

## SEARCHING GERMAN MILITARY SOURCES

Robert E. Ward

"Mobility is the curse on genealogy"—such should be the motto of the family researcher who laboriously tracks his ancestors to their places of birth. "If only they had stayed in one location," is uttered. This dilemma is often encountered by the genealogist whose ancestors came from Germany, for he is confronted by the ancient German tradition of apprenticeship. With few exceptions, German occupations required a period of apprenticeship which meant leaving one's hometown to gain the requisite experience and skills of one's trade under the tutelage of the "Meister" (master).

While searching German military sources, thoughts have often turned to the phrases of the well-known folksong, "Es ist ein harter Schluss" in which the plight of the apprentice is expressed with humorous comments and insults aimed not only at the "Meister," but at his wife as well. Since it is the nature of military service that the soldier shall move about, one must first devise an approach to the mobility factor. This is perhaps best done by identifying the soldier's regiment or unit and remembering that prior to 1800 German military regiments carried no numerical or alphabetical designations, but rather were named after their superior officers. Therefore, search other sources carefully for a clue to the particular regiment.<sup>1</sup> If you don't discover this information in available sources, consider the geographical possibilities of his enlistment. In addition to publications on the subject of the German military, those family heirlooms may yield the desired information.

While researching, for example, one of my collateral lines, I started with a regimental beer stein which had been handed

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<sup>1</sup>Minor sources such as the colorful military service certificates issued in the 19th century as a memento of the soldier's service sometimes list the regiment and headquarters. Those that do not, should be studied carefully since some of the pictures and scenes printed on them may give a clue to the geographical location. German-Swiss military records date from about 1800 and generally give the soldier's name, rank, places of residence, and occupation. Information as to their whereabouts can be obtained from the Eidgenoessisches Militaer-Departement, Bundeshaus, 3000 Bern, Switzerland [see *Major Genealogical Record Sources in Switzerland*, Series C, No. 2 1967) published by the Genealogical Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, hereinafter referred to as *LDS*] and the various Swiss archives, a list of which will be found in Maralyn A. Wellauer's

down to me. Thus I learned that "Gefreiter" (Private) Weller belonged, in the years 1911-1913, to the Infantry Regiment "Alt Heidelberg" (3rd Wuerttemberg Regiment) No. 121, 5th Company, out of the town of Ludwigsburg. Since ancestor Weller came from Heilbronn am Neckar in the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, it was only natural to suspect that he belonged to a military unit headquartered nearby. Had I not had the beer stein, I would most likely have checked military records for units in towns such as Stuttgart, Heidelberg, or Ludwigsburg.

The chances that a male ancestor served in the German military are good, since (1) if he was employed in some governmental occupation, e.g., customs officer, mailman or policeman, it is most likely that he saw service in the military, since soldiers were often given priority in government hiring practices,<sup>2</sup> (2) military service was frequently required throughout German history.

If the German ancestor was a noble, it is also likely that he was, in some way, associated with the military. If the listing of his surname is preceded by the abbreviation "v." (short for "von"), then it is safe to assume that he was nobility before becoming a soldier (usually an officer). If, however, the surname is preceded by the word "von," he was, at the most, patent, nobility, or it was properly a part of the surname.<sup>3</sup>

The following are common sources pertaining to German military service.<sup>4</sup> In addition to them, the genealogist should also search records and publications pertaining to the nobility and, of course, to heraldry. German military sources since the 17th century are the easiest to find.

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*A Guide to Foreign Genealogical Research*, rev. & enl. ed. (Milwaukee, 1976), pp. 213-18. German-Austrian military records date back to at least 1740, and consist of three general types: *Garnisonsmatrikeln* (give name, rank, dates of birth and marriage, name of spouse, date of death); *Musterunglisten* (give name of soldier, date of birth and birthplace, residence and rank); *Konskriptions-register* (give name, date of birth, place of birth, occupation and residence, sometimes names of relatives and their place of residence). See *Major Genealogical Record Sources in Austria*, Series C, No. 16 (1971), published by the LDS. Names and addresses of important Austrian archives are given in Wellauer, op. cit., pp. 20-28; she lists German archives on pp. 109-23. See also *Historical Background Affecting Genealogical Research in Germany and Austria*, research paper, Series C, No. 19 (1977); and *Major Genealogical Record Sources in Germany*, research paper, Series C, No. 1 (1975), published by the LDS.

<sup>2</sup>Note that public schoolteachers and frequently physicians were included as government employees.

<sup>3</sup>The designation "von," originally meant "from," in surnames. It later became also a designation for nobility. Therefore, Johann von Hohenstatt, for example, could have come about his name either by being a noble or as a fellow named Johann who came *from* the village of Hohenstatt.

<sup>4</sup>Much of the information contained in this article has been extracted from Eckart Henning and Wolfgang Ribbe, *Handbuch der Genealogie* (Verlag Degener & Co.: Neustadt an der Aisch, 1972), pp. 98ff.

### *Stammrollen* (Nominal Rolls)

The *Stammrollen* were kept for petty officers and soldiers who were non-commissioned. The oldest is said to date from 1726.<sup>5</sup> Before 1850, they contain the name and place of origin of the soldier, the period of his military service and his height (in cubic measure). After 1850, the *Stammrollen* list the name, place of origin, period of military service, height, and the town of birth.

This type of military source is usually found at the state archive (*Staatsarchiv*) of the state, province, or region in which the soldier's regiment was headquartered. The Bavarian army records are at the *Kriegsarchiv* in Munich; the Saxon military records are at the State Archive of Dresden (East Germany); the army records for Hannover are at the State Archive of Hannover; those for Wuerttemberg are at the State Archive of Stuttgart. Many of the Prussian military records have been destroyed. What is available on Prussian soldiers is mostly at the *Geheimes Stattsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz* in Berlin-Dahlem. If you have a Prussian Army ancestor, you ought to also check the holdings of the *Heeresarchiv* in Potsdam (East Germany).<sup>6</sup>

### *Ranglisten* (Rank Lists)

The term for this type of source is deceiving since it contains information only on officers. Arranged by regiment, it dates back to 1784 and includes the officer's name, the title of his commission, and sometimes other data. Although the *Ranglisten* are written in longhand, some of them were printed as early as the 18th century. They were not officially printed during World War I, however. They are mostly in the possession of German archives.

### *Stammlisten* (Troop Lists)

This source contains varying amounts of information. Some are quite extensive and even give the names of wives, the names and birthdates of children and the place and date of the marriage of the serviceman. The *Stammlisten* of various regiments and units have appeared in print and are generally available at German archives.

### *Regimentsgeschichten* (Regimental Histories)

German regimental histories are similar to those written on American military organizations and usually list the names and dates of soldiers killed in action and who have been decorated for bravery, etc. They are mainly concerned with relating

<sup>5</sup>See Hans Saring, *Die Söldner des Soldatenkoenigs*, *Brandenburgische Jahrbuecher*, Heft 2 (1936).

<sup>6</sup>For details on the Prussian Army, see Alexander von Lyncker, *Die Altpreussische Armee 1714-1806 und ihre Militaerkirchenbuecher* (Berlin, 1937) and *Die Preussische Armee 1807-1867 und ihre sippenkundlichen Quellen* (Berlin, 1939).

incidents on the battlefield and frequently stretch the truth. They are to be found in German archives, libraries, and antique bookdealers' stores.

*Militaerkirchenbuecher* (Military Church Registers)

This source can be divided into two main types: (1) those from the Prussian Army, and (2) all others. They consist of two specific types: (1) *Regimentskirchenbuecher*, and (2) *Garnisonskirchenbuecher*. In general, both the former, i.e., regimental church registers, and the latter, i.e., garrison church registers, give the same kinds of information as the church registers kept by clergymen not stationed in army camps.<sup>7</sup>

The military church registers kept by the Prussian Army can be further distinguished. First, the regimental church registers were kept only for those infantry and cavalry units which had a chaplain assigned to them. The garrison church registers, on the other hand, contain entries on all troops stationed at a particular garrison insofar as the same are not recorded in the regimental church registers. Whereas the garrison church registers date back at least to the late 17th century, the regimental type was started much later.

Henning and Ribbe<sup>8</sup> point out that the researcher should not limit his search to the military church registers of a particular regiment, since it was common practice to record data on any soldier who happened to pass through a garrison town. Therefore, this source does not limit itself only to those soldiers whose regiment or unit was headquartered there.

Since these registers were the private property of the chaplain or travelling preacher, many of them did not come into the possession of the Prussian Army and have been lost.

When searching for a Catholic ancestor soldier before 1806 in this source, look into the Protestant registers. Military church registers for Catholics were not separately kept until after that year.

Military church registers do not list deaths. This information was kept by the local churches in the garrison town.

The researcher is cautioned not to count on the birthplace entry for the soldier's children which may be found in many military church registers, since it is often the location of the regiment's military staff and not the actual town of birth.

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<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of the types of information found in German church registers, see Robert E. Ward, "German and German-American Genealogical Guides and Sources Since 1850," *Genealogical Journal*, 6 (March 1977): 3-14. This article was republished in a three-part series, beginning 10 September 1977 in the *Tri-State Trader* (Knightstown, Ind.).

<sup>8</sup>Cited in footnote 4, *supra*.

Most of the Prussian military church registers are located at the Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin-Dahlem.<sup>9</sup>

Fortunately, most of the garrison church registers for other parts of Germany were turned over to the church registries and local archives and state archives of the garrison towns.

#### *German-American Military Sources*

In the United States, German-born immigrants are recorded in two basic types of sources relating to their military service which are often overlooked by the genealogist: (1) records of German military clubs in the United States, and (2) sources on the special German-speaking regiments and units in the Civil War. The former are in the possession of German-American organizations and historical societies; the latter are frequently found in local histories, German-American publications, and at historical societies. The first type were composed of information on former soldiers in Germany who, after settling here, formed fraternal and social clubs and reminisced of days gone by.

In addition to the bibliographical sources listed above, the lists published by genealogical societies, the HETRINA-series, the *German-American Genealogical Monographs* (lists German-American soldiers) by Clifford Neal Smith, etc., one should also contact or pay a visit to various German archives which have special holdings on the German military.

In his *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy*, (1977), Ernest Thode lists the following archives for military records: Staatliches Archiv (Kriegsarchiv), Leonrodstrasse 57, D 8000 Muenchen; Heeresarchiv, Gutenbergstrasse 109, D 7000 Stuttgart; Deutsches Bundesarchiv (Militaerarchiv), Wiesenthalstrasse 10, D 7800 Freiburg im Breisgau, all three of which are in West Germany. For information on German marines and sailors, contact the Deutsche Dienststelle, Eichborndamm 167, D 1000 Berlin 52, West Germany. The Oesterreichisches Innenministerium (Karl-Schweighofer-Gasse 3, A 1000 Wien, Austria) and the Kriegsarchiv (Stiftgasse 2, Wien, Austria) have records on German-Austrian soldiers.

The researcher seeking information on a German-American ancestor who served as a soldier here or abroad, should consult the three major bibliographies: Henry Pochmann and Arthur R. Schultz, *Bibliography of German Culture in America To 1940* (1953); Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *German-Americana: A Bibliography* (1976), and Emil Meynen, *Bibliographie des Deutschtums der kolonialzeitlichen Einwanderung in Nordamerika . . . 1683-1933* (1937). Olga K. Miller's *Migration, Emigration, Immigration* (Logan, Utah: Everton Publishers, 1974) also has

<sup>9</sup>For an extensive list of its holdings, see *Uebersicht ueber die Bestaende des Geheimen Staatsarchivs in Berlin-Dahlem*, Teil II (Koeln u. Berlin, 1967).

a section on German-American soldiers which she lists in a section entitled "Foreigners in American Wars."

The Smiths' latest book, *American Genealogical Resources in German Archives* (1977) contains many heretofore unlisted data, for example, references to sources on the issuance of emigration permits to persons subject to military service, pension correspondence of soldiers from the former Hannoverian Army who fought under the British flag until 1815, and so forth.

In their *Encyclopedia of German-American Genealogical Research*, the Smiths advise the genealogist not to limit himself to German archives alone, but rather to search also in Canadian, American, and British archives. "A major difficulty with German military records has to do with the fact that such records are dispersed among many archival collections, reflecting the fact that, until the twentieth century, each of the principalities recruited its own troop units . . . Another difficulty has to do with the fact that, for centuries, German principalities provided mercenary troops to any country willing to pay for them."<sup>10</sup>

Whereas sources on the so-called "Hessian" soldiers in the American Revolution have been widely published in English-language books and periodicals, other sources on the German military in Europe have received only scant attention in genealogical literature in the United States. Excellent bibliographies are to be found in German publications, for example, Eduard Heydenreich, *Handbuch der praktischen Genealogie* (1913), and Paul Hirsch, *Bibliographie der deutschen Regiments- und Bataillonsgeschichten* (1906).

Major sources on German-American soldiers are listed among the works cited in Clifford Neal Smith and Anna Piszczan-Czaja Smith's *Encyclopedia of German-American Genealogical Research* published by R. R. Bowker Co. (1976). Smith and his wife have made major contributions to genealogical literature on German-Americans in the colonial period. An important list of German-American mercenaries is to be found in Erhard Staedtler, *Die Ansbach-Bayreuther Truppen im amerikanischen Unabhaengigkeitskrieg 1777-1783*, which was published as volume 8 of the *Freie Schriftenfolge der Gesellschaft fuer Familienforschung in Franken* (Nuernberg, 1956).

In addition to the *Gesellschaft fuer Familienforschung in Franken*, many other German genealogical societies have published articles and bibliographical data on German-American soldiers. Many of these publications are regularly added to the Ward Collection at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>10</sup>Clifford Neal Smith and Anna Piszczan-Czaja Smith, *Encyclopedia of German-American Genealogical Research* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1976), p. 152.

The Institut fuer Archivwissenschaft at Marburg is presently publishing the series known as HETRINA (*Hessische Truppen im amerikanischen Unabhaengigkeitskrieg: Index nach Familiennamen*) which is a computer printout by surname. The State Archive of Marburg is compiling and publishing data from the muster rolls of Hessian units which served in Britain and North America.

From this short overview, it can be seen that some proficiency in reading the German language is necessary when searching sources and records on the German and German-American military. The family researcher must also equip himself with knowledge or aids to decipher the abbreviations and special terms encountered when delving into German military sources and records. A *Pionier*, for example, is a German word meaning *pioneer*; however, in Kaiser Wilhelm's army at the end of the 19th century, the term applied to what we might call *army engineer*.

### *Terminology*

The Catholic military church registers are frequently written wholly or partly in Latin. To assist the genealogist, the C.A. Starke Verlag (Postfach 310, 6250 Limburg/Lahn 1, West Germany) has published a special series of books entitled "Grundriss der Genealogie." Volumes 2 and 3 of this series are entitled *Latein fuer den Sippenforscher* (1965/1969) and were compiled by Karl H. Lampe who lists Latin terms, place names, personal names, and occupations which are frequently encountered in genealogical research. The sixth volume of this series is Paul Arnold Grün's *Schluessel zu alten und neuen Abkuerzungen* (1966) which is a dictionary of old and new abbreviations, in German and Latin, found in genealogical sources.

Military terms in the German language can be found in dictionaries such as Cassell's *German-English, English-German Dictionary*, or the *Brockhaus Illustrated German-English, English-German Dictionary*. They are available at most large American libraries. Cassell's is commonly sold in American bookstores.

A standard reference book on German genealogical terminology is published by the Verlag Degener. Compiled by Fritz Verdenhalven, it is entitled *Familienkundliches Woerterbuch* (2nd ed., 1969).

### *Locating Publications on the German Military*

In addition to the C. A. Starke Verlag, the Degener Verlag is a major genealogical publishing house. The latter's address is 8530 Neustadt/Aisch, Postfach 1340, West Germany. It publishes Germany's most widely circulated genealogical periodical, *Familienkundliche Nachrichten*, in which you can place an ad

regarding your ancestor or a request for information on military sources.

Many books and other publications treating the German military can be borrowed from German libraries through your local American library's interlibrary loan agreement. Hard-to-find sources can usually be purchased from German bookstores which specialize in rare and out-of-print publications, for example, the Braun'sche Buchhandlung, Antiquariat-Abteilung, Kaiserstrasse, 7500 Karlsruhe, West Germany.

German newspapers are particularly helpful if your ancestor was in the military service since they contain extensive lists of officers and their regiments. To locate a newspaper for the area from which your German soldier-ancestor came or in which he was stationed, write to local and state archives in that area. Thode's aforementioned *Address Book for Germanic Genealogy* lists, according to region, most of the state archives in Germany and Austria and gives information on some of the local ones. Consult your local librarian for information on how these newspapers can be borrowed for research purposes.

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## GERMAN-AMERICAN GENEALOGICAL NOTES

Some recent additions to the Ward Collection of Americana Germanica at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio are:

1. *Die Entstehung der europäischen Stadtfreiheit in Wallerfangen und in Flandern*, by Andreas Mailänder (1976). Published by the Landrat des Landkreises Saarlouis.

2. *Heimatkundliches Jahrbuch des Landkreises Saarlouis*, 3 vols. (1960, 1966, 1975).

3. *Unsere Heimat. Mitteilungsblatt des Landkreises Saarlouis für Kultur u. Lanschaft*, Issue 1 for 1976, Issues 1, 2, 3, 4 for 1977.

4. *Register zu dem Heiratsbuch der katholischen Pfarrei St. Peter zu Bous*, by Philipp Rupp (1977). Veröffentlichung der Vereinigung für die Heimatkunde im Landkreis Saarlouis, No. 1.

5. *Der französisch-republikanische Kalender*, by Gernot Karge. Veröffentlichung der Vereinigung für die Heimatkunde im Landkreis Saarlouis, No. 2. [Contains tables for conversation of French Republican calendar dates]

6. *Zeitschrift für Niederdeutsche Familienkunde*, 52. Jahrgang, Heft 4 (Hamburg, July 1977). Copy at Ward Collection of Americana Germanica, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Articles on: Von der Meden (Hamburg-East Prussia — names in church chronicle of town of Odagsen near Einbeck — Curio family in Otterndorf and Hamburg — names in records on town of Hamburg — names from area known as Pappenteich.

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