit,” *Escher Tageblatt*, 13 October 1945, 3.

ist Workers' Party cried out in the *Tageblatt*. In Parliament, the social democrat deputy Adrien van Kauvenbergh adopted a similar tone: "We have to take care not to turn the young recruits into unthinking brutes by making them undergo exaggerated military and physical hardships. Our aim should above all be to develop the young soldiers' intellectual, moral and social competences."[103] At the same time, his party's representatives in the *Chambre des Députés* took the opportunity to raise the spectre of a long-term contamination of the nation's work ethos through its forced militarization: "Do you not worry that work morale is undermined by military service? If they are now conscripted for one more year, they will have done between two and four years of military service. They have lost much during the war. They could not finish their studies. They could not finish their training as craftsmen, which now they are not allowed to resume. When they ultimately leave the army, they will be too old and unwilling to work",[104] the social-democrat deputy Nicolas Biever lamented in Parliament on 26 February 1946.

Within the Army, the low spirit of the conscripts was certainly no secret (Fig. 4). "The morale of our troops suffers from the men's mentality, which is bad in many cases", the commanding officer of the 2nd Infantry Battalion reported to the *État-Major* (General Staff) in February 1946. "There is no doubt that the fact that the majority of our men were in the German army has had a deplorable impact on them." Many instructors thus found the former "forced conscripts" stubborn and highly unwilling to bow to their authority. "Since they had made it a principle to do the opposite of what the Germans expected, many of them now think that they have to assert themselves through such refusal."[105] During a press visit in Bitburg, a high-ranking officer put the issue in a nutshell: "Most boys have served under the Germans. They have become intractable."[106]

In fact, many war-battered conscripts looked down at their inexperienced and militarily untested officers, who had not served in the war and hence struggled to legitimize their authority as leaders. *Ons Jongen* did not hesitate to scornfully hold a mirror up to the verdant officers: "Remember that you are facing quite a few boys who may have more knowledge and experience than you, and who have more moral merits than you."[107] In the army's eyes, however, it was first and foremost such attacks by the press that were at the root of the overall

103 *Compte Rendu des Séances de la Chambre des Députés du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Session ordinaire de 1945–1946*, 16ème séance (Luxembourg: Victor Buck, 1946), 416.

104 Ibid., 433.

105 "Rapport moral du mois de février", 12 February 1946, LUXARMY, Folder "Rapports mensuels 2e Bn".

106 rbr. [Robert Bruch], "Huewelspe'n aus der Occupatio'n," *Ons Jongen*, 15 February 1946, 12.

107 Poilu., "Hallo! Hei schwätzt d'Armée," *Ons Jongen*, 25 August 1945, 4.

Fig. 4: Many officers within Luxembourg's post-war army considered the former "forced conscripts" under their command to be stubborn and unwilling to bow to their command.
Drawing by Pierre Bergem, undated. Musée National d'Histoire Militaire (Diekirch), Collection Pierre Bergem, BER_211.

problem: "We have recently noted in the Luxembourgish press that the most common means to sway the masses at the moment is to tell Luxembourgish parents that their children are being abused and corrupted by the army. That they are being tyrannized by the officers and that they have to undergo hardships unknown to them even in the German army. Newspapers [like] *Ons Jongen* [. . .] seem to delight particularly in that kind of gratuitous and cheap propaganda."[108]

By early 1946, the initially respectful or tolerant relationship between *Ons Jongen* and the Luxembourg Army had thus clearly suffered severe damage. A key event in this sweltering conflict had been the return of approximately 1,000

108 "Rapport moral du mois de février", 28 February 1946, LUXARMY, Folder "Rapports mensuels 2e Bn".

"forced conscripts" from Soviet captivity on 5 November 1945.[109] Against the *Ligue*'s appeal to the Army High Command to "be generous in this matter, and to liberate all boys without further ado [*o'ni ze faxen*]",[110] the General Staff had decided to once again draft many of the returnees from the 1925/26 age group. In light of this decision, the mood in the *Ligue Ons Jongen* and among the second-time conscripts grew permanently sour. "It would be a poor principle if we boys were to put up with anything, just because we didn't fare better under the Germans",[111] the former "forced conscript" Robert Bruch objected in *Ons Jongen*. As a consequence, the Ministry for the Armed Forces and Army High Command were flooded with letters from parents asking for the dispensation of their sons from military service.[112] Ernest Classen, who had been diagnosed with jaundice and sent to a military hospital in Luxembourg City in early February 1946, also saw his chance. "It would be best to write a plea to the General Staff [. . .] in Luxembourg City [. . .]", he told his parents on 4 February 1946. "Just tell them that I would like to continue my studies, and that I would like to prepare for the next school year. [. . .] For this year, it might still work. Next year will certainly be much more difficult."[113]

Even though Ernest's father duly sent a hand-written request (with explicit reference to his son's forced service as *Luftwaffenhelfer*) to Army High Command, the plea ultimately went unanswered.[114] By sheer bad luck, Classen seems to have picked the wrong addressee: while the Ministry for the Armed Forces was rather open to grant exemptions to former "forced conscripts", the General Staff of the Army – which had received the letter from Ernest's father – was not. Of the 3,874 recruitable men of the class of 1925/26, only 504 recruits were thus granted an overall exemption from military service, while 1,125 others were liberated after several months in uniform.[115] For *Ons Jongen*, this was definitely not enough. What they wanted was a decision in principle – even more so as the French Army had decided

109 Peter M. Quadflieg, "Mal Blumenstrauß, mal Handschellen: Luxemburgische und ostbelgische Wehrmachtrückkehrer zwischen gesellschaftlicher Teilhabe und sozialer Ausgrenzung," in *Identitätsbildung und Partizipation im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert: Luxemburg im europäischen Kontext*, ed. Norbert Franz et al. (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2016), 295.

110 Poilu., "Hallo! Hei schwätzt d'Armée," *Ons Jongen*, 15 November 1945, 3.

111 rbr. [Robert Bruch], "Hallo! Hei schwätzt d'Armee," *Ons Jongen*, 28 February 1946, 10.

112 Leider, *L'Armée luxembourgeoise*, 54–55.

113 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 4 February 1946, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

114 Letter from Jos. Classen to the *État-Major de l'Armée*, 8 February 1946, LUXARMY, Personnel File of Ernest Classen.

115 Leider, *L'Armée luxembourgeoise*, 55, 246. In addition, 859 draftees were declared "unfit for service".

to exempt *all* of its former *malgré-nous* from military service.[116] “We call for a total dispensation from military service for the age groups 1925–26, since their normal lives were already uprooted by the *Gauleiter* decree. That is our right, and that is what we stand in for!”,[117] the *Ligue* repeated on 15 April 1946. Army High Command, however, viewed matters differently: “A proposal for dispensation from military service has been made by certain great patriots. The recruiting officer would like to point out that good patriots should be proud to do military service.”[118]

By consequence, Ernest Classen was not liberated, but sent back to his unit on 13 March 1946. “Nothing new here but would like to let you know that we are still in Bitburg, and we three [friends] are still doing well, but we painfully long for 1 June, because then we will be liberated”,[119] he wistfully wrote to his parents on 28 April. Faced with the endless boredom of army life once again, Classen and his friends subsequently seem to have engaged in what many young and bored recruits did in the beer-brewing city of Bitburg: they drank. On 3 June 1946, Classen was caught in a drunken state by his superior and punished with three days of arrest (*arrêt simple*) in the barrack’s prison cell.[120] Incidents like these indubitably created irrevocable damage to the public image of military conscription that would remain for many years to follow. “If green boys boast at 4 o’clock on a Sunday afternoon that they have already had 14 beers; if 70% of the conscripts are drunk at least once a week, if not two or three times; if the bar of the Bitburg canteen does not have enough glasses to satisfy all the needs; [. . .] then it is clearly too much of a good thing”,[121] the monthly newspaper *Letzeburger Arbecht* (published by the *Action catholique*) still deprecated several years later. In the case of Ernest Classen however, his youthful escapade had no further consequences. On 9 July 1946 – exactly one year after joining his unit in Dudelange – he was honourably discharged from the Army. “Has always made a good impression”,[122] the final appreciation report by his unit commander laconically stated.

116 “Hallo! Hei schwätzt d’Armée,” *Ons Jongen*, 22 June 1946, 5.

117 “Unsere Armee,” *Ons Jongen*, 15 April 1946, 10.

118 Report from the G-1 to the Minister for the Armed Forces, 26 January 1946, cited in: Leider, *L’Armée luxembourgeoise*, 55.

119 Letter from Ernest Classen to his parents, 28 April 1946, Project Warlux, Collection Everard/Classen.

120 “Livret Matricule Classen Erneste, N° M[le] 00948, Classe 1945/26.”, LUXARMY, Personnel File of Ernest Classen.

121 “Coin du Soldat: Ein ernstes Wort,” *Letzeburger Arbecht* 6, no. 12 (1952), 3.

122 “Livret Matricule Classen Erneste, N° M[le] 00948, Classe 1945/26.”, LUXARMY, Personnel File of Ernest Classen.

Conclusion

In the pseudo-ethnological *Essay on the psychology of the Luxembourgish people* from 1911, the Luxembourgish writer Nicolas Ries presented his readers with the dubious soldierly qualities of the *homo luxemburgensis*: "Not having been trained from an early age on to take orders, neither at school nor, above all, at the barracks, and not standing in the need of serving the interest of higher orders, we are not willingly submissive and we refuse blind obedience to the law, authority, customs or status. We are never passively obedient; we question everything. Revolt and contestation are the trademarks of our minds and our natural disposition. [. . .] We feel acrimonious about obedience."[123] In the immediate post-war years after 1945, similar voices rose all across the political spectrum of the Grand Duchy. "No, Gentlemen, the Luxembourger is not a people of soldiers [*Zaldotevollek*]!",[124] the conservative deputy Georges Wagner thus reaffirmed in Parliament on 30 April 1947. He was echoed by the communist newspaper *D'Zeitung vum Letzeburger Vollek* only two weeks later: "To sum it up, the Luxembourgish armed forces look too martial; they march too well, most unlike true Luxembourgers!"[125] The post-war introduction of compulsory military service in the Grand Duchy – after three years of "forced conscription" under Nazi rule – clearly did not sit easily with the country's culture.

In view of the above-cited voices, the Luxembourgish rejection of military conscription – both in German as well as in Luxembourgish uniform – could appear a foregone conclusion.

Yet, the historical non-existence of systematic short-term military service in the Grand Duchy should not be mistaken for an inherent Luxembourgish antimilitarism.[126] The latter, for example, would leave no room for explaining the undeniable tradition of war volunteering in foreign armies that existed in the Grand Duchy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[127] The Luxembourgish hostility towards conscription into the Nazi forces and the later reluctance to-

123 Nicolas Ries, *Essai d'une psychologie du peuple luxembourgeois* (Diekirch: J. Schroell, 1911), 235.

124 *Compte Rendu des Séances de la Chambre des Députés du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. Session ordinaire de 1946–1947*, 24ème séance (Luxembourg: Victor Buck, 1947), 789.

125 "Abreißkalender," *D'Zeitung vum Letzeburger Vollek*, 13 May 1947, 1.

126 This narrative is also questioned by: Vincent Artuso, "Quand l'armée fit triompher le parlementarisme," in . . . *la volonté de la Chambre qui est la volonté du pays: Un florilège de débats parlementaires luxembourgeois (1848– 2008),* ed. Claude Frieseisen, Marie-Paule Jungblut and Michel Pauly (Luxembourg: Imprimerie Centrale, 2019), 368.

127 Sandra Camarda et al., eds, *Légionnaires: Parcours de guerre et de migrations entre le Luxembourg et la France* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2020).

wards the draft into Luxembourg's post-war army are to be found in more situational considerations and short-term experiences.

For young Luxembourgish men like Ernest Classen, military conscription into the *Wehrmacht* marked a decisive turning point in their adult lives. To start with, men from the Grand Duchy had not been militarized as thoroughly as their German counterparts (even though they had been subjected to up to four years of indoctrination in secondary school and in the Hitler Youth). For many, their experience of military life in the barracks and survival at the front constituted an unsettling and often traumatizing experience. The Luxembourgish "forced conscripts" had to either quickly adapt to the new everyday realities in German uniform while hoping for an early end to the war – or face the dire consequences of desertion or conscientious objection. Even though Ernest Classen's mobilisation into an anti-aircraft battery may have ultimately saved him from a more perilous stationing on the Eastern or Western Front, his *Flak* duty in the ever-intensifying Allied bombing war remained a deeply hazardous deployment.[128]

While the reasons for the aversion to "forced conscription" by the majority of Luxembourgers between 1942–1944 were thus rather obvious – an enemy power had invaded and occupied their country and was drafting young men to fight for its cause – the scepticism and hostility towards post-war military service remains harder to explain. This holds true especially when one looks at the initial euphoric embrace of, or at least the stoic-nationalistic consent to, the introduction of military conscription in liberated Luxembourg in November 1944.

In fact, as the examples of Ernest Classen – and many of his comrades serving a "second term" – show, most Luxembourgers did not struggle with post-war military conscription per se; more so, however, with their insensitive treatment at the hands of Luxembourg's post-war army leaders. Post-war military service was not an issue in itself, but the Government and the Army failed to "sell" it to its reticent and war-traumatized recruits, or society in general. Against the negative experience of "forced conscription", the Luxembourg Army failed to maintain the initial enthusiasm (or at least the good will) of its conscripts. Instead, many draftees felt disillusioned by the repetitive rhythm of army duties – which often reminded them of the everyday realities and "bodily techniques" of the German army – and by the low quality of life in a largely improvised set-up. This is probably best illustrated by a letter from one of Classen's comrades to the *Escher Tageblatt* in January 1946: "Whatever enthusiasm for military service may have been left in our boys, it will have drowned in Bitburg's muddy streets by now."[129]

128 Schörken, "'Schülersoldaten'," 460–461; Stargardt, *The German War*, 346.

129 A. W., "Freie Tribüne (ohne Verantwortung der Redaktion)," *Escher Tageblatt*, 5 January 1946, 3.

In conclusion, Ernest Classen and most of his colleagues did not enjoy any of their experiences in military uniform. Over the course of the "long 1940s", military service did not appear appealing or meaningful to Luxembourgish society, but remained an unwelcome, politicized and disruptive duty that had been imposed twice "from above" onto the lives of ordinary Luxembourgers. Even though military service in the totalitarian Nazi forces and the democratic Luxembourg Army were two entirely different experiences, they were still intrinsically linked through the recruits' "spaces of experience" and their "horizons of expectation". As such, the post-war situation of the former "forced conscripts" in the newly founded Luxembourg Army triggered individual and societal resistance to the measure of military service in the post-war Grand Duchy, and irrevocably damaged the public image of service in the young institution from its very beginnings.

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Jörg Echternkamp

Afterword: War Experiences and the History of Narratives

Innovation by combination: this is how we could best describe the research strategy reflected by this edited volume and the interdisciplinary conference it is based upon. Rather than exploring separate unexplored paths, it seeks to stimulate new insight by locating the research of a particular field for the first time at the crossroads of tried and tested yet stimulating methods. In order to shed new light on an important chapter of World War II history – the forcing of non-Germans into German military and labour services – most contributions to this volume can be found at the intersection of the (new) history of occupation and research on ethnicity and citizenship, as well as the history of forced recruitment. In addition, the editors have adopted the subjective approach that has characterised the WARLUX research project (2020–2024) at the University of Luxembourg. The focus has been on the biographical profiles, personal motivations and experiences of the men and women affected, while also considering their families and social networks. For example, the German army imposed sanctions such as imprisonment, resettlement or expropriation on relatives of Luxembourgish deserters (*Sarah Maya Vercruysse*). Meanwhile, *Konrad Graczyk* demonstrates that the men and women who helped deserters in occupied Poland were predominantly the relatives of the non-German soldiers, based on records from German special courts ("Sondergerichte"). Furthermore, bringing together various cases against this methodological backdrop reveals a comparative perspective on the years between 1938 and 1945.

These conceptual considerations and empirical case studies are in turn both an outcome of and the driving force behind the internationalisation of WWII research. For quite some time, the history of this global war has no longer been written from a predominantly German perspective, which included a top-down approach when it came to the people within the occupied territories. With regard to the recruitment of non-Germans, however, the focus had been on members of the Wehrmacht, and particularly the Waffen-SS, who originated from countries outside the German Reich. In the case of Slovenia, for instance, more than 500 Slovenians and Volksdeutsche are known known to have been conscripted into the Waffen-SS by force, threats or deception. Others had joined paramilitary organisations before they were recruited into the Waffen-SS, as *Klemen Kocjancic* points out. The fact that they were often treated with contempt by their German superiors and comrades reinforced the cohesion among Slovenians, as their dia-

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ries reveal (*Monika Kokalj Kočevar*). In this case, as in many others, the stories told in this book call into question what have become known as "master narratives", or "metarécits" in French: a prevailing narrative that provides historical meaning and offers social legitimisation. In our context, the master narrative of victimisation is a case in point. Presenting these men and women as victims of the Nazis allowed the non-German soldiers to be remembered as "morts pour la patrie". East Belgium is another example: while its history during the annexation had long been framed by stories of victims – forcefully recruited men and women, fallen soldiers, and victims of the Battle of the Bulge for annexation – there are in fact "many different stories", as *Philippe Beck* argues. German nationalism, a search for adventure, and individuals striving to adjust also characterised the experiences of the conscripted East Belgians, both men and women. The fruitful distrust of grand narratives has long since led to the analysis of smaller, more "localised" narratives, focusing on a limited group of people, if not an individual, and on singular events and local or regional contexts, taking into consideration the complexity of human experience. Methodologically speaking, most articles within this volume place the emphasis on an actor-centred approach to understanding the diversity of wartime experiences.

"Experience" has also emerged as a leading category in cultural studies, a term that is so closely affiliated with the concepts of recollection and memory that the borders at times blur.[1] Recent studies of historical experience take their cue from Reinhart Koselleck's work on historical semantics. For Koselleck, the distinction between "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" that prefigures it is important.[2] It is no coincidence that *Felix Streicher* and *Nina Janz* explicitly refer to Koselleck in their chapter on the impact of former forced conscription on post war military service in Luxemburg.

Alternatively, in the course of their reflections on the sociology of knowledge, Peter L. Berger and Thomas L. Luckmann have coined a constructivist definition for the term "experience." They do not conceive of experience as it is commonly understood – i.e. actual, ostensibly authentic experiences. Rather, they examine the social and cultural interpretive frameworks that shape (and are in turn shaped by) experience, the temporal structure of these frameworks, the mediated transmission of others' experiences, and the implications these interpretations hold for praxis. Memory, in this case, functions as a "kind of switchboard which

1 Jörg Echternkamp/Stefan Martens (eds.), *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*, (Berghahn Books: Oxford / New York, 2013) (Contemporary European History, vol. 7).

2 See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004).

organises experience both prospectively and retrospectively"[3] by giving order to what is actually perceived and processed, and converting the simple fact of the experience into a meaningful life event by a narrative recounting of the past. Yet the glittering ambiguity of the term "experience" is made no clearer by its frequent use. Critics are thus right to demand a theoretical clarification of the term's advantage over Koselleck's historical semantics.

"The impact of war experience" – the title of this book – points to experientiality as the core of narrative. In recent years, experts from various fields have discussed the possible link between the narratological approach to experiences and historians' interest in past experiences. They start with the assumption that there is an increasing interest in focusing on and conceptualising the experiences of past agents in historical research. However, within narratology, experiential aspects and definitions of narrative have also become increasingly popular. Put in another way: "Postclassical narratology emphasizes experientiality as the core of narrative, and new trends in historiography foreground the salience of experience in social and cultural history".[4] While experientiality is considered the core of all narrative, experience is not an ahistoric concept. In what can be called the "classical" phase of the relationship between history and narratology, the narrative was conceived as a pre-existing structure imposed upon the past (Haydn White). The authors of this edited volume, however, reveal a post-classical (i.e. non-structuralist) understanding of narratology. They study narrative structures to find out about the world knowledge of those who use these structures in times of war and violence. They concentrate on the personal and the individual, and ultimately on the experience of those understood as marginalised and silenced. For instance, in the chapter on conflicting loyalties among soldiers who had fought in both the German Army and the Allied Forces, the 1st Polish Armoured Division, (*Machteld Venken*), it becomes evident that in postwar narratives on wartime memory, these soldiers were silenced or marginalised for a long time.

Small wonder that authors such as *Nina Janz* privilege so-called "ego-documents", such as diaries and letters from the front, in order to understand how people gave meaning to their wartime experiences. The same holds true for postwar experience, as *Inna Ganschow* highlights for Luxembourger prisoners of war in So-

3 Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung*. (Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2005), 110.

4 For an effort to combine recent developments in the study of experience in narratology and history see Reetta Eiranen et al., "Narrative and Experience: Interdisciplinary Methodologies between History and Narratology", in: *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 47, 2022 (special issue), 1–15.

viet camps, or directly after their return home. Others, like Venken, have conducted interviews or draw on oral history studies that have generated their own sources through biographical interviews.[5] The term "ego-document" might seem self-explanatory; it relates to any kind of source material that reveals valuable information about the author, i.e. the person who has created this document. But as Mary Fulbrook has pointed out, "the character of such sources and the uses to which they can be put are far more problematic and diverse than might at first glance appear." An ego document is thus "not just a particular type of source, but a source which uniquely serves to open up a wide set of theoretical issues and questions of history and historiography."[6] Using narratological jargon, we could call these first-person narrative sources: diaries, letters to and from the front (Feldpostbriefe),[7] memoirs and autobiographies (Kriegsmemoiren). As contemporary sources that come from the private sphere, both are "open to the future" and free from the interpretive lenses of the postwar period.

The interpretation of these first-person narrative sources is usually based on the assumption that they point directly to the social and narrative construction of a unique self. Reading a first-person narrative thus implies learning how the writer wanted to talk about himself or herself, and how he or she wanted to be narrated by the recipient of the letter, the reader of the memoirs. It is true that memoirs present the whole story, while letters remain fragmentary. There is an intentional aspect to both, however: letters from the front deliberately left out certain information – military details, as well as personal suffering in order not to worry families. Memoirs can be understood as an attempt to present the self in a very particular way – which is, of course, also open to analysis.

In the chapter by *Streicher and Janz*, for example, this subject-oriented approach led to a "close reading" of the war correspondence of one conscript who, according to the conscription order, was one of more than 10,000 Luxembourgish men who had joined the Wehrmacht. While his letters are highly subjective and individual, their in-depth-analysis enhances our general understanding of the experiences of Luxembourgish Wehrmacht soldiers, as the authors rightly argue.

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5 Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?" In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 1998), 48–58.

6 Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, "In Relation: The 'Social Self' and EgoDocuments" in: German History 28, no. 3 (2019): 263–272; Volker Depkat, "Autobiographie und die soziale Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit", in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 29, no. 3 (2003), pp. 441–476.

7 Cf. Klaus Latzel, "Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle" in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Bilanz einer Debatte*, edited by Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, Ulrike Jureit, Horst Möller, Jan Philipp Reemtsma (München: Beck, 2005), 171–81; Jörg Echternkamp, Kriegsschauplatz Deutschland 1945. *Leben in Angst, Hoffnung auf Frieden: Feldpost aus der Heimat und von der Front* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006).

The individual experiences of a double-drafted Luxembourger exemplify the legacies of double military service in the Wehrmacht and Luxembourgish military forces after 1945, and highlight how difficult – if not impossible – it was for the government of the Grand Duchy to provide a positive public image of serving in postwar Luxembourg. Methodologically speaking, the analysis of individual experience and identity enhances our understanding of political structures and decisions. In turn, a close look at the policy of citizenship sheds light on the growing complexity of ethnicity during the war. It is in this light that *Denis Scuto* underlines the flexible use of racist ideology. While in ideological terms citizenship in occupied Luxembourg from 1940 to 1944 was defined by dissent rather than commitment, pragmatism allowed for an ideology that depended on individuals' interests and needs in specific situations within a multiethnic society. The vagueness of the key term "deutschstämmig" left room for manoeuvre, with significant effects on the individual.

By ignoring nationality as a sorting criterion, the Western Allies failed to consider the individual situations of prisoners of war from Alsace and Moselle, the "Malgré-Nous" (*Philippe Geny*). Alsatian conscription evaders who fled to Switzerland had profited from their origins and been met with "benevolent indifference", if not clemency, by Swiss authorities – in direct contrast to Jewish refugees. It is by focusing on individual experiences and scrutinising the refugee files compiled by the Federal Department of Justice and Police that *Tobias Kossytorz* is able to draw this conclusion. In dealing with various aspects of the forced conscription of non-Germans into German military and labour services during and after World War II, the chapters of this volume attest to the additional value of taking a subjective approach, with its consequent interest in personal experiences. By placing the emphasis on biographies – not least the profiles of women – the analysis of appropriated sources such as ego-documents allows for actor-centred stories. In short, narratives in this book are not understood as compulsory structures, but rather as opportunities to express individual and collective experience, and at times even offer a chance to resist predominant, hegemonic narratives. What this volume makes clear is that we are no longer primarily concerned with history as narrative, but with the history of narratives.

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