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“A Man with a Wide Horizon”: The Postwar Professional Journey of SS Officer Karl Nicolussi-Leck

Gerald Steinacher

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In his biography of SS *Obergruppenführer* Werner Best, the German historian Ulrich Herbert coined the phrase *Ausgrenzung in den Wohlstand*, or “exclusion into prosperity.” According to Herbert, “for those excluded from politics and public service, there remained the liberal professions and business, mostly provided by old contacts, some dating from their student days.”¹ Yet there are few studies on the postwar professional lives of former high-ranking Nazis and SS officers.

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Much of the detailed information about Nicolussi-Leck and other Nazi businessmen in this chapter is new and based on years of research. All the former Nazis discussed in this chapter were highly respected businessmen, men of the arts, or men of politics after 1945. Thus I faced considerable resistance and am therefore extremely grateful for the support that I did receive while researching this paper. In particular, I would like to thank Leopold Steurer and Franz Haller for sharing important archival and library sources. Tracy Brown did a fantastic job copyediting and proofreading this chapter. For the larger context, see Gerald Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run: How Hitlers Henchmen Fled Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). All translations are mine or are taken from *Nazis on the Run*.

1. Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903-1989* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 1996), 475.

Among them are Norbert Frei's edited volume *Karrieren im Zwielicht* (*Careers in the twilight*) and a dozen or so biographical studies, such as Herbert's work on Best.² Former SS officer Karl Nicolussi-Leck and his post-1945 network of "comrades"—business associates and friends—exemplify Herbert's assertion that former Nazis and SS men reinvented themselves after 1945, transforming from political actors into successful "apolitical" businessmen.

Nicolussi-Leck and his circle provide excellent examples of the post-war careers of former midlevel SS officers and Nazi officials, many of whom managed to start new careers in the private sector, especially with big German companies in the Rhine-Ruhr region. This traditional heartland of German industry started to boom again in the 1950s, and with it many careers took off too. Indeed, it is striking how swiftly and easily former SS officers reintegrated into German and Austrian social and economic life. By no means an exception, Nicolussi-Leck's career was a product of the Cold War-era economic and political climate, and as such it is a telling case. It was not until the late 1980s that hard questions about former Nazi officials began to be asked: To what degree were they involved with the crimes of the Hitler regime? Did they bear any legal or moral responsibility for these crimes? What did they do after the war? While researching Nicolussi-Leck's post-war career, I came across a number of similar cases that can only be touched upon here. Given the scarce research on the postwar careers of former Nazis with major German companies, this chapter seeks to raise awareness of this understudied topic and begin to fill in the gap in scholarship.³

2. Norbert Frei, ed., *Karrieren im Zwielicht: Hitlers Eliten nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001). See also the important book by the Austro-American historian and political scientist Kurt P. Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika: German Nationalism since 1945*, 2 vols. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967). For South Tyrol, see Gerald Steinacher, "Ausgrenzung in die Wirtschaft? Karrieren von Südtiroler Nationalsozialisten nach 1945," in *Regionale Zivilgesellschaft in Bewegung/ Cittadini innanzi tutto: Festschrift für/Scritti in onore di Hans Heiss*, ed. Hannes Obermair, Stephanie Risse, and Carlo Romeo (Bozen: Folio 2012), 272-86.

3. A recently published novel by Ferdinand von Schirach dramatizes such a case. In *The Collini Case: A Novel* (New York: Viking, 2013), Schirach tells the story of a former SS officer and war criminal who after 1945 went on to an impressive career in a big German company, before his dark past caught up with him.

Karl Nicolussi-Leck was born to a South Tyrolean farming family on March 14, 1917, in Vadena (Pfatten in German), near Bolzano (Bozen in German). He was one of eleven children. The Nicolussi-Leck family had for centuries lived in the German-speaking enclave of Luserna in the northern Italian province of Trentino in the Dolomites. During World War I, the region erupted in fighting between the Austro-Hungarian and Italian armies. In May 1915, the town of Luserna was shelled from nearby Italian forts,⁴ forcing the Nicolussi-Leck family to flee the front for a little farmhouse called Kreithof in Vadena. Karl attended elementary school in Kaltern and later the well-respected Franciscan *Gymnasium* in Bolzano, graduating in 1936. Soon after, he began studying law at the University of Padua.⁵

After World War I, Italy annexed the mostly German-speaking South Tyrol, which had up to that point been part of the Austrian province of Tyrol. Under Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime (1922-1943), South Tyrol's German-speaking population experienced harsh discrimination and oppression. The use of German in schools and on official documents was forbidden, and German names for towns, mountains, and valleys, and even some German surnames, were Italianized. At the same time, tens of thousands of Italians began to pour into the region. Almost overnight, the people of South Tyrol who had for centuries belonged to the powerful German-speaking majority of the Habsburg Empire-became a powerless ethnic minority in the Italian state.⁶ After Adolf Hitler became German chancellor in 1933, many South Tyroleans placed their hopes for liberation from Italian rule in

4. Franz Kurowski, *Panzer Aces II: Battle Stories of German Tank Commanders of WWII* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2010), 273.

5. Christoph Pan, *Lebenspfade des Karl Nicolussi-Leck* (Bozen: Eigenverlag, 2007), 3-4.

6. See Stefan Lechner, "Die Eroberung der Fremdstämmigen": *Provinzfaschismus in Südtirol 1921-1926*, Veröffentlichungen des Südtiroler Landesarchivs 20 (Innsbruck: Wagner, 2005). See also Leopold Steurer, *Südtirol zwischen Rom und Berlin 1919-1939* (Vienna: Europa, 1980), 256-71. See also Martha Verdorfer, *Zweierlei Faschismus: Alltagserfahrungen in Südtirol 1918-1945* (Vienna: Gesellschaftskritik, 1990). See also Günther Pallaver and Leopold Steurer, eds., "Deutsche! Hitler verkauft euch!": *Das Erbe von Option und Weltkrieg in Südtirol* (Bozen: Rætia, 2010).

Nazi Germany.⁷ They supported National Socialism mostly because it was German and rejected Fascism mostly because it was Italian. As the South Tyrolean journalist Claus Gatterer explains, in the eyes of the South Tyroleans, “Mussolini’s Fascism was more human, more corrupt, and, precisely in its human imponderables, more easily predictable—but it spoke Italian; it was ‘alien.’ Although Nazism was more brutal and inhuman, many South Tyroleans embraced it (because it spoke our language.”⁸ South Tyrol was a region where Italian nationalism and German nationalism met and often clashed. This ethnic conflict also burdened the relationship between Hitler and Mussolini.

Nicolussi-Leck became involved as a teenager with the Volkischer Kampfring Südtirol (VKS)—a pro-Nazi movement opposing the Italian Fascists’ denationalization policy. According to his friend Christoph Pan, “When VKS leaders were exiled by the Italian rulers in 1936, three people assumed the lead in the movement. One of them was Karl Nicolussi-Leck, at the time just nineteen years old.”⁹ Beginning in 1933, the VKS came increasingly under Nazi influence. According to the South Tyrolean historian Leopold Steurer, from 1933 to 1939 the VKS’s main goal was to lay the groundwork for the *Anschluss* (annexation) to the Third Reich by Nazifying South Tyrol through teaching and propaganda.¹⁰

In his curriculum vitae, Nicolussi-Leck wrote: “When I was 14 years old, I started my political career in the national fight [*Volkstumskampf*] for the South Tyrolean people and with it, my career as a National Socialist”¹¹ Nicolussi-Leck soon became one of

7. See Anthony E. Alcock, *The History of the South Tyrol Question* (London: Joseph, 1970); Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003).

8. Claus Gatterer. “Südtirol 1930-45: Eine politische Landschaftsskizze,” in *Aufsätze und Reden* (Bozen: Raetia. 1991). 171-84 at 177; see Steinacher. *Nazis on the Run*, 33.

9. Pan, *Lebenspfade des Nicolussi-Leck*, 5-6.

10. Leopold Steurer, “Südtirol zwischen schwarz und braun,” in *Teilung Tirols: Gefahr für die Demokratie*, ed. Godele von der Decken, Beiheft Sturzflüge No. 23 (Bozen: Redaktion “Sturzflüge,” 1988). 25-40, at 32.

11. RG 242, Berlin Document Center (BDC), RuSHA, roll E0295. File Karl Nicolussi-Leck. “Als 14-jähriger begann ich meine politische Betätigung im Volkstumskampf der Südtiroler und damit meinen Werdegang als Nationalsozialist.” Handgeschriebener Lebenslauf Karl Nicolussi-Leck, 1943, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

the leading and most active members of the VKS. On his SS documents, he listed his profession as “political leader and organizational head of the Nazi movement in South Tyrol.”¹² He received an appropriate ideological education in Germany at the NS-Schulungsburg in Krössinsee. His superiors ascribed to him a “leader’s personality and comradeship.” His commitment to Nazi ideology was described as “firm and clear.”¹³

Four months after accepting German citizenship in January 1940,¹⁴ Nicolussi-Leck enlisted in the Waffen-SS.¹⁵ “The Second World War had started,” wrote Christoph Pan about his friend’s decision, “and Karl Nicolussi volunteered immediately after the *Option* ... because he thought that the war had to be won by Germany if his homeland, South Tyrol, was not to be lost for good.”¹⁶ In November 1941, SS-*Scharführer* Nicolussi-Leck was sent to officer-candidate training at the SS-Junkerschule in Bad Tölz. On April 20, 1942, he was promoted to SS-*Untersturmführer*.¹⁷

SS Man Becomes War Hero

On May 1, 1943, Nicolussi-Leck assumed command of the newly formed Eighth Company of the Viking Division’s Fifth Panzer Regiment, a tank unit that initially consisted of volunteers and was chiefly deployed on the eastern front.¹⁸ Formed in 1940, the Viking Division comprised ethnic German, Flemish, Dutch, Belgian, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Finnish soldiers, most of whom had fought earlier against the

12. RG 242, RuSHA, roll Eo295, File Karl Nicolussi-Leck, R. u. S.-Fragebogen, Karl Nicolussi-Leck, NARA.

13. RG 242, RuSHA, roll Eo295, File Karl Nicolussi-Leck, Personalbogen und Beurteilungsbogen Karl Nicolussi-Leck, Schulungsburg Krössinsee, November 23, 1940, NARA.

14. RG 242, EWZ, Südtiroler, File Karl Nicolussi-Leck, Einbürgerungsurkunde, January 24, 1940, NARA.

15. His SS number was 56.834.

16. Pan, *Lebenspfade des Nicolussi-Leck*, 8-9.

17. Kurowski, *Panzer Aces*, 276.

18. *Ibid*, 401.

Soviet Union as volunteers in a kind of “Germanic Army.”¹⁹ Armed with the new Panther tanks and a deep sense of comradeship, Nicolussi-Leck turned his company into “a tight-knit unit.”²⁰ Just six months later, on November 9, he was promoted to *SS-Obersturmführer*.²¹

On January 26, 1944, while on leave, he married the politically active Maria Troy (nicknamed Mutz) of Bolzano. She was a senior leader in the League of German Maidens (Bund Deutscher Mädel), the girls’ wing of the Nazi youth movement. Nicolussi-Leck’s friend Robert Kukla, himself a high-ranking Nazi, vouched for the bride’s Aryan and pro-Nazi background. Karl and Maria could not marry before receiving authorization from the SS in Berlin; thus by the time of their wedding, their daughter Reinhilde had already been born.

By March 1944, Nicolussi-Leck had rejoined his company and set off for the eastern front on a special assignment in the Ukrainian city of Kovel, which was encircled by strong Soviet forces. The German defenders inside the city were poorly armed and consisted of mostly railway men and supply troops. Nicolussi-Leck received orders to break through the Soviet forces, get into the city, and hold out until the siege could be broken. His unit’s advance was slow and incurred heavy losses. After ten hours, the group had covered barely half the distance to the city. The situation looked hopeless, and the officers received orders to withdraw. Determined to get inside the city, however, Nicolussi-Leck ignored the orders. Heavy snowfall covered the group’s advance, enabling it to penetrate the encirclement. Once inside the city, Nicolussi-Leck’s men fought successfully for a week against the far superior Soviet forces, securing the orderly retreat of the German defenders and wounded soldiers.²² In honor of his courage at Kovel, in April 1944 Nicolussi-Leck was awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross—one of the Third Reich’s highest decorations—and Nazi propaganda in South Tyrol celebrated his heroism.²³

19. Bernd Wegner. *Hitlers politische Soldaten: Die Waffen-SS 1933-1945: Leitbild. Struktur und Funktion einer nationalsozialistischen Elite* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997), 310ff., 315.

20. Kurowski. *Panzer Aces*, 401.

21. RG 242, RuSHA, roll E0295, File Karl Nicolussi- Leek. Gebuhrniskarte. NARA.

22. Kurowski. *Panzer Aces*, 401.

23. *Ibid*, 398, 400.

After the German defeat at Stalingrad and Reich propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels's announcement of "total war," all available home-front forces were mobilized. In a telegram to SS chief Heinrich Himmler on February 3, 1943, the South Tyrolean Nazi leader Peter Hofer declared his willingness to "completely mobilize the forces of the *Volksgruppe*." Nicolussi-Leek, who had been criticizing the South Tyroleans' unwillingness to mobilize for the Third Reich and accusing them of *Verschweizerung* (Swissification), was a key proponent of this crusade. In all his speeches, he voiced support for the SS as the "elite troop of the Reich."²⁴

Nicolussi-Leek's wartime service showed his daring and fearlessness, qualities that also served him well in his postwar life. During the last year of the war, he served with distinction while leading his tank company. He was promoted to *SS-Hauptsturmführer* in January 1945 and awarded the German Cross in gold in March 1945 after being wounded several times on the eastern front.²⁵ In early April 1945, Nicolussi-Leek was transferred with a unit of 150 men from Hungary to northwest Germany. After fighting fierce battles while retreating, Nicolussi-Leek finally gave the order in mid-April to dissolve the unit. Each soldier had to make his own way home. Nicolussi-Leek and most of his men either surrendered or were captured and then interned in U.S. prisoner-of-war camps in Austria and Germany.²⁶

In 1947 Nicolussi-Leek was released from the Glasenbach camp near Salzburg and began to work as an "escape agent" for SS men and Nazis fleeing to South America via Italy. Like Nicolussi-Leek, they had been interned for two years in Glasenbach. "The American internment camp for the bad Nazis [was] well known all over

24. Leopold Steurer, "Meldungen aus dem Land: Aus den Berichten des Eil-Nachrichtendienstes der ADO (Jänner-Juli 1943)," *Sturzflüge: Eine Kulturzeitschrift*. 29-30 (1989): 31-125, at 41. See also Ulrich Saft, *Der Krieg in der Heimat: Das bittere Ende zwischen Weser und Elbe* (Langenhagen: U. Saft, 1990), 54.

25. RG 242, RuSHA, roll E0295, File Karl Nicolussi-Leek, Gebührniskarte, NARA; see Wilhelm Eppacher and Karl Rued, *Hohe Tapferkeitsauszeichnungen an Tiroler im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Veröffentlichungen des Innsbrucker Stadtarchivs 6 (Innsbruck: Stadtmagistrat, 1975), 41.

26. Saft, *Der Krieg in der Heimat*, 53-66.

Austria,” remarked one former SS man.²⁷ The friendships forged in the confines of Glasenbach evolved into escape networks. In the period leading up to their escapes, the “bad Nazis” were less concerned with politics than with camaraderie and mutual assistance, keys to starting over after 1945. One Glasenbach prisoner wrote, “We are closely connected and help each other as much as we can.”²⁸ Indeed, groups of SS comrades helped one another, mostly to start over at home but also to emigrate overseas. Word began to spread that SS men were escaping from Europe, and the group from Glasenbach knew there must be a reliable friend facilitating the getaways—Karl Nicolussi-Leck.

From Prisoner to Escape Agent: The Man behind ODESSA

After his release from Glasenbach, Nicolussi-Leck returned to Bolzano and soon met former *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Horst Carlos Fuldner, a German Argentine who was one of the masterminds behind Nazi escape assistance in Italy. Fuldner acted as a liaison with the Argentine immigration office to secure visas and employment for the fugitive Nazis.²⁹ He had contacts all over Italy, notably along the route to Genoa via the Brenner Pass. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency knew about Fuldner and his activities. One CIA document stated: “An Argentine-born SS leader named Fultner (aka Fuldner or Fuster), was reported to be Col. Gonzalez’ liaison with the Argentine Office of Immigration. In 1948, Fultner was made a member of the Argentine Immigration

27. US. Army Intelligence and Security Command. Fort George G. Meade, MD. Counter Intelligence Corps, 430th CIC Detachment, City of Vienna, “Subject: Possible Nazi Group,” June 1948 (Confidential), Records concerning Austrian Intelligence Services ZF400006WJ, Department of the Army, 107ff. (copies of the files in the possession of the author).

28. US. Army Intelligence and Security Command, Fort George G. Meade, MD. Counter Intelligence Corps, 430th CIC Detachment, City of Vienna. Letter from Ambros Murbitzer, Vienna, Civil Censorship Group Austria, APO 777 US. Army, Vienna Station, March 20, 1948 (Confidential).

29. Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: How Perón Brought the Nazi War Criminals to Argentina* (London: Granta, 2002), 65ff.

Delegation for Europe, and was stationed in Genoa. From this key position he was able to help many Wehrmacht, Gestapo, and Waffen-SS veterans to enter Argentina.”³⁰

In a 2004 interview, Nicolussi-Leck recounted that after he got to know Fuldner in 1947 in Italy, Fuldner revealed that he was helping to smuggle people out of Europe and into Argentina. Nicolussi-Leck agreed to assist him. The two became friends, and even late in life Nicolussi-Leck spoke with respect of “Don Carlos.”³¹ They were ideal complements for each other. Nicolussi-Leck knew many SS men and smugglers, and he was familiar with the safe routes across the Austrian-Italian border. He and his network escorted the fugitives over the border to Genoa, and Fuldner handled the next stage of the journey. Nicolussi-Leck worked with former Nazis and their family members as well as the smugglers, coordinating his efforts with Fuldner and the Argentine authorities.

Nicolussi-Leck was one of the most important organizers of escape assistance via Italy for Nazi fugitives. Among those whom he smuggled into Italy and then hid in Bolzano were the well-known Luftwaffe fighter pilots Hans-Ulrich Rudel, Adolf Galland, and Herbert Bauer.³² The Argentine government under Juan Perón—desperate for specialists, particularly technicians, in every profession—welcomed German experts with open arms.³³ Nicolussi-Leck knew this. Fuldner had told him that “Peron was going to buy out all of Germany” and bring the German experts to Argentina.³⁴ Indeed, it was likely Nicolussi-Leck who guided colleagues of airplane designer Kurt Tank, who went on to

30. RG 263, Records of the Central Intelligence Agency, 62-00865R, box 0003, folder 0003, 22, NARA. “German Nationalist and Neo-Nazi activities in Argentina,” July 8, 1953.

31. Karl Nicolussi-Leck, video interview by Franz Haller and Gerald Steinacher. May 10, 2004, Film-Archives Franz Haller, Meran, Italy. Statement by Franz Haller, July 10, 2010.

32. Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run*, 236ff.

33. For more information about Argentina and its immigration policy after 1945, see Holger Meding, *Flucht vor Nürnberg? Deutsche und österreichische Einwanderung in Argentinien 1945-1955* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1992).

34. Nicolussi-Leck interview.

build the first fighter jet for the Argentine air force, over the Brenner Pass to Bolzano.³⁵ Holocaust perpetrators like Adolf Eichmann also escaped overseas via South Tyrol. Eichmann and other high-ranking Nazis received new papers and new identities from the town of Tramin (Termeno). This is how Eichmann became the South Tyrolean “Riccardo Klement” from Bolzano.³⁶ We still don’t know who provided these Nazi criminals with new papers and identities, but certain possibilities should be researched further. One of the closest friends of Nicolussi-Leck was the former Nazi official Kurt Heinricher. Heinricher was the brother-in-law of Viktor Walch, who belonged to the richest and most influential families in Tramin and was the powerful *Nazi-Kreisleiter* (district leader) there. Is this just a remarkable coincidence?³⁷

The escape route via Austria and Italy was an open secret. A 1953 CIA document stated that “many Wehrmacht and SS veterans went from a center in Munich through Innsbruck, Bern and Rome, to Beirut and Damascus. Some of those going to Spain and South America also passed through Rome. A transit and recruiting center existed there under the protection of German [actually. Austrian] Bishop Alois Hudal.”³⁸ The Austrian police believed that the flight of Nazis across the Brenner Pass was controlled and financed by a “secret organization.” As early as 1949, after receiving tips about well-organized Nazi human-smuggling operations, the Austrian Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation that uncovered Nicolussi-Leck’s escape network and even caught some smugglers, including Nicolussi-Leck’s brother-in-law. It was not until 1969, however, that the Austrian

35. Jürgen Leyerer, *Argentinien der Flieger und wir* (Vienna: Liber Libri, 2010), 300-301.

36. Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run*, 52ff.

37. RG 242, EWZ Südtiroler, File Viktor Walch, born in Tramin on April 22, 1906, NARA; Walch attended the “*Schulungsburgen*” Sonthofen and Hohenwerfen and is referred to in these files as “*Kreisleiter der Bewegung*.” Trude Heinricher married Viktor Walch on July 15, 1933. See letter from the town of Tramin to the author, August 14, 2012. See also obituary for Ida Heinricher in *Dolomiten*, July 29, 1942. Thanks to Leopold Steurer, Meran, for important information and materials in this case.

38. RG 263, 62-00865R, box 0003, folder 0003, 11-12, “German Nationalist and Neo-Nazi Activities in Argentina,” July 8, 1953, NARA.

government connected Nicolussi-Leck's group to the mythical Organisation der ehemaligen SS-Angehörigen (Organization of former SS members), known as ODESSA. That year, the Austrian Ministry of Justice placed a new cover page titled "ODESSA Organization" in the file for the Tyrolean human smugglers.³⁹

Nicolussi-Leck himself longed to start a new life "away from ruined Europe." His professional and political prospects in South Tyrol were bleak. Because of his Nazi past, the Italian government very likely refused to restore his citizenship. A business career in Argentina seemed to be a realistic alternative. In a 2004 interview, Nicolussi-Leck said that the Argentines had invited him to go to Argentina.⁴⁰ So, in 1948, using the same routes along which he had guided so many others, Nicolussi-Leck headed for South America via Italy.

On August 31, he applied for a Red Cross travel document in Rome together with the family of Luftwaffe officer Otto Behrens.⁴¹ Nicolussi-Leck had no need to lie on his application forms. He could declare his citizenship truthfully: he was "stateless." But he had no proof of identity. Fortunately, he had close contacts with the Fascist Croatian priest Krunoslav Draganovic in Rome. According to Nicolussi-Leck, "the good Father Draganovic was the most important contact and colleague of Fuldner's in Italy."⁴² On the morning of August 31, 1948, Nicolussi-Leck met with Draganovic in Rome. The Vatican aid mission for refugees issued Nicolussi-Leck a letter of recommendation, and Draganovic himself signed his application for the Red Cross travel document. Nicolussi-Leck and his wife were placed on Draganovic's list of 169 Croats and received their visas for Argentina as "Croats." Nicolussi-Leck deliberately left his nationality of origin open, saying only that

39. Bestand Landesgericht, Akt 10 Vr 873/49, Bundesministerium für Inneres an das Landesgericht Innsbruck, "Betr.: Organisation 'Odessa,'" July 1, 1969, Tiroler Landesarchiv.

40. Nicolussi-Leck interview.

41. "Titres de Voyage CICR 1945-1993," application 83,520, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Archive, Geneva; Barbara Kummer-Behrens. *Mosaiksteine aus Rom. Ein alter Filmstreifen führt zurück in die Vergangenheit*, Manuskript, 2003; see also "Titres de Voyage CICR 1945-1993," application 83,520, "Application for a Travel Document for Gertrud Behrens," August 31, 1948, ICRC Archive.

42. Nicolussi-Leck interview.

he was stateless and that his place of birth was “Wadena” (Vadena). The lack of data seemingly enabled Draganovic to present him as an ethnic German from Croatia.⁴³

Once their papers were in order, Nicolussi-Leck and his wife and daughter immigrated to Argentina. With Fuldner’s help, Nicolussi-Leck became a business manager for a group of industrial designers that included former Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, and Nazi technicians and other experts who had formed the *Compania Argentina para Proyectos y Realizaciones Industriales (CAPRI)*.⁴⁴ As early as 1950, Nicolussi-Leck worked in agricultural planning, probably within the framework of CAPRI, for the Argentine provinces of Tucuman and Santiago de Estero. In 1952 in Buenos Aires, he founded Nicolussi-Leck Aspersión, a watering-system company, which was a great success.⁴⁵ He also lectured on thermodynamics at Buenos Aires University. At this point, Nicolussi-Leck and Fuldner shared an office on the sixth floor of 375 Avenue Cordoba in Buenos Aires. Their firms in the Argentine capital employed former Nazis and even war criminals such as *SS-Brigadeführer* Hans Fischböck.⁴⁶ Nicolussi-Leck and his comrades in Argentina won numerous contracts from President Perón and quickly established new companies.

A New Beginning Abroad: The Mannesmann Era

The origin of Nicolussi-Leck’s connection with the powerful Dusseldorf-based corporation Mannesmann AG is unclear, but it most likely began in Argentina, perhaps while he worked as an agricultural-machinery salesman (a job he acquired through his acquaintance with Ferdinand Porsche) for Porsche-Diesel-Motorenbau, a division of Mannesmann.⁴⁷ Mannesmann was one of Germany’s biggest enterprises.

43. “Titres de Voyage CICR 1945-1993,” application 83,519, Application for a Red Cross travel document for Karl Nicolussi-Leck, Italian Red Cross in Rome, August 31, 1948, ICRC Archive.

44. RG 263, 62-00865R, box 0003, folder 0003, 22, “German Nationalist and Neo-Nazi Activities in Argentina,” July 8, 1953, NARA.

45. Nicolussi-Leck interview; Uki Goñi, email, July 28, 2010.

46. Uki Goñi, email, July 28, 2010.

47. Nicolussi-Leck interview.

According to sociologist Rolf Wiggershaus, “Mannesmann was not just any company. It was a founding member of the Anti-Bolshevik League and financed the Nazi Party. During the Second World War, it took over factories in occupied countries.”⁴⁸

Several high-ranking Nazis had successful careers with Mannesmann after the war. Wilhelm Zangen, a key figure in the German war economy, was the supervising chairman of the board of Mannesmann’s pipe company from 1948 to 1952, chairman of Mannesmann AG from 1934 to 1957, and supervising chairman of Mannesmann AG from 1957 to 1966. So integral was he to the firm that Mannesmann proudly commemorated Zangen’s accomplishments in 1990 with his portrait under the general motto “Continuity within Change.”⁴⁹ Yet Zangen, who had joined the Nazi Party in 1937, had served in myriad positions for the Reich, including director of the Reichsgruppe Industrie, substitute director of the Reichswirtschaftskammer (the Reich’s economic ministry), and war industry leader.⁵⁰ His name was even on the U.S. list of suspected Nazi criminals to be called to justice, but he never was. Instead, in 1956 he received the Bundesverdienstkreuz mit Stern (Federal cross for merit with star) from the West German government. The historian Tim Schanetzky makes the point that “in this context, the processes carried out in Nuremberg after 1947 against a total of 36 owners, leaders and managers of the concerns Flick, IG Farben and Krupp could be interpreted as a symbolic and substitute accusation of the German Industry.”⁵¹

In addition to Zangen, *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Bernhard Baatz, ex-leader of the Einsatzkommando 1 and commander of the

48. Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 479.

49. Horst A. Wessel, *Kontinuität im Wandel: 100 Jahre Mannesmann 1890-1990* (Düsseldorf: Mannesmann-AG, 1990), 211.

50. Ernst Klee, ed., *Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer war was vor und nach 1945?* (Fischer: Frankfurt, 2005), 690, states that Zangen joined the SS and the Nazi Party in 1927; Zangen’s Nazi Party membership card at the National Archives in College Park gives the year 1937. I found no evidence for his membership in the SS in the BDC files at NARA; see RG 242, NSDAP Ortsgruppenkartei, roll 2065, NARA. NSDAP-Karteikarte Wilhelm Zangen, born September 30, 1891.

51. Tim Schanetzky, “Unternehmer: Profiteure des Unrechts,” in Frei, *Karrieren im Zwielicht*, 73-129, at 84.

Sicherheitspolizei and the SD in Estonia, became director of Mannesmann-Wohnungsbaugesellschaft in Duisburg.⁵² And, at Zangen's urging, in 1962 Egon Overbeck, ex-officer of the Wehrmacht chief of staff, was made general director of Mannesmann ("through a *Zangengeburt*"—a forceps delivery—according to the German weekly *Der Spiegel*).⁵³

Despite a short interruption owing to war damages and Allied intervention, Mannesmann managed to reconstruct its international organization by 1949 and to open sales offices in the United States and Canada.⁵⁴ It also quickly resumed its operations in Argentina and Brazil. U.S. authorities recognized that Argentina was the perfect locale for German interests: "The German commercial and political penetration in Argentina went so deep that it was disturbed only slightly by Germany's military defeat. Neither domestic nor foreign anti-Axis forces were able to induce the Argentine government to take effective action against the principal German [businesses] which had provided funds and cover for Nazi operations."⁵⁵

Notwithstanding Allied interferences, Mannesmann regained the Sociedad Tubos Mannesmann in Buenos Aires, with its numerous branch offices in Argentina as well as in Chile and Brazil. Soon Mannesmann's Milan-based partner company Dalmine established a pipe factory in Argentina. According to Zangen, "The demand increases steadily. Who satisfies it is another question. It is impossible to stop a country from industrializing, and the international concerns must ask themselves if they will deal with the question. Mannesmann will always be present in foreign countries." Mannesmann also hoped to profit from Perón's ambitious plans for modernizing Argentina. Zangen talked about *Entwicklungshilfe* ("assistance in development").⁵⁶ Nicolussi-Leck later explained that "Mannesmann ... was very interested in regaining its influence all over the world."⁵⁷

52. Herbert, *Best*, 475. See also Schanetzky, "Unternehmer," 73-129, at 96.

53. "Mannesmann AG: Zangen-Geburt," *Der Spiegel*, October 17, 1962, 37.

54. Wessel, *Kontinuität im Wandel*, 284.

55. RG 263, 62-00865R, box 0003, folder 0003, 17, "German Nationalist and Neo-Nazi Activities in Argentina," July 8, 1953, NARA.

56. Wessel, *Kontinuität im Wandel*, 284-85.

57. Nicolussi-Leck interview. "Mannesmann war damals interessiert wieder in der Welt Fuss zu fassen."

It was not only in Argentina that former SS men helped one another professionally. In Europe, groups of former Nazis set up thriving businesses, sometimes working with their friends in South America. Perón's escape assistants in Italy again played a key role. Connections from Germany, Italy, Spain, and Argentina often came together in companies and SS circles in South Tyrol. Thus the borderland evolved from an escape hub into a business hub. A good example is the company Mengele & Steiner in Merano (Meran) and Ora (Auer). Founded in 1969, it was probably established to provide financial security for Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele's wife and son, who had returned from South America and settled down in South Tyrol. In South Tyrol, Mengele's family could rely on old networks. Joseph Mengele himself had escaped justice in 1949 under the alias "Helmut Gregor," thanks to a South Tyrolean ID from the town of Tramin.⁵⁸ Like other companies of former comrades in South Tyrol, the Mengele & Steiner Company sold German agricultural equipment in Italy and elsewhere. Harvesters with the company name "Mengele" were soon seen on farms all over Alpine Europe.

Many former Nazis in South Tyrol who needed jobs turned to the agricultural sector.⁵⁹ There were ideological networks within the South Tyrolean farming community, which was in large part organized into the Chief Agricultural Association (Landwirtschaftlicher Hauptverband).⁶⁰ These networks were hardly secret. Based on information provided by local anti-Nazis, the British consulate in Bolzano reported to the embassy in Rome in May 1949 that "the headquarters of the Nazi movement in S. Tyrol is the exhotel Sti[e]gl at Bolzano, now occupied by the 'Hauptverband Landwirtschaftlicher Genossenschaften' (Consorzio delle Co-operative Agricole), a very powerful body[;] the prominent Nazis inside this body [include] ... Nicolussi."⁶¹ These associations, which were based on friendship, a shared worldview, and

58. Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run*, 41 ff.

59. Steurer, "Südtirol zwischen schwarz und braun," 25-40, at 36.

60. See also Walter Pichler and Konrad Walter, *Zwischen Selbsthilfe und Marktlogik: Geschichte des Genossenschaftswesens in Südtirol* (Bozen: Raetia, 2007).

61. British Consulate in Bolzano to British Embassy in Rome, Savingram, May 27, 1949 (Confidential), copy in the possession of the author.

business interests, lasted until the 1980s. Nicolussi-Leck's close comrades included Michael (Much) Tutzer, Ferdinand (Ferdl) Lauggas, and Paul Hafner. Tutzer and Nicolussi-Leck may have known each other since their school days.⁶² *SS-Sturmmann* Tutzer was one of the top organizers of the Nazi movement in South Tyrol. In 1943, he wrote to his SS superiors: "In 1939, I had to interrupt my university studies, since, due to the ... relocation of our South Tyrolean people, I had to put myself [completely] at the service of the secret Nazi movement, of which I had been a member since 1933, and in the *Landesführung* (regional direction) since 1934. I could contribute significantly to the achievement of a unique adherence to Germany of the South Tyrolean people."⁶³

Tutzer had worked closely with South Tyrolean Nazi leader Peter Hofer, had attended courses on Nazi ideology for "political leaders" at the Ordensburg in Sonthofen, Krössinsee, and Erwitte, and was decorated with the *Alte-Kämpferwinkel*.⁶⁴ In May 1942, he was severely wounded in the Soviet Union and hospitalized in Italy. *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Robert Kukla and Nicolussi-Leck intervened on his behalf so that he could obtain leave to complete his *Diplomvolkswirt* (economics degree).⁶⁵

Ferdinand Lauggas was also a leading figure in the VKS who was educated in the Reich-political courses in Rossitten in 1935 and in Berlin-Hubertushöhe in 1937, and ideological training at the Ordensburg Hohenwerfen in 1943. He listed his profession that year as "leader for political training in the *Volksgruppenführung*."⁶⁶ Lauggas later became *Nazi-Kreisleiter* of the Bolzano district during the German occupation of Italy in 1943-1945.

Like Nicolussi-Leck, Paul Hafner attended the Franciscan *Gymnasium* in Bolzano and grew close to the leading South Tyrolean Nazis

62. Karl Kompatscher, interview by Franz Haller, February 5, 2011.

63. RG 242, EWZ, Südtiroler, roll So28. Tutzer, Michael, April 18, 1916, Much Tutzer CV, June 18, 1943, NARA.

64. RG 242, EWZ. Südtiroler, rollSo28, Tutzer, Michael. April 18, 1916, "Personalbogen Ordensburg Sonthofen," 1940, NARA; RG 242, EWZ, Südtiroler, roll So28, Tutzer, Michael, April 18, 1916, "Beurteilungsbogen Reichsschulungsburg Erwitte," 1941, NARA.

65. RG 242. EWZ, Südtiroler, roll So28, Tutzer, Michael, April 18, 1916, Robert Kukla and den Reichskommissar für die Festigung des deutschen Volkstums, June 18, 1943, NARA.

before World War II. After obtaining German citizenship in 1940, Hafner transferred to the Hegelhaus *Gymnasium* in Berlin. It was there that he became a fervent Nazi.⁶⁷

Like other enthusiastic young South Tyroleans, Hafner volunteered for Hitler's war; he joined the Waffen-SS in 1941,⁶⁸ initially serving in the SS-Polizei- Ersatz-Bataillon Dresden.⁶⁹ In 1942-1943, he fought in the ranks of the Waffen-SS-Gebirgsdivision Nord at the Finnish-Soviet border.⁷⁰ Hafner was wounded several times there and was highly decorated for his efforts. Beginning in September 1943, he attended the



Paul Hafner in Spain. Courtesy of MOSOLOV-P, "Hafner's Paradise." Special thanks to Günter Schwaiger.

SS-Junker School⁷¹ and then Oberjunkerlehrgang officers' training, both in in Bad Tölz in southern Germany.⁷² The following summer, he became an instructor at the SS-Junker School in Bad Tölz, where he

66. RG 242, EWZ, Südtiroler, roll 0006, Lauggas, Ferdinand, November 9, 1906. Personalbogen Ferdinand Lauggas Schulungsburg Hohenwerfen, February 17, 1943, NARA.

67. Georg Mair, "Ein Leben als Nazi," *FF-Südtiroler Illustrierte*, May 2008, 32-37.

68. His SS number was 490,167.

69. RG 242, SS Lists, roll SS-A0006, p. 1732, List number 1396 Hafner, Paul, February 24, 1923, "Liste der zur Waffnen-SS einberufenen volksdeutschen Freiwilligen," March 1941, NARA.

70. RG 242, SS Lists, roll SS-A0009, pp. 2798ff., Hafner, Paul, February 24, 1923, "Amt Führerausbildung. SS-Gebirgsdivision Nord," 1942, NARA.

71. RG 242, SS Lists, roll SS-A0012, p. 4199, Hafner, Paul, February 24, 1923, "Kriegs-Junkerlehrgang an der SS-Junkerschule Tölz," October 7, 1943, NARA.

72. RG 242, SS Lists, roll SS-A0014, Hafner, Paul, February 24, 1923, "Kriegsjunkerlehrgang an der SS-Junkerschule Bad Tölz," March 14, 1944, NARA.

helped to set up the SS Grenadier Division Nibelungen, one of the last SS squads.⁷³ Like so many others, he spent several months in U.S. custody as a POW. After he was released, he studied business at the University of Innsbruck and graduated in 1949. The combination of his academic studies and his contacts from his SS days positioned him well for a prosperous postwar career.

With a Little Help from Their Friends

Nicolussi-Leck's companies provided a livelihood and a professional community for many former Nazis and SS men. In 1950 in Bolzano, Nicolussi-Leck and Tutzer founded the Aedes-Landmaschinen agricultural machinery company, which sold German agricultural equipment in Italy.⁷⁴ Later that year, Tutzer and Nikolaus Christanell, owner of Tenax Import-Export in Bolzano, founded the successful Allgemeine Berechnungsgesellschaft mbH (ABG)—also known as Società Generale Pioggia—which installed sprinkler systems and made and distributed irrigation devices in Italy and abroad.⁷⁵

Nicolussi-Leck was at the time still in Argentina working in the field of irrigation, but his comrades in Italy kept him informed about the status of joint agricultural projects in the homeland as well as politics and the "Südtiroler Volkskörper." In a letter to Nicolussi-Leck in Buenos Aires, they wrote: "Best greetings from your comrades at the firm; they work like crazy,"⁷⁶ Given his close ties with his colleagues in Europe, Nicolussi-Leck was also probably involved with the founding of ABG. His friend Ferdinand Lauggas was certainly in on it from the start.⁷⁷

73. RG 242, SS officers, roll 051A, SS File Paul Hafner, February 24, 1923, NARA; CV Pablo Hafner für die Universität Innsbruck, July 3, 1999. Copy in possession of author.

74. Steurer, "Südtirol zwischen schwarz und braun," 25-40, at 36.

75. Verbale, assemblea straordinaria, December 22, 1953, Anhang, Statut der Generalpioggia, Bolzano-Bozen, Files of the company Agrotecnica Bolzano, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

76. Letter to Karl Nicolussi-Leck, September 17, 1951 (copy in possession of the author).

77. Files of Agrotecnica Bolzano, Gründungsakt, Allgemeine Berechnungsgesellschaft mbH, August 25, 1950, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

When Nicolussi-Leck returned from Argentina in 1953, he was named general manager of ABG. He remained in control of the Argentine firm Nicolussi-Leck Aspersión as well and made sure that the two companies were not competing with one another, noting that ABG's work was primarily in "the Italian Republic, the Balkan States, the Near East, and North Africa."⁷⁸ As head of ABG, Nicolussi-Leck did not forget about the old "combatants in the national struggle" for South Tyrol. He found Hafner a position as technical director with ABG, and in 1954 Nicolussi-Leck made Kurt Heinricher an authorized representative of the company.⁷⁹ Heinricher had been an important Nazi activist in South Tyrol and was de facto head of the northern Italian province of Trento during the Nazi occupation in 1943-1945.⁸⁰ Heinricher defined himself as *gottgläubig* (an adherent to Nazi ideology). His teachers in a 1940 course on Nazi ideology in Krössinsee had praised him as "very knowledgeable in all areas of Nazi *Weltanschauung*" and considered him to be a good candidate for *Kreis-leiter* (Nazi district leader) or *Gauamtsleiter* (a high official in Nazi provincial governments).⁸¹

In 1955, Georg Thaler, an Austrian and former *SS-Unterscharführer* who was close to Nicolussi-Leck, became a special representative for ABG.⁸² Five years later, he was promoted to technical director, and in 1964 he became Nicolussi-Leck's second-in-command. The chair of the supervisory board, Anton Lun of Bolzano, had attended courses at the Nazi Ordensburg Sonthofen in 1940 and in Hohenwerfen in 1943. He

78. Pan, *Lebenspfade des Nicolussi-Leck*, 15; files of the company Agrotecnica Bolzano. Verbale, assemblea straordinaria, December 22, 1953. Anhang, Statut der Generalpioggia, Bolzano-Bozen, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

79. George Tinzl, interview by the author, September 6, 2004.

80. RG 242, NSDAP-File, Zentralkartei, Rolle H058, Kurt Heinricher, June 15, 1911, NARA. See Michael Wedekind, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik in Norditalien 1943 bis 1945-die Operationszonen "Alpenvorland" und "Adriatisches Küstenland,"* Militärgeschichtliche Studien, 38 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), 124.

81. RG 242, EWZ, Südtiroler, Rolle M008, Dr. Kurt Heinricher, June 15, 1911, Personalbogen Schulungskurs Krössinsee, November 24, 1940, NARA.

82. RG 242, RuSHA, Rolle G0197, SS-File Georg Thaler, July 7, 1923, NARA; Tinzl interview; files of the company Agrotecnica Bolzano, Procura Speciale, November 15, 1955, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

stated that he had been involved in the “illegal movement” of South Tyrolean Nazis in 1943 and had served as the economic expert for the Südtiroler Volksgruppe.⁸³

Former *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Nicolussi-Leck’s postwar career was flourishing. His position at ABG was secure, and his businesses were profitable, particularly in the area of irrigation devices. The market was strong for Mannesmann sprinklers, used for agricultural frost protection and irrigation from South America to North Africa. According to the introduction to Mannesmann’s 1959 irrigation handbook, “The increasing linkage of agriculture and economic development presents serious challenges, the solution to which must interest industry as well as agriculture. Mannesmann addresses these challenges, further developing techniques with its two firms, Porsche-Diesel Motorenbau and Mannesmannregner.”⁸⁴

In December 1956 ABG became a subsidiary of Mannesmannregner GmbH in Düsseldorf, thereby substantially raising ABG’s capital.⁸⁵ During these years, Mannesmann’s business in Italy was growing, and Nicolussi-Leck frequently worked with Dalmine and other companies in Milan.

In 1954, Hafner took a job with Mannesmann in Spain. He gained the position via his connections with Nicolussi-Leck and Tutzer.⁸⁶ Hafner started a small company for Mannesmann in Madrid that specialized in sprinkling systems for large agricultural areas and sold Mannesmann pipes. It eventually branched out into steel silos and livestock breeding. The company grew to fifty-five employees. Hafner later started a pig-breeding business, boasting in 1999 that “there are at least two million Spanish pigs with German blood in their veins today!”⁸⁷ He also joined the community of exiled Nazis

83. RG 242, EWZ, Südtiroler, Rolle 0014, File Dr. Anton Lun, August 31, 1906, NARA.

84. Mannesmannregner GmbH, *Beregnungs-Taschenbuch*, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Mannesmann, 1959), foreword, 3.

85. Files of the Agrotecnica Bolzano, Verbale di Assemblea Straordinaria, Repubblica Italiana, December 28, 1956, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

86. Mair, “Ein Leben als Nazi,” 32-37.

87. CV Pablo Hafner for the University of Innsbruck, March 7, 1999 (copy in possession of author). “Für Spanien ein großer Erfolg, denn es gibt so mindestens 2 Millionen spanische Schweine mit deutschem Blut in den Adern!”

in Madrid—playing tennis with SS officer Otto Skorzeny, who had rescued the imprisoned Benito Mussolini in 1943, and becoming acquainted with the prominent Belgian Waffen-SS officer Leon Degrelle.⁸⁸ Hafner also attended yearly gatherings of former Waffen-SS members to celebrate Hitler’s birthday. Even as an old man, he still believed that “Hitler [was] the most important personality in world history.”⁸⁹ He also denied the Holocaust to the end, claiming that “Hitler was not the gasser of the Jews, but the promoter of efforts to establish the Jewish national state (Zionism!) Not a single Jew was killed because he was a Jew! For me, Hitler is the savior of Europe and Christianity!”⁹⁰

The Irrigation Expert

While Hafner had found his “paradise” in Spain in the late 1950s, Nicolussi-Leck was busy making money in Europe, North Africa, and South America in the field of multipurpose irrigation. He planned large irrigation complexes in Italy and, in 1956, obtained a huge contract for ABG for the construction of the then-largest irrigation installation in Europe, on the Natz plateau in South Tyrol.⁹¹ Frost-protective irrigation for the booming apple plantations in South Tyrol was lucrative business. Together with Mannesmann, ABG built the gigantic installation in a year,⁹² making Nicolussi-Leck a good deal of money. He

88. Mair, “Ein Leben als Nazi,” 31-37, at 31. See Paul Hafner on Leon Degrelle in the documentary *Hafner’s Paradise*, 2007, directed by Gunter Schwaiger. Special thanks to Günter Schwaiger for helping me with this research and for the photo of Hafner in Spain. Courtesy of Mosolov-P (Günter Schwaiger). For more information about the documentary, see www.mosolov-p.com.

89. Paul Hafner in *Hafner’s Paradise*: “Ich betrachte Hitler als die bedeutendste Persönlichkeit der bisherigen Weltgeschichte.”

90. Pablo Hafner to the University of Innsbruck, February 24, 1999 (copy in possession of the author). “Hitler war nicht der Judenvergaser, sondern der Förderer des jüdischen Nationalstaatsbestrebens (des Zionismus!).... Nicht ein einziger Jude wurde umgebracht, weil er ein Jude war! Für mich ist Hitler der Retter Europas und des Christentums!”

91. Ernst Überbacher, *Wasser auf durstige Äcker: 50 Jahre Bodenverbesserungskonsortium Natz* (Brixen: Weger, 2008), 42.

92. *Dolomiten*, June 19, 1958, 9; Überbacher, *Wasser auf durstige Äcker*, 67.

worked closely with Mannesmann's specialists on this project as well as with old Nazi acquaintances, including the former Nazi party member Baron Rudolf von Unterrichter, who was secretary of the supervisory council for the Natz project.⁹³ The assistant chief of the project, Hans Stanek, had been mayor of Bressanone (Brixen) during the Nazi occupation of South Tyrol.⁹⁴ The Natz plant opened in 1958. Among the honorary guests at the grand opening were members of the state parliament such as Mario Gunther von Unterrichter, a key figure in the Consorzio Agrario, and Italian MP Karl Tinzl, who had been governor of South Tyrol during the Nazi occupation,⁹⁵ as well as many representatives of Mannesmann AG from Dusseldorf.⁹⁶

Nicolussi-Leck held a variety of positions with Mannesmann through the years. He was active as technical consultant for the agricultural-industrial sector for Mannesmann AG Dusseldorf from 1957 until 1969. Between 1960 and 1967, he also worked for Mannesmann-Export GmbH in Dusseldorf.⁹⁷ When Mannesmann bought Nicolussi-Leck Aspersión in 1957, Nicolussi-Leck purchased some property near Bolzano with the profits and built a villa, using Mannesmann pipes.⁹⁸ In 1957, Nicolussi-Leck's old friend Michael Tutzer started the Bolzano-based *Agria Mediterranea* firm, which distributed agricultural machinery as a subsidiary of the *Agria Werke* engineering works in Möckmühl in Germany.⁹⁹ In 1959, with the assistance of Mannesmann, ABG's capital was again increased, and the board gave Nicolussi-Leck "far-reaching authority" to realize the firm's ambitious goals.¹⁰⁰

93. RG 242, NSDAP-Zentralkartei, File Rudolf Unterrichter, May 2, 1914, Aufnahme: January 1, 1940 (handwritten correction, December 1, 1940), NARA.

94. Überbacher, *Wasser auf durstige Äcker*, 41. See Wedekind, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik*, 147.

95. See Wedekind, *Nationalsozialistische Besatzungs- und Annexionspolitik*.

96. *Dolomiten*, June 19, 1958, 9; Überbacher, *Wasser auf durstige Äcker*, 67.

97. Pan, *Lebenspfade des Nicolussi-Leck*, 13, 15.

98. Nicolussi-Leck interview.

99. Handelskammerauszug aus dem Firmenregister bezüglich der "AGRIA Mediterranea Spa," March 9, 2005, Handelskammer Bozen. Cf. Company charter for "AGRIA Mediterranea," December 13, 1957, articles of incorporation, "AGRIA Mediterranea," Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

100. Akten der Firma Agrotecnica Bolzano. Verbale di Assemblea Straordinaria, August 31, 1959, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

Over the years, ABG changed names several times. In 1963, it was renamed Mannesmann Agrotecnica GmbH.¹⁰¹ “This decision was made,” wrote Nicolussi-Leck, “by the Administrative Council, in order to adapt the name of our company to those of the Mannesmann branches that are active in the agricultural sector in European countries.”¹⁰² According to Hafner, in 1972 the Mannesmann main office in Germany decided to abandon its business in agriculture and instead to focus on major projects such as oil pipelines from Siberia to Germany. With the retreat of Mannesmann from the agricultural sector, Mannesmann Agrotecnica slid into crisis. In 1978, it was dissolved.

The Master in the Magic Garden

Nicolussi-Leck’s career both before and after 1945 must also be understood in the context of the history of South Tyrol. There was no *Stunde Null* (“zero hour”) in the region in May 1945, making this borderland a unique case—a region shaped more by a continuity between the pre-war and postwar periods than by a break. According to the historian Leopold Steurer, “In South Tyrol, the year 1945 did not signify a hiatus in the political, cultural, and spiritual life of the region, but rather a continuity.”¹⁰³ The Allied Military Government in northern Italy ended in December 1945. Thus South Tyrol became one of the first German-speaking regions in Europe not under Allied control. Given the lack of an Italian Nuremberg, attempts at denazification and defascistization in the region were extremely short-lived, aborted in their infancy. Former Tyrolean Nazis and former Italian Fascists soon returned to their posts in public life. The dividing line in South Tyrol continued (and continues) to be drawn along ethnic lines: Italian *or* German. Nazism was identified with the pro-German camp and Mussolini’s Fascism with the pro-Italian camp. As a consequence, South Tyrol is

101. Akten der Firma Agrotecnica Bolzano, Schreiben Karl Nicolussi-Leck an Walter von Walther, Handelskammer Bozen, December 1962, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

102. Akten der Firma Agrotecnica Bolzano, Karl Nicolussi-Leck to Walter von Walther, Handelskammer Bozen, December 1962, Handelskammer Bozen, Archiv.

103. Steurer, “Südtirol zwischen schwarz und braun,” 25-40, at 37.

one of the few regions in the world (and maybe the only one) where one could be an anti-Fascist and a Nazi at the same time. And many German-speaking South Tyroleans were. On the other hand, many Italians in the region were anti-Nazi but pro-Fascist. Nicolussi-Leck's purported "anti-Fascism" was therefore nothing other than anti-Italianism born of his desire to defend the German identity of his native South Tyrol. The Südtiroler Volkspartei, the political party of the German-speaking South Tyroleans, received the "Wehrmacht generation" with open arms after the war. But Nicolussi-Leck had no postwar political career in mind.

In the postwar era, Nicolussi-Leck, who always valued his war-time relationships, shifted his focus away from politics and toward culture. He founded the South Tyrolean Educational Center (Südtiroler Bildungszentrum) and the Museum for Modern Art in Bolzano, of which he was a long-serving president. His villa, not far from Bolzano, became a center of cultural life in South Tyrol. Over the years, he adorned the walls of his home and the surrounding vineyard with modern art and resided there like a "Master in the Magic Garden."¹⁰⁴

Nicolussi-Leck was also at the center of the community of former Wehrmacht soldiers and members of the Waffen-SS in South Tyrol. In 1975, the *Südtiroler Kamerad*, the journal of war veterans, wrote of him: "Karl Nicolussi needs no introduction. He is one of those comrades who has distinguished himself a thousand times on the battlefield, as his decorations dearly show."¹⁰⁵ He gave big speeches at gatherings commemorating the "war heroes." In 1959, for example, he spoke together with former high-ranking SS officer Sepp Dietrich, who had been commander of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler. Dietrich was sentenced to life in prison at the 1946 trials in Dachau for his involvement in the murder of U.S. prisoners of war during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944–January 1945.¹⁰⁶ But Dietrich spent only

104. Marina Kramper, "Meister im Zaubergarten," *Bunte*, May 26, 2007. www.stern.de/reise/europa/hochfrangart-der-meister-im-zaubergarten-589622.html.

105. Quoted by Leopold Steurer, foreword to *Die versteinerten Helden: Kriegerdenkmäler in Südtirol*, by Elmar Heinz (Bozen: Raetia, 1995), 7-12, at 11.

106. For more information on the Malmédy case, see James J. Weingartner, *A Peculiar Crusade: Willis M. Everett and the Malmédy Massacre* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); James J. Weingartner, *Crossroads of Death: The Story of the Malmédy Massacre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); John M. Bauserman, *The Malmédy Massacre* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane, 1995).

a few years in prison and was released in 1955. In 1957 he was again imprisoned but set free six months later—just in time for the memorial speech with Nicolussi-Leck.¹⁰⁷ This was not unusual. German Nazi officials and SS officers could expect a warm welcome in the *German South Tyrol (im deutschen Südtirol)*. It is therefore not surprising that during the Cold War era, many former Wehrmacht and SS officers, including SS general Karl Wolff, Himmler’s right-hand man, enjoyed their vacations in South Tyrol and were even sometimes honored by the local tourist boards.¹⁰⁸ Until his death, Nicolussi-Leck liked to spread the word about his “heroic deeds,” sending all over the world letters with an enclosed autographed picture of himself wearing his SS uniform.

The French author Jean Mabire, in his book on the Viking tank division, wrote that Nicolussi-Leck “came from Bozen in South Tyrol—which the Italians renamed Bolzano in 1918—and thus belongs to the southernmost German minority abroad. He was a young, slim, and dashing daredevil, who waged war in the Hussar style, and attracted attention even in the battles in the Caucasus.”¹⁰⁹ Journalist Erich Kern, a former *SS-Sturmbannführer*, described him as a “courageous officer from South Tyrol” who, with the help of his unit, “destroyed the plans of the Communists, at least [in Kovel].”¹¹⁰ Indeed, Nicolussi-Leck’s reputation for being a “reckless daredevil” endures even today, especially online.

In 2006 Nicolussi-Leck wrote the foreword to Peter Mooney’s book *Waffen-SS Knights and Their Battles*. He seems to assert there that Hitler’s war of aggression and annihilation was fought based on “knightly ideals” and that the majority of SS officers served honorably: “In the first decades after the war, the public opinion was stamped by the victor powers. Nevertheless, not even in those days could it be denied that also on the German side brave soldiers and extraordinary achievements were to be found. ... Actions led by knightly ideals occurred far

107. Mair. “Ein Leben als Nazi,” 32-37, at 33.

108. For Karl Wolff, see Kerstin von Lingen, *SS und Secret Service: “Verschwörung des Schweigens”: Die Akte Karl Wolff* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010).

109. Jean Mabire, *Die SS-Panzer-Division “Wiking”* (Eggolsheim: Dörfler, 2002), 282-97, here 282.

110. Erich Kern, *Kampf in der Ukraine 1941-1944* (Göttingen: Plesse, 1964), 134.

more often than the opposite and after sixty years of peace this should be admitted in any publication.”¹¹¹

Nicolussi-Leck died in the summer of 2008 as a respected art collector in Bolzano. In an obituary in the widely read South Tyrolean cultural magazine *Der Schlern*, not a word was devoted to his involvement in National Socialism, the SS, or helping Nazis to flee Europe.¹¹² His obituary in the South Tyrolean daily *Dolomiten*, titled “A Man with a Very Wide Horizon,” stated that the “greatest patron of the arts in South Tyrol has died ... at the age of 91.” The notice makes no mention of his Nazi and SS past, but the accompanying photo of his funeral shows members of a veterans’ organization carrying a large flag bearing the black cross of the Wehrmacht.¹¹³

The impressive postwar business careers of Karl Nicolussi-Leck and his circle of former Nazi and SS comrades were not exceptions. By 1950, as the Cold War was heating up, the Nuremberg trials and the denazification process were basically over, and former SS men and Nazis were being integrated into the new democratic society—whether they had renounced Nazism or not. And few did. According to Ulrich Herbert, “West Germany’s political and economic ascent offered former Nazi elites the possibility of ... social elevation”; thus “their interest in new political activity, particularly in the field of the radical right, constantly diminished.”¹¹⁴ Yet this does not mean that they ever broke with their Nazi pasts, or that they stopped glorifying their “heroic deeds” during Hitler’s Thousand Year Reich. At heart, Nicolussi-Leck, Michael Tutzer, Ferdinand Lauggas, and Paul Hafner remained proud Nazis until the end. At least it very much appears that way.

Just as Cold War geopolitics encouraged the reintegration of former high-ranking Nazis, West Germany’s postwar “economic miracle,” or *Wirtschaftswunder*, rewarded the old comrades for staying out of

111. Karl Nicolussi-Leck, foreword to *Waffen-SS Knights and Their Battles: The Waffen-SS Knight’s Cross Holders, vol. I, 1939-1942*, by Peter Mooney (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 2008), 7-8.

112. Christoph Pan, “In Memoriam Karl Nicolussi-Leck,” *Der Schlern*, August 2008, 48-49.

113. “Ein Mann mit sehr großem Weitblick,” *Dolomiten*, September 3, 2008, 17. “Der wohl größte Kunstmäzen Südtirols war am vergangenen Samstag 91-jährig verstorben.”

114. Herbert, *Best*, 475.

politics and tolerating democracy. Private-sector enterprises, including the large German industrial firms on the Rhine and the Ruhr, offered many opportunities to men such as Nicolussi-Leck. Rudolf Rahn, the former Nazi ambassador to Italy, became secretary-general of the Coca-Cola Company in Essen; Konstantin Canaris, commander of the security police in Belgium, found a position with Henkel-Werke in Dusseldorf. Both Werner Best, the former Reich commissioner for occupied Denmark, and the former Hitler Youth leader Heinz Wilke worked for the Hugo Stinnes Company in Mülheim.¹¹⁵ Franz Hofer too, the former *Gauleiter* of Tyrol, became an entrepreneur in Mülheim, and *SS-Obelführer* Reinhard Hoehn became West Germany's leading expert in management training.¹¹⁶

Even more than Germany in some ways, South Tyrol presented an ideal locale for starting over after the war. There was no Italian Nuremberg, no consequent defascistization or denazification. Moreover, the war had done nothing to diminish the long-standing tensions in the region between German-speaking South Tyroleans and Italian immigrants, which continued to dominate the sociopolitical landscape there. Thus many Tyroleans, Austrians, and Germans of the Wehrmacht generation revered men like Nicolussi-Leck for having fought on what they deemed to be the “right” side of important battles—opposing the Italianization of South Tyrol during Mussolini's Fascist regime and battling against the Soviets during World War II. Given the impressive “anti-Fascist” and “anti-Communist” credentials of Nicolussi-Leck and his ilk, West German companies could easily and openly welcome such men into their folds.

115. Ibid.

116. Tim Schanetzky, “Unternehmer,” 73-126, at 116. For postwar networks, see also Nina Grunenberg, *Die Wundertäter: Netzwerke der deutschen Wirtschaft 1942-1966* (Munich: Siedler 2006).