

“ON BEHALF OF MY COMRADES”:

TRANSNATIONAL PRIVATE MEMORIES OF GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN U.S.

CAPTIVITY

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in American Studies  
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### ABSTRACT

On May 8, 1945 eleven to twelve million Germans experienced the fall of National Socialist Germany while in Allied captivity;<sup>1</sup> four million German soldiers experienced it as captives of the United States. These Germans not only had to negotiate and respond to “victorious” Americans who judged them by standards different from those in the regime for which they fought, but also had to put into perspective their active investment in a political and social structure that had initiated and carried out global war and genocide. This study analyzes nine personal interviews conducted between 2001 and 2004 to address how German soldiers and war prisoners remember their “private” experiences of the rupture of Germany’s defeat and their transnational relations with U.S. personnel in captivity. By employing popular memory theory, it will investigate how German veterans, sixty years after the war, compose private memories and senses of self in the persistent shadows of their National Socialist past.

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<sup>1</sup> This number includes a small percentage of persons of other nationalities who had to fight or volunteered to fight for the Germans in western and eastern war theaters. The number also includes civilians who had worked for National Socialist offices and organizations.

### NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

This dissertation uses excerpts from nine German-language interviews and cites several German-language secondary sources. I have translated into English all quotations from these sources. Translations from secondary sources are identified by “[my translation]” inside the quotation marks of translated quotations. German words and phrases are italicized and directly followed by their English translation in parentheses. Translations of interviews are not specifically identified because *all* interviews were originally in German and were translated into English.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The future publication of this work will include both the original German-language quotations and their English translations.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Growing up in the Rhineland region of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the 1970s and 1980s, I heard stories about the aftermath of the Second World War, and about grandfathers and uncles who were war prisoners under British and U.S. control in North Africa, Italy, and Germany. I heard stories of the destruction of my great-grandparents' house in Speyer in 1944, the arrival of U.S. soldiers in March 1945, the burnt-out U.S. tank my relatives pilfered for metal, and their great surprise that the U.S. soldiers did not shoot them in the back, as Hitler had warned. Another tale concerned a horse bone, found during 1947, postwar Germany's leanest year, and which provided animal fat to supplement the family's weekly seven-gram rations of butter. The abundance of stories about the end of the war makes two things clear: 1) my family has an ambivalent relationship to our German past, U.S. military personnel (and the United States in general), and the consequences of Germany's defeat, and 2) memory often conflicts with history.

Early on in my life, I observed that my relatives' memories of Germany's past were anything but comprehensive. Most of their stories focused on the damage that real or imagined "enemies" had inflicted rather than on what Germans had done to their adversaries. This was a tendency my parents and their siblings (all born after 1948) refused to accept when the family was together. In the 1970s and 1980s, my parents refused to listen to their parents' war stories. Instead, they confronted my grandparents and

great-grandparents with Germany's atrocities—mainly the murder of Jews—made increasingly explicit in media reports and history texts. Although my relatives' conflicts exposed rifts among different memories of Germany's past, these conflicts were not limited to our family: memories clashed at home and in public, between generations and among peers, between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic.

As an American Studies Graduate student at the University of Kansas, I began to wonder if Germans from the war generation would ever honestly address their choices and actions. Would people who lived in the Third Reich tell the same defensive stories to a less cynical audience? I wanted to know how the U.S. military intervention affected the memories of Germans most actively involved in the war: German soldiers. In particular, how did German soldiers negotiate memories of the rupture caused by their defeat? How did they negotiate the fissure between memories of the Third Reich, the nation that started, planned, and justified the war legally and morally; and memories about the United States, the nation that defeated, held captive, judged, and punished Germans for acts that were legitimate according to National Socialist standards? How have the soldiers remembered and talked about this past? Since memories of those from "the war generation" did not seem to resonate with memories of Germans from later generations, how did the soldiers re-negotiate their memories with stories that circulated among the



German public in the decades after the war? What functions do their memories perform in the context of present-day German society and culture?

In an effort to examine how German soldiers composed their pasts as memory and how they have sought to maintain a cohesive sense of self in the face of those conflicting memories, I interviewed—in German—thirty German veterans who fought in the war and experienced U.S. captivity either in the United States or in Europe between 1943 and 1947, and who lived in the Federal Republic of Germany. Based on nine of these interviews, which I conducted between 2001 and 2004, this dissertation analyzes how former German soldiers and war prisoners compose their stories in present-day (unified) Germany about the rupture of Germany's defeat and their transnational relations with U.S. military personnel in captivity.

### **1.1 German Soldiers and Prisoners of War: A Brief History**

The mass internment of German soldiers after 1945 was a specific consequence, perhaps an unanticipated one, but nevertheless a consequence, of Germany's illegal and aggressive war as well as its war crimes and crimes against humanity. Among the eleven to twelve million Germans who were in Allied captivity during Germany's defeat in May 1945, approximately eight million men and a few thousand women were from the *Wehrmacht*, the German army between 1933 and 1945, and several hundred

thousand were from the German *Waffen SS*.<sup>3</sup> The German *Wehrmacht* had an estimated eighteen to nineteen million members and the *Waffen SS* had an estimated 600,000 members (301). Both groups were deployed in combat, on both the eastern and western fronts, and committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The *Waffen SS* followed orders by the SS and the upper command of the German *Wehrmacht*. The *Waffen SS* was excessively brutal in warfare, especially against civilian populations.

Both the SS and the German *Wehrmacht* upper command had strategically overruled rules of war to decriminalize military orders and actions that were commonly punishable under international law (Berghahn; Browning; Weinberg; Streit). Both *Waffen SS* and *Wehrmacht* units were permitted, encouraged, and ordered to commit war crimes for which they would not be punished in Germany. The *Wehrmacht's* function was to invade, occupy, and relocate or kill the original inhabitants of the occupied territories. Racially and politically "dangerous" people were to be executed. The soldiers plundered food, livestock and grain, and possessions to have them turned over to Germany, and they intentionally starved large parts of the populations in Soviet territories. The *Wehrmacht* participated in executions of Soviet Jews and maltreated and neglected prisoners of war. Between two and three million Soviet POWs alone perished at the hands of the German *Wehrmacht* (Berghahn).

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<sup>3</sup> Exact numbers could not be found, but all *Waffen SS* men were supposed to be automatically interned for their affiliation with the SS.

Between 1942 and 1943, a *Wehrmacht* division deployed in North Africa to support the Italian troops against the British counteroffensive— *Das Deutsche Afrika Korps* (DAK) (German Africa Corps)—was defeated and fell into British and U.S. captivity. Of the 275,000 German *Afrika Korps* prisoners, about 140,000 stayed in British captivity in North Africa, and after an agreement between the United States and Great Britain in 1942, about 135,000 were transported to the continental United States (Robel). As Gerhard Linderman suggests in *A World Within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*, combat between the German *Wehrmacht* and western Allies in North Africa was more structured and humane than the combat in western Europe, including Normandy.

Members of the *Afrika Korps* were put in captivity under comparatively amicable conditions. They were the first German prisoners to arrive, and they formed the most coherent group of German prisoners in the United States. Between 1944 and the spring of 1945, the *Afrika Korps* members in America were joined by about 250,000 German troops, primarily from the *Wehrmacht's* different divisions, who were captured in Europe after the Normandy invasion. The 380,000 German prisoners were housed comfortably. As Arnold Krammer argues in *Nazi Prisoners of War in America*, these prisoners received privileges far beyond what the laws protecting POWs required. They received these privileges from both the U.S. military captors and from the U.S. civilians for whom many of the prisoners worked in

wartime POW labor programs. The German POWs in the United States had been sheltered from the war, and in 1945 and 1946 returned to Germany well-fed and tanned, some with a college education and duffle bags full of cigarettes. However, not all of them were swiftly repatriated but were moved to camps in Europe for reasons unknown to them.

The majority of the nearly 12 million Germans fell into captivity in May 1945. More than 3.3 million of them fell into U.S. captivity and experienced very different material and political circumstances than those existing in prison camps in the United States. The Allies processed millions of people—not only defeated soldiers, but also German civilians who had to be screened for their participation in the Nazi regime. Four million Germans who were captured in Europe in 1945 were categorized by the western Allies as Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) or Defeated Enemy Forces (DEF), categories that excluded them from the protection of the Geneva Convention. One reason for this was that the Allies were unable to house and adequately feed and care for the massive number of POWs who fell into captivity. The U.S. military was especially overburdened with the Germans who, fearing reprisals for the atrocities they committed in the East, had preferred surrendering to the U.S. instead of to the Red Army (Bischof; Robel).

Early on, the U.S. military interned prisoners in temporary enclosures that sometimes were no more than overcrowded fenced-in open fields. In the early weeks and months after the war, the U.S. military not only had to

accommodate German prisoners, but also displaced persons, refugees from the East, and liberated concentration camp survivors. The U.S. military was incapable of adequately feeding, housing or medically treating either its prisoners or the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in dire need of food and shelter. Due to a Europe-wide food shortage, lack of housing and medical supplies, the enclosures' overpopulation and bad weather, many of the inhabitants died of typhoid and dysentery.

In 1945, Europe was in ruins, and the millions of people who needed care were simply not able to get it. The majority of German *Wehrmacht* soldiers in U.S. captivity were disarmed, registered, and held mostly in these temporary enclosures for processing, after which they obtained their release papers and were allowed to travel home, where they reported to the local police station and received new identification cards. Persons who seemed to endanger security, war criminals or SS members, had to remain in captivity, some until mid-1947.

Whether they were in the United States or in Europe, in 1945, German prisoners had to face the consequences of having supported the Nazi regime, the war, and the destruction they had caused. The Allies exposed Germany's war crimes and crimes against humanity, and temporarily charged the Germans with collective guilt for the atrocities committed in the name of the Third Reich (even though the actual Nuremberg Trials charged Germans not collectively but individually). The POWs in the United States

and the POWs in Europe had to face the changed political and social climate. Germany was defeated, the social, political and military organizations and structures disbanded, and German soldiers and civilians confronted with the legal and moral consequences of Germany's atrocities. In 1945, Germans were judged by the ethical and legal standards of the occupying forces.

However, these material, ethical and legal confrontations and consequences were neither homogenous nor consistent, and they occurred in very different transnational contexts: in the context of wartime America, on the one hand, and in the context of postwar Germany, on the other. Many POWs had spent the end of the war in the United States—where they were sheltered from the war's destruction, the danger of being killed in combat or in aerial bombings and fed better and housed more comfortably than any of their peers at home. Most POWs who spent the end of the war in captivity in Europe had personally experienced Germany's military defeats on all battlefronts and the bombings between 1944 and 1945. Many of them had already arrived in captivity malnourished and battle-fatigued.

In addition, in 1945, the Allied militaries screened, denazified, and punished National Socialists, war criminals, and men who had been members of any National Socialist organization the Allies declared illegal. Yet, soldiers and auxiliaries of the German *Wehrmacht* were released quickly and were seemingly exonerated for their involvement in the criminal war. The

majority of them were interned only very briefly for the purpose of disarmament, registration, and repatriation.

Many of these soldiers were released as early as May 1945 and in the order in which they were needed in industry or for administration during the general discharge in August 1945. The United States military was the first occupational power to release its prisoners, sometimes by transferring them to French captivity as early as 1946, other times by repatriating them. Approximately 800,000 German POWs were transferred to the French forces, where many of them remained until 1947. Another reason for early repatriation was the United States' increasingly difficult relationship with the Soviet Union and its goal to rebuild Germany and establish the western Alliance.

Many German prisoners who had *not* been found guilty of war crimes were nevertheless kept in captivity in France or Great Britain, where they were used for labor. Because prisoners were seemingly randomly selected for these postwar labor and reparation programs, many Germans saw these additional years in captivity as punishment for crimes they had not committed. Many Germans, some of whom had even been categorized anti-Nazis in the United States and trained to work for the U.S. occupational forces, ended up in French captivity after their release from the United States, some even as late as 1948. By contrast, many high-ranking Nazis were released as early as 1945.

Immediately after the war, Volker R. Berghahn argues, returning soldiers shared “escapist” memories of the war, in public or within the family, with people who had no combat experience. He argues that the soldiers claimed that the generals, officers, and soldiers who had fought on the Eastern front “had all done no more than fight valiantly and honorably for their country to stem the tide of Soviet communism. If there had been war crimes,” Berghahn explains, the soldiers argued that “they had been the work of Heinrich Himmler’s SS. Many claimed they had not even witnessed anything incriminating but had merely fought a ‘clean’ war at the front” (xiii). These private memories that soldiers shared immediately after the war had the effect of sanitizing warfare, on the one hand, and covering up their personal traumas, on the other.

Moreover, the generals’ memorandum, in which former *Wehrmacht* generals presented their testimony for the defense, created an official narrative, or a version of the past, about the relationship between the *Wehrmacht* and the Nazi regime that offered memories useful also for the composure of soldiers because it claimed that the organization itself operated separately from the National Socialist leaders.

In the early years after the German defeat and the Allied supreme command of Germany, the U.S. military government led the war crimes tribunal in Nuremberg (1946-1949) and helped define what constituted criminal acts and organizations in the Nazi regime and during the war.



Popular discourses in immediate postwar Germany included news about the trials and the verdicts. As Robert G. Moeller, Harold Marcuse, and many other cultural historians argue, the Allies' denazification process, which officially began in 1946, including the internment of war and Nazi criminals, the Nuremberg trials, and the occupation, were constitutive factors in the construction of war memory in the Federal Republic of Germany. During the follow-up proceedings of the Nuremberg Trials, specifically the so-called *OKW-Prozess* (the trial against the Wehrmacht high-command), the Wehrmacht was not found a criminal organization (Wette). According to the Joint Chiefs Staff Directive 1067 (also referred to as Eisenhower's denazification plans), the SS was a criminal organization. Because of this, members of the *Waffen SS* were usually not released together with all other POWs but were held longer and moved to internment camps for reasons of punishment. As Berghahn argues, the separation of the *Waffen SS* from the *Wehrmacht* also signaled to the Germans that the *Wehrmacht* was beyond reproach. The clear-cut separation between criminal and non-criminal organizations was not meant to be a moral acquittal of the atrocities by the German *Wehrmacht*, about which the Allies knew, but it was perceived as such among the general German population. The Nuremberg trials thereby allegedly excused former *Wehrmacht* members and made the SS solely responsible for the atrocities, which also shaped discourses through which many *Wehrmacht* soldiers composed their war memories.

In captivity, even before the official denazification process began, the U.S. captors interrogated the German POWs about their ranks and places of deployment. They were confronted with the concentration camps, sometimes personally, when they were placed in former concentration camps by their U.S. captors, sometimes in the form of film materials about Bergen Belsen. It was in captivity that outsiders who would judge them differently than their previous government confronted many of the men and women about their actions in the war and the Third Reich. Whereas the National Socialist Regime, as well the *Wehrmacht* command, had created a space within which the soldiers were able to commit atrocities without legal punishment, in captivity, they found that the “rights” did not apply.

However, denazification in the U.S. zone ended relatively early, in 1947. The United States needed western Germany as a partner in the newly emerging Cold War. Germans living in the U.S. occupied zone experienced a relatively quick return to cultural normalcy under these circumstances. For instance, the United States military was the first occupying force to release its war prisoners. The western Allies had released all their prisoners by the end of 1948, whereas the Soviet Union released most of them two years later, in 1950, yet still retained 26,000 “war criminals,” a group comprised both of German POWs and interned civilians (Biess 45). The early release of German POWs actually comprised part of the ground work for the western Alliance. The United States officially ended its military occupation of

Germany and granted the Federal Republic of Germany state sovereignty in 1949, and the FRG, under the first post-war chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, began to reestablish the FRG's domestic and international stability in close cooperation with the western Allies (Herf; Moeller).

Moreover, Nazi Germany's anti-bolshevism corresponded smoothly with the Cold War *raison d'être* of the western Alliance. As Berghahn argues, the western Allies in the wake of the Cold War relied heavily on the testimonies of generals who had fought against the Soviet Army, testimonies that historically and socially reestablished the reputation and power of thousands of former *Wehrmacht* generals and officers. The U. S. military anticipated a new ground war against the Soviet Union and used former *Wehrmacht* officers with experience at the Eastern Front, men whose criminal and moral status were far from "clean." For the sake of rearmament in 1955, Berghahn argues, the United States and West Germany swept "the criminal aspects and behavior of the *Wehrmacht* under the carpet," because, Berghahn explains:

the *Bundeswehr* could not be built up without the expertise of former *Wehrmacht* officers, and so the new armed forces were vitally interested and heavily involved in spinning out the early postwar narratives of a *Wehrmacht* that had kept away from politics and Nazi race ideology—that had concentrated on fighting a decent war with traditional means. (xiii-xiv)

The United States Marshall Plan and Cold War alliance with Germany rehabilitated West Germany materially and morally (Grosser; Schröder). The Federal Republic of Germany was soon better off than the countries it had destroyed, which, in itself, seemed to be a way of forgiving past crimes, sanitizing the German war and “cleaning” the record of the German *Wehrmacht* for the purpose of a new war.

The public memory of the German *Wehrmacht* that developed in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1940s and 1950s was that the *Wehrmacht* and its soldiers fought a traditional, if not defensive war, and were exceptionally “honorable” and “chivalric.” Since the 1970s, historians have established indisputably that the *Wehrmacht* was inextricably involved in the war of extermination and the Holocaust, following closely the main goals of the National Socialist regime. Despite the availability of such historical evidence, many Germans have continued to cling to the long-lived myth of the “clean” *Wehrmacht*, the belief that the *Wehrmacht*, the organization and its individual soldiers, had been fully separated from the Nazi Regime and uninvolved in its atrocities.

This public memory of the “clean” *Wehrmacht* has apparently permeated the West German population so much so that when in 1994 the Hamburg Institute for Social Research opened the exhibition Crimes of the German *Wehrmacht*: Dimensions of a War of Annihilation, 1941-1944, many Germans reacted with outrage and disbelief. The exhibit showed

photographs *Wehrmacht* soldiers had taken of their atrocities, putting in plain view the atrocities and the perpetrators as well as the dehumanizing gaze of the soldiers who took the pictures. Widespread resistance to the exhibit in 1994 and some photo materials, unprofessionally labeled, resulted in the exhibit's temporary closure. The exhibit was revised and reopened with fewer photographs but more documentation on the *Wehrmacht* orders and subsequent atrocities; it was finally able to withstand the accusation of condemning categorically and insubstantially all *Wehrmacht* soldiers.

The *Wehrmacht* exhibition and the debates revolving around it comprised a watershed in West German popular memory of the Second World War, but the shift of popular memories about the war had not been easy because this newly popularized memory of the *Wehrmacht* conflicted with the myths of the clean *Wehrmacht* and its long-standing tradition. Different interest groups publicly fought over the meaning of the past and sought to preserve or earn the central place in popular memory of the war. Historical scholarship that proved that *Wehrmacht* soldiers and the *Wehrmacht* as an organization were part of the war of extermination in the East, such as Christian Streit's *Keine Kameraden*, has repeatedly met with resistance from the West German public. Over the decades, the myth of the clean *Wehrmacht* has been challenged frequently not only by professional scholarship, but also by politicians and German public figures (Herf). In the late 1990s, knowledge of the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* was about to finally

establish itself as a popular and collectively shared memory of the past in the public. It resonated with a growing group of critics willing to assimilate the memories of the past that the exhibition made public. Their openness towards the exhibition coincided with the moment when Holocaust memory permeated popular culture as well. It was the time when the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opened and Steven Spielberg released Schindler's List (1993) and Saving Private Ryan (1998), and when many new Holocaust memorials and commemorative events occurred in Berlin. At the same time, Germans became increasingly aware that the last surviving witnesses of the War and the Third Reich were about to die.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

Most cultural historical scholarship on German war captivity memories focuses on political constructions of a “usable past,” a past that serves politicians to reestablish West Germany’s international reputation and power after Nazism. As is the case in many postwar societies, soldiers’ war stories often serve to re-construct national community and identity (Anderson; Mosse). The history of postwar Germany is no different. Robert G. Moeller argues in War Memories: Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany that West Germany re-constructed its national identity after National Socialism by strategically deploying German soldiers’ personal memories of war captivity in the Soviet Union as public discourse. Moeller argues that the German POWs’ experiences of Soviet internment “became

part of West German political consciousness in the 1950s” (3-5). Citizens of the FRG could feel membership in the “imagined community” of the FRG by adopting the public memory of Germany’s victimization by the Soviet Union. Moeller opposes a large body of preceding literature claiming that Germans engaged in willful amnesia, a type of intentional forgetting of the past. Moeller’s central argument is that Germans did not forget their pasts in the 1950s, but they remembered selectively by constructing two competing narratives of victimization, one which accounted for Germany’s victimization of European Jews and one which emphasized the Soviet Union’s victimization of German soldiers and citizens.<sup>4</sup> Public discourses about the war became more critical in the 1960s and 1970s, but Moeller argues that the narrative of German victimization reemerged in the 1980s and 1990s because the narrative in which the Germans suffered as much as the Jews had never been abandoned (291).<sup>5</sup>

Moeller’s study exclusively focuses on those memories that were assimilated and assimilable into the national memory in the FRG and served the construction of its postwar identity. Interested in public narratives—the dominant stories that circulated in the public arenas of the FRG in the 1950s—Moeller excluded those memories that did not cohere with the public representations of the past. Consequently, the private memories of Germans

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<sup>4</sup> Soviet soldiers did, in fact, keep Germans in captivity, many of them until 1956, and expelled millions of ethnic Germans from eastern European territories.

<sup>5</sup> See also Harold Marcuse, Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001.

whose experiences did not overlap with collective, public experiences were subordinated and marginalized.

Frank Biess' study, Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany, analyzes the East and West German public discourses dealing with Germans returning from Soviet captivity between 1945 and 1956. Neither side acknowledged the crimes of the German *Wehrmacht*. Biess shows that political parties—the CDU and the SPD in West Germany and the SED in East Germany—used narratives of returning prisoners to construct political identities after the war that would deflect responsibility for the atrocities. These narratives served to construct a democratic and pro-American FRG and a socialist, pro-Soviet GDR—a point Jeffrey Herf also establishes in Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys. Herf argues that West Germany's national memory earned transnational justification from the FRG's relationship with the United States in the Cold War. German war memory constructed public narratives *after* the war in a process through which politicians constituted the FRG's national identity in the 1950s.

Biess, however, acknowledges the differences between public narratives constructed by these states and the responses of common Germans. Between 1945 and 1946, the devastation of Germany's defeat and the German casualties at the battlefronts and home fronts alike “prompted a surprising, though rather brief, willingness to address guilt and responsibility



for Nazi crimes and military defeat” (46-47). In the early months and years of the occupation, common Germans made complaints to the U.S. military, stating that among the men who were released from captivity early were a disproportionately large number of ardent Nazis, including *Wehrmacht* officers who had carelessly ordered common soldiers to fight deadly battles they could not win. Biess concludes from these complaints that many Germans were willing to find and persecute Nazis who seemingly preserved their wartime privileges of impunity. He also concludes that these debates about German POWs also served “as one way to differentiate between degrees of German guilt”: men in captivity were rendered more innocent than men who were repatriated early (47). German POWs who were in U.S. captivity in late 1945 and 1946, even under conditions comparably favorable to the civilian population, were publicly regarded as victims of an unfair Allied administration that failed to separate the Nazis from the less guilty *Wehrmacht*.

In Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses and a Concentration Camp, Harold Marcuse argues that between 1945 and 1949, many Germans officially shared the notion that they were victims of the Nazis and the Allied forces. The Nazis, they believed, had used German soldiers for the war, and the Allied forces troubled these German soldiers with unnecessary denazification processes and abused them in captivity long after Germany’s defeat. Illustrating that the history of German victimization was a central

aspect of war memory and national interest in the 1950s is the FRG-funded commission (the Maschke Commission<sup>6</sup>).

This commission produced twenty-two volumes over the course of seventeen years, including seven volumes on captivity in the Soviet Union, two on captivity in Yugoslavia, one on captivity in Poland and Czechoslovakia, two on U.S. captivity, two on captivity in Britain, one on captivity in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg, and one on captivity in France (Maschke).<sup>7</sup> The volumes draw on interviews and diaries, letters and written testimonies by as many as 400,000 returned German POWs as well

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<sup>6</sup> Robert G. Moeller explains that Maschke had been:

chairholder at the University of Jena under the Nazis. An outspoken propagandist for German expansion in eastern Europe, he celebrated a 'German right to the east' and practiced a variety of history that was riddled with racist conceptions of Germany's eastward expansion as part of the necessary 'growth of the German national body,' a place to be filled with German "blood and the best of [Germany's] soul.' His academic career was interrupted by military service that allowed him to battle what he had identified as the 'Asiatic powers' behind Soviet expansion, but German inability to contain those powers resulted in his capture by the Soviets and a lengthy stint as a prisoner of war that ended only with his release in 1953. Although dismissed from his university position on political grounds in 1945, in the 1950s he was named to a professorship in social and economic history at the University of Heidelberg. Maschke did not have the same high professional status as the editors of [an] expellee project, but he was well situated; entrusting the official chronicle of the POW experience to him was therefore a clear sign that a 'scientific' account, free of any claims of partisan bias or self-pity, was the goal (177-178).

<sup>7</sup> The extraordinary interest in the "fate" and suffering of German POWs in postwar West Germany (but not on the victims of Nazi Germany) also had other reasons. Rüdiger Overmans argues in "Ein Silberstreif Am Forschungshorizont" that trace services sought to locate the whereabouts of about one million Germans who were missing at the end of the war and realized that they could only do so by reconstructing how each victorious power processed the German enemy combatants. The German *Büro für Friedensfragen* (The German Office for Peace Questions), which funded the Maschke Kommission, sought to collect information about German POWs for postwar peace negotiations allegedly because the lack of documentation about German POWs after the First World War put Germany at an economic disadvantage.

as on 45,000 reports from the Red Cross, the German *Caritas Verband*, the YMCA, and the U.S. military.

In spite of the work's rich resources, meticulous details, and mostly accurate historical references, the commission's focus on victimization represents a disturbingly limited viewpoint and lacks in critical perspective. Most noticeably, the volumes are exceptionally detailed in dealing with the German prisoners' suffering in Soviet captivity. The volumes appear to interpret the experiences of German POWs held in Europe after the war as an experience of *national* humiliation, clearly juxtaposing the personal "fate" of male soldiers and the "fate" of the German nation as an imagined and political community. The authors present war captivity in hyperbolic terms of passive but heroic suffering. Captivity appears as if it had been *Schicksal* (fate), rather than the result of the German war.

The volume by Kurt Böhme, Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand—Europa (The German Prisoners of War in American Hands—Europe), describes the experience of millions of POWs who fell into American hands around May 8, 1945, as a "tragedy," and as a "mass calamity not previously known to world history [my translation]" (140-41). As such, Böhme's version of war captivity was the consequence of Germany's defeat, not the consequence of Germany's aggressive war. The work excludes the suffering the Germans caused European countries and pays no attention to their own implication in the devastation of Europe. He also

overstresses the suffering of the German POWs and minimizes the suffering of the civilian population. On the contrary, the volumes make soldiers, not civilians, appear to be the main victims of the war.

In addition, both of the commission's volumes on U.S. captivity preserve and promote a sense of military honor and group cohesion and suggest that the Allies, disloyal German soldiers, and the Nazi regime undermined their comradeship. Both volumes do so by relying heavily on the prisoners' dramatic testimonies. Testimonies about captivity in the U.S. emphasize the prisoner's resourcefulness and hard work at preserving a civilized life-style while longing for their families and their *Heimat* (homeland). Testimonies about U.S. captivity in Europe after 1945 emphasize the U.S. military's poor treatment and, in many other cases, examples of un-collegial German comrades. The commission further stresses military cohesion and honor by separating *Wehrmacht* (and *Waffen SS*) members from "National Socialists" who sacrificed German soldiers for a lost war. The soldiers sacrificed themselves for a cause that failed, and the victors punished them for a defeat the Nazis had brought on the German people.

Especially the soldiers who fell into captivity in Europe after the war are represented as doubly victimized; the total collapse of the Third Reich was doubly traumatic.<sup>8</sup> Böhme argues:

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<sup>8</sup> The term "collapse" is a common U.S. military reference describing the falling apart of an enemy regime. Much of the German literature adopted language used by the U.S. military

Six years of war that, now behind barbed wire seemingly turned out to have been a senseless because wasted sacrifice sobered up the soldier over night... Underneath his uniform, which concealed much, the naked human being became visible, the individual who was not quite able to understand the defeat of the fatherland, for whom questions about shelter, food, clothing and medical care, contact with the outside world and repatriation became the meaning of life [my translation].  
(141)

The main emphasis of the massive study was the undeserved suffering of the German POWs, comprised of the German defeat, the realization that the cause for which the German soldiers had fought was lost, and the government for which they went to war no longer existed and would not help them when they were in need.

Moreover, the two main volumes on U.S. captivity use testimonies of German POWs to assess the quality of the U.S. military's treatment of its prisoners. In the United States, the commission argues, prisoners were treated "correctly," as expected, failing to mention that the German military had broken the same regulations. In Europe, the U.S. military did not always fully adhere to the rules of the Convention, which led many of the prisoners Böhme cites to conclude that the German soldiers had become the victims of

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and appropriated it for their own writing of history, which is frequently overlooked in studies seeking to understand the ways in which Germans narrated the experience of their past.

“vengeful” and “victory-intoxicated” U.S. soldiers (139). The Allies’ discovery of the concentration camps and their feeling of superiority as victors, Böhme suggests, made the U.S. captors neglect and willfully abuse German POWs. He repeatedly suggests, however, that their treatment was not characteristic of U.S. people and their culture. Böhme’s representations of German-American relations in U.S. captivity in Europe after 1945 suggest that the general brutality of the war disconnected people who were otherwise racial and cultural equals:

The [POWs’] emotional misery remained hidden. For the man from Texas or North Carolina, it was unfathomable, and it had to be because for him the world had not collapsed... Even though there were many commonalities between the victors and the defeated, with regards to ancestry and background, ways of thinking, and culture, under these extreme conditions, they did not for a long time prove to be a basis for a clarifying dialog. Too much evil had preceded it [my translation]. (140)

Although he argues that U.S. forces treated POWs better than Soviet forces (whom the National Socialist regime represented as racially and culturally inferior), Böhme frequently refers to the U.S. military’s transgressions as “crimes against humanity.” Böhme claims that inappropriate “behaviors among the captors [were] humanly understandable. But not excusable because they broke the rules of the humanitarian law [my translation]” (140).

The German soldiers' own active involvement in causing misery to others remains somewhere in the shadows of Böhme's allusion to the general brutality of war. The German soldiers' suffering, in contrast, is supposed to restore their military and masculine honor. The early literature on German POWs represented by the volumes of the Maschke commission separated captivity from the atrocities the Germans had committed, as if captivity occurred in an historical and moral vacuum, at the same time as it sought to sanitize Germany's national past. The rehabilitation of the German soldiers' reputation was thus intertwined with the rehabilitation of postwar German civic society.

### 1.3 Popular Memory Theory

Popular memory theory (developed by the Popular Memory Group based in Birmingham, England) explains emotional and political functions of public and private memory narratives. In Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory, Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper explain that popular memory theory acknowledges that *public* and *private* memories are analytically distinct but dialectically constitutive of one another; they interact and affect each other. The theory conceptualizes "representations" of the past as "public" when they "achieve centrality" within the public domain, where their institutional propagation by the national and local state, the culture industries or the public media ensure their scope to make public meaning for vast audiences" (13). Postwar Germany's memory

of victimization, for instance, was a public memory insofar as it was promoted by the state. By contrast, private memories “[circulate] among particular social groups ‘in the course of everyday life’” (13). However, they cannot be readily unscrambled from the effects of dominant historical discourses. It is often these that supply the very terms by which a private history is thought through. By the same token, the power of dominant memories depends not simply on their public visibility, but also on their capacity to connect with and articulate particular popular conceptions, whilst actively silencing and marginalizing others. (13)

For instance, the public memory of German national victimization resonated with a large part of the German population at the same time as a large part of the German population shared stories of suffering and victimization among themselves. However, stories that were not assimilable into the public narrative of German victimization remained marginal or silenced.<sup>9</sup>

Popular memory theory posits that different memories coexist and that people and groups actively seek “to give public articulation to, and hence gain recognition for,” their memories (16). Ashplant et al. term this phenomenon the *politics of war memory and commemoration* and define it as

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, one possible interview subject decided not to participate and did so because he felt that he had “nothing good to say about the Germans” and “liked the Russians [sic.]” because they treated him “very well.” Even sixty years after the war, this man felt that his story should, but did not, resonate with the public representation of the war in the 1950s, and that his memory was and should remain outside of a domain dominated by hegemonic narratives.



the relations of power that structure the ways in which wars can be remembered, across forms that range from public commemoration orchestrated by nation-states through to the personal testimonies of war survivors; and from the cultural memories of war represented in film, plays and novels, through to juridical investigations of wartime atrocities in courts of human rights. By the *politics* of war memory and commemoration, we signal the contestation of meaning that occurs within and between these various forms and practices, and the (unequal) struggle to install particular memories at the centre..., at the expense of others which are marginalized and forgotten.( xi)

The politics of memory model is especially useful for analyzing private German war memories because it facilitates seeing personal memories of POWs and public commemorations of war (in which POWs play a central role) not as identical but as outcomes of ongoing horizontal and vertical struggles; as variables, not essences; as forms of dialectic negotiation, not as steps in a linear progression of “working through” the past. Individuals are historical and cultural agents who have the need and power to shape, subvert, or conform to culture, and they do not all remember and narrate their pasts in the same fashion or for the same purpose. Based on a British cultural studies framework, popular memory theory therefore understands

culture as an arena of constant conflict among forces of domination, consent, and resistance.

Popular memory theory differs fundamentally from the main two paradigms that have defined both memory studies and scholarship on Germans' relationships to and memories about their National Socialist past. The older paradigm, exemplified by the work of Theodor Adorno and Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, studies public expressions of Germany's memory of the past as constructed "from below." The Mitscherlichs, in particular, argue that common Germans' "collective" experiences and memories manifested themselves in the public sphere, where private and public memories appeared to be analytically the same. The newer paradigm, represented by the works of Jeffrey Herf and Robert Moeller, among others, approaches public expressions of Germany's memory of the past as constructed by the state.<sup>10</sup> This model subordinates private memories that do not correspond with hegemonic memory discourses circulating in the public sphere. It accounts only for hegemonic narratives of the past, excluding marginal, subordinated, or oppositional memories that

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<sup>10</sup> The shift from the first, a Freudian and psychoanalytic model, to the second, a cultural historical model interested in discourse analysis, is exemplified by the shift from the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (mastering the past) to the concept of memory studies. The work of Jan Assmann should also be mentioned here because his work had defined the newly emerged field of memory studies in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. Assmann's memory theory, however, is more useful to studies on collective memories that define a culture and cultural traditions that remain relatively constant over a long period of time.

people share predominantly in private, not public, arenas. These models not only rely on but also fabricate the assumption that culture is cohesive.

Instead, popular memory theory combines these paradigms (which Ashplant et al. refer to as the “state-centred” model and the “social-agency model”, in order to “identify the transactions and negotiations that occur between the various agencies involved in producing war memories: those of the state, civil society, ‘private’ social groups and individuals” (7, xii). However, each paradigm by itself diminishes “individual subjectivity” of private memories.<sup>11</sup>

The state-centered model treats memory as “politics” and fails to account for “the richness and complexity of personal memory” (11). This model suggests that social and cultural cohesion are both the purpose and the structure of memory, because the power of conformity makes people adhere to a common culture and shared identity.<sup>12</sup> Granted, the state seeks to preserve domestic and international power and recognition, subordinating needs and memories of “ordinary” people to larger goals. However, as popular memory theory posits, ordinary people, whose private memories may differ from memories circulating in public and global arenas, also seek power and recognition through their own memories and by resisting and opposing

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<sup>11</sup> Ashplant et al. believe that the separation of these two paradigms, the seemingly mutual exclusiveness of these bodies of work, “are a product of disciplinary divisions within the emerging field of memory studies; between, for example, those historians influenced chiefly by political science, international relations or sociology; and those influenced by anthropology, cultural criticism or psychoanalysis” (7).

popular narratives. Thus, Ashplant et al. argue that the state-centered approach “may over-play the unity of social elites and tends to take for granted their capacity to touch off popular identifications” (10). In conclusion, the state-centered model downplays agency and subjectivity of individuals in shaping public and private memories, and it marginalizes existing memories that do not fit public forms of commemoration.

Moreover, Ashplant et al. explain, the “social-agency” model presents memory as transhistorical and as an “expression of mourning, being a human response to the death and suffering that war engenders on a vast scale” (7). Based on Freud’s concept of melancholia and mourning, this approach, like the work of the Mitscherlichs, downplays the influence of the state and the political specificity of cultural or national discourses, and the impact that changing popular currents in memorial culture have on individuals and their memories. This model suggests there is a “universal psyche” that responds to trauma in a predictable way, a stance that deprives memory of its political inflections, making it ahistorical and closed off to individually different needs and methods of dealing with emotional damage (11). Ashplant et al., however, see a problem with the social agency model insofar as it frequently suggests that memory is an expression of universally shared psychic processes. The model tends to impose “‘normal grieving’ which ignores the range of individual psychic responses to death” as well as “situations in which there is a “psychic imperative not to ‘work through’ from

melancholia to mourning” (41). Freud considered melancholia the unproductive form of dealing with loss and trauma, and mourning the productive way of letting go of the past. The social agency model is problematic because it suggests that people seemingly either succeed or fail in coming to terms with the past. It suggests that letting go of the past—as if to overcome it and cut it out of one’s life—is desirable. However, I argue that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* entails dealing with the past constructively and not by repetitive denial. It also means that Germans have an obligation to remember and not to lose touch with the trauma they, their ancestors, and their country have caused in order to affirm accountability and avoid becoming perpetrators again.

Moreover, Ashplant et al. point out new insights gained by war veterans who have experienced and inflicted trauma. Many war veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder “are encouraged to work at creating their own private remembrance—for example, lighting candles for dead mates or using drama-therapy to enact their burial” for the purpose “of making memory biddable rather than involuntary” (41). However, as it turns out, they explain, “many ex-servicemen are reluctant to ‘let go’ of their memories this way. The very fact that this memory remains private and unassimilated is important to them; it shows that they were keeping faith with the dead” (41-42). More recent scholarship on veterans with war trauma, including the work by Svenja Goltermann on emotional trauma among German veterans, strongly

suggests that soldiers have no homogeneous, collective experience of acts they committed and witnessed. Soldiers' emotional responses to war are biographically and individually unique, which requires scholars interested in "how" Germans remember to study biographically unique memories of the war rather than public discourses.

Much processing of past identifications and emotional, active investments in National Socialism has taken place privately and revolved around biographically unique memories (similar to processes used when treating PTSD). Confessing what one has done also means that people give up control over the information and when and how they choose to recall it, which may be detrimental to private healing processes. However, healing and transformation need to be made public because the social world needs to see evidence of change. *Vergangeheitsbewältigung*, therefore, should be an emotional, cognitive, and narrative process. The only facet of *Vergangeheitsbewältigung* to which I had access as a researcher, however, was the former POWs' articulated memories: carefully composed stories that serve a sense of self with which the subjects can live.

#### **1.4 Composure**

How do German veterans and former prisoners compose private memories of the past? Popular memory theory conceptualizes the process of making memories, both private and public, as "composure." Brian Dawson, one of the original members of the Popular Memory Group, argues in Soldier

Heroes that people compose their memories in an effort “not only for a formally satisfying narrative or a coherent version of events, but also for a version of the self that can be lived with in relative psychic comfort” (Dawson 23). In “Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia,” Alistair Thomson explains the main aspects of composure:

In one sense, we ‘compose’ or construct memories using the public language and meanings of our culture. In another sense, we ‘compose’ our memories which help us to feel relatively comfortable with our lives, which gives us a feeling of composure. We remake or repress memories of experiences which are still painful and ‘unsafe’ because they do not easily accord with our present identity, or because their inherent traumas or tensions have never been resolved. We seek composure, an alignment of our past, present, and future lives. One key theoretical connection, and the link between the two senses of composure, is that the apparently private process of composing safe memories is in fact very public. Our memories are risky and painful if they do not conform with the public norms or versions of the past. We compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable, or, if we have been excluded from general public acceptance, we seek out

particular publics which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives (301).

Most importantly, composure explains how storytelling is an intersubjective performance in which narrators tell the most suitable version of their memories, anticipating that the audience will recognize it as meaningful and valid. This intersubjective performance makes the audience a constitutive factor in the story told. Telling the story is also a social act through which people manage (or seek to manage) their disturbing acts or experiences and seek sympathy or recognition from an audience, which can further soothe bad feelings. Composure is part of everyday life and our intersubjective relations with other people.

Composure also explains that we compose memories about our lives to project a cohesive sense of self to others and ourselves. We compose our private memories carefully, selecting elements and excluding others, emphasizing pleasant aspects and downplaying, reinterpreting, denying, or repressing painful aspects. We imagine ourselves within our own stories in relation to events we choose to recall. We may describe ourselves as observers or actors, as victims, bystanders, or perpetrators. We may downplay our own agency in aggressive acts and overplay our agency in acts of heroism. In Soldier Heroes, Dawson explains that any narrative can become a “site for imaginary scenarios with desired and feared outcomes, narrated ‘as if’ they had ‘really’ happened in just this way. These fantasy



investments represent a range of possible selves, some powerful and effective in the social world, others threatened and at risk” (Dawson 22). This applies to private and public narratives because *all* narratives offer scenarios in which we can imagine ourselves—and others. We use existing narratives to make choices before we act; we may use them to anticipate explanations for our actions; we may use them to justify our actions; and we may use them to compose memories and a cohesive sense of self. However, people neither integrate external (mostly hegemonic) narratives to the same degree nor draw from only one set of narratives to compose their own.

Storytellers negotiate between their emotional needs and the public’s interpretation of them by gauging cultural and ethical expectations defined in public discourses and enacted through social forms of merit and punishment. Therefore, the interview subjects’ private memories and sense of composure are shaped by intra-psychic needs (and problems) and social discourses (or narratives) and structures. People remake painful or shameful memories of past actions, experiences or identifications in order to align them with their present sense of self. German soldiers have participated in violent actions and identified to different degrees with National Socialist ideology. German soldiers participated in murders of Germany’s “racial enemies:” Jews, Roma, and Sinti. They killed Soviet soldiers and civilians and participated in the

occupation and violent control of territories to bring about the “Thousand-Year Reich.” Did they do so based on orders or out of conviction?

The Germans’ line of defense in the Nuremberg Trials, as well as the defense by men such as Adolf Eichmann, was that they should not be held accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity because all they had done was follow orders. However, many scholars, such as Omer Bartov, have argued that many—if not all—German soldiers firmly believed in and identified with National Socialist ideology or racial superiority and the Germans’ justification to murder civilians for the sake of eastern territories. Bartov argues in Hitler’s Army that the longer they stayed in the war, the more ideologically motivated they became. Therefore, Bartov argues that many *Wehrmacht* soldiers not only acted in accordance with military commands, but also identified emotionally with hegemonic narratives of the National Socialist state. Ideology was a constitutive part of their actions and identifications, their cognitive rationalizations and emotional experiences.

Therefore, composure is not only constituted after the event. The ways in which subjects composed their memories of the war might have been in place when they fought in the war. National Socialist ideology and propaganda presented the *Wehrmacht* as “honorable” and “chivalric.” These contemporary representations may have scripted the ways in which soldiers experienced their actions, not only how they remembered and narrated them after 1945. They might remember themselves as chivalric because they

identified and experienced themselves as chivalric. However, as stated above, the *degree* to which they internalized these hegemonic narratives and emotionally identified with them depended on the individual.

In 1945, identifications with and actions justified by National Socialist narratives were no longer justifiable—legally or morally. The main premise of this dissertation is that the conflicts that emerged in this particular moment of rupture are precisely those tensions the subjects most seek to overcome by composing their memories: the tensions between their emotional identifications and the “new” political relations and discourses. These tensions, around which their composed memories revolve, give insight into how and why German soldiers used National Socialist narratives as moral justifications or sources of identification. Emotional inflections of their memories concern how they felt in response to being defeated, captured, treated (fed, housed, talked to), and confronted physically with Germany’s atrocities. Feelings of shock, shame, or disappointment in relation to their captors illuminate the ways German soldiers felt about themselves and what they did and witnessed. Emotional aspects of private captivity memories—, which the interview subjects only occasionally, and seemingly accidentally, shared—can provide insight into their wartime mentalities. In captivity (i.e. in U.S. reeducation programs, screening procedures, and interrogations), the soldiers had to adjust to a new social order. Contradictions in the interview subjects’ memories demonstrate that personal memories and hegemonic

narratives never align. Individuals seek to preserve private and emotional memories that simultaneously connect and disconnect them from social history. How?

### 1.5 Memory Conflicts and Tensions

The work of German memory scholar and oral historian Harald Welzer serves to explain the specific tensions and conflicts between emotional and rational forms of composure. In “Was Wir Für Böse Menschen Sind!”, (“What Terrible People We Are!”), Welzer argues that people remember and transmit memories on two different levels: cognitive and emotional. People “interpret the world... not only cognitively, but our interpretation is always accompanied by emotions that turn the event into an experience [my translation]” (9). War captivity was an *experience* in the sense that Welzer describes. People live in an ideological context within hegemonic narratives, the purpose of which is to make citizens supportive subjects of the state. These narratives affect people, but the degree to which they believe in and empathize with these narratives depends on the individual. More poignantly, Welzer argues that, memory of one’s own past operates on different levels, which is particularly apparent where historically concluded processes such as National Socialism are concerned. On the one, more cognitive level, we remember the past from the side of history where we look at the past in the light of what we learned about it *afterwards*. Experiences that are located on a more

emotionally colored level of experience preserve their “Zeitkern” [“temporal essence”]; that means that they are being looked at in the light of “des Erlebens” [emotional experience]—and that is being remembered [by Welzer’s interview subjects] ... as if “it happened yesterday” [my translation]. (9)

Welzer explains the coexistence of emotional and cognitive levels of memory with examples of seemingly contradictory narratives by members of the war generation. Both men Welzer cites presented critical perspectives of the Third Reich (with which they evidenced their intellectual processing of a criminal past) but occasionally lapsed into uncritical, even enthusiastic references to the “same” past, i.e. their feelings of heroism in the Navy or a sense of accomplishment for earning military honors (7-9). Welzer’s theory suggests people may cognitively adopt interpretations of a past—the lesson of a book that argues that Nazis are criminals—that are different from the way they experienced that past emotionally. Welzer argues that the *temporal essence* of their *emotional experience* of that past may remain unchanged and can be re-experienced (and transmitted to others) the same way it was experienced in the first place.

I have observed these same contradictions in interviews I conducted with subjects whose cognitive and emotional memories seemed to clash. As my analysis will show, many interviewees claimed not to have identified with National Socialism but explained they experienced Hitler’s rise to power as

uplifting. This shows they rationalized currently “appropriate” statements about the past, through which they sought to protect their reputation. By contrast, many interviewees preserved emotional memories from as early as the 1930s, such as their excitement when Hitler came to power. Several subjects claimed they had very close Jewish friends who were able to leave the country “early” and asserted they never agreed with “the National Socialist’s anti-Semitism” but later discussed their outrage at being housed, as prisoners of war, in former concentration camps still “dirtied” by their previous inmates. These memory conflicts reveal the contradictory nature of memory and tension between cognitive and emotional levels of memory. The subjects had not abandoned earlier emotional “memory habits,”<sup>13</sup> instead, they sought to align their emotions with more publicly acceptable memories. These memory conflicts offered me insight into their wartime mentalities and the ways in which they identified with and acted in response to the public (hegemonic) discourses in the Third Reich.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Steven T. Ostovich, “Epilogue: Dangerous Memories” and Andrew S. Bergerson’s Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times: The Nazi Revolution in Hildesheim on his application of Ostovich’s concept of “memory habit.”

<sup>14</sup> Bergerson came to similar theoretical conclusions about the quality of interviews he conducted with Germans about the Holocaust. He argues: “When encouraged to present the story of their lives in narrative, my interview partners arguably re-enacted those same habits by which they cultivated their identities in the first place.... The habitual correlation between self-cultivation in the past and self-representation in the present enabled me to reconstruct [the interview subjects’] roles in the early stages of the Holocaust. From this perspective, ordinary Germans still deny their knowledge of Nazi crimes against humanity in the present because they denied their knowledge of it in the past” (238).

Most of my interview subjects have learned how to use language to appear respectable. Many have constructed rational explanations for their choices and actions when they joined the Hitler Youth, decided to stop speaking with a Jewish classmate, or went into combat. German soldiers might have foreseen Germany's defeat, becoming subjects of a different power structure after National Socialism and rationalizing their alibis. Likewise, hegemonic discourses after May 8, 1945, were perhaps easy for them to repeat but not embraced emotionally as the truth. My hypothesis hinges on Welzer's views about contradictions between emotional and rational embodiments of memory. Welzer's work helps interpret contradictions in my interviewees' narratives and analyze their significance in relation to their emotional entanglement, on the one hand, and their cognitive explanations, on the other.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Welzer's theory is compatible with popular memory theory, the latter of which puts more emphasis on the political dimensions of memory narratives than Welzer. Ashplant et al. argue that "eyewitness's" memory of the war ... is constructed from both personal experience and in relation to pre-existing cultural templates ... consisting of cultural narratives, myths and tropes, through which later conflicts are understood" (34). While the authors refer to a tendency to interpret one event in terms of another—for instance, interpreting the Second World War in terms of the First World War—their reference to eyewitness memories suggests that the concept of cultural templates applies to interpreting one's own war actions and experiences and deriving a positive sense of self in terms of a cultural narrative that already existed (34-35).

## 2. INTERVIEWS

### 2.1 The Interview Subjects

From the thirty interviews I conducted, I have carefully selected nine interviews with subjects whose narratives were both representative of the tendencies of interpretations within my sample and were detailed and rich enough to reveal their memories' heterogeneous forms and functions. Represented in this dissertation is a selection of nine interviewees. These include, in the order in which they appear in the dissertation: Herr Paul, Herr Bauer, and Herr Leitner in chapter 3; and Herr Koch, Herr Müller and Herr Schuhler, in chapter 4. All six of them had been deployed in North Africa as members of the *Afrika Korps* that was defeated in 1943. All six of them were interned in the United States. Herr Vogel, Herr Becker, and Herr Bachmann, whose interviews are discussed in chapter 5, were interned in U.S. military operated camps in Europe, not for the duration of the war, as the group of prisoners in the United States was, but for punishment for their National Socialist affiliations. Herr Vogel was among the upper ranks of the German Wehrmacht that had fought both in western and eastern European theaters. Herr Becker and Herr Bachmann had been deployed as soldiers in the *Waffen SS*, the armored infantry division of the German *Schutzstaffel (SS)*. All interview subjects will be introduced in more detail in the sections discussing their interviews. The following section discusses my research



methods, the subjects' commonalities, and the interview relationship within which my subjects composed their memories of U.S. captivity.

## 2.2 Method

I anticipated difficulties finding subjects, especially since I live in the United States most of the year and spend only a few weeks in Germany during the summers. I initially planned to obtain names of possible subjects from the rosters of the Red Cross or the Modern Military Records of the National Archives in Washington and the *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* (BA-MA), the federal military archives, in Freiburg and Koblenz, Germany, which hold the main collection of military documents in the Federal Republic of Germany. Locating subjects through the rosters of the German or United States military archives was ineffective because the rosters did not list their current addresses and phone numbers. Contacting family and friends in Germany to locate subjects by word-of-mouth, however, was effective. Family, friends, acquaintances, and neighbors of my family in Germany, as well as a colleague at the University of Kansas, referred me to various subjects—with contact information in hand.

I cleared the project with the Human Subjects Committee-Lawrence (HSC-L), which ensures that all interview participants are protected by international research protocol. Prior to the interviews, I provided consent forms assuring the anonymity of participants and persons mentioned during the interview. I have used pseudonyms for persons who participated in the

interviews as well as private persons the interviewees' mentioned in their interviews, mainly to protect the subjects' relatives and friends who might not want to be recognized. Most of the subjects wanted to remain anonymous. Interviews lasted one-and-a-half to two hours on average, but some interviews lasted as long as five hours. I interviewed some of the subjects twice, which added up to thirty-seven interviews and more than sixty interview hours. I taped the interviews with a dictating machine and took notes for follow-up questions.

Because I wanted access to the participants' *subjective* interpretations of the past and learn how they composed their private memories, I conducted open-ended, open-narrative interviews with little interference. I had hoped to create an environment where they could speak openly about issues they might not be willing to discuss with their children or in public, where they would risk being scrutinized. Encouraging subjects to share details they initiated allowed me to gather evidence about their subjective remembering. It simultaneously allowed the subjects to use the interviews to direct the course of dialogue. Many men began speaking before I had set up the tape recorder, and many continued to speak for about half-an-hour or an hour without an invitation or opportunity for me to ask questions. This led me to conclude that those subjects who chose to participate felt a strong need for composure.

Subjects who had been referred to me by acquaintances, friends, or

relatives eagerly invited me to their homes. The private family sphere provided an inter-personal context for the interviews. Many of the men I met through word-of-mouth and interviewed in their homes, such as Herr Koch, Herr Bachmann, Herr Becker, and Herr Paul, related to me on an emotional and intergenerational level and quite frequently sought to pass on memories their children and grandchildren did not want to hear. Other times, they asked questions they could not discuss within their own families. I sensed very frequently that they had hoped that I would be the guardian of their pasts. Many subjects connected quite intensely with me as an interviewer. Herr Paul, for instance, invited me to spend the night in the family guestroom. Herr and Frau Bachmann invited me to stay for dinner and come back soon for coffee and cake.

Several of the subjects wanted to spend much time with me talking about their pasts and contemplating their families in historical perspective. In this way, the familiar context of the homes in which they had raised children and watched grandchildren lent itself to associative connections between the subject of the interview and the familiar context in which it was conducted. Many times, the subjects referred to a place in the home where a brother had done his homework before the war, or to a photograph of a relative who had died or a son who does not come home anymore. Whereas the subjects I met through word-of-mouth (2001 and 2002) were eager to meet me personally, they were strangely reluctant to refer me to other potential

subjects, thus not creating the much-anticipated snowball effect.

I assume that not cross-referencing helped the interview subjects preserve the integrity of the stories they told me. As Ashplant et al. explain, private memories are unsafe or dangerous when they do not cohere with public (hegemonic/collective) representations of the past. Not cross-referencing was possibly a matter of protecting their private memories from public scrutiny. It helped them keep their private memories private as long as I was in the research process. Moreover, not cross-referencing helped them preserve the ownership and integrity of private memory. Many of their friends and acquaintances had incriminating or conflicting information that could undermine the validity of their stories. (For instance, Herr Becker explained to me during the interview that he was forced to join the *Waffen SS*, whereas his friend confessed that Becker had eagerly volunteered.) Keeping their memories personal was also a matter of male privilege and private "honor." Many men rigidly excluded their wives from the history they discussed in their presence. The subjects allowed, even required, their wives to corroborate their stories but were reluctant to let their wives tell their own. Last but not least, I was under the impression that many subjects wanted to feel free to vacillate between speaking as *individuals* and as members of a German generational and experiential community. Depending on the narrative

context, each position served different kinds and degrees of composure.<sup>16</sup>

One subject, whose interview is not included in this dissertation, urged me to contact the *VDAK*, which is not only one of the largest organizations for veterans of the Second World War, but which also represents a large number of men who had been POWs in the United States. This participant assumed that many of his “comrades” in the organization would be eager to speak about their captivity in the United States. He was correct. I wrote letters to several individual representatives of local *VDAK* groups in western Germany. One *VDAK* spokesman submitted and published my personal letter in the *VDAK*'s newsletter, Die Oase (The Oasis), which led to an abundance of responses from *VDAK* members who were excited to be interviewed.

From the pool of these *VDAK* volunteers, I selected only men who had experienced, not only heard about, captivity in the United States. Among the subjects from the *VDAK* were Herr Leitner, Herr Müller, Herr Bauer and Herr Schuhler. I interviewed them by telephone (2002 and 2004) because I was not able to travel to Germany. Telephone interviews differ from personal interviews because they do not communicate facial expressions, allow

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<sup>16</sup> As I will demonstrate in the interview with Herr Becker, for instance, the interview subjects often identified themselves as individuals when they referred to collective *criminal* actions to set themselves apart from them, but as members of a community when they referred to collective actions that had positive implications.

physical proximity, or require travel. Telephone interviews were still qualitatively the same as the personal interviews insofar as the subjects' stories showed no significant disparities.

Unlike the men I had found by word-of-mouth, many men mentioned me to "comrades" in the *VDAK*, but the interviewees themselves were just as reluctant to let me know about others who had a similar story to tell. The intermediary was a military organization that had firmly established its own version of the past, a version to which all members had full access and with which they knew they had to align themselves if they wanted recognition from their "comrades." Their use of the term "comrades" shows that they created a sense of cohesion as soldiers in a military organization. From what I could gather from several issues of *Die Oase*, comradeship, among German soldiers and prisoners and between the German and U.S. militaries, came to resonate strongly as a shared narrative in the memories of soldiers from the *Afrika Korps*.

The subjects who responded to my ad in *Die Oase* frequently referenced their memories with articles published in the magazine or otherwise resonated with the discourses of the *VDAK*. Although the different intermediary agencies—family and acquaintances on the one hand and the *VDAK* on the other—created referential frameworks for the interviews, they did not seem to bear on the emotional core of their memories.

### **2.3 The Subjects: Commonalities and Particularities**

The most pertinent commonality the interview subjects shared was their willingness if not strong desire to participate in the project. Several potential subjects turned me down for fear of difficulties with family or peers. Others explicitly stated that they preferred not to talk about the past anymore. The subjects who did participate, however, all shared the desire to transmit their memories. The absence of voices from people who did not want to revisit the past, appear side by side with other war generation Germans, or felt that their stories did not “fit” comprises the biggest limitation of this project.

Another commonality, an intended one, was that all participants had lived in the Federal Republic of Germany, the western part of reunified Germany. In former West Germany, public memories were shaped by pro-U.S. transnational relations and were qualitatively different from East German public war memories. I chose to interview only subjects from the FRG for these reasons. Although all my subjects had lived in the FRG, some had lived in North Rhine-Westphalia and the Rhineland Palatine, which were in the French occupation zone between 1945 and 1949. Others had lived in Hesse, Baden Württemberg, and Bavaria, which were in the U.S. occupation zone. Yet, all of them were in the equally “Americanized” part of West Germany.

At the time I began searching for subjects in 2000, only the youngest

group of Germans was still alive, those who were in their late teens or early twenties when they fought in the war and were in U.S. captivity. Most of the subjects I located were born between 1920 and 1928, only Herr Vogel was older. He was born in 1913. Thus, with the exception of Vogel, the men represented in the dissertation were among the youngest group of Germans who actively participated in the Third Reich and the only group of active participants still alive at the time I conducted the interviews.

The subject's age played a role in the ways they experienced and participated in the Third Reich, and in the ways they remembered the past. The subjects were children or young teenagers when Hitler came to power in 1933. This means that they remembered German society and culture before Hitler either vaguely or not at all. They were in school during the formative years of the Third Reich, and in their late teens or early twenties when they enlisted in the German military and auxiliary forces. They were also in their late teens or early twenties when they became prisoners of war.

From today's perspective, the people who populated Germany in the Third Reich often appear as a coherent, unified and collectively motivated group. However, various sociological scholars suggest that groups of people experience and remember historical events differently based on their age, which is a relevant factor in the memories my subjects composed. In Legacies of Dachau, Harold Marcuse emphasizes the impact of nationally and socially significant political events on young adults:



sociological studies have observed that pivotal experiences between the ages of 16 and 26, in certain circumstances from 14 to 30, are critical in shaping lifetime political attitudes. Certain momentous political events such as wars and economic crises may overshadow important events in individual biographies and affect most people born during a range of years (291).

Marcuse's "cohort model" has its limitations, especially in a project that seeks to understand biographically diverse private memories. Although Marcuse's model does not account for subjective interpretations of larger historical events or the "eccentricities of individual biography" (291), it contextualizes the lives of people of a certain age in the linear progression of history. Understanding the correlation between age and the different phases and events in German history helps put into perspective the correlation between the deeds of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. More importantly, the cohort model foregrounds the succession of actions that different cohorts of Germans themselves set into motion.

Based on this sociological model, Marcuse carefully categorizes war generation Germans into five different cohorts. According to Marcuse's model, my subjects belong to two different groups of "experiential cohorts." The first are the "1943ers" who experienced the "hopelessness of the situation after 1943 and the defeat of Stalingrad" (292). The 1943ers, born

between 1916 and 1925, “staffed the offices, schools and institutions—including the army and the concentration camps—of the Nazi Reich during Nazism’s stable phase after 1935. This cohort was also the most decimated in World War II” (292). Marcuse adds that they “contributed to the generation of perpetrators” and that they “were young enough to have had only limited complicity in constructing the regime” (292). The second cohort represented among my subjects is the group of Germans born between 1926 and 1936. Marcuse refers to them as the “1948ers,” “since the Marshall Plan aid and the currency reform of 1948 gave them their first positive political orientation, as opposed to the total disorientation of 1945” (292-3).<sup>17</sup> Marcuse’s model helps researchers understand why different cohorts might have different relationships to the past in the war, and it is also valuable to appreciate different degrees of moral responsibility.

Most of my subjects were the children of the Nazi founding fathers and career Nazi cohorts. They inherited and actively participated in the Nazi regime. While they may not have contributed to establishing the Nazi regime, they were old enough to have participated in, defined and defended the

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<sup>17</sup> Marcuse refers to the cohort of people born between 1890 and 1902 as the “‘1918ers’ or the cohort of Nazism’s founding fathers” because they “created the pivotal event ... the Nazi accession to unprecedented political and cultural power after 1930” (291). Marcuse refers to people who were born between 1903 and 1915 as the “1933ers” or “the careerist Nazi cohort” because the pivotal event in their lives was Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, which, to them, “was a vindication of Germany’s national pride. They immediately took the opportunity to make careers building and consolidating this state.” “Recent German authors” refer to them as the ‘Tätergeneration’ the generation of perpetrators” (291-2).

regime. Notwithstanding their moral responsibility for having actively participated in a criminal regime, my subjects inherited the Third Reich from their parents and turned out to be the one group among the Germans most damaged and devastated in the German war itself. If “pivotal experiences between the ages of 16 and 26 ... are critical in shaping lifetime political attitudes,” then we can assume that the experience of defeat and war captivity has shaped my subjects’ political views about and memories of the past more than subsequent events in their lives.

The interviews demonstrate that the experiences my subjects had at that age were indeed quite formative of the ways in which they would understand and relate to the past, but not on a collective level, as Marcuse’s model suggests. These two cohorts were fully socialized in the Third Reich and had no personal experiences with times before National Socialism. Many of them experienced National Socialism and the aggressive war as ordinary; the changes that came in the form of denazification and the changed ideological and hegemonic context under allied occupation was, by contrast, extraordinary. The degree to which they experienced the end of the war as a caesura reflects the degree to which they perceived the Third Reich as normal.

#### **2.4 Interview Relationship**

The oral historian Alessandro Portelli argues that the subjective involvement of researchers shapes the interviews they conduct and that the

interviews themselves are shaped by the circumstances of the interview. “The content of oral sources,” he argues, “depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, dialogue, and personal relationship” (70-71). Objectivity can only be achieved when the researcher is aware of her input, her own connection to the topic and the interviewee, and when she makes her investment transparent to her audience. I assume that my initial expectations early on in the interview process affected the interviews in very particular ways. I entered the relationship with my subjects confused about how to relate to them. On one hand, I assumed that, as a third generation German, I was more open to listening to the war generation than were the postwar generations in the left-wing circles in which I was raised.<sup>18</sup> Many of the subjects gave me the impression that no one had given them a fair hearing; I felt justified in listening. On the other hand, I was deeply skeptical about them because they were part of a society that supported National Socialism. The generation appeared to me as silenced and powerless and simultaneously contaminated by the possibility of having actively participated in Nazi Germany, perhaps by having condoned the

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<sup>18</sup> In “Fathers and Sons Retrospectively,” Michael Schneider analyzes the deeply acrimonious relationship between the war generation and the left-wing postwar cohort, the so-called ‘68ers. The ‘68ers rejected their fathers and in many cases after the fathers had already passed away. They exposed and scrutinized their parents but failed to engage in a dialogue with them. I had similar experiences in my own family where I perceived my parents’ unwillingness to listen to anything related to the war anymore as a form of silencing and repression of my grandparents’ memories.

persecution and murder of the Jews, or even participated in them. The point was: I thought I would not find out anything unless I asked and actively and non-judgmentally invited members of the war generation to engage in a dialogue. I had hoped that if I listened to them, they would volunteer more information to me than they did to my parents' generation. I felt that as a third-generation German, I had a score to settle with both my parents, because they did not listen to my grandparents; and with my grandparents, because they once actively supported the National Socialist regime or fought in a criminal war.

As a West German, I had both a national and a regional relationship with my subjects. All subjects were citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany; we were part of the same society and memory culture of German past. We were exposed to the same hegemonic narratives. However, we were positioned very differently in relationship to both that past and the present context within which we interacted. Our relationship was thereby also inter-generational; I am the grand- and great-grandchild of war generation Germans, but, in relationship to my subjects, I was occasionally the same age as their children, and at times the same age as their grandchildren. They were, however, my grandparents' age, which made me feel separated from them by one generation. At the same time, I felt connected to them because I had frequently wanted to overcome my parents' rejection of my grandparents. As my research progressed, I learned that the war

generation's memories of the past were indeed quite troubling in many cases, which led me to assume that my parents' generation simply disconnected themselves from the past by refusing to accept the memories their parents sought to transmit.

As a third generation German whose own family's conversations about the past were pronouncedly defensive, I was quick to assume the role of the stand-in grandchild. This simultaneously hindered and helped me gather information. In "Mein Opa War Kein Nazi" ("My Gandpa Was No Nazi"), Harald Welzer, who also specializes in memories between generations of Germans and the ways in which memories are transferred among them, argues that it is primarily the emotional component of memory that is passed from the war generation to the generation of their grandchildren. He suggests that grandchildren are particularly prone to absorb the emotional memories discussed earlier.

I entered the interviews with expectations that remained unfulfilled. I was naïve about the persistence of Nazism in many of these subjects' lives, but my naiveté and openness were also conducive to encouraging the subjects to speak—which they were already eager to do. I had expected the subjects to address issues of trauma and to be conscious of their past crimes. Only a few of them spoke of trauma, and if so, mainly their own: German casualties caused by their adversaries' counterattacks, Allied aerial bombings, and their judgment of the Germans' war crimes and crimes

against humanity. Most of my subjects preferred to speak about the fate of people they considered their own, but some men, for instance Herr Koch and Herr Bauer, spoke about feeling personally accountable for Germany's atrocities. Subjects who fought at the eastern front spoke more about incidents in which they felt victimized by the Red Army or Czechoslovakian troops, the British, French and U.S. militaries. Only Herr Koch, Herr Bauer and Herr Bachmann used the interviews to speak about Germans victimizing others. At the same time, most subjects sought to distance themselves from National Socialist ideology and the regime. The subjects did so in very different ways, while, at the same time, they may have preserved aspects of National Socialist ideology. As my analysis of the interviews will show, most subjects strategically sought to defend themselves from the stigma of Nazism. Most of them denied sharing the hatred propagated by National Socialist propaganda even when many of their emotional memories seemed to tell a different story.

Moreover, in a sociological study on generational inflections of collective memories, Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott (1989) not only suggest that *generations* remember events of national significance differently, stemming from the age at which they experienced or learned about them; but they also find that "generational effects are the result of the intersection of *personal and national history*" (Scott 380). Their study concludes that personal experience of national historical events in

adolescence and young adulthood leaves a prominent impression on a person's life memories. They argue that "it is the intersection of personal and national history that provides the most vital and remembered connection to the times we have experienced" (380).

Their observations are particularly crucial to this project as they explain that emotional attachments to certain historical events are pronouncedly stronger when people experience them in their youth. Personal experiences of historical events during the most formative years shape the way people interpret the world around them. Schuman and Scott explain that:

youthful experience of an actual event or change often focuses memories on the direct personal meaning of the experience, whereas the attribution of some larger political meaning to the event is more likely to be made by those who did not experience it at all, or at least did not experience it during their adolescence or young adulthood (378).

They add that groups of people who personally experienced the war are usually "quite personal and particular—less about 'World War II' as a collectively conceptualized event than about one's personal loss of hearing while on military assignment in North Africa, or the shortage of candy bars on the home front" (379). Their "collective memory" of the Second World War is autobiographical and mainly about what they lived through rather than what has become the social, historical or national significance of that war.



This might explain why groups who did not personally experience the Second World War tend to form and share a collective memory of it by contrasting (and comparing) it to the events they have experienced. In other words, “collective” memory of an event shifts its ground over time so that it becomes less rooted in direct personal experiences and more rooted in socially constructed discourses.

Therefore, Schumann and Scott’s theory about collective memories is compatible with popular memory theory, which focuses on the transmission of memories between the generations in what they call “post-memory.” Ashplant et al. argue that what defines the “social relationships between the witness and the second generation” is that they are “metaphorically in the same realm of memory, yet never in an identical place” (46). People have to negotiate between their own experience and the framework in which they articulate and share their memories. Ashplant et al. explain that transmitting memories among the generations—in private or public arenas—is always a very difficult cultural negotiation process “that further demonstrates the complexity of subjective relations to war memory” (43). Different age groups have very particular relationship to the same past. The “witness” generation, as they call it, tends to defend the “inviolable truth of witnessing from the ‘almost memory’ of others.” (46) Ashplant et al. suggest that the witnesses “seek to ensure that their version of the war is not forgotten, whilst successors struggle between the conflict between acting as ‘trustees’ of

survivor memory, and reasserting this legacy and their own relation to it” (43). Witnesses often feel “skepticism towards other people’s representations” (46), whereas successive generations “may wrestle with the way in which eyewitness experience blocks out or marginalizes other ways of remembering... [and] may impose a critical perspective on the survivors” (45). This intergenerational difficulty of negotiating the different quality of memories is another variable in the subjects’ memory conflicts, where emotional memories seek to preserve their “authenticity” in the face of external (transnational or transgenerational) discourses. From the emotional urgency with which many interview subjects approached me during the interviews, I conclude that speaking with a third-generation German might have been an additional facet of their desired composure

### 3. “THE AMERICANS WERE OUR FRIENDS“: TRANSNATIONAL COMRADESHIPS

#### 3.1 Introduction

An article by Lyn Ermann published in the Washington Post early in 2004 represents the key facets of German POW history used in the United States popular representations of the Second World War. Ermann’s article deals with a U.S. military program that allegedly reeducated German prisoners of war in the principles of freedom and democracy. Ermann claims that the program’s purpose “was no different from the one being pursued today by the United States in Iraq: to transform a dictatorship into a democracy.” She argues that this democratization program:

changed those who went there by immersing them in the fruits of democracy. Germans were given physical freedom: afternoon swims, talks with professors cross-legged on the grass. American and German, captor and captive, teacher and student, blueblood and farmer, officer and enlisted man, treated one another as equals.

Attesting to the program’s inherent egalitarianism and by extension, America’s egalitarianism and its ability to enthuse former German nationalist prisoners about U.S. popular culture, Ermann cites the voices of three former POWs who had participated in the program. When their POW camp’s army band met after the war, for instance, it had “switched from marching songs to

American standards.” One of the men not only married a Jewish woman after the war, but also became “head of Austria’s largest bank, and, later, served as honorary president of the Austrian Red Cross.” He describes himself as “very American” in that he is “now known for his generosity and his habit of speaking hard truths.” Ermann’s article resonates with the main themes represented in U.S. public representations about the War that permeate the majority of laymen studies on the topic produced in the United States. She presents the U.S. treatment of German POWs, generally, and the reeducation program, specifically, as models of a uniquely U.S. egalitarianism, generosity, and honesty.

Ermann’s article is representative of the themes prevalent in the greater part of books on German POWs in U.S. captivity, which comes from local and lay historians in the United States, not Germany, and deals primarily with the local histories of POW camps in different states and the U.S. military’s reeducation program. Judith M. Gansberg’s Stalag U.S.A.: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America (1977) was the first book published on the topic of the U.S. reeducation program. Her interpretation of the reeducation program continues to permeate the literature in the field, as well as Arnold Krammer’s Nazi Prisoners of War in America.<sup>19</sup> Scholarship on German POWs in the United States tends to argue that the good treatment German POWs received in the camps in the United States was a

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<sup>19</sup> A book that is more critical of the program is Ron T. Robin’s The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II (1995).

clear sign of the United States' democratic character, that the United States was inherently well-intentioned and egalitarian.<sup>20</sup>

The United States government planned to transform Germany into a pro-American democracy after the war. In 1944, U.S. Office of the Provost Marshal General (OPMG) inaugurated an "intellectual diversion program" for prisoners of war in the United States, a program also referred to as the Special Projects Division (SPD). The SPD, which operated secretly until May 1945, sought to influence the prisoners' attitude about the United States by what the America War Department termed "intellectual diversion (Krammer 193)." The U.S. military decided to offer materials reflecting favorably on the county's government, culture and people. Through these media sources, "the curiosity of the prisoners concerning the United States and its institutions would provide the means for reeducation" (Krammer 195). The PMGO's rationale behind the "diversion" program was to make facts "available" to them, "rather than being forced upon them ... through such

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<sup>20</sup> Among the local histories are, to name just a few, Robert D. Billinger's Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida (2000); David Fiedler's The Enemy Among US: POWs in Missouri during World War II (2003), Jeffrey E. Geiger's Prisoners of War at Camp Cook, California (1996), Allen V. Koop's Stark Decency: German Prisoners of War in a New England Village (1988), Lowell A. May's Camp Concordia: German POWs in the Midwest (1995); Allan Kent Powell's Splinters of a Nation: German Prisoners of War in Utah (1989), Glen Thompson's book on POWs in Nebraska, Prisoners on the Plains: German POWs in America (1993). Arnold Krammer's Nazi Prisoners of War in America (1979) is still the most comprehensive study of the history of German POW camps in the continental United States.

media as literature, motion pictures, newspapers, music, art, and educational courses.” The PMGO argued that:

Two types of facts were needed, those which would convince them of the impracticality and viciousness of the Nazi position. If a large variety of facts could be presented convincingly, perhaps the German prisoners of war might understand and believe that historical and ethical truth as generally conceived by western civilization, might come to respect the American people and their ideological values, and upon repatriation to Germany might form the nucleus of a new German ideology which will reject militarism and totalitarian controls and will advocate a democratic system and government (qtd. in Krammer 197).

As this excerpt illustrates, the PMGO equated democracy with American-style democracy and democratization mainly with an acceptance of the U.S. intervention in the war and German’s cultural development. Ron Robin argues in The Barbed Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States During World War II that the SPD adopted a liberal arts program that was to destroy “the mass deception of National Socialism,” and sought to replace it with “an alternative, and thoroughly American cultural agenda” (5).

The SPD was headed by Colonel Edward Davison and Maxwell McKnight and various intellectuals, such as Walter Schönstedt and Howard Mumford Jones. Jones was the most prominent member of the group of university professors who participated in the conceptualization and actualization of the Special Projects Division. He served as Director of Education and instructor of American civilization at the so-called Idea Factory at Fort Kearney, but among present-day American Studies scholars, Jones are also known as one of the architects of what is today known as American Studies.<sup>21</sup> The History of American Civilization program focused on recurring themes in history and literature representing distinctive features of American culture. American Civilization sought to search for, document and study an essential American character in “great” American literature. Thus, the objective of early American Studies was not only to study but also to propagate Americanisms in the United States by defining an essentially American literary and historical canon and, with that, an essential American mythology. Robin argues that Jones saw Fascism’s success “not in the ruthless deployment of repressive political tools, but in the ‘efficient creation by the dictators of a glamorous mythology’” (Robin 43). He felt that “the only way to conquer an alien mythology is to have a better mythology of your

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<sup>21</sup> Jones was one of the various Professors who in the 1930s and 1940s shaped the new interdisciplinary (History of American Civilization graduate) program at Harvard University that would emerge as American Studies. Albeit not characterized by an identifiable school, the early Americanists of the 1930 shared in principle their approach to and understanding of their subject in very similar ways in which their successors of the Myth and Symbol school perceived them.

own” (Robin 43). Robin argues that Jones sought to regenerate the humanities and ward off the effects of what he perceived as detrimental effects of the social sciences. Jones felt that a liberal arts’ effort would serve to create American democratic myths capable of resurrecting an engaging vision of America’s past.<sup>22</sup>

The SPD’s work between 1944 and 1945 consisted mainly of censoring materials that supported Nazi propaganda and depicted the United States poorly. Through censorship, they sought to replace negative representations of democracy and the United States with favorable ones. Between 1944 and 1945, the SPD helped incorporate American history, literature and civilization courses into the curricula of the prisoners’ camp universities. Prisoners could take college-level courses from their educated peers and receive credit from German universities. Various Universities in the United States, such as the University of Kansas, supported these German camp universities and provided textbooks. Another intellectual part of this diversion program was the publication of a German language POW

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<sup>22</sup> Jones was not only a precursor of the discipline of American Studies, but he symbolizes the intersections between the discipline and Americanization of Germany. The reeducation programs in the United States represent the beginning of a longer process of intellectual and cultural change of western Germany. In the 1950s, American Studies programs emerged in western Germany as a continuation of this reeducation process and various former POWs played a part in the establishment of these programs, such as the American Studies program at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz. As the Federal Republic of Germany manifested its anti-Soviet memory of the war, it also established its American Studies programs and America Hauser. In that context, the reeducation project signifies a part of a larger Americanization project that sought to define an essentialist American national narrative at the moment when the United States established itself as a world power.



newspaper, Der Ruf (The Call), by and for prisoners of war. The newspaper offered literary reviews of and political essays on topics censored from the German media. Writers consisted of German POWs who positioned themselves intellectually and politically against the Nazi regime and the war.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the SPD sent specially trained Assistant Executive Officers (AEOs) to infiltrate the camp population and monitor as well as indoctrinate “by example” (Gansberg 89). Krammer explains that there about 150 AEOs, one for each of the main prisoner of war camps. Most AEOs spoke German, many were German Jewish immigrants, and some of them had fled Germany only a few years earlier. Using their language skills, AEOs’ determined the political attitude among the prisoners, separated Nazi POWs from anti-Nazi POWs, and sought to prevent kangaroo courts and other forms of Nazi intimidation. Separating Nazis from anti-Nazis, Gansberg argues, effectively prevented internal camp conflicts and increased the number of prisoners who embraced a pro-American stance in lieu of the other inmates who promoted National Socialism with hostility.

The second phase, also referred to as the “crash course” phase of the program, began May 8, 1945. In early 1945, the Supreme Headquarters

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<sup>23</sup> Hans Werner Richter and Andreas Andersch, two removed German authors, wrote for Der Ruf and continued their political and literary work in western Germany. Andersch founded the so-called *Gruppe 47* that consisted of various German authors, such as Günter Grass. They continued to write and publish Der Ruf in postwar Germany, but the U.S. occupation forces prohibited it in 1947.

Allied Expenditory Forces (SHAEF) had requested that the War Department train anti-Nazi prisoners for police duty in occupied Germany (Arthur L. Smith 84). Fort Getty reeducated German POWS in administration, and Fort Wetherill, specifically called the “United States Army School,” became a distinct police school that trained German POWs to become future Allied Law enforcement officers in occupied Germany.<sup>24</sup> In fall 1944, the SPD had begun to set up specially designed reeducation POW facilities in New York, Rhode Island, and Virginia, which processed nearly 39,000 German anti-Nazi POWs in pro-American democracy (Robin 5). The largest re-education effort was launched in Fort Eustis in 1946, close to Hampton Roads, Virginia, where 23,000 POWS took the six-day crash courses in democracy and police work in the American occupied sector. The SPD tried to reeducate as many POWs as possible so that they would “contribute most to the building of a more democratic, peaceful, and cooperative Germany” (86). By April 5, 1946, 23,142 POWs of a total of 39,000 men who had gone through the SPD’s programs had completed the reeducation program at Fort Eustis alone (Smith 98).

According to early postwar research on the effects of reeducation, Hermann Jung explains in Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in

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<sup>24</sup> Readers interested in the reeducation programs may consult Maschke commission volumes, Judith Gansberg’s Stalag USA, Arnold Krammer’s Nazi Prisoners of War in America, Ron Robin’s The Barbed Wire College, and Alfred L. Smith’s The War for the German Mind.

amerikanischer Hand, USA, only 3% of those who had previously been categorized as Nazis now opposed Nazism and favored the idea of a democratic system in Germany. Jung concludes from U.S. military reports that the program had only a minimal effect on the 355,000 German POWs who did not directly participate in the special schools, but he argues that the program has “surely” served the prisoners in dealing with National Socialism internally (238). The end of the SPD’s reeducation effort overlapped with the War Department atrocity education about the Germans’ collective guilt. The U.S. military began reeducating German prisoners of war no longer by voluntary participation but forced confrontations with the German atrocities.

Three of my subjects were among the 39,000 Germans who were selected for and participated in the intense reeducation programs: Herr Paul, Herr Leitner and Herr Koch. (Koch’s interview will be discussed in chapter 4.)

In this chapter, I analyze interviews with three former German *Afrika Korps* soldiers who were in captivity in the United States between 1943 and 1946 and who were labeled “anti-Nazis”: Herr Paul, Herr Bauer, and Herr Leitner. Their “anti-Nazi” behavior qualified them to participate in the above-described reeducation program and to work for the U.S. military in postwar Germany. Between 1943 and 1945, when other German soldiers were still feverishly hoping that Germany would win the war and defending their sense of national pride and honor, Herr Paul, Herr Bauer and Herr Leitner had seemingly relaxed their identifications with Germany and sought out a

“transnational comradeship” with the U.S. military for the sake of social recognition and material privileges.<sup>25</sup>

### **3.2 Herr Paul: “Not Even Goering Eats This Well in Germany.”**

Born in 1921, Herr Paul learned to be an auto mechanic at the Opel factory in 1938, and was in the infantry of the German *Afrika Korps* deployed in combat in North Africa, *15th Panzer Division, 115 Panzergrenadier Regiment*. After his capture by the U.S. military in 1943, Paul and his fellow POWs were first kept in a large British camp in Oran, and then transported on a “liberty” ship to Glasgow, Scotland, where they were interrogated individually by British intelligence officers before being transported to New York under Canadian guard on the Louis Pasteur. In New York, Paul and his peers were deloused, redressed, and transported comfortably by train to Camp Concordia, Kansas, where Paul stayed for one year in Compound B. Paul volunteered for the labor program and was hired out to a canning factory and to peach and sugar beet farms in Kansas. Conditions in the camp changed noticeably the day after Germany’s unconditional surrender, but Paul thought the U.S. soldiers’ treatment of the prisoners remained the same. He was among those subjects who did not perceive the end of the war as a caesura and had probably not depended on the notion of “German

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<sup>25</sup> Herr Schmidt, whose interview is not discussed in the dissertation, felt that the “economic miracle” had already begun in captivity in the United States. Herr Koch and his peers could not comprehend the abundance of brand new clothes, bed sheets, towels they received when they arrived in the camp. They were greeted with “get rid of your old stuff, here you get it “all new.”

superiority” for his sense of self. Paul was repatriated through a release camp in France in 1946 to the U.S. military occupation zone in Hesse. There, Paul took employment with the district’s U.S. administrative office translating denazification reports.

I met Herr Paul in 2001 at his home in a small suburb of Frankfurt am Main in Hesse. He spontaneously started the interview by telling me about his brother’s return from Soviet captivity. Paul had already returned from the United States and was living with his parents when his brother arrived at their sister’s house in 1946 or 1947, where Paul first saw him in a bathtub. He said, “His eyes were hanging out like this [he gestures], the whole body was only a skeleton, like the Jews from Buchenwald, exactly like they were shown to us, that’s what he looked like.” He added,

That was a horrific sight. I will never forget it. He brought this tin cup for his food with a handle he made from wire. And I, I had come back from America. The exact opposite, you see? And that’s why I wanted to tell you, uh. Well, one likes, prefers to talk about this than about the horrible things, you see? Because it was a pleasant time in America, you know? .... And that’s why I have always had a positive attitude about America, you see? There are people in [German] politics ... people who stupidly blat [like sheep]: “uh, those Amis,” and who say a lot of *shit* [he said this word in English], you know? And that always agitates

me, you know? [Because] 95% of what I experienced over there in those three years was positive, you know? They treated us *humanely*. They really catered to us. We had clean and neat clothes. As far as hygiene was concerned, there was nothing to complain about at all (my emphasis).

Paul's private transnational memory of captivity in the United States depends to a large degree on contrasts between his war and captivity experiences and those of his brother. Paul compares the sight of his brother's dystrophied body to images of the bodies of concentration camp survivors that U.S. military personnel showed German captives in 1945. At one point during the interview, Paul showed me a photograph of himself in U.S. captivity. He was young, healthy, tanned and shirtless, with a big smile on his face: a stark contrast to the description of his brother. Whereas U.S. captors treated him "humanely" and thus made Paul feel human, Soviet captors treated his brother inhumanely and deprived him of his humanity. Paul assumed his brother was repatriated from the Soviet Union with dystrophy because the Soviets did not want to care for him. The U.S. military, on the other hand, took excellent care of Paul. He returned home physically and mentally fit, whereas his brother was both physically and mentally close to death.

This contrast made Paul forever grateful to "the Americans." His narrative is thus amicable and uncritical of the United States. He told me that he becomes agitated whenever people criticize the United States and he

dismisses anti-American sentiments as “shit.” Using the term “shit” in English emphasizes Paul’s identification with the United States and his ability to cultivate his own Americanization in English. His memory is based on transnational autobiographical history of his and his brother’s respective times in U.S. and Soviet captivity; it shows Paul has embraced a transnational—that is, German-American—identity. His memory is private and analytically different from public discourses about the German prisoners of war through which he interpreted his experiences.

Paul’s visual association of the sight of his brother with the sight of concentration camp photographs he was shown illuminates the transnational and private dimensions of his memory. His description of his brother’s body is a facet of his unique biography; his use of the term “humanely” in describing the U.S. military’s treatment and contrasting it to the Soviet’s “inhumane” treatment of his brother is an adaptation of hegemonic discourses in Germany between 1933 and 1945, and 1949 and 1955. Nazi ideology presented “Russians” as barbarian aggressors and the German war against the Soviet Union as militarily preventive and racially justified. Nazi ideology also conceptualized citizenship racially and politically. Based on this ideology and National Socialist laws and practices, only German citizens were granted human rights in the German Reich.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For more information, see George Mosse, Fallen Soldiers, and Marion Kaplan, Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany.

Between 1945 and 1955, public discourse in the western part of Germany, which later became the Federal Republic of Germany, hinged on the suffering of German soldiers (and Germans in general) under Soviet totalitarian barbarism. Paul's narrative also hinges on this suffering; he interpreted his brother's condition as a consequence of Soviet cruelty, which he likened to Nazi atrocities targeting European Jews. Paul made this connection based primarily on the sight of bodies. They looked the same to him, yet he also interpreted the meaning of these bodies by refusing to accept Germany's contribution to the condition of his brother. For instance, Paul did not consider what condition his brother might have been in when he became a prisoner, perhaps even as late as 1945. Paul himself became a prisoner in North Africa in 1943, in a campaign that was relatively benign compared to the warfare between the German *Wehrmacht* and the Red Army after 1942. He did not account for acts of violence and destruction the *Wehrmacht*, *Waffen SS* and *SS* committed against Soviet soldiers and civilians, which may have caused his brother's captors to be ruthless; nor did he account for the lack of food supplies.

Paul therefore still interpreted the horrific sight of his brother as the lens through which he viewed his own U.S. captivity narrative, composed through discourses that were prevalent at the time: National Socialist ideology, U.S. ideology and postwar atrocity education, and national discourses that shaped the cultural identity of the Federal Republic of



Germany. Paul's narrative also shows that public discourses in Germany could not displace his need for deriving composure from his experience in U.S. captivity or for identifications he gained during his Americanization. His narrative composure stems from having interpreted his embodied experience primarily in relation to discourses prevalent at the time: telling how well he fared in the United States seemed to provide him with a large degree of composure, whereas telling about his brother's return caused him discomposure. He did not feel comfortable talking about his brother, but he felt *obligated* to talk for the sake of commemorating him; for his own sake, he wanted to justify his Americanization.

Paul's narrative is uniquely his own, but it also illuminates commonalities among the interviews I conducted with former *Afrika Korps* members held captive in the continental United States. Paul felt treated "humanely," a term many former German war prisoners used to describe their treatment by the U.S. For Paul, this "humane" treatment entailed physical comfort in the camps in the United States and stood in stark contrast to the treatment his brother or the men, women and children had suffered in concentration camps. In North Africa, Paul slept in tents or under his truck in the open air in the desert for two years; he ate mainly crackers and sardines. In captivity, however, Paul was able to sleep in a bed with clean sheets and received large, varied meals. He never experienced any violations. He and

his peers were never assaulted or shot at, which was the main reason Paul was thankful.

As an *Afrika Korps* member, Paul felt he had earned fair treatment because he fought a “fair” war and “never shot anyone in the back.” Paul also felt that the “good reputation” of the *Afrika Korps* had “preceded” them, that they had fought “without any evils in attendance, you know?” He felt that the U.S., British and Canadian soldiers all treated them “with respect,” which he said was “fantastic.” He attributed the respect from western allies to what he and many other *Wehrmacht* soldiers, specifically from the *Afrika Korps*, perceived as military expertise and fairness. He said, “We won every battle. Each and every one. Really true! When we attacked, the soldiers from England just ran-and the French and whoever was there. This is not false self-praise. That’s really how it was. When it was dark, at night, the war was over.” As soon as the U.S. military was involved in the war in North Africa, however, Paul noticed that fewer and fewer of his people returned from combat. Three times, he claimed, he was taken prisoner by a few U.S. soldiers and let go again because no U.S. military backup arrived. Even then, he said, he hoped he could stay in captivity because he wanted the war to be over for him. When the entire *Afrika Korps* surrendered and Paul was on the prisoner transport from the front to the prison camp, he noticed the abundance of U.S. military jeeps and weapons. It was then and there that Paul knew Germany would lose the war. When he arrived in the United

States and saw the size of the buildings and the land and the country's material wealth, he was further convinced that Germany would lose the war and that he would embrace this new place as a new opportunity.

The material wealth, luxurious accommodations, and apparent comradeship with which the U.S. military met the *Afrika Korps* soldiers served as Paul's composure. It provided him with a positive memory he preferred over the horrific images of the concentration camps, the sight of his brother, and the Third Reich in general. Paul arrived in Camp Concordia, among the first group of German soldiers greeted with a large and varied breakfast with coffee, rolls, butter and five types of jam. He had his first fried chicken in captivity. Life in captivity was "absolute prosperity if not excessiveness." He added, "I always said that 'Not even Goering eats this well in Germany.' I could say that because I was far away from Germany. The Third Reich was a terrible time, you can believe me." The memory of U.S. captivity offered Paul a refuge from memories he preferred to repress, an imaginary scenario that he inhabited as an imaginary (honorary) American.

### **3.3 Herr Bauer: "But We Were Friends!"**

Herr Bauer was born in 1922 in a small town in the Rhineland Palatine. He was a private in the German *Wehrmacht*, a *Richtschütze* (gunner) in the Panzer Regiment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Division that was deployed in North Africa when he fell into captivity in 1943. Bauer was transported to the

United States and interned in Camp Concordia, Kansas until 1945 in a compound for common soldiers. Bauer read my letter in the *Afrika Korps* newsletter, Die Oase, and we established our first contact through the *Verband Deutsches Afrika Korps (VDAK)* (Africa Corps Veterans Organization), an agency that has thrived for more than sixty years. Among its members, the *VDAK* promotes and circulates narratives of masculine, military comradeship, not only among German soldiers in the Second World War, but between the postwar German *Bundeswehr* (German army) and the British and U.S. armies. Bauer used the *VDAK*'s central narratives when he referred to his past military division in the *Afrika Korps* and when he sought to explain the transnational relations during and after the war that many German, British and U.S. military veterans organizations seek to nourish. Like many other *VDAK* members I interviewed, Bauer sought to make sense of his captivity by employing prevalent stories circulating within the *VDAK*.

I conducted two interviews with him by telephone in 2003. Both times, he was accompanied by his wife, who frequently told him to speak up. The first time we spoke, he was enthusiastic and happy to talk about "good times" in captivity. He was exceptionally enthusiastic to report positive memories about his time in U.S. captivity, which gave me the impression that he wanted to use the interview as an opportunity to share actively pleasant memories of the past and exclude unpleasant memories of the past, an impression that was confirmed by the second interview.

The second time we talked, his story about captivity was the same, but his mood was noticeably different. He wanted to tell me about the Jewish families who lived in his village when he was a child. Instead of referring to the *VDAK* newsletter, he cited newspaper articles and archival materials he had collected on his own. Bauer had accounted for all of the nine Jewish citizens in his village. Each of them was killed in *Auschwitz*. Bauer repeatedly questioned himself for having “noticed nothing ‘wrong’” about the marginalization and disappearance of his Jewish neighbors. This led me to believe that Bauer felt personal guilt about the German atrocities, and that his story about U.S. internment focuses so much on positive memories because he had to bring his feeling of pride and elation as an *Afrika Korps* member in U.S. internment into cohesion with his feeling of ethical guilt.

Bauer utilized his idealized captivity memories for the purpose of exoneration. Examples of friendliness and occasional admiration he and his peers experienced served not to continue his past beliefs but to negotiate the conflict between his past and present selves.

Herr Bauer constructed a sense of composure around what he represented as a “natural” transnational friendship among the German and U.S. military personnel that developed in Camp Concordia, Kansas.<sup>27</sup> He presented these friendships as spontaneous and unaffected by the war or

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<sup>27</sup> Lowell A. May's [Camp Concordia: German POWs in the Midwest](#), confirms both Paul and Bauer's descriptions of the camp and the prisoners' relations with the captors. Paul and Bauer also remembered the names of the U.S. personnel correctly.

national ideology. He and his comrades from the *Afrika Korps* felt respected and admired by the U.S. military and civilian personnel in the camp. Bauer's narrative revolved around instances that allowed him to relive feelings of comradeship and appreciation.

Like many other members of the VDAK, Bauer suggested that *Wehrmacht* soldiers deployed in the *Afrika Korps* were better soldiers and had higher morals than other soldiers deployed in other divisions. Bauer identified with the *Afrika Korps Wehrmacht* divisions largely by using the identity the veterans organization constructed for itself and the reputation it had earned internationally. By sheer association with the *Afrika Korps*, as military division, and with the VDAK, as veterans' organization, Bauer sought to create a U.S. captivity narrative in which his captivity in the United States exonerated him and absolved him of the crimes Germany committed.

As a member of the VDAK, Bauer frequently inserted interpretations promoted in the VDAK's newsletter, Die Oase. His private memory of being a member of the *Afrika Korps* in U.S. captivity was congruent with the collective memories that circulate in the VDAK. He explained that:

the *Afrika Korps* was well-liked. Because one thing is clear, with us was nobody who had fought in Europe and, uh, who fought after 1943. With us in Concordia there were only the *Africans* [Africa Corps soldiers]. No other group came in. And it is still the case today: they were war opponents, but, nevertheless,

*fair* war opponents.

Bauer distinguished soldiers who had fought in Europe from the *Afrika Korps* by the time and location of their service. Bauer also distinguished between the *Afrika Korps* members, whom he described as “fair” war opponents, and “anti-Nazis” involved in the re-education programs in the United States, whom he described as “unfair” war opponents.

Bauer was incorrect in assuming that soldiers in the *Afrika Korps* had not fought anywhere else, but he presented this particular group of *Afrika Korps* soldiers in Concordia as uncontaminated by soldiers from other war theaters where the German *Wehrmacht* did not obey the rules of the Geneva Convention: “When we arrived in North Africa, as young soldiers, we were instructed in the rules of the Geneva Convention before we went into the first battle.... They told us that prisoners were to be treated fairly and that we should not take away any of the things they are carrying.” Indeed, military historians have identified the North African war as a fair and compassionate war among all the adversaries, especially compared to the war the Germans fought in other areas of the world, even the war the Americans fought in the Pacific. Bauer’s distinction between the *Afrika Korps* and other parts of the *Wehrmacht*—the North Africa war and the war in Europe—served as the foundation for his representations of friendship between the *Afrika Korps* members and the U.S. military and civilian personnel.

Bauer described the relationship between the POWs and the U.S.

military as compassionate and amicable. Their captors did not make them feel inferior or defeated, and U.S. officers socialized with Germans of the same rank. For instance, within only four weeks of their arrival, Bauer said, the German camp company commander and the U.S. camp commander, both colonels in their respective armies, went horseback riding outside the camp. In addition, several of the U.S. officers working at the POW camp in Concordia along with imprisoned German officers jointly became what he calls “paternal guides” to some of the teenaged common soldiers among the German POWs. One of the U.S. camp commanders, a “Captain Strong,” was so helpful and approachable, Bauer claimed, that he and many other prisoners called him “Papa Strong.”

A U.S. “Captain Teufel,” who was originally from Berlin, held lectures on democracy and was widely known as the one person in the camp who tried to make “real democrats out of Nazis.” Bauer related to him as a nice, non-coercive superior who invited German POWs to exercise their freedom of speech. Bauer claimed that Teufel encouraged the prisoners to tell him “the truth” about their feelings about the Third Reich or National Socialism. Bauer’s affection also stemmed from the intellectual openness with which Teufel responded to some of the POWs’ belief in National Socialism and Hitler’s political decisions. Bauer described “American joviality” towards the POWs as if it had been a natural reaction to what he described as the “non-Fascist,” “fair” and “pacifist” character of the German *Afrika Korps*. Bauer



perceived the exchange between the POWs and the U.S. camp representatives as a true example of egalitarianism, a validation that they were proper and respectable.

Bauer's idealization of his U.S. captors as father figures is also apparent in the following example. Despite admitting that he "shouldn't even say this, the POWs celebrated Hitler's birthday in our camp.... April 20<sup>th</sup> was Hitler's birthday and we celebrated Hitler's birthday and the Americans were standing there and smiled." "In a sense," he adds, "the whole thing was comical ... they hung a flag out and so forth. That's the way it was. And no one did anything about it; we all thought it was a hoax. We were all glad the war was over."

In Bauer's explanation, the U.S. military did not react because they "must have" understood the lack of seriousness behind this potentially inflammatory celebration. In seeking to demonstrate that the American camp commander tolerated and approved of their Nazi gatherings, Bauer's story ambiguously suggests that U.S. military would have intervened had they believed that the POWs celebrated a Nazi ritual in earnest. If the American military's tolerance of Nazi rituals was proof that the prisoners had not been dangerous Nazis, it could just as likely have meant that they followed the rules of the Geneva Convention, were indifferent, or were perhaps even sympathetic to the Germans and their cultural beliefs.

Based on his reading of U.S. military documents, Arnold Krammer

argues in Nazi Prisoners in America that the Convention allowed German prisoners to do the Hitler salute, keep the Nazi flag and portraits of Hitler, and celebrate his and other National Socialist leaders' birthdays. American military personnel stood by or permitted Nazi rituals, and sometimes even *provided* the Nazi flags and participated in the events. Most scholars argue that the American military allowed Germans to celebrate Nazism out of respect for foreign military prisoners on one hand, and their fear of reprisals against American soldiers in German captivity on the other (Krammer; Gansberg). As I will discuss in more detail in the following section on the interview with Herr Koch, the American military did indeed share cultural beliefs about race in general and about Jews specifically.

In light of these different possible interpretations, Bauer's story comes to reveal itself more clearly as a strategic cultivation of positive memories of American captivity in which the American captors ostensibly represent a decisive moral authority. Bauer's narrative presents his fellow prisoners as anti-Nazis within the transnational relations between the German prisoners and the American captors. After all, he had already explained that the *Afrika Korps* had been "fair" and did not necessitate American interference or correction. Bauer's narrative revolves around non-judgmental and paternal U.S. military men whose compassionate and fatherly supervision implied that he and his fellow *Afrika Korps* members were not Nazis. The American military did not react to their participation in Germany's war with resentment

or revenge, but rather with compassion and parent-like forgiveness. In his narrative, he derives a sense of composure from imagining himself and his comrades under the benign guardianship of men in the American military.

From within his memory of American captivity, Bauer cultivates a sense of comfort and composure that stands in stark contrast to his otherwise negative memories of the Third Reich and his feeling of guilt for the murder of Jews. He utilizes narratives from the *VDAK* that create a sense of comradely cohesion within the *Afrika Korps* and between the *Afrika Korps* and the British and American militaries. He uses the trope about Rommel's alleged anti-Nazism and the international recognition of the North African war as a comparatively "fair" war to decontaminate his part in the German past. For Bauer, this narrative of German-American friendship provides private comfort and a sense of composure, a moral refuge not apparently from external accusations but from deeply personal feelings of ethical guilt.

### 3.4 Herr Leitner “A Word of Honor”

Herr Leitner was born in 1920 in Kassel, where he grew up in a working class Social Democratic household. A soldier in the German *Wehrmacht*, deployed in the German *Afrika Korps*, Leitner was taken prisoner on May 10, 1943 near Mateur, Tunisia. He was subsequently transported on the Pasteur to the United States, and moved to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, in June 1943, where he stayed until summer 1944. Leitner was part of the POW labor program, took many jobs that required him to move, and was transferred to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Between 1945 and February 1946, Leitner was relocated to Camp Marion, Ohio, where he worked as inventory manager at Camp Perry, a satellite camp of Camp Marion. In Ohio, Leitner participated in a four-week education program that trained him to work for the U.S. military in the western part of postwar Germany. Leitner was released from U.S. captivity at Camp Shanks, New York, in February 1946 with discharge papers for Kassel.

However, Leitner’s ship did not go to port in Bremerhaven, as he and his peers expected. Instead, the ship went to port in Le Havre, France and took them to a U.S. camp in Bolbec, where, according to Leitner, U.S. officers gave him “their word of honor” that he could work for U.S. occupation authorities in Kassel and that he would be taken there immediately. Instead, Leitner found himself in Cherbourg, a French labor camp, where Moroccan soldiers took the Germans’ possessions and beat them. Leitner referred to

this camp as a “starvation camp” where seven inmates received one loaf of bread, about two ounces of butter, and one ladle of soup each day. Leitner escaped once but was apprehended by German youth who immediately turned him over to the French police for a monetary reward. Leitner’s fifth escape attempt was successful, he said, only because he reported to the U.S. military police, who quickly arranged for Leitner’s repatriation and employment. He worked for the U.S. military authorities in Kassel until 1958.

When Leitner spoke with me in a telephone interview in 2004, he was 83 years old. He had a walking disability that required him to use a wheelchair. Leitner said he had an excellent relationship with his children, and lived with his son and his family, who supported him and helped him communicate with me through email and by telephone. Unlike other subjects, Leitner’s family did not appear torn over his past in National Socialist Germany; neither did he emphasize the end of the war as a caesura. Leitner’s discomfort derived from feelings of betrayal about his transnational past in U.S. and French captivity. He felt betrayed by the U.S. officers who had promised to repatriate him promptly but instead turned him over to the French. Leitner said he was under the impression, until only recently, that the U.S. military “sold” German prisoners to France as slave laborers. All his life, Leitner said, he was upset about the transfer to the French camp.

Leitner’s narrative about captivity in the United States and France represents him as a thoughtful and diplomatic man who was able to manage

difficult international negotiations. His narrative does not negotiate intra-German or generational conflicts, but rather cultural and national boundaries. He did not identify as a German national subject or seek cohesion within the state, but rather sought personal cohesion within other public spheres.

For instance, Leitner's story about captivity in the United States between 1943 and 1946 revolved much more around relationships with Americans than with German prisoners. In October 1943, Leitner learned that his mother and fiancée were killed in the Allied firebombing of Kassel. Compared to many German POWs whose relatives were killed in the bombings, Leitner never presented the attack on Kassel as a personal or national victimization. Instead, he said, he started feeling "very alone." He felt that he had "little connection" to his home and instead of making a new life in Germany, he wanted "to stay in America." Staying in the United States when the war ended, however, was not an option for POWs, even though many of them wished to immigrate to the United States, mainly for economic stability (Reiss).

Leitner talked at length about the process that led him to consider immigrating to the United States. In Camp Marion, Ohio, where he arrived in February 1945, Leitner assisted a Reverend with his church service. Leitner's involvement with the church, he explained, was a commitment to his deceased mother and fiancée, his family's religious tradition, and his faith in God. Leitner participated regularly in camp church services, a practice many

other POWs avoided in favor of participation in Nazi rituals such as the *Morgenfeiern* (morning celebrations or morning assemblies). *Morgenfeiern* had nationalist and ideological import, replacing religious traditions and indoctrinating participants through propaganda. Leitner thus ostensibly distanced himself both from National Socialism and from many of his peers who continued with the *Morgenfeiern*, even in captivity.

Moreover, instead of seeking advice from his peers about the loss of his family, Leitner said that he sought advice from a Reverend, who encouraged Leitner to immigrate, and from a Corporal, a German Jewish émigré who encouraged Leitner to join the U.S. military as he had when he immigrated to the United States with his family. As a result, Leitner reported to the U.S. military with his plans to enlist, a decision that rendered him a traitor to the German military and the National Socialist regime. To determine Leitner's trustworthiness, U.S. military representatives asked Leitner if he was willing to fight against the German military. Although Leitner stated he was ready to fight against the Japanese, he could not fight against Germans. Leitner explained: "I experienced something that helped me make that decision. In Camp Mateur, in Africa, one of my German comrades was guarded by his own brother who fought for the U.S. military." He did not want to face a situation where he could have the "misfortune of shooting [his] own relative." He was willing to fight for the United States to earn the privilege to immigrate but could not "fight [his] relatives in good conscience." Ultimately,

the U.S. military spokesperson in charge of Leitner's application informed him that he "lacked in democratic understanding" and therefore would not be admitted to the U.S. military.

Leitner persisted in using the material advantages that U.S. internment offered. Leitner abandoned the thought of joining the U.S. military during wartime but began to anticipate the U.S. victory and the prospect of immigrating to the United States after the war, and made another attempt at taking advantage of his transnational situation. Leitner took an English class to improve his reading abilities, which he would later need to work at a Heinz factory and as manager of the Marion satellite camp.

Taking English classes improved Leitner's opportunities in yet another way. The U.S. military frequently interpreted POWs' interest in English classes as a sign of positive inclination towards the United States and democratization. Even self-interested study of English was interpreted by the U.S. military as a sign of democratization. As Mathias Reiss (and several of my subjects) have argued, taking English classes was more of an opportunistic strategy than a sign of their democratization. When the war ended, Leitner volunteered to work for the U.S. military and was selected to participate in a reeducation program at Camp Perry, Ohio in 1945. Camp Perry was generally reserved for prisoners who had proven to have positive opinions about the United States and would live in the U.S. zone of occupation. Leitner volunteered because he assumed that working for the



U.S. occupation government would help him develop a good résumé to present to the U.S. consulate if he still wanted to immigrate.

Like many POWs interned in the United States, Leitner gained educational advantages in captivity. German POWs could take college-level courses in these camps and earn college credit transferable to universities in Germany. Many POWs who took English courses used their skills in western Germany under U.S. military occupation to communicate or do business with U.S. military personnel. Taking English courses and participating in the training program for work in the U.S. military occupation zone in Hesse allowed Leitner to loosen ties to Germany at a time when he had no desire to return.

During the four-week program in Camp Perry, Leitner read Der Ruf (The Call) with great interest. Der Ruf was a newspaper written by prisoners of war who opposed the Nazi regime. Many German POWs rejected and even burned copies of Der Ruf. Leitner rejected neither the paper nor its stance on the war. Leitner took courses about Hitler and the nature of National Socialism, about United States history and the nature and goals of democracy. He said that he performed well as a student. A representative of the reeducation program offered to transfer him to an anti-Nazi camp while he was awaiting repatriation. However, describing this “anti-Nazi” camp as a site “for men who did not want to have anything to do with the *Wehrmacht* from the first,” Leitner declined. He did not identify with those calling

themselves (or those whom the U.S. military labeled) “anti-Nazis.” Leitner did not describe anti-Nazis as opponents of Hitler, the National Socialist ideology, or the regime, but as opponents of the German military. Leitner ultimately refused the offer to move to an anti-Nazi camp. Even though he was opposed to Hitler, he refused to oppose or harm his German comrades.

Leitner’s composure rests on his persistent comradeship with German soldiers, a relationship he needed to emphasize when he explained his cooperation with the U.S. military. He explained: “the oath I had sworn to the German people and the German *Wehrmacht* was binding.” Nevertheless, he would have left the German military to fight for the U.S. military. The people to whom he claimed total loyalty would have seen him as a traitor, not a comrade. Leitner confessed that, “For me, a deserter is a deserter and an oath is an oath. I have not taken an oath on Hitler, but I have taken an oath as a soldier, to my God.” His sense of comradeship and loyalty thus seems contradictory. Leitner saw the men in anti-Nazi camps as deserters, but did not see himself that way. The difference was not in leaving one military and joining another, but in actively undermining or opposing German soldiers. This means Leitner’s loyalty was passive. He would have joined the U.S. military and paid the price of warfare and possible death, but that would have been a sacrifice for himself, not for Germany’s victims. Leitner’s motivations were neither political nor ethical, but rather strategic; and his composure was still tied to a military code of honor to other soldiers in Hitler’s army.

Leitner's interview reveals that he felt responsible neither for Germany's atrocities nor for his plan to join the U.S. military to help stop the atrocities. Leitner sought to negotiate his position *between* Germany and the United States. Like many other interview subjects, Leitner perceived the U.S. military as inconsistent when the negotiations concerning his desire to join the U.S. military did not receive his anticipated recognition. Like many other subjects, Leitner questioned the U.S. military's understanding and practice of democracy. The U.S. military's diagnosis of Leitner as *not democratic enough* did not appear consistent with other instances when U.S. military authorities offered to move him to an anti-Nazi camp, made him camp commander, and later chose him to participate in a democratization program. Therefore, Leitner positioned himself in his narrative ambiguously between Germans and Americans, between the German and the U.S. militaries, between his peers and the U.S. military guards. He presented himself as an agent in intercultural and international exchanges: as a diplomat.

Like a diplomat, Leitner sought to nourish public relations between two parties who had difficulty negotiating differences. He utilized tact to gain strategic, material advantages. Even though his diplomacy did not yield the results he hoped for—he was denied immigration and “betrayed” by U.S. officers—Leitner's narrative about his past serves to represent his ability to negotiate seemingly dissimilar social and political positions. During the war, Leitner was a German soldier who had sworn loyalty to his people, but who

did not wish to return to Germany and would have joined the ranks of Germany's enemies. In that regard, Leitner's captivity narrative coheres with the sense of identity he created for himself over the course of his life.

After his retirement in 1983, Leitner joined an organization for aging people that soon affiliated with an international organization for seniors in France. He traveled to Canada, the United States, and Israel several times. As the German representative of the organization, he was proud that he and his delegation were the first Germans to be received by the mayor of Paris in the 1980s. Leitner stated that he looked back on his accomplishments and awards as the German representative of the organization with pride. The theme of his captivity narrative reappears in his representation of a lecture he delivered for a French audience in the late 1980s:

I went to the podium, looked around the room, slowly. I looked left and I looked right and didn't say a single word; and then I said—and that was the bomb—I said: "I see many women of my generation in the audience who have been marked by the suffering of the last years of the war. Please allow me to bow to their suffering," and they gave me a standing ovation. I couldn't even give them enough autographs.

Leitner's diplomatic abilities were finally rewarded at this speech. He found a way to approach the tension between German and French audience members by "bombing" their expectations and inserting women into a

narrative about a war that has been “owned” mostly by men.

Leitner negotiated transnational tensions, the main origin of his discomposure, by exposing it as a narrative of masculine nationalism where acts of national and transnational comradeship were repeatedly betrayed. However, he used a reference to women strategically to dislocate a tension that was very personal to his experience of war and captivity. Leitner’s narrative represents him as a person whose main conflict was finding a place among cultures: Germany, the United States, and France, whose relations and decisions about the Germans were unpredictable. His conflict stemmed from tension among nations, not among regimes, generations, or narratives within Germany. Leitner’s strategy of composure was to tell a story that would earn him recognition for his ability to “bomb” or invalidate ineffective public relations.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

Paul, Bauer and Leitner composed positive memories of U.S. captivity that they used to position themselves historically and ethically in a culturally negotiated history of the German past. Paul, Bauer and Leitner did so by offering stories about their relaxed emotional ties to the Third Reich. In conjunction to this, Paul, Herr Bauer, and Herr Leitner represented different degrees of a transnational comradeship between American and German soldiers in the United States that Lynne Ermann described so positively in her article.

Herr Bauer stated “those were good times in America.” Herr Leitner, stated that he “liked it in USA” and had hoped to start a new life in the United States after his fiancée and his mother had been killed in the Kassel bombing. Herr Paul was enthusiastic about his time in America and described it as “wonderful” and exceptional, [as] a time [he] will never forget.” Herr Paul wholeheartedly cultivated discourses identical to the ones promoted by the reeducation program. Whereas Paul had seemingly embraced the wartime U.S. ideology of “democracy,” he was more effectively persuaded by the “excessive” abundance and variety of food. Herr Bauer embraced both wartime U.S. ideology and narrative shared in the arena of the VDAK that resonated richly with stories about transnational military comradeships. Leitner, whose frustrated attempt to immigrate had disconnected him emotionally from a more permanent friendship with the United States composed a counter-narrative to the transnational military comradeship.

Paul, Bauer and Leitner did not emotionally struggle with the cultural and social changes in May 1945 when the U.S. military changed its treatment of the POWs in the United States slightly by requiring more of them to participate in the labor program, screening them more rigidly for their Nazi affiliations, and subjecting them to Nazi atrocity education. Even though the U.S. military lowered the quality of the food, neither Paul, nor Bauer, nor Leinter experienced these changes as a caesura.

Another subject, Herr Koch, whose interview I discuss in chapter 4, took part the reeducation program. What distinguishes him from Herr Paul and Herr Leitner, however, was that he clearly cultivated his ardent Nazism while he was interned in the United States. Koch was among a very small number of soldiers who were picked for the program in spite of their hostility towards the United States and their dedication to defend “the Third Reich” both physically and symbolically. The following section discusses interviews with POWs who had preserved their nationalism and have composed memories that revolve around national comradeships in a transnational context.

## 4. NAZIS OR ANTI-NAZIS? TRANSNATIONAL CONVERSIONS

### 4.1 Introduction

On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally. Prisoners who were still in the U.S. did not personally experience Germany's devastation, but they saw images published the U.S. news media. They did not experience serious food shortages in Europe, but they noticed that the U.S. military served them smaller amounts and less palatable foods. They had fewer privileges. Before 1945, officers were exempt from the labor program, but they were urged to work after Germany's defeat. The three subjects whose interviews I discuss in this chapter had all identified strongly with Nazi Germany at the time they were in captivity. All three of them have sought to account for their feeling of shock in 1945 when they were confronted with the consequences of Germany's defeat.

One crucial way in which the changed relations between the United States and Germany became apparent to the prisoners was the U.S. military's shift from a voluntary reeducation program to a sudden confrontation with Germanys' atrocities (Robin 120). German radio propaganda had ended and the Allies' media published the horrific images of the Nazi concentration camps, which they required the prisoners in the U.S. to see. The U.S. military confronted prisoners with film materials from the liberated concentration camps without notice but under close observation. What intensified the shock value of these film screenings was the fact that



they were shown in camp movie theaters that had previously been used for entertainment and diversion in the non-coercive and covert phase of the SPD's reeducation effort. Beginning in May 1945, the Army Signal Corps released concentration camp documentaries. The British and American military produced newsreels of Bergen Belsen, and the SHAEF's Psychological Warfare Division and the American Council for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality in 1945 produced the one hour long Nazi Concentration Camps (Robin 122). The Nazi atrocity films were an undeniable testimony to Germany's genocide. The screening of these films was mandatory and the AEOs, who were previously supposed to engage with the prisoners in a non-coercive manner, were now required to report the prisoners' responses to the films to the War Department.

The screening of atrocity films in the same theaters in which POWs previously viewed motion pictures for entertainment signified a power shift between the captors and their captives. Because of this specific cultural context, the screening of atrocity films in the camps in the United States resonated differently than the screening to POWs in Europe. Previously, they prisoners had the opportunity to view pre-selected, as Robin suggests, pro-American movies that assured the inmates' consumption of favorable images of the United States. On average, Krammer argues, each POWs viewed thirty motion pictures on a voluntary basis.

With the end of the war and the mandatory screenings of atrocity films, the act of viewing movies changed from leisure to moral confrontations. It was no longer a choice for leisure but a requirement meant to instill collective guilt for German atrocities. In her essay, "Compulsory Viewing: Concentration Camp Film and German Re-education," Susan L. Carruthers argues that:

images of Nazi atrocity were fastened upon as resources for identity-construction from the very moment the cameras entered the camps. For the victorious Anglo-American Allies footage from the camps assumed a privileged role in the work of re-educating a defeated populace: bringing Germans to 'proper' awareness of their complicity in Nazi crimes by exposing them to graphic illustrative testimony. (733-34)

As much as the SPD previously sought to construct an essential American character that was benign and egalitarian and enjoyed a good life style in the eyes of the German POWs, the Army Signal Corps' atrocity films now constructed an essential American character that was the masculine victor and moral authority that would judge and punish criminals. These films also developed German postwar identities as defeated, emasculated, and immoral. These atrocity films, which replaced and made inaccessible the previous films, signified a shift from America as military friend to America as victor, and they linked the idealized version of a prosperous America in

Hollywood films to the representations of stigmatized, defeated, and destroyed Germany.

Herr Koch, Herr Müller, and Herr Schuhler composed memories of their captivity in the United States that accounted for their experience of rupture. Certainly, all three of them had experienced 1945 differently and from a biographically unique perspective. However, their memories all seek to negotiate what I understand as their loss of an imagined German national cohesion.

#### **4.2 Herr Koch: “The Complete Viciousness of Nazism”**

Herr Koch was born in 1923 in a small town in the Rhineland Palatine. Even though his father was a democrat and opposed to Hitler, Koch was actively involved in the Nazi movement at an early age. He volunteered for the Hitler Youth as early as 1934, when membership was voluntary, and made it to *Rottenscharführer*, junior squad leader.<sup>28</sup> Koch enlisted in the *Wehrmacht* in 1941 as a Non-Commissioned officer and was deployed in North Africa twice, the second time by choice because he wanted to avoid the eastern campaigns. He had seen many severely wounded and traumatized German soldiers returning from the East in 1943, and he did everything in his power to be declared fit to fight in tropical climates and

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<sup>28</sup> Membership in the Hitler Youth was not compulsory for youth 17 and over until 1939. By 1941, it was compulsory for youth over 11 years of age.

qualify for deployment in North Africa. He was taken prisoner in North Africa in May 1943 and subsequently interned in Camp Trinidad, Colorado where he stayed until 1945. He was then moved to Camp Phillips, Fort Riley, and eventually to Camp Eustis, Virginia, where he was one of the 39,000 German POWs who participated in the U. S. special democratization program. He was repatriated through France and Bavaria and returned in 1945 to his home, which was in the French zone of occupation until 1949 when the occupation of Germany officially ended.

In 2001, when I interviewed Koch personally at his home in a small village in the Rhineland Palatine, he composed his narrative by contrasting his present identity as a liberal and well-educated retired Protestant Minister to his past identity as a National Socialist and anti-Semite. He explained his actions and motivations from the perspective of a changed man, representing his present-day understanding as the result of a long process of intellectual and emotional confrontation with the German past. Koch credited Jewish German Assistant Executive Officers (AEOs), the U.S. military's reeducation program, and other atrocity education programs in the U.S. for this change, even though he had not been able to accept responsibility for the German atrocities and his own actions until much later. His interview reveals that former Nazis were able to change not only the stories they told, but also the fantasy investments they made in the National Socialist narratives of German superiority and the alleged inhumanity of Jews.

Koch began his narrative with his first official interaction with the U.S. military. While aboard a ship bound for the United States, a U.S. military representative informed them that they would be treated by the rules of the Geneva Convention, “like the soldiers of the captors.” Koch and his peers “thought that was hilarious.” He added, “We didn’t know about the Geneva Convention because we were not supposed to be captured. We were supposed to die before being captured, according to Adolf Hitler.” Koch interpreted the U.S. military’s stance towards its prisoners as a sign of naiveté about warfare. Koch told me about this and many other incidents to illustrate how arrogant he had been in 1943. He described his arrogance as very common among prisoners captured in North Africa because the war had not yet been lost and the *Afrika Korps* had not been not as decimated as other parts of the German *Wehrmacht* fighting in Europe.

Koch also went to great lengths to recount the process of Nazification in captivity. Koch was from a deeply religious Protestant family, had regularly visited church, and planned to become a Minister early in his adolescence. Between 1943 and 1944 in the U.S., he attended camp church services, but became gradually infected by what he called “the mental disease of National Socialism.” Koch turned his back on church services and began frequenting National Socialist gatherings instead. “By the end of 1945, I can see that in my letters home, I wrote about *Morgenfeiern* [“morning celebrations”], about

[Alfred] Rosenberg. And I went to these events in complete uniform with the band on my arm. That was part of my life then.”

Indeed, Koch identified these events clearly as National Socialist propaganda. The *Morgenfeiern* were a National Socialist invention. Their function was to replace religious education on Sundays with National Socialist ideology. Ritualized dialogues about Alfred Rosenberg were part of this National Socialist propaganda. Rosenberg had developed the racial theories around which Nazis constructed the ideal of the Aryan race and sought to justify the genocide of Jews. Rosenberg was one of the most influential Nazi leaders and was tried and sentenced to death in the 1946 Nuremberg trials. Even in captivity, “common” Germans practiced and actively involved themselves with racial and National Socialist rituals that celebrated not just German nationalism, but racial superiority and hatred towards others. Identifying the ideological and racist purposes of these meetings sets Koch apart from other subjects who sought to present the *Morgenfeiern* as harmless, boyish little pranks.

However, Koch used these examples to show how he “became more Nazi” after a new wave of POWs arrived from the European war theaters in 1944. Koch did not join these meetings out of boredom, but rather because he wanted to be active. He was particularly drawn to the men from the SS. Although nobody in his family “had ever considered becoming a member of the SS,” Koch said that he was so impressed with their dedication towards

National Socialism that he decided to collaborate with them. Koch not only gathered with them on a regular basis and reaffirmed himself and others of the superiority of Germany and National Socialism, he also actively participated in the harassment of other inmates whose behavior they considered disrespectful toward the German regime.

Germans who processed the inmates' letters read in one that a soldier had asked his mother to burn his SS uniform; when the men who intercepted the man's mail informed the SS, Koch's people beat him up. At one point, several of his fellow POWs beat another inmate unconscious, and Koch, who had worked at the camp hospital, covered up the beating by claiming the inmate had fallen out of his bed. The assaulted man sought protection from the U.S. military camp commander, and Koch was among those POWs in his group who regretted that they had not "beaten him to death" before he could get the support from the U.S. military and be removed from the camp.

In Nazi Prisoners in America, Arnold Krammer argues that the internal social structure of the camps, which was organized by order of military rank, frequently served those inmates who were more aggressively involved in defending the Nazi regime. Krammer argues that the U.S. military's failure to understand the diversity of opinion, experience, and military affiliations of the prisoners "confused the War Department and allowed the drastic increase of Nazi influence inside the prisoner of war camps to occur" (Krammer 149). In our interview, Koch similarly claimed that the American military must not

have fully appreciated the “complete viciousness of Nazism” at the time and was naïve for assuming that the prisoners would behave in a civilized manner.

Not feeling defeated but empowered in U.S. captivity, Koch and his peers also actively tried to harm the U.S. military by passive disobedience: destroying food rations, for example, and using flour to mark their soccer fields. As an accomplice of the SS men in the camp, Koch also helped plan a camp riot. The U.S. camp commander had put several SS men in charge of the camp fire department, which also meant, as Koch explained to me, that these SS men knew where the ammunition was stored. Their plan was to steal the ammunition, distribute it among fellow supporters and take the camp hostage. “Fortunately for us,” he said, the riot “never materialized because the war ended” before they could act on their plans.

After many years, Koch, said, he finally understood his behavior in captivity as inappropriate. Koch was ashamed of his behavior in captivity, but he said that the freedom to organize without punishment in the camps facilitated his Nazification as much as the arrival and influence of the SS men. Koch excused the American military’s failure to intervene because of their honest ignorance about Nazism’s “viciousness,” which he tried to represent with his reference to the U.S. soldier informing them about their rights.



Koch was also aware that these aspects of his past would not resonate among an American audience. He knew that the U.S. military's tolerance of Nazism in the camps, and the amicable relations they developed, is a shameful aspect in the history of the United States. In the early 1990s, Koch visited Colorado again and was invited by a local newspaper to write about his time in Camp Trinidad, Colorado. Koch included anecdotes about the U.S. military's friendliness, his gratitude for the U.S. captors, and his story about the planned riot. The story about the U.S. military's use of SS men for the camp fire department was exactly what the newspaper edited out. Koch knew that this story did not fit public memory of the Second World War in the United States. Indeed, popular memory in the U.S. represents the American military as an inherently anti-fascist institution.

What was shameful to Koch, however, was not the damage he and his peers had done to one another, but the damage they had done to Jews. Koch stated that anti-Semitism and the lack of self-reflection were uncustomary in his own family before and during the Third Reich, but that he was anti-Semitic even before he became "more Nazi" in the camp. In our interview in 2002, Koch stated that from his personal experience of the Third Reich, anti-Semitism was pervasive among the majority of Germans, and that Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners was "correct to a certain extent." Koch agreed with Goldhagen's main argument that common Germans were motivated by anti-Semitism and willing to act on it. Koch

explained that he had participated in Hitler Youth rallies singing race-baiting songs, and harassing Jews in the U.S. military. He recalled specific incidents in the camp kitchen: the Assistant Executive Officer in Koch's company in the POW camp was a Herr Paul Blum, a German Jewish exile who was then employed by the American military. When Herr Blum came to the kitchen to sit down and eat, where POWs "had everything in abundance." Koch emphasized that "the majority" of the present POWs "sang race-baiting Nazi songs until Blum left the room. We sang '*Krumme Juden zieh'n dahin, daher,/ sie zieh'n durchs Rote Meer,/die Wellen schlagen zu,/ Die Welt hat Ruh.*' (Crooked Jews, they scurry hither and thither / they cross the Red Sea / the waves lunge out / the world is at peace.)" The song was very popular in Germany, sung by soldiers and schoolchildren alike to the melody of "*Die Wolken ziehn dahin.*" POWs exposed the same behavior in front of a Jewish Lieutenant Colonel Hirsch, a German émigré from Frankfurt, Main. Koch and his comrades hissed death threats at him, such as, "shoot the Jew; kill him dead."

Many German prisoners, including Koch, refused to consider Jewish men in the camp as rightful members of the U.S. military community or as human equals. Because the U.S. military and the Jewish AEOs treated POWs with much dignity and respect, Koch felt that German prisoners were unjustified in behaving aggressively. He recalled: "We had nothing to complain about. When we were together, we talked about a lot of shit, but

not much about the Americans. We had nothing to complain about. Nothing, you see?" However, what is for Koch a story about the dignity of Jewish AEOs., represents the U.S. military's failure to protect Jewish personnel from the German's verbal and physical threats. The German-speaking Jewish AEOs were not only in charge of the POWs, but also often superior in rank, a class category that prisoners commonly respected. Koch argued: "the American military treated us with velvet gloves" in spite of the "the German's pure brutality towards Jews." In Stalag USA, Judith Gansberg mentions anti-Semitism in the U.S. military and among participants in the Special Projects Division (SPD) in charge of the AEOs. She argues that the SPD:

worried about the German reaction to dealing with members of [the Jewish] faith. They soon discovered that Jewish AEOs were having more trouble with fellow-officers in the camps than with the POWs. At one camp the Jewish AEO finally had to be replaced by a Gentile because the anti-Semitic CO, along with other officers, was hindering his work by encouraging the Germans and American enlisted personnel to ignore the AEO's directions (Gansberg).

Moreover, Joseph W. Bendersky's systematic study of anti-Semitism in the U.S. Army between the First World War and today, "The Jewish Threat": Anti-Semitic Politics in the U.S. Army shows that anti-Semitism was

pervasive, especially among the ranks of U.S. officers. According to Bendersky, the U.S. Army participated in stalling and preventing missions for the rescue of Jewish people from Europe. Many U.S. officers believed that the war was a “Jewish war,” or that “it was time the Germans got rid of [the Jews].” He argues that the majority of U.S. officers believed in WASP superiority. Many assumed that Jewish immigrants were communist instigators. Even though, as Ronald Takaki argues in Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II, Jews were represented in disproportionately large numbers in the U.S. military, Bendersky shows that many U.S. military officers believed that Jews wanted to evade military service, especially infantry service. Anti-Semitic jokes and hateful remarks in front of Jews were common and so were incidents in which Jewish soldiers were “singled out for repudiation and ridicule,” Bendersky argues (299). Bendersky also suggests that many of the American officers actually admired Hitler’s policies and the organization of the German army.<sup>29</sup>

Bendersky’s book proves that anti-Semitism and hostility towards Jews pervaded all ranks of the U.S. military, and Koch’s interview shows that anti-Semitism and hostility towards Jews pervaded all ranks of the German

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<sup>29</sup> American military history has long failed to study systemic anti-Semitism in the American Army and thereby contributed to the continuous misrepresentation of Jewish, American and German American transnational history. Regarding the history of German POWs in U.S. internment, that omission resulted in a sanitized representation of the American military and in most cases of the German POWs—at the expense of Jews.

civilian and military population. In April or May 1945, Koch and other POWs heard about extermination camps on “the news and on the radio.” He said that:

When the news came from the concentration camps in Bergen Belsen, the first one, and about the murdered people ... then, at that time, I said, ‘Where would we all have ended up at if we had let those criminals loose on the German people? We *had* to kill them!’ [Pause] Oh, just thinking of the people who were [killed]. [Pause] And I thought that was just and reasonable!

When the U.S. military confronted the POWs with the atrocity films to educate them about their “collective guilt,” Koch did not recognize Jews as human beings or himself as a perpetrator. Koch thought at the time that mass murder was an acceptable solution to what he perceived to be the Jewish threat. He perceived Jews as criminals who deserved a painful death and merited no empathy.

Even three months after hearing the news and seeing the films of the extermination camps, Koch told me, he was among those who said, “full of resentment,” that “the Germans would have never done anything like that.” Even though Koch had openly perpetrated anti-Semitism at home and in the camp, and felt that the murder of the Jews was justified and reasonable, he was still in disbelief about the material evidence and apparent barbarism of these crimes. Koch wanted to believe and adamantly insisted in 1945: “these

people died in a British firebomb.” Koch’s first reaction was to deny Germany’s atrocities by projecting them onto the Allies.

During the interview in 2001, Koch used this story to show his past inability to understand what he saw—even though he had talked about and seemingly believed in the “need” to “murder” Jews. Addressing his past contradictions, Koch assumed that he simply never really contemplated what it meant to murder a person. Koch said that he was now distraught over his hatred towards people “who had done nothing to deserve it.” Koch was the only interview subject who admitted to his active role in mobbing and threatening Jews. He understood later that he had assimilated Nazi ideology as a form of self-identification that deeply shocked him when he was confronted with the physical evidence of the horror it had produced, though he did not understand why.

Koch composed his memory of the past with recollections of his past anti-Semitism, through which he identified himself and his peers as perpetrators. After the war, however, Koch slowly began to change his perspective and became increasingly impressed with Blum and Hirsch. “The Germans reacted with brutality to this man’s refinement,” Koch elaborated. Decades later, he sent Hirsch a letter of apology for his and his comrades’ behavior. Hirsch wrote back, stating that he “had never made the mistake of ascribing the stupidity of a few onto the majority.” Koch thought that Hirsch

was wrong, that the majority of Germans was, indeed, anti-Semitic, and that he had been one of them.<sup>30</sup>

He also came to wonder why the U.S. military had never punished the Germans for their hostility. He assumed that Blum and Hirsch had decided not to report them.

Koch represented the German POWs' anti-Semitic acts as a clear symptom of National Socialism and as the core of National Socialist ideology. Koch was careful not to compose an argument for moral equivalence, like

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<sup>30</sup> Only very little research has been done on the German Jews who served in the U.S. military or on the experiences of German Jews who oversaw, interrogated, or otherwise had contact with German POWs. I have interviewed German Jews I have contacted through a Jewish newsletter in New York. Today's emphasis on America's role in saving Jewish victims of the Holocaust has contributed to widespread misunderstandings about the American Army as well as its treatment of Jews on the one hand and Germans on the other hand. The local histories of German POW camps in the United States tend to paint a very different picture. Penny Clark's book on German POWs in the American Midwest, for instance, cited several Americans who exonerated the German POWs from accusations of racism and hostility. One woman was quoted saying the German atrocities were horrible, but that "these boys" had done nothing. Anti-Semitism was pervasive in the United States both in the civilian and military populations, and the majority of U.S. produced books on the topic focus on the American military's rehabilitation of German prisoners of war and thereby obscure wartime American anti-Semitism.

<sup>30</sup> I have also interviewed German Jewish émigrés who worked for the U.S. military and who oversaw or worked beside German POWs. They suggest two kinds of experiences with the German POWs and the U.S. military that I will cover in a separate project later on. Several of the Jewish émigrés missed a Germany before Hitler, a Germany for which they, too, would have fought a war. At the time they left Germany for the United States, they felt disappointed and hurt for not being allowed to join the German military, for having been excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the community of the German people. Herr Kurt Hochmann, for instance, identified himself primarily as a German and secondarily as a Jew. Hochmann was sent back to Germany with the U.S. military where he worked as an interpreter. He experienced the Germans' frequent refusal to obey the U.S. camp commander as an expression of their nationalism for Germany. When Hochmann was in Germany, he witnessed how a high-ranking German POW who, according to the decisions at *Nuremberg*, should have been tried for war crimes, was removed from the camp and, he presumed, sent to the U.S. under a false identity. Rabbi L was deeply disappointed about the U.S. military's favorable treatment of many of its POWs. Rabbi L., who had fled Germany for the United States, joined the military. When he was getting ready to fight in the Pacific, he was sent to a military camp in Texas where, to his utmost surprise, he received his combat training from German POWs. He experienced the situation as "mind boggling."

several of my other subjects had. At the same time, he did not idealize the United States or the U.S. military. Koch explained by way of examples that his learning process involved his better appreciation of pluralism, especially among cultures in the United States. For instance, Koch explained that he noticed that “the Americans treated the Japanese like apes” at the same time as he and his Nazi peers were terrorizing the camp. Koch stated that “the real America” was not the U.S. military, but more authentically represented in Jazz music. Indeed, Koch’s living room showed a large collection of Jazz albums, Native American art, and literature about Jewish culture in western Europe. Koch’s rehabilitation involved appreciation of cultural pluralism, the one aspect I noticed most of my subjects refused to accept. Most of them complained about immigrants and the unemployed German youth. Koch, however, composed his past as a journey of intellectual rehabilitation. By welcoming pluralism and confessing to his past mistakes, Koch composed a self he could live with.

#### **4.3 Herr Müller: The Trouble Maker’s “Unfaltering Loyalty”**

Herr Müller was born in 1921 in a mid-sized town close to Munich in Bavaria. He was a Private First Class in a field hospital of the German *Afrika Korps* in North Africa when he was captured by the French in 1943. He was first held captive by the French in Morocco until 1944 and then was transferred to the United States in summer 1944, where he remained until 1945. Together with 600 other POWs from the *Afrika Korps*, he was



transported to Camp Florence, Arizona, and later to camps in Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Tennessee. Herr Müller felt fortunate that the U.S. military repatriated him early, after he had fallen ill and had to have surgery. He returned home in 1945, much earlier than most soldiers did.

When Müller spoke with me on the phone in 2004, he began his narrative with anecdotes about the luxuriousness of the camps in the United States. He emphasized that POWs in the United States “lived like the king of France.” In Arizona, he and his peers felt as if they had arrived in a “super hotel.” He quickly began to explain the limitations of what sounded like a story about the best vacation of his life, because the U.S. military had categorized him as a “trouble-maker,” one of those men whom the U.S. military had separated from the general camp population. Müller, like Koch, contrasted the good treatment he had received in the United States with his own antagonistic and nationalist demeanor.

Müller’s narrative revolved primarily around conflicts and moments of recognition related to his wartime nationalism. He and his peers, Müller stated, “could have been better off in Arizona, but we also had that pride in our nation. We were filled with pride, and we did not want to turn into degraded, will-less creatures.” He explained this strong sense of nationalism in a letter he sent me following our interview: “the fatherland was to us the greatest notion anyone could carry inside his heart; it gave us strength and a

symbol of unfaltering loyalty to our homeland [my translation].<sup>31</sup> In 1944, Müller sought to prevent the humiliation of a captured soldier under the control of his national enemy by demonstrating strength-of-character and rigid determination to defend the German “Reich.” After he arrived in Camp Florence, Arizona in 1944, Müller volunteered to work in the camp library. American camp representatives asked him to sign an agreement not to commit sabotage, but he refused. He believed that POWs were protected under the rules of the Geneva Convention and should therefore not be expected to comply with any additional agreements. Reflecting on his captivity in 2003, Müller thought the U.S. military had simply wanted to reduce the number of watch personnel and hoped that POWs would agree to the terms of a formal contract. He felt that he and his peers should have agreed with the offer, but in 1944 Müller and his unit declined. Müller claimed that soldiers from his unit were inclined to be resistant and proud because the *Afrika Korps* were very “correct” in following the rules of the Geneva Convention.

Müller and his peers felt as though the U.S. military had attempted to punish them for refusing to sign the agreement by ordering the POWs to pick cotton off camp instead of doing work inside the camp. Müller and his unit

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<sup>31</sup> The German original to this quotation is: “Der Begriff Vaterland war für uns das Höchste was man in seinem Innern tragen konnte und war uns Kraft und Sinnbild unerschütterlicher Treue zu unserer Heimat.”

refused to pick cotton because, as he explained to me, “they did not want to let [the U.S. personnel] give them orders.” He and his peers thought that the U.S. military “would use the cotton for the bombs they might drop on Germany,” and argued that using prisoners of war for labor related to armament or warfare was illegal. Nevertheless, the U.S. military moved them to a satellite camp near Camp Florence, Arizona, and took them out to the cotton fields. Müller and his comrades “had the audacity to fill 1.5 inch long tobacco pouches with cotton and turn these in at the end of their shift.” The consequences of this form of resistance were fourteen days on a diet of only bread and water. They still refused to comply with work orders, at which point the U.S. military returned them to the main camp. Müller recalled: “five-hundred POWs commenced with a strike.” Once again, they received no more than bread and water. This time they held out for fifty days. Christmas came around and they received a whole turkey, but afterwards they were put back on their bread-and-water diet until New Years.

Subsequently, a group of sixteen prisoners, including Müller, was singled out and ordered to a separate camp for *Aufwiegler*. troublemakers. Müller insisted that he “had not done anything.” The majority of the remaining four-hundred and sixty prisoners tried to protect the sixteen “trouble-makers” from the U.S. soldiers but capitulated when the U.S. men threatened to shoot. Müller and the other fifteen troublemakers were held in a field camp, where they decided to wage a hunger strike. After six days they

“could not get up anymore.” Müller and his peers decided on this strike because they “were not conscious of any guilt”; the *Aufwiegler* had acted no differently than their four-hundred-and-sixty fellow prisoners. After all, he argued, the captors “did not know what kinds of stories we put out in the camps, the kinds of slogans that circulated in there.” Since he could not understand why he was singled out, Müller assumed that the U.S. captors must have known about his “nationalist slogans.” Müller assumed that the U.S. mail censors had read his letters to his family and friends at home in Germany in which, he confessed, “I was probably a little political.”

In this interview, it is clear that Müller’s sense of composure derives from constructing a cohesive connection between acts of nationalism followed by seemingly conflicting consequences. He downplays his nationalism in the context of punishment he received, but emphasizes it in an incident that earned him recognition from a U.S. camp chaplain. Müller recalled having written down a nationalist poem and hanging it up in the camp library where he worked before the U.S. military took notice of him as a troublemaker. Müller quoted what he referred to me as “a poem about the fatherland,” and he recited it on the phone: “*Ans Vaterland, ans teure schliess Dich an, // Das halte fest mit deinem ganzen Herzen, // hier sind die starken Wurzeln deiner Kraft,*” (“Join your beloved fatherland // Hold it fast wholeheartedly // Here are the strong roots of your strength [my translation].” This line is a passage from Schiller’s Willhelm Tell that was not only inscribed

in the rim of some of the German *Reichsmark* coins—Germany’s currency between the 1920s and 1948—but it was also one of the most prominent phrases used in National Socialist propaganda (Ruppelt). Although Müller used this incident to represent his nationalism, National Socialist elements remain unmentioned. Müller told me about the event with the poem to emphasize that the U.S. military chaplain “appreciated [him] very much and expressed high regard for [him] very explicitly;” the chaplain even patted him on his shoulder and said, “My good boy!” Müller’s story thus revolves around his personal identification with Germany and German nationalism on one hand, and the ways in which U.S. military personnel responded to his nationalist actions on the other.

In our interview, Müller attempted to use his narrative to decontaminate German nationalism from shame and disgrace. When Müller spoke about the chaplain’s admiration of his Schiller citation, he added, “now that is not something one could condemn, is it?” He continued to explain the origins of his nationalism. He was “raised to be nationalistic” in school where he “recited National Socialist propaganda” about the “stab in the back” after the First World War, learned about France’s alleged antagonisms towards Germany and the Treaty of Versailles, which, he was told, unjustly punished Germans after the First World War. As a teenager, he believed National Socialist ideology and witnessed Hitler being represented as the savior of Germany. He said that:

dissatisfaction developed in Germany in response to these reprisals.... And when Hitler came, he straightened out the [situation with] the seven million unemployed [people] and instituted the *Arbeitsdienst* [labor duty] and the economy got off the ground again. That was the departure from the defeat of the First World War that was a dishonor to Germany in every aspect [my translation].

Müller continued to believe in the “*Endsieg*” (“the ultimate victory”) after he was captured and held in the United States, because, as he explained, “we were not very well informed about the economic and military conditions back home.” “In captivity, we did not know anything about what was really happening, and that’s when I wrote ‘we hope for the ultimate victory and so forth’.” Müller’s nationalism and his trust in Germany’s victory hinged on success stories from the Nationalist Socialist news media, such as the report of the *Oberkommando der Deutschen Wehrmacht (OKW)* (Supreme Command of the German Army). Receiving news of Germany’s destruction and impending defeat through the *Wehrmacht* report, to which some prisoners listened in secret, would have destabilized his nationalism. Instead, he received more propaganda, which nourished his “unfaltering loyalty” to his “fatherland.”

German prisoners were allowed to read U.S. as well as German language papers, both of which covered Germany’s losses, but Müller

interpreted them as propaganda. Coming from North Africa in 1943, these men had not seen the destruction of Germany as had many other soldiers who fought in Europe. They had not personally experienced the German civilians' reaction to the *Wehrmacht's* defeat in Stalingrad. For some of the prisoners in the United States, the downtrodden outward appearance and horrific first-hand testimonies of soldiers arriving from battles in Europe in 1944 and 1945 were evidence enough that Germany was about to lose the war, but Müller and the rest of the "troublemakers" believed in a chance for the alleged German "wonder weapon" that would lead to the German victory.

When the war eventually ended in 1945, Müller and his group were deeply depressed, but he did not understand the full extent of Germany's defeat until he saw the destruction of Germany through the windows of the passenger train on the transport from Bremerhaven to Cologne in 1945. Müller also struggled with accepting the implications of the "news" about the *Auschwitzler* (the National Socialist term for prisoners in death camps, such as Auschwitz). Müller, like most subjects I interviewed, seemed especially resistant to the implication of collective guilt in the Holocaust. Müller mentioned the process of denazification and the Nuremberg trials. Unlike other prisoners who were in the United States or Europe, he read about the trials in newspapers at his home in Bavaria. He explained that he:

had no influence on these [things.] We were under the impression that our, uh, me and my men thought that a lot of

things happened over there that were not, well. It was not right what was done to all those *Auschwitzler*, all those Jews, so forth, and all those things, and we did not know about any of that beforehand. We only found out about *most* of that after the war. Among *us soldiers*, nobody knew that something like that had happened in Germany or in Auschwitz. In our area, only Dachau was somewhat “known.” In our region [in Bavaria] they said, if you did this or that, then you’d come to Dachau. But what really happened there, we did not know because we thought that was a little bit like a *Straflager* [penal camp]; but that something else was included in that, we did not know.

Nobody was allowed to say a single word about it.

Like many of my other subjects, Müller contradicted himself by stating that he knew nothing and that he was also not supposed to talk about “it.” Like all of my subjects, except one, Müller acknowledged that Germans murdered Jews, and he disapproved of this genocide. In many cases, each interviewee’s references to the Nazi genocide served only to distinguish him from outward Nazis and Holocaust deniers. Although many Germans denied the Nazi genocide of Jews in the 1950s and 1960s, knowledge of the Holocaust, as it came to be known in the 1960s, was required and expected. However, like Müller, most of my subjects deny having known about mass murder in the camps. Müller’s story is exceptional insofar as it offers insight into the



motivations among prisoners whom the U.S. military categorized as troublemakers. Müller's narrative demonstrates that his need for cohesion revolved around conflicts stemming from his identification with National Socialist nationalism.

#### **4.4 Herr Schuhler and the "999ers"**

Herr Schuhler was born in 1923 in a small community in the southwest corner of the Rhineland Palatine. Schuhler volunteered to join the war in May 1941 and was deployed on the eastern front until March 1942. He fought in Greece in 1942, left for Italy in October 1942 and was transported to Tunis, North Africa in November 1942. Schuhler was taken captive along with his whole unit following combat against U.S. and British forces in May 1943. They arrived in Boston three months later and were transported to Camp Trinidad, Colorado. Schuhler worked in the POW labor program and was moved very frequently: from to Fort Greely, Colorado, to Camp Douglass, Wyoming, and Fort Custer, Michigan, where he harvested asparagus. Schuhler was then moved to Camp Grant, Illinois, where he picked corn and worked in a fruit-packing factory; in Atterburg, Indiana he helped with the tomato harvest. After his release from U.S. captivity in 1946, Schuhler was moved to camp Mereworth in England where he helped with grain and hops

harvests. Schuhler was repatriated through the release camp in Bretzenheim in March 1947.<sup>32</sup>

Schuhler's narrative about war captivity revolves around labor and the money he was able to save. He volunteered for all the labor opportunities he could get, mainly to earn money. Schuhler was very meticulous about validating dates and places to which his narrative referred and he provided detailed information about his deployment and the many camps he worked in as a prisoner of war. Schuhler mentioned no conflicts with U.S. camp personnel and no events where he needed or received crucial validation from a U.S. military authority that would later shape his sense of composure. Instead, his narrative revolves around conflicts with one specific group of prisoners he encountered in Fort Devens, Massachusetts in May 1945. Fort Devens was one of the three major so-called "anti-Nazi" camps in the United States. It housed 3,300 German prisoners categorized as anti-Nazis or "democrats." Schuhler claimed that he was moved to Fort Devens to "undergo reeducation."

Schuhler was offended by the presence of the prisoners who ran Fort Devens because they called themselves "anti-fascists." In 1945, as well as in 2003 when I interviewed him by telephone, Schuhler perceived them as "foreigners" because they identified themselves by their outspokenly non-German national identities. It particularly irritated him that each nationality got

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<sup>32</sup> The camp in Bretzenheim was the most notorious of the Rhinemeadow camps in which several thousand German POWs died of typhoid and dysentery.

its own camp leader, one German, one Austrian, one Polish, and one Czechoslovakian. They “used to be our *Helvölker* [“support nations”], but now,” Schuhler said: “They wanted to be their own group. They no longer wanted to be Germans. They fought with us, but now they called themselves Poles and Austrians. They called themselves Czechoslovakian.” In addition, Schuhler perceived them as “deserters” because they had “abandoned the German *Wehrmacht*” when they were in the United States.

Schuhler had apparently continued to identify as a German *Wehrmacht* soldier and felt very strongly about German nationalism. His narrative illustrates that his sense of military duty and national obligation were thoroughly intertwined. Moreover, Schuhler interpreted the role of the German “anti-Nazis” through the lens of National Socialist ideology. He described the men as “communists” and “criminals” because many of the German soldiers who were trained as reeducators had belonged to the “999ers,” which the National Socialists conceptualized as a *Bewährungsbattalion* (probation battalion), a *Wehrmacht* unit composed of former concentration camp inmates on probation. Schuhler referred to the “999ers” as a “*Strafbattalion*” (“punishment battalion”) and claimed that it was “composed of criminals, child molesters and deserters.” Schuhler inadvertently explained his use of the term by suggesting that the 999ers had been “forced to fight at the front” as a form of punishment for crimes they had

committed. At the front, they could redeem themselves and rectify the damage they had done to the German people.

Schuhler complained that these men in Camp Devens wanted to “cook their own soup,” a phrase many subjects used to refer to people and groups seeking to counteract or discredit the *Wehrmacht* or sever their ties from Germany or the Third Reich. Schuhler composed his memory by validating his antagonism towards the German anti-fascists with the friendliness between *Afrika Korps* soldiers and U.S. military personnel. In May 1945, Schuhler noticed that his U.S. captors were “a little bit more firm” and punished them “little, but not much.” Even then, Schuhler claimed, “we were war prisoners. We could do anything we wanted. We just could not get caught doing it.” Illustrating his claim, he began recalling several incidents during the time he worked for the U.S. labor program. They had to pick cotton and sometimes put a watermelon in their cotton sacks to pretend they had fulfilled their 160-pound ratio. Many times I heard from the former prisoners of war that they had done “things that we can laugh about—today,” as if these things had not been laughable back then. At the same time, they always add that “the Americans” laughed, too, such as in this story about the watermelon. Schuhler, like most other subjects, described his U.S. captivity as *menschlich* (humane).

Representing the U.S. soldiers as his friends suggests that Schuhler’s captivity in the United States was an elating, lighthearted time in his life.

Schuhler recalled with great enthusiasm the time when he and his peers were transported by train and found that crowds of civilians were standing by the train tracks to see the German prisoners. Posters on the POW transport trains persuaded Americans to “Buy War Bonds” by displaying German POWs as evidence for the U.S. military’s successes. Schuhler and many other POWs did not experience their captivity as defeat. On the contrary, Schuhler felt as though he was in a carnival parade.

When the war ended, these amicable transnational relations persisted, but the relationships between Schuhler and the 999ers had changed. The “anti-fascists” had chosen to use the U.S. military as an agency and the anti-Nazi camps as arenas to propagate their anti-Nazi sentiments. With the end of the war, these members of the former “support nations” regained social and national power and defined themselves. Schuhler described these men in Fort Devens as “traitors.” They had turned their backs on the German *Wehrmacht*. He described them as criminals because they had been in concentration camps; for him that made them “naturally” the strongest advocates of German collective guilt.

Schuhler was a common soldier who was happy and eager to work for his own good, even when it served the U.S. economy. Schuhler was categorized as a possible candidate for the reeducation program for which German prisoners allegedly only qualified if they were anti-Nazi. However, Schuhler’s representation of the main conflicts in U.S. captivity demonstrates

that he had assimilated prevalent Nazi beliefs about concentration camps, deserters, and National subjects and did not adjust his understanding. Schuhler's narrative portrays his relationship with the U.S. military as unproblematic. Even though he was labeled an "anti-Nazi," perhaps because he so diligently participated in the labor program, Schuhler's main conflict revolved around the loss of comradely cohesion among the prisoner population.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Koch, Müller, and Schuhler's memories of U.S. captivity revolve around their emotional memories that stemmed from the loss of their sense of national cohesion in 1945. Their memories revolve around the tensions between their past emotional identifications as a national subjects and their desire to be respectable and ethical postwar German subjects. Müller sought to preserve and justify his nationalism by composing memories of receiving recognition from representatives of the U.S. military. Schuhler did the same, but his memory is less concerned with ethical questions than it is concerned with the loss of national comradeship among German soldiers. Schuhler's discomposure stemmed from disappointment about the consequences of the war that resulted, for him, in the loss of his sense of cultural cohesion. Koch, however, composed his memory around contrasts between his past self and his seemingly approved, present self. Koch sought to achieve composure by proving that he was a changed man, has learned from his past mistakes, and

felt the need to expose these mistakes. Only by confessing that he was, indeed, a “Nazi,” was Koch able to compose an ethically respectable identity that he could live with. Koch, Müller and Schuhler had preserved their nationalism in captivity, but had composed very different memories revolving around the tensions between their past nationalist selves and the selves they felt they had to become in the years and decades after the war.

## 5. “ON BEHALF OF MY COMRADES”

### 5.1 Introduction

Most of my interviewees (and most Germans) were evaluated according to the criteria of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive 1067 (JCS 1067) (1945-1947) after they returned to Germany in 1945 or 1946. As part of the Allied postwar denazification process, JCS 1067 declared the disbandment of the Nazi party and all its organizations, the abolishment of all National Socialist laws, and the dismissal of Nazi party members in public office. Moreover, it demanded the automatic arrest of several National Socialist groups and organizations, such as the SS, and the automatic release of groups not defined as criminal.

The majority of war prisoners were exonerated because they were members of the *Wehrmacht*, which was not declared a criminal organization in the Nuremberg Trials. However, men who had been in the *Waffen SS*, the armed part of the SS, were automatically categorized as “lesser offenders.” The Allied Control Council, responsible for implementing denazification in four zones of occupation, also issued directive no. 24, which demanded the removal of National Socialists and resisting persons, as well as directive no. 38, which distinguished between five categories of war criminals: *major offenders, offenders, lesser offenders, followers and persons exonerated*. Angelika Königseder argues that sentences were decided based on



testimony given in screenings and denazification hearings, which sought to determine potential threats to postwar German society.

This chapter discusses interviews with Herr Vogel, Herr Becker and Herr Bachmann. Herr Vogel was deemed a 'danger to society' as a consequence of the statements he made during an interrogation. Herr Becker and Herr Bachmann had been members of the *Waffen SS*, a criminal organization, but convinced their captors they had become *Waffen SS* members against their better judgment and therefore posed no threat to postwar Germany or the Allied occupation forces. As punishment for being "lesser offenders" by virtue of their *Waffen SS* affiliation, Becker and Bachmann were interned in American *Internierungslager* (internment camps), facilities which had previously been used by the Nazis as concentration camps. Internment camps were special facilities for national and local Nazi officials, members of *SS*, *SD*, and the *Gestapo*, and suspected war criminals. Königseder estimates that 92,259 persons in the U.S. zone, 64,500 in the British zone, 18,963 in the French zone, and 67,179 persons in the Soviet zones were placed in internment camps (Benz 114-17). These persons were removed from the civilian population and from the general population of surrendered or defeated enemy personnel.

Vogel, Becker and Bachmann were thus clearly set apart from "common soldiers" and therefore had to negotiate a position fundamentally different from most of the other soldiers I interviewed. Their separation from

the general German population, both military and civilian, put the two former *Waffen SS* soldiers in a unique relationship with the public memories of the war in western Germany. Their roles as outsiders become apparent in their private memories of captivity as punishment. They were *legally punished* for their affiliation with the *Waffen SS* or for being deemed a danger to postwar German society.

### **5.2 Herr Vogel: “On Behalf of my Comrades”**

I spoke with Herrmann Vogel (1913-2004) in a telephone interview in 2002. He had been *erster Generalstabsoffizier* (first officer of the General Staff) of a newly formed infantry division of 10,000 men, which fought in Mecklenburg against the Red Army in April and May 1945. Vogel was in the upper echelon of command, right under the *Wehrmacht* High Command (OKW) in the eastern front, which means that he not only engaged in the warfare in the East, but also relayed the combat orders. Vogel explains that as the “1A,” he had been educated in tactics at the war academy. He was the tactical advisor to the division’s commander.

Vogel eagerly participated in my project—he contacted me, in fact—and told me right away that he disagreed with the representations of the German *Wehrmacht* in the public media and politics, and the ways in which the “dear Germans” had commemorated the past. When we first spoke on the telephone, he stated that he had no worries about “speaking openly”

with me because he “was of the opinion that we should indeed give the war witnesses—those who are still alive—their right to speak, so that all that nonsense,... started and put out into the world by the Germans, that Herr Reemstma,... finally gets sorted out. It’s not the Americans;” Vogel added, “it’s the dear Germans [who are talking] nonsense about the war.” Vogel spontaneously accused Jan Phillip Reemtsma, the sponsor of the Crimes of the German Wehrmacht exhibit, of “consciously distorting the truth” about the *Wehrmacht* generally, and about its actions at the eastern front specifically.

Speaking from “a relatively high position,” Vogel said, he strongly disagreed with the slogan, “soldiers are murderers.” Vogel’s repeated references to this Kurt Tucholsky phrase (first published in a German newspaper in 1931) strategically complicates the question of guilt by implying that pacifists who call soldiers murderers are guilty of denunciation. Pacifists in Germany have used this recognizable phrase over the past seven decades, inciting controversy about its legal and ethical ramifications. Around the same time that the Crimes of the German Wehrmacht exhibit was opened, a public debate began, in which the conservative parties CDU/CSU asked the court to make the public denunciation of soldiers illegal. The request was denied by popular demand.

Vogel’s repeated references thus resonate with the sectional memories promoted by German militarists and veterans organizations and with his narrative of American captivity. His captivity story, along with his

objections to pacifism and the claim that soldiers are murderers, composed Vogel's memory. Vogel complained, "With that Reemstma exhibition, the *Wehrmacht* exhibition [sic.] and all that, these interpretations [of soldiers as murderers] will survive. If we reduced those stories [about the crimes of the *Wehrmacht*] back into reality that would not even be possible." Attempting to discredit the exhibit, Vogel drew only from his own subjective interpretations. Vogel acknowledged that the crimes the exhibit showed did, in fact, occur, but he sought to blame a small minority of soldiers for committing crimes outside of the generally proper conduct of *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Vogel disagreed with the phrase "soldiers are murderers" and the exhibit's claim that the *Wehrmacht* was involved in a war of annihilation:

The *Wehrmacht* was an army of millions, and among millions, you will always find criminals. Today, more than one percent of all people are criminal. One can't just pick them out and say, that's how the Germans are. You know? They picked those events that were not altogether right and projected those onto the majority. And that is something that deeply disturbs me—on behalf of my comrades—nearly all [of whom] fell in the war.

Vogel claimed that he spoke "on behalf of his comrades," that he wished to counteract public denunciations of the German military because his comrades had died. Vogel's narrative does not really serve his soldiers, however, but it does serve him on two levels: by claiming to defend his

soldiers, by describing war crimes as exceptions to the rule, he deflected from the fact that first officers like himself implemented the National Socialist foreign policy in combat. He also deflected from his position of a first officer who must have strategized so that German soldiers would fight until the very end of a war that had already been lost. He was among those Germans who sought to defend the Third Reich at all costs.

Vogel seemed to be more interested in restoring the reputation of the German *Wehrmacht* and his authority as first officer. His claim, to speak on behalf of his comrades, is especially telling in the context of immediate postwar Germany when Vogel was in U.S. captivity. In Homecomings, Frank Biess explains that the civilian population in 1945 and 1946 publicly complained to the Allies that among the men they released early were a disproportionately large number of ardent Nazis, including *Wehrmacht* officers who had carelessly ordered common soldiers (some of them teenage boys) to fight deadly battles they could not win. While these complaints mainly sought to exonerate family members, Biess suggests, they also showed that many Germans were willing to find and persecute Nazis. In that context, the German POWs who were in U.S. captivity in late 1945 and 1946, even those in favorable conditions as compared to the civilian population, were also publicly regarded as victims of an unfair Allied administration that failed to separate the Nazis from the less guilty *Wehrmacht* soldiers. In light of that particular conflict in postwar Germany at a time when Vogel was still

in captivity, his story about speaking “on behalf of his comrades” loses much of its substance, while illuminating his strategy for composure.

Vogel’s main strategy was to praise the German *Wehrmacht* by discrediting the U.S. military. Vogel used anecdotes from U.S. war captivity to substantiate his defense of the *Wehrmacht* and his rigid self-identification with National Socialist militarism. Vogel began by elaborating on the processes of his division’s retreat from the Red Army. He thus fulfilled the dual purpose of illustrating his knowledge and perspective of a first officer with above-average military skills, as well as the American and German military’s seemingly shared opinion that the German *Wehrmacht* should surrender to the U.S. forces rather than to the Red Army. This narrative emphasizes that the American military chose to break international law to help the German soldiers evade Soviet captivity. Vogel presented his surrender and subsequent captivity in American hands as a result of implied anti-Bolshevism among the German and American militaries. His narrative suggests that the German *Wehrmacht* and the American military shared a common understanding of warfare outside of the questions of guilt and responsibility.

Vogel came to U.S. captivity at the end of the war. He and his infantry division were in the process of “fighting the Russians [*sic*]” eastwards of the demarcation line. Vogel explained that the Allies had decided on the demarcation lines at the Yalta Conference. The conference determined that

Germans were to be taken prisoner by whichever military occupied the zone in which they were fighting, upon their own surrender or defeat. The Allies informed the German military about the places where they expected them to surrender. However, on May 2, 1945—six days before Germany's official surrender—they were given the order to "retreat westwards over the demarcation line to surrender to the U.S. forces and be taken into captivity," Vogel suggested. That plan "was negotiated and agreed on with the Americans" and included his division, as well as all other divisions fighting in Mecklenburg against the Soviet forces, "specifically the *Armee Wenck* that was, as is commonly known, to liberate Berlin, which didn't work." Vogel explained that the U.S. military was helpful to them: "the Americans allowed us to use our radios to withdraw from the enemy. See, you can't just retreat and leave ground. You separate from the enemy under artillery fire. You retreat further and further to the point where the Russians could not advance because that was taboo." Apparently in violation of the Yalta agreements, the U.S. military helped the division to surrender to them instead of to the feared Red Army in whose designated territory they were fighting at the time.

However, in the three-and-a-half weeks his division was in U.S. captivity, the U.S. military tried to turn them back over to the Soviet forces, to whom they should have surrendered in the first place. Vogel's division apparently successfully resisted and managed to negotiate to be moved instead to Schleswig Holstein, an area temporarily dedicated to POW

detainment, and then turned over to the British forces. Even though the U.S. military was helpful in “protecting” them from Soviet captivity, Vogel felt insulted that they had tried to change their minds.

Vogel’s story resonates with a sense of entitlement: for being a general staff in the German *Wehrmacht*, for being a German. He felt entitled to be held in western captivity, where conditions were reputedly good, and he found this entitlement seemingly justified by the very fact that the U.S. military at the time of active warfare chose to override international agreements with the Soviet Union. Vogel’s sense of entitlement is also illustrated by his perceptions of the American soldiers who were in charge of them during those three-and-a-half weeks. Vogel claimed that he obtained a “distinctly poor impression of the Americans.” He believed they had surrendered on May 3, 1945 to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 28<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry Division from Texas, which he described as “reputedly unintelligent.” Vogel’s experience of U.S. captivity “disappointed” him. He said that:

with all that we experienced in captivity, we were depressed that—in spite of our expertise and all these things—that we were on the side of the losers. Well, and the battalion, as far as their combat ability was concerned—if they had had to fight the Russians [*sic*], they would have gone under as a result of their immobility. They would have been inept. Well, but that’s just the way it was. As is commonly known, the Americans have always



won not by especially good tactics or skilled single combatants, but with an overabundance of materials. They are still doing that to this day.

Vogel felt superior both as a militarist and as a German, as his descriptions of his captivity experience suggests. His assessment of the U.S. soldiers' alleged lack of qualification foregrounds his arrogance at being an educated, upper-ranking German militarist, a rank he was only able to obtain due to his age and his upper-class background.

Vogel also seemed to defend the German military's rigid class structure. He claimed that the first encounter with the U.S. military organization shocked him. "The adjutant of the battalion carried the radio unit on his own back and had to make radio contact without the help of a Non-Commissioned officer. I asked him why he did that by himself and he said, 'We do not have well-trained people like you who can do that.' That was my first impression in captivity—that an adjutant has to do what was in our army an absolutely subordinate task." Nevertheless, Vogel felt that the "co-operation" between the U.S. and German military officers was "very proper and respectable, and very good. And we among the upper ranks quickly got the impression that we were quite fortunate that things worked out the way they did, aside from the provisions."

Vogel described captivity in very practical and administrative terms, showing that he was able to judge the quality of the U.S. military's camp

administration from his professional military position. For instance, Vogel defended the material conditions in the U.S.-run camps immediately after the war. Because a large mass of Germans surrendered to the U.S. forces, “the Americans,” Vogel explained, “were overburdened, mainly when it came to food. That was a very, very big problem, but inevitable.” The U.S. military was only able to offer the POWs one daily ration for twenty persons. They still had some food and were able to cook with their field-kitchens but soon resorted to slaughtering and eating their horses.

However, Vogel criticizes the U.S. soldiers from the “Texan” battalion. He stated that they “picked” the German’s badges and wristwatches. Some of them, Vogel claimed, would have up to six watches on each arm. If they had horses, they would ride them “rambunctiously,” still wearing the steel helmets, “seemingly out of a feeling of exaltation,” even though the war was over, with their fingers on the trigger. That made Vogel very “uncomfortable” because:

one never knew if one of them would pull the trigger. Nothing much happened, but they simply had slightly odd manners. For example, there were watch guards who would get an armchair out of one of the houses and a parasol and did their watch duty in that armchair. That would have been utterly impossible with our German terms and conditions. Needless to say they were

occasionally falling asleep and our Lieutenants were still burning for action and stole the rifle from one of these posts. Vogel described roll calls as “very frustrating,” because the guards, he claimed, had a hard time counting to one hundred and had to repeat the procedures several times. Eventually, Vogel argued, the POWs helped the American guards with the task.

In Vogel’s narrative, the American soldiers meant well but lacked high qualifications. Vogel used these stories to show that the U.S. military had severe administrative difficulties and needed the German soldiers to get their own jobs done. From Vogel’s perspective, U.S. soldiers, primarily the common soldiers, were incompetent and irresponsible, seemingly untrained in proper military conduct. He thereby created a contrast between him and his higher ranking German *Wehrmacht* officers and generals and the lower ranking U.S. soldiers.

His captivity narrative served Vogel to represent Germany as culturally and militarily superior and the U.S. military as mostly “proper” and “fair” but “dumb.” This was at a time when Germany’s atrocities were revealed worldwide. As first officer in the *Wehrmacht*, he knew that many of his army’s operations violated the Hague rules, but he still felt unquestionably entitled to protection under those same laws. This illustrates that in captivity Vogel actively chose to preserve—but also was given the opportunity to preserve—his sense of superiority and impunity for the crimes they committed in the

name of the German “*Volk*” (“people”). Vogel represented the “proper” treatment they received from the U.S. forces as their right. The same rules and regulations the *Wehrmacht* broke now protected them from the consequences of their actions.

His interview illustrates two things I wish to emphasize. First, it shows that Vogel was capable of preserving the sense of self that he had created in the ideological framework of National Socialist militarism. It also shows that he has sought to protect this sense of self from pacifist and humanist discourses generally and the claims of the *Wehrmacht* exhibition specifically. Second, his interview also allows insight into the relatively amicable relationships between the American and German militaries at the end of the war. More specifically, it serves as an example of the admiration many American military members had for the German *Wehrmacht*. The treatment he received in captivity appears to comprise a less visible layer of postwar German-American relations that began to emerge only more prominently in 1948, with the onset of the Cold War, and was firmly established in 1955, with the remilitarization of West Germany as part of the Alliance with the United States. Like my interviews with most of the subjects, Vogel’s interview suggests that the relationship between the German and the United States militaries remained friendly in spite of the hostilities and Germany’s atrocities.

Vogel’s narrative attempts to defend and justify German militarism in the Third Reich with stories about the German *Wehrmacht*’s strategic and

organizational competence. In his narrative, German soldiers are better qualified than U.S. soldiers, a focus on competence that seems to serve as a positive identification for him, only possible in the absence of empathy for those people who were killed by that same alleged competence and effectiveness. His belief in German military superiority was the result of National Socialist propaganda, as was the perceived “incompetence” of the U.S. military. Vogel’s representation of U.S. soldiers in captivity corresponds precisely to Nazi propaganda. American captivity gave Vogel evidence to support his assumptions about America incompetence, which he seems to find more important to remember than the immorality of the war.

Far more disturbing were Vogel’s interpretations of the persecution of the Jews in Germany. Vogel described the history of anti-Semitism, persecution, and even the murder of Jews in Europe as “nothing new” in the world. They had always been wronged and mistreated, he claimed, and implied that what the Germans did to European Jews in the Third Reich was morally no more despicable than what had been done to them hundreds of years prior to Hitler. Even in reference to the Holocaust, Vogel described Germans as more competent than others. Vogel claims that the only difference between the past and the Third Reich was that the Germans were more effective at murdering Jews: “unfortunately, when the Germans do something, they do it thoroughly, as is commonly known.” Vogel, whose remarks are so blatantly flippant, as if he were not talking about human

beings, simultaneously claimed that he had not approved of the treatment of the Jews in the Third Reich.

Vogel did not explicitly distance himself from Hitler's ideology, and he did not even try very hard to hide his apparent distrust of Jews. Even though Vogel claimed that Jews had done nothing to deserve being singled out by the regime, he still distrusted his Jewish interrogators. Vogel was disappointed over having lost the war to what he perceived to be an under-qualified and poorly trained American military that would not have been able to withstand the Soviet Army or to win as many battles as the German *Wehrmacht* had.

Because his division was in the Soviet zone of occupation, they were supposed to be in Soviet captivity. Within his three-and-a-half weeks of U.S. captivity, the U.S. military tried to turn the division over to the Soviet forces, but Vogel and his superiors managed to negotiate with them to be moved to a British camp in East Holstein, which was north of Schleswig Holstein in the British occupation zone. Because the Allies, including the British, released their prisoners in the order in which they were needed to rebuild Europe, farmers went first, and officers of the General Staff and Generals were last. Waiting to be processed for release, in 1946 they were moved to the *Münsterlager*, where they were put in front of a review board and were "practically denazified." Vogel claims that all men who were in the Marines

were interrogated by the British Marine people, “all others were interrogated by emigrated Jews. Well, and they had a pretty rough tone.”

Unfair treatment, according to him, did not really come from the U.S. military but from Jews in the intelligence service.<sup>33</sup> Again, Vogel’s anti-Semitism makes itself heard in spite of his story about having opposed the persecution of the Jews. Vogel claimed that he was interrogated by a Jewish intelligence officer from Saxony. When Vogel told him that he was a professional soldier, the interrogator allegedly responded in German, “‘So, you have made murder your profession.’ In response to which I said, ‘Sure, just like Montgomery and Eisenhower.’” Again, Vogel sought to represent the German military and the American military in terms of moral equivalence, excluding from his interpretation the fact that Germany had started the war, not the United States or Great Britain, and that Germany fought an illegal war that was from the start planned and carried out as a war of extermination.

Vogel claimed the interrogator called in two more interrogators and stated that he, as the first operations officer in this division, must be “an ardent Nazi” because, “as is commonly known, only ardent Nazis served in this division.” Vogel claimed that he responded:

‘Aside from the fact that that’s not true, I am sure your prognosis would also apply to the commander of the division ... whom you have released four weeks ago.’ They did not like

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<sup>33</sup> Marcuse explains that the documents of the intelligence service have not been made accessible to researchers.

hearing that, either, and the outcome of the interrogation was that I was declared to be a danger to the democratic *Aufbau* [construction] of Germany and had to be put in detention to protect the general German public, and would therefore be interned.

His status was changed from prisoner of war to criminal internee. Vogel resisted the interrogators, even though feigned compliance might have motivated his interrogators to repatriate him with lesser punishment. Vogel's narrative presents him as a firm, consistent, and frank military man with the conviction that the German *Wehrmacht* had not done anything the western Allies had not done to win the war.

After the interrogation, Vogel was transported to a civil internment camp, CIC Adelheide.<sup>34</sup> In Adelheide, intelligence service from Erfurth arrived and captors told Vogel and his peers that their "time of white collars were over. You now have the opportunity to learn a decent profession. You can become a mason, a tailor, or a mechanic so that you can finally become a proper member of society." Vogel confessed that he thought, "oh well, if that's how it is, then I will become a mason. After all, Hitler always said that 'I will rebuild Germany, more beautifully than ever before.' So, I learned to become a mason." Vogel appeared unashamed to reference and imitate Hitler's worldview. More importantly, he presented his acceptance of what

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<sup>34</sup> Also, see Harold Marcuse on several CICs, including Dachau's postwar utilization as a CIC. CIC Adelheide is also referred to as a special camp no.11.



turned out to be a temporary punishment for his defiance during the interrogation as another way to insert his Nazi beliefs in spite of the U.S. military's attempt to change him.

Vogel claimed that a British delegation visited the camp in 1948 while representatives of the intelligence service "were having their *Shabbos*." The delegation allegedly overrode the decisions of the Jewish intelligence service officers during their Sabbath, and decided that the inmates were not a danger to the German postwar society and released them. According to Vogel, he was never questioned again. Later, he learned he had been "documented as category five," the least incriminated, "and all that without any noticeable brainwashing."<sup>35</sup> He pointed out that not he, but rather the interrogators, had changed their politics. Vogel sought to illustrate his own consistency and the outsider's inconsistency. Vogel's consistently National Socialist consciousness was meant to represent him as more authentic and honest than either the U.S. military or the interrogators.

Vogel's memories of the confrontations between the victors and the Germans served to illustrate his mentality at the end of the war. He distanced himself from the accusation that all German *Wehrmacht* members had participated in exceptionally violent crimes against eastern European civilians. Thus, Vogel resisted the claim that Germany had fought a war that was fundamentally different from all other wars before or after. Instead, he

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<sup>35</sup> This remark was clearly meant to be sarcastic.

presented the German *Wehrmacht* as more qualified and prestigious, role models for effective warfare whom the United States even today would do well to imitate. Vogel's sense of composure derived from his continued sense of superiority and continuity.

Vogel's memory represents the *Wehrmacht*, even Nazis, as superior to their victors. He described his American captors as "dumb" but "fair" and the *Wehrmacht* as capable and even helpful so that the American soldiers could hold them captive. Like a reversal of the characters in Hogan's Heroes, a popular U.S. TV series from the 1960s about U.S. soldiers in German captivity, the German military characters in Vogel's narrative could have left the camp whenever they pleased. They could have stolen the U.S. soldiers' weapons because the latter were allegedly so neglectful as to go to sleep while on watch duty. Vogel used all of these incidents to present the *Wehrmacht* as the qualitative winners of the war. They were more capable than "the Americans," if not cooler, calmer and more collected in their willingness to accept their position as captives of allegedly unqualified soldiers. Vogel thereby composed his memory by presenting the German soldiers as rational thinking people who fulfilled military chores in a detached and thoughtful manner—an image that would contrast starkly with the images shown by the Crimes of the German *Wehrmacht* exhibit.

### 5.3 Herr Becker: “The Same Porcelain Insulators”

Herr Becker was born in a small town in southwestern Germany in December 1926. At the age of seventeen, Becker joined the motorized *Waffen SS*, the armored *SS Division Das Reich*, Regiment *Der Führer*. He participated in campaigns in the eastern and western war theaters and fell into the hands of the U.S. military when the war in Europe ended. Becker was held briefly as a POW before being declared a “lesser offender” for his *Waffen SS* membership and placed in Flossenbürg, a liberated concentration camp in which the American military held members of the *SS* and *Waffen SS*.

Becker’s interview did not address debates about the *Wehrmacht* crimes. While the Nuremberg Trials ostensibly proved to the German population that the *Wehrmacht* was “clean,” the *Waffen SS* came to represent the most ferocious, criminal acts of warfare. Distinctions between the *Wehrmacht* and the *Waffen SS* have contributed to the exoneration of the *Wehrmacht* from its participation in atrocities and war crimes. Becker did not discuss these debates—about the Crimes of the German *Wehrmacht* exhibit—even though he could have addressed the exhibit to show that his guilt was no greater than the guilt of millions of his fellow Germans.

Becker did not use the debate to diminish his guilt. His lack of reaction to the exhibit leads me to conclude that the new debates did not affect Becker’s composure. The truth about the criminality of the *Waffen SS* had

been decided more than fifty years before our interviews. In the transnational context of American captivity and the sentence they received based on JCS 1067, Becker was not able to construct stories of exoneration based on their military affiliation, unlike members of the *Wehrmacht*.

However, Becker's narrative remains linked to the alleged distinctions between the National Socialist regime and the German military. Becker relies on the falsehood that German military activities during the Second World War had nothing to do with National Socialist ideologies or convictions. The core of Becker's argument is that he did what he was told to do and was a proper, professional, and levelheaded soldier whose actions were based on following orders. In this regard, Becker joined the thousands of German soldiers who contrasted their patriotic behavior with that of "Nazis," who enjoyed killing.

Similar to many other German Second World War veterans, Becker shaped his memories according to his denazification testimony. In interrogations and denazification testimonies, these men articulated stories of their actions for an audience *not* composed of their peers (anticipatory memory). To make his memories conform to a story that qualified him for exoneration by his U.S. captors, Becker explained during his interrogation that he was in the *Waffen SS* "against his will." Becker used his denazification story in his interview with me, indicating the enduring value of the memory he composed at the end of the Second World War. At the time, Becker and his peers faced not only punishment, but also the loss of their

possessions and future careers. During my interviews (2001-2004), these former German POWs were retired and had successfully raised their children to adulthood. They no longer feared losing their jobs and livelihood. Late in their lives, Becker and his peers were in safer positions to correct their earlier rationalizations and strategies for excusing their crimes, yet Becker did not do so.

Instead, Becker emphasized that he had just turned seventeen when, on 7 January 1943, he was conscripted into the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) (Reich Labor Service), a six-month labor program mandatory for German men and women between seventeen and twenty-five to receive National Socialist ideological, practical and pre-military training (Bartsch). Most German men were drafted into the *Wehrmacht* after their six-month RAD, but Becker claims that SS representatives visited only eight days after he began his RAD to lecture on the elite status of the SS and its devotion to National Socialism and the *Führer*, then “picked” and “commanded” him into the ranks of the *Waffen SS*. After physical examinations, Becker was again “picked” for the infantry and became a member of the motorized *Waffen SS* Division *Das Reich*.

Becker’s emphasis on being picked and ordered into the SS was the first part in a chronological series of events in his denazification story that convinced authorities that Becker had not become a *Waffen SS* member based on his ideological convictions. The sound-byte that Becker repeated

frequently during the interview was that he was “forced” into the *Waffen SS*; this comprised his plea for exoneration. However, the friend who had referred me to Becker told me directly that Becker had volunteered eagerly for the *Waffen SS*. The friend, who had experienced similar recruitment procedures, argued that men were rarely forced and that most were free to decide. This interviewee was among the men who would not step forward and therefore remained in the *Wehrmacht*. Becker chose to stand by his denazification testimony when he spoke with me, even though he seemed to have revealed a different story to his friend.

Whether Becker had volunteered for the *Waffen SS* or had been forced was an ethical question, but at the end of the war it was mainly a legal question because it decided the severity of his punishment and the course of his future career. Had Becker become a member of the *Waffen SS* prior to 1942, he would probably not have been able to claim that he was “forced” into the *Waffen SS* because membership until then was voluntary. Nevertheless, Becker sufficiently persuaded the authorities that he would not be a threat to a democratic postwar Germany and was therefore deemed only minimally incriminated.

With the verdict he received in the 1940s in hand, Becker appeared comfortable telling the story of his deployment, presenting himself as emotionally uninvolved (and therefore a non-Nazi soldier), but Becker’s sense of community within *Waffen SS* seems to contradict his denazification

story. Becker emphasized the “immense comradeship” and “harmony” he felt among *Waffen* SS members, which was lost when men in captivity denounced one another or Nazi Germany.

Becker never mentioned feeling out of place, disliking his job, or being associated with a stigmatized organization. On the contrary, he appeared to feel like an accepted, proper member of the *Waffen* SS, saying “I was the kind of person, I have always, uh, done what was asked of me; I never dropped out. And I was...I was athletically pretty fit. I took part in everything. And, uh. I had basically nothing to fear.” He admitted that *Waffen*-SS soldiers were better dressed and equipped than *Wehrmacht* soldiers. His brother had been in the *Wehrmacht* and was sometimes inadequately dressed, so he gave him his uniform while on leave, which Becker could apparently afford because he ordered and received a new uniform for himself before redeployment. Becker’s sense of security in the *Waffen* SS thus suggests his feelings of physical and material superiority over *Wehrmacht* units, an attitude stemming from his division’s modern heavy armament and greater privileges and advantages than other men in combat enjoyed.

Becker presented himself as a well-adjusted, cooperative soldier whose service at the front was unobjectionable. He befriended a captain of his unit, a man twice his age who was a Lieutenant from Baden Württemberg. “I got along with him very well; and I always did what I was told; and I was dedicated, he remembered.” Becker emphasized that his

captain often complimented him for his driving skills. Proud to be good driver and to fit in and get along, Becker explained how he:

drove the trucks for the [German] troops in Russia and in Normandy and in the Ardennes. I had a special vehicle, namely an all-wheel drive ... with grenade launchers, 12.5. And then I was in the unit. That was in the Ardennes. And in Hungary, when we were in Hungary and in Russia, I always drove the trucks. I drove down to the front and back again. At night, I brought them food and brought the wounded back with me. That was my job.

Although Becker emphasized his driving skills, he also described his job as if it were a standard occupation for a man his age. He spoke about killings of Soviet prisoners with a casual tone. Becker claimed, “we made prisoners in the Ardennes,” but “we didn’t take prisoners in Russia.” Killing Soviet soldiers and executing Soviet civilians after they were taken prisoner were common practices, and not only among *Waffen* SS members. These actions were later considered war crimes, but not by the standards of German warfare in the Third Reich. According to Hergard Robel, about three million out of a total of five million Soviet POWs died or were killed by the Germans during the war.

Becker clothed his memories of killing Soviet soldiers and civilians with descriptions of his driving duties. He drove men from the front lines to



the rear areas, where they were transferred even further back. Becker claimed not to have known what happened to enemy soldiers near the front lines and denied knowing the fates of the captured soldiers after transporting them to the rear. When I requested more details, Becker claimed he could remember no incidents involving “Russians.” This sounded more like a rejection of my questions than a lapse of memory, because Becker did not ask about the events to which I referred. His denial of taking prisoners in the Soviet Union was the most he would let himself to say or allow me to hear.

Becker spoke of his past as if it had been a series of ordinary movements from one location to another or a list of stations, each one as mundane as the next. Within this sequence of seemingly ordinary events, there are casual references to brief vacations at home, military actions, lengthy drives, and “*Partisaneneinsatz*” (“partisan actions”), as if discriminating among these incidents were mere formality. All events became part of the same chronological story Becker offered with no inflection or emotion. For instance, in March 1945, he and his division were in Dresden and then moved to Czechoslovakia, where they learned that Adolf Hitler had died:

We were a motorized unit—well equipped—and then we drove to Prague and, well, restored the calm there—we had a high profile there—and then it got calmer. We were a regiment.

That’s more than 1,000 heavily armed men and lots of armored

vehicles, armored personnel carriers. That was a good regiment, that is, well equipped.

Becker explained his regiment's action in Prague:

There was an uprising. There were many *Wehrmacht* members there in Prague and we had to go to Prague. We freed those who were isolated in there; they were closed-in on in there. We got them out. That was almost half a division that we got out of there, but then we went back to the west where we went into captivity.

Becker's narrative neither responds to nor even acknowledges the *Wehrmacht* exhibition nor the public debates about genocidal warfare that included some criminal actions of his division. He seemed content with the story of himself as a "lesser offender" among a group of war criminals, but he also perceived the *Waffen SS* as an elite organization of agents who were physically and militarily superior to the *Wehrmacht*.

From Prague, Becker and the rest of his division moved west to "meet and surrender to the American troops" in Klatovy in Czechoslovakia, where the American military had a *Sammellager*, a camp where the German soldiers were to gather. These camps usually consisted only of grasslands and farmlands, some of which were enclosed by fences. Becker and his group were told to park their vehicles, put down their weapons, walk into the camp and "sit in tank furrows" until further notice. Becker claimed, "the

guards had nothing to worry about. We had no interest in leaving—we felt comfortable being with the Americans and not the Russians.” With his assertion of comfort in American captivity, Becker immediately established an impression of German-American amicability. The implication is that he and his peers would have been motivated to fight had they been in a Soviet camp.

Becker claimed that he and the rest of the captives stayed in the temporary enclosure for six to eight weeks before being transferred to the barracks in Klatovy and from there “loaned” to Czechoslovakian farmers as field hands during August and September 1945. Again, Becker related the events in the matter-of-fact tone of voice and monotonous chronology that characterized his narrative style throughout the interview. After their work for the Czech farmers, he and the other *Waffen* SS men were transported by the American military to Flossenbürg, which Becker described as a “prisoner of war camp that was previously a concentration camp” where “all the SS men stayed until April or May 1946.”

Flossenbürg was in northern Bavaria, close to the Czechoslovakian border and in the vicinity of several large granite quarries where, as early as 1938, the SS had used slave laborers as workers. Barbara Distel argues that the Nazis had “no consideration for the health and life” of these laborers (462-64). Distel also notes that by 1944, there were more than one hundred branch camps around Flossenbürg that held about 45,000 prisoners,

including 16,000 women. Starting in 1944, Flossenbürg was also an execution camp, where 1,500 people were put to death, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who were involved in the July 20, 1944. assassination attempt on Hitler. Distel estimates that 30,000 of the total 100,000 inmates of Flossenbürg died in the camps or on death marches when the SS evacuated the camps as late as the end of April 1945.

However, Becker's recollection did not seem to match either the historical descriptions of the camp or the historical descriptions of the *Waffen SS*' acts in the Second World War. Becker claimed that he and his peers had been in the Flossenbürg camp for three to four weeks before they realized that people had been killed there. He found out through a conversation with his peers; they were in the showers and one man said that people "had been gassed" in those showers, which is highly improbable since there were no gas chambers in Flossenbürg. More important, however, is his claim that he "hadn't known that people were killed." He stated, "I knew there were concentration camps where people were interned and had to accustom themselves to a daily routine," yet he claimed ignorance about the killings in the camps. Becker's story thus accomplishes two things at once. It represents his ignorance about the Holocaust and inserts his and his peers' bodies into the image of the gas chambers; victims who had actually lived or were killed by the SS in Flossenbürg were absent from Becker's image of the camp. Moreover, Becker's narrative persistently refers to the internment

camp as a concentration camp, which was its purpose until Germany lost the war but not when the American military used it as an internment camp.

The American military had significantly improved the conditions in these barracks before the SS men arrived, but, according to Becker, there was still uncomfortably little space for the 280 interned *Waffen* SS men in each barrack; by contrast, the Nazis had forced about 500 persons to live in these same barracks before Germany's defeat. The prisoners slept in three-level wooden bunk beds. Becker complained that there was room only for three people in the corridors, and that the place was overcrowded and did not allow for good personal hygiene. He mentioned having had lice and mange. Yet, the U.S. military not only heated the barracks, it also gave the men more personal space than the SS had allowed its prisoners.

Becker's use of the term "concentration camp" illuminates that he failed to differentiate between his fate in the hands of the American military and the fate of the victims of the SS. Becker actively emphasized that he was interned in a former concentration camp, apparent when he went to great lengths to describe a distinctive three-part fence: "The middle part of fence was electric; it still had the porcelain insulators the Nazis had installed." He added, "That fence ran right by the latrines, which meant that one had to walk carefully not to get too close to the fence" on the way to the bathroom. With his story about the camp, Becker sought to illustrate his and his comrades' vulnerability in the camp. One time, Becker claimed, an American

guard shot into his barracks at night, wounding a man who was taken away and “did not return.” Becker’s story about the fence and the shooting imply that the American military made the *Waffen* SS men vulnerable. By continually describing the camp as a “KZ,” the German abbreviation for concentration camp, and by focusing on the insulators and the same bunk beds, Becker’s narrative illustrates that he was uncomfortable in Flossenbürg for both material and symbolic reasons.

Becker spoke about learning from another inmate about German war crimes that were committed inside concentration camps, but he did not speak about how the victims who had been in the camps before him might have suffered. He felt as little sympathy for the people who suffered in the camps as he did for the partisans his division killed. Becker’s narrative shows that although he learned about the Nazis’ use of the camp, he did not empathize with any other human beings who had been at the mercy of “his” people. Where Becker’s narrative could include human beings who suffered in Nazi camps, there is an absence, a void. The victims did not take human shape in his memory, though his peers did. Becker contemplated that people had lived and died in the camp before him, but not in an empathic way. On the contrary, he compared himself to them and felt superior and inconvenienced by the lack of comfort and safety in the camp.

Becker’s description of the American camp experience illuminates his mentality at the time. During our interview in 2002, Becker mentioned the

murders the Nazis had committed in concentration camps in order to distract from other war crimes he and his division had committed. He spoke directly about the war crimes in the concentration camps perhaps because he was not directly involved in them. However, Becker either ignored or downplayed the crimes in which he was directly involved. Like many other subjects, Becker distracted himself from his own crimes or acts of aggression by speaking plainly about the war crimes others had committed.

Becker's narrative overshadows and distracts from memories of killings that occurred in the streets in Germany, in the ghettos, and at the front. Becker stated that he took part in anti-partisan actions, which implies that he partook in killings of civilians, the majority of whom were Jewish. With the focus on the memory of the concentration camps, men like Becker can construct memories in which they have not seen or known of any atrocities, even though millions of them occurred not only in the areas in which he was deployed, but also in the actions of his division. Becker used his U.S. captivity story to deflect from the active aggressiveness he had embraced as a *Waffen SS* member and to construct a passive persona. He did not know about the genocide of the Jews, but he "had to be told." He was not a hardened criminal but an ordinary guy rendered defenseless by the American military.

Becker seemed eager to explain actions that the American military recognized as crimes at the time of his internment. Becker described

emotionally significant activities as normal or heroic, especially when he could assume that I would not recognize these activities as criminal. He mentioned not taking prisoners in the Soviet Union and took the statement back when I indicated that I knew what this might have entailed. He mentioned having established “order” in Prague—a Nazi euphemism for ferocious warfare—seemingly under the impression that a member of my generation would not understand the significance of his statement. Using National Socialist jargon with his peers also served Becker to preserve his identification with an outlawed regime and ideology. Becker did not question his activities in the war. He did not interrogate his understanding of National Socialism or the Third Reich. His constructed passivity and ignorance distracted from the active choices he made in the war. He distracted from his individual acts by associating himself with a whole paramilitary organization, the *Waffen SS*. Becker had ostensibly atoned for his crimes by serving his sentence in the American internment camp; nothing more was necessary.

#### **5.4 Herr Bachmann: “They didn’t like us much, the Americans”**

Herr Bachmann was born in 1925. He was a “cable-fox” in the Signal Troops of the 12. *Waffen SS Panzer Division Hitler Jugend* between 1943 and 1945. The 12. *SS-Panzer* division was deployed in Chechnya, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Brussels, France, Hungary and Austria. Like Becker, Bachmann’s narrative was chronological. He narrated the stations of his military involvement in battles against the Americans in the winter of 1944.



His division was sent to Budapest, Hungary, to “support” the German occupational forces, as he put it. On May 8, 1945, they had returned to Austria, where they surrendered to the American military.

Bachmann was first incarcerated in a *Sammellager* in Altheim, Austria, for two months. There, he was among about 100,000 German prisoners who, according to his memories, got little water and even less food. Bachmann, who is about six’ one”, claims he weighed only forty kilos (eighty-eight pounds) when he left. By the end of these two months, Bachmann says, everybody who had not been in the SS was released. Being one of the men who were interned when most German soldiers had been released, he was afraid the American military would treat him the way the German military treated its prisoners. The Americans, Bachmann says:

drove us through the woods and then I saw in front of me a quarry in the front of the line. Then I thought, “Oh, my! What will happen this time? Everything that happened under the sign of the SS—now they are going to do the same things to us. Quarry. Machine guns. Uh. Those are totally logical thoughts one has in that situation. My legs got heavier and heavier and suddenly I see the line in front of me make a turn away from the quarry. Man, could I walk well all of a sudden.

Instead of bringing the SS men to the quarry, the American military escorted them to the camp Ebensee, in Austria. During the war, Ebensee had been a

concentration camp similar to Flossenbürg. Bachmann did not speak about the details of the camp but mentioned that Ebensee was a satellite camp of the Concentration Camp Mathausen. During the war, it was referred to the *SS Arbeitslager Zement*.

“They didn’t like us much, the Americans,” Bachmann said. “When we came to Ebensee, there was still the sign *Arbeit macht Frei* and the porcelain insulators on the electrical fences were still there.” It was in this former concentration camp that Bachman learned about the “mountains of corpses” from the American press. He explained that he had “not known” about the “gas chambers” and the mass killings. When he arrived in Ebensee, he was confronted with those things he did not want to perceive or think about during the war, and he admitted that. When he was there, the concentration camps no longer looked like labor camps but like death facilities in which men and women had been worked to death. At Ebensee, Bachmann came into closer contact with former concentration camp inmates:

A world collapsed for me. All that had happened? Madness ...  
And now [the Americans] put me in the *same* dirty, bug-ridden, lice-infested barracks, in those plank beds—you know those from pictures, how they are lying there, sticking their heads out like chicken, and that’s where they put us. The same plank beds. And, of course, all the lice. As a soldier, I knew lice. We had lice. Sometimes they crawled out of my sleeves. Lack of

hygiene. We could not wash for six weeks. No water. The same clothes on, day and night—in the snow and that's where you get lice. And the *Kz'l'er*, [the concentration camp prisoners] who could not go home because they were from Russia or from Poland and did not want to go home or could not go home and were housed somewhere near, near the vacated concentration camp—uhm, they, naturally, happily threw stones at us or beat us up with clubs. We put our backpacks over our heads and walked in, into the concentration camp.

Bachmann's narrative made him sound degraded or dishonored by being held captive in the same site where unspeakable horror had occurred.

Bachmann was shocked to find himself in a place for people he thought were criminals; he interpreted photographs and his presence in the camp from a perspective of superiority to the camp's previous inmates. Today's audiences know these same photographs as evidence for the abuse of prisoners. In Bachmann's case, the photographs did not depict victims; instead, he saw unclean people beneath his social standing. He did not maintain this position during his interview, but Bachmann's emotional memory of the American military's confrontation with the camp remained unchanged.

Bachmann married a Hungarian Jewish woman in the 1970s and has become very sympathetic to what she and her family endured during the war. However, when confronted with evidence of extermination camps and seeing

photographs of inmates, when recalling his captivity in a former concentration camp, Bachmann seems to return to the personal outrage he felt at the time. He would never be like the men who had been in the camp.

Distel estimates almost 100,000 people were murdered at Mathausen and its branch camps. Mathausen was liberated by a U.S. tank division three days before Germany's defeat. In our interview, Bachmann seemed to know more about the camp than Becker had known or admitted knowing about Flossenbürg. Yet, Bachmann mentioned no details about the camp's previous function besides its beds and the security systems and the apparent distaste Americans expressed for their German prisoners.

In Ebensee, Bachmann was interrogated by the American intelligence service, which was still searching for various high-ranking SS disguised as lower-ranking soldiers and using false German military identification. Bachmann's first three interrogations were "not pleasant," as he put it. He said he was beaten, clubbed, and maimed. After the third interrogation, he claimed to be "fearful of the punches by the MPs. They were not particularly tender. Uh. The German police weren't tender, either, during prisoner interrogations. It's just like that, everywhere in the military." His comparison of transgressions by the U.S. and German militaries implies that Bachmann did not feel victimized or treated unfairly, considering what he knew of military police methods. However, Bachmann's statement does make the

actions of the German military relative, complicating assumptions that the U.S. military was incapable of abuse.

A young German-speaking lieutenant who identified himself as a German Jewish émigré from Frankfurt finally interrogated Bachmann. This new interrogator, Bachmann suggested, used a different method by offering him a cigarette and coffee and telling him directly why he was being questioned. Bachmann, whose narrative style is characterized by a lot of direct speech, imitates his interrogator's Hessian dialect: "Got beat up? Those are idiots. They aren't any better than your military police. But—uh, wanna cigarette? Coffee? OK, now. OK, now. You were *Obersturmbannführer* of the *Waffen SS*." This would be equivalent to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the American and British Armies (Ripley 338). At twenty years old, Bachmann could not have been an *Obersturmbannführer*, so Bachmann told this new interrogator: "Me? I am not even 21. I am only 20 years old. I can't BE an *Obersturmbannführer* at 20." The interrogator allegedly responded, "OK, enough. You can go. Take a cigarette and get lost." Bachmann was not interrogated again.

Bachmann experienced these interrogations as the outcome of a moment when high-ranking Nazis managed to escape and lower-ranking soldiers were caught up in a convoluted screening process. He did not seem to feel bitter about the American interrogators and made sure to mention that they were no more aggressive than the German military police, though he

appeared to fear punishment for some unknown crime. Sometime later, he found out why he had been interrogated for so long. He claimed that he read a newspaper article years after the war that mentioned an escaped *Obersturmbannführer* with his same last name.<sup>36</sup> Only then did he understand that the American military was in fact eager to find and apprehend this man. The problem was that they did not fully understand that a man Bachmann's age at the end of the war could not have possibly been able to reach the rank of *Obersturmbannführer*. The man they had searched for was more than thirty years older than Bachmann.

Bachmann's narrative does not suggest he felt unfairly treated by the U.S. military, but he did feel the American interrogators were not very well informed about the German military and ranks. It took a German who also happened to be Jewish to correct a major misunderstanding caused by a higher ranking *Waffen SS Obersturmbannführer*, which was another example of how lower ranking Germans "suffered" from rank and class hierarchy in the military and the Nazi state. The person who exonerated Bachmann from false accusations was a German Jew, and in this regard, his story is different from the stories other subjects shared. Most other subjects claimed they had been interrogated and victimized by revengeful Jewish interrogators. Bachmann, however, felt that the only person who managed to think clearly,

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<sup>36</sup> I confirmed this story. The *SS Obersturmbannführer* was never apprehended.

and not vengefully, who was capable, and not ignorant, was this Jewish interrogator.

Even in the internment camp, Bachmann claimed he had received “so much food” all of a sudden, that they “got sick from it and sent home packages with sugar, butter and tobacco.” He and his “comrades” helped renovate the camp and deloused the barracks. Because the barracks could not be heated, they were moved out of Ebsensee in October or November 1946 to another former concentration camp near Augsburg where Bachman worked in a motor pool, a kitchen, and a sick-station primarily for African-American soldiers. Among various other things he perceived as absurd, he was ordered in Augsburg to paint several Mickey Mouse cartoons on the walls as a way to show the prisoners who was now in power.<sup>37</sup>

Bachmann described his denazification as a farce because the screenings the American military undertook when he was interned were driven by a goal to punish criminals, not collectively exonerate Germans with symbolic fines. Standing in the middle of his living room, he read out his denazification papers: “The accused has joined the SS due to his very National Socialistically-inclined parents. We classified him as less incriminated. As atonement, he has to pay 250 marks.” He laughed and added: “And that’s how I was ‘atoned’.” Both he and his wife rolled their eyes as he recited what was apparently his standard commentary on his

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<sup>37</sup> Marcuse explains similar occasions where U.S. military personnel made German POWs do something seemingly American.

denazification: “*Sobald das Geld im Kasten klingt / Die Seele in den Himmel springt,*” (“As soon as the money drops in the box / The Soul jumps into heaven.”)<sup>38</sup>

Bachmann’s interview reveals that confronting his memories about the concentration camp caused him to have strong emotions of hubris and outrage about having to be in the same place as people he did not consider his human equals. Herr Bachmann was not aware of the significance of his feelings when he described having to sleep in the “same bunk beds” where the concentration camp victims had “stuck their heads out like chicken.” His sense of unfair treatment after the war was not a form of convenient denial that focused him only on the cognitive aspects of memory, as some scholars might conclude. The concepts of denial or strategic forgetting often applied to German war memories do not manage to explain that so many Germans, such as Bachmann, truly lacked the ethical capacity necessary to understand the suffering of Jews in the Third Reich. For instance, denial or strategic forgetting do not manage to describe what he and his future wife *experienced* when they had their first conversation in a café in the 1970s. She told him that she was Jewish, and he responded with enthusiasm and reaffirmation that he felt very “close” to her and rolled up his sleeve to show his SS blood-type tattoo for evidence. He explained that he knew what she had been

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<sup>38</sup> This phrase refers to indulgences.



through because he, too, had undergone maltreatment in a former concentration camp after the war. He added to his explanation that he had once seen “slave laborers from concentration camps in their striped pajamas,” and only much later recognized his indifference and initial assumptions: “and I thought, oh well, there are some concentration camp guys. They must be criminals—and I moved on!” In 1945, Bachmann felt outraged about being put in a camp “dirtied” by camp inmates and this emotion stayed in his memory as if it happened yesterday.

By contrast, in the 1970s when met his future wife, Bachmann was better capable of appreciating what she had lived through during the Third Reich—even though he was not able to revise the emotional memory of feeling degraded in the former concentration camp.

After their marriage, Bachmann and his wife traveled to Israel many times. He visited synagogue with her. Their armoire was decorated with flags of Israel and little tokens from both other families’ and their own travels. Over their bathroom door hung a large poster photograph of the first postwar Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, who had established the ties with the western Allies, primarily the United States, and with Israel. In their living room, Herr and Frau Bachmann had collected symbols of national significance that correlated with their personal pasts. He showed me a little piece of wood he had made briefly after the war in which he had carved the names and dates of the prison camps where he was held. He kept his denazification papers

right beside it, along with his family photo album, and typed-up letters his father had distributed in the community, all signed “Heil Hitler.”

### 5.5 Conclusion

The interviews with Herr Vogel, Herr Becker and Herr Bachmann demonstrate how they composed their private memories of transnational relations in the context of their internment as incriminated subjects. Vogel, Becker and Bachmann remembered internment emotionally as forms of social degradation. Seeking to bring these emotional memories in alignment with their cognitive understanding of their previous roles in the Third Reich, they composed different memories and significantly different identities. Becker composed his memory by passively assuming the role of a man who simply followed orders—both in the war and in captivity. Becker appears as a member of the collective *Waffen SS* in stories about military successes. His memory also shows that Becker continued to evaluate these successes by National Socialist standards when he refers to “helping” Wehrmacht troops “establish order.” However, Bachmann actively composed his memory by assuming the role of a man who emerged from his youthful deception. He admitted to being having volunteered for the *Waffen SS*, and explained that he had learned about his mistakes because of his internment in a former concentration camp. By contrast, Vogel composed his memory by assuming the role of a military authority, aggressively discrediting opposing viewpoints. Vogel, too, continued to evaluate and explain his actions during the war

through the lens of National Socialism, and he did so to defy social and cultural change after the German defeat.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Most subjects who were captured in North Africa and were interned in the United States did not represent their capture and internment as a form of victimization. Most of them composed memories of war captivity as scenarios in which they could imagine themselves collectively and automatically exonerated by their sheer absence from the worst acts of violence. Some of them represented the U.S. military's acceptance of the prisoners' Nazi behavior as a reliable diagnosis of alleged non-Nazism. Others represented the U.S. military's positive treatment not only to show appreciation for what they perceived as a transnational comradeship, but also to defy socialist or anti-fascist discourses and preserve a sense of national cohesion after 1945.

In each case, the interview subjects sought to compose an imagined, cohesive identity by composing memories of who they were and what they had experienced in U.S. captivity. Some sought to decontaminate their former selves from the *stigma* of Nazism, and others sought to protect their former selves from the sense of loss caused by the social changes in 1945.

Most of the POWs in the United States composed very positive memories about captivity in which the U.S. military welcomed the German soldiers as comrades. This comradeship, as most of the interview subjects described it, revolved around personal interest, socialization, and, primarily, the fact that the U.S. military gave the POWs such generous access to their material wealth. They had plenty to eat, lived comfortably, were able to earn

money by participating in the labor programs and maintained a relatively luxurious life. German prisoners were also given access to privileges from which non-white Americans were excluded at the time. Material wealth, in addition to promises of repatriation and employment opportunities at home, helped to persuade German POWs to embrace the United States as a future ally more than the intellectual diversion the SPD had offered the prisoners between 1944 and 1945.

Most of my interview subjects who were captured in Europe and interned in U.S. camps after the war did not represent their capture and internment as a form of victimization, but as a form of (temporary) degradation. They represented their internment as both physical punishment and symbolic humiliation. Vogel, Becker, and Bachmann had previously belonged to a military and National Socialist elite, and they still identified themselves as elite soldiers after 1945 when they were interned. Their memories revolved around their need to bring into cohesion their sense of privilege as members of a National Socialist and military elite and the loss of these privileges when they were interned.

However, even Vogel, who aggressively defended his past degraded self from the “incompetent” U.S. soldiers, drew on memories of transnational military comradeship. Memories of “fair” relations between German and U.S. soldiers counteract German discourses that are critical of the German past. They do so because they resonate both with their emotional memories and

the transnational hegemonic memories of military relations between the United States and Germany after the war. It is in these private memories of this German-American (war and postwar) transnational comradeship where the United States—real and imagined—provides composure.

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