

VETERANS, WAR WIDOWS, AND NATIONAL BELONGING IN ALSACE, 1871-1953

By

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## ABSTRACT

### VETERANS, WAR WIDOWS, AND NATIONAL BELONGING IN ALSACE, 1871-1953

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This dissertation focuses on Germany's and France's handling of former enemy veterans and war widows in the disputed borderland of Alsace from 1871 to 1953. During this period, the province changed hands in 1871, 1918, 1940, and 1945 at the conclusion of military engagements. Each transfer of sovereignty left the newly empowered state with a significant population of Alsatian veterans who fought for the opposing power in the previous conflict, as well as women whose husbands died fighting for the recently divested state. The project focuses on how these two nationally ambiguous groups attempted to reconstruct postwar lives, relationships with one another, and the newly sovereign state, not just once, but four times. Individual subject chapters include studies of postwar citizenship options, pensions, the incorporation of the Alsatian male population into the victor's army, the ex-enemy soldiers' participation in veterans' associations, and postwar memory and memorialization projects. Studying the actions of the victors and vanquished in Alsace facilitates my interrogation of the notions and practices of German and French citizenship, issues of identity, and the evolution of the welfare state. The German and French states utilized policies that combined elements of forgiveness, benevolence, and coercion to simultaneously validate their return to sovereignty in Alsace and purge the province of nationally suspect elements. The inclusive and exclusionary strategies of the newly sovereign powers highlighted and challenged their own national self-conceptions and demonstrated officials' recognition that national reintegration must occur on multiple levels beyond political and juridical changes in citizenship status.

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To Stephanie,  
for being there every step of the way.

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# Introduction

## *Zwische horizons des bleus und Felder von Grauen*

“This rise in peril is part of the destiny of Alsace,” he told me. “The Franco-German rivalry can only be bloody. We are made to change uniform, language, and culture, we are living through an identity crisis in a conflict that is beyond us, killing our fathers, our brothers, and our sons.”<sup>1</sup>

~Alsatian Conscript Jean Lechner father’s observations as he departed in 1914 for service in the German army.

“My only son, who grew up in Germany, but who according to the Treaty of Versailles was a Frenchman, fell as a German soldier in France in June 1940. Had he been taken prisoner, he would have been shot as a deserter by the French. He died battling against Alsatian troops, among whom was his own blood-relative cousin, who likewise fell on the same day. Both graves lie a few kilometers apart in France. Another cousin, who was forced to fight against the Reich on the French side, stands today as a volunteer and *SS-Oberabschnitte* in the East, where shortly after his arrival he was awarded the Iron Cross.”<sup>2</sup>

~Herr Schmitthenner to the President Freißler People’s Court, February 11, 1943.

“By that time I belonged to the Victorious Allies, who were all heroes, like every French soldier I met after the war. Only victors have stories to tell. We, the vanquished, were all cowards and weaklings by then, whose memories, fears, and enthusiasms should not be remembered.”<sup>3</sup>

~Alsatian soldier Guy Sajer on his post-Second World War experience as a Wehrmacht veteran living in “recovered” French Alsace.

“Before holding the draftees to account and punishing them eight years after the liberation, is the State sure that it has fulfilled all its obligations towards them? Is it not because the State failed in its mission in 1940 that these men are in their present plight?”<sup>4</sup>

~Response of *Les Dernière Nouvelles d’Alsace* to the Oradour-sur-Glane verdict as translated by the American consulate in Strasbourg, February 1953.

Are nation-states capable of forgiveness? More specifically, if the role of the nation-state is to guarantee its citizens protection, the rule of law, and international prestige, can it forget the actions of individuals whose very existence marks a dramatic reminder of a failure to fulfill the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine: Histories d’une Tragédie Oubliée* (Paris: Séguier, 2004), 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Schmitthenner to the Präsident Freißler Volksgerichtshof, February 11, 1943, R 43 II 1339a, Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde (hereafter cited as BABL).

<sup>3</sup> Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier: The Classic WWII Autobiography* (Washington: Brassey’s (US) Classic, 1967), 86.

<sup>4</sup> George Andrews to the Department of State, Washington, February 20, 1953, 208 Z 6, Archives Municipales de Strasbourg (hereafter cited as AMS).

state's functions and prescribed ideals? On the other hand, must such individuals subsume their own memories to the dominant national narrative, or can alternative histories peaceably coexist? Nationalists often portray the nation as a singular entity progressing steadily and linearly through historical time that logically culminates in the present. In this depiction, alternative visions and competing national narratives are often subsumed as immaterial or doomed to failure in the face of the inevitable progression of historical forces. However, as historians Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer have argued for German history, an alternative methodology is to dissolve the notion of a singular national narrative and adopt an approach that embraces and highlights the nation's "fractured" history – its multiple competing visions and subjects – in order to recover a sense of their significance and the efforts expended in overcoming a "shattered" past.<sup>5</sup> The disputed Franco-German borderland of Alsace represents an important context in which to undertake such a study. Over the course of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, France and Germany turned the province into a battlefield in a literal military sense during times of war and an ideological battleground of competing national narratives during times of peace. Each sovereignty transfer was accompanied by a campaign by the victor to (re)integrate the province and its population into the larger German or French nation, thus making Alsace an ideal setting to study the two states' nation-building efforts.

This dissertation focuses on Germany's and France's handling of former enemy veterans and war widows in the borderland of Alsace from 1871 to 1953. During this period, the province changed hands in 1871, 1918, 1940, and 1945 at the conclusion of military engagements. Each transfer of sovereignty left the newly empowered state with a significant population of Alsatian

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<sup>5</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 17.

veterans who fought for the opposing power in the previous conflict, as well as women whose husbands died fighting for the recently divested state. The project focuses on how these two nationally ambiguous groups attempted to reconstruct postwar lives, relationships with one another, and the newly sovereign state, not just once, but four times. Individual subject chapters include studies of postwar citizenship options, pensions, the incorporation of the Alsatian male population into the victor's army, the ex-enemy soldiers' participation in veterans' associations, and postwar memory and memorialization projects. Studying the actions of the victors and vanquished in Alsace facilitates my interrogation of the notions and practices of German and French citizenship, issues of identity, and the evolution of the welfare state. The German and French states utilized policies that combined elements of forgiveness, benevolence, and coercion to simultaneously validate their return to sovereignty in Alsace and purge the province of nationally suspect elements. The inclusive and exclusionary strategies of the newly sovereign powers highlighted and challenged their own national self-conceptions and demonstrated officials' recognition that national reintegration must occur on multiple levels beyond political and juridical changes in citizenship status.

Alsace was invested with enduring patriotic symbolism for Germany and France despite its geographic peripherality. Each post-reclamation, however, was marked by increasing degrees of mutual disillusionment between the newly sovereign government officials and Alsatians as the prewar rhetoric of nationalist imaginings shattered on the complicated reality of a mixed borderland population. Despite the potential for official coercion, I argue that a mutually influential relationship existed between provincial authorities, central state officials, and the local populace. The former groups did not simply impose their will upon the latter nor did the Alsatians completely disengage from the administrative framework created by the former.

Definitive differences in opinion often separated provincial authorities and national officials in Berlin and Paris, with the former group regularly expressing the belief and frustration that the latter had an insufficient appreciation of conditions in Alsace. In certain instances, provincial officials were not averse to taking action prior to the capital's approval and in so doing overstep their own authority if they believed that the center's misunderstanding was negatively affecting local conditions. For their part, Alsatian veterans and war widows similarly differentiated their attitudes between the more responsive and concerned local officials and the distant and unsympathetic central authorities. They situationally invoked the identities and experience narratives prescribed to them by the newly empowered state's nationalist language as a means to maximize their chances of receiving aid and achieving reintegration. Yet Alsatians also vehemently defended their local distinctiveness when faced with the threat of homogenizing central legislation by invoking the legacy of the "superior" policies of the previous administration in an attempt to capitalize on the Franco-German rivalry. The "reconciliation" of former enemy veterans and war widows is best characterized as a series of postwar processes rather than singular events. In the end, the final settlements represented compromises between national and local interests and were accomplished through official and unofficial means.

The dissertation's period of study covers the period from the annexation of Alsace by the newly constituted German Reich after the victory in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 to the amnestying of thirteen Alsatians by the French National Assembly in 1953. In 1871, the province's annexation was symbolic of Germany's emergence on the international scene, while for the French, the loss facilitated an unprecedented allegorical investment in Alsace and

Lorraine, which became synonymous with French patriotism.<sup>6</sup> Following World War I, the return of Alsace to France became symbolic of Germany's shameful defeat and the post-war humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, the revision of which would form a cornerstone of interwar German policy, the most radical form emerging in the National Socialist political program. For the French, the Interwar period was one of disillusionment with Alsace, as the desires of the province's population did not match the pre-war patriotic imaginings of the French state. The German re-conquest of Alsace in 1940 and its return to France in 1945 are watersheds in the conflict marking the zenith and nadir of Nazi power in Western Europe. The concluding date for the study is February 18, 1953, the date that the French National Assembly amnestied thirteen Alsatians who had been convicted for their role in the massacre of 642 men, women and children in the French town of Oradour-sur-Glane in 1944. The National Assembly's decision to amnesty the Alsatians was a reconciliatory gesture intended to begin healing the wounds caused by the German conquest and occupation. The temporal breadth of the study allows for the chronological tracing and identification of thematic continuities in German and French social and political institutions across traditional historiographic "ruptures."

Veterans and war widows are figures of profound ambiguity in peacetime society. Discharged soldiers occupy an intermediary space between military and civilian realms, neither wholly incorporable nor excludable from either. On the one hand, both are marginal and potentially threatening figures, often representing an unwanted reminder of the perceived disequilibrium and disillusionment of postwar society. On the other, they are their individual sex's embodiment of the quintessential citizen, who may invoke their service and sacrifice as justification

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<sup>6</sup> Laird Boswell, "From Liberation to Purge Trials in the 'Mythic Provinces': Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920," *French Historical Studies* 23, no. 1 (2000): 132.

for special state beneficence in the form of financial support or social prestige. The presence of war widows and ex-soldiers in the aftermath of conflict and states' attempts to reincorporate them into peacetime society are phenomena that transcend both historical time and geographic place. The exceptionality of Alsatian veterans' and war widows' experiences is that in 1871, 1918, 1940, and 1945 many became subjects of the nation whose conquest they or a loved one had actively opposed with force of arms.

## **Historiography**

Veterans have received significant historiographic attention. Scholars have highlighted the ideological and material efforts undertaken by governments to rehabilitate and return society to an often idealized prewar norm. Within this context, the state's officially sanctioned reception and care of its own returning ex-soldiers, the former combatants' responses, and their postwar politics have increasingly become viewed as the barometer for evaluating larger societal issues such as anxiety surrounding war altered gender roles, state sponsored social policies, and the growth of political extremism. Critically, however, these studies focus on how states have welcomed and supported their own returning soldiers and survivors of the fallen. My dissertation's focus on former-enemy combatants and their dependents opens up a new direction in the study of postwar social and political regeneration projects by examining the reintegrative, reconciliatory, and coercive efforts of both France and Germany that other studies neglect. First, it captures the moment of the state's implementation of its idealized postwar rebuilding project and traces it through the period of increasing distance between rhetoric and real conditions. Second, it tests the boundaries of the nation's ability to forgive and reintegrate individuals who violently resisted their takeover.

When ex-soldiers are the subject of historical inquiry, they often are studied as members of larger groups, such as veterans' associations.<sup>7</sup> Antoine Prost, in his exhaustive study of French veterans' associations in the Interwar period, argued that former combatants' experiences in war have a negligible impact upon society unless veterans organize themselves in groups claiming special status. These meso-level associations are usually analyzed by historians as either objects of state policy or agitation groups, but the internal dynamics of veterans' organizations and individuals' experiences in relation to the state are minimized.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, addressing veterans at an organizational level risks imparting ex-servicemen's groups with a particular associational "essence" or "inherent nature" that elides internal dynamics and adaptations to external events.<sup>9</sup> An alternative methodology to study former soldiers has been demonstrated by Mark Edele. Edele illustrates that veterans can exist as a socially relevant "entitlement group" prior to their organization.<sup>10</sup> Common experience rather than formal association unites members of an entitlement group. In the context of post-conflict societies,

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<sup>7</sup> Antoine Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939* vols. 1-3 (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques vol Histoire, 1977). There is no better source than this three volume work for general information on French veterans from 1914 to 1939. Yet the geographic scope (France in its entirety) misses the complexity of the regional level. Excluding several maps showing the presence of the veterans' organizations, the *l'union fédérale* and *l'union nationale des combattants*, Alsace receives little mention.

<sup>8</sup> For an example see Antoine Prost, *The Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society, 1914-1939* trans. Helen McPhail (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Chris Millington, *From victory to Vichy: Veterans in inter-war France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 9-11, 111. Millington critiques Antoine Prost's conclusions in regard to the antiparlamentarianism of Interwar French veterans' associations.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society, 1941-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12. Edele defines an entitlement group as "a collection of individuals sharing similar claims to special treatment." In the Soviet Union following the Second World War, the government sought to discourage veterans' claims to privileged status and minimize their agitational power by forbidding the formation of veterans' organizations. This prohibition, however, did not prevent veterans as individuals from claiming increased privileges from the government on an individual basis.

unorganized associates of such collectivities independently seek compensation for their personal sacrifices made in defense of the state. Official and public gratitude alone is insufficient; as special status along with lifelong care may also be expected.

The essential difference between the Alsatian veterans studied in this dissertation and the Russian ex-soldiers who petitioned the Soviet government after World War II was not the method of their entreating, but rather that the Alsatian supplicants were former enemy soldiers. Unable to justify their claim to official aid based on service and sacrifice accomplished for the state currently in power in the province, this dissertation will demonstrate that Alsatian ex-servicemen and war widows effectively mobilized themes of reciprocity and officially created narratives of their own victimization to successfully obtain governmental support. Archival sources suggest that Alsatian ex-soldiers were reluctant to join the associational ranks of the victor in the postwar periods.<sup>11</sup> The primary interaction between the French and German governments and former enemy Alsatian soldiers and war widows often occurred at an individual level and took the form of a direct petition instigated by the claimant. Although these applications might identify a common experience, supplicants overwhelmingly addressed authorities on behalf of themselves or perhaps secondarily for a group of immediate acquaintances. It is much rarer to encounter individual applicants claiming to speak or seek benefits for the more abstract category of “Alsatian veteran” or “war widow.” Despite the individual nature of their submission, notions of entitlement were an effective unifying force across traditional generational, political, gender, social, and ethnic divisions.<sup>12</sup> Entitlement

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<sup>11</sup> As will be discussed below, an exception to this trend occurred during the Interwar period. In this case, material considerations played a critical role.

<sup>12</sup> Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War*, 213.

groups, however, were not static and should be conceived as a community that was continually evolving and experienced varying degrees of organization at different times.

Disabled soldiers are a key group to study official policy towards ex-servicemen. Individuals with debilitating physical and mental injuries sustained during their period of military service are the first group of veterans to return to civilian life and have the most immediate and sustained interactions with governmental authorities. In contrast, their comrades who emerged “unscathed” from the war often do not seek state support until later in life. The visible disfigurement of ex-soldiers are a permanent reminder to postwar society of the suffering inflicted by war. In Alsace, veterans’ observable disabilities invoked a further dimension of memory as it recalled the problematic legacy of Alsatians’ wartime service.

Who the disabled were and their place in society changed significantly over my period of study. In the nineteenth century, the disabled were disproportionately members of the laboring classes who had been injured in industrial accidents.<sup>13</sup> In this context, infirmity was a permanent sentence of poverty. Even soldiers wounded in the line of duty were not immune from the threat of destitution, as the stereotypical image of the disabled Franco-Prussian War veteran organ grinder haunting German streets in the late nineteenth century attests.<sup>14</sup> The mass conflicts of the twentieth century created a large number of disabled ex-soldiers from all social classes.<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Poore, *Disability in Twentieth Century German Culture*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> In Germany, an estimated 1.5 million men returned from the battlefields of the First World War with permanent injuries. See Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4. This number, however, pales in comparison to the number of disabled German ex-soldiers following World War II, when an estimated 1,472,100 disabled veterans resided in West Germany and West Berlin alone. See Poore, *Disability in Twentieth Century German Culture*, 169.

pervasiveness of such life altering injuries and the fact that disability had been incurred as a result of service to the state gave veterans' claims for official aid an unmatched moral legitimacy and popular backing. Disabled ex-servicemen from across the political spectrum responded by agitating for a special status in recompense for their suffering and “unparalleled service to the state’.”<sup>16</sup> The study of German and French reintegrative efforts directed at disabled Alsatian soldiers demonstrates that the nature of rehabilitation for war invalids and the notion of who should bear the burden of their care fundamentally changed between 1871 and 1945.

The treatment of war widows complements that of veterans, particularly disabled veterans. Pension legislation often lumped the support of the both groups together. Care for war widows was similarly revolutionized over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Widowhood in the nineteenth century had meant poverty and hardship for the mass of the population. The advent of popular armies during the 1914-1918 conflict created an unprecedented societal wide experience of mass bereavement.<sup>17</sup> Governments were forced to address the issue of adequate pensions lest the loss of so many male breadwinners lead to widespread social and economic disruption and create a “new poor.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, war widows were the beneficiaries of unprecedented official generosity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cohen, *The War Come Home*, 163; Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 119.

<sup>17</sup> German authorities estimated in 1923 that 533,000 German women lost their husbands during the war. See Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 226. In France the number stood at 600,000. See Erika Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort: War Widows, Fallen Soldiers, and the Remaking of the Nation after the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 210. Kuhlman has argued that war widows existed between the poles of “living, patriotic symbol of self-sacrifice to the nation” and potential disruptor of the existent social order as a result of their lack of male protection. See Kuhlman, *Of Little Comfort*, 5, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Michal Lanthier, “War Widows and the Expansion of the Welfare State” in *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 31 (2003), 255. In the French case, Article 14 of the pension legislation that

Historians have shown war widows' ability to instrumentally utilize officially endorsed maternal and self-sacrificing identities for their own benefit.<sup>20</sup> Support for the wives of fallen servicemen took the form of financial support and other benefits, such as job training. In many cases, however, pension amounts were insufficient for a widow to support herself and her family. In response, some women chose to join associations to protect their interests and lobby government officials.<sup>21</sup> Here again, the historiographic focus on the associational influence of war widows risks promoting an understanding similar to the one articulated by Prost in regard to French veterans. In other words, the idea that war widows only exist as a group when they are part of larger organizations. The example of war widows in Alsace illustrates that women actively and successfully petitioned authorities on their own behalf by mobilizing their identities as mothers and self-sacrificing patriots. Yet at the same time, the study also demonstrates that this utilization of officially prescribed identities could only take women so far. The relationship that bound the state and soldier to one another in a reciprocal exchange of service for support did not function at the same level between the state and war widows. In instances of a shortfall in pension funds, national authorities prioritized claims of living male ex-soldiers over that of war

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was passed on March 31, 1919, bestowed a pension of 800 francs a year with an additional 300 per child to the widows of soldiers who had died as a result of their active service during the conflict. See Lanthier, "War Widows and the Expansion of the Welfare State," 258. The awarding process outlined by the National Pension Law of 1920 in Germany was more complicated. A widow's pension was to be 1/3 of what her husband would have received with a 100% disability with a small additional supplement for each child under the age of 13. See Michael Lanthier, "Women Alone: Widows in Third Republic France, 1870-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2004), 77.

<sup>20</sup> Some historians, however, have taken the position that governmental assistance came at the price of war widows accepting that their eligibility stemmed from a husband's sacrifice and their potential as mothers, rather than their own personal merit. See Lanthier, "Women Alone," 67.

<sup>21</sup> Lanthier, "War Widows and the Expansion of the Welfare State," 8, 260. Lanthier argues that a goal of war widows' associations in France during the 1920s was to be awarded a pension amount that was equivalent to that of a 50% disabled veteran.

widows. Officials justified this preference by arguing that ordinary poor relief was a viable emergency option for women, but would be too meagre a demonstration of the thanks of the *Vaterland* or *Patrie* to men.

Studying the experiences of veterans and war widows in Alsace and their interactions with German and French officials opens up new avenues for examining the province. Many older studies of Alsace focused on the region as a source of international tension, but few focused on the internal history of the region and its relationship to Imperial and Nazi Germany and Republican France.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, much of the older historiography of the region focused on “Alsace-Lorraine,” even though the label was imposed upon the region by the German government after 1871, when the hitherto individually differentiated provinces of Alsace and Lorraine became a single imperial administrative unit.<sup>23</sup> The hyphenation elides significant linguistic, historical, and economic differences between the two provinces, in addition to obscuring similar tensions that also divided Alsatian society. In recognition of these differences, this dissertation focuses on “Alsace” and refrains from discussing “Alsace and Lorraine” unless the point or policy in question was equally applicable in both provinces.<sup>24</sup>

Exemplary recent scholarship has moved beyond framing studies of Alsace in strictly national terms. Thus Christopher Fisher’s book, *Alsace to the Alsatians?*, examined the efforts of Alsatian “regionalists” to assert Alsace’s uniqueness and promote particular visions of the

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<sup>22</sup> Dan P. Silverman, *Reluctant Union: Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnie Menes Kahn, *My Father Spoke French* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 24.

<sup>24</sup> I do frequently utilize the term “*Reichsland*” that in official Imperial parlance referred to the geographic area of Alsace and Lorraine that was annexed by Germany in 1871.

political, social, economic, and cultural interests of the province.<sup>25</sup> Fischer's work tell us much about the activities and goals of a restricted group of cultural elites and their circumscribed audiences, yet does little to address the form and manner in which ordinary Alsatians experienced and interacted with the newly sovereign "masters" at an individual level and in turn how national officials responded to the demands of this potentially disruptive and suspect element of their newly acquired population. Similarly, David Allen Harvey focused his book, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace*, on the social and nationality politics of the working-class milieu in Alsace. Harvey demonstrates German officials' attitudes towards workers as *a whole* and the manner in which a collectivity of individuals with the same class background could make demands of the new regime.<sup>26</sup> Yet in these situations, workers interacted as a group with agents of the German state and only rarely on an individual basis. For this reason, even the more specific subject category of "worker" retains a significant degree of ambiguity that corresponds to the minimal contact that the vast majority of workers in Alsace had with official representatives. In contrast, Alsatian ex-soldiers and war widows out of necessity initiated and sustained communication with national authorities or their representatives at the local and regional level.

National belonging as it is expressed in citizenship policy is an important focus of the dissertation. In the modern state, citizenship is the preeminent institution for delineating the limits of inclusion. Citizenship indicates an individual's membership in a state and the responsibilities and rights associated with that attachment at a basic political and legal level.

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<sup>25</sup> See Christopher J. Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?: Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> See David Allen Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace, 1830-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

Different evaluatory methods both connected with birth play the key role in affiliating an individual with a particular state. The first, *jus soli*, reflects an attribution of nationality based on an individual's birthplace. In such cases, the individual takes up the membership of the state that exercises sovereignty over the territory in which they were born. The second, *jus sanguinis*, refers to a nationality designation founded on descent, specifically passed through bloodlines from an individual's forbearers.<sup>27</sup> Recent scholarship has argued that a strict reliance upon the *jus soli/jus sanguinis* dichotomy creates an oversimplified understanding that obscures the nuance of citizenship practice.<sup>28</sup> These scholars argue that citizenship should be viewed not as a purely political-legal construct, but rather as a “set of practices—juridical, political, economic, and cultural—which define a person or through which persons define themselves as competent members of society.”<sup>29</sup> Concretely, this entails a vision of national belonging that is chronically unstable, evolving, and that stretches along a continuum from legal and political categories to the manner in which individuals situate and conceive of themselves in relation to official policies.<sup>30</sup> This dissertation adopts this latter view. While the study analyzes the legislated definitions of citizenship, it also examines other subjects such as veterans' associations, pension payments, military service, and commemorations in an effort to move beyond a strict political and legal

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<sup>27</sup> Patrick Weil, *How to be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>28</sup> See *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. by Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Geoff Eley, “Some General Thoughts on Citizenship in Germany,” in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. by Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 240, quoting Bryan Turner, “Contemporary Problems in the Theory of Citizenship,” in Bryan Turner, ed., *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Kathleen Canning, “Reflections on the Vocabulary of Citizenship in Twentieth Century Germany,” in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. by Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 231.

definition of national belonging. The study demonstrates that these other sites were also important contexts in which the state and Alsatians negotiated and defined what it meant to be a member of the national community.

In Europe, Germany and France have been the frequent focus of citizenship historiography. Much of the concentration stemmed from Rogers Brubaker's influential 1992 study that contrasted what he characterized as the inclusive "political-ideological" (*jus soli*) French conception of citizenship to the exclusive "ethno-cultural" (*jus sanguinis*) model utilized in Germany.<sup>31</sup> Brubaker has received significant criticism from historians of both France and Germany for what they argue is the essentialization of the two countries' national belonging practices. Critics argue that the book's superficial engagement with German and French political history failed to appreciate the complexities and the evolving nature of citizenship policy over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>32</sup> Yet both German and French historians have been content to criticize Brubaker primarily from the singular perspective of their respective fields without making a significant effort to provide an alternate, more nuanced, comparison of Germany and France's citizenship policies in practice.<sup>33</sup> Thus one contribution of

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<sup>31</sup> See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> See the critiques in Eley and Palmoski, *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*, 2008; Weil, *How to be French*, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> For instance Patrick Weil devotes one chapter to the "false opposition" of German and French citizenship law. See Weil, *How to be French*, 173-193. Dieter Gosewinkel focuses one section of a chapter in his book, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen* to a comparison of nationality options in Alsace-Lorraine and North Schleswig during the Imperial period. See Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen: Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 191-211. Only Gosewinkel's essay specifically addresses the Franco-German comparison in the collected essays of *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*. See Dieter Gosewinkel, "Citizenship in Germany and France at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: Some Observations on an Old Comparison," in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. by Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 27-39. In this latter book, certain authors utilize the example of

this study of former enemy soldiers and war widows in Alsace is to provide the “microhistorical density”<sup>34</sup> lacking from Brubaker’s original work, while at the same time providing the *long durée* comparison of French and German citizenship programs lacking in the current scholarship.

Alsace is an important context for a comparative study of the implementation and evolution of German and French nationality and citizenship policy. A central preoccupation of German and French authorities in the aftermath of the province’s sovereignty transfers was to delineate the boundaries of belonging and exclusion. The form and manner in which each country sought to implement their nationality and citizenship laws reveals the “ideal”<sup>35</sup> population they envisioned populating the Franco-German borderland, and, ultimately, the tension between these goals and reality. The study of French and German citizenship policy between 1871 and 1953 demonstrates that at no time did either state rely solely on *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis* principles. Instead, regardless of the contemporary national legislation on the matter, both Germany and France utilized procedures that combined elements of both,<sup>36</sup> but were equally reliant (and in some cases more so) on considerations that had nothing to do with birthplace or

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German citizenship policy towards groups of Eastern European immigrants such as Jews and Poles to engage and disprove Brubaker’s thesis. The case study of Poles and Jews, however, does little to further a comparison of French and German citizenship policies. For as Gosewinkel himself acknowledged, German policy towards Alsatians and that which was directed at Eastern European Poles and Jews are singularly unsuited for comparative purposes. See Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen*, 187, 211.

<sup>34</sup> Eley, “Some General Thoughts on Citizenship in Germany,” 235.

<sup>35</sup> “Ideal” because as Annemarie Sammartino observes, “Citizenship is quite literally an *imagined* community; rather than representing the actual composition of society, it represents its ideal.” See Annemarie Sammartino, “Culture, Belonging, and the Law: Naturalization in the Weimar Republic,” in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany* ed. by Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 62.

<sup>36</sup> Andreas Fahrmeier, *Citizens and Aliens: Foreigners and the Law in Britain and the German States, 1789-1870* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 29. Andreas Fahrmeier has observed that neither *jus soli* nor *jus sanguinis* adequately encapsulate the citizenship policies that were enshrined in treaties between German states during the nineteenth century.

descent. In the end, national authorities relied primarily on the procedures that filtered the population of the borderland in a manner that appeared to most favorably fulfill their current national interests. Thus the study of Alsatian veterans and war widows demonstrates the ongoing constructedness and permeability of national categories.<sup>37</sup> Over the course of the studied period, the margin for individual maneuver and choice in regards to postwar nationality options was progressively curtailed. Each transfer of sovereignty witnessed increased state intervention in the “filtering” process that corresponded to a narrowing of definitions utilized to identify “genuine” Alsatians. Relatively free nationality options following the Franco-Prussian War were superseded in 1918 by ethnocultural and residential classifications, and finally to racial<sup>38</sup> notions of “Alsatianness” in 1940.

The repeated instances of war and sovereignty transfers in Alsace destabilized the relationship between national identity and citizenship. The immediate result was an incongruity (or at least the perception of incongruity on the part of newly empowered officials) between the province’s population’s national loyalties and their current state membership. Germany and France would direct their efforts of reconciliation and exclusion with the goal of merging the citizenship and nationality commitments of Alsace’s populace.<sup>39</sup> Schools and the military were

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<sup>37</sup> See Gosewinkel, “Citizenship in Germany and France at the Turn of the Twentieth Century.”

<sup>38</sup> I have chosen to only utilize “race” as a descriptor of citizenship prerequisites when discussing National Socialist policies in Alsace. Although both German and French nationalists discussed national differences between their two nation-states in terms of “race” as early as the 19th century, their meaning referred to individuals sharing a common descent and had more in common with our contemporary understandings of ethnicity. See Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 211; Dieter Gosewinkel, “Citizenship and Naturalization Politics in Germany in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 60.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Lohr, *Russian Citizenship: From Empire to Soviet Union* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 6. At the general national level, Lohr has observed that both Germany and France attempted to fuse their conceptions of citizenship and nationality.

the two institutions tasked by both German and French authorities to align Alsatians' national identities and their contemporary citizenship. Two important pieces of scholarship examining the former in the Alsatian context have been produced by John E. Craig and Stephen L. Harp. Focusing on secondary and primary schooling respectively, Craig and Harp demonstrate the nationalist underpinnings of education and its objective of strengthening loyalty to the nation-state in Alsace.<sup>40</sup> The second pillar of a national education, military service, has received significantly less attention – particularly in regards to Alsace. Universal military conscription was first introduced to Europe by French Revolutionary armies and established a direct connection between military service and active citizenship.<sup>41</sup> Both French and German administrations identified the military as an assimilatory institution, specifically as a place in which recruits from disparate political, religious, social, and cultural backgrounds would be brought together and forged into “Frenchmen” or “Germans.”<sup>42</sup> Their faith in the acculturating power of the ranks caused both German and French officials to push for the rapid introduction of

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<sup>40</sup> See John E. Craig, *Scholarship and Nation Building: The Universities of Strasbourg and Alsatian Society, 1870-1939* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984); Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to Be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Ute Frevert, *A Nation in the Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, trans. Andrew Boreham with Daniel Brückenhaus (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 4. Frevert argues that revolutionaries supported the ideal of universal military service because it appeared to fulfill the principles of “equality” and “fraternity”. Interestingly, conscription’s association with revolution and middle-class emancipation made Prussian authorities initially hesitant to emulate French practices, as they feared a potential threat to the existing social hierarchy. See Frevert, *A Nation in the Barracks*, 9-11. Josh Sanborn has similarly argued that a direct connection was forged between political belonging and military service through the institution of universal military conscription in the nineteenth century. See Josh Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Frevert, *A Nation in the Barracks*, 81, 149. Frevert problematizes the notion of “universal” military service and its ability breakdown of pre-service barriers. However, despite the fact that the army never became “the training school for the *entire* nation,” she argues that it nonetheless developed into an influential and important socialization institution.

compulsory military service for eligible Alsatian youth. At the same time, however, the nature of the relationship between the government and conscript was not simply the former imposing martial responsibilities on the latter. Instead, as Josh Sanborn contends, mandatory military service was not only a civic duty, but also entailed an implicit contract between soldiers and the state. In return for their time in the ranks, the state would reward soldiers and their families with material security and prestige.<sup>43</sup> Thus a crucial link between military service and the nascent welfare state was forged. On the flipside, the consequences for failing to discharge one's civic duties became increasingly punitive and broad over the course of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.

This dissertation does not claim (or seek) to uncover the “true” national identities of Alsatian veterans and war widows. Besides being of questionable historical value, such an effort would only serve to reify and perpetuate the myth of an inherent “national essence” of the dwellers of the Franco-German frontier, in effect replicating modern states’ and nationalists’ efforts to order and homogenize the ambiguous national identities of populations living in multiethnic borderlands. Historians have demonstrated that “backwardness” became the predominant official paradigm associated with border-residents over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much of contemporary authorities’ uncomfortableness with these populations stemmed from the seeming ease with which border-dwellers existed outside and moved between national categories, as evidenced by their bilingualism and apparent inability or unwillingness to identify with one particular national group. Instead, local residents showed a disconcerting tendency to instrumentally associate themselves with whatever nationality appeared most personally beneficial. Yet what might have begun as authorities

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<sup>43</sup> Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, 53.

“smiling at the simplicity of villagers who could not identify their nationality and were ignorant of their own language” was increasingly perceived to be dangerous, as the border populations’ “backward” cultural, economic, and political development were seen as potentially threatening state security.<sup>44</sup> Concurrently, national authorities progressively demonstrated a willingness to employ violence to eliminate the “national hybridity” of the borderlands.

While borderlands historiography has identified national authorities’ standardizing goals, it has also emphasized the longevity of local populations’ “national indifference,” even when faced with significant state pressure. The indeterminacy and continually evolving nature of identity has been portrayed as a fundamental characteristic of the borderland. In such boundary spaces, identities tied to the locality, class, profession, religion, and social status often took precedence over more abstract notions of nationality.<sup>45</sup> Even the language of everyday use was not necessarily an indicator of national identity, as the widespread phenomenon of bilingualism allowed residents to move between different ethnic groups.<sup>46</sup> When a national identity was introduced by the state, it took its place alongside these other long established forms of self-understanding. In fact, local people demonstrated a propensity for instrumentally utilizing official nationality classifications to express local interests.<sup>47</sup> In the end, the nationalization of

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<sup>44</sup> Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 40, 86.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 22.

<sup>46</sup> King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*, 7. Tara Zahra has also made the important argument, however, that bilingualism does not necessarily indicate “national indifference”. See Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 107.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 163-165, 291. Sahlin argues that local people instrumentally utilized national identity and political language to give local squabbles national significance.

European states' populations was a laborious and protracted undertaking. Different scholars have attributed the eventual success of nationalization campaigns to a range of factors that included: the gradual reconciliation of local and national loyalties,<sup>48</sup> the sharing of significant common experiences with other members of the state,<sup>49</sup> the artificial consolidation and promotion of different nationalities by central authorities,<sup>50</sup> and paradoxically, the removal of individuals from their original residences.<sup>51</sup>

The study of ex-enemy soldiers and war widows in Alsace reveals significant differences in regard to the experiences of borderland populations in Eastern Europe and Russia. Alsace lacked the "indeterminacy" of spaces like the *kresy*. Kate Brown has observed that the border-dwellers of the region were able to go about their lives "as if the Soviet state did not exist."<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Alsatian veterans and war widows had a much more direct and sustained relationship with both German and French local, regional, and national officials. These interactions most often revolved around securing their residence in the province or obtaining pensions. The repeated and persistent contact of these individuals with the representatives of state authority

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<sup>48</sup> See Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Confino argues that the *Heimat* idea played a central role in bridging the gap between local and national identities.

<sup>49</sup> See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 298, 486. Weber contends that the nationalization of France involved the colonization of rural space by Parisian civilization. He argues that the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War was the pivotal event and common experience that connected local and national interests.

<sup>50</sup> See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414-52.

<sup>51</sup> Brown argues that the deportation of villagers from the *kresy* to eastern Ukraine cut them off from familiar terrain and its connection to "myth, faith, and personal and communal histories," which made previously impersonal national identities tangible. Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 148.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 9.

suggests a need to move beyond a dichotomous division of borderland society between the “nationally indifferent” and “nationalist.” The case of Alsatian veterans and war widows illustrates the presence of individuals who inhabited an intermediary zone between the poles of national apathy and mobilization. Both groups’ effective navigation of the citizenry and pension policies of successive German and French political regimes reflected an ability to successfully mobilize themes of past faith, service, and sacrifice, rather than evidence of “indifference.”

The current of “backwardness” was largely absent from the Franco-German borderland. Instead, in Alsace, the “threateningness” associated with all border-dwellers coexisted alongside an element of patriotic investment that portrayed residents as the quintessential national partisan. Successive French and German governments resumed power in Alsace with a standardized preconception of the national nature of the populace.<sup>53</sup> Authorities utilized this presumption to distinguish between “genuine” Alsatians and “foreigners” living in the province, the former of whom was celebrated, the latter were seen as an element whose presence and influence was necessary to mitigate or eliminate. Indeed, the sovereignty changes in Alsace that occurred during the twentieth century would be defined by the newly empowered state’s implementation of policies that assumed a fundamental incongruity between the status of “Alsatian” and alternately “German” or “French.”<sup>54</sup> Time and again veterans and war widows were able to obtain support from their onetime enemies and slip between categories of “loyal Frenchman” and

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<sup>53</sup> Kate Brown makes this point in regard to the *kresy*, arguing that Soviet and German authorities did not approach populations with an appreciation of the hybridity of local conditions, but instead brought with them “standardized notions of nations and achievement.” Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 229.

<sup>54</sup> Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 141. Zahra has argued that a similar binary opposition between the supposed “innate democratic values” of Czechness and the “authoritarian and aggressive nature” of the German minority was the fundamental basis for the Czechoslovak nation-state.

“steadfast German” by adopting and deploying official post-conflict narratives regarding the nature of their service to the vanquished state, despite the progressive inflexibility of post-sovereignty transfer definitions of “Alsatian.”<sup>55</sup>

## Structure of Study

The dissertation is divided into four, chronologically organized parts. Part I focuses on the experiences of Alsatian veterans and war widows under the Imperial German administration from 1871-1914. Chapter subjects include post-Franco-Prussian War citizenship options, the incorporation of Alsatian youth into the German military, military pensions for pre-Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian soldiers and later legislation for French Franco-Prussian War soldiers, and the inclusion of former enemy soldiers into German veterans’ associations. Collectively, the chapters demonstrate that rather than presenting a clear program, German policies were marked by ambiguity and contradiction that collectively slowed the process of reconciling Alsatis to the German Reich. They also highlight the mutuality of influence between local people and provincial and state officials. The Imperial period also marks the highpoint of official postwar inclusivity.

Part II examines Alsatis in the German and French army during World War I. The two chapters demonstrate that Alsatis were progressively alienated by the discriminatory policies taken against them by German military and civilian authorities. France, who portrayed Alsatis as long-suffering French patriots, was the direct beneficiary of German actions. French officials merely had to extend Alsatis an open invitation to desert and allow themselves to become a safe haven for

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<sup>55</sup> In relation to the residents of the *kresy*, Kate Brown has made the argument that border-dwellers ability to remain on the “winning side of shifting borders” was “less an expression of their ‘true identity,’ of self-determination, than an accommodation to forcibly established parameters.” Brown, *A Biography of No Place*, 234.

individuals who were reluctant Germans or simply reluctant soldiers. Such desertions were portrayed as affirming the French nature of the province. In the end, however, many Alsatians did not choose one model of the nation-state over another, but rather made the decision to cast their lot with an affirming and optimistic image of themselves and their future over the distrustful and pessimistic alternative in the present.

The first four chapters of Part III focus on France's treatment of Alsatian veterans and war widows who fought for Germany during the First World War after 1918. Chapter subjects include citizenship policy, military service, pensions, and memorialization. The chapters argue that the cornerstone of French policy in Alsace during the Interwar period was the conviction of a fundamental incongruity between "German" and "Alsatian." This assumption played a critical role in shaping all other subsequent French policies, particularly the introduction of an exclusionary ethnocultural and moral conception of "Alsatianness" into the borderland. This in turn entailed a re-integrative policy that utilized a retroactive judgment of Alsatians' actions and attitudes during the period of German administration, along with an evaluation of their "roots" in the province in determining citizenship status, pension awards, and military duties. The final chapter of Part III temporarily shifts the analytical focus of the dissertation outside of Alsace to a group of veterans that were geographically no longer present in the province. It demonstrates the process by which Alsace was invested with national and emotional significance by an external population and illustrates that despite their physical exclusion, participants nonetheless laid an emotional and spiritual claim of belonging to the province that transcended contemporary national borders.

Part IV examines the period of the Nazi occupation of Alsace after the French defeat in 1940 to its reversion back to France in 1945. The chapters demonstrate that National Socialist policies in relation to citizenship, military service, pensions, and memorialization, were to some extent built

upon Imperial and Republican precedents. In critical areas, however, the radical Nazi program was combined with an unprecedented willingness to utilize terror and violence to mold the population of the Franco-German borderland. Notions of racial essentialness took precedent over previous French ethnocultural dichotomies. Nonetheless, Alsatians' actions and demonstrated national sentiment were also key considerations of Nazi officials in evaluating the reliability and desirability of the population living in Alsace.

The epilogue closes the dissertation by examining the delicate balancing act French authorities pursued in seeking to rebuild unity and assign culpability after 1945. The latter was accomplished through a combination of popular and official initiative. The prosecution of local collaborators culminated in the trial of ex-Gauleiter Robert Wagner in 1946. The *épuration* process and the return of the *malgré-nous* forced conscripts cemented Alsatians' conviction of their own victimization during the war. This image was fundamentally challenged and provoked popular outrage in 1953 when 14 Alsatians were put on trial for their role in the massacre of French civilians in the town of Oradour-sur-Glane. The French National Assembly's decision to amnesty 13 of the defendants marked a final act of reconciliation between France and Alsace.

Alsace is a microcosm for France and Germany's struggle for the political and cultural domination of the European mainland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and provides a distinctive comparative framework to study the continuities and ruptures in the processes of German and French nation-building from the margins in a single contested geographic space.

# **Part I**

## **After Unification: German Policy Towards and Treatment of French Alsatian Soldiers and War Widows, 1871-1914.**

### **Introduction**

Alsace and Lorraine are unwilling to pass into alien hands. Associated with France for over two centuries, both in good and adverse fortune, these two provinces, exposed as they have ever been to the first blows of the enemy, have repeatedly sacrificed themselves for the cause of national greatness; they have sealed with their blood the compact uniting them to France...All of one mind, both the civilians who have remained in their homes and the soldiers who have rallied to the colors, the former by their votes, the latter by their gallantry in the field, make known to Germany and the world the immutable determination of Alsace and Lorraine to remain French.<sup>1</sup>

~Protest of Emile Keller, Deputy of the Haut-Rhin to the National Assembly of Bordeaux, February 17, 1871.

Because, Gentlemen, between these two great nations that rub like millstones against one another, a neutral zone is an absurdity. Either Alsace-Lorraine must be French or it must be German...and I believe every German is with me when I say it must remain a German land. (Energetic bravos.)<sup>2</sup>

~Deputy Freiherr von Schorlemer-Alst speaking in a Reichstag debate on March 27, 1879.

The conflict that reopened the Franco-German rivalry over Alsace in 1870 was the product of overlapping French and Prussian needs. Napoleon III, once an energetic and inspired leader, was by the late 1860s fat, gouty, and chronically ill.<sup>3</sup> Faced with increasing popular discontent, the Emperor was in search of a successful foreign adventure to rally the French and

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Harrison, *The Stolen Lands: A Study in Alsace-Lorraine* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1918), 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1879, 27 Sitzung, March 27, 1879, 659, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25.

shore up his regime. On the Prussian side, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was likewise seeking a common cause with which to rally the Catholic southern German states to join the Protestant north and so complete the process of German unification. Both statesmen perceived war with the other as an opportunity to accomplish their goals. Napoleon III saw a defeat of Prussia as an opportunity to check a power rising at a disconcertingly pace on their eastern border, while Bismarck recognized that a French *Napoleonic* invasion would smash the internal divisions dividing the German states. Ultimately, it was France who declared war on July 19, 1870 after Bismarck skillfully utilized the crisis of the Spanish succession as a “red rag to taunt the Gallic bull.”<sup>4</sup> The ensuing conflict would prove that French *élan* was no match for superior Prussian organization, logistics, and planning. Yet despite a cascade of decisive German victories on the battlefield, hostilities would be drawn out until an armistice was signed on January 28, 1871, which was followed by peace preliminaries on February 26, and finally, the definitive settlement in the form of the Treaty of Frankfurt on May 10.

The protracted nature of the conflict can be explained by the fact that the Germans were forced to defeat two different French political regimes and the persistent French refusal to countenance any territorial losses in negotiations. Napoleon III and with him the Second Empire were effectively beaten after the disastrous Battle of Sedan and surrender of the fortress of Metz on October 29, 1870.<sup>5</sup> Yet rather than accept the Emperor’s surrender as definitive for the country, a new republican “Government of National Defense” was formed in Paris that called for a people’s war to drive out the invaders. This second regime only capitulated after a prolonged

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<sup>4</sup> Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 21, 37.

<sup>5</sup> David Wetzel, *A Duel of Nations: Germany, France, and the Diplomacy of the War of 1870-1871* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 133.

German investiture of Paris and the destruction of the remaining French armies eliminated the possibility of relief for the city. While the fighting was ongoing, several early attempts to create a basis for a Franco-German peace settlement foundered on the new French Government's determination that France would not yield "'an inch of her soil or a stone of her fortresses.'"<sup>6</sup> The "soil" and "fortresses" referred to in this statement were in direct reference to Alsace and parts of Lorraine, the annexation of which Bismarck made clear was a central German war aim.

Alsace and Lorraine witnessed some of the bloodiest and decisive campaigning of the conflict. Wissembourg, Alsace would have the dubious distinction of being the location where invading German troops first set foot on French soil and the site of the first German victory. Subsequently, the primary zone of operations would shift to Lorraine, but not before German armies laid siege to the fortified city of Strasbourg. The battle for the city had the ignominious distinction of witnessing one of the first utilizations of a practice that would become commonplace in later twentieth century conflict; that is the targeting and bombarding of a town in an effort to hasten the surrender of a military fortress.<sup>7</sup> Yet despite the destruction of whole quarters of the city, Strasbourg withstood the siege for a month until it became evident that further resistance was futile after the arrival of outside news relating the French defeat at Sedan and confinement of the Army of the Rhine in Metz. After the surrender of the city on September 27, sporadic *franc-tireur* activities would continue to harass German soldiers in the province, but major military operations were over.

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<sup>6</sup> Quote in Michael Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (London and New York: Methuen, 1961), 227.

<sup>7</sup> Howard, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 274.

German intentions for the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine were revealed as early as August 1870 when a provisional government under the leadership of Friedrich Alexander von Bismarck Bohlen was established in the occupied areas. Annexing Alsace and Lorraine to Germany was widely supported among members of the German intellectual community, who believed that the inhabitants were at their root German and that this “Germanness” could be cultivated and brought to the surface.<sup>8</sup> Although Bismarck would pay lip service to such justifications, the inclusion of predominantly French speaking regions of Lorraine, including the fortress of Metz, demonstrate an important strategic dimension to the decision. The unofficial annexation of Alsace and Lorraine was codified by the Treaty of Frankfurt and a supplementary agreement (*Zusatzkonvention*) on December 11, 1871. The National Assembly’s ratification of the peace settlement prompted the famous Bordeaux protest from Alsatian and Lorrainer deputies that would subsequently become the stuff of French nationalist legend and the cornerstone of the myth of the eternally francophile provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.

The inclusion of Alsace and Lorraine into the newly unified German Reich was formalized by the unification law of June 9, 1871. The two provinces were designated as an imperial territory, the *Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen*. Unlike other German states, the *Reichsland* was under the direct rule of central Imperial authorities.<sup>9</sup> In deciding to annex the two provinces, German officials had set before themselves a daunting task. In Alsace, idealized memories of French governance<sup>10</sup> combined with vivid recent memories of the destructive campaigns in

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<sup>8</sup> Craig, *Scholarship and Nation Building*, 29, 41.

<sup>9</sup> Stefan Wolff, *Disputed Territories: The Transnational Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict Settlement* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), 44. In practice, this meant that all executive and legislative powers were vested in the German Emperor.

<sup>10</sup> Beginning with the French Revolution, Alsace and Lorraine had been drawn into a progressively closer relationship with France and the French military. On April 25, 1792, after word was received in

Alsace and siege of Strasbourg to create elements of the population who were resentful, if not outright hostile to the German presence. In spite of these challenges, German actions in Alsace were marked by their efforts to reconcile Alsatians to the Reich and were expressed in the realm of citizenship policy, military service, pensions, and veterans' associations' activities.<sup>11</sup>

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Strasbourg that the Legislative Assembly had declared war on Austria, Captain Rouget de l'Isle composed "the War Song for the Army of the Rhine". Under the title "*La Marseillaise*" the anthem would become the national hymn of France. Alsatian and Lorrainers made up an important contingent of the revolutionary and Napoleonic armies and held key leadership positions. Men such as Jean Baptiste Kléber, François Christophe de Kellermann, and Jean Rapp served as generals in both the Republican and Napoleonic armies. In all, twenty-eight names of Alsatian and Lorrainer generals are inscribed upon the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. See Daniel Blumenthal, *Alsace-Lorraine: A Study of the Relations of the Two Provinces to France and to Germany and a Presentation of the Just Claims of their People* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons: 1917), 20, 22. In addition to the martial glory of the regions' sons, nostalgia for the revolutionary and Napoleonic period also grew out of Strasbourg's position as a critical military, economic, and spiritual outpost during the revolutionary period. Napoleon's Continental system propelled the city to a commercial preeminence that it would never again experience after the Emperor's fall. See Silverman, *Reluctant Union*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> This claim will come as something of a shock to historians who have strictly studied the political development of the *Reichsland*. They rightfully have identified Alsatians' lack of voice and representation in their governance as being a perpetual source of resentment for most of the period of the *Kaiserreich*. Yet as I develop further in Part II, Imperial policy in Alsace was marked by a Janus-faced tension between the official belief that Alsatians could become "good Germans" and the inability of German policymakers to treat the population as anything but nationally suspect.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **French – German - Alsatian?: Nationality Options in the Imperial Period**

I admit, I must recognize that a number – no the majority – of optants declared their option [for France] in order to avoid German military service.<sup>1</sup>

~Deputy Grad speaking in a Reichstag debate on March 6, 1878

The national fate of the populations of Alsace and Lorraine was a central point of discussion in the peace settlements that marked the end of the Franco-Prussian War. Between February and December 1871, German and French negotiators conversed, argued, and ultimately seemed to reach resolutions on a complex set of issues that ranged from defining a resident of the annexed region to the process by which individuals from the area could retain their French nationality. The agreements that were signed on March 2 and December 11, 1871 set October 1, 1872 and October 1, 1873 respectively, as nationality decision deadlines. Up to these latter dates, individuals originating from the annexed region were free to opt for French nationality and transfer their residence to France. Unlike later peace treaties, the text of the settlement allowed for genuine freedom of choice in the nationality decision and guaranteed the right of a citizenship transfer without threat of personal or proprietary retribution.<sup>2</sup> In its final form,

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<sup>1</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 354, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> The option to “vote with one’s feet” in regards to nationality policy marked a sharp differentiation from previous annexation and naturalization practices. For instance, Eric Lohr relates that until the reforms of the 1860s the general elements of Russian naturalization in annexed areas was “...1) ascription of subjecthood to the entire population at the moment of occupation and 2) the ‘separate deal’ model of granting permanent or temporary privileges and exemptions from the obligations of all-imperial subjecthood.” See Lohr, *Russian Citizenship*, 34. In contrast, the Russian signed Treaty of Constantinople of 1878 provided for a six month period of option for the populations of Kars, Batum, and Ardahan. Lohr does not suggest that the German example in Alsace and Lorraine influenced the changed Russian policy towards occupied areas. Given the precedent set by the Alsatian option period following the Franco-Prussian War, however, it is difficult to accept Lohr’s characterization of the post-1918 Soviet

German nationality following the Franco-Prussian War was conferred through a combination of *jus soli* and residence considerations. Once the status of “German” had been granted, it was passed through paternal lines of descent. Thus an idea of an ethnocultural German community living in Alsace was not decisive in demarcating citizenry bounds in the peace negotiations nor adhered to in administrative practice.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the seemingly straightforward nature of an option decision – Germany or France – a host of factors including the potential for military service, familial considerations, ties of national and regional loyalty, and economic self-interest complicated individual Alsatian’s nationality decisions. After the expiration of the options period in October 1872, German officials would report that 131,152 Alsatians opted for French citizenship. However, of this number only 28,409 completed all the necessary steps to have their options considered valid.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of emigrants were members of the Francophile upper and professional middle

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option treaties with the newly formed Baltic countries as “quite an innovation aimed at giving populations the ability to vote with their feet for the citizenship of their choice.” See Lohr, *Russian Citizenship*, 143.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that ethnocultural considerations did not play a role in defining the German nationality community in the Alsatian borderland at the moment of the German Empire’s founding would appear to fundamentally challenge the importance of Germany’s “community of descent” citizenry model advocated by Rogers Brubaker. See Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 115. At the same time, however, Brubaker does acknowledge the “internally inconsistent” nature of pre-1913 German citizenship legislation that included elements of “citizenry as a territorial community”. Thus Eley’s argument that Brubaker “implied” “stable or transparent” and “juridicially fixed” citizenship policy during the Wilhelmine period seems excessive. See Eley, “Some General Thoughts on Citizenship in Germany,” 238.

<sup>4</sup> “Zweite Jahres Übersicht über die Gesetzgebung sowie die Einrichtung und den Gang der Verwaltung in Elsaß-Lothringen für 1872/73” No. 38, 6. R 101 3556, BABL. A further 378,777 individuals from the areas to be ceded living in France at the time of annexation also opted for French citizenship. However, given their preexisting residency outside of Alsace and Lorraine it is difficult to say if they would have returned to the provinces even without their transfer to German sovereignty. The total number of optants is highly contested. Kahn sites the figure of 160,000 as the number of Alsatians and Lorrainers resident in the annexed areas who opted for France with a further 388,000 from other parts of Europe and the world. See Kahn, *My Father Spoke French*, 135.

classes between the ages of 17 and 20.<sup>5</sup> Alsatians who were mobilized in the French army at the time of the peace treaty faced an additional complicating factor in their nationality decisions. The choice to opt for civilians involved declaring their desire for French nationality or taking no action and automatically becoming German. The situation was reversed for Alsatian soldiers. They would maintain their French citizenship unless they declared before local French military authorities or the local mayor their desire to take up German citizenship. Given these circumstance and the recent cessation of the Franco-Prussian War, Alsatians soldiers faced high levels of institutional compulsion and peer pressure to remain French.

Labelling the Franco-German agreement as a “settlement” is a misnomer that instills the treaty with an aura of finality that did not exist in practice. Instead, intense and ongoing diplomatic dialogues continued throughout the entirety of the Imperial period between Germany and France over cases involving disputed nationality and demonstrates that “negotiations” never really ceased. The repeated confrontations resulted from conflicting and categorically false interpretations of the treaties’ clauses and diverging French and German law. These factors combined to create an options process that never lost its aura of confusion and uncertainty. Both German and French authorities sought to interpret and utilize the ambiguities of the treaty to their own benefit, which frequently led to bouts of diplomatic wrangling. Throughout the controversies and debates it was most often the populace of the annexed areas who would suffer the consequences of being caught between the conflicting interpretations of the two national rivals. However, Alsatians were not simply victims of German and French policies beyond their control. Individuals actively and regularly utilized the existing Franco-German rivalry to protect themselves and their interests by appealing and receiving the patronage and protection of the

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<sup>5</sup> Kahn, *My Father Spoke French*, 135.

rival state. In this manner, France and Germany were drawn into local and regional conflicts and differing state interests were articulated and fought out in individual cases.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter examines the nationality options process in Alsace. It seeks to intertwine the official positions of both France and Germany as they were articulated in the postwar peace discussions with regional and local narratives. The various initiatives and accords that were formally agreed upon by German and French representatives during the peace negotiations were not made in consultation with the Alsatian populace. Yet although Alsatians were denied an official voice at the proceedings, they were nonetheless vociferous in their reactions and influenced the manner in which the official policies were put into practice. German authorities, as the newly minted sovereigns of the region, demonstrated a concern for Alsatians' perception of their policies and sought uniformity in their implementation. They were convinced that inconsistency in the application of laws was guaranteed to generate popular resentment towards the entire administration among the Alsatian populace. This interest in "fairness" and "equality of treatment" were factors that played a role in the frequent Franco-German clashes over the nationality of individual Alsatians. Moreover, it explains Imperial authorities' willingness to pursue individual Alsatians they judged to be shirking their responsibilities as German citizens, when it would have been easier to simply recognize them as French.

Worries of the negative perception and potential damage to the prestige of the administration in Alsace also led German officials to seek to reconcile instances of conflicting administrative and judicial policies. Reestablishing consistency in the decisions of its justice and administrative officials' decisions likewise demonstrates German authorities' concern to act and

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<sup>6</sup> Sahlin, *Boundaries*, 9. Sahlin highlighted a similar phenomenon of the state being drawn into local conflicts.

rule in an evenhanded manner. Thus German officials were instructed to decide in favor of Alsatians in exceptional instances where administrative error had led to problems with certain Alsatians' options for France, even if the resultant decision was contradictory to codified German policy and the individual became French.

### **Negotiating the Options Process at the Official Level**

The process by which Alsatians would decide for French or German nationality was an important subject of Franco-German negotiations. The clauses regarding the ability of the provinces' population to opt to retain their French citizenship took shape over the course of the meetings held at Versailles in February 1871, Brussels from March to May 1871, and in Frankfurt from May to December 1871. October 1, 1872 was agreed upon as the option deadline. Alsatians and Lorrainers who wished to retain their French citizenship were required to declare this desire before local authorities and leave the ceded area before this date. Any individual born in the annexed areas who had not opted for French citizenship and relocated their residence to France after this date would become German citizens.<sup>7</sup> The Franco-German discussions regarding nationality options were formally concluded on December 11, 1871 with the signing of the *Zusatzkonvention*. This agreement set October 1, 1873 as the deadline for Alsatians and Lorrainers living outside of Europe to opt for France.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "(Nr. 657) (Übersetzung.) Friedensvertrag zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und Frankreich. Vom 10. Mai 1871," *Reichsgesetzblatt*, No. 26, June 19, 1871, 225, 5 AL 93, ADBR.

<sup>8</sup> "Art. 1, 152. Die Zusatzkonvention zum deutsch-französischen Friedensvertrage. Frankfurt a.M. 1871 Dezember 11," in *Bismarck und die Friedensunterhändler 1871* edited by Hans Goldschmidt (Berlin and Leipzig: Verlag von Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 270.

Despite the seeming clarity that accompanied the conclusion of the peace settlement at the official level, popular understandings of the option process were marked by confusion. As a result, the ten months following the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt saw relatively few options. In March 1872, Governor Eduard von Moeller published a series of bulletins that sought to clarify misunderstandings regarding the option procedure.<sup>9</sup> The breadth of the March 7, 1872 bulletin's inclusivity is particularly striking. The proclamation related that Alsatians born in the province and other current residents that had been born outside the annexed areas needed to declare their desire to maintain their French nationality and transfer their residence to France if they wished to remain French citizens.<sup>10</sup> The application of this policy towards elements of the population born in Alsace is unsurprising given that it was explicitly laid out in Article II of the Treaty of Frankfurt. Yet the unreserved willingness to include individuals who did not "originate" in the annexed areas is striking.<sup>11</sup> These Frenchmen did not have the benefit of being "native" Alsatians who could mobilize and draw upon the symbolically potent nationalist rhetoric of Alsatians as "long-lost" German cultural brothers to justify their receiving German nationality. The fact that these individuals were unequivocally given the right to receive German citizenship signals an unparalleled openness to Imperial citizenship policy that was not present in subsequent sovereignty transitions. In 1872 the newly empowered German state did not assert itself into individual Alsatian's postwar nationality decisions. Both German and French officials

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<sup>9</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller, "No. 148, Bekanntmachung," March 7, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>10</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller, "No. 148, Bekanntmachung," March 7, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>11</sup> The importance of differing Franco-German understandings of the word "*originaires*" is discussed in greater detail below.

would adopt policies designed to “encourage” Alsatians to opt one way or another, but ultimately the nationality decision was a matter of personal choice.

The number of options steadily rose after March 1872. The period from July to October witnessed the highest number of options as the October 1 deadline loomed.<sup>12</sup> Instead of being a uniform movement across the entirety of the ceded areas, the number of optants varied significantly between Upper and Lower Alsace and Lorraine, at the district and community levels, and rural and urban areas. Other factors influencing the number of options included the proximity to the French border, individually held national inclinations, age, familial composition, occupation, religion, gender, and the availability of francophile publications.<sup>13</sup>

### **First Optants: Alsatian Prisoners-of-War**

Alsatians who had been taken prisoner as French soldiers were the first element of the province’s population given the option of choosing French or German citizenship. German authorities began this process in March 1871 even before the peace settlement had been finalized. Prisoner-of-war camp commandants gave interned French Alsatian soldiers the option of being immediately released to return to their homes in Alsace or to wait and be repatriated to France with the rest of their French comrades. What at first glance might appear to be a simple “either or” choice, however, belies the range of external and internal factors that complicated an individual Alsatian POW’s decision. The question was asking more than whether or not the

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<sup>12</sup> Alfred Wahl, *L’Option et L’Émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains* (Paris: Ophrys, 1974), 51.

<sup>13</sup> Wahl, *L’Option et L’Émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains*, 100. Wahl cites an official German report from 1885 that recorded the number of options and the total number of individuals affected by these declarations as: Lower Alsace: 14,750 options affecting 39,130 people; in Upper Alsace: 31,719 options impacting 93,109 people, and finally Lorraine: 11,950 optants and 28,639 effected.

individual wished to remain in French military service. Alsatian prisoners were being essentially being invited to choose between France and Germany and at a more fundamental level, between France and Alsace.

National feelings and personal loyalties aside, the prospect of early release from the camps was undoubtedly enticing to the Alsatian soldiers. A report from the Saxon Ministry of War to the Imperial General Government of Alsace reported the release of 2,150 Alsatian and German Lorrainer POWs from camps in Dresden, Leipzig, and Königsstein. Only 252 of eligible individuals expressed their desire to remain in French military service and in the camps.<sup>14</sup> Alsatian soldiers who opted to return to the province were required to sign a pledge that declared their intent to return home and not reenter French military service. One such oath that POWs interned in Ludwigslust signed read, “We hereby declare our intention to never again enter French military service and ask to be allowed to return to our Heimat, where in the future we will be Germans and live according to German laws.”<sup>15</sup>

Early release was not the only factor that contributed to Alsatian soldiers’ desire to either return home or apply for residency in the local German community. The case of Gustav Riebel from Strasbourg is exemplary. Riebel enlisted in the French army in 1859 and reengaged for a further seven years of service in 1866, rising to the rank of *Maréchal-des-logis* (sergeant). He was taken prisoner by German forces at the surrender of Metz in 1870 and remained in German custody until April 25, 1871. Instead of electing to return to Alsace or France, Riebel took

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<sup>14</sup> Kriegsministerium, Allgemeines Kriegsdepartement to kaiserlichen General Gouvernement, April 10, 1871. 1 AL 157/3, ADBR. A similar note from the commandant of a prisoner-of-war camp in Rastatt reported the release of 810 Alsatis and German Lorrainers, while only approximately 100 eligible soldiers chose to remain in the camp. See Grossherzoglich Badisches Gouvernement der Festung Rastatt to Kaiserlichem General-Gouvernement im Elsass, April 18, 1871, 1 AL 157/3, ADBR.

<sup>15</sup> Testament from Camp of Ludwigslust, March 9, 1871, 1 AL 157/2, ADBR.

service in the Prussian army. He was stationed as a sergeant in the 15th Artillery regiment in Berlin in November 1871, when he wrote a letter to his parents in Strasbourg asking them to pursue his claim to funds owed him by the French army with local Alsatian authorities.<sup>16</sup>

Several aspects of Riebel's case are extraordinary. First, the fact that Prussian officials apparently allowed Riebel to move directly from being an inmate in a German prisoner-of-war camp to the ranks of the Prussian army demonstrates German officials' reconciliatory stance toward Alsatians and seeming unconcern for potential security risks of having ex-enemy soldiers in their ranks. Even more astonishing was that Riebel was allowed to take up a rank in the Prussian army equivalent to the one he had held as a French soldier. Unfortunately, neither Riebel nor the other short testaments of Alsatian soldiers who chose to join the German army provide an explanation of the motivating factors behind their decisions. We can postulate that such decisions were motivated by the lack of a language barrier, the apparent willingness of Prussian officials to recognize the French ranks of those Alsatians who sought to enlist in their army, and perhaps the recognition of an imminent sovereignty change of their homeland.

Those Alsatian soldiers who elected to remain in German prisoner-of-war camps and be repatriated at a later date were also motivated by factors beyond national conviction. The commandant of the Rastatt camp related to German officials in Alsace that "the majority [of the Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers] declared their desire to remain in French service because they fear the loss of their pensions or enlistment premiums."<sup>17</sup> The prevalence of this motivation is

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<sup>16</sup> Gustav Riebel to Frau Riebel, November 21, 1871, 1 AL 142, ADBR.

<sup>17</sup> Grossherzoglich Badisches Gouvernement der Festung Rastatt to Kaiserlichem General-Gouvernement im Elsass, April 18, 1871, 1 AL 157/3, ADBR. Similar sentiments are related regarding Alsatians' and German Lorrainers' decisions to remain in prisoner-of-war camps by commandants from Mulhouse in Thuringia and Pillau (present day Baltiysk, Russia).

evident in several individual cases that emerge from the archival record. Joseph Mueller from Strasbourg related in a signed testament that

I reenlisted on January 1, 1868 in the 84th Regiment of the Line and after seven years of service will receive 1,500 francs, of which I have not yet received anything. I would like to remain in French military service only to receive this 1,500 francs. However, should it prove that after the discharge of my service I do not receive anything from the current French government, I do not wish to remain in French military service.<sup>18</sup>

Mueller's note was echoed nearly verbatim by three fellow Alsatians interned in the Mulhouse POW camp. An older Alsatian internee in Mulhouse similarly articulated financial considerations in his decision to remain in the French army. Georg Raser wrote in a signed statement that "On account of my long years of service, I will be awarded a lifetime yearly pension of 465 francs after a further five years and nine months in the French army. In order to not lose this claim, I have decided to complete my period of service in the French army."<sup>19</sup>

The case that best demonstrates the importance of financial considerations in dictating decisions to return to Alsace or France is that of Alsatian soldier Kaitz. Kaitz was interned in Bremen, but had declared his desire to remain in the area and accordingly been the beneficiary of an early release. A subsequent report from the garrison commander in Bremen to the War Ministry in Berlin related Kaitz' change of heart after receiving a letter from his sister who lived in Nancy. In the communication Kaitz' sister related to him that the French government would not pay premiums owed to its former subjects who elected to remain in Germany. Kaitz informed German officials that he was not in a position to simply give up the 2000 francs he was owed and consequently was petitioning to be allowed to be *readmitted* as a prisoner-of-war into the Bremen internment camp. The report explained this desire by saying, "It is his intention to

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<sup>18</sup> Testament of Joseph Mueller, March 10, 1871, 1 AL 157/6, ADBR.

<sup>19</sup> Testament of Georg Raser, March 10, 1871, 1 AL 157/6, ADBR.

return to France with the remaining prisoners-of-war and there complete his service period and after payment of the money that is owed to him return to his Heimat in Alsace.”<sup>20</sup> Prussian officials in Berlin approved the request.

Kaitz’ case demonstrates the importance of familial connections and rumor in conveying information during the uncertain period following French defeat and the uneasy armistice period before the terms of the peace were finalized. In the subsequent peace settlement, France would accept its responsibility to pay sums owed to French Alsatian soldiers, but the process was marked by diplomatic wrangling and bureaucratic hurdles that often delayed the dispensing of funds for years. In the months immediately following the conclusion of hostilities, enlistment premiums and pensions were a critical consideration affecting individuals’ options decisions and one that French authorities were not hesitant to exploit. Financial motivations, therefore, must be seen as an important factor in accounting for the high number of options for France in the postwar period.

### **Breakdown of the Options Process**

Gentlemen, it has been conceded by every speaker that confusion and contradiction has ruled the question of options for six years. Confusion and contradiction from every side: confusion and contradiction between Article II of the Treaty of Frankfurt and the *Zusatzkonvention* from December 11, 1871, confusion and contradiction in the various publications of the administration, confusion and contradiction between the decisions of the courts and the instructions of the administration, and finally, confusion and contradiction in the administrative practices between districts.<sup>21</sup>

~Deputy Winterer summarizing a Reichstag discussion regarding problems associated with the options process, March 6, 1878.

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<sup>20</sup> Garrison Kommando Bremen to Königliche Kriegsministerium, Allgemeines Kreigsdepartement Berlin, April 8, 1871, 1 AL 157/8, ADBR.

<sup>21</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 370, R 101 3557, BABL.

In theory, the expiration of the option deadline for Alsatians living outside of Europe on October 1, 1873 should have marked the end of the citizenship ambiguity for Alsatians living within and outside the *Reichsland*. Yet rather than inaugurating an era of stability, the remainder of the Imperial period was marked by repeated confrontations between German and French officials over the nationality status of individual Alsatians. Fundamentally, the clashes stemmed from differences in French and German civil law and unresolved controversies from the peace settlement. The primary catalytic factor that accounted for the temporal breadth and repeated occurrence of disagreements between German and French administrations was the ongoing coming of military service age of young Alsatian men who had been minors during the options period. The recurring nature of this process meant that in practice the nationality status of the male Alsatian youth was never definitively settled and under continual debate between German and French officials. Ascertaining the status of these youths was critical because the military recruitment laws in both Germany and France provided for the arrest, fine, and potential imprisonment or impressment of young men who failed to voluntarily report for their mandatory military service.

The root causes underlying the persistence of contested cases of citizenship status were divergent French and German definitions of terms like “*originaires*” and “domicile” and differing civil law regarding minors’ rights. The confusion of the options process was increased by the promulgation of options information by *Reichsland* officials that contradicted the provisions of the Franco-German peace settlements. The diffusion of this misinterpretation was compounded when central authorities ordered the dissemination of the incongruous material. Even though this interpretation of the options procedure was incorrect, the policy might have maintained its administrative cohesion had the courts in Alsace not repeatedly upheld the literal

interpretation of the peace settlements' text. The result was a blatant incongruity between administrative and judicial decisions and created an intolerable scenario in which Alsatians who were recognized as French by local provincial authorities could find themselves fined and arrested for their failure to complete their German military service.

### **Controversy over the term “*Originaires*”**

The controversy regarding the word “*originaires*” was closely tied to the larger issue of who German officials defined as “Alsatian.” German authorities advocated a broad understanding of the term.<sup>22</sup> French officials, for their part, sought an absolute definition.<sup>23</sup> The German preference for ambiguity regarding *originaire*'s meaning stemmed from a desire to maintain a flexibility in regards to the options process that a precise definition would preclude. German negotiators related that it would be very difficult to substitute a word for “*originaires*” that did not include an element of the provinces' population that the German government wished to exclude and exclude an element of the provinces' population that the German government wished to include. Pressed by French negotiators to provide a definitive definition, German authorities finally related that they understood the phrase “*originaires des territoires cédés*” to encompass all persons born in Alsace-Lorraine, regardless of the birthplace of their parents.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the specificity implied by the precise definition of “native,” Imperial officials put into practice a more inclusive understanding of nationality that proved to be a source of controversy with French officials. The discrepancy between the language of negotiations and

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<sup>22</sup> “146. Der deutsche Gesandte in außerordentlicher Mission Graf von Arnim an den Reichskanzler Fürsten von Bismarck, 14. November 1871” in *Bismarck und die Friedensunterhändler 1871* edited by Hans Goldschmidt (Berlin and Leipzig: Verlag von Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 259-260.

<sup>23</sup> “Verhandelt Frankfurt, 19. Oktober 1871,” 5 AL 93, ADBR.

<sup>24</sup> “Verhandelt Frankfurt am Main, 28. November 1871,” 5 AL 93, ADBR.

practice heightened the confusion and controversy surrounding the options procedure. German authorities had articulated an inclusive *jus soli* interpretation of the word “*originaires*.” In practice, however, birthplace and contemporary residence would be utilized to determine the status of individuals living in the province. German authorities also transferred German nationality to individuals who had been born outside Alsace, but made their permanent home in the province.

### **Controversy over the term “Domicile”**

German and French authorities also clashed over differing understandings of the word “domicile.” The two states’ dissimilar definitions of “domicile” assumed a central role because a *permanent* transfer of the optant’s residence to France was an obligatory step in a successful option for French nationality. However, after the expiration of the options deadline on October 1, 1872, German officials quickly became aware of a large number of Alsatians who had either opted for French citizenship and never left the province or returned after a short sojourn in France. Individuals from both groups claimed to be French citizens. Fundamentally, the controversy stemmed from conflicting guidelines for founding and proving residency in France and Germany. In many cases, these France opting Alsatians would reside in France just long enough to receive some type of official documentation that labeled them as French, such as a worker’s book or residency certificate signed by the local French mayor, before returning to permanently reside in Alsace.

An exemplary case was that of Dominik Risser. Shortly before the October 1872 deadline, Risser declared his desire to maintain his French citizenship before Guebwiller’s German district governor and in the company of his minor son left Alsace. Only eight days later,

Risser returned to his hometown of Lautenbach-Zell. His son remained in France.<sup>25</sup> As a result of his failure to establish a permanent residence outside of Alsace, local German officials nullified Risser's option in November 1872. Thus in the eyes of Imperial authorities Risser possessed German nationality and so too did his minor son. Consequently, his son would be arrested in March 1874 during a return visit to Lautenbach-Zell and forcibly incorporated into a German infantry regiment for failure to voluntarily complete his mandatory period of military service.

Cases such as Risser's were frequently the subject of diplomatic discussions between France and Germany. The underlying issue that contributed to Franco-German disagreements was the incongruity between their residency laws. The German perception of cases like Risser's was that the validity of an option for French citizenship hinged on a "genuine" transfer of domicile to France. Governor von Moeller defined the term as "The word domicile is the juridical expression for the established relationship between a person and place. A domicile does not exist without such a relationship."<sup>26</sup> Contrary to the citizenship practices in Germany, there existed no official intermediary state citizenship in France. In practice this meant that individuals possessing French nationality could freely move from province to province in France without the moves affecting their nationality status or original residency in their birthplace community. French officials argued that Alsatians like Risser had established a legal domicile in France according to French law and should not be considered German or liable for German

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<sup>25</sup> Bezirkspräsident Strenge (Colmar) to Oberpräsident Elsaß-Lothringen Eduard von Moeller, July 25, 1874, R 901 30055, BABL.

<sup>26</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller to Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, January 16, 1876. R 3001 1567, BABL. Andreas Fahrmeir observes that naturalization entailed an exchange of old citizenship for a new one in the pre-unification German states. See Fahrmeir, *Citizens and Aliens*, 63.

military service. All that was necessary for a French citizen to transfer residency according to Article 104 of the Civil Code was for the individual to declare their intention before the authorities in both the community of departure and arrival.

### **Controversy over the Rights of Minors**

The status of minors and their ability to independently opt for French nationality was another point of contention throughout the Imperial period. During the peace negotiations, French and German negotiators had clashed over the issue of whether emancipated and non-emancipated minors could opt for French citizenship. German authorities maintained that no minor, regardless of their legal status, could independently acquire French citizenship without the co-option of a parent or legal guardian (if the parents were deceased) and subsequent emigration from the provinces.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, French officials recognized emancipated minors' nationality options as binding provided that they were made with the approval of their legal representative and also involved a transfer of residence to France. The implications of minors' status for the purposes of military recruitment explains the longevity and repeated instances of clashes between Franco-German authorities during the Imperial period.

German officials' ignorance regarding the options' requirements also led to the unintentional promulgation of misinformation that played a significant role in the overall confusion regarding the process. During the peace negotiations German negotiators had rejected a differentiation between emancipated and non-emancipated minors and the proposal that emancipated minors might opt and transfer their residence to France independently of their parent or guardian. Yet on March 16, 1872, Governor Eduard von Moeller published a bulletin

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<sup>27</sup> "Verhandelt Frankfurt, 13. Juli 1871," 5 AL 93, ADBR. This initial reaction was officially confirmed at the follow-up meeting on July 13, 1871.

that recognized the right of emancipated minors to opt for French citizenship.<sup>28</sup> The circulation of this misinformation was compounded when it was spread by national Imperial officials. Rudolf von Delbrück instructed the Imperial Foreign office to send copies of von Moeller's March orders to German embassies and consular officials in order to avoid any "unclear" options requisites.<sup>29</sup> The promulgation of von Moeller's order caused a large number of young Alsatians who had reached the age of 18 (the age that according to French law that minors could be emancipated) to opt for French citizenship. For four years these individuals were officially recognized by the German government as French. Their situations were irrevocably altered after several court verdicts in 1876 invalidated their options.<sup>30</sup>

The High Court of Alsace consistently upheld the preeminence of the option process that had been officially agreed upon in the Franco-German peace negotiations. Three verdicts by the High Court of Alsace in 1876 confirmed that under no circumstances was an emancipated minor's option valid. The court's decisions presented a problem for Imperial authorities in the *Reichsland*. They directly contradicted the order that had been published by Governor von Moeller on March 16, 1872 and threatened to create an intolerable situation in which provincial administrative officials declared certain minors' options for French citizenship valid, while the *Reichsland* courts condemned the same individual to fines and prison for failure to fulfil their German military service.

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<sup>28</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller, "No. 149 Bekanntmachung," March 16, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>29</sup> Reichskanzleramt Rudolf von Delbrück to Auswärtige Amt, June 8, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>30</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 356, R 101 3557, BABL.

Central justice officials in Berlin were alerted to one such case in 1878. A certain Heinrich Mihs had been emancipated in 1872 and moved to France and enlisted in a French artillery regiment. The lack of parental accompaniment to France led to Mihs' option being declared invalid in 1876. He was subsequently condemned in absentia to a 1000 Mark fine, court costs, and the possibility of six months in prison for failure to complete his German military service. Mihs returned to Alsace in 1878 with the intention of taking advantage of an Imperial amnesty order. However, after appearing before the local district governor in Alsace, Mihs learned that the Governor had declared his option retroactively valid. As a result, he could not make use of the amnesty and instead had to apply for naturalization. This lack of uniformity in policy between justice and administrative officials was troubling for Imperial officials, particularly since the discontinuity had been made public by a local newspaper, the *Elsässer Journal*.

Imperial authorities were also conscious of the delicate nature of the situation. Imperial Procurator-General Schneegans wrote that although it was "self-evident" that von Moeller's misinterpretation of the right of emancipated Alsatian minors to opt could not influence the exercise of the High Court's order, he nonetheless argued that the published mistake could not be ignored. Schneegans observed that "The optants in good faith followed its [the Governor's order] instructions. It would be unfair and weaken the repute of the administration if the order were overturned."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Schneegans relayed to central officials that the Governor had privately conveyed his intent to continue using the milder provisions of his March 16 order, despite the High Court's decision. With these considerations, Schneegans argued that the only

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<sup>31</sup> Kaiserliche Generalprokurator Schneegans to the Kaiserliche Reichsjustizamt in Berlin, December 20, 1878, R 3001 1567, BABL.

course of action available was to provide special instructions to administrative and justice officials in Alsace to refrain from labeling those Alsatians who had followed the provisions of the March 7 and 16 orders as military malingerers and condemning them. Justice officials in Berlin agreed. The efforts undertaken by Imperial authorities in the *Reichsland* and Berlin to resolve contradictions between administrative and judicial policies demonstrates a concern for popular perception and a proclivity to respond to public pressure by adapting official policies to fit local realities. At a broader level, the controversy regarding the March orders again shows the importance of local influence and that German policy was often just as reactive as proactive in Alsace.

### **Resolving Disputed Nationality Cases**

The controversies surrounding *originaires*, domicile, and the rights of minors were a continual source of friction between Germany and France during the Imperial period. The frequency of clashes over citizenship issues made it imperative for German and French authorities to be familiar with their rival's nationality policy. Neither regime, however, intended for this awareness to be passive knowledge. German and French officials actively mobilized the rhetoric of the two 1871 peace settlements and their opposite's nationality policy to frame their demands and settle disputes in their favor.

This trend is illustrated by the presence of the French *Bulletin officiel* from August 1900 in the Federal Archives of Berlin Lichterfelde.<sup>32</sup> An article in the *Bulletin officiel* outlined the most frequent cases of nationality disputes between France and Germany and also provided a

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<sup>32</sup> Circulaires et Instructions: Direction de la sûreté générale. – 4<sup>e</sup> Bureau. Communication d'une note relative à l'acquisition de la qualité de Français et à la perte de la nationalité allemande. 1. juillet 1900," *Bulletin officiel du Ministère de l'Intérieur* 64, nr. 8 (August 1900), 319-321, R 901 30077, BABL.

synopsis of the nationality revoking clauses of Germany's 1870 citizenship law.<sup>33</sup> Officially, local French officials were to use this information to help individuals with an Alsatian connection make an informed decision regarding the potential threat of their being impressed into German military service should they return to the province. But at another level, local authorities could also utilize this knowledge as a tool to engineer the release of Alsatians from German citizenship claims. The fact that that *Bulletin officiel* is preserved in German archives also indicates that German authorities were aware of its existence.

French and German authorities actively mobilized the citizenship rhetoric and policies of the opposite state as the basis of their own argument in instances of disputed nationality. The case of François Joseph Weber demonstrates that this knowledge could effectively be wielded. Weber had joined the French Foreign Legion in 1875 and since that time had not returned to Alsace. In 1892, during a return visit to see his father-in-law he had been arrested and imprisoned by German authorities as a military malingerer. In the subsequent French appeal on Weber's behalf, the French ambassador observed "He [Weber] seems to have lost his German position (*qualité d'Allemand*) by a stay of more than ten years abroad after having reached the age of majority. On the other hand, he acquired French nationality through naturalization on June 7, 1879."<sup>34</sup> The success of Weber's appeal was demonstrated in a note instructing *Statthalter* Hohenlohe to release the prisoner.

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<sup>33</sup> Thus the article related that the German government could revoke a citizen's German nationality as a result of: an official decision, a German citizen's uninterrupted absence of 10 years abroad, the entrance of a German citizen into the service of a foreign state without the permission of the German government, and finally, individuals younger than 17 or older than 25 who applied for a release from their German nationality and after being granted immediately emigrated.

<sup>34</sup> Note from French Ambassador, October 19, 1892, R 901 30073, BABL.

Although it occurred less frequently, there is also evidence of German authorities petitioning their French counterparts for the release of an Alsatian from French military service. In such cases, German officials likewise demonstrated their knowledge of French citizenship law. The case of Eugen Pompey is exemplary. Pompey had been arrested for failure to complete his French military service. In a subsequent memorandum, Puttkammer, the State Secretary of Alsace-Lorraine, began by outlining the reasons that Pompey possessed German nationality according to the post-Franco-Prussian War peace settlement. This included the fact that although he had been born outside of Alsace, his family had been resident in the province and neither emigrated nor opted for French citizenship. The State Secretary also cited articles 21 and 17 of the French Civil Code to argue that Pompey should be seen as a foreigner because of his previous service in the German army and lack of intention to permanently reside in France.<sup>35</sup> French officials released Pompey in February 1894 and allowed him to return to Alsace.

### **Options of French Alsatian Military Personnel**

The options process for Alsations mobilized in the French army posed a unique set of challenges that went beyond the general confusion of the process. Members of the civilian population living in Alsace became German without any action on their part after October 1, 1872. Unlike their noncombatant counterparts, however, Alsatian soldiers who wished to assume German citizenship were required to declare their desire to be released from French military service before French military authorities or the local mayor of their garrison town.<sup>36</sup> The setting of this declaration exposed Alsatian soldiers to a great degree of pressure from their

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<sup>35</sup> Note from Staatssektretär Puttkammer, February 2, 1894, R 901 30074, BABL.

<sup>36</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller, "Bekanntmachung, Nr. 148," March 7, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

comrades and commanding officers. Speaking in a Reichstag debate in 1878, Baron von Stauffenberg emphasized the difficulty of a German citizenship option for a French Alsatian soldier by observing that,

I would like to point out the intensity of the moral determination necessary for an individual in the French army to opt for German nationality because the environment was certainly a thousand times more biased than any other, especially when you consider that for them the option was specifically for Germany and so in an even more difficult form, as those individuals who opted in Alsace-Lorraine. You will find it is the reason for the larger number of the latter options.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, the context in which the option was given played a significant role in Alsatian soldiers' final decision for French or German nationality. In addition, throughout the option period, French officials demonstrated their willingness to utilize a multitude of means to leverage and "encourage" Alsatian soldiers to retain their French nationality and remain in the French army. This included obstructing German authorities in their efforts to inform all eligible soldiers from annexed areas of their right to option, economic pressure, and by taking actions that further confused the options process.

Logistics was one problem faced by German authorities in obtaining the options of French Alsatian soldiers for German citizenship. As inquiries from German consular officials from Yokohama, Buenos Aires, Russia, and Tasmania to central officials in Germany demonstrate, the "Alsace-Lorraine" question was in no way limited to the geographic area of the two provinces or the states that claimed them.<sup>38</sup> The breadth of France's colonial empire meant that soldiers from the annexed area eligible to opt for German citizenship were stationed all over the globe, often in fairly inaccessible locations.

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<sup>37</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 363, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>38</sup> For examples of such letters see file R 901 30051, BABL.

In November 1871, the German consul in Saigon wrote to central authorities in Berlin estimating that approximately 200 Alsatians and Lorrainers were stationed in the interior of the colony. The consul related that he had only been able to inform a fraction of the eligible individuals, a feat made more difficult by his inability to obtain a list of the soldiers who originated in the annexed areas.<sup>39</sup> Although the consul did not specifically cite French obstructionism, his inability to acquire a list of eligible individuals at a minimum indicates that local French officials were not going out of their way to assist his efforts. Imperial authorities' protests through diplomatic channels confirms their perception of French officials' passivity, if not outright blockage of their efforts to ensure that every Alsatian soldier had the opportunity to choose German citizenship.<sup>40</sup>

The payment of enlistment premiums and pensions also remained a critical consideration for Alsatian soldiers and played an important role in their final options decisions. At the official level, Deputy Wagner highlighted the significance of economic factors in a Reichstag debate that followed close on the heels of the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt. Wagner argued to his fellow deputies that Alsatians' and Lorrainers' close bond to the French army was grounded in financial concerns. He related,

If you are familiar with the conditions of the French army than perhaps you will know what the connection between Alsace and Lorraine rests upon. Gentlemen, my information tells me that for the majority of Alsatian and Lorrainer enlistees' it is based on a desire to keep their enlistment premiums – a large portion of which [on account of their already accomplished service] they have already earned. In order to ensure this payment they must complete their service period, if not they will lose their claim.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Konsul des Norddeutschen Bundes G. Niederberger to Kanzler des deutschen Reiches, November 11, 1871, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>40</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller to Auswärtige Amt des Deutschen Reichs (Berlin), May 30, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>41</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1871, 39 Sitzung, May 20, 1871, 821, R 101 3556, BABL.

It is difficult to generalize about individual motivations for their decision. Genuine national loyalty towards France and a desire to remain in French military service certainly played a role in the decisions of some remaining Alsatians, but the economic security that accompanied an option for France cannot be ignored.

French officials also directly contributed to the ambiguity and confusion in regards to mobilized Alsatian soldiers' eligibility to opt for German citizenship. French Alsatian soldiers were doubtless made hesitant to choose German citizenship after several cases in which Alsatian soldiers who claimed to have opted for Germany were condemned by French military officials as deserters and imprisoned. The French justification for such actions was predicated on a policy that emphasized following the letter rather than the spirit of the Franco-German peace settlements. The *Zusatzkonvention* that was signed on December 11, 1871 stipulated that Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers who had opted for Germany were to be released from their French military service. In addition, any individual originating from the annexed areas who had been condemned by French courts prior to the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine was to be transferred to German custody. French authorities took the position that March 2, 1871 was the date of the annexation.

According to the French interpretation, the period between the annexation and the signing of the *Zusatzkonvention* was legally ambiguous. In practice, French officials adopted the position that any "crime" committed by an individual from the annexed areas in France during this period, regardless of whether the individual intended to opt for German citizenship, should be charged and the sentenced according to French law. Here the verbatim usage of the peace settlements' provisions gave French authorities an opportunity to push back against policies that

the Germans had imposed upon them as the victor. Yet ultimately, it was the Alsatian population that paid the price for this small, but nonetheless symbolically significant resistance.

The cases of Charles Haubennestel and Joseph Schiffmacher are illustrative of the French position. Haubennestel and Schiffmacher both originated from Alsace and served in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War. Haubennestel wrote directly to Otto von Bismarck to inform him of his plight in February 1872. Haubennestel related that following the annexation of his “Fatherland,” he determined to become a German subject and left French military service. Despite the fact that he considered himself German, he had been arrested and imprisoned by French authorities as a deserter.<sup>42</sup> French officials responded to multiple German intercessions on Haubennestel’s behalf by arguing that the *Zusatzkonvention*’s provisions were not applicable in Haubennestel’s case because he had left his corps without permission in April 1871. Consequently, the “crime” of desertion fell into the ambiguous intermediary period and could be prosecuted and imprisoned according to French law.<sup>43</sup> At this point, Haubennestel’s case falls out of the archival record.

Franco-German negotiations regarding Joseph Schiffmacher would continue for several more months. French officials related to their German counterparts that Schiffmacher was being indicted for desertion to the interior, the illegal wearing of a uniform and insignias, and for fraud “to the detriment of the state.”<sup>44</sup> The French Minister of War had rejected a pardon for Schiffmacher on account of his “reprehensible” conduct since his arrival at the Bicêtre prison

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Haubennestel to Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, February 11, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>43</sup> French Ambassador Rémusat to German Ambassador Graf von Wesdehlen, July 17, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

<sup>44</sup> French Ambassador Rémusat to German Ambassador Graf von Wesdehlen, July 17, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

and the potential “bad effect” that his release might cause. French authorities were convinced that Schiffmacher was only opting for German nationality to escape conviction for his crimes.<sup>45</sup> Schiffmacher’s decision to desert “to the interior” does call into question the earnestness of his declaration of intent to opt for Germany, but German officials chose to not engage in a dialogue about Schiffmacher’s worthiness for a pardon. Instead, they articulated the position that he should be transferred to German custody because the deciding date in the matter of prisoner exchange was the date of the signing of the *Zusatzconvention* in December and not March 2. In the end, it is difficult to see French authorities’ motivation to pursue and uphold such cases in any other light other than a desire to punish Alsatian soldiers who opted for Germany and dissuade others from following their example.

French authorities’ contention that Schiffmacher opted for German citizenship in order to avoid punishment for his crimes demonstrates that some Alsations instrumentally utilized the nationality option to advance their own self-interest. Provincial wide option statistics for convicts support such a contention. One report cited that 145 individuals facing prosecution by German authorities had opted for French citizenship, while France had transferred 101 Alsatian and Lorrainer convicts to Germany. Of these 101 individuals, 40 were military convicts of whom 19 were released immediately by German authorities.<sup>46</sup> In addition, while neglecting individual cases studies, Wahl relates a phenomenon whereby a few French Alsatian soldiers currently mobilized in the French army chose to opt for Germany, were discharged, but subsequently opted a second time before local officials of a different community. This process

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<sup>45</sup> Note from French Ambassador Rémusat, August 16, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

<sup>46</sup> “Zweite Jahres Übersicht über die Gesetzgebung sowie die Einrichtung und den Gang der Verwaltung in Elsaß-Lothringen für 1872/73” No. 38, 6, R 101 3556, BABL.

allowed these individuals to remain in France and elude French military service altogether.<sup>47</sup>

The example of large numbers of individuals condemned by one regime opting for their counterpart provides an important example of the instrumental utilization of option policy for perceived personal gain.

Many cases like Haubennestel's and Schiffmacher's that involved some dereliction of military duty carried a penalty of a few years in prison. There were instances, however, where jurisdictional issues relating to Alsatians were a literal matter of life and death. Joseph Rauch was involved in such a case. Rauch had been a soldier in the Zouave Second Regiment and opted for German citizenship on April 6, 1871. Following his option he had been involved in a fight with a sergeant in his French regiment and subsequently been court marshalled and sentenced to death. French Ambassador Rémusat argued for French jurisdiction on Rauch's case because the incident took place in a French barracks and that despite his discharge Rauch had continued to reside there.<sup>48</sup> Imperial authorities utilized a two pronged strategy to argue for the transfer of Rauch to German custody. The first involved the German position that December 11 was the definitive date in the matter of Franco-German prisoner exchanges. Any individual from the annexed regions at that time being held by the French should be transferred to German supervision. The second argument was that Rauch could not be condemned for military insubordination because the offense occurred after his option and release from French military service.<sup>49</sup> A troubling aspect of the case that Governor von Moeller identified to the German

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<sup>47</sup> Wahl, *L'Option et L'Émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains*, 83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Kaiserlich Deutsche Botschaft in Frankreich to the Auswartiges Amt, January 1, 1873, R 901 30052, BABL.

<sup>49</sup> Note to Ambassador von Arnim and Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller from the Reichskanzler Amt, November 22, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

Foreign Ministry was that “the severity of the proceedings against him [Rauch] have the appearance of being motivated by resentment on account of his option for Germany.”<sup>50</sup>

The details of the case emerged over the following months. The night before Rauch was scheduled to leave for France became involved in a drunken brawl with some of his former French comrades in the barracks. Rauch attempted to draw his sabre on a corporal who sought to restore order and after being physically subdued, continued to hurl insults at anyone in the vicinity for the remainder of the night.<sup>51</sup> Imperial authorities engaged in their own inquiry of Rauch’s reputation in his hometown of Hagenau. The investigation concluded that both Rauch and his parents enjoyed “faultless” reputations. Diplomatic wrangling over Joseph Rauch’s fate and jurisdictional issues continued until a note from March 21, 1873 related that Rauch had been granted a full pardon. German officials’ interest in Rauch also should not be construed as being strictly humanitarian nor as steps taken to defend their interests vis-à-vis the French. Von Moeller believed that Rauch’s case might be utilized as counter-French propaganda in the Alsace saying, “If he [Rauch] were to return to his Heimat, he would likely contribute to the abatement of French sympathies.”<sup>52</sup>

In the end, whether their decisions were based on French patriotism, peer pressure, economic considerations, or the ambiguity of the options process, the vast majority - nearly 90% - of French Alsatian soldiers chose to retain their French citizenship. German records indicate

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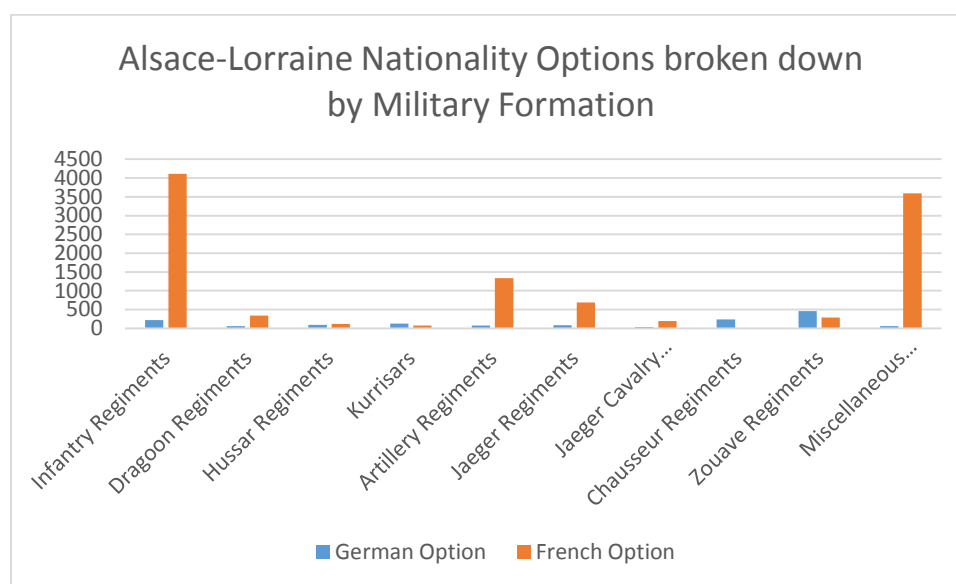
<sup>50</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller to the Auswärtiges Amt, December 16, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

<sup>51</sup> French Ambassador Rémusat to von Arnim, December 30, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

<sup>52</sup> Oberpräsident Eduard von Moeller to the Auswärtiges Amt, December 16, 1872, R 901 30052, BABL.

that 1,420 Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers opted for German citizenship, while 10,856 decided to remain French.<sup>53</sup>

**Figure 1: Alsace-Lorraine Nationality Options broken down by Military Formation**



	Number of German Options	Number of French Options	Percentage of Eligible French Alsace-Lorraine Soldiers who Opt for France
Infantry Regiments	216	4114	95.01%
Dragoon Regiments	58	341	85.5%
Hussar Regiments	93	117	65.56%
Kurrisars	124	77	38.3%
Artillery Regiments	71	1336	95%
Jaeger Regiments	79	684	89.6%
Jaeger Cavalry Regiments	30	196	86.7%
Chasseur Regiments	232	0	0%
Zouave Regiments	458	284	38.3%
Miscellaneous Military Formations	58	3596	98.4%
Total	1420	10,856	88.4%

<sup>53</sup> “Zusammenstellung: Derjenigen französischen Soldaten, welche bei französischen Militär resp. Civilbehörden ihre Erklärungen bezüglich der Nationalitätswahl abgeben haben,” October 15, 1872, 1 AL 86, ADBR.

In interpreting these highly disproportional option statistics, it must be taken into account that these were the numbers reported two weeks after the expiration of the October 1, 1872 deadline. They do not take into account the number of French Alsatian soldiers who initially opted for France, but later returned to the province and sought to be naturalized as German citizens. Their experiences will be discussed below.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Incorporating Alsatians into the German Military**

Our army is not only an offensive weapon, particularly, at appropriate intervals it brings back a certain capital of martial fame to the Heimat, it is the people under arms, it is the greatest teacher of courage, manhood, moral devotion for the entirety of the nation's youth, and we do not want to exclude the Alsatians at the outset from this great school.<sup>1</sup>

~Deputy von Treitschke advocating the extension of mandatory German military service to Alsace during the Reichstag debate of May 20, 1871.

Early, gentlemen, were young Alsatians called to the German flag, early, much too early, at a time when the French flag still dripped with the blood of their brothers and when Strasbourg and Brisach had not yet raised themselves from their rubble. Gentlemen, certainly great success was promised through what was for us such a painful measure. And what came to pass? Of 33,000 military-aged young men only 7,000 presented themselves and among these more than half were unfit for service. The others emigrated in all directions and homeless (*heimatlos*) wander the entirety of the earth. This is a lasting pain for thousands of families.<sup>2</sup>

~Alsatian Deputy Winterer describing the effect of military service in the province during the Reichstag debate of March 3, 1874.

Imperial authorities identified schools and the military as the two institutions that would be most effective in assimilating the population of Alsace to the German Reich. Both establishments were envisioned as complimentary mediums to be utilized to inculcate loyalty to the German nation, shatter pre-existing ties to France, and supersede more local forms of identity. Primary schools were central to the German nation-building project in Alsace. Schools were the single state sponsored institution that touched the daily lives of future citizens of both sexes and whose curriculum could be crafted to construct a German national consciousness and loyalty to the emperor through instruction in German language, culture, history, and geography.<sup>3</sup> Service in the German military was likewise viewed as an effective tool to reconcile Alsatians to

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<sup>1</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1871, 39 Sitzung, May 20, 1871, 815, R 101 3556, BABL

<sup>2</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1874, 12 Sitzung, March 3, 1874, 201, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>3</sup> See Harp, *Learning to be Loyal*.

Germany. Within the ranks it was believed that young male Alsatians would rediscover their forefathers' German roots and be taught discipline and love of Emperor and country. Deputy Wagner articulated this view during a Reichstag debate in May 1871. He observed,

In the German Reich there is no other institution more effective in assimilating and binding (*verbrüdern*) newly conquered lands to us than the German army. I therefore completely share the wish that we do not wait too long to introduce this comradely institution (*Verbrüderungsinstitut*), so that therein we can soon greet our German brothers from Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, while Imperial authorities hoped that time in the ranks would facilitate Alsatians' reconciliation with the German Reich, the prospect of German military service was one of the primary motivators behind the high number of Alsatians' options for French citizenship.

Alsatian parents were more likely to opt for French citizenship if they had sons who would be liable to be called up for service in the German military. Looking at the figures for the environs of Strasbourg, an area in which only .6% of the population opted for France, Wahl observes that 80 of the 414 optants had a son who was born in 1851 and would have been eligible for German military service.<sup>5</sup>

The reluctance of recruits from Alsace and Lorraine to complete their military service in the German army is legendary and reached absurd proportions in the years immediately following the transfer in sovereignty. In 1872, German authorities called up the classes of 1851 and 1852. Of the 33,475 eligible individuals, only 7,454 presented themselves.<sup>6</sup> The low turnout rate is indicative of the high percentage of the military eligible demographic that had opted and emigrated from the provinces. In addition, throughout the Imperial period a steady stream of

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<sup>4</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1871, 39 Sitzung, May 20, 1871, 821, R 101 3556, BABL.

<sup>5</sup> Wahl, *L'Option et L'Émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> Wahl, *L'Option et L'Émigration des Alsaciens-Lorrains*, 181.

young men from Alsace would illegally immigrate to France.<sup>7</sup> However, the high rate of refractors from mandatory military service was not unique to the Franco-German borderland. Historians have commented upon a similar reluctance of young men to don the uniform in France<sup>8</sup> and Russia.<sup>9</sup> Another factor that perhaps compounded the unattractiveness of military service in the German army was that in 1871, military service was not mandatory in France, although it would be reinstituted in 1872 in response to the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Thus some Alsatian youths' option for France may have also been a reaction against the potential of military service in general.<sup>10</sup>

Alsations were eligible for one form or another of German military service from the age of 17 to 42. The temporal breadth of the military service period was problematic for Alsations who wished to avoid being incorporated into the ranks of the German army. In practice, it meant that an individual who left the province after they turned 20 could not return until they were 43.

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to have an idea of the general form of the German military service they were fleeing. In Germany, every able-bodied male citizen from the age of 17 until 42 was eligible for some form of military service. The potential martial obligations for every German male fit for military service was a period from the end of their 20th to the beginning of their 28th year spent in the standing army. The first three years were comprised of active military service, with the following four in the reserves, and a further five years in the militia (*Landwehr*). See "Gesetz, betreffend die Einführung von Bestimmungen über das Reichskriegswesen in Elsaß-Lothringen. Vom 23.1.1872," *Reichsgesetzblatt* No. 5, February 3, 1872, 31, R 101 3556, BABL. Individuals who were not called up to active service during their first three years of eligibility were transferred to a reserves army (*Ersatzarmee*). Whether they participated in active military service or not, all German males from the age of 17 to 42 could be called to serve in the local militia (*Landsturm*) in cases of emergency. This military service requirement was also extended to immigrants to Germany. Such individuals would be held liable to whatever form of military service corresponded to their age, regardless if they had completed some form of military service in a foreign country. See Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 354, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>8</sup> See Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 296; Weil, *How to be French*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Lohr, *Russian Citizenship*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Frevert, *A Nation in the Barracks*, 40. Frevert identifies reluctance on the part of both the Prussian establishment and middle classes to support mandatory military service when Friedrich Wilhelm III decreed the "duty of military service" in September 1814, albeit for very different reasons.

Even military service evaders who had held off their return to Alsace until they were too old to be impressed into the German army faced the potential of being forced to pay fines for their shirking. Throughout the Imperial period and during the First World War, pro-French publications were unceasing in their criticism of the “German militarism” that forced Alsatians into the German army soon after provinces’ annexation in 1871. Such nationalist publications were not interested in nuance and it should come as no surprise that they did not mention that Imperial officials did exempt particular groups of the Alsatian populace.

In the years immediately following the transfer of sovereignty to Germany, there were multiple concessions that Alsatians could utilize to avoid German military service. One of the foremost groups to be freed from German martial duties were Alsatians who had served in the regular French army before December 1870. This allowance was also extended to individuals born prior to January 1, 1851. “Domestic relationships,” such as marriage or being the primary supporter of an aged parent were also grounds to provisionally circumvent mandatory military service. Moreover, up until 1877 Alsatians who had volunteered for incorporation into the German ranks were given a shorter service period.<sup>11</sup> Finally, on February 8, 1878, Kaiser Wilhelm I promulgated an amnesty order specifically addressed to the approximately 4,000 residents of the annexed areas who had been convicted for evading their military service and another 2,000 who were currently under investigation for the same offense. A pardon would be issued to any of these individuals who registered themselves with the military muster rolls prior to September 1, 1878 and entered into the army or navy if ordered by German authorities.

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<sup>11</sup> “Anlage, 26. März.1872,” *Übersicht über die Gesetzgebung, sowie die Einrichtung und den Gang der Verwaltung in Elsaß-Lothringen für 1871/72*, No. 14, 264-265, R 101 3556, BABL.

Evidence demonstrates that many eligible Alsatians and Lorrainers took advantage of these opportunities for release. Only 3,119 of the 7,454 young men who reported for German military service in 1872 were declared fit for duty. Of those eligible, 695 received exemptions for their previous service in the French army and 689 for their “domestic relations.”<sup>12</sup> A similar report for 1873 related that 8,702 of a total of 39,844 qualified Reichsland males reported for military service with 4,223 judged to be fit to serve. This year, 936 were released because of their previous military service and 226 for their domestic situation.<sup>13</sup>

The provisions that freed these categories of Alsatians from mobilization into the German military were at one level undoubtedly motivated by Imperial authorities’ concerns regarding the presence of elements in the ranks with questionable national loyalties. However, these policies also demonstrate German officials’ recognition and consideration of the province’s recent French past. Central state policies in regards to military recruitment and evasion were not imposed in their totality upon Alsace. Instead, these alterations to central laws demonstrate a willingness on the part of Imperial authorities to adapt existent German law to better fit the complex reality of the borderland. More relevant, for the purposes of this dissertation, however, is an examination of Germany’s policies and attitudes towards those former soldiers of Alsatian origin who either fought with France during the Franco-Prussian War and retained their French citizenship, but eventually sought permission to return to the province and be naturalized as German citizens, as well as towards those Alsatians who evaded German military service, but who subsequently sought official German aid in securing their release from the French military.

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<sup>12</sup> “IV. Militärangelegenheiten,” *Zweite Jahres Übersicht über die Gesetzgebung sowie die Einrichtung und den Gang der Verwaltung in Elsaß-Lothringen für 1872/72*, No. 38, 7-8, R 101 3556, BABL.

<sup>13</sup> “IV. Militärangelegenheiten,” *Dritte Jahres Übersicht über die Gesetzgebung sowie die Einrichtung und den Gang der Verwaltung in Elsaß-Lothringen für 1873*,” No. 46, 8, R 101 3556, BABL.

As the above examples demonstrate, it is problematic to construct an image of Imperial authorities that emphasizes their obstinacy in pushing through mandatory military service for Alsatians despite the alleged overwhelming evidence of widespread local resistance and alienation towards the regime. German officials continued to insist on mandatory military service because they believed they were witnessing genuine progress in the program. They saw the advancement of Alsatians' reconciliation with Germany articulated in the attitudes and bearing of returning young Alsatians who had completed their time in the ranks of the German army.

A report that gathered different descriptions of the effect that German military service had on recruits and their home communities was compiled by the War Minister in 1875/76. The accounts related that the returning recruits made a positive impression upon their hometowns and were "scarcely recognizable" because of their improved attitudes, cleanliness, character, confident demeanor, and German language skills.<sup>14</sup> Multiple reports expressed the belief that the positive influence of these returning Alsatian recruits would help alleviate the fear of German military service and significantly decrease the number of *refractaires* from the *Reichsland* fleeing to France. The 1. Battalion of the 130th Molsheim, Lower Alsatian Landwehr Regiment argued that "The young people who completed their military duty and returned to their native fold were better apostles of Germandom than hundreds of well-meaning officials' speeches and decrees."<sup>15</sup> Evidence that was drawn on to support this optimism was the presence of tension between the returning German Alsatian soldiers and their provincial comrades who had remained

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<sup>14</sup> Report from the 1. Bataillon/Saargemuend/Elsaß-Lothringischen Landwehr Regiment No 129, 1875/1876, R 901 29391, BABL.

<sup>15</sup> Report from the 1. Bataillon/Molsheim/Unterelsäßischen Landwehr Regiment No. 130, 1875/1876, R 901 29391, BABL.

in the French army, but returned on leave to the province. In one instance, a fistfight had allegedly broken out between the two groups in Rappoltsweiler.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps German authorities were politicizing an ordinary drunken brawl, but the existence of tensions that escalated to blows between German and French Alsatian soldiers also suggests that the process of instilling a pride grounded in service in the German army and opposed to that of their former French comrades was developing among Alsatian recruits by the mid-1870s.

### **The Multidirectional Migrations of Alsatian Soldiers**

It is also problematic to characterize the experiences of young male Alsations as either immobility in the province or as a unidirectional movement out of Alsace. In fact, the migratory pattern of young Alsatian soldiers is best characterized as a two directional flow. Although many young Alsations did legally opt or illegally emigrate to avoid German military service, it is also important to note that a significant number came to regret their decisions and sought release from French military service and permission to return to their homes in Alsace. The return of military eligible Alsatian recruits to the province began as early as 1872, when some 507 youth agreed to fulfil their service requisites in the German army in exchange for being allowed to reside in Alsace.<sup>17</sup> In judging such petitions, Imperial officials differentiated their treatment based upon the proximity of the annexation date, the date of enlistment, and the branch of the French military in which the applicant was mobilized. Alsations who had opted for French

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<sup>16</sup> Report from the 2. Bataillon/Schlettstadt/Unterels Unterelsäbischen Landwehr Regiment No. 130, 1875/1876, R 901 29391, BABL.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Rossé et al, *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, vol. 1 (Colmar: Verlag Alsatia, 1936), 71.

citizenship and remained in the French army or joined the French army after their option were in general treated with greater leniency than individuals who crossed the border at a later date.

The correlation between later enlistment date and the branch of the French military an Alsatian entered were closely connected. Until France's recruitment law of July 15, 1889, only French citizens were eligible to join the regular French military forces. In practice this meant that Alsatians engaged in these branches had either already been enlisted at the time of annexation, joined after they opted for French nationality, or were minors at the time of option but became French after they reached the age of majority. A report from the President of Lower Alsace in 1890 reported that 556 Alsatians from his region who were considered German by Imperial officials were currently serving in the active French army.<sup>18</sup> The regular branches of the French military were not open to non-French citizens. Instead, foreigners who wished to serve France had to do so in the French Foreign Legion. If an Alsatian petitioned for German aid in facilitating their release from the Legion, it was likely that the individual had crossed the border and illegally enlisted long after the option deadline passed. In such cases, the reputation of the Foreign Legion to corrupt its enlistees in a moral and physical sense combined with German prejudice against the illegal emigrants to make the re-naturalization process of these individuals more difficult.

Imperial authorities were more hesitant to readmit Alsatians who joined the French military at a later date. At one level, this reluctance reflected their disapproval and desire to curb illegal emigration from Alsace, but was also echoed the fact that in some cases German officials had specifically given the individuals in question the opportunity to reverse their decision and return to the province and been rejected. According to the German citizenship law of June 1,

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<sup>18</sup> Report from Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß, June 6, 1890, 122 D 17, ADBR.

1870, any German who emigrated and enlisted in a foreign army without the permission of the *Kaiser* was liable to have their German citizenship revoked. Imperial officials did not exercise this clause lightly and took extensive action to ensure that the individual in question was aware of the consequences of their foreign service and given the opportunity to return to Germany.

This is aptly demonstrated in the treatment of the earlier mentioned 556 Alsatians of disputed nationality from Lower Alsace who were on active service in the French army in 1890. The report from the President of Lower Alsace contained a copy of a notification that was relayed to the individuals' families who lived in Alsace. The note informed the reader that their family member had enrolled in the French military without permission and that following the provisions of the 1870 citizenship law would have his German citizenship revoked if he did not permanently return to the province within four weeks of receiving the warning.<sup>19</sup> The rest of the archival file documents Imperial officials' efforts to reach out and ensure that each of the 556 Alsatians was informed of the proceedings and given the opportunity to return to the *Reichsland*. Most of the cases ended in the forfeiture of German nationality, either through a response from the individual that officially gave up his German citizenship or through inaction and expiration of the four week deadline. Alsatians who wished to maintain their German citizenship were allowed to return to Alsace.<sup>20</sup>

German officials were not able to inform all of the eligible Alsatians simultaneously. The varying times of delivery were a combination of the breadth of France's global empire and obstructionism on the part of French officials. The sabotage in this latter case was easily facilitated by the fact that the Germans were reliant upon French channels to relay the

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<sup>19</sup> Report from Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß, June 6, 1890, 122 D 17, ADBR.

<sup>20</sup> Unterstaatssekretär to Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß, August 25, 1892, 122 D 17, ADBR.

notifications. One official expressed his doubt regarding the prospect of success for such a message by observing, "...if this letter is relayed through the medium of the French administration it is unlikely to achieve success because the military officials will not wish to release a soldier from his service, even if he serving in the Foreign Legion and even if, as is not uncommon, he is a German subject."<sup>21</sup> As a result, the four week deadline period began only after the individual in question had received the notification. The cases of the 556 Alsatians demonstrates that Imperial authorities did not always strictly and immediately apply central state laws in the Alsatian borderland. Instead, the recognition of Alsace's recent history and because of the population's sometimes murky nationality status, they utilized their discretion to ensure that each of the potentially affected individuals were fully cognizant of the potential consequences of their action and given the opportunity to return to the province. Only after they were certain that the relevant individuals had been fully informed did they take the step of revoking the citizenship of the Alsatians who chose to remain enrolled in the French military.

The return of former French soldiers to Alsace raised the question of their status for German officials. Should the Imperial administration view the migrants as immigrants who possessed German nationality prior to their emigration? Or should they be viewed as foreign immigrants who had never acquired German citizenship? The answer to these questions was key because it affected the former soldiers' military service obligations. If the former soldiers were considered to be emigrants then they would have to complete all the requisite military service until they turned 31. If the returning optants had never possessed German citizenship then they were freed from active military service – so long as they were over the age of 23. Ultimately, the German government chose the latter position. Alsatian optants were liable for the same duties as

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<sup>21</sup> Abschrift, No. 1509, R 901 30092, BABL.

any immigrating foreigner. An important perk of this status was that these individuals were able to complete their reserve service while remaining in Alsace. This decision sparked significant backlash from Alsatians who had not opted and were currently fulfilling the entirety of their military service obligations in the German army. The mobilized Alsatian soldiers were incensed that their “comrades” who had left the province and returned were allowed to “sit at home” while they were forced to sacrifice 3-4 years in active service and also time in the reserves.<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck found the complaints to be well-founded and in June 1876 ordered that the naturalization applications of optants who had been born after January 1, 1851 not be approved, so long as members of their military age group remained engaged in active service in the German army.<sup>23</sup>

Exceptions to this order could be made if the optant was returning to support a needy parent, married an Alsatian or Lorrainer woman, purchased or inherited property, had a brother who entered into German military service, or if they were unfit for military service as a result of some physical ailment. As a result of the breadth of the exceptions, it appears that the majority of naturalization petitions were approved. In the period between July 1 and December 1877 only 47 of 694 applications were declined. Rejections were usually the result of the applicant being a convict or having been judged to be a potential negative influence upon the province. Military service in the French army in itself was not a great detriment to a naturalization petition. 184 of the successful applications were from individuals still eligible for military service. A further 65

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<sup>22</sup> Alsatian recruits in the German army were required to be stationed outside the Reichsland. Separated from the everyday life and culture of the provinces, German authorities hoped to speed their assimilation to the Reich. Ironically, however, the prospect of being forced to leave Alsace and Lorraine caused many recruits to either not report for service or desert.

<sup>23</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 359, R 101 3557, BABL.

were granted after the individuals declared their willingness to fulfill their military duties in Germany. In all, Understate Secretary of Alsace-Lorraine, Karl Herzog, estimated that during the period from January 1873 until December 31, 1877 approximately 5,000 naturalization applications had been received and only 300 declined.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the Alsatian soldiers who were mobilized and chose to remain in the French army at the time of option applied for re-naturalization in 1873 and 1874. The defeat of France and annexation of the province had provoked reactions of anger and national feeling among some elements of the Alsatian population and led to cases of spontaneous enlistment in the French army. For some of these individuals, it did not take long to lose their ardor for military service. In such cases, Imperial authorities often found themselves being petitioned by once enthusiastic French Alsatian soldiers to assist in their release and return to the province.

One such petition originated from Jean Kissenberger. Kissenberger related that he had not fought in the Franco-Prussian War, but had been enticed shortly thereafter by promises from “French agents” to engage. He had been quickly disillusioned with French military service and finding himself in an “invidious situation” sought German authorities’ aid in securing his own release and that of his son. The elder Kissenberger described the emotions that led to his son’s enlistment as, “Like so many other young Alsations, he allowed himself to be carried away by youthful foolishness and enlisted and now bitterly regrets that action.”<sup>25</sup> Three other Alsations, Georg Durrenberger, Louis Kohler, and Laurent Bueb sought similar help from Imperial officials. They likewise cited “French agents” as enticing them to leave their “Fatherland” and enlist in France. The three men related that they now very much regretted their actions and

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<sup>24</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1878, 15 Sitzung, March 6, 1878, 359-360, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>25</sup> Note from Jean Kissenberger, April 14, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

wished to return to Alsace so that they might “serve our new Fatherland.” They also invoked the recent history of the province to argue, “We respectfully ask the Ministry to take into consideration the past political position of our province. In any other situation we would not have taken such a foolish step and enlisted [in the French army].”<sup>26</sup>

An interesting aspect of all the men’s cases is that although submitted separately and nearly a month apart, they were members of the same company in the 2nd Zouave regiment that was stationed in Mascara, Algeria. A revolt had broken out against French rule in northern Algeria in 1871 and it is likely that these men were a part of the French forces sent to quell the insurrection. The experience of colonial warfare apparently had convinced these Alsatians that living under German sovereignty was preferable to fighting rebelling indigenous peoples. Ultimately, the Alsatians were lucky in that their petitions were received within the permissible nationality options period. As a result, the Chancellor’s office instructed German ambassador Arnim to inform the men to opt for German citizenship and demand to be sent home.<sup>27</sup> Other disgruntled Alsatian enlistees in the French military utilized less formal means to secure their release. The proximity of the Franco-German border was always an enticement and potential escape route for Alsatian soldiers who came to regret their decision to enlist in the French or German armies.

In general, Imperial authorities were less inclined to support the discharge applications for Alsatians who had enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. This hesitation stemmed from a range of factors that included the Legion’s reputation for corrupting the mores of its members, the concern that such elements would have a negative influence upon the Alsatian populace,

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<sup>26</sup> Note from Georg Durrenberger, Louis Kohler, Laurent Bueb, May 12, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

<sup>27</sup> Reichskanzler to Kaiserlichen Botschaften Herrn Gr. v. Arnim, May 14, 1872, R 901 30051, BABL.

and the fact that many of the later Alsatian enlistees in the Foreign Legion had illegally left the province in order to avoid German military service. However, an important caveat, to these observations is that applications for naturalization from Alsatian Legionaries who enlisted around the time of the annexation were often treated with greater leniency than the later Alsatian enlistees. One report from 1873 related that 211 Alsace-Lorrainers who entered into the French Foreign Legion after the expiration of the options deadline had sought to be reclaimed by Germany and allowed to return to their Heimat.<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, after diplomatic communications between German and French officials, 97 of the individuals were released to return to Alsace.

These individuals were fortunate, as German officials did not welcome nor facilitate the homecoming of every Alsatian petitioner who wished to be released from French military service. In 1881, German Foreign Secretary Friedrich Wilhelm Graf von Limburg-Stirum wrote to *Statthalter* Edwin von Manteuffel to relate that the number of petitions from Alsatians and Lorrainers asking for German aid in securing their release from the French Foreign Legion had recently grown exponentially. As a result, he was instructing the German Ambassador in Paris to only approve the release of such individuals in exceptional circumstances. The Foreign Secretary explained this decision by saying,

Notoriously, there can be found among the elements who enter the Foreign Legion only a small portion whose return to their Heimat can be seen as desirable from an economic standpoint. Most by far are work-shy, lazy people whose morality is likely to have been heavily damaged by their service time in Algeria. It is not only not in our interest to bring such elements en masse back to Alsace-Lorraine, but it is also politically harmful to continually scatter former French soldiers throughout the *Reichsland*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Dritte Übersicht über die Gesetzgebung sowie die Einreichung und den Gang der Verwaltung in Elsaß-Lothringen für 1873, No. 46, R 101 3557, BABL.

<sup>29</sup> Foreign Secretary Friedrich Wilhelm Graf von Limburg-Stirum to Statthalter Edwin von Manteuffel, February 12, 1881, 27 AL 335, ADBR.

Limburg-Stirum's first concern was not the fact that the Alsatians and Lorrainers had illegally enrolled and served in the French army. Instead, he focused on the stereotype that only particular types of people – in this case non-productive elements of society – were attracted to service in the French Foreign Legion. Moreover, he believed that the notorious debauched atmosphere of the Legion would be sufficient to break down the morality of most enlistees. Faced with these circumstances, the fact that the petitioners were Alsatian was moot. German officials would have excluded any such applicants from residency in the *Reichsland*. The note also suggests the official position that Alsatians who had broken German law, crossed the border, and enrolled in the French military had given up their right for automatic inclusion into the German nation. Their applications to be readmitted to the *Reichsland* would be judged using the same criteria as any other foreigner.

The foremost consideration in such naturalization applications was whether the individual would be a productive member of society or a liability. The reputation of the French Foreign Legion worked against Alsatian applicants on both points. Throughout the Imperial period young Alsatian men continued to enlist in the Foreign Legion and a portion of these individuals invariably applied for official German aid in securing their release. Newspapers also kept the phenomenon in the public eye by periodically publishing articles warning the province's youth of the physical and moral dangers that accompanied service in the Legion. Writing in 1910, Statthalter von Wedel wrote with satisfaction that since 1871 there had been a "considerable" reduction in the number of Alsatian youth who were entering into the French Foreign Legion. He concluded that "I have the impression that despite all of the inhibitive influences the

development of the German mindset continues to advance and it may be supposed that the tacit work of the schools will be successful in further lessening the number.”<sup>30</sup>

Archival sources do suggest that the number of Alsatian youth crossing the border to France did decline over the course of the Imperial period. One indirect piece of evidence is France’s promulgation of a more inclusive recruitment law in 1889. As previously discussed, French recruitment laws prior to this piece of legislation only allowed French citizens to enlist in the regular branches of the French military. This policy meant that only those contingents of Alsatians who had either chosen French citizenship or were opted as minors before October 1, 1873 had the opportunity to serve in the regular armed forces. As a result, any German nationality possessing Alsatian who crossed the border at a later date could only join the French Foreign Legion.

Writing to *Statthalter* Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst in 1892, the Minister of War remarked on the limited appeal of the Legion saying, “As a result of the arduous service and the especially severe treatment that Legionaries are subjected to, enlistment in the French army does not appear especially alluring to the youth of the *Reichsland*.”<sup>31</sup> The diminishing appeal of service in the French Foreign Legion occurred during a time of general demographic decline in France.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the drop in Alsatian recruits necessitated that French officials take steps to make military service more attractive. In this light, several clauses of the July 15, 1889

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<sup>30</sup> Graf von Wedel to the Auswärtiges Amt, November 22, 1910, 27 AL 335, ADBR.

<sup>31</sup> Kriegsminister to Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, February 23, 1892, R 901 30088, BABL.

<sup>32</sup> C.C. Eckhardt, “The Alsace-Lorraine Question,” *The Scientific Monthly*, vol. 6, No.5 (May 1918), 434. This conclusion stands in contrast to later claims by Francophile writers that “thousands” of young Alsatians and Lorrainers continued to leave the provinces in order to join the French Foreign Legion. For instance, Eckhardt claimed that between 1900 and 1913 over 22,000 boys fled the *Reichsland* to enlist.

recruitment legislation appear to be specifically directed at appealing to young Alsatians. German officials certainly interpreted this to be the case. Article 59 in particular seemed aimed at the youth of Alsace and Lorraine. The article stated that “young men born in a foreign country to a Frenchman who had lost their French citizenship (*qualité de français*)” could from the age of 16 voluntarily enlist for three years in the French navy or for the same period in the French army after they turned 18.<sup>33</sup> A report from Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst provides valuable data regarding the number of Alsatians and Lorrainers leaving the provinces and also made an interesting distinction between those who were legally applying to be released from their German citizenship and those *refractaires* who simply crossed the border to France.

**Table 1: Number of Alsatian Youth Legally and Illegally migrating from the Province, 1881-1890**

Year	Number of Granted Release Certificates ( <i>Entlassungsurkunden</i> )	Number of Condemnations for Failure to Report for Military Service ( <i>Verletzung der Wehrpflicht</i> )
1881	1237	875
1882	1196	1753
1883	1337	1561
1884	1240	2433
1885	1008	1849
1886	1127	1896
1887	1158	1398
1888	952	2434
1889	749	1850
1890	645	1801
Total:	10,649	17,850

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<sup>33</sup> Note from Kreisministerium, Berlin to Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, February 23, 1892, 69 AL 651, ADBR.

Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst pointed out that the number of applications for legal release from German citizenship had declined over the outlined period, while the number of *refractaires* had remained relatively constant. He claimed that simply crossing the border to France did not necessarily correlate to a desire to “be” French. Instead, the *Statthalter* argued that Alsatians and Lorrainers who genuinely wished to be French were those individuals who went through the legal process of emigrating, while the *refractaires* that crossed the border sought to avoid military service altogether.<sup>34</sup>

Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst also noted Article 59’s close connection with Article 10 of the Civil Code that had received a similar revision on June 26, 1889. Article 10 read, “Every individual born in France or abroad to parents who lost their French citizenship (*qualité de français*) are able to reclaim this status at any age according to the conditions in Article 9 [declaration of the applicant or that of the lawful representative if the petitioner was a minor].”<sup>35</sup> The *Statthalter* observed that these clauses would undoubtedly be used in practice to naturalize Alsatian and Lorrainer youth whose fathers had possessed French citizenship. However, he argued that the altered legislation did not provide the German government grounds to lodge a diplomatic complaint because fashioning of laws regarding the awarding of citizenship and military service were the prerogative of every individual state.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst to Kriegsminister Kaltenborn-Stachau, April 13, 1892, 69 AL 651, ADBR.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst to Kriegsminister Kaltenborn-Stachau, April 13, 1892, 69 AL 651, ADBR.

<sup>36</sup> Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst to Kriegsminister Kaltenborn-Stachau, April 13, 1892, 69 AL 651, ADBR.

Subsequent reports suggest that Imperial officials concerns were grossly exaggerated. In 1893, the Regional Presidents of Upper and Lower Alsace reported that only 23 young Alsatians in *total* had made use of the provisions 1889 law to enlist for three years in the French army.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, many of these 23 individuals had some previous connection to France, such as an earlier option that had been declared invalid by German officials. Unfortunately, to date I have not located similar data as that contained in the table for the period following the passage of the 1889 legislation. Doubtless young Alsatians continued to utilize both legal and illegal means to leave the *Reichsland* and cross to France. Yet this low number of young Alsatians who decided to utilize the provisions of the 1889 legislation appears to confirm Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst's argument that many of the individuals who left Alsace and crossed to France did so out of a general desire to avoid military service in general and not solely to avoid completing it in the German army.

### **Applying for Naturalization during the Imperial Period**

Every individual seeking to be naturalized in Alsace was required to be evaluated using a common questionnaire. The queries that this sheet contained highlight Imperial authorities' primary areas of interest and concern in relation to the admittance of foreigners to the *Reichsland*. The naturalization form asked if the petitioner: 1) had been a French soldier and the specifics of any service; 2) had opted for French citizenship or emigrated from the province and the associated dates; 3) the reason why the applicant was applying for naturalization; 4) if the official in charge of the naturalization case thought that having the petitioner in the province

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<sup>37</sup> Report from Bezirkspräsident des Unterelsaß, March 27, 1893 and Report from Bezirkspräsident des Oberelsaß, January 16, 1893, 69 AL 651, ADBR.

seemed desirable and useful or potentially problematic; 5) was the naturalization supported by the applicant's home community; 6) what was the reputation and property of the petitioner and his family; 7) what was the national attitude of the applicant and did he concern himself with politics; and 8) what was the reputation and property holdings of the petitioner's next of kin in the province.<sup>38</sup> In order to understand the way in which German officials weighted the answers to these questions it is important to study a few exemplary applications.

The case of Jacob Veltz illustrates a case in which a naturalization application was approved on the basis of the projected benefit that the applicant would bring to the province. Veltz fought in the French 96th Infantry Regiment during the Franco-Prussian War and opted for French citizenship in 1872. In his application, Veltz claimed to have emigrated because his wife had held a salaried position in a straw hat factory in France, while he was able to find home-work as a tailor. Following his wife's death, Veltz decided to return to Alsace. His application was deemed desirable because of his reputation for respectability and his skill as an artisan.<sup>39</sup> In another instance, a shortage of farm laborers and Martin Pfeiffer's reputation as a hardworking and honorable man contributed to the approval of his application.<sup>40</sup>

Imperial authorities were also prone to favor applications from former soldiers who petitioned to be able to return to Alsace in order to care for an ill or aged parent. George Hillbold had opted for French citizenship in 1872 and served in the French army until 1877. In his application, he related that he wished to return to Alsace in order to support his sickly father. The official recording Hillbold's answers observed that the province would not gain anything in

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<sup>38</sup> For multiple examples of such naturalization forms see 395 D 38, ADBR.

<sup>39</sup> See Naturalization Application for Jacob Veltz, December 10, 1878, 395 D 38, ADBR.

<sup>40</sup> See Naturalization Application for Martin Pfeiffer, 395 D 38, ADBR.

particular by approving the application, but that the father would benefit from his son's presence. In the end, German authorities elected to delay a final decision on Hillbold's case for 6-8 months. The reason for the final decision's postponement was to see if Hillbold's younger brother would voluntarily complete his military service in Germany or like his brother cross the border to France. After the brother did report for duty, Hillbold's application was approved and he was made an active reservist in the German army.<sup>41</sup> Hillbold's case exemplifies two important trends in German naturalization thought. The first was financial considerations. Although Hillbold did not have any particular skill that would benefit Alsace's economy, his care for his father lessened the chances that the elderly Hillbold would end up having to be supported by government funds. The case also highlights the tendency by provincial officials to approve naturalization applications from former French soldiers if an immediate male family member was currently serving or expected to enter the German military. Such a commitment demonstrated the family's acquiescence that as German citizens they needed to fulfill particular duties and responsibilities. Perhaps the advance of German "ways of thinking" in the province was also illustrated in the brothers' different choices.

Yet just as Hillbold's brother's service in the German army could facilitate the approval of his application, the failure of a family member to fulfill their martial duties could lead to an application's rejection. This occurred in the case of Joseph Breitsch. Breitsch had fought against Germany and opted to remain in French military service following the annexation of Alsace. In 1879, he submitted a naturalization application to German authorities with the justification that he wished to return to the province to care for his elderly mother. The official recording the responses to the questionnaire related that although Breitsch could certainly be a

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<sup>41</sup> See Naturalization Application for George Hillbold, April 2, 1878, 395 D 38, ADBR.

significant source of support for his mother, his presence in the *Reichsland* would not have any particular usefulness for the state. Moreover, Breitsch had a documented tendency to overly indulge in alcohol and had two brothers who had immigrated to France in 1871. The decisions of his siblings were interpreted as being demonstrative of a pro-French mindset in the family. In the end, these factors, combined with the fact that the mother did not possess any property, led German authorities to conclude that the brothers could care for her just as well in France as in Alsace. The application was rejected.<sup>42</sup>

### **Case Study: The Scherbeck Family**

The experience of one family from Willgottheim weaves together multiple threads of the naturalization narrative. Brothers August Victor and Franz Anton Scherbeck applied to Imperial officials for permission to return to their home community of Willgottheim and be naturalized as citizens of Alsace-Lorraine in 1876. Both men had served in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War and claimed to be motivated to return to the province out of a sense of filial duty to care for their disabled father. A subsequent investigation by the local Police Commissioner, however, suggested less altruistic motives behind the brothers' return. Police Commissioner Scholtz argued that Franz Scherbeck's true motivation to return to the province was a desire to marry his brother's young widow and to get his hands on his father's property. Moreover, Scholtz reported that Franz' actions and attitude did not recommend themselves for his naturalization's approval. Franz had already had several brushes with the law. Nor did Scholtz' report look favorably upon the other brother. August Victor worked as a mechanic in the nearby

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<sup>42</sup> See Naturalization Application of Joseph Breitsch, June 15, 1877, 395 D 38, ADBR.

community of Wasselonne and was alleged to never ask about his father. Scholz' report stood in stark contrast to the glowing description of the brothers' reputation and the support they received from Willgottheim's mayor. Scholz explained the discrepancy as the result of "political reasons" and described the mayor as a "barkeep" and "huckster."<sup>43</sup> In this instance, provincial officials in Strasbourg followed Scholz' advice and ordered the expulsion of the brothers from Alsace.

In response to this order, Franz Anton Scherbeck wrote *Oberpräsident* von Moeller. The letter read,

I am not in the position to describe to your Excellence the pain that this sentence has caused me. It is so much harder knowing that our poor, sick, 79 year old father will be stripped of all help and once more lose two sons, who are his only support and who are ready to comply with any directive given by Reich's officials, if they be allowed to stay...<sup>44</sup>

In this letter, Franz again sought to emphasize the duty he felt to care for his father and attempted to draw von Moeller's attention to the improvements he had made on his father's farm since he had returned to the province. The appeal proved to be unsuccessful, as was another that was written later that winter on Franz Anton's behalf by the mayor of Willgottheim. That might have proved to be the end of the affair if the father had not suddenly become ill and died in December 1877. The men were given permission to return to the province for 10 days in order to set their father's affairs in order.

The allotted time, however, proved insufficient and the brothers were still requesting extensions to their stay in February 1878. In late January, however, Franz Anton decided to make his naturalization appeal directly to Bismarck. The letter is the most detailed chronicle of Franz Anton's life surviving in the archival record, but its significance lies in that the application

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<sup>43</sup> Polizeikommissar Scholtz to Kreisdirektor Strasbourg, September 21, 1877, 395 D 38, ADBR.

<sup>44</sup> Franz Anton Scherbeck to Oberpräsident Elsaß-Lothringen Eduard von Moeller, June 10, 1877, 395 D 38, ADBR.

is a clear example of Franz Anton tailoring the language of his appeal to address the questions on the official naturalization application. Franz Anton explained that he had served in the French military during the Franco-Prussian War and had opted in 1872 because he was employed in a salaried position in Paris, but decided in 1876 to return to Alsace. He went on to highlight that the death of his father had left him with a “not insignificant” amount of property in Alsace and that his family enjoyed an “impeccable” reputation in the community.<sup>45</sup> Whether it was the brothers’ changed status as property owners in Alsace or another factor that Bismarck found convincing, the President of Lower Alsace, Carl Ledderhose, ordered the *Kreisdirektor* to reconsider Franz Anton and August Victor’s naturalization decision in February 1878. As a result of this re-evaluation, *Oberpräsident* von Moeller approved a six month probationary residency in Alsace for the brothers. During the provisional period both brothers would marry local women and receive the support of their local community leaders. Their naturalization applications were approved on March 2, 1880.

Franz Anton and August Victor Scherbeck’s cases illustrate several important aspects of the relationship in the *Reichsland* between former French soldiers and Imperial authorities. First, Franz Anton’s appeal over the head of the provincial officials that had denied his first naturalization claim demonstrates the belief that central authorities would be more responsive and sympathetic to his situation. The fact that after sending the letter the order was given to reevaluate the brothers’ cases likewise demonstrates that national officials did not feel compelled to uphold the decisions of their provincial counterparts in a show of bureaucratic solidarity. Instead, central authorities’ instructions to “reconsider” the matter demonstrated a willingness to

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<sup>45</sup> Franz Anton Scherbeck to Kanzler des Deutschen Reiches Otto von Bismarck, January 15, 1878, 39 D 38, ADBR.

reverse the decisions of provincial leaders if they felt the latter had either judged individual cases wrongly or too harshly. Finally, Franz Anton's decision to highlight the non-nationalistic motivation behind his initial option for French citizenship, his status as property owner in Alsace, the unimpeachable reputation he held in his local community, and later marriage to a local woman seem too specific to be a coincidence. Particularly, when we take into consideration that the naturalization questionnaire contained inquiries that addressed each of these subjects. Thus we can interpret Franz Anton's letter to Bismarck and his subsequent actions as having been deliberately initiated and addressed with full knowledge of the information and answers that Imperial officials sought.

While Franz Anton and August Victor were engaged in their dialogue with provincial and central German officials, a relation of theirs also submitted an application to be naturalized as a German citizen in the *Reichland* in January 1878. Marie France Eugen Scherbeck explained his decision to initially opt for French citizenship by relating, "at the time of the options transfer, I was serving in the French military as a brigadier in the 4th Hussars regiment. As a soldier, I did not find it reconcilable with my honor to break my oath of allegiance. For that reason, I opted for French citizenship before the mayor of the 5th arrondissement of Paris on August 31, 1872."<sup>46</sup> Now, his military service completed, Scherbeck sought to return to Alsace in order to support his elderly parents. Unlike other cases, Scherbeck's file contained two questionnaires that were completed in January and March 1878. Unfortunately for Scherbeck, the conclusions of each form were similar. In response to the prompt if Scherbeck's naturalization appeared beneficial to the province, the German official wrote "No! Nor do I see it as being advantageous because Scherbeck belongs to one of the most anti-German families...I am certain that the

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<sup>46</sup> Marie Franz Eugen Scherbeck to Kreisdirektor Hasse, January 11, 1878, 395 D 38, ADBR.

father's singular and well-known hate of Germany will sooner or later create a political figure.<sup>47</sup>

Scherbeck's application was supported by the mayor of Willgottheim, but like Police Commissioner Scholtz, the recording official observed that the local support came out of a desire to "strengthen anti-German" feeling in the community.

Based on this information, Carl Ledderhose, the President of Lower Alsace, rejected Scherbeck's application and gave him 8 days to leave the Reichsland before he would be forcibly expelled over the border. Unlike Franz Anton and August Victor, there is no archival evidence that Marie France Eugen Scherbeck persisted in his attempt to be naturalized as German. The difference in outcome between the applications of the Scherbeck brothers and Marie France Eugen Scherbeck demonstrates that German officials were less concerned with prior military service in the French army than they were worried about the potential negative influence of immigrants in the present. Marie France Eugen Scherbeck was excluded from German citizenship not because of his time in the French ranks or even his earlier option for French citizenship, but rather because German officials feared that as a member of a famously anti-German family, he would become a rallying point for discontent and a potential security risk for the Imperial regime. Germany's decision to screen petitioners and selectively approve applications was not a sign of an anti-French nor an anti-Alsatian bias, but rather simply an instance of a state acting in its own perceived self-interest.

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<sup>47</sup> See Naturalization Application of Marie Franz Eugen Scherbeck, March 9, 1878, 395 D 38, ADBR.

## Military Service as a Matter of Equality

Imperial officials saw the presence of foreigners and former French Alsatian soldiers in the province as a twofold threat. Naturally, German authorities were always wary of allowing a significant population of ex-French soldiers and French citizens to grow and freely develop within the *Reichsland*. Yet when it came to German citizenship policy and foreigners residing in Alsace, officials' primary concern was that the "privileges" the non-Germans enjoyed could prove to be a consistent source of resentment amongst the German Alsatian population. Not surprisingly, the largest population of "foreigners" in Alsace and the element that most concerned Imperial authorities were French citizens. Yet, as Max von Puttkammer observed to *Statthalter* Manteuffel, the problem lay not with the entirety of French citizens resident in Alsace, but rather with the male, military aged portion of the population. The foreign French population in the province was partly comprised of Alsations who had opted for French citizenship. These individuals' status as foreigners precluded them from service in the German army, while their residency in Alsace also facilitated their avoidance of French military service.<sup>48</sup> The presence of a French element that for all intents and purposes stood completely free from any military service was guaranteed to generate resentment among German Alsatian citizens toward the Imperial administration.

The *Elsässer Journal* reprinted a memorandum between *Statthalter* Manteuffel and the Secretary of State of Alsace-Lorraine Georg von Hofmann that proposed a solution to this dilemma. The note began with the premise that French citizens born outside the province and individuals who had legally opted for French nationality should be allowed to continue to reside

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<sup>48</sup> Der Vorsitzende der Kommission zur Prüfung der Staatsangehörigkeit von Optanten, Max von Puttkammer to Statthalter Edwin von Manteuffel, December 21, [illegible year], 27 AL 318, ADBR.

in Alsace undisturbed. However, the “unnatural” situation created by the population of military eligible non-German young men living in the province needed to be resolved. To this end, Manteuffel proposed that whenever a foreign male turned 17 his family would be given the option to either be naturalized as German citizens as a group or just the son individually. Families who turned down the opportunity for German nationality would be allowed to continue to reside in the province.<sup>49</sup> However, the non-naturalized military aged son would be forced to leave the province and only be permitted to visit his family in Alsace for 2-3 weeks a year.<sup>50</sup> Puttkammer argued that from an international relations standpoint, this scenario was preferable to the outright expulsion of all military aged male foreigners.<sup>51</sup>

Another significant problematic population in Alsace was young men who had legally applied for and received a release from German citizenship prior to their 17th birthday. The original intent of this declaration was to allow an applicant to emigrate and start a new life outside of Germany. However, in Alsace, some of the minors who made use of this clause subsequently returned to permanently reside in the province. Manteuffel observed of these individuals, “The residence of these young people, who although born in Alsace-Lorraine have not discharged their duty to serve in the German army, makes an ill impression upon those Alsatians and Lorrainers who loyally fulfilled their duty to the Fatherland.”<sup>52</sup> He went on to observe that 359 individuals who fit this category currently resided in the *Reichsland*. The 359’s

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<sup>49</sup> This toleration of permanent residence of non-German elements in the western borderlands of the Empire stands in stark contrast to German policies in the east, which in the 1880s saw widespread deportations of Jews and non-German Poles from Prussia.

<sup>50</sup> “Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Elsäßer Journal*, No. 205, August 31, 1884, 27 AL 318, ADBR.

<sup>51</sup> Der Vorsitzende der Kommission zur Prüfung der Staatsangehörigkeit von Optanten, Max von Puttkammer to Statthalter Edwin von Manteuffel, December 21, [illegible year], 27 AL 318, ADBR.

<sup>52</sup> “Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Elsäßer Journal*, No. 205, August 31, 1884, 27 AL 318, ADBR.

social background was primarily upper-class, as they were the only element of the population that could afford to send their sons abroad for their education. Manteuffel argued that the return of these young men to the province at an age in which they were still eligible for military service demonstrated that they had sought release from German citizenship not to found a new life outside of the state, but rather to simply avoid military service. The *Statthalter* took the position that it was in the interest of popular feeling and equality of treatment for all residents of Alsace-Lorraine to hold these individual accountable to the same laws as their poorer neighbors. As a result, he ordered that the 359 either be naturalized as German citizens and complete whatever level of military service corresponded to their age or leave the province within a period of four weeks.<sup>53</sup> In a later note to Hofmann, Manteuffel would observe of this population that, “The fact that these young people in the future will not be allowed to establish themselves in Alsace-Lorraine, will make fathers think twice before applying for a release certificate (*Entlassungsurkunde*) for their sons.”<sup>54</sup> Throughout this discussion, fears of a French “fifth column” developing within the Reichland was not the primary concern of German provincial and central state authorities. Instead, they emphasized the importance of fairness and sharing of the burdens of citizenship among all elements of the German Alsatian population as a means to avoid the threat posed by unchecked popular resentment.

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<sup>53</sup> “Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Elsässer Journal*, No. 205, August 31, 1884, 27 AL 318, ADBR.

<sup>54</sup> Statthalter Edwin von Manteuffel to Staatssekretär Georg von Hofmann, September 24, 1884, 27 AL 318, ADBR.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Providing for the Enemy: French Alsatian Veterans and the Issue of Pension Payments**

The issue of pension payments was an important point of discussion in the peace negotiations that occurred in Brussels and Frankfurt to end the Franco-Prussian War. As early as March 31, 1871, German negotiators declared their willingness to take over the payment of civilian and military annuities for eligible individuals from Alsace and Lorraine who chose not to opt for French citizenship. A critical caveat of this proposition was that the German administration would only assume responsibility for the payment of military pensions incurred prior to July 19, 1870.<sup>1</sup> In effect, the Imperial government wished to only take responsibility for those pensions acquired before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. A French report would observe that the German Empire, “did not want to make a commitment in the treaty to pay pensions to the benefit of soldiers who had taken up arms against it.” French delegates contested this position arguing that both the veterans of the pre-1870 campaigns and those of the Franco-Prussian War “had equally accomplished their duty in the service of the country that they had ceased to be citizens of only after the conclusion of the peace...”<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the German

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<sup>1</sup> Giesberg, *The Treaty of Frankfurt*, 247. A later addition to this article would guarantee the employment and maintenance of their current salary for the duration of their career for any currently serving public functionary or officer.

<sup>2</sup> “Protocole No. 5; Protocole de la Conférence tenue à Francfort le 21 Septembre 1871,” 5 AL 93, ADBR.

proposal was codified in the Article 2 of the *Zusatzkonvention* that was signed on December 11, 1871.<sup>3</sup>

On paper, the provisions of the *Zusatzkonvention* appeared to clearly lay out the parameters of Germany's responsibilities in regards to pensions payments to the French Alsatian veterans living in the *Reichsland*. Imperial authorities were to discover in subsequent controversies and discussions that adhering to such dichotomous guidelines proved impossible in practice. Instead, the annuities policies that were enacted in Alsace during the *Kaiserreich* often created confusion among both the Alsatian population and provincial authorities. The German administration never fully reaped the complete propagandistic benefits for their aid efforts to Alsatians. This stemmed from a variety of factors that ranged from contradictory and half-hearted measures, ambiguity of the support funds' source, and the lack of uniformity in implementing pensions' legislation across Alsace. Despite the problematic process through which pensions were awarded, the Imperial government lived up to the letter of its treaty codified pension payments for Alsatians, if not always its spirit. The study of the process by which French Alsatian veterans applied for governmental support and the subsequent reactions of provincial and state authorities demonstrates a mutuality of influence between individual applicants and official institutions. It shows that labels such as "Imperial authorities" need to be used with a sense of caution, as very real differences often separated the opinions of the different

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<sup>3</sup> "Art. 2, 152. Die Zusatzkonvention zum deutsch-französischen Friedensvertrage. Frankfurt a.M. 1871 Dezember 11," in *Bismarck und die Friedensunterhändler 1871* edited by Hans Goldschmidt (Berlin and Leipzig: Verlag von Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 271. Article 2 confirmed that the German government would take charge of the payment of all military pensions earned prior to July 19, 1870 for any resident or their dependents living in the annexed region who opted for German citizenship for as long as they lived in German territory. The article similarly stated Germany's agreement to pay civil and ecclesiastical pensions earned prior to March 2, 1871. The payment of all three types of pensions was to begin from March 2, 1871.

layers of official bureaucracy in Alsace and between provincial and central state officials in Berlin.

Studying the many applications for official support that resulted after the passage of multiple pieces of pension legislation likewise establishes the key role and influence of the petitioners. Prospective beneficiaries were far from passive when it came to applying for financial aid. Instead, they bombarded local, provincial, and even national authorities with petitions regarding pension payments. French Alsatian veterans existed as an unorganized “entitlement group” in the province. However, these former French combatants’ claims to special treatment stemmed not from service to the newly unified German state, but rather was articulated in the rhetoric of reciprocity. Applicants claimed that it was the legal and moral duty of German officials to honor their pension requests since they had relinquished the guaranteed support that would have accompanied an option for France for the promises of aid from Germany. French Alsatian veterans also sought to maximize the effectiveness of their petitions by utilizing a specific form of national rhetoric. An initial rejection for governmental support did not preclude a reapplication. Thus the study of veterans’ repeated petitions demonstrates an active knowledge of pension eligibility requirements, as well as the broader ideological issues that concerned *Reichsland* officials.

In Imperial officials’ minds there existed two distinct categories of French Alsatian veterans that resided in the province in 1871. The first group were those former soldiers who had participated in France’s military campaigns prior to the Franco-Prussian War. It was the support of these individuals that had been agreed to in the *Zusatzkonvention*. The other group of veterans was made up of individuals who had fought in the French army against Germany during the Franco-Prussian War. The first official provision providing for the support of these former

enemy soldiers did not occur until 1895, when a law that gave aid to needy German veterans of the 1870-71 war was extended to include the French Alsatian veterans. This was followed in 1901 by a law that awarded support to Alsatian ex-soldiers who had been disabled during the conflict, their dependents if the soldier had subsequently died in peacetime, and finally, to the survivors of soldiers who had been killed during the course of the conflict. The final piece of pension legislation that was passed during the period of the *Kaiserreich* occurred the year before the outbreak of the First World War in 1913.

### **Existent Pension Legislation**

The first official military pensions legislation for the new German Reich was promulgated close on the heels of the conclusion of the peace. On June 27, 1871, in two separate sections, the law spelled out degrees of support for long-service and disability for both commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers of the lower classes and provisions for their survivors. Alsatian French veterans were not eligible to receive any of the compensation outlined in the law's various sections. Indeed, the law would not be extended to cover German veterans living in Alsace and Lorraine until 1875.<sup>4</sup> The June 27 law also outlined the support

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<sup>4</sup> "(Nr. 671) Gesetz betreffend die Pensionierung und Versorgung der Militärpersonen des Reichsheeres und der Kaiserlichen Marine, sowie die Bewilligung für die Hinterbliebenen solcher Personen. Vom 27 Juni 1871," *Reichs-Gesetzblatt* Nr. 31, 10, 22. R 101 3557, BABL. Several sections of the law are relevant for comparative purposes for later legislation that was extended to ex-French soldiers in Alsace. Sections 3 and 59 of the law specified that injuries considered to be related to military service (*Dienstbeschädigung*) included wounding sustained in an engagement with the enemy, any permanent injury suffered during the exercise of active military service, and any lasting health damage associated with contracting an epidemic or endemic disease. There were five grades of monthly disability pensions to be paid out to low ranking soldiers. The rates of compensation and prerequisites ranged from the monthly award of 10 thalers for ordinary soldiers with "first class disability pensions," who had either accomplished 25 years of service or sustained an injury that left them completely unable to work and unable to survive without outside care, to the 2 thalers for individuals with "fifth class disability pensions," who were classified as either "semi-disabled" (*Halbinvalide*) or "fully-disabled" (*Ganzinvaliden*). The primary difference between these two groups was that the individuals in the former

that widows and any legitimate children would receive should their husband or father die whilst on active service. The legislation defined a war widow as the wife of an officer or soldier who had either died during the war or as a result of sickness or wounding died within a year of the conclusion of peace.<sup>5</sup>

### **Agreements Made: The German Payment of Pre-Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian Veterans' Pensions**

The study of German payments of French Alsatian veterans' pensions earned prior to the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War reveals the mutually influential relationship that existed between provincial authorities, central state officials, and the local populace. It also illustrates the often seemingly contradictory nature of German policy in Alsace. In agreeing to pay pensions for this group of French Alsatian ex-soldiers, German officials were assuming a significant financial responsibility. The composition of this large and diverse group of former combatants reflected France's violent nineteenth century. Claimants ranged from veterans of

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category could still be used for garrison service, while the injuries sustained by the latter forced them entirely from military service. Individuals who had suffered a catastrophic injury such as the loss of an eye or limb were entitled to receive an additional 6 thalers as an additional "disfigurement allowance" (*Verstümmelungszulage*) and a further 2 thalers would be awarded if the injury had occurred in the course of active hostilities. Finally, a critical prerequisite that would later have significant repercussions for both German and later Alsatian applicants with less visible infirmities was the law's requirement that a district physician provide a medical attest that explicitly stated the patient's contemporary disability was a result of their military service.

<sup>5</sup> "(Nr. 671) Gesetz betreffend die Pensionierung und Versorgung der Militärpersonen des Reichsheeres und der Kaiserlichen Marine, sowie die Bewilligung für die Hinterbliebenen solcher Personen. Vom 27 Juni 1871," *Reichs-Gesetzblatt*, 18, 28-29. R 1010 3557, BABL. The amount of support ranged from 500 thalers a year for the widow of a general to 60 thalers a year for the widow of an ordinary soldier. The law stipulated that this amount would be continued to be paid so long as the widow did not remarry, although in such a case the individual would continue to receive their pension for a year. Widows received additional financial aid for each child. In the case of an officer, 50 thalers were provided yearly for each child until the age of 17, while 42 thalers were awarded yearly to the children of common soldiers until their fifteenth birthday. Interestingly, these same monetary amounts were given to the parents or grandparents of a deceased soldier, provided that in life he had served as their only provider.

Napoleon's campaigns to the more recent colonial and intra-continental martial adventures of his nephew Napoleon III.<sup>6</sup> Aside from the common experience of French military service, many of the former soldiers in this category shared the attribute of advanced age and consequently were more likely to require significant and lasting official aid. Thus from a strictly economic position had the decision about which group of French Alsatian veterans to support simply been a matter of financial outlay, Imperial officials made a puzzling decision in deciding to support the group that would most tax German financial sources. The decision to privilege the interests of the older pre-Franco-Prussian War pensioners over those individuals who had been engaged in the most recent conflict also appears counterintuitive from an internal security standpoint. Simply put, in terms of defense, the goodwill of the militarily-fit component of the populace is more valuable than that of its senior citizens. Had the Germans intended to rule the province forever as conquerors, concentrating on cultivating friendly relations with the former group in both cases would have made more sense. Instead, Imperial representatives during the Frankfurt Treaty negotiations and in the first decades following Alsace's transfer of sovereignty deliberately chose a line of action and policy that appeared contrary at one level or another to Germany's immediate interests. No doubt Imperial officials hoped to generate goodwill among the veterans and general population through their support of those who most needed external support. But beyond the instrumental use of pensions to generate local approval, it is also an indication of a desire to not only rule the province, but to have their governance accepted by its

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<sup>6</sup> The agreement of Imperial negotiators in 1871 to pay the pensions of Napoleon I's veterans is particularly interesting given the tremendous resentment and symbolism associated with his conquest and dismemberment of the German lands and which continued to resonate amongst contemporary ordinary and policy-making Germans. For a discussion of how this memory helped shape Imperial authorities' post-Franco-Prussian War demands see Wetzel, *A Duel of Nations*.

people. It was a reconciliatory stance and position that German central authorities would lose sight of during subsequent decades.

### **Seeking Equality of Pensions**

An important storyline in the history of German paid pensions to pre-Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian veterans played out over the course of the 1880s. The first mention of the issue occurred in November 1880 when *Statthalter* Edwin von Manteuffel wrote to Bismarck that he was receiving petitions from French Alsatian veterans of the Italian campaigns. The subject of their requests was a raise of their pensions following rumors of the passage of legislation in France that increased the level of support for their French counterparts.<sup>7</sup> The importance of this particular episode is threefold. First, it demonstrates the existence of transnational networks of communication in Alsace between former French soldiers still living in the province and those living in France that conveyed personally relevant information at a rate faster than it was received through official channels. Second, it demonstrates individual initiative and expectations on the part of these petitioning groups of the former French combatants. Third, Manteuffel's inquiry to central officials in Berlin in response to these petitions demonstrates their effectiveness and *Reichsland* officials' responsiveness to local demands. This would be a hallmark of Manteuffel's and his successor, Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst's, tenures as *Statthalter*, as throughout the 1880s they sought to impress upon central authorities the critical importance of keeping pension payments to French Alsatian veterans living in Alsace at the same level of Alsations who had opted for French citizenship following the Franco-Prussian War.

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<sup>7</sup> Statthalter Manteuffel to Reichskanzler Bismarck, November 27, 1880, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

The petitions and internal discussions between *Reichsland* authorities and those in Berlin persisted throughout the 1880s. Manteuffel continued to receive requests that Imperial officials match French pension payment rates. It is worth reproducing one such petition in its entirety in order to examine the rhetorical devices the petitioners employed to articulate their own interests. One of the most striking aspects of the document is its use of language that emphasized the national significance of the pension equality issue. Moreover, it provides an alternative explanation to the long-standing claim of French propagandists that the great population exodus from Alsace and Lorraine following 1871 was attributable to the provinces' populations' deep rooted attachment to France. The petition instead suggests for some Alsatians that uncertainty and ignorance at the local level regarding the continuation of state support was the primary determining factor in the decision to opt for French citizenship. The petition below was addressed to *Statthalter* Manteuffel from a Moritz Hamion from Mutzig and was co-signed by 90 other individuals in January 1882:

In the year 1871, when Alsace-Lorraine was incorporated into the German Reich and it was required that individual citizens decide henceforth if they would belong to the German or French nation, the question that was raised for French military pensioners was "What should we do?" Lacking proper instruction and fearing the loss of their pension with an option for the German Reich, nearly all without exception opted for French citizenship. Only after the text of the December 11, 1871, *Zusatzconvention*, and especially the content of §2 was disclosed and were confirmed by German officials' responses did the military pensioners learn that Germany would assume the same commitments as the French and that individuals who opted for Germany would have the same rights as those in France, did the devotedness to the beloved Heimat prevail and a large number of reverse applications take place.

The Imperial German Government has fulfilled all of its promises and commitments and through it earned the love and respect of those who remained in the Heimat. Yet today a new question has arisen for pensioners who opted for the German Reich.

On August 18, 1879, after long negotiations in the French Deputies' chamber a law was accepted that stipulated that beginning on January 1, 1881 the pensions of noncommissioned officers, soldiers, and their widows would receive a not insignificant raise. Already the retroactive payments of this supplement for the year 1881 have everywhere begun.

How will the Imperial German government conduct itself in the face of this fact? Will it approve a similar raise for its adopted pensions or will it declare that it is unable and in so doing lessen the

material and social position of its citizens in relation to their French comrades? The loyal and obedient supplicants indulge the hope that the latter will not occur and that they likewise will be entitled to a raise of their pensions in proportion to the aforementioned law from August 18, 1879 and that the Imperial German government will regard the equalization of its subjects' pensions with those of French pensioners domiciled in Alsace as a moral duty.

The undersigned trustfully lay this statement in the hands of your Excellence and dare to appeal to your sense of justice and the so often demonstrated love of Alsace-Lorrainers and to ask your Excellence to grant their fair and inexpensive wish.<sup>8</sup>

Moritz Hamion and his fellow petitioners drew upon a number themes in order to justify their deservingness of an increased pension. Explicitly the petitioners attempted to recreate for Manteuffel the uncertainty that had faced the pensioned population in Alsace in 1871 and so highlight the courage necessary to trust that the newly empowered German state would follow through on its promises of support. The underlying contention was that such an investment in faith in the past deserved to pay dividends in the present. The petition also made it clear that since the pre-Franco-Prussian War veterans had remained in Alsace when so many of their comrades had chosen the safer route of opting for France, Imperial authorities had a moral, if not legislated duty to at a minimum ensure an equality of support between themselves and their French counterparts. Another, more implicit argument in the petition is that when the German state had fulfilled its obligations towards the former combatants it had been rewarded with their love and respect and that within the present pensions issue the Imperial authorities had the opportunity to further gain – or lose – the appreciation of their Alsatian subjects.

Hamion's and his colleagues' petition and others like it accomplished their goal of securing the support of Manteuffel. On February 9, 1882, in a note to Bismarck, the *Statthalter* cited information contained in the application regarding the passage of the new pension legislation in France. But instead of drawing upon a moral basis for his argument, Manteuffel

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<sup>8</sup> Moritz Hamion and Comrades to Statthalter Manteuffel, January 1882, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

chose a more pragmatic approach by framing the justification of an equalization of pensions in the terms of German political interest. He wrote,

I do not want to neglect to point out the ill-feeling that will arise amongst the numerous, mostly poor French military veterans who receive their pensions from Germany if they find their hopes disappointed that the German administration will not approve the higher, retroactive French pension sums and if they compare their position with their fellow countrymen who opted for the French nationality and now draw a higher pension. Therefore it seems to me a political necessity to counteract any potential and enduring ill-feeling by matching pension raises as they are introduced in France. In any case, it is only a matter of a momentary yearly outlay of an estimated 200,000 Marks because most of the pensioners are of an advanced age and therefore the rate of attrition is strong. The expense will likely decrease considerably from year to year and very soon totally disappear.<sup>9</sup>

Although this final comment might appear unnecessarily callous, Manteuffel's observations regarding the high mortality rates and rapidly diminishing required financial outlays were designed to highlight the temporary nature of the expense and so mitigate the hesitance of central Imperial policymakers to approve pension increases for former French soldiers without concurrent measures to raise the level of support for German veterans.<sup>10</sup> Manteuffel's argument was effective. A note from the Imperial Treasury in October informed the *Statthalter* that Bismarck had approved the equalization of pensions and that the new amounts would commence being paid on April 1, 1883. The necessary 149,000 Marks were to be incorporated into the 1883/84 Reich's budget.<sup>11</sup> The same note also informed Manteuffel that the petition from Hamion and his comrades was being returned. Thus Bismarck had it in his possession at the

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<sup>9</sup> Statthalter Manteuffel to the Reichskanzler, February 9, 1882, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

<sup>10</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1883, 49 Sitzung, February 3, 1883. Subsequent debates in the Reichstag revealed that 31 officers, 292 noncommissioned officers, 683 soldiers, and 283 widows and orphans (for a total of 1,289 pensioners) would enjoy an increase to their support. The same debate also provided evidence of the rapidly diminishing financial outlay associated with the equalization, by noting that the average age of the pre-Franco-Prussian War veteran in 1870 was 63. In 1873, the total financial outlay amounted to 1,200,000 Marks, by 1882, this amount had been reduced to 565,000.

<sup>11</sup> Reichsschatzamt to Statthalter Manteuffel, October 26, 1882, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

time of his decision and it is not unreasonable to conclude that their supplication might also have been influential on the Chancellor's final verdict.

Despite the agreement of *Reichsland* officials and Bismarck of the desirability to equalize pension payments in Alsace, the attempt to raise the necessary 149,000 M quickly bogged down in the Budget committee meetings and in the Reichstag. In an article in the *Elsässer Journal* from March 30, 1883, Strasbourg's representative to the Reichstag, J. Kablé, informed readers of his efforts to obtain support in the Reichstag for the measure. The issue that had caused him the most trouble was delineating the type of support that had been promised to the pre-Franco-Prussian War veterans by the Treaty of Frankfurt. On the one hand, pensioners argued that Imperial officials had guaranteed them the same treatment and care as their comrades who had opted for France. The problem, however, was that Kablé could not find a single collaborating piece of evidence despite extensive research efforts.<sup>12</sup> For their part, opponents of the measure argued that while the Treaty of Frankfurt had guaranteed pension payments to the French veterans, it did not have any provisions requiring or providing for their increase. Ultimately the measure was voted down by an overwhelming margin and the 149,000 Marks was cut from the 1883/84 budget.

The failure of the passage of the 149,000 Mark raise in the Reichstag did not end the pensions conversation over the course of the next several years *Statthalter* Manteuffel and later his successor, Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, continued to write to central authorities in Berlin asking that the Chancellor include the amount necessary to cover the pension increases in the yearly budget, only to be repeatedly rebuffed. 1886, in particular, seemed an opportune

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<sup>12</sup> J. Kablé, "Die Pensionen der alten französischen Militärs," *Elsässer Journal*, March 30, 1883, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

time to approve an augmentation of Alsatians' pensions. The Reichstag had passed a bill that provided for a general increase in military pensions. Hohenlohe once again wrote to Bismarck, arguing that the 109,000 M expenditure that would be necessary to equalize the pensions of French Alsatian ex-servicemen who possessed German citizenship with their French comrades was minimal in comparison to the amount that had just been approved for German veterans. Finally, the *Statthalter* once again observed that the equalization of pensions in the *Reichsland* was an important political issue.

Bismarck responded to Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst in November of that year. The memorandum is significant because it reveals the confused and changing trajectory of German policy in Alsace and Lorraine. Bismarck wrote,

...I do not deem it advisable to submit an additional charge to the budget for the purpose of a raise of the pensions of former French military persons and their next of kin.

These pensioners have done nothing of particular worth in the service of Germany to earn special consideration. The question if they in their entirety or even as a majority are worthy and in need can hardly be supported. A general raise of their pensions can also not be supported by reference to the military pension law of April 21. The beneficence of this law is only retroactive for such pensioned officers which took part in the Franco-Prussian War. Officers, like the formerly French pensioners, who were already receiving pensions at the beginning of the conflict are not considered. In addition, the provisions of the law are not applicable to individuals of the soldiery profession from the rank of sergeant and below and their next of kin. The majority of the French pensioners belong to these lower classes.

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Hereafter only individual French pensioners or their next of kin who are proved honest and have fallen into poverty will be awarded assistance. Insofar as the existing funds in the Alsace-Lorraine Treasury do not offer the necessary means - especially those of the *Gnadenpensionen* and *Gnadenbewilligungen* of every type, I am prepared to approve such support from the Imperial Reserve Funds. I can, however, not neglect to mention that these funds to a great degree have already been subject to claims as a result of his Majesty's order from July 22, 1884. As a result, applications of the mentioned type must be limited to the most desperate measures.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Reichskanzler Bismarck to Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, November 18, 1886, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

Whereas not participating in military campaigns against Germany had once been an element utilized to support claims from the pre-Franco-Prussian War French veterans for official support during the 1883 Reichstag debates, now the French Alsatian former combatants found themselves excluded because they had not taken part in the Franco-Prussian War. Thus the Alsatians veterans found themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place – as on the one hand they were unable to claim pensions from the German state if they had acquired their right to a pension after July 19, 1870 and on the other hand they were ineligible to receive a pension raise from the newest German legislation because they had not taken part in the 1870-71 conflict. A further irony of the situation was that most of the potential Alsatian claimants were members of the lower classes, the very people who were most likely to be in need of state support.

A concrete example of the difficult position that many French Alsatian veterans domiciled in Alsace found themselves in is provided by the case of Carl Schoellhammer. In 1893, Schoellhammer submitted an inquiry to Imperial authorities regarding the possibility of pension for his French military service. Understate Secretary von Schraut responded and informed Schoellhammer that he was ineligible for support because he had neither completed the necessary 30 years of service in the French army nor suffered an injury during his time in the ranks. An accompanying request that the German government pay him the 100 franc honorarium that accompanied being awarded a “Militär-Medaile” from the French government was likewise declined on the grounds that it had been bestowed after July 19, 1870. The compensation that von Schraut did offer Schoellhammer was an 80 mark yearly honorarium to be paid from Alsace-Lorraine’s central pay office.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Unterstaatssekretär von Schraut to Carl Schoellhammer, January 31, 1893, 27 AL 994, ADBR.

Interestingly, it is at this point that Moritz Hamion and his fellow petitioners reemerge in the pension saga. Their case demonstrates the measures, considerations, and outcomes that were taken by Imperial Officials in their case by case evaluations of pre-Franco-Prussian War French veterans' pension requests. The existing sources do not allow me to definitively say if the subsequent decision regarding a raise in their pensions for Hamion and his colleagues was in response to the earlier petition or was generated by a subsequent supplication. The sources do show Hamion and his comrades resurfacing as the subject of a "Record Notice" from December 10, 1886. Unfortunately for them, it was the notification that their application had been rejected because the government "only approved support for poor pensioners."<sup>15</sup> Given Bismarck's recent instruction that such cases be evaluated individually, perhaps it is not surprising that a petition with so many signatures would be turned down. What is puzzling about the procedure is that a mere 16 days later Emperor Wilhelm would write to *Statthalter* Hohenlohe and approve an increase to Hamion and his colleague's pensions, thereby throwing the entire process into further confusion.<sup>16</sup> This is the last mention I found of Hamion and his fellow petitioners in the sources. They should have considered themselves fortunate to receive their pension raises. In the following decades, the funds available for pre-Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian veterans only became scarcer. In November 1898, a Felix Fahsler was informed that funds were too limited to approve his request for a pension increase. In the margins of this note Understate Secretary von Schraut expressed his frustration writing, "Despite repeated letters to the Reich's

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<sup>15</sup> "Akten Notiz," December 10, 1886, 27 AL 994, ADBR.

<sup>16</sup> Emperor Wilhelm I to Statthalter Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, December 26, 1886, 27 AL 994, ADBR.

Chancellor and a resolution from the Reichstag, the Reich's Financial Administration has again refused to increase the *Reichsfonds*.<sup>17</sup>

Support for the war widows of the French Alsatian veterans of the pre-1870 conflicts were also affected by the limited Imperial funds. There is scant mention of their cases within the archival record, but within the few notes that do surface, it is evident that the shortage of funds forced *Reichsland* authorities to prioritize the claims of living veterans over those of their survivors. Thus a note from the *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen* in 1913 related that the necessary funds to support the demands of the pre-1870 French Alsatian former soldiers were insufficient and as a result, "The awarding of support to widows and orphans of such can no longer be considered."<sup>18</sup> A similar note from 1914 to a mayor demonstrated the persistence of this issue by informing him that support was to continue for cases in which the 80 M had already been awarded to veterans' survivors from state resources, but that future claims would not be recognized. Faced with a shortage of funds, *Reichsland* officials were forced to prioritize payment to recipients. The result was the privileging of the claims of living ex-soldiers over those of the deceased's survivors.

Several articles that were published by the *Amtliche Korrespondenz* in 1911 and the *Straßburger Korrespondenz* in 1913 give an approximation of the number of French Alsatian

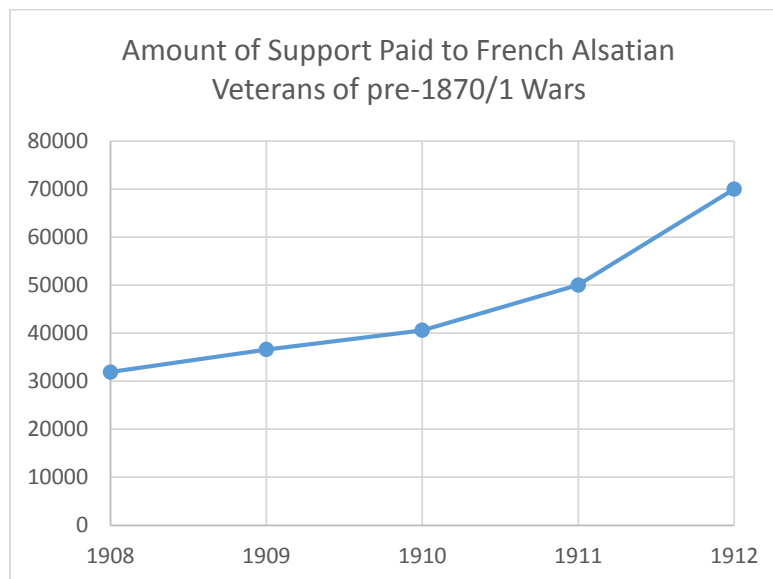
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<sup>17</sup> Unterstaatssekretär von Schraut to Felix Fahsler, November 24, 1898, 27 AL 994, ADBR. It appears that the pre-Franco-Prussian French Alsatian veterans, like their Alsatian Franco-Prussian ex-soldier counterparts, may have temporarily benefited from the passage of the 1895 legislation that provided for 120 M pensions for German veterans. However, a note from the *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen* related to the *Kreisdirektor* of Altkirch that beginning in April 1905, the Alsace-Lorraine treasury was being instructed to permanently reduce the amount of yearly support for pre-1870/71 French Alsatian veterans from 120 M to 80 M on account of insufficient funds. See *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen* to the *Kreisdirektor* of Altkirch, March 24, 1905, 1 AL 1/1331, (hereafter cited as ADHR).

<sup>18</sup> *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen* to *Kreisdirektor* Colmar, 1913, 3 AL 1/1417, ADHR.

veterans from the pre-1870 conflicts that were receiving the yearly sum of 80 M from the German government. The following graph and tables demonstrate a gradual increase in the number of Alsatian former combatants over the period between 1908 and 1912. The reported expenditure over these years demonstrates the veracity of the *Statthalter*'s contention that held the financial outlay necessary to cover the increased costs of these individuals' pensions would have been relatively minor in comparison to other pensions expenditures to which the Imperial government subsequently committed itself.

**Figure 2: Amount of Support Paid to French Alsatian Veterans of pre-Franco-Prussian War Conflicts, 1908-1912<sup>19</sup>**



Year	Amount Paid in Marks
1908	31900
1909	36600
1910	40600
1911	50000
1912	70000

<sup>19</sup> Statistics paid to French Alsatian veterans of the pre-Franco-Prussian War period provided by "Straßburger Stadtnachrichten," *Amtliche Korrespondenz*, October 4, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR. The 1911 and 1912 figures came from "Die Fürsorge für die Kriegsteilnehmer," *Straßburger Korrespondenz*, January 15, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

**Table 2: Number of French Alsatian Veterans from Pre-1870 Conflicts Receiving German Pensions<sup>20</sup>**

Year	Number of Recipients
1908	398
1909	457
1910	507
1911	625
1912	875

Before closing this section, it is important to examine one pension equalization case in order to ascertain how much of an increase the French Alsatian veterans were requesting. The relevant example is provided by Joseph Baumann. Baumann's initial pension that had been granted by the French government amounted to 180 francs (144 marks). The payment of this yearly sum was what the Germans had agreed to take over in the Treaty of Frankfurt. Between 1891 and 1895 similar pensions in France were raised to 240 Fr. (192 M) and in 1898 raised a further 25 Fr (30 M). Thus had Baumann remained a French citizen in 1900 he would have been receiving an annual pension of 265 Fr (212 M) – a difference of 85 Fr (68 M) a year. In other words, in 1900, by remaining in Alsace and becoming a German citizen Baumann had sacrificed 32% of his total pension due to the Imperial government's unwillingness to enact a policy of pension equalization with France. The difference in sum was on the one hand certainly significant enough to have made a difference in economic situation of the Baumann, while on the reverse side was a relatively minor expense for the German government to bear, especially in

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<sup>20</sup> The numbers in this table are approximate as the articles from which the total financial outlay was reported did not mention the actual number of recipients. The figure was arrived at by dividing the "Amount Paid in Marks" by 80. Non-whole numbers resulted in 4 out of the 5 calculations – a phenomenon that ideally should not have occurred because the legislation specified that no partial awards of the 80 M was permitted.

light of the larger political ramifications that the issue of pension equalization had in Alsace. An increase in assistance amounts for French Alsatian veterans of pre-Franco-Prussian War conflicts did not materialize until 1913. The *Straßburger Korrespondenz* reported in September 1913 that prior to the enactment of the most recent legislation some 865 French Alsatian ex-servicement were recipients of the yearly sum of 80 M. After September 1, the number of eligible recipient of this category jumped to 1,191 and were granted a yearly sum of 150 M.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, several arguments emerge regarding why it is important to study Imperial authorities' handling of the pre-Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian pensioners in a chapter dedicated to an examination of the treatment of Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans. The first comes from a contextual standpoint as without this particular investigation the period from the end of 1871 to the passage of the legislation in 1895 would be relatively barren from a pension standpoint. The second is that the treatment and policies towards the pre-Franco-Prussian War veterans was the precursor for the later 1895 legislation and provides an important point of comparative reference. Third, the case of the pre-Franco-Prussian War pensioners and in particular their efforts to obtain higher pension rates reveals a reciprocity of influence betwixt the local populace and provincial and state authorities. Taken as a whole, it demonstrates that the relationship between Alsations and Imperial officials in the province was not simply a matter of the latter imposing their will upon the former nor the former completely disengaging from the administrative framework. Alsatian pensioners worked within the established administrative system in order to affect change – without ever being completely subjected to it. The study of

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<sup>21</sup> “Die Fürsorge des Deutschen Reichs für die ehemaligen französischen Soldaten in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Straßburger Korrespondenz*, September 9, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR. The article did not report the new total expenditure, but if we multiply the total number of recipients by the 150 M reward, the sum is 178,650 M.

the treatment of the pre-Franco-Prussian War veterans likewise demonstrates that it is misleading to conceive of “Imperial authorities” as a monolithic bloc. Definitive differences in opinion often separated provincial authorities in Alsace and central state officials in Berlin with the former group regularly expressing the belief and frustration that the latter had an insufficient appreciation of conditions in the *Reichsland*.

### **Reconciling with a Former Foe: Unofficial Pensions and Legislation for French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War Veterans**

The first official legislation that provided for the payment of support for French Alsatian veterans of the Franco-Prussian War was not enacted until 1895. The Imperial German government had officially declined to assume pension payment responsibilities for Alsatian veterans and war widows who had acquired their right to a pension during the course of the Franco-Prussian War. German authorities’ abrogation of these pensions was not a general rejection of these individuals’ right to material aid, but rather a refusal that such support should come from German coffers. A contributing factor to the later date of German sponsored aid was a lack of widespread need for such legislation in the years immediately following the conflict. By and large most of the Alsatian ex-soldiers who would have left military service and opted to remain in Alsace in 1871 were healthy and able-bodied young men who had no reason or basis to make an immediate claim for state support. The numbers of pension eligible war disabled veterans and war widows were a distinct minority. In fact, the majority of French Alsatian ex-soldiers’ applications for official aid did not materialize until decades later, after the weight of years combined with once seemingly minor war service related afflictions to negatively affect a veteran’s ability to work and earn a living. As a result, the pension claims in the immediate aftermath of the conflict against the French state were relatively insignificant. Laws passed in

1895, 1901, and 1913 would all make provisions for the support of French Alsatian veterans of the 1870/71 conflict.

### **Unofficial Pensions: German Authorities and Disabled French Alsatian Veterans of the Franco-Prussian War**

The lack of official legislation providing for French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans as a whole did not mean the Imperial government declined to provide any form of support for their onetime foes. A close study of individual pension requests by Alsatians who had been disabled as a result of wounds received fighting in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War demonstrates that in exceptional cases Imperial authorities were willing to intervene and offer financial aid to former enemy soldiers, despite their official abrogation of such responsibilities in the Treaty of Frankfurt.

The main characteristics of these successful requests are illustrated by the individual cases of Leonard Strauel and Stephan Langenfeld. Leonard Strauel was the eldest of 11 children and received a thigh wound in the Battle of Wörth.<sup>22</sup> Prior to his military service, Stephan Langenfeld had been a weaver but was wounded in the right foot at the Battle of Mars-la-Tour.<sup>23</sup> The severity of both men's wounds precluded their return to their prewar occupations nor were their families able to support them. The men's pension applications were turned down by Upper Alsace's regional governor von der Heydt with the explanation that a law providing support for Alsatians wounded while serving in the French army did not exist.

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<sup>22</sup> Kreisdirektor to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, August 1871, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

<sup>23</sup> Kreisdirektor to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, August 3, 1871, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

Throughout the application process, the district director of Colmar acted as an intermediary between Strauel and Langenfeld and von der Heydt and the two men's advocate. In his support of Langenfeld, the *Kreisdirektor* observed that "...while a section of the Alsatian war disabled have turned to France and from there received a very handsome pension, Langenfeld has put his trust in German help..."<sup>24</sup> In this statement the *Kreisdirektor* articulated an unlegislated notion of moral reciprocity that held that Langenfeld was due a certain amount of extra consideration and financial support because of the faith he demonstrated in the German government by giving up his guaranteed French pension for the uncertainty of German benevolence. Whether moved by the *Kreisdirektor*'s reasoning or the plight of Strauel and Langenfeld, von der Heydt did grant each man financial aid in the form of a "onetime relief" (*einmalige Unterstützung*).<sup>25</sup>

The problem for both men, however, was that the fundamental facts of their disability and economic situations did not change. Already by December 1871, Strauel was forced to submit another request to Imperial authorities for financial aid. This time, however, von der Heydt referred the request to the President of Alsace-Lorraine, Eduard von Möller, and himself played the role of advocate to testify to Strauel's genuine need and worthiness of a further "relief" gift of 40 francs.<sup>26</sup> Von Möller approved the additional support. Langenfeld would likewise receive a second "relief" gift in May 1872. Further petitions were granted in June and October 1872.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Kreisdirektor* to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, November 23, 1871, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

<sup>25</sup> Strauel was awarded 10 thalers in August 1871, while Langenfeld's application was also successful, but he was forced to wait until December 1871 to receive 16 thalers.

<sup>26</sup> Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt to President of Alsace-Lorraine, Eduard von Möller, December 7, 1871, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

<sup>27</sup> *Kreisdirektor* of Colmar to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, October 11, 1872. 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR. In the note, the *Kreisdirektor* again articulated his argument for pensions for Strauel and Langenfeld by

A note from Colmar's *Kreisdirektor* to von der Heydt in the request for additional aid that was submitted in May 1872 gives a broader contextual overview of the number of individuals involved while also further invoking the rhetoric that it was the responsibility of the Imperial government to aid needy French Alsatian veterans who had opted to remain in the province. The *Kreisdirektor* wrote,

Wiss<sup>28</sup> belongs to a circumscribed group of former French soldiers who were wounded during the war and despite the promise of a good French pension, entrusted that Germany would treat them as well the French.

Even if it is expected that a pensioning will soon occur – the application for such has happened – the war disabled still currently find themselves in a thoroughly needy position and require multiple, larger subsidies.

I am familiar with 7 or 8 war disabled in the district who are hoping for a German pension, however I have only recommended support for the most needy - Langenberg, Strauel, and Wiss – and even then only if the conditions urgently demanded it.

Once again the three mentioned individuals find themselves in a most pressing situation and I urgently request the same consideration once more.<sup>29</sup>

We should not assume that German officials' willingness to provide support in particular cases signaled a broader inclination to undertake greater financial obligations. Instead, multiple cases demonstrate that the bar to receive exceptional support remained high throughout these initial years of German sovereignty.

The extreme thoroughness of the official investigations that were sparked by these lasting pension applications is demonstrated by the case of Peter Hauter from Mulhouse. Hauter's pension claim was rejected by von Möller, who instead awarded the disabled ex-soldier financial

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suggesting it was the German state's duty to support them. He related, "The individuals concerned did not opt [for France], but rather trustingly await the liquidation of their pensions from the German side."

<sup>28</sup> Wiss was another French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War disabled soldier in a comparable position to Langenfeld and Strauel.

<sup>29</sup> *Kreisdirektor* Colmar to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, May 28, 1872, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

support that needed to be applied for and renewed on a yearly basis. In the note, von Möller informed new Upper Alsatian governor Dr. Karl Adolph Ernst von Ernsthäusen that “Should Hauter want to further establish the accuracy of his declaration, which remains to be delivered, he should above all clarify why in his military discharge the wounding is not mentioned and how it can be that he could escape from captivity and on September 15 of the same month rejoin his regiment despite the many wounds he received on September 2, 1870.”<sup>30</sup> A note from Hauter’s mother in 1877 informed *Reichsland* officials that Hauter had moved to the town of Wanzenau and no longer required the government’s aid. In the end, for Hauter, perhaps the amount of aid he received was not worth the trouble of repeatedly applying for it.

Several aspects of these cases are significant. First, we observe local officials taking an active interest in the affairs of individual French Alsatian ex-soldiers who had been disabled during the Franco-Prussian War, a concern which was in turn passed up the bureaucratic chain of command. Thus the *Kreisdirektor* of Colmar could write in May 1872 while advocating a second gift to Langenfeld and a third to Strauel that he was personally familiar with the conditions of the two men which, he observed, “must be described as very sad.”<sup>31</sup> Von der Heydt in turn took up the two men’s cause with von Möller.<sup>32</sup> Taken together, these events once again demonstrate that *Reichsland* officials were very responsive to Alsations’ requests. Second, the cases of Strauel and Langenfeld demonstrate the flexibility and willingness of Imperial officials to assert themselves and provide support in certain exceptional cases for French

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<sup>30</sup> Oberpräsident Elsass-Lothringens Eduard von Möller to Bezirkspräsident Dr. Karl Adolph Ernst von Ernsthäusen, December 1, 1875, 8 AL 1/1488, ADHR.

<sup>31</sup> *Kreisdirektor* Colmar to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, May 4, 1872, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

<sup>32</sup> Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt to Oberpräsident Elsass-Lothringens Eduard von Möller, May 30, 1872, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

Alsatian Franco-Prussian war veterans. This aid was given despite Germany's explicit rejection of pension payments French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans in the Treaty of Frankfurt and later *Zusatzkonvention*.<sup>33</sup> In all, the repeated rewarding of "one-time relief" on multiple occasions effectively served as an "unofficial" and temporary pension until the regular support of both Strauel and Langenfeld was established beginning in October 1872.<sup>34</sup> At that time, the Insurance Institution of Alsace-Lorraine (*Landesversicherungsanstalt*) took over their support payments.

Instances in other contexts make it abundantly clear that Imperial officials were not opposed to situationally ignoring or selectively applying their treaty enshrined non-obligation to pay pension sums to ex-French Alsatian soldiers. For example, the Liquidation Committee<sup>35</sup> advised a certain Charles Heim from Westhoffen that the German government was not responsible for paying the additional amount to his pension that was a result of his having received a *Medaille militaire* from the French, because it had been awarded after July 19, 1870.<sup>36</sup> This decision stands in contrast to one taken in 1882 when a certain Johann Henlé requested a similar raise in support. The basics of Henlé's case were nearly identical to that of Heim's, his *Medaille militaire* also having been awarded after July 19. Henlé, however, had been appointed

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<sup>33</sup> As will be demonstrated later, German authorities were not above selectively utilizing and bending these same rules in other contexts as well if it was perceived as ultimately in the Empire's self-interest.

<sup>34</sup> Oberpräsident Elsaß-Lothringens Eduard von Möller to Bezirkspräsident von der Heydt, November 22, 1872, 8 AL 1/1487, ADHR.

<sup>35</sup> The Liquidation Committee was a joint Franco-German venture tasked with negotiating and resolving any problems associated with the transfer of sovereignty over Alsace and Lorraine to Germany.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Heim to Bezirkspräsident von Sybel, June 18, 1873, 1 AL 173/1, ADBR. The note from the Liquidation Committee was written in the margins of this note.

to the position of councilor in Weiler and as a result the French had stopped payment of his 80 M honorarium. Statthalter von Manteuffel informed the Kaiser that,

For this reason Henlé has applied for a yearly 80 M indemnification from Germany. According to the employment investigation, Henlé owns property worth 22,000 M. against which he has a debt of 14,000 M and operates a spice shop. He can therefore not be seen as requiring financial support. However, for political reasons I consider it justified and also inexpensive to grant Henlé the requested compensation.<sup>37</sup>

Had Imperial officials abided strictly by the prescribed guidelines for pensions payments Henlé's application should have been rejected because it had been awarded after July 19, 1870 and also because his financial situation did not warrant additional support.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, a subsequent note related that Kaiser Wilhelm I had authorized the yearly payment of 80 M.

### **1895 Pension Legislation: Combatants' Assistance**

The first piece of legislation that explicitly provided for the support of French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans was not passed in Germany until 1895. The focus of the bill was primarily directed at providing financial aid to needy German veterans of the 1870/71 conflict and the earlier wars of German unification. The piece of legislation was itself unique in the history of officially sponsored veterans' support, as the *Straßburger Post* would later claim in 1911, because its provisions provided for the financial support for needy veterans who had not been wounded or otherwise disabled in the course of active military service.<sup>39</sup> Instead, it awarded a yearly sum of 120 M to former combatants who had "honorably" discharged their

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<sup>37</sup> Staatssekretär Georg von Hoffmann to Kaiser Wilhelm I, June 9, 1882, 27 AL 937, ADBR.

<sup>38</sup> As we will see below, many later applications for financial aid submitted to the Imperial government by French Alsatian veterans would be turned down because the applicant themselves was not "needy" (*hilfsbedürftig*) or it was judged that the individual's family had sufficient financial holdings or income to support them.

<sup>39</sup> Prof. Dr. Goercke, "Die Veteranenbeihilfen," *Straßburger Post*, March 14, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

military service whilst on active campaign and who currently as a result of a “lasting complete inability to work” (*dauernder gänzlich Erwerbsunfähigkeit*) found themselves in need of external support.<sup>40</sup> The buzz surrounding such an unprecedented type of legislation may account for the lack of discussion regarding the extension of the bill’s benefits to the former enemy French Alsatian soldiers in the Reichstag debate that occurred on May 14, 1895. The bill was eventually passed and became law on May 22, 1895. Despite the provision that former French Alsatian soldiers should likewise receive the benefits the legislation specified, the placement of the relevant section towards the end of Article 3, while the eligibility of their German counterparts were outlined in the first article seemed to confirm their second-class status and made their inclusion seem an afterthought.<sup>41</sup> In the end, Section V of Article 3 read that,

Citizens of Alsace-Lorraine (*elsaß-lothringische Landesangehörige*) who served on military campaign in the French army during 1870/71 and subsequently become German may likewise be considered after an assessment of need.<sup>42</sup>

The 1895 legislation’s strict eligibility requirements were intended to ensure that only those applicants most in need would be its beneficiaries. To this end, local authorities were instructed to stringently observe the requirement that the applicant be faced with a “lasting complete inability to work” and have no alternative sources of support.<sup>43</sup> The same “implementation rules” instructed local officials that individuals judged to be “disabled” were

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<sup>40</sup> Gesetz wegen Abänderung des Gesetzes vom 23. Mai 1873, betreffend die Gründung und Verwaltung des Reichs Invalidenfonds, *Reichsgesetzblatt* no. 17, 237-238.

<sup>41</sup> “Gesetz wegen Abänderung des Gesetzes vom 23. Mai 1873, betreffend die Gründung und Verwaltung des Reichs Invalidenfonds,” *Reichsgesetzblatt* no. 17, 237-239.

<sup>42</sup> “Gesetz wegen Abänderung des Gesetzes vom 23. Mai 1873, betreffend die Gründung und Verwaltung des Reichs Invalidenfonds,” *Reichsgesetzblatt* no. 17, 239.

<sup>43</sup> Unterstaatssekretär Schraut, Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Gewerbe und Domänen to the Kreisdirektoren and Polizeipräsidenten Straßburg und Metz, June 28, 1895, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

those former combatants whose ability to work had been decreased to less than a 1/3 of their onetime abilities as a result of age, infirmity, incurable sickness or other ailments. This conclusion was to be based upon an investigation into the occupational training of the claimant and a judgment on whether or not the individual was capable of mustering the requisite strength and aptitude to earn a third of what a physically and mentally healthy person with the same training and in the same region could earn through their labor.<sup>44</sup> In cases where this level of disability was in doubt local officials were instructed to enlist the aid and opinions of the local district doctor.<sup>45</sup> Finally, an inability to work was in itself insufficient to guarantee the awarding of a “combatant’s assistance” to applicants. Officials were instructed that only the applications of the neediest claimants should be approved. In practice, “needy” meant that without support the individual would “fall to poor relief.” Imperial officials declined to create a definitive maximum income limitation, instead instructing local officials to judge a claimant’s neediness based on individual and locally specific factors like the financial position of the applicant and his family members<sup>46</sup> and the living expenses of his place of residence.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Ausführungsbestimmungen über die Gewährung von Beihilfen an Kriegsteilnehmer (Art. I 3 und Art. III des Gesetzes vom 22. Mai 1895 – Reichsgesetzbl. S. 237),” 1 AL 1/1331, ADHR.

<sup>45</sup> Unterstaatssekretär Schraut, Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Gewerbe und Domänen to the Kreisdirektoren and Polizeipräsidenten Straßburg und Metz, May 13, 1896, 1 AL 1/1331, ADHR. Understate Secretary Straut instructed the district governors and chiefs of police of Strasbourg and Metz that they were to ensure that a report from the local district doctor attesting to the claimant’s complete inability to work accompanied the assistance application, should they themselves be unable to observe the scope of the disability.

<sup>46</sup> Note from Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen, January 24, 1906, 1 AL 1/1331, ADHR. Other financial information to be included in the application was a value of the applicant’s property, sources of income, their tax assessed value, and any debts they possessed.

<sup>47</sup> Ausführungsbestimmungen über die Gewährung von Beihilfen an Kriegsteilnehmer (Art. I 3 und Art. III des Gesetzes vom 22. Mai 1895 – Reichsgesetzbl. S. 237),” 1 AL 1/1331, ADHR.

Examining actual applications from various French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans provides insight into how the “combatants’ assistance” was awarded at the practical level. One of the first visible trends is the frequency of application rejections in the years immediately following the passage of the law. In most cases, the justification that was given was that the claimant was neither “completely unable to work nor needy.” An important caveat to add to this observation is that an initial rejection often did not signal an end to the individual’s application attempts. A study of the changing rhetoric that is evident in the resubmission of rejected assistance applications demonstrates efforts by claimants to fashion supplications that would maximize their chance for success. Moreover, it also reveals local people’s perception of the nature of power in Alsace and Germany.

An exemplary case is provided by the application of a certain August Schwartze. Schwartze’s application was first rejected in August 1895 because authorities judged that he did not meet the eligibility requirements. In this first attempt, Schwartze had focused on connecting his family’s contemporary financial troubles to debilitating physical problems caused by his foot freezing whilst on campaign during the Franco-Prussian and his postwar development of rheumatism. Schwartze was not deterred by this initial rejection of his case and in January 1896, bypassed provincial authorities and wrote directly to Wilhelm II. He opened his petition by saying,

Allow me, your Majesty, in accordance with the law of May 22, 1895, wherein according to imperial order a yearly amount of 120 M has been graciously awarded to honorable participants of the honorable and glorious war of 1870/71 who find themselves in a position of need and also today in consideration of the general anniversary celebration occurring throughout the German Fatherland on account of the reestablishment of the long yearned for imperial dignity (*Kaiserwürde*) do most humbly submit the following petition.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> August Schwartze to Kaiser Wilhelm II, January 18, 1896, 3 AL 1/896, ADHR.

Schwartzze thus consciously framed his application in rhetoric that demonstrated a knowledge of the purpose of the 1895 legislation, while at the same time taking great pains to highlight his personal feeling of elation that he shared “with all Germans” regarding the 25 year anniversary of the founding of the German Reich. This latter point must be seen as intended to establish Schwartzze’s German national credentials to Wilhelm II. The direct appeal to the Kaiser over the heads of provincial authorities suggests that the petitioner differentiated between the attitudes and actions of national and local authorities – with the former being the more sympathetic audience. Moreover, the letter to the Kaiser was accompanied by a note from the local mayor that attested to Schwartzze’s need and endorsed his application. Ultimately, the application was referred back to *Reichsland* authorities who once again rejected the petition on the grounds that nothing significant had changed in Schwartzze’s situation since the earlier September rejection, specifically citing that he still was neither “lastingly and completely unable to work” nor particularly “needy.”

The support expressed by Schwartzze’s local mayor in the face of his immediate superiors’ decisions and his willingness to bypass them altogether and seek the intercession of the Kaiser is particularly interesting. First, it demonstrates a disconnect between local and higher provincial officials’ definitions of what constituted “needy” and is further illustrative of the problem of envisioning *Reichsland* officials as a monolithic bloc. The existence of real differences in opinion on the matter is evident in a note from the *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen* in September 1895 that instructed a *Kreisdirektor* Ott to limit the number of applications that were being forwarded to higher ranking provincial authorities by using his own competence to reject cases where it was “doubtless” that

the candidate did not meet either of the criteria.<sup>49</sup> Second, Schwartz's letter to the Kaiser and a similarly destined note from a certain Michael Lihrmann, also from the community of Zimmerbach, both appear to have been written by the mayor as the national rhetoric and form of the petition appear almost identical. The implications of this dual authorship is that it illustrates a local communal official attempting to utilize his "insider" knowledge of the Imperial system in order to put their constituents in the best possible position to receive some type of aid. Ultimately, the differing definitions of local and provincial officials would later prove to have practical implications for the efficient implementation of the "combatants' aid." This is demonstrated in a general circular sent from Understate Secretary Schraut to local district and police officials in 1903. Schraut related that *Reichsland* authorities' lack of strict observance of the 1895 legislation's eligibility "neediness" criteria had led to an exhaustion of the combatants' assistance funds.<sup>50</sup>

An examination of the individual applications for the *Kriegsteilnehmerbeihilfe* likewise illuminates the important connection between the awarding of veterans' assistance and Imperial German officials' conception of citizenship. Two cases in particular are worth highlighting. The first case is that of Andreas Wenino, who applied for the combatant's assistance in August 1895. In his letter of application, Wenino related that he had rejoined the French army after the conclusion of the peace and opted for France in June of 1872. However, he informed Imperial authorities that self-interest had motivated this decision rather than French national sentiment as he related, "I did this [opting for France] because I believed the French government would

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<sup>49</sup> Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen to Kreisdirektor Ott, September 26, 1895, 3 AL 1/895, ADHR.

<sup>50</sup> Unterstaatssekretär Schraut, Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Gewerbe und Domänen to the Kreisdirektoren and Polizeidirektoren, June 6, 1903, 1 AL 1/1331, ADHR.

provide a measure of support for a back injury (*Rückenverkrümmung*) incurred during the war. When this did not occur, I returned to Griesbach and took up permanent residence.”<sup>51</sup> He was submitting his current application because the debilitation caused by the injury was worsening by the day and would soon keep him from working entirely. After the *Kreisdirektor* responded that no such support could be rewarded unless Wenino was able to prove his German citizenship, Griesbach’s mayor stepped in to support his application. In a letter to the police inspector in Münster, the mayor wrote,

After his return from captivity, Wenino rejoined the French army despite his back injury with the belief that he would in the near future be transferred to a position that would assure his long-term livelihood. For this reason he opted [for France] in 1872. Because this hope did not come to fruition, he returned to Alsace in 1872, married (1874) and settled in Griesbach. The case of Wenimo is the same as that in which many Alsations find themselves, who originally elected to remain under the French flag, opted, and first thing after the war returned to their Heimat without having been considered anything other than German citizens.<sup>52</sup>

The mayor also added that Wenino had been told by a policeman in Münster that it was unnecessary for him to formally opt for German citizenship, because a failure to legally change his residence made his option for French citizenship invalid. Despite this endorsement, the status of Wenino remained in doubt because he was unable to prove his Alsace-Lorraine and German citizenship. It does appear, however, that his application was eventually approved. That the Imperial *Reichsland* officials would drag their feet in such a case stands in stark contrast to the many contemporary instances in which the German government was declaring the options of Alsatian youth invalid (effectively making them German citizens and liable for German military service) because their parents had opted for France and then failed to permanently transfer their residence.

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<sup>51</sup> Andreas Wenino to Kreisdirektor, August 28, 1895, 3 AL 1/895, ADHR.

<sup>52</sup> Mayor of Griesbach to Polizeikommissar in Münster, September 26, 1895, 3 AL 1/895, ADHR.

Another case in which the application of a former French Alsatian soldier who had initially opted for France but subsequently elected to return to Alsace was turned down is that of Johann Fehl. Fehl had initially directed his supplication to Kaiser Wilhelm II, claiming that he had chosen to return to his French regiment after the war in order to claim money that was owed to him. Furthermore, he claimed to have remained in France after his discharge in August 1872 and opted for French citizenship on the instructions of French officials, who informed him that he would only receive his money after having established a residence. The payment of his *masse individuelle* never occurred and he eventually returned to Alsace and renounced his earlier option.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the letter, Fehl repeatedly referred to the German emperor as “*Lieber Gutes Kaiser Wilhelm*,” thus again implicitly underscoring a projection of a beneficent and generous Emperor who stood in contrast to *Reichsland* officials.<sup>54</sup> Fehl’s application was ultimately rejected. The explanation that the *Kreisdirektor* received from the *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen* was that “native”-born Alsatians who had validly opted for France and subsequently returned to the province possessed the same status as Frenchmen residing in Alsace who had been born in French Departments

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<sup>53</sup> Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen von Schraut to Statthalter Hermann von Hohenlohe-Langenburg, July 1, 1902. 27 AL 994, ADBR. Soldiers serving in the French army were entitled to enlistment bonuses and premiums, the so-called *masse individuelle* and *prime de rengagement*. The *prime de rengagement* was a sign-up premium that was promised to a French soldier at the time of their enlistment. The average of this sum hovered around 2000 francs, half of which the new recruit would receive immediately and the other half coming at the conclusion of their period of service. At the end of their enlistment period, should a soldier decide to reenlist, the initial 1000 would continue to be held for them and they would receive a similar bonus paid out in the same manner. The *masse individuelle* was a form of reserve fund that built up over the course of a French soldier’s time in the military. Each soldier had 10 cents withheld from the daily wage he earned that was deposited in a regimental bank. These funds were to be used to replenish essentials of the soldier’s kit. Each individual soldier’s cumulative savings were recorded in a special personalized book, the so called *livret*. After the completion of their military service, the balance of this account would be paid to the decommissioned soldier.

<sup>54</sup> Johann Fehl to Kaiser Wilhelm II, July 9, 1896, 3 AL 1/896, ADHR.

outside the annexed areas.<sup>55</sup> This status meant that Fehl was ineligible to receive the “veterans’ assistance” from the German government, even if he was unable to work, in financial need, or had been awarded Alsace-Lorraine citizenship at a later date. This is the sole explanation for the withholding of benefits that I found couched in this language. Such a distinction stands in contrast to otherwise seemingly inclusive post-1870/71 German citizenship policies. Fehl’s case introduce a side of German citizenship that was neither based on *jus sanguinis* or *jus soli* terms because under either of these parameters Fehl should have been recognized as a citizen. His case does suggest the existence of a segment of the population of Alsace living in a “grey area” of citizenship – considered members of the state but ineligible for the benefits that their contemporaries received.

### **1895 Legislation: Support for Dependents**

A group who the 1895 legislation did not make provisions for was the dependents of the veteran receiving aid. The law only provided support for the French Alsatian veterans during the course of their lifetime. Once the beneficiary died, the legislation did not guarantee the continuation of the 120 M yearly payments to the deceased ex-soldier’s family. This is demonstrated by the case of Andreas Wenino’s wife’s application in 1910. The *Kreisdirektor* of Colmar informed the widow that the *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen*, had turned her application down for the continuance of her husband’s combatant’s assistance because the 1895 law had made no such provisions.<sup>56</sup> Yet the clarity in this rejection of Widow Wenino’s claim was not exercised uniformly throughout the province.

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<sup>55</sup> Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Gewerbe und Domänen to Kreisdirektor Colmar, August 5, 1896, 3 AL 1/896, ADHR.

<sup>56</sup> Kreisdirektor Colmar to Widow Wenino, June 2, 1910, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

A short article in the *Elsäßische Kurier* from 1911 reported a lack of uniformity in implementation when it came to the continuation of the combatant's assistance after the death of the primary beneficiary. The *Kreisdirektor* of Sélestat had approved such a case, while the *Kreisdirektor* of Colmar related that such support could only continue in exceptional cases, and finally, Guebwiller's *Kreisdirektor* rejected any widow's claim because it was not mentioned in the 1895 law.<sup>57</sup>

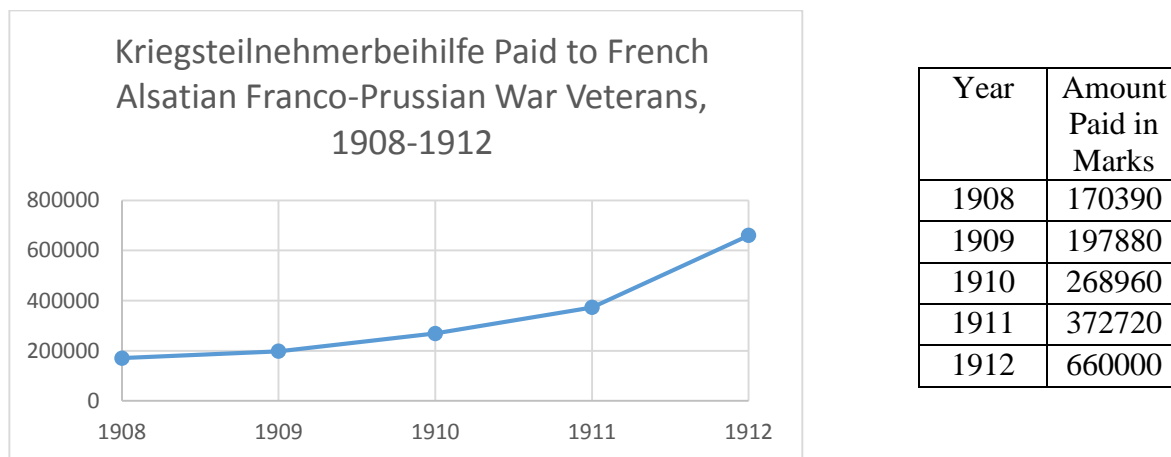
The neglect of Alsatian war widows might be passed off as mere official oversight if it were not for the fact that just in 1894, a law had been passed that increased the amount of support awarded to German war widows. Imperial officials in Alsace had ample opportunity to revise or rethink the decisions with the repeated raising of the issue. The exclusion must at one level be seen, then, as evidence of a degree of authoritative indifference that was not present when it came to the demands of living Alsatian veterans. More specifically, it suggests a difference in perception regarding Germany's responsibilities towards male versus female pension claimants. The express purpose of the "combatant's assistance" had been to prevent former soldiers from being forced to rely on local poor relief institutions. Therefore authorities' willingness to allow their survivors to subsequently fall to charity signals a gendered differentiated notion of official responsibility – i.e. we cannot repay the brave, masculine former defenders of our state by allowing them to assume a stereotypically feminine role of receiving handouts – a notion that clearly was not extended to their dependents. This discrepancy in eligibility demonstrates that women gained their right to official aid through the actions of their husbands. Sending a husband off to war and subsequently having to care for or mourn him was in itself insufficient grounds for officially sponsored relief.

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<sup>57</sup> *Elsäßische Kurier*, February 27, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

The statistics provided by the articles from the *Amtliche Korrespondenz* in 1911 and the *Straßburger Korrespondenz* in 1913 are useful to provide an approximation of the number of French Alsatian veterans benefitting from the 1895 legislation. The article reported that 3,800 of the 4,000 beneficiaries of the 1895 legislation in Alsace were former French soldiers.<sup>58</sup> The exact number of Alsatian recipients of the “former combatants’ assistance” is slightly unclear, however, as an article in the *Straßburger Korrespondenz* in September 1913 put the number of beneficiaries of the 120 M aid at 6,590.<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 3: Kriegsteilnehmerbeihilfe Paid to French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War Veterans, 1908-1912<sup>60</sup>**



<sup>58</sup> “Straßburger Stadtnachrichten,” *Amtliche Korrespondenz*, October 4, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

<sup>59</sup> “Die Fürsorge des Deutschen Reichs für die ehemaligen französischen Soldaten in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Straßburger Korrespondenz*, September 9, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

<sup>60</sup> Statistics of Kriegsteilnehmerbeihilfe paid to French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans from 1908-1911 provided by “Straßburger Stadtnachrichten,” *Amtliche Korrespondenz*, October 4, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR. The 1912 figure came from “Die Fürsorge für die Kriegsteilnehmer,” *Straßburger Korrespondenz*, January 15, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

**Table 3: Number of French Franco-Prussian Combatants' Assistance Recipients Living in Alsace**

Year	Number of Recipients
1908	1,420
1909	1,649
1910	2,241
1911	3,106
1912	5,500

### **1901 Legislation: Support for the War Disabled and War Widows**

Three sections of the needy Alsatian martial community were not provided for by the 1895 legislation. These groups included Franco-Prussian War veterans who had been disabled during their wartime service, these individual's surviving family members in the event of their death following the conclusion of hostilities, and finally, the dependents of Alsations who had been killed while fighting for France during the conflict. Support for these parties was first proposed by Alsatian Reichstag delegates in the negotiations surrounding the reform of the existent Reich-wide military disability and widows' pensions in 1901. In the discussion that occurred on April 16, Dr. Johannes Höffel related his disappointment that the first draft of the legislation continued previous laws' neglect of disabled former French soldiers and their surviving family members.<sup>61</sup> Alsatian delegates made their claim for their constituents' inclusion based on the fact that other groups of veterans who had similarly fought against either

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<sup>61</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1901, 74 Sitzung, April 16, 1901, 2132.

Prussia or its allies in the pre-1870 wars of unification had already been legislated state support.<sup>62</sup>

Adolf Riff painted a picture of the difficult situation that the disabled French Alsatian veterans and their families faced after having chosen to opt for German citizenship,

They became German citizens in so far as they did not opt for France in 1872. As a result, they do not have any grounds to claim a pension from France because they are German citizens. On the other side, they do not have a basis from which to make a claim against the German Reich because they were not taken into consideration by the Treaty of Frankfurt.<sup>63</sup>

Another proponent of the bill, a Dr. Bachem argued that providing for ex-enemy war disabled and war widows would aid the reconciliation of Alsace to the Reich. Referring to two Alsatian women who were in attendance in Alsatian *tracht* he remarked, “They will certainly be eulogists of the Reichstag, and when the Alsace-Lorrainers love the Reichstag then they will very soon love all of the great German Fatherland.”<sup>64</sup> The amendment to provide for the Alsatian disabled was included and the law was passed on its third reading on May 4, 1901.

The progress of the bill through the Reichstag was closely observed by Alsations. An opening statement in an article in the *Straßburger Zeitung* reported a great deal of popular elation in Alsace that such legislation was finally being discussed and explicitly articulated the resentment that the lack of equal treatment had caused among Alsations by saying,

Deputy Dr. Höffel expressed the wish which every old soldier [in the provinces] has long held in their heart and the fulfillment of which would make the entire population grateful to the government. The Alsations would [be thankful to] see that the old soldiers of the French army still residing in the province should no longer be treated as second class Germans (*Deutsche 2. Klasse*) simply because it was their fate to be born at a time when Alsace-Lorraine still delivered up its recruits to the French army. The Germans [currently residing in Alsace] would similarly

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<sup>62</sup> Specifically this included former combatants from Schleswig-Holstein and Saxony. The care for disabled veterans from Schleswig-Holstein had been provided by a law that was passed on January 14, 1894.

<sup>63</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1901, 87 Sitzung, May 3, 1901, 2524.

<sup>64</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1901, 87 Sitzung, May 3, 1901, 2524.

embrace such legislation] because they have long since learned to appreciate the old [Alsatian] comrades through daily contact and living together.<sup>65</sup>

The article went on to express the hope that finally the French Alsatian disabled veterans of the Franco-Prussian War would be put on equal footing as the rest of their fellow German “comrades-in-arms.” Interestingly, in contrast to some of the earlier direct petitions to the Emperor, the article suggests that the disconnect in the Alsatian-German relationship was with central Imperial officials rather than the Germans who were living in Alsace. The rhetoric of the piece is telling, because it draws a stark contrast between the neglect and mistreatment at the hands of distant Reich officials in comparison to the support of the local German element – particularly the population of German veterans currently residing in the province who had learned to appreciate their onetime enemies.

The legislation pensioning the war disabled of the Franco-Prussian War went into effect on April 1, 1901. The bill maintained much of the original terminology and rhetoric of the original June 27, 1871 pension legislation, while increasing the amount of support that was given.<sup>66</sup> In an effort to prevent “double-dipping” of veterans into the different support funds, regardless of their nationality during their time of service, Imperial authorities specified that

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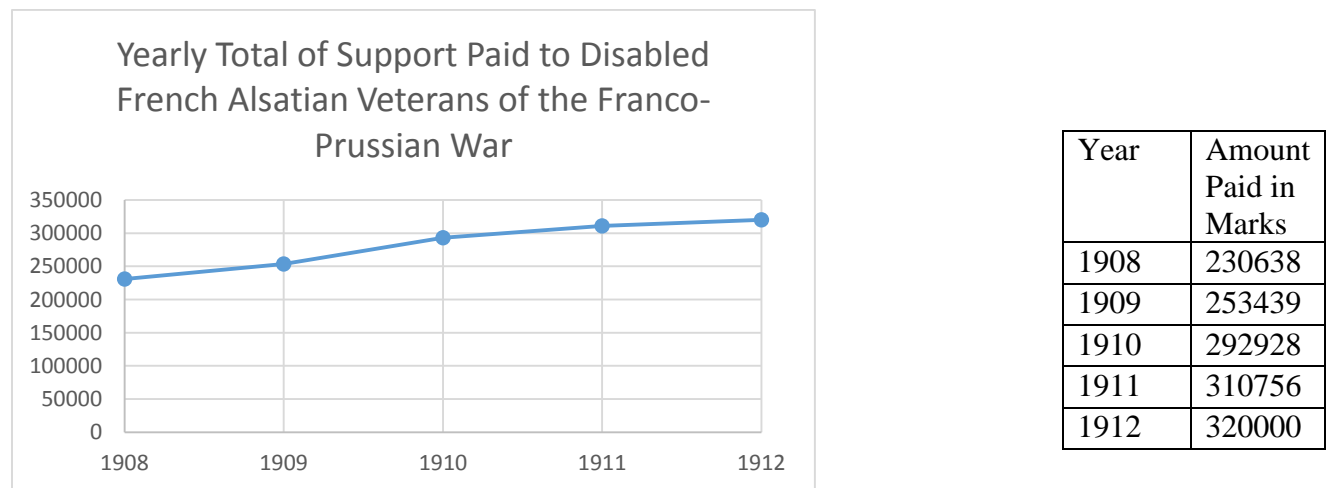
<sup>65</sup> “Kriegsveteranen in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Straßburger Zeitung*, April 23, 1901, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

<sup>66</sup> “Gesetz, Betreffend Versorgung der Kriegsinvaliden und der Kriegshinterbliebenen,” *Reichsgesetzblatt*, June 8, 1901, 199. The same distinction was made between the “semi-disabled” (*Halbinvalid*) and the “fully-disabled” (*Ganzinvalid*), as well as the 5 grades of disability pensions that were based on rank and judged degree of infirmity. An additional “disfigurement allowance” was still awarded for catastrophic injuries. On the other side, the law took into account the passage of time from the conflict to name any woman whose husband had died after hostilities as the result of a wound incurred during his military service as a war widow, while maintaining the provision that only the survivors of veterans who died within a year as a result of a sickness caught on campaign were eligible for the war widow benefits. A new provision of the 1901 law was that it also provided an additional superannuation (*Alterszulage*) for individuals judged to be “fully-invalid” over 55 years of age and whose yearly income was less than 600 M. Section 23 of the bill specifically extended the benefits of the law to the disabled former French Alsatian soldiers, their widows, and the widows of French Alsatian soldiers who had been killed during the 1870/71 conflict.

recipients of the support provided by the 1895 law were ineligible, as the 1901 law was only applicable to “recognized” war disabled.

It is difficult to arrive at an exact figure regarding the number of French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans who were granted disability pensions. The *Straßburger Korrespondenz* reported in 1912 that 1,513 individuals in Alsace were the beneficiaries of a disability pension that paid a yearly amount between 216 and 300 M. The newspaper made it clear that the Imperial government’s outlay for their support in 1912 was around 320,000 M and that the recipients were “almost exclusively” former French soldiers.<sup>67</sup> The following graph and tables relate the Imperial government’s reported expenditure for the care of its current Alsatian citizens who had suffered their disability as members of the French army.

**Figure 4: Yearly Total of Support Paid to Disabled French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War Veterans, 1908-1912<sup>68</sup>**



<sup>67</sup> "Die Fürsorge für die Kriegsteilnehmer," *Straßburger Korrespondenz*, January 15, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

<sup>68</sup> Statistics paid to disabled French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans from 1908-1910 provided by "Straßburger Stadtnachrichten," *Amtliche Korrespondenz*, October 4, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR. The 1911 and 1912 figures came from "Die Fürsorge für die Kriegsteilnehmer," *Straßburger Korrespondenz*, January 15, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

**Table 4: Approximate Number of French Alsatian Beneficiaries of 1901 Legislation, 1908-1912**

Year	Number of Recipients
1908	768
1909	844
1910	976
1911	1,035
1912	1,066

The increased financial amount that was associated with a war-disabled pension made them a popular focus for ex-soldiers' applications in the aftermath of the law's adoption. The great interest in the funds and *Reichsland* officials' desire to limit their expenditure to only the direst of cases caused authorities to stringently adhere to the law's eligibility requirements in a vein similar to the first years immediately following the passage of the 1895 legislation.<sup>69</sup> One of the primary difficulties for French Alsatian applicants seeking a war disability pension was that district doctors often had difficulty differentiating ill health or infirmities that were a result of war service and not simply the result of the normal aging process or a life of toil. In the face of uncertainty, *Reichsland* officials were inclined to withhold the title of "war disabled."

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<sup>69</sup> The exact form and evidence needed for an application was given by the *Kreisdirektor* in Colmar to local mayors. Information that was to be determined for each applicant included: 1) if the claimant was completely healthy at the outbreak of hostilities; 2) if the claimant had returned from the conflict suffering from sickness or affliction and if this had effected their ability to work; 3) if the applicant's ability to work during the 6 years following their return had been "considerably" lessened; 4) if the claimant at the time of application still suffered from the same affliction and if it still "considerably" impacted their ability to work. The applicant was likewise to produce 3 witnesses who could directly corroborate their statements, while the mayor in his report was to relate to higher authorities his impressions regarding the witnesses' reliability. See *Kreisdirektor in Colmar to Polizeikommissar in Colmar*, February 17, 1911, 3 AL 1/2020, ADHR.

This was the case of Martin Klein, who was already receiving the 1895 “combatant’s assistance,” but who wished to trade this support for the larger amount that accompanied being designated as “war disabled.” Klein claimed that his disability stemmed from both his feet freezing while he was mobilized during the Franco-Prussian War and which prevented him from working. A doctor’s attest confirmed Klein’s infirmity left him unable to support himself.<sup>70</sup> Klein’s witnesses collaborated his story that he had been in the hospital because of his frozen feet and typhus and returned from the war a sick man.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, however, Imperial authorities placed more importance on Dr. Müller-Herings’s assessment that he could not determine if the disability was a result of Klein’s wartime service. The application was denied.

The case of Martin Buehl demonstrates that disability pensions were not static after their awarding, but could be adjusted (for more or less) based upon the claimant’s life events. Buehl was a veteran of the French Mexican campaigns and the Franco-Prussian War, where he had received the wound that rendered him completely unable to work. Buehl had already been recognized as a war invalid and been awarded a yearly disability sum of 240 M. He claimed that a raise in his rent made it impossible to get by on the amount he was receiving and requested an increase to 360 M (a difference of 10 M a month). Buehl wrote he had travelled to Strasbourg in an attempt to personally deliver his petition to the *Statthalter*, but having left it at his palace had heard nothing since July 1912 and therefore conjectured that Wedel had not received it.<sup>72</sup> The application was rejected in June 1913 with the explanation from the *Kreisdirektor* that raising the amount of a disability pension could only occur if an increased inability to work stemmed

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<sup>70</sup> Dr. Müller-Herings, “Ärztlichesattest,” August 26, 1912, 3 AL 1/2020, ADHR.

<sup>71</sup> “Protokoll,” July 27, 1912, 3 AL 1/2020, ADHR.

<sup>72</sup> Martin Buehl to Statthalter Karl von Wedel, May 27, 1913, 8 AL 1/1485, ADHR.

directly from the war injury.<sup>73</sup> Despite this initial setback, Buehl submitted another request in July of 1913 and was finally approved for a yearly pension of 300 M – a monthly increase from 20 to 25 M.

The 1901 legislation was unique for Alsace in that it provided for the care of former French soldiers' widows. However, the eligibility requirements were just as stringently held to as the early years of the 1895 combatants' assistance. The case of a Widow Katharina Spenlehauer is instructive. Spenlehauer first wrote to the *Kreisdirektor* of Colmar in 1911, relaying that her husband had died in 1907 of rheumatism complications that she argued were a result of his exertions in the field during the Franco-Prussian War. On these grounds she was requested a pension as a widow of a disabled Franco-Prussian War veteran. In response to the request, the *Kreisdirektor* sent the local mayor a form in order to judge her eligibility. Of the three witnesses she called to attest to the veracity of her claim, one was a former comrade of her husband, another the husband's sister, and the third a former neighbor. Despite their statements and Spenlehauer's insistence that a local doctor had throughout the care of her husband remarked that his ailments were a result of his war service, the application was rejected on the grounds that her deceased husband was not "disabled in the sense of the law of May 31, 1901."<sup>74</sup> This was not the last of Spenlehauer's applications, as in October of that year she again wrote to the mayor, explaining that her earlier application had been rejected, but seeking to renew her application based on an article in the *Journal d'Alsace-Lorraine* that she felt supported her earlier application.<sup>75</sup> The mayor dutifully passed on her note, but her petition was again rejected

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<sup>73</sup> Kreisdirektor to Kreisartzt, June 12, 1913, 8 AL 1/1485, ADHR.

<sup>74</sup> *Kreisdirektor* to Katharina Spenlehauer, July 26, 1911, 3 AL 1/2020, ADHR.

<sup>75</sup> Katharina Spenlehauer to Mayor of Horburg, October 11, 1911, 3 AL 1/2020, ADHR.

on the same grounds with the remark that “The notice in the *Journal d’Alsace-Lorraine* explicitly reads that the pension amount is awarded based on the severity of the wound and the degree of disability.”<sup>76</sup> The *Kreisdirektor* also noted that Spenlehauer’s children could also provide her with some support and that she was already receive 5 M a month from the local poor relief organization.

### **Confusion in the Awarding of Support**

Despite the repeated circulation of the instructions regarding the awarding of combatant’s assistance and multiple passages of different pensions/support legislation, the matter of aid to former soldiers continued to be marked by uncertainty and misunderstandings on the part of *Reichsland* officials and the public. In an article entitled, “*Die Veteranenbeihilfen*,” a Professor Dr. Goercke argued that this state of affairs was the result of factors that ranged from a willful disregard to a genuine misunderstanding of the legislation’s eligibility requirements.<sup>77</sup> Regardless of the source, the cumulative result was to create a general confusion regarding the different types of veterans’ support and source of the aid to the former soldiers.

These misperceptions caused a number of practical problems for Imperial authorities in the *Reichsland*. First, as the *Amtliche Korrespondenz* reported in 1911, a significant portion of the Alsatian population did not realize that the funds for the veterans’ assistance came almost exclusively from the German Reich and instead assumed that the money came from French coffers.<sup>78</sup> This false belief was a double loss for Imperial authorities. First, it meant that they

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<sup>76</sup> Note to Katharine Spenlehauer, November 4, 1911, 3 AL 1/2020, ADHR.

<sup>77</sup> Prof. Dr. Goercke, “*Die Veteranenbeihilfen*,” *Straßburger Post*, March 14, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

<sup>78</sup> “*Straßburger Stadtnachrichten*,” *Amtliche Korrespondenz*, October 4, 1911, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

were missing out on an opportunity to gain increased recognition and perhaps favor amongst the Alsatian population. Second, it was France who was the beneficiary of the goodwill that was paid for out of German coffers. Another problem that emerged was a lack of implementation uniformity of the pensions and support legislation. In discussions that would eventually lead to the passage of pension reform legislation in 1913, Alsatian Reichstag Delegate Dr. Dionysius Will observed,

I would also like to call attention to the fact that among us [in Alsace] the handling of [combatant assistance] differs from district to district. In one district one can easily obtain combatant assistance, while in another it is very difficult, when one asks after the reason the reply is that one district is more accommodating, the other more rigorous. Differences even exist between different communities in the same district.<sup>79</sup>

Will went on to claim that colleagues had informed him that it was even easier to receive the stipulated support of the 1895 and 1901 laws across the border in Prussia. The lack of uniformity in the dispersal of combatant's assistance was likewise echoed in a general memorandum sent out to the mayors of Alsace and Lorraine from the Understate Secretary, who observed nothing else had caused so much complaint and ill-feeling in the provinces as rejected claimant's observing successful petitions of individuals in nearly the same position as themselves in neighboring communities.<sup>80</sup> Reichstag's delegates also criticized the outdatedness of the support amount provided by the 1895 law, the intrusive mandatory medical examinations, as well as the vaguely defined eligibility requirements of being "worthy" (*würdig*), being in a

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<sup>79</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1912, 56 Sitzung, May 8, 1912, 1786.

<sup>80</sup> *Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Handel und Domänen* to Mayors, April 4, 1911, 1 AL 1/1331, ADHR.

“position of needing assistance” (*unterstützungsbedürftige Lage*), and being “lastingly and completely unable to work” (*dauernde gänzliche Erwerbsunfähigkeit*).<sup>81</sup>

## 1913 Pension Legislation

Certain lawmakers drew a direct connection between the overhaul of existing veterans’ pension legislation and the contemporary effectiveness of the German army. Reichstag Delegate Bauman noted that, “If the current generation who now stands under the flag sees the high regard in which veterans are held and that the Fatherland is thankful to them, then courage and enthusiasm will be and remain in their ranks and [they will] be a loyal guard of the Fatherland, the Heimat, and the entire people in the same way as the old veterans.”<sup>82</sup> Others approached pension reorganization from the position that it was the duty of the Reich to provide assistance to individuals who had offered up their health and lives for the Fatherland. The primary issue in the multiple Reichstag debates regarding pension reform was not whether it should occur, but rather how much of an increase should be approved. It is not surprising then, that the law was easily passed and set to go into effect on October 1, 1913.

Even as the law remained under debate, in June 1912, the Understate Secretary of Alsace-Lorraine wrote a general circular to the mayors of the provinces informing them about the proposed pension reform and going through a point by point analysis of the alterations that would result in existent law. The modifications were intended to simplify the prerequisites for receiving combatant’s assistance. Some of the more important points included that an “inability

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<sup>81</sup> See Germany, Reichstag Debates 1912, 56 Sitzung, May 8, 1912, 1770, 1785, and 1794; Germany, Reichstag Debates 1913, 132 Sitzung, April 5, 1913, 4508; Germany, Reichstag Debates 1913, 149. Sitzung, April 25, 1913, 5110, 5112, 5114, and 5117.

<sup>82</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1913, 132 Sitzung, April 5, 1913, 4509.

to work” was no longer defined as earning less than a third of their ordinary wages, but rather when the individual could no longer earn enough to provide for their “necessary livelihood.”<sup>83</sup> Determining this amount was to be done by taking into account local costs of living, special care required by the applicant on account of old age or sickness, and any financial obligations associated with the claimant’s dependents. In addition, a doctor’s attest would only be required in instances where doubts existed regarding the degree of an individual’s inability to work.

A new prerequisite introduced by the 1913 legislation was that in order to receive a pension the French Alsatian ex-soldier applicant must have taken part in an active engagements against the Germans during the Franco-Prussian War. Thus the *Elsaßische Kurier* reported that the Imperial government had decided that former French soldiers who had been members of the *Legion de Marche* were not eligible for assistance for combatants. The *Legion de Marche* had been formed solely for wartime service and had even marched from Villefranche to Lyon. However, it never engaged with the German army prior to its disbanding. This latter point proved to be the deciding factor in the decision to withhold aid to its onetime members.<sup>84</sup> The reasoning regarding the payment or non-payment of support to French Alsatian veterans had thus come full circle. Initially excluded from aid consideration because of their participation in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War, now only those individuals who had taken part in active operations against Germany were eligible to receive the assistance for combatants.

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<sup>83</sup> This rather vague phrase suggests a desire to maintain pensioners in their pre-injury social station. The goal of minimizing social disruption caused by injury or death of a breadwinner was likewise the focus of Imperial pensions and retraining practices during the First World War.

<sup>84</sup> “Keine Kriegsteilnehmerbeihilfe für die Angehörigen der ‘Legion de Marche’,” *Elsassische Kurier*, no. 80, April 4, 1914, 3 AL 1/1419, ADHR.

An article entitled, “The German Reich’s Aid for former French Soldiers in Alsace-Lorraine,” that was published by the *Straßburger Korrespondenz* went through the main provisions of previously passed pensions laws and related how the newly passed 1913 legislation would increase the number of eligible individuals and alter earlier eligibility guidelines. The loosening of eligibility requirements for the combatants’ assistance provided by the 1895 legislation expanded the number of recipients from 6,590 in 1912 to 7,600 in 1913. The increase in the number of individuals receiving this aid was accompanied by a raise in the yearly award amount from 120 to 150 M. Although the pool of recipients of the 1901 war disabled pensions in Alsace would decrease from 1,500 to 1,480 (which was likely a result of natural attrition), the 1913 legislation provided additional funds in the form of a funerary allowance and three months of support for the individual’s dependents following the death of the beneficiary. The legislation did not, however, provide for an increase in the actual amount paid for the war disabled. Finally, the 1913 pension law also equalized the support of pre-Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian veterans with their Alsatian and German Franco-Prussian War counterparts. The amount of yearly support they received nearly doubled from 80 to 150 M and the number of individuals receiving assistance rose from 865 to 1,191.

Taken as a whole, in 1912 Germany was providing financial aid to some 8,950 former French Alsatian soldiers. After the 1913 legislation this number increased to 10,240, which with the addition of the approximately 1,480 Alsatian war disabled meant that the Reich was supporting some 12,000 individuals at a cost of approximately 1,800,000 M a year. An

important point of emphasis for the article was that the overwhelming majority of recipients were former French soldiers.<sup>85</sup>

Two exemplary claims that resulted from the passage of the 1913 legislation demonstrate the proactive role that applicants took in seeking government support. Imperial authorities, regardless of the easing of eligibility requirements, did not go out of their way to solicit aid applications from the former French Alsatian soldiers. Instead, application letters had to be initiated by the individual, often after seeing a notice in the local newspaper. Moreover, the form of the applications and the specific questions they addressed indicate the applicants' familiarity with the eligibility requirements of the law.

A certain David Weniger informed Imperial officials that he had fought in the French army during the Franco-Prussian War and subsequently returned to civilian life as an agricultural laborer. Since his homecoming, he had continued to care for himself and his family, but factors that included his increasing age and worsening health attributed to a head wound suffered during the conflict combined to force him to rely on the beneficence of Imperial authorities and request a "combatant's assistance" stipend. An inability to work based on both age and infirmity were considerations that *Reichsland* officials were to take into account in deciding to award support. Weniger, however, further demonstrated his knowledge of the legislation's eligibility requirements by systematically identifying his children, their occupation, and finally, why they were not in a financial position to provide him with any meaningful support.<sup>86</sup> The effectiveness

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<sup>85</sup> "Die Fürsorge des Deutschen Reichs für die ehemaligen französischen Soldaten in Elsaß-Lothringen," *Straßburger Korrespondenz* 73, September 19, 1913, 27 AL 939, ADBR.

<sup>86</sup> David Weniger to the Kreisdirektor Colmar, October 31, 1913, 3 AL 1/2029, ADHR.

of Weniger's method was demonstrated on November 25, when he was awarded the yearly sum of 150 M.

Similarly, a certain Eduard Hemmerle informed Imperial officials that the disabilities that resulted from exertions during his wartime service had become more serious with each passing year, so that he was currently unable to continue to work as a tailor. He continued by informing authorities that he had included a medical attest that stated he was completely unable to work and not in a position to support himself.<sup>87</sup> Hemmerle was likewise awarded 150 M on June 24, 1914.

What is most interesting about Hemmerle's case, in addition to the fact that it showed his knowledge of the eligibility guidelines of the combatants' assistance aid, is that subsequent applications from other individuals demonstrate the existence of information networks among French Alsatian veterans. These networks conveyed relevant information in regards to contemporary support and pension legislation and the eligibility guidelines to the former French Alsatian soldiers. Thus a Joseph Haas wrote to *Reichsland* officials that Hemmerle had learned from a newspaper that he (Haas) was eligible for the combatants' assistance.<sup>88</sup> The cooperation amongst potential recipients of the benefits of the 1913 law's provisions is likewise demonstrated by examining the identity of witnesses that appeared for the individual applications.<sup>89</sup> Petitioners could aid one another in their efforts receive combatants' assistance by acting as each other's witnesses. This was true of Georg Steib and Andreas Kopp, who both were awarded the yearly sum of 150 M in late 1913.

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<sup>87</sup> Eduard Hemmerle to the Kreisdirektor Colmar, November 21, 1913, 3 AL 1/2030, ADHR.

<sup>88</sup> Witness Statement of Joseph Haas, April 27, 1914, 3 AL 1/2030, ADHR.

<sup>89</sup> An applicant could produce two witnesses to collaborate the veracity of their wartime service and current economic need in cases where the petitioner's military papers had been lost.

More than the civic incorporation of French Alsatian veterans, the payment of pensions demonstrated an active desire among Imperial officials to reconcile the former enemy soldiers and their survivors to the German Reich. In general, an individual's transfer in citizenship required little investment and interaction between authorities and the Alsatian populace. This was particularly true for Alsatians who underwent the transition from French to German citizenship following the Franco-Prussian War, when all that was required was that the individual remain in their place of residence in Alsace after October 1, 1872. In contrast, pension payments required individual applicants opening a dialogue with provincial and central Berlin authorities. For the petitioners, submitting a successful application meant taking a proactive role in learning the eligibility requirements and presenting their case in a manner and language most likely to achieve approval. The repeated rejections and resubmissions of petitions gave applicants the opportunity to increasingly tailor their rhetoric to the perceived official expectations.

For their part, the willingness of Imperial authorities to assume charge over pension payments for individuals who had militarily resisted their takeover demonstrates a long term wish to permanently incorporate all Alsatians into the German nation. The active advocate role that local *Reichsland* authorities often took on behalf of individual French Alsatian veterans in relation to distant provincial officials in Strasbourg and Berlin demonstrates the responsiveness of local governance to popular pressure and the willingness of these administrators to defend the interests of their constituents. Ultimately, the Imperial German government fulfilled its contractual obligations towards French Alsatian veterans that were outlined in the Treaty of Frankfurt and even showed a willingness to work around the official abrogation of support responsibilities for Alsatian veterans of the Franco-Prussian War in cases of exceptional need.

Yet as much as these early efforts and the legislation that was subsequently passed in 1895 and 1901 were met with approval in Alsace, a combination of factors that included the widespread uncertainty about the source of the support funds, the strictness of the eligibility requirements, lack of uniformity in implementation, and an understandable, if not ultimately hurtful policy that prevented increases in support for former French soldiers if an equivalent raise was not approved for German veterans, combined to diminish the propagandistic advantages that might have resulted from these genuinely generous and reconciliatory efforts. The passage of the 1913 legislation did much in the way to eliminate these issues, but the time elapsed since the 1870-71 conflict and the short period that it existed prior to the outbreak of the First World War served to reduce its overall effect.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Old Comrades or Old Enemies?: Veterans' Associations in Alsace, 1871-1918**

Veterans' associations experienced a dramatic growth in post-unification Germany. In Alsace, the coexistence of significant populations of both former French and German soldiers created an associational context and potential membership base that was markedly different from veterans' organizations in "old" Germany. The presence of former French veterans in the province raised a host of questions for Imperial officials and associational leaders that were unique to the borderland. Issues, such as membership that were more self-evident in inner Germany had additional levels of complexity in Alsace as authorities were forced to consider who should and should not be allowed to belong to a veterans' group. Moreover, the activities of veterans' organizations took on an additional level of importance in the *Reichsland*. Alsatian veterans' associations, like their interior counterparts, were charged with developing ties of love and loyalty to the *Kaiser* and Reich and fostering a sense of camaraderie amongst members. However, beyond these shared responsibilities, Alsatian groups were identified as "outposts of Germandom," whose example and influence were seen as an important component in a general effort to win the loyalty of the province's population. In 1891, the president of the *Reichsland's* regional veterans' corporation, the *Elsass-Lothringische Kriegerlandesverband* (ELKLV), would

go so far as to say that the development of veterans' associations in the *Reichsland* was a reflection of the overall advancement of "Germandom" in the provinces.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter investigates veterans' organizations in Alsace. It examines the patriotic and social purposes that were ascribed to the former combatants' groups, their membership criteria, the relationship between provincial authorities and associational leaders, and the connections between local, regional, and national veterans' associations. Much of this information provides the necessary context in order to understand the relationship between French Alsatian veterans' and German veterans' associations. Provincial authorities refrained from taking a decisive stand on whether or not ex-French soldiers should be admitted as members and instead gave individual associations the prerogative of deciding on the issue for themselves. While this policy was satisfactory to local veterans' groups, who jealously guarded their autonomy, it created a mishmash of different exclusive and ambiguously inclusive membership policies that only served to alienate the former French combatants. The issue was not conclusively addressed until the ELKLV codified a membership statute explicitly inclusive of French Alsatian veterans in 1901. Yet, by that time, thirty years after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War hostilities, it was unlikely that many French veterans who had not already taken advantage of ambiguous membership statutes to join local former combatants' groups would feel compelled to enroll. Taken as a whole, former French soldiers only ever constituted a small fraction of the population of *Reichsland* veterans' associations. The rapid expansion of the veterans' organizations in the province during the 1880s was due to the influx of younger Alsations who had completed their period of mandatory military service under the Imperial flag. The high percentage of younger,

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<sup>1</sup> "Elsass-Lothringische Kriegerverbandsfest," *Straßburger Neueste Nachrichten*, December 15, 1891, 27 AL 169. ADBR. I will address the specific role and function of the ELKLV in Alsace at a later point in this section.

aged 20-30, members in veterans' associations demonstrates that army service rather than associational practices and benefits were more effective in acclimating Alsatians to German rule.

## **Purpose**

Both German authorities and the leadership of the veterans' organizations believed that veterans' associations should fulfill a patriotic and social purpose. The former duty was expressed in the first paragraphs of every Alsatian veterans' groups' statutes. Each association committed themselves to deepen the love and loyalty to the Emperor and Reich amongst its members and the general public. This responsibility was doubly significant in the *Reichsland*, where generations of French administration and political and cultural influence made the population's German loyalties suspect in the eyes of Imperial officials. The latter social responsibility was intimately connected with patriotic duty, as veterans' associations utilized their own funds to supplement governmental aid to members and their families who had fallen on hard times. Motivating this support was the idea of comradeship and mutual care amongst members, but like the national German social legislation of the 1880s, the organizations often envisioned this aid as providing a defense against the spread of socialism. The focus on the socialism's "menace" is all the more interesting in a borderland, where former French soldiers could potentially find a home in the local veterans' associations, while Social Democrats – even those who had completed their German military service - were barred from membership.

The first and foremost charge of the veterans' association was to strengthen and deepen ties of loyalty and love to the *Kaiser*, German Fatherland, and to develop the national consciousness of its own members and that of the wider civilian population. Alsace's position as a borderland with the undeniable dual influence of German culture and French politics created a context in which veterans' organizations and Imperial officials maintained a close working

relationship. This connection was most publically visible in the guardianship that the *Statthalter* assumed over the veterans' groups. Speaking at an associational flag dedication ceremony at Bischwiller in 1891, *Statthalter* Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst recognized veterans' associations as the "bearers of Germandom" in Alsace and charged them with furthering the cause of German patriotism. He argued that veterans' associations' "peaceful" and "conciliatory" propaganda promulgated through their comradely unity and loyalty to the *Kaiser* was the most effective means of advancing these causes in the eyes of the local populace.<sup>2</sup>

The secondary constitutive purpose of veterans' associations was the care of comradeship within the association. Organizational authorities expected group cohesion would be built upon members' attendance and participation in regular associational meetings and events. But a further element of comradeship was based upon aid, advice, and when necessary, the financial support to needy fellow association members. An interesting aspect of veterans' organizational life throughout the Imperial period was that while the charge to maintain and further the German loyalties of the Alsatian populace as a whole remained static, the social responsibilities of the veterans' groups expanded.

This extension of social obligations over the course of the Imperial period is evident through an examination of different veterans' organizations' bylaws. One example is provided by the *Kriegerverein Straßburg*, which was founded on July 25, 1873, making it the oldest veterans' organization in the *Reichsland*. The only monetary backing that was codified in the group's 1874 statutes was the support of needy comrades.<sup>3</sup> An updated version in 1881

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<sup>2</sup> *Erster Jahresbericht des Elsaß-Lothringischen Kriegerlandesverbandes für das Geschäftsjahr 1891* (Straßburg: Druckerei der Straßburger Neuesten Nachrichten), 10, 3 AL 1/3245, ADHR.

<sup>3</sup> *Statut des Kriegervereins zu Straßburg: Genehmigt durch die Generalversammlung den 6. August 1874* (Straßburg: R. Schultz u. Co., 1874), 1, 69 AL 462, ADBR. The statutes of the *Kriegerverein Colmar*

maintained the original promise to support penurious comrades, but expanded support to include a funeral allowance for deceased members.<sup>4</sup> The social obligations of the *Kriegerverein Straßburg* were further magnified in 1892. In addition to the previous obligations, the bylaws expanded organizational support to the surviving dependents of needy comrades beyond the funeral allowance.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this support becomes evident in the study of different associations' annual reports. Veterans' organizations envisioned themselves acting as a monetary safety net for members that was complementary/supplementary of state aid in instances where official support was insufficient. The *Deutsche Kriegerbund's* (DKB)<sup>6</sup> report from the years 1910/1911 also demonstrates the leadership's desire to expand social support in order to protect its members from "terroristic acts" of social democracy in the workplace and economy. The proposed account, titled the *Kriegerfürsorgekasse*, would be used to support members who were "forced" to take part in workplace strikes or who had lost their positions due to their membership in a veterans' organization. Members who were small business owners and were affected by Social Democrat boycotts could also receive aid.<sup>7</sup>

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followed a similar pattern of the association taking on more and more social responsibilities from the period 1878 to 1903. See 3 AL 1/3246, ADHR.

<sup>4</sup> *Statut des Kriegervereins Straßburg* (Straßburg: H. L. Kayser, 1881), 3, 69 AL 462, ADBR. The previous bylaws had only stipulated that association members would accompany the bodies of their comrades to their final resting place.

<sup>5</sup> *Satzungen des Kriegervereins Straßburg, 1892* (Straßburg: Straßburger Neuste Nachrichten, 1891), 1, 69 AL 462, ADBR. Subsequent changes to the statutes of the *Kriegervereins Straßburg* in 1897 and 1906 would maintain the association's social obligations that were laid down in the 1892 version.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship of the veterans' associations with the *Deutsche Kriegerbund* will be discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>7</sup> *Vierunddreißigster Geschäftsbericht des Deutschen Kriegerbundes: Geschäftsjahre 1910 und 1911* (Berlin: W. Moeser Buchdruckerei, 1912), 14-15, 27 AL 170 A-B, ADBR.

Despite this desire to act as a source of supplemental support, the case of the *Kriegerverein Straßburg*, also demonstrates that there were practical limits of this funding. In 1882, the association saw its membership leap from 270 to 630 members. The organization's leaders were not so naïve as to believe that a new patriotic fervor was sweeping the province, but instead recognized that the membership expansion coincided with the association's implementation of the funeral allowance. Most of the new initiates sought membership in order to claim the 100 M sum for their families in the event of their death. The association's leadership informed provincial officials that a significant percentage of the new inductees suffered from "chronic" sickness and died shortly after joining the organization. The threat of financial ruin led the *Kriegerverein Straßburg* to revise their bylaws.<sup>8</sup> The new statutes stipulated that prospective members present the association leadership with their military papers and certificates regarding their respectability and state of health. Incremental entrance fees were introduced that were based upon the applicant's age and correspondingly higher the older the individual. New members older than fifty were not eligible for the funeral allowance.<sup>9</sup>

## Membership

Organizational and provincial leaders in Alsace sought to attract particular types of members to the ranks of veterans' groups. The associational setting was envisioned as an environment in which different social classes could meet as equals.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the statutes of the

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<sup>8</sup> "Motive zu den neuen Statuten des Kriegervereins Straßburg," 69 AL 462, ADBR.

<sup>9</sup> "Neues Statut des Kriegervereins Straßburg," 69 AL 462, ADBR.

<sup>10</sup> "Einleitung," *Achtzehnter Geschäftsbericht des Deutschen Kriegerbundes: Geschäftsjahr 1889* (Berlin: Funcke & Naeter, 1890), 6-7, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

majority of local Alsatian associations explicitly precluded religious or political discussions within the organization. In practice, however, the associational leadership only welcomed pro-monarchist initiates. In this context, political discussions were unnecessary because prospective members, through their entrance into and acceptance of the group's statutes, committed themselves to loyalty to the monarchy and to the monarchical state. The DKB – a larger regional corporation of veterans' leagues to which the ELKLV was a member – characterized the meaning of an individual's decision to become a member of a veterans association as, "Through his entrance into a veterans' association, the former soldier pledges his loyalty to *Kaiser* and Reich, princes and Fatherland. He pledges to do his part to enhance and strengthen the national consciousness and he pledges his care of comradeship."<sup>11</sup> This pledge alone precluded the entrance of individuals whose political sympathies ran counter to these principles.<sup>12</sup>

Social Democrats in particular were singled out for exclusion. An article in the *Straßburger Post* by an "Old Officer" addressed the belief that a Social Democrat, as a former soldier, could be just as sound of a comrade as any other former soldier. The author called such a belief "erroneous" by observing that the party's declared opposition to the monarchy, desire to overthrow the existing social order, and commitment to internationalism over nationalism ran counter to the veterans' associations' foundational principles.<sup>13</sup> In Alsace, President Muths of the ELKLV utilized the menace of social democracy and the Germanizing influence of the ELKLV's activities in a successful appeal to *Statthalter* Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst to take up the

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<sup>11</sup> "Einleitung," *Achtzehnter Geschäftsbericht des Deutschen Kriegerbundes: Geschäftsjahr 1889* (Berlin: Funcke & Naeter, 1890), 6, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

<sup>12</sup> "Einleitung," *Achtzehnter Geschäftsbericht des Deutschen Kriegerbundes: Geschäftsjahr 1889* (Berlin: Funcke & Naeter, 1890), 8, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

<sup>13</sup> Alten Krieger, "Politik und Kriegervereine," *Straßburger Post*, October 1, 1898, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

guardianship of the association. Muths highlighted the dual role of the ELKLV as a defense against the “plague” of social democracy and the group’s function to lead the “hearts of Alsatians and Lorrainers more and more to Germandom.”<sup>14</sup> A final piece of evidence that demonstrates that Imperial and associational authorities considered the threat of social democracy greater than that of pro-French agitation in the province is demonstrated by a question and response from the *Kriegerverein Noveant* in Lorraine to Understate-Secretary Mandel in 1912. The note sought official endorsement of an organizational decision to allow its members to simultaneously be adherents of the pro-French organization, the *Souvenir-Français*.<sup>15</sup> The *Kriegerverein Noveant* justified the decision by arguing it was in their association’s interest to avoid the creation of unnecessary conflict and resentment amongst its members.<sup>16</sup> Although the *Souvenir-Français* would be banned later that year, Mandel responded on March 17, that he had no objection to the decision. This example demonstrates that veterans’ associations members could be adherents of a francophile association, but not socialists.

The inclusion of supporters and exclusion of “enemies” of the existing political and social order within veterans’ associations was a statewide practice in Germany. The position of

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<sup>14</sup> Muths to Statthalter Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, February 7, 1891, 27 AL 169, ADBR. Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst informed Muths of his decision to accept the proffered position on June 2, 1891. In the 1910/1911 report of the DKB, the author characterized the difference between veterans’ associations and social democracy as that between fire and water. See *Vierunddreißigster Geschäftsbericht des Deutschen Kriegerbundes: Geschäftsjahre 1910 und 1911* (Berlin: W. Moeser Buchdruckerei, 1912), 4. Throughout the remainder of the Imperial period it became standard practice for a newly appointed Statthalter to assume the guardianship of the ELKLV.

<sup>15</sup> The stated purpose of the *Souvenir-Français* in Alsace and Lorraine was the care of Alsatian culture and French war graves. Although suspicious of their motivations, German authorities allowed the organization’s activities to continue, despite a blatantly pro-French demonstration that accompanied the inauguration of a monument on the Franco-Prussian War battlefield of Wissembourg in 1909. See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 64-68.

<sup>16</sup> General Mossner, Elsaß-Lothringische Kriegerlandesverband President to Unterstaatssekretär Mandel, March 16, 1912, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

Alsace as a borderland with its significant population of former soldiers who had served in the French ranks, but were now German citizens, added an additional layer of complexity to the question of who should be allowed to be members of the German veterans' groups. As a result, the membership guidelines for veterans' associations in Alsace were the subject of sustained intra-organizational and inter-organizational-governmental dialogue and expanded along with the general population of veterans' groups in the *Reichsland* over the course of the Imperial period.

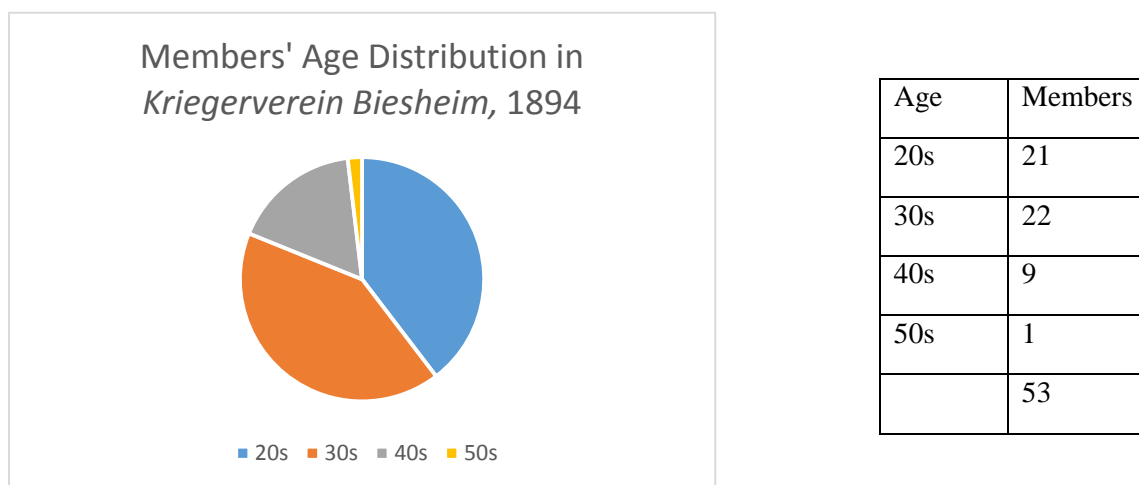
It is difficult to make broad characterizations of the willingness of Germans veterans' associations to admit former French Alsatian combatants to their ranks because individual associations had a great deal of autonomy on the matter. In the years immediately following the transfer of Alsace to German sovereignty, veterans' associations found it difficult to expand their membership beyond the population of former German soldiers who had immigrated to the province. Speaking at the foundational celebration of the ELKLV in 1891, President Muths, described a fifteen year period after 1871 in which veterans' associations were nearly exclusively made up of "old Germans." He suggested this phenomenon was the byproduct of Alsations' profound mistrust of the former combatants' groups' motivations, believing them to be a product of a German chauvinism that sought to utilize the legacy of the past war to work for a renewed outbreak of hostilities.<sup>17</sup> Muths argued that the observation of veterans' groups' deeds had gradually overcome these unfounded suspicions and "opened up the hearts" of the "natives." These activities included fostering loyalty to the Emperor and Empire, Christian charity, the military rites that accompanied the burial of an associational comrade, and decorating the war graves in Alsace – regardless of the internee's nationality.

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<sup>17</sup> "Elsass-Lothringische Kriegerverbandsfest," *Straßburger Neueste Nachrichten* 14 December 15, 1891, Nr. 293, 27 AL 169. ADBR.

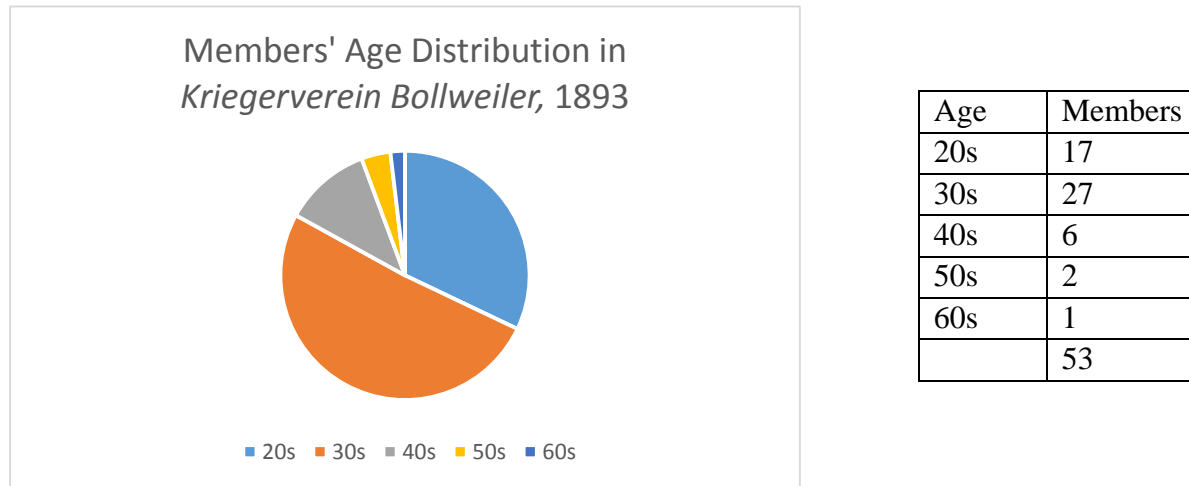
Beginning in 1891, veterans' associations in the *Reichsland* were required to make annual reports regarding their membership and receive official approval for any change to their statutes. The information contained in the responses from the former combatants' organizations demonstrates a wide interpretation of this order on the local level. The answers Imperial authorities received ranged from simple lists of names to sheets that included the occupation, birthplace, residence, birthdate, and the former military formation of individual members. These latter reports were less common than the former, but the information contained in those few meticulous exceptions provides a unique glimpse into the backgrounds of individual members. In particular, the highlighting of individuals who did their military service in the French army provides critical information regarding the percentage of these individuals who participated in German veterans' associations. Moreover, the few associations that included the ages of their members also gives an opportunity to observe the demographic distributions of several individual veterans' organizations (See Figures 5-7).

**Figure 5: Members' Age Distribution in *Kriegerverein Biesheim*, 1894<sup>18</sup>**

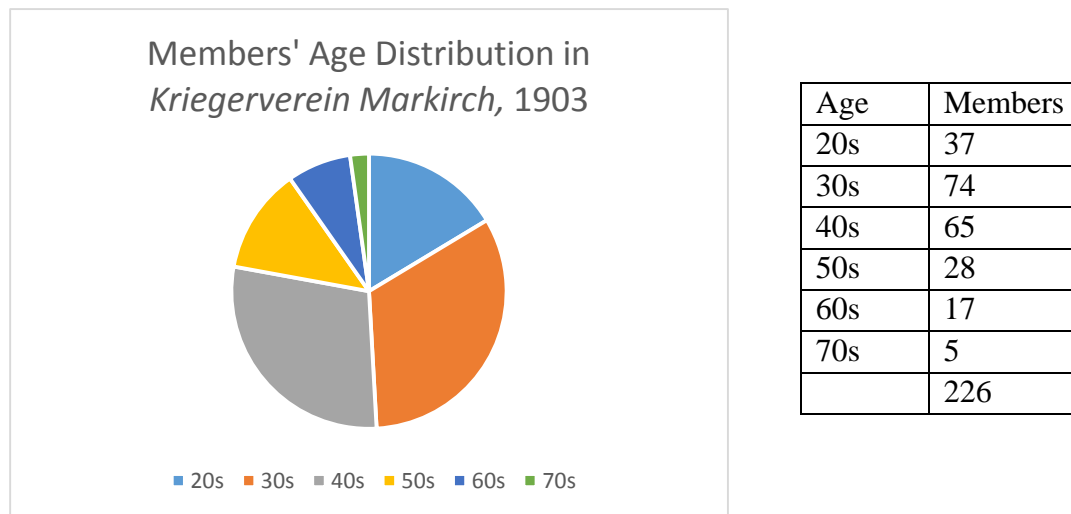


<sup>18</sup> "Verzeichniss der Mitglieder des Kriegervereins Biesheim," 3 AL 1/3255, ADHR.

**Figure 6: Members' Age Distribution in *Kriegerverein Bollweiler*, 1893<sup>19</sup>**



**Figure 7: Members' Age Distribution in *Kriegerverein Markkirch*, 1903<sup>20</sup>**



<sup>19</sup> "Mitgliedverzeichnis des zur errichtenden Kriegervereins Bollweiler," 8 AL 1/1574, ADHR.

<sup>20</sup> "Namentliche Liste des Kriegervereins in Markkirch," 8 AL 1/1608, ADHR.

Although a limited sample size, the picture that emerges from the age statistics of the *Kriegerverein Biesheim* and *Kriegerverein Bollweiler* is of an associational population by and large too young to have fought on either side in the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>21</sup> This information suggests that most members had completed their military service in a German regiment. At a broader level this also indicates that the German military proved to be a more effective vehicle of integration than the veterans' associations. In contrast, the demographic statistics from the *Kriegerverein Markirch* coming a decade later, provides useful comparative data to the 1890s graphs. This latter chart no longer presents a drastically bottom-heavy (younger) membership and instead, although maintaining a solid lower base, is more evenly distributed in the upper-age ranges and coincides with an age range one might expect to see in an established association. The case of the *Kriegerverein Markirch* also demonstrates that it was not impossible to build a functioning, soundly based veterans' organizations in the *Reichsland* that included both populations of French Alsatian and German veterans, as 28 of the association's 227 members had fought in the French army during the 1870-1871 conflict. The problem, however, was that a systematic provincial-wide effort to include French Alsatian veterans was not undertaken until 30 years after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War hostilities.

The greater participation of the Alsatian population in veterans' groups was largely a development of the 1880s. In the years following the transfer of the provinces to Germany, associations' low numbers necessitated an expansion of the organizations' membership criteria. In practice this meant that although the parameters for "ordinary" membership in the association retained the basic requirement that the individual be "respectable" and have served in the

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<sup>21</sup> The specific percentage of members of these associations who fought for France during the Franco-Prussian War (Biesheim – 9.4%, Bollweiler – 3.1%, and Markirch – 12.4%) will be considered at greater length below.

military, there was also a provision that allowed individuals who possessed a noncombatant war medal to join. The rules regarding an “honorary membership” were even more inclusive in Alsace as the provision of having completed military service was dropped and any “native” individual who was committed to the same goals as the veterans’ association could join, although they would be ineligible to receive support from the association.

Another factor that contributed to the initial lack of Alsatian participation in veterans’ organizations was their deliberate exclusion. For instance, in 1875, the *Kriegerverein Straßburg*’s statutes only allowed for the inclusion of individuals who had served in the German army or “in a time of danger to the German army served with honor.” This latter clause was meant to include a wide range of officials and male nurses.<sup>22</sup> In general, however, the trend during these transitional years was to utilize language in the membership bylaws that neither specifically included nor excluded former French soldiers. Thus the statutes of the *Kriegerverein Colmar* stated that “Any respectable member of the German Reich (*Reichsangehörige*) who was a soldier or is in possession of a noncombatant’s war medallion can be an ordinary member.”<sup>23</sup> In another case, the *Kriegerverein zu Schlettstadt* was more explicit about including non-German veterans, but managed to retain the general non-specificity and, furthermore, made the membership of such individuals appear as an afterthought. The bylaws read, “Every respectable former soldier of the German army and every functionary that served in a German army

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<sup>22</sup> “Statut des Kriegervereins zu Straßburg,” 1875, 69 AL 462, ADBR. The result of this policy was that in comparison to other *Reichsland* associations the *Kriegervereins Straßburg* membership consisted of a low percentage of native-born Alsatians. For instance, only 66 of a total 1005 members were listed as being born in Alsace in the organization’s 1890 annual report.

<sup>23</sup> “Statuten des Kriegervereins Colmar gegründet am 11. November 1878,” 3 AL 1/3246, ADHR. I found language of this sort to be used in 4 out of 6 association statutes printed in the 1870s, 7 out of 8 in the 1880s, 11 out of 13 in the 1890s, and 0 out of 8 in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

detachment whilst on campaign qualify for acceptance as ordinary members, likewise every citizen is eligible who proves his respectable service in a foreign army to the associational leadership, is of good local reputation, and attests to have an active interest in the association.”<sup>24</sup>

The second-rate status of these citizens who had served in a foreign army was cemented by the fact that they, along with “honorary members” of the association, were not eligible for election to the association’s leadership. In my survey of 24 different veterans’ associations in Alsace, the earliest membership bylaw that explicitly included former French veterans came from the *Kriegerverein Sulz und Wald* in 1886 or 1892. The provision read, “Any respectable man who served with honor in the German or French armies or accomplished their service as an official in the German or French armies on campaign and through this assistance received a commendation can be an ordinary member.”<sup>25</sup>

The lack of widespread provisions among veterans’ associations in the *Reichsland* that would have allowed the inclusion of former French soldiers is puzzling. This is particularly true given that a concentrated effort to include the former enemy soldiers might have gone a long way in overcoming the often commented upon suspicion and hostility with which the local populace received German veterans’ associations. A note from a Dr. Kochmann to *Statthalter* Manteuffel regarding the membership policies of “local” veterans’ associations in 1882 suggests that a possible reason for the lack of such explicit guidelines on the part of *Reichsland* veterans’

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<sup>24</sup> *Statuten des Kriegervereins zu Schlettstadt* (Colmar: Buchdruckerei von Ww. J.B. Jung, 1879), 4, 3 AL 1/3246, ADHR.

<sup>25</sup> *Statuten des Kriegervereins Sulz u. Wald: Gegründet am 20. Juni 1886* (Wissembourg: R. Ackermann, 1904), 3, 87 AL 87, ADBR. The *Veteranenverein Straßburg* claimed to have formally included French Alsatian veterans of active service in 1885, but to date the only copy of the association’s statutes that I have found indicates its contents were approved in 1904.

organizations stemmed from a lack of direction from provincial authorities.<sup>26</sup> The result of an authoritative nonintervention on the matter was twofold. On the one hand, it left veterans' groups who were not opposed to including former French soldiers hesitant to enshrine such an inclusive policy in their statutes while unsure of official approval and, on the other hand, it gave local associations who wished to exclude such individuals the autonomy to do so.

Both results ultimately worked against official Germanization policies in the provinces by slowing the growth of veterans' associations. In this particular note, Dr. Kochmann sought Manteuffel's support for a proposal that provided for the formal inclusion of former French soldiers in his local veterans' association.<sup>27</sup> Kochmann went on to justify this application with a series of 12 points. Some of the main arguments he utilized for the inclusion of French veterans included: 1) the *Kaiser's* desire for a friendly and peaceful relationship between native Alsatians and German immigrants; 2) that the German patriotism of the Alsatians would be increased through their association with former German soldiers; 3) that the former French Alsatian soldiers who would become members were already German citizens; 4) that the French Alsatian veterans had merely fulfilled their duty to their Fatherland - Alsace-Lorraine, and it was not their fault that it had been under French sovereignty at the time; 5) that the *Kaiser* had ordered that the years of work that Alsatian officials had accomplished under the French administration be included in the reckoning of these individuals' German pensions; 6) that it was not only patriotic

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<sup>26</sup> Although Kochmann never specifically identified the veterans' association to which he was referring, the inclusion of this note and the associated correspondence in a folder dedicated to the *Kriegerverein Straßburg* and the fact that at least through 1897 the bylaws of the association continued to only admit individuals who served in the German military and lived in Strasbourg, suggests that it was indeed to this organization that Kochmann was referring.

<sup>27</sup> Kochmann informed Manteuffel that he had brought a similar petition the last six years to the association's leaders and had each attempt rejected.

to battle the enemy on the field, but by teaching him patriotism in peacetime; 7) that the fact that the *Kaiser* had not refrained from bestowing regimental flags on those *Reichsland* veterans' associations that had already included former French soldiers, which signaled de-facto royal acceptance of the policy.<sup>28</sup> He continued to say that these arguments had never been seriously refuted by his local veterans' association, but that the proposal's opponents had simply justified the rejection by reverting to "high" and "patriotic" phrases.

Kochmann's note prompted an internal letter from the District President of Lower Alsace, Otto Back, to the Ministry of Alsace-Lorraine. Back noted that only a small number of the association's members had favored the inclusion of the former French veterans in Kochmann's previous attempts and predicted a similar fate for any subsequent proposition.<sup>29</sup> Back opined that the issue was an internal associational matter in which authorities had no reason to interfere. The official response from the Ministry for Alsace-Lorraine on November 16, 1882 took Back's position and informed Kochmann of their decision to not intervene in the matter. In the end, the *Kriegerverein Straßburg*, the oldest and singularly largest veterans' organization in the *Reichsland*, would not formally enshrine the inclusion of former French Alsatian soldiers into their statutes until 1906. By this time, 35 years after the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian War, it is unlikely that many of the former enemy combatants chose to take advantage of this "opportunity."

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<sup>28</sup> Dr. Kochmann to Statthalter Manteuffel, September 29, 1882, 69 AL 462, ADBR. This final justification/observation is also a clear indication that some former French soldiers were finding their way into different Imperial veterans' organizations.

<sup>29</sup> Bezirkspräsident Otto Back to the Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung des Innern, November 3, 1882, 69 AL 462, ADBR.

Other evidence suggests that a similar discussion regarding the inclusion of French veterans was occurring around the same time in another former combatants' group in Strasbourg. The pamphlet that accompanied the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the founding of the *Veteranenverein Straßburg* informed participants that former French veterans had increasingly expressed their interest in participating in German veterans' associations over the course of the fifteen year period following the German victory in 1871. However, as late as 1885 in Strasbourg – and another indication of Kochmann's failure to convince provincial or associational authorities to implement his proposal – no German comradesly organization was in the position to accept them. The author outlined that an additional consideration that motivated the creation of the *Veteranenverein Straßburg* was that a significant portion of former soldiers who had seen active service refrained from joining contemporary veterans' associations. Discussions regarding the conditions under which a former French soldier might join a German veterans group concluded that such an organization could only exist if its members were only ex-soldiers who had seen active service. This conviction was given material form through the creation of the *Veteranenverein Straßburg*. Ironically, although inclusive of French Alsatian veterans, the provision that members must have taken part in a battle, skirmish, or as defenders or attackers in a siege made the *Veteranenverein Straßburg* one of the most exclusive veterans organization in the *Reichsland*. Speaking at the inaugural meeting of the association in October 1885, the newly appointed associational president, a Comrade Strunck informed the 49 participants that,

The care of love and loyalty to the Emperor and Empire is self-evident to us old soldiers who have risked our lives and blood for the sake of the Fatherland, nevertheless we must always continue to bear in mind the great obligation we have to set an example of real German patriotism, self-sacrificing love and courage for our new Heimat – for beautiful Alsace and thereby our collective German Fatherland and coming generations. For the comrades who once

served in the French army, we want to offer a place of sincere comradeship. We hope for a similar commitment from them.<sup>30</sup>

As is visible in Figure 8 below, I was able to locate extensive membership records of the *Veteranenverein Straßburg* from the period of 1885-1909. Unfortunately, the existent membership data does not differentiate between former French soldiers and German veterans. The one exception to this trend occurred in 1909 when, after a period of general membership decline, the *Veteranenverein Straßburg* reported that 32 of its current 264 members had completed their military service under the tricolor.<sup>31</sup> As valuable as this information is, it likewise does not differentiate Franco-Prussian war veterans from those of earlier French campaigns. What the information does demonstrate is that by utilizing a membership principle that was explicitly inclusive of both former French and German soldiers, the *Veteranenverein Straßburg* was able to build a respectably sized association that outnumbered many other more exclusive *Reichsland* veterans' organizations.

The same 1910 pamphlet also drew attention to the *Veteranenverein Straßburg*'s participation in a military review with the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Corps that was observed by *Kaiser* Wilhelm II on August 29, 1908. The purpose of the joint maneuver was to highlight the cooperation between the association's French and German members. In a toast following the parade, the *Kaiser* made a point of expressing his pleasure to see combatants of such engagements as Solferino and Sebastopol standing alongside ex-German soldiers wearing Iron crosses.<sup>32</sup> The

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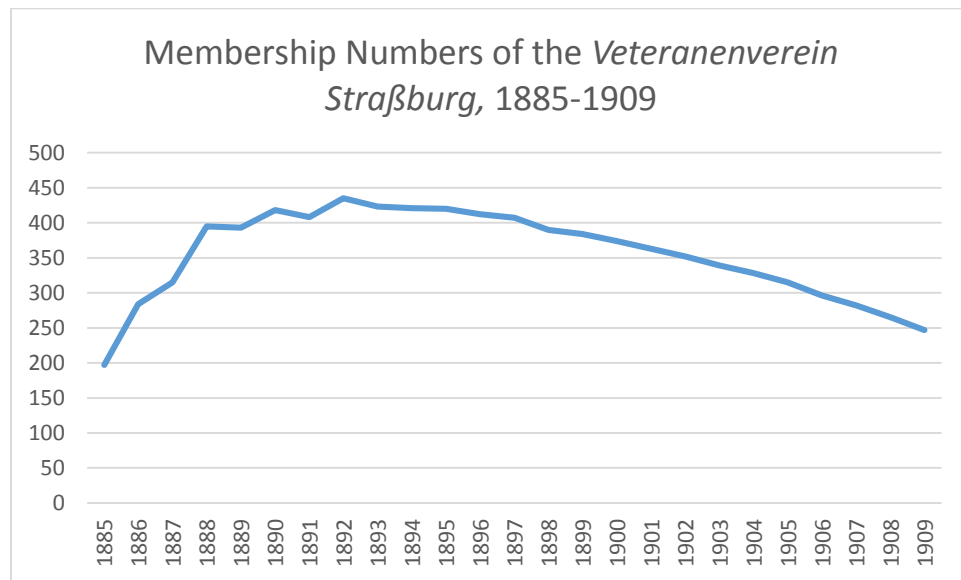
<sup>30</sup> *Veteranenverein Straßburg i. E., Nach fünfundzwanzig Jahren: Festschrift zur Jubelfeier am 12. Juni 1910*, 4-5, 27 AL 209, ADBR.

<sup>31</sup> Directorate of the *Veteranenvereins Straßburg* to Statthalter von Wedel, May 8, 1909, 27 AL 209A, ADBR.

<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps also significant that in the list of battles (Solferino, Magenta, Inkermann, and Sebastopol) that *Kaiser* Wilhelm II neglected to mention any of the major engagements of the Franco-Prussian war.

author of the tract took this royal recognition as validation of the principles behind the foundation of the association in 1885.

**Figure 8: Membership Numbers of the *Veteranenverein Straßburg*, 1885-1909<sup>33</sup>**



Year	Number of Members	Year	Number of Members
1885	197	1898	390
1886	284	1899	384
1887	315	1900	374
1888	395	1901	363
1889	393	1902	352
1890	418	1903	339
1891	408	1904	328
1892	435	1905	315
1893	423	1906	296
1894	421	1907	282
1895	420	1908	265
1896	412	1909	247
1897	407		

<sup>33</sup> Veteranenverein Straßburg i. E., *Nach fünfundzwanzig Jahren*, 30, 27 AL 209A, ADBR.

The explicit provision that provided for the membership of former French Alsatian soldiers in Imperial German veterans' associations did not gain widespread usage until the ELKLV took the initiative and adopted the statute at its associational meeting in Metz on June 9, 1901. The subsequent note from the ELKLV's President Muths to Statthalter Hohenlohe-Langenburg in 1901 highlighted how Alsace's position as a borderland had altered the membership guidelines of the association. He began by noting that it was the basic principle of all German veterans' associations that members have served in the *German* army or navy, but that the ELKLV had been authorized to also accept Alsace-Lorrainers who had served in the French military up to the conclusion of Franco-Prussian peace and who had subsequently received German citizenship.<sup>34</sup> Despite this relatively clear set of instructions, Muths observed that certain individual associations chose to ignore them and allowed individuals who had served in any army to join. This overstepping of the leadership's instructions led to the adoption of a specific membership clause that read,

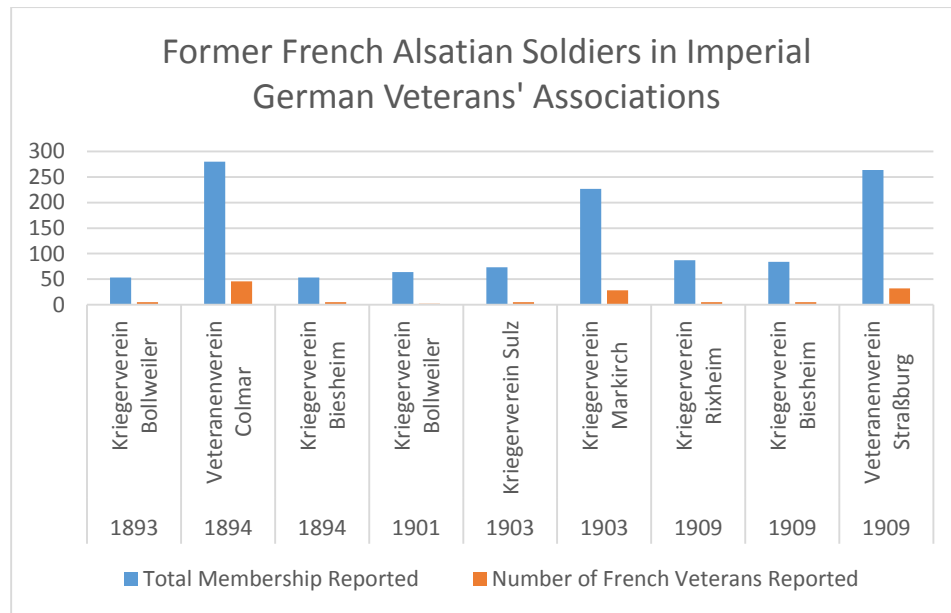
Only men with blameless moral conduct and of proven respectability who served in the German army or navy or who before the Treaty of Frankfurt of 1871 served in the French army or navy, possess German citizenship, have sworn an oath of allegiance, and through their attitude and conduct demonstrate their loyalty to the Kaiser and Reich, are allowed to be members of the veterans' associations that make up the *Elsass-Lothringische Kriegerlandesverband*.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Elsass-Lothringische Kriegerlandesverband* President Muths to Statthalter Hohenlohe-Langenburg, June 20, 1901, 3 AL 1/3244, ADHR. Muths does not give any other indication about how long this practice of de-facto inclusion has been in place.

<sup>35</sup> Muths to Hohenlohe-Langenburg, June 20, 1901, 3 AL 1/3244, ADHR. This statute would be utilized as the standard association membership statute following its adoption by the ELKLV.

**Figure 9: Former French Alsatian Soldiers in Imperial German Veterans' Associations<sup>36</sup>**



Year of Report	Association Title	Total Membership Reported	Number of French Veterans Reported
1893	Kriegerverein Bollweiler	53	5
1894	Veteranenverein Colmar	280	46
1894	Kriegerverein Biesheim	53	5
1901	Kriegerverein Bollweiler	64	2
1903	Kriegerverein Sulz	73	5
1903	Kriegerverein Markkirch	227	28
1909	Kriegerverein Rixheim	87	5
1909	Kriegerverein Biesheim	84	5
1909	Veteranenverein Straßburg	264	32

<sup>36</sup> This graph and the accompanying chart are based on information the respective associations reported to provincial authorities. The relevant files include: *Kriegerverein Bollweiler* 8 AL 1/1574, ADHR; *Veteranenverein Colmar* 3 AL 1/3247, ADHR; *Kriegerverein Biesheim* 3 AL 1/3255, ADHR; *Kriegerverein Bollweiler* 8 AL 1/1574, ADHR; *Kriegerverein Sulz* 8 AL 1/1581, ADHR; and *Kriegerverein Markkirch* 8 AL 1/1608, ADHR.

In the end, as is demonstrated in Figure 9, only a tiny fraction of former French veterans joined the veterans' associations in the *Reichsland*.<sup>37</sup> The fact that only a minority of eligible ex-soldiers participated in veterans' organizations is not unique to the Alsatian context nor to the Imperial period.<sup>38</sup> However, in the Alsatian case, the local population's suspicions and general hostility towards German veterans' associations combined with a lack of a clear central directive from provincial authorities to thwart widespread French Alsatian participation in veterans' organizations. A final piece of evidence that is worth highlighting that demonstrates French Alsatian ex-soldiers in principle were not opposed to joining a veterans' association is provided by the short-lived *Verein französischer Veteranen* (Association of French Veterans) that was founded in Mulhouse in 1913. One of the membership guidelines read, "Only Alsace-Lorraine citizens who participated in campaigns with the French army until 1870/71 will be accepted as members."<sup>39</sup> The most interesting/telling observation that is included in the same memorandum was the group's membership statistics. Despite its short existence, the District President in

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<sup>37</sup> Low participation rates of French Alsatian ex-soldiers in Imperial veterans' associations is not necessarily an indicator of an anti-German bias. Chris Millington has observed that the rates of Franco-Prussian War veterans joining combatants' associations in France was proportionally much lower than the number that would join similar organizations following World War I. Millington explains this phenomenon by writing, "Tainted by the defeat to Prussia, they were an unwelcome reminder of a past that nation wished to forget." See Millington, *From victory to Vichy*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Throughout the Interwar period, veterans' groups in Germany would observe and lament the fact that only a minority of their soldierly comrades chose to participate in associational life. In the ELKLV annual report from 1911, the author attributed the absence of "1000s of soldiers who have served" in the veterans' organizations to a combination of factors that included preconceptions of the groups, unfamiliarity with the association's purpose and goals, and other fatuitous reasons. These reasons for abstentions were likewise frequently cited in the Interwar period. See *Einundzwanzigster Jahresbericht des Elsaß-Lothringischen Kriegerlandesverbandes für das Jahr 1911* (Strasbourg: Elsaß-Lothr. Druckerei, 1912).

<sup>39</sup> Kaiserliche Kreisdirektor und Polizeipräsident to the Bezirkspräsidenten zu Colmar, September 17, 1913, 8 AL 1/1606, ADHR.

Colmar was informed that the association already numbered 450 members, most of whom came from the working class, but that all social classes were represented. Clearly former French combatants did not have an issue joining a veterans' group so much as a German veterans' association.

### **Monitoring Veterans' Associations' Activities**

Examining the prescribed role and membership of the veterans' associations in Alsace can only take our understanding of the organizations so far. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine a central event in the life of an Imperial veterans' group in order to see how both the associations and Imperial authorities utilized the other's expectations or desires as leverage to achieve their own ends. The efforts surrounding the application and eventual reception of an associational flag provide an opportunity to see this relationship in practice.

Having an associational flag bestowed from the hand of the Kaiser was a central recognition and goal for Imperial veterans' groups in Alsace. Prohibitive manufacturing costs and German law precluded individual associational initiative in regards to designing and commissioning the creation of their own flag. An organizational flag had both pragmatic and symbolic meaning. In the former case, being awarded a regimental flag not only was a sign of authorities' recognition of the association, but also guaranteed a certain level of financial security.<sup>40</sup> The high profile of veterans' groups and their public connection to the regime could be utilized as leverage for governmental aid if an association ran into financial difficulty.

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<sup>40</sup> In the overall process of applying for and receiving a regimental flag, veterans' associations in Alsace relied twofold on German authorities' monetary benevolence. In the first place they needed extra funds to pay for the commissioning of the banner and, secondary (but invariably), later *Reichsland* officials would receive a follow-up request for additional funds to support a "fitting" and "proper" dedication ceremony. The often subliminal (if not overt) suggestion in this latter request was that a failure to provide the necessary funds would result in a lackluster ceremony that would shame both the organization and the

Applying for an association flag was an intensive process that included official and police review of the individual organization's statutes, membership lists, and often a required revision of both if they did not conform to official guidelines. Imperial German officials utilized veterans' groups' desires for an associational flag to ensure that the associations conformed to official policies and overcome local resistance to obvious infringements on local organizational autonomy. Moreover, the associational flag applications also gave provincial authorities increased oversight and knowledge of the inner-workings of a wide range of veterans' groups in Alsace and Lorraine. Legislation regarding associations that was passed in 1887, 1890, 1902, and 1909 demonstrates that German officials utilized the flag application process to progressively simplify their supervision of the associational landscape. Small local associations that did not meet the minimum membership threshold were amalgamated into larger groups that themselves were members of provincial-wide organizations like the ELKLV, which in turn were incorporated into regional corporations like the DKB.

Imperial authorities drafted specific guidelines that took advantage of the desire of veterans' groups for an associational flag to both keep tabs on existing organizations of former soldiers and to prevent the proliferation of a myriad of smaller associations that would have been more difficult to monitor. The overall trajectory of this process can be seen in a series of decrees between 1887 and 1909 that progressively heightened the associational banner prerequisites and centralized their administration. In 1887, a decree from the German Ministry of Interior ordered that only associations that had a minimum of 30 members and existed for three years were eligible for consideration for an associational banner. In 1890, the membership requirement was

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*Reichsland* government, by association, in the eyes of the local populace. In the overwhelming number of these cases contained in the files of the ADBR, a certain amount of support was usually granted.

increased to 50 and members were required to maintain “blameless” conduct for a three year period. This last order brought Alsace’s standard requirements in line with equivalent legislation in Prussia.

These rules, however, were not set in stone. In a confidential note that was signed on the behalf of the Reich’s Chancellor in 1893, *Statthalter* Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst was informed that royal Prussian officials had been empowered to review, cases, and approve flag applications on a case by case basis in instances of exceptional circumstances. Despite, or perhaps unaware of the exception, ELKLV leaders argued to Hohenlohe-Langenburg in 1898 that veterans’ associations in the *Reichsland* were faced with an entirely different set of challenges than their Prussian counterparts. In particular, they contended that the logistical and unique political problems facing these “outposts of Germandom” in sparsely populated rural settings and in “French areas” of the province meant that it would take years to build up an associational population that met the 50 member minimum. Ultimately, association leaders were granted a concession that veterans’ groups located in such areas could be considered for a regimental banner if they had a minimum of 35 members and been functioning for five years.<sup>41</sup> Thus Imperial authorities demonstrated a willingness and ability to adapt their policies to the unique set of challenges posed by the Alsatian borderland.

The oversight of the veterans’ association landscape in Alsace and Lorraine was simplified for the German authorities by the creation of the ELKLV in 1890. Official direction and support were key factors in the founding of the *Reichsland*’s first and only regionally constituted veterans’ association. The ELKLV was to serve a twofold purpose. The first was to provide a centralized, unified, and goal-conscious leadership of veterans’ organizations’

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<sup>41</sup> ELKLV to Statthalter Hohenlohe-Langenburg, April 18, 1898, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

activities in order to coordinate and maximize the “Germanizing” effectiveness of the local associations. Previous efforts of founding organizations similar to the ELKLV had foundered on the reluctance of local associations to compromise their autonomy. To overcome this hesitancy, the Understate Secretary recommended giving the future ELKLV the oversight over a sizable associational support account. The dispensing of these funds would ensure the regional group’s influence over the communal veterans’ groups.<sup>42</sup> German authorities’ decision to make a local membership in the ELKLV a requirement to be considered for an associational flag.

The second purpose of the ELKLV was simplify the oversight of the veterans’ associational landscape. The ELKLV was charged with monitoring smaller associations in the province and making sure their bylaws and membership were in line with official policy. In practice, local *Reichsland* veterans’ organizations who wished to join the ELKLV were able to maintain their autonomy, but were required to ensure that none of their local association statutes (including those individuals who were included in their groups) contradicted the equivalent bylaws of the ELKLV.<sup>43</sup> This process led to a homogenization of associational bylaws in the provinces. All eight of the associational statutes I examined following the ELKLV’s adoption of the inclusive membership statute that explicitly included former French Alsatian soldiers were word for word copies of the original 1901 proposal. The membership of the ELKLV in the

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<sup>42</sup> Unterstaatssekretär to Statthalter Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, December 11, 1890, 27 AL 169, ADBR.

<sup>43</sup> Second Associational President (II Verbands-Vorsitzender) Muths, “Geschichte und Einrichtungen des Deutschen Kriegervereinswesens, insbesondere des Els.-Lothr. Landesverbandes,” 3 AL 1/3245, ADHR. Naturally not every local association followed the directives of the ELKLV as strictly as others. This is demonstrated by the annual reports of the ELKLV that noted with disappointment that in 1912 146 and in 1913 198 of its member associations chose not to undertake drives to collect funds for the care of ELKLV members’ widows and orphans and expressed the hope that these associations would be more accommodating in the future. See the *Zweiundzwanzigster Jahresbericht des Elsaß-Lothringischen Kriegerlandesverbandes für das Jahr 1912* (Strasbourg: Druckerei, Abt. Müh und Cie, 1913), 27 AL 225, ADBR; *Dreiundzwanzigster Jahresbericht des Elsaß-Lothringischen Kriegerlandesverbandes für das Jahr 1913* (Strasbourg: Druckerei, Abt. Müh und Cie, 1914), 27 AL 225c, ADBR.

regionally constituted DKB, which along with other larger associations from Bavaria, Saxony, Württemberg, Hesse, and Baden were incorporated as members of the only truly national corporation of veterans' groups, the *Kyffhäuserbund*, formed the apex of the pyramidal structure that characterized the organization of veterans' associations in Imperial Germany.

The unification of veterans' organizational activity in the provinces provides an opportunity to better study the dramatic expansion of such groups that took place beginning in the 1880s. Both the DKB and ELKLV were more consistent than local groups in keeping track and reporting their membership. It was a staple of every annual report to include a section that highlighted the current year's membership numbers (See Appendix). Membership statistics, like census figures,<sup>44</sup> must be utilized with caution as it was in the interest of both the DKB and ELKLV to show an annual participation increase so as to demonstrate the effectiveness of their activities to Imperial authorities. Yet, despite these potential drawbacks, the membership statistics of the national, regional, and several local associations nonetheless provide an extended temporal picture of the *Reichsland* veterans' organizations. The fact that Alsatians constituted the majority of members in many associations – despite the fact that the majority of these individuals (as suggested by the previous age distribution tables (Figures 5-7)) had completed their service under the Imperial flag – nevertheless demonstrates the advance of veterans' associational life in the provinces. It is impossible to generalize about the ex-soldiers' motivations to join ex-servicemen's groups without oversimplifying a complicated process. Undoubtedly, associations' financial support for members and their families in cases of unforeseen problems or death remained a strong attractant. In order to utilize these advantages,

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<sup>44</sup> Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). Judson identifies problems associated with the use of census materials.

however, an individual was required at a minimum to participate and at least pay lip service to the other aspects of associational life – including the care and expansion of “loyalty and love” to the Kaiser and Reich. Whatever their level of interest or disinterest in pro-monarchical activities and German nationalism, members’ participation provided a context where exposure could lead to a growth in both, which in many cases was the opportunity for which the veterans’ organizations were working.

Chapter 4 focused its attention on the policies and practices of Imperial veterans’ organizations in Alsace and their relationship with provincial authorities. By examining the official and associational ascribed patriotic and social purpose of veterans’ groups it has demonstrated that both were utilized in attempts to advance “Germandom” in the province, build support for the new political order, and provide a moral and economic defense against the most malicious foe facing the contemporary German empire – social democracy. The explicit focus on social democrats demonstrates that socialism was more of a concern to Imperial authorities than pro-French agitators in the province. In effect, despite their claims of their apolitical nature, veterans’ groups sought out and attracted ex-servicemen who shared a similar commitment to the monarchical principal.

Low participant numbers in the years after 1871 caused German officials to approve a broadening of membership criteria that was gradually narrowed over the course of the Imperial period as associations organically grew in size. An additional characteristic of this early period was that provincial officials gave local veterans’ associations a considerable amount of autonomy in deciding their makeup. This freedom, along with a lack of any specific central instruction, led to the creation of a multitude of different membership policies that generally fell somewhere between ambiguous and exclusive in relation to former French veterans. The advent

of the regionally based ELKLV eventually lead to the implementation of uniform inclusive membership policies, but throughout the Imperial period only a small minority of French Alsatians veterans joined the German former combatant groups.

The expansion of the veterans' associations' membership in the *Reichsland* occurred until the outbreak of the First World War. During the conflict, veterans' organizations were put into permanent state of decline by a combination of factors that included the call up of members to active military service, enemy occupation of certain parts of Alsace, the de-prioritization of associational activities among members in the face of larger wartime concerns and privations, and ultimately, the population expulsions and movements that accompanied the French reoccupation of the province in 1918. Any potential for a postwar reconstruction of German veterans' associational life was precluded by an official French prohibition against their existence and activities in the province. Some of the ex-soldiers who either through voluntary immigration or expulsion found themselves excluded from Alsace would join regimental associations in Germany that commemorated their period of service and laid a symbolic claim to Alsace through the construction of their regimental memorials on the heights of the Black Forest overlooking their former garrison cities. Their memorialization and commemorative activities are the focus of chapter 11.

## Conclusion to Part I

If we Alsace-Lorrainers were so stupid as to yield to these French chauvinist activities and if these chauvinist activities were to have success and lead to a war between France and Germany – and if that was the final purpose of the agitation – who then would suffer the most under these conditions? We Alsace-Lorrainers! The first battles would fall on our soil. We would bear the first and predominant burdens of war. We know this very well. And because Alsace-Lorrainers are a very practical folk, they would for this reason never let themselves be seduced by such agitation.<sup>1</sup>

~Deputy Bueb speaking in a Reichstag debate on January 30, 1895.

In the few years prior to the outbreak of the First World War, both the German administration and French Alsatian veterans could look with some satisfaction upon the current state of their relationship. On the official side, German authorities could point to the declining number of legal emigration applications, as well as a rapidly expanding veterans' association membership as evidence that the Alsatian populace were increasingly reconciling themselves to Germany. This state of affairs appeared to validate the trust and reliance that they had invested in schools and the military as assimilating institutions. For their part, both the pre- and Franco-Prussian War French Alsatian veterans could be pleased by official concessions that finally equalized the amount of support they received with their German counterparts. Even more impressive, this change had been affected almost entirely through the efforts of individual initiative and lacking the benefit of an organized lobby. Yet the *eventual* success of French Alsatian veterans should not obscure our recognition of the contentious nature of the process and the significant enactment delay of such policies. Although Imperial officials' expressed concern with perceptions of fairness and equality of treatment in regard to issues of citizenship, pensions, and military service as their rationalization to withhold or enact certain policies in Alsace, Alsations themselves understood these measures as evidence of authorities' lack of sympathy for

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<sup>1</sup> Germany, Reichstag Debates 1895, 26 Sitzung, January 30, 1895, 61, R 101 3557, BABL.

the province's recent past and proof of their "second-class" status in the Reich. A welter of competing jurisdictions, unclear policies, and at times a lack of central initiative contributed to a confused atmosphere in Alsace. The result was that German authorities were never able to fully reap the propagandistic benefits of what at times were genuinely reconciliatory measures towards the former French Alsatian soldiers.

The opening of hostilities in 1914 with France was a watershed moment and served as a twofold test Imperial/Alsatian relations. At the official level, in the zero-sum game of war, the German government's rhetoric regarding its faith in the assimilating power of its educational and martial institutions and the reconcilability of the Alsatian populace to the Reich were put to the ultimate test. In practice, the concrete attitudes and policies directed at the province's population, and in particular the thousands of young men who served in the German military's ranks, would demonstrate that four decades of Imperial rule had done little to alter German authorities' own perceptions of the national allegiance of Alsatians. In the changed circumstances, Imperial military officials found themselves unwilling to trust the conversionary power of their educational and martial institutions. The result was an atmosphere of suspicion that found expression in a combination of policies and actions that served to alienate many Alsatian soldiers.

For different elements of the Alsatian population, the reopening of the conflict with France was viewed as a dilemma and an opportunity. Alsatians with German nationalist leanings saw the potential of the conflict to draw the province's populace even more into the German orbit. They hoped that the war contributions of the population and a German victory would finally prove Alsatians' loyalty and worthiness to be incorporated into the Reich with the same autonomy and rights as any other German state. On the other side, Francophile elements of the

population hoped for a reversal of the “crime” of German annexation. They likewise saw Alsatians’ participation in the French cause as a means to definitively demonstrate the province’s “French heart.” In the end, however, rabid French or German nationalists were a distinct minority in Alsace. The realization that the physical space of the province would once again be the setting for the renewed Franco-German clash combined with the pull of ambiguous national allegiances to create a general popular reaction in Alsace that in no way mirrored the celebratory scenes in urban centers in Germany and France. The experience of Alsatians wearing the fiedl gray or horizon blue is the topic of Part II.

## **Part II**

### **The Conflict Rekindled: Alsace and Alsatians in the First World War, 1914-1918.**

“Are you an Alsatian?”<sup>1</sup>

~Imperial Mulhouse Military Tribunal Counsel to Defendant.

“Are you German or Alsatian?”<sup>2</sup>

~French Interrogator’s Question to Captured German Alsatian Soldier.

“‘What are you saying here? That you don’t care how the war ends? Consider the consequences that would result from our defeat!’ – ‘Lieutenant,’ I answered, ‘the war can end however it wishes for if I survive it either way I am with the victor.’ – ‘How is that?’ asked the now astounded Lieutenant. ‘Simple,’ I replied in answer. ‘I am an Alsatian. If Germany wins, Alsace remains German and we find ourselves with the victors. If the other side wins then Alsace will be French and we still find ourselves among the victors!’ - ‘Really,’ said the Lieutenant, ‘I hadn’t thought about it like that. But naturally you would prefer a German victory over a victory of the enemy!’ - Whereupon which I answered, ‘Lieutenant, I am a farmer and must cultivate my soil either way. If I pay my taxes here or there is all the same to me.’”<sup>3</sup>

~Alsatian German Soldier Dominik Richert retelling a conversation with his Lieutenant shortly before his desertion in 1918.

“We Alsatians are the forgotten soldiers of this war. I no longer find meaning in life. I only want the war to end quickly. I want to save my skin and if later I must remain German or become French, what is that to me? For now, I just want to save my skin.”<sup>4</sup>

~ Alsatian German Conscript Jean Lechner, January 1, 1917.

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<sup>1</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1:258.

<sup>2</sup> “Abschrift, Flülen,” November 3, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>3</sup> Dominik Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben: Meine Erlebnisse im Kriege 1914-1918*, ed. by Angelika Tramitz und Bernd Ulrich (München: Kneesebeck & Schuler, 1989), 337.

<sup>4</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 125.

## Introduction

Few contemporary observers could have predicted how the conflict that broke out in August 1914 would fundamentally reshape the political and demographic map of Europe. Over the next four years, millions of young men would die on the battlefield or return home with both visible and invisible scars, millions more would be displaced, empires would fall, and the social, cultural, political, and economic fabric of combatant societies' would be fundamentally altered. However, unaware of the destruction and dislocation that would result, the rekindling of the Franco-German military rivalry was initially perceived as an opportunity and challenge for both sides. For Germany, the war provided an opportunity to test the extent to which the "Germanization" efforts of the martial and educational systems had advanced in Alsace. Certain observers believed that Alsatian participation in a military victory against France would serve as the ultimate assimilatory experience and once and for all draw the population of the *Reichsland* into the German national fold.<sup>5</sup> For France, the war was a chance to right the wrong of 1871 and an opportunity for Alsatians to prove the French nationalist imagining that they had never ceased to be French in their hearts.<sup>6</sup> French authorities refrained from discussing their intention to

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<sup>5</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 22. Alsatian conscript Jean Lechner reported this was the opinion of a fellow Alsatian volunteer. Alan Kramer cites similar statements from Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and General Staff member Lieutenant-Colonel von Gleich. See Alan Kramer, "Wackes at War: Alsace-Lorraine and the failure of German National Mobilization, 1914-1918" in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 106.

<sup>6</sup> Scholars such as Jean-Jacques Becker are careful to stress that the French government was not driven to actively seek or provoke an opportunity for *revanche* during the preceding forty-three years of German occupation. Instead, France focused on a defensive strategy that saw the construction of intricate fortifications by General Séré de Rivières. Yet although France would not have gone to war solely to reclaim Alsace and Lorraine, the return of the provinces was adopted as a war goal once the Franco-German conflict was again rekindled. See Jean-Jacques Becker, "L'Opinion Public française et l'Alsace-Lorraine en 1914," in *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre*, ed. Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008), 40.

retake Alsace and Lorraine in terms of revenge or conquest and instead suggested that it was a matter of honor and international justice.<sup>7</sup> For Alsatians themselves, their only guarantee was that the geographic location of their homes on the Franco-German border would likely bring the conflict to their front doors. Throughout the next four years, individuals would be influenced by national loyalties, but ultimately many would make decisions based upon their own perceived self-interest and those of their families. As mobilized Jean Lechner articulated in 1914, “I remain Alsatian in spite of my German uniform.”<sup>8</sup>

During the conflict, both Germany and France would analyze and categorize the *Reichsland*’s population and from their different perspectives differentiate between “good” and “bad” Alsatians. Ultimately, the force of the *Entente*’s arms would achieve the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France in 1918, but France’s constructed image of Alsace had triumphed long before the guns were silenced. Ironically, the French owed the Germans themselves a great deal of thanks for this victory. Throughout the war, Imperial officials consistently demonstrated their own lack of faith in their Germanization program through policies and orders that treated Alsatians as nationally suspect elements. Their treatment as “second-class soldiers” confirmed their status as “second-class citizens” to many Alsatians and worked to disillusion them with the German Empire. On the opposite side of the trenches, the French portrayed Alsatians as long-suffering heroes patiently waiting and preparing for the moment in which they might rise up and reclaim their rightful place in the Republic. In practice, this idealized image was tinged with a great deal of caution as French authorities also worried about potential disloyalty among the

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<sup>7</sup> H.A. Gibbons, “The Question of Alsace-Lorraine in 1918 as viewed by an American,” *The Century Magazine*, March 1918, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 22.

borderland population. Regardless, the positive image in combination with the vicissitudes of the conflict made the French version increasingly attractive.

On the evening of Friday, July 31, 1914, the population of Alsace received word that a state of war had been declared in the province. In practice, this meant that the German military took executive power.<sup>9</sup> General mobilization was announced the following day. By all accounts, the German authorities were satisfied with the quiet, order, and discipline in which the populace responded to the call up. General von Deimling of the XV. Army corps garrisoned in Lower Alsace utilized a bulletin to publically thank the population for their “excellent attitude” and recognized the “many thousands” of young men from “old Alsatian” families who had voluntarily enlisted.<sup>10</sup> Despite this instance of praise, from the outset, German officials and soldiers noted that the enthusiasm that gripped certain elements of the population in inner Germany, notably those of the urban middle classes, was distinctly absent in Alsace. An Interwar history would note that although not enthusiastic for the conflict, the Alsatian populace was thoroughly loyal and prepared to fulfil their duties as German citizens.<sup>11</sup> The province would be the scene of some of the earliest clashes between French and German forces, as French General Joseph Joffre unleashed the Plan XVII offensive that was intended to reconquer Alsace and Lorraine. The campaign failed, but the French were able to retain and hold a small portion

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<sup>9</sup> Restrictions on peacetime freedoms went hand-in-hand with the military’s assumption of power. This included suspending articles of the Reich’s constitution that guaranteed freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The Alsatian population residing in the combat zones was also evacuated. Moreover, an effort was undertaken to eliminate the French language as French newspapers were closed, speaking in French in public was forbidden, and French names of businesses, natural features, and towns were Germanized. See Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1:339-362.

<sup>10</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 188.

<sup>11</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 228.

of Upper Alsace from repeated German counterattacks.<sup>12</sup> The Alsatian front marked the only point in which the enemy would successfully entrench themselves on German soil for the duration of the war. This singular failure in the face of the otherwise overwhelming success of German arms would play an important role in Imperial authorities approach to Alsace and its populace.

Men from Alsace fought for both Germany and France during the conflict. The vast majority of Alsatian and Lorrainers (380,000) fought in the German army. Of this number, some 50,000 would fall in the field-gray uniform, an estimated 150,000 would be wounded, and 25,000 be captured and interned in *Entente* prisoner-of-war camps. From the battlefields of the Eastern Front and the Balkans, to the trenches in the West, to the mountain warfare of Northern Italy, and the clashes in the German colonies, wherever German soldiers fought, *Reichslanders* could be found among them.<sup>13</sup> On the other side, approximately 17,650 Alsatians and Lorrainers would don the horizon blue uniform and serve in the French army. This number included some 3,000 Alsace-Lorrainers who crossed the Franco-German border in the days immediately following the declaration of war to enlist and another 1,000 individuals who were “recruited” from among the Alsatians forcibly evacuated by French forces. Alsatian soldiers in the French army served wherever French troops were located. However, unlike their German counterparts, Alsatians in the French army had the opportunity to choose the location of their posting.<sup>14</sup> Most

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<sup>12</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1:222. Some 60,000 German and French troops would die fighting for control of the Hartmannswillerkopf between 1914 and 1918, making it one of the bloodiest battle sites in the war.

<sup>13</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1:298-301.

<sup>14</sup> Certain scholars have not recognized the element of personal initiative that Alsatians had in choosing their place of service. See Jean-Noël Grandhomme, “Introduction,” in *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre*, ed. Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008), 29.

opted for service in the French colonies, particularly North Africa. These figures alone demonstrate that the vast majority of Alsatians (95.4%) that fought in the First World War did so under the Imperial flag. However, it would be the actions of a minority of *Reichslanders* that would become emblematic of the psyches of *all* Alsatians for German authorities and become a centerpiece of French wartime and postwar imaginings of the province. For Alsatians in the German army, this meant they would be increasingly viewed as nationally suspect and the subject of a range of discriminatory orders and policies, while those in the French army or in “privileged” prisoner-of-war camps were heralded as national heroes and paradigms of patriotism.

The French occupied the enviable position vis-à-vis Alsace during the First World War. France merely had to extend Alsatians an open invitation to the “special camps” and allow themselves to become a conduit and safe haven for individuals who were either reluctant Germans or reluctant soldiers. French authorities could simply stand back as Imperial officials, floundering in their suspicions and efforts to curtail Alsatian desertion, enacted policies that only led to more Alsatian disillusionment and defections. Alsatians in increasing number would reject Germany as the war progressed, but in their eyes, Germany, through its discrimination founded on national distrust had rejected them first. Each Alsatian who crossed to French lines or prisoner who chose to remain in the privileged camps became another shell in France’s symbolic arsenal that supported their argument that Alsace had never ceased to be French since 1871 and should be so again in the future. In the end, however, many Alsatians did not choose one model of the nation-state over another, but rather made the decision to cast their lot with an affirming and optimistic image of themselves and their future over the distrustful and pessimistic alternative in the present.

## CHAPTER 5

### Alsations in the Imperial Army

“This admonition [to never volunteer for anything] was really not necessary, because my love for the Fatherland was not so large and the thought of dying the so-called “hero’s death” filled me with terror.”<sup>1</sup>

~Alsation German Soldier Dominik Richert.

“Your fellow countrymen are brave and intelligent soldiers. There are blackguards among them, but dear God, where are they not found?”<sup>2</sup>

~Württemberg Colonel to Alsation Reichstags Member Karl Hauss.

“At the beginning of the war we were *Wackes*, Frenchies (*Franzosenköpfe*), and spies and now the Alsations are heroes and brave soldiers. But I don’t want to be anything. The main thing is that we safely return home. Then we will see what we are.”<sup>3</sup>

~Josef Kalbert to Johan Kalbert, April 1, 1918.

Throughout the First World War, Imperial civilian and military authorities’ viewed Alsations with unbridled suspicion. In particular, the German High Command’s unmitigated distrust and skepticism towards its *Reichsland* soldiers *as a group* displayed a fundamental suspicion of their national loyalties. These doubts were enshrined in policies and individual orders that had the effect of progressively restricting the posts and activities of Alsation soldiers over the course of the war. Specifically, soldiers from the *Reichsland* were to be kept from positions in which officials feared they might do harm to the German war effort. These sensitive positions were to be found both at the front and in rear areas. The foremost worry in the minds of German authorities was the fear of widespread francophile sentiments among its *Reichsland*

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<sup>1</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 321.

<sup>3</sup> Mulhouse Überwachungsoffizier, “Auszüge aus Briefen elsäbische Heeresangehöriger, welche Fahnenflucht beabsichtigen,” April 18, 1918, M 30/1 107, Hauptstaatsarchiv-Stuttgart (hereafter cited as HStAS).

soldiers. This was the fundamental suspicion that shaped much of the subsequent wartime policies towards Alsatians. Such anxieties were based primarily not on any real experiences and interactions with Alsace-Lorrainer combatants, but rather were directed at the preconceived image of the “suspect” and “disloyal” borderland soldier that Imperial officials had constructed in their own minds. The distrust was expressed in multiple forms including transfers from the Western Front, increased surveillance, the exclusion of Alsatians from certain tasks, and leave restrictions. These biased policies and orders were enacted by Imperial officials despite the fact that their own statistics at the beginning of the war suggested that their fears of pro-French sympathies and loyalty among mobilized Alsatians were exaggerated. An examination of the relationship between German authorities and German Alsatian soldiers during the First World War demonstrates that in many cases it was in fact the “preventative” actions and policies enacted by officials themselves that disillusioned and alienated *Reichsland* soldiers from Germany and redirected their aspirations to France, rather than any innate pro-French conviction. This shift in attitudes among Alsatians was particularly tragic from the point of view of Imperial officials. For even though officials recognized the damage of their discriminatory policies, they proved unable to fundamentally alter their treatment of Alsatian soldiers because they were never able to overcome their own stereotypes of the suspect *Reichslander*.<sup>4</sup> The average Alsatian serving in the German army might not have been an ardent German nationalist, but by and large he was willing to loyally fulfil his military obligations. In the end, it was the prejudiced policies

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter argues that there is no “controversy” in regard to whether or not Alsatians and Lorrainer soldiers were the “victims of discrimination” during the First World War in the German army. The experience of *Reichsland* soldiers was marked by differential treatment both large and small that originated primarily at the upper levels of the German military hierarchy. See Grandhomme, “Introduction,” in *Boches ou Tricolores*, 27.

and actions of Imperial authorities themselves that were responsible for turning Alsatians into the disloyal subjects that they had always been suspected of being.

An important contrast to an analysis of the discrimination that Alsatian soldiers faced in the German army is provided by an examination of official aid for soldiers and their families on the home front. The societal wide mobilization that accompanied the First World War created an unprecedented demand on official support. As the conflict progressed, three different categories of claimants emerged. This included the families of mobilized soldiers, soldiers discharged for a physical or mental disability, and the surviving dependents of soldiers killed on the battlefield. German authorities designed their care for each of these groups to meet both short- and long-term objectives that were cumulatively intended to create immediate and future economic and social stability. The different forms of support that were provided to each of these groups represented the physical fulfillment of the German government's half of a reciprocal arrangement with its mobilized male citizenry.<sup>5</sup> In return for their service, the Imperial administration recognized its duty to provide for the needs of the families of the currently mobilized and the fallen, as well as those soldiers who sacrificed their health in service to the state.

Authorities made a direct connection between the health of the German war effort and their fulfillment of this contract. They believed that soldiers would only continue to willingly fight if they knew their families were receiving adequate support. The care that was rendered to the families of currently serving soldiers was limited to the genuinely needy and prewar dependents of the mobilized man and was accomplished through both official and private initiative. Imperial authorities approached the maintenance of the war disabled and war widows

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<sup>5</sup> Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation*, 53.

differently. They determined that official aid should not be limited to financial payments, but rather that the goal should be to return these individuals most devastated by the war to contributing members of German society. The attainment of these objectives became increasingly difficult as the conflict and the hardships associated with it dragged on and intensified. Officials in Alsace made a genuine effort to treat eligible individuals fairly, but at the same time were limited by their strict reliance on codified policy. The example of pension payments demonstrates that even as mobilized Alsatian soldiers were treated as nationally suspect on the battlefield, their families and discharged comrades were handled as German at home.

## Statistics

The vast majority of Alsatians fought for Germany during World War I. Approximately 220,000 Alsatian and Lorrainer men were mobilized during the first weeks of August. By the end of the conflict some 380,000 would have served in the German army.<sup>6</sup> Despite this high number of war participants, the subsequent historiography has sought to mitigate this figure with the observation that only 8,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers volunteered for war service.<sup>7</sup> A problematic aspect of this figure is that the Interwar historians who compiled them did so using the French definition of a “genuine” old Alsatian. As a result of the reliance upon this official definition, the sons of German immigrants were not included in the final figure, regardless of the fact many had been born and raised in the province and likely self-identified as “Alsatian.”

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<sup>6</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 298, 300.

<sup>7</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 296. Thus in the XV. Army Corps that was stationed in Strasbourg only 3,153 out of 12,361 volunteers were “old Alsatians.” The XIV. Army Corps in Karlsruhe had an even smaller percentage with 1,378 out of 27,225 and the XXI. Army Corps in Saarbrücken only 3,500.

Contemporary German authorities did not make a similar distinction between “Alsations” and “old Germans” living in Alsace. Moreover, the lack of Alsations in these military units also reflects established German military tradition. Throughout the Imperial period, officials had deliberately chosen to not fill the ranks of the nominally “Alsatian” regiments with a majority of local conscripts because of disloyalty worries. Consequently, Alsatian conscripts were primarily incorporated into the military formations in the Prussian army – a practice that continued into the war.

To its credit, the Interwar history does suggest several factors that helped to account for the low volunteer numbers. This is evident in the observation that in the *Reichsland*, even before the war, a great many young men had been declared unfit for service. Furthermore, unlike other German states, shortly after the outbreak of war previously un-mobilized members of the Landsturm between the ages of 17 and 20 were called up, leaving few individuals who could volunteer.<sup>8</sup> Questions of representation are ultimately responsible for unproblematized figures and the general lack of familiarity with the overall participation of Alsations in the German war effort. The actions of the minority have been accepted as the illustrative of the majority. Thus the Alsatian deserters to French lines have become representative of Alsations’ war participation and national sympathies, while the “old Alsatian” volunteers in the German army who outnumbered them more than 6 to 1 have become the “unknown soldiers” of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> The figures of Alsatian deserters, therefore, are an important point to demonstrate and challenge such notions.

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<sup>8</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 297.

<sup>9</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 297.

In a confidential report compiled for the Alsace-Lorraine Department of the Interior in March 1915, the *Statistisches Landesamt für Elsaß-Lothringen* reported that as of January 1, 1915, 1,525 Alsatian soldiers had been killed, 7,117 wounded, 2,337 missing, and 89 taken as prisoners-of-war. Altogether, 22.1% of the total casualties from Lower Alsace and 21.6% of casualties from Upper Alsace had either been reported missing or were confirmed prisoners-of-war.<sup>10</sup> The statistics broke down as follows:

**Table 5: Number of Alsace-Lorrainers Killed, Wounded, Missing, or Prisoners of War up to January 1, 1915**

	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Prisoner-of-War	Percentage of Total Casualties Missing or POW
Lower Alsace	886	4,308	1,402	75	22.1%
Upper Alsace	639	2,809	935	14	21.6%
Lorraine	641	3,030	1,033	19	22.3%
Total for Alsace-Lorraine	2, 166	10,147	3,370	108	22.0%
Total for German Reich	90,000	400,000	140,000	Not Provided	Not Provided

Evidently *Statthalter* Hans von Dallwitz found the proportion of 22% of all casualties from Alsace-Lorraine as missing or prisoners-of-war troubling and inquired with the Ministry of War about his opinion of the figure. Minister of War Franz von Wandel responded in May 1915 that the comparative figure for the entire German army was 18.44%. In his opinion, the Alsace-Lorraine percentage could not be described as “extraordinary.”<sup>11</sup> These figures, particularly in

<sup>10</sup> “Die Verluste an aus Elsaß-Lothringen stammenden Militärpersonen, im Kriege 1914, soweit sie in den bis 1. Januar 1915 erschienenen Verlustslisten veröffentlicht sind,” March 31, 1915, 47 AL 90, ADBR.

<sup>11</sup> Kriegsminister Franz von Wandel to Statthalter Hans von Dallwitz, May 20, 1915, 47 AL 90, ADBR.

regards to the number of military deaths of Alsatian soldiers would later prove to be much too low. Yet despite their inexactitude, the numbers and von Wandel's response are significant. Their comparability with figures for the German army as a whole problematizes the notion of widespread instances of Alsatian desertion at the war's outset. Von Wandel's seeming unconcern likewise cements this impression.

An updated report from the *Statistisches Landesamt für Elsaß-Lothringen* in June 1916 demonstrated that the initial estimates of Alsatian and Lorrainer dead were well below the actual figures.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 6: Number of Alsace-Lorrainers Killed, Wounded, Missing, or Prisoners of War up to June 1916**

	Military Deaths in 1914	Military Deaths in 1915	Military Deaths up to April 1, 1916	Total Military Deaths	Number Died or Killed in Alsace-Lorraine	Number Died or Killed Outside of Alsace-Lorraine
Lower Alsace	2,585	3,038	150	5,773	538	5,235
Upper Alsace	1,343	1,975	61	3,379	226	3,153
Lorraine	2,184	3,594	138	5,916	460	5,456
Total	6,112	8,607	349	15,068	1,224	13,844

The table's figures are revealing in two ways. First, the figure that 91.8% of Alsations and Lorrainers who had been killed up to the date of April 1, 1916 had died outside of the *Reichsland* is striking. This high percentage reveals the scope of German military operations in Europe, but it is also a reflection of German unease regarding the national loyalties of their soldiers of Alsace-Lorraine origin and their reluctance to utilize them in Alsace. Second, the table

<sup>12</sup> "In Elsaß-Lothringen gezählte Militärsterbefälle 1914 bis 1. April 1916," June 28, 1916, 47 AL 92, ADBR.

demonstrates that many of the Alsatians and Lorrainers who had been reported as wounded or missing in the initial 1915 report had subsequently died of their injuries or been confirmed as having been killed. The rise in confirmed cases of deaths would have likely proportionately decreased the 22% figure of Alsatians and Lorrainers missing or taken prisoner and brought it even closer in line to that of the German army as a whole. Historian Christoph Jahr has compiled desertion statistics for Alsatians from December 1917 to September 1918 that likewise demonstrate that the desertion rates of Alsatians and Lorrainers were comparable to those of Germans from the rest of the Empire.<sup>13</sup> Finally, an Interwar history calculated that 7.6% of Alsatians and Lorrainers would fall into enemy hands during the war, compared to 7.5% for the whole German army.<sup>14</sup> Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that Alsatians were as likely to desert as any German soldier. This statistic is all the more remarkable considering the different forms of discriminations that Alsatians faced that will be discussed below.

How are we to explain this discrepancy between reality and German authorities' perception in relation to the wartime service records of Alsatians? One explanation is provided by an Interwar history that suggests a veritable "distrust psychosis" developed among Imperial military leaders in relation to their Alsatian soldiers.<sup>15</sup> One third of all orders addressing themes of desertion, defection, and discipline in the German military dealt with *Reichslanders*.<sup>16</sup> The preexistent suspicions among German officials regarding the national loyalties of its *Reichsland*

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<sup>13</sup> See Christoph Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten: Desertion und Deserteure im deutschen und britischen Heer, 1914-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 278.

<sup>14</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 300.

<sup>15</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 318.

<sup>16</sup> Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten*, 283.

subjects played an important role in the singularity of this focus. The tendency to automatically assume a pro-French sympathy among the provinces' populace led Imperial military authorities to concentrate on and actively seek out potential instances of disloyalty. This proclivity is evident in the immediate suspicions of treachery that accompanied the capture of some 200 *Reichslanders* in the fighting that occurred around Sundgau in Upper Alsace in August 1914. The fact that approximately 1,000 soldiers from other German states likewise fell into captivity at the same time was not taken into account or remarked upon.<sup>17</sup> The high number of reported desertions among Alsatians similarly reflected the predisposition among German officers to habitually label any missing Alsatian as a deserter without further investigation. Thus even as their own statistics suggested that the "threat" of Francophile sympathies and fears of disloyalty among mobilized Alsatians was exaggerated, German officials enacted a number of discriminatory measures against *Reichsland* soldiers based on their preexisting suspicions. Ironically, it would be the discrimination that Alsatians experienced as a result of these policies that would be a source of disillusionment with Germany and generate a great degree of pro-French attitudes among them.

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<sup>17</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 302. Certain contemporary scholars have also been content to rely upon these German interpretations of widespread Alsatians disloyalty without considering the larger context of the confused fighting of the opening weeks of the conflict and the fact that many "old German" soldiers likewise fell into French hands during this period. In this regard, Grandhomme specifically focuses on the legend of the mass desertion of the Alsace-Lorrainer soldiers of the 99th Regiment. See Grandhomme, "Introduction," in *Boches ou Tricolores*, 28.

## German Restrictions on Alsatians in the German Army

### Geographic Restrictions

The removal of Alsatians from troop contingents on the Western Front and their transfer to the East was one of the most visible and resented actions taken against *Reichslanders* as a group during the war. Already in 1915, German military officials had begun separating “politically suspect” Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers from their units in the West and sending them to the Eastern Front. Writing in January 1916 in a confidential memorandum, Minister of War Franz Gustav von Wandel explained the initially intended scope and reasoning behind the removal of Alsatians from the Western Front as, “...on account of multiple activities or manifestations of anti-German attitude it has been requested that all *Reichsland* military personnel regardless of their reputation, antecedents, and the witness of their superiors be transferred to the interior of Germany or the Eastern Front.”<sup>18</sup> German military officials would soon discover that the transfer of Alsatian soldiers to the East was not an indefinite nor practical solution and in many cases created additional problems. The ideal that the transfer of all Alsace-Lorrainers to the Eastern Front would have a positive effect on the soldiers themselves crumbled rapidly in the face of experience. An examination of the widespread practice of singling out and transferring Alsatians to the East illustrates a recurrent theme in regard to Alsatian-German relations during the First World War. In many cases, it was the actions taken and policies enacted by Imperial military officials themselves that alienated their Alsatian soldiers from Germany and redirected their hopes to France rather than any innate francophile sentiment.

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<sup>18</sup> Kriegsminister Franz Gustav von Wandel, January 11, 1916, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

Initially, some circles of the German High Command attempted to justify the transfer of all Alsatians and Lorrainers to the Eastern Front by arguing it would have a positive effect on their morale and martial effectiveness. The recognition of the falsity of this assumption was articulated in a memorandum to the Army-High Command 2, “the view of the Army-High Command 6 that the transfer of Alsace-Lorrainers to the Eastern Front would not prove damaging because of the occasional good elements among the mass of delivered Alsace-Lorrainers is not sustainable. The experience has taught that more frequently the good elements under the effect of their transfer and the influence of unreliable elements have changed for the worse.”<sup>19</sup> This statement is revealing in that only an “occasional” good element happened to be included in the transports, intimating (not very subtly) that the majority of the transferred *Reichsland* soldiers did not fall into this category.

The widespread transfer of *Reichsland* soldiers to the East also caused problems for the various German armies into which they were to be incorporated. In a classified memorandum from June 1917, Baron von Gall of the German War Ministry wrote that “The transfers have permeated particular Armies of the East with so many [unreliable] men, who not only put them [(the armies)] at a disadvantage in relation to other armies, but who [(referring to the Alsace-Lorrainers)] also represent a serious danger for the discipline and combat effectiveness of the force.”<sup>20</sup> In the end, the transfers of *Reichsland* soldiers to the East did not create “good” German soldiers. Instead, the discrimination and targeting of Alsatians served to confirm the French leanings of those soldiers who already possessed francophile sentiments and alienate otherwise loyally serving soldiers. Compounding the entire issue was that the transfers took

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<sup>19</sup> Kriegsministerium Grantoff to Armee Oberkommando 2, September 15, 1917, M 33/2 681, HStAS.

<sup>20</sup> Freiherr von Gall to the Armee Oberkommando, June 2, 1917, M 33/2 681, HStAS.

potential individual malcontents, grouped them together, gave them additional (or real) cause for complaint, and then concentrated them in particular military formations, where they now would make up a significant proportion of the overall fighting force. The situation was so alarming by December 1917 that Ludendorff sent out a general memorandum to all German army groups ordering the scaling back of transfers and warning that the continued removal of Alsace-Lorrainers to the Eastern Front would soon create armies in which the majority of soldiers were from the *Reichsland*.

Ludendorff also highlighted an unintended consequence of the transfers when he observed, “It is to be kept in mind the chance of being released from the severe combat conditions of the West to the comparative calm and safety of the East puts a premium on unreliability. It is therefore to be feared that the urge of Alsace-Lorrainers to escape the dangers and strains of the West and the justifiable outrage of the “old German” men over this apparent favoritism will cause unreliable elements to win further ground [in the ranks].”<sup>21</sup> This observation demonstrates official recognition of Alsations’ instrumental usage of the consequences of German military authorities’ suspicions – in this case the opportunity to escape the combat of the Western Front and proportionately increase their own overall chances of survival. In addition and paradoxically, Ludendorff’s mention of “German” soldiers’ “justified” outrage at the “preferential treatment” enjoyed by Alsace-Lorrainers and the associated general danger to the German war effort effectively twisted official discrimination and its results into the fault of its victims. Taken as a whole and in an ironic turn, the discriminatory actions enacted by

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<sup>21</sup> Erich Ludendorff to all Army Groups, December 2, 1917, M 30/1 107, HStAS. A confidential order from the Ministry of War officially cancelling the transfer of Alsace-Lorrainers to the East was sent out on January 12, 1918.

German officials actually created the injuries and incentive that facilitated the development of aggrieved groups who posed a real danger to German security.

Before moving on to discuss other forms of discrimination that Alsatians faced as members of the Imperial German military, it is important to offer a critical caveat to the notion that all German authorities supported the removal of *Reichsland* soldiers from their ranks. In practice, some efforts were made by lower level German officers to mitigate the number of Alsatian transfers. Thus the Third Reserve Division wrote Army High Command 4 in 1917 that,

there were 445 Alsace-Lorrainers in the Division that were considered for the exchange. Among them were 105 who were decorated with the Iron Cross II. Class (1 with the Iron Cross I. Class) and other individuals who had conducted themselves irreproachably and proved themselves before the enemy, so that their superiors, if possible, vouched for them. As a result, a transfer of only 173 unreliable men was requested, brought about, and approved by the High Command...at this time, 272 Alsace-Lorrainers are still in the Division.<sup>22</sup>

Dominik Richert, an Alsatian German conscript that kept a detailed journal of his service as a German soldier from the opening days of the war until his desertion in July 1918 described an experience that was slightly different. Richert himself had been awarded an Iron Cross II Class, but nonetheless was ordered to remain behind on the Eastern Front while his regiment was transferred to the Western Front. He reported the general response among his *Reichsland*-originating comrades as ““Oh, still second-class soldiers. They’re probably afraid we will desert’ and so on. Then the company leader said, ‘I would have liked to keep you in the company. I was very satisfied with all of you. But you yourself know, orders are orders, and there is nothing to be done to change them. You should actually see yourselves as fortunate to remain here because the danger on the Western Front is much greater.’”<sup>23</sup> The subsequent complaining

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<sup>22</sup> 3. Reserve-Division gez. Rusche to Armee Oberkommando 4, May 21, 1917, M33/2, HStAS.

<sup>23</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 224.

against the Prussians that Richert reported suggests that the Alsatians in his regiment found these words to be of little comfort.

These two sources raise an important cautionary flag for historians when discussing the treatment of Alsatians in the German army during the First World War. At one level, they demonstrate that soldiers from the *Reichsland* were specifically targeted and either transferred to- or ordered to remain on the Eastern Front. Moreover, it is evident that being identified by the vaguely defined label of “unreliable” was sufficient cause for Alsatians to be removed from their existent troop contingents. The blurriness of this suspect category no doubt encompassed a range of Alsatians who were more aptly described as reluctant *soldiers* rather than as reluctant *Germans*. At another level, the memorandum is instrumental in demonstrating that Alsatians’ experiences in the ranks ranged from discrimination to being recognized for their bravery and contributions.

Although German military officials’ first instinct may have been to suspect the loyalty of their *Reichsland* soldiers, not all were irreconcilably prejudiced against Alsatians. This is evident in the statistic that nearly a quarter of Alsatians and Lorrainers had been decorated with the Iron Cross, but even more so by the fact that the recommendations of their superior officers kept the majority of *Reichsland* soldiers in the Third Reserve Division. At the same time, Richert’s case demonstrates the Janus-faced aspect of Imperial policy towards Alsatians, extending an award for bravery with one hand and pushing them away and labelling them as suspect with the other.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 239. Richert reported a similar instance in which his battalion commander wished to promote him to non-commissioned officer, but the transfer of the regiment to the Western Front once more caused Richert’s removal.

Closely related to the support of their immediate superiors, the sources clearly suggest that German military authorities' suspicion regarding Alsatians increased in proportion to their distance from regular contact with "ordinary" Alsatian soldiers. Thus, it was the disconnected highest martial policy makers that were responsible for discriminatory policies towards *Reichsland* soldiers. Their orders stemmed not from their own experience with Alsatians and Lorrainers, but rather from a preconceived image of the "disloyal" borderland soldier that was constructed in their own minds. The prejudice was transferred down the ranks. Richert related the "greeting speech" by the battalion commander following his transfer to his fifth different unit,

Then came Major Zillmer, an approximately 65 year old man, in order to give his welcoming speech. Up to that point there had not been any Alsatians in the regiment, so the Major was only familiar with hearsay. And after what he spoke, it seemed that he had heard little good about the Alsace-Lorrainers. First he walked among us, looking at each of our hats. 'It's alright. I thought there would be more second class soldiers.' This was the first sentence he spoke. (Second class soldiers, 'felons,' were not allowed to wear a cockade on their hats.) He continued, 'What do I see? A few of you even wear the Iron Cross!' He seemed so astonished, as if he had discovered something completely impossible. I would have loved to punch the old scoundrel. He had earned it!<sup>25</sup>

In this case, and throughout his memoir, Richert's anger and resentment is not directed at "Germany," but rather at those officers who were the authors of his mistreatment and others he deemed to be "responsible for the war." The targeting of certain officers and war profiteers for hatred was not unique to Alsatians and was a widespread sentiment and source of discontent among German soldiers *as a whole*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 240-241.

<sup>26</sup> This is demonstrated throughout the recently translated source collection *German Soldiers in the Great War: Letters and Eyewitness Accounts*. Edited by Bernd Ulrich and Benjamin Ziemann. Translated by Christine Brooks. (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2010).

In contrast, Richert reported developing close relationships with other German soldiers in his units and even some officers. His battalion commander of the 9th Company of the 260th Infantry Regiment was so impressed that he ensured the Alsatian received the Brunswick War Service Cross even after Richert had been transferred to a Prussian regiment. In 1918, Richert told a non-commissioned German officer that his family was in the French occupied portion of Alsace and that he had not received any packages or money for the entire war. This news was enough to evoke the sympathy of the officer who declined to report Richert after he was caught stealing potatoes. In another instance, he was given permission to remain with the cook and given better food after he contracted Spanish flu and returned to his unit without being fully recovered.<sup>27</sup> When he eventually was able to successfully desert, he related that he was sorry to leave his men and all his other comrades. Richert also refused to give his French interrogators any information about the German lines because “I had deserted to save my life and not to betray my former comrades.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Frontline Restrictions**

After Russia’s separate peace with Germany in March 1918 and transfers of Alsatians to that Front were no longer practical, exile to the East was replaced by a number of different security measures. The use of increased numbers of Alsatians in the West did correspond to a rise in the number of desertions from the German army, particularly in the latter half of the conflict. Imperial officials found themselves caught in a classic Catch-22 in their relationship with their Alsatian soldiers. No single policy or practice was sufficient or effective enough to eliminate desertions in their entirety. This was true regardless of the origin of the combatant in

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<sup>27</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 284-285, 364-366, 374.

<sup>28</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 387.

question. The conundrum for German military authorities was that their efforts to diminish the number of desertions would not return a single defector. It was the Alsatians who remained in the German ranks that would face the full retaliatory consequences of their compatriots' departure. In fact, by increasing their surveillance of *Reichsland* soldiers, restricting the positions they could occupy, and in some cases banishing them altogether to rear work details, officials risked alienating the remaining Alsatians. The end result was that an intensification of restrictions directed at soldiers from the *Reichsland* corresponded to increased disillusionment in the Alsatian ranks that in turn led to more desertions, which corresponded to a tightening of restrictions in an unending and vicious cycle.<sup>29</sup>

On the frontlines, German military authorities feared that the close proximity of the enemy, particularly when the opposing troops were French, would provide an irresistible opportunity for Alsatians to desert. This suspicion impacted the manner in which Alsatians were incorporated into various military formations and the activities they were allowed to undertake. A confidential memorandum that was circulated by General Erich Ludendorff in March 1917 ordered that Alsatians and Lorrainers, especially those originating from the same district, were to be separated as much as possible within their troop formations. Ludendorff explained the preventative reasoning behind this deliberate division by saying, "because many untrustworthy [Alsace-Lorrainers] who have an inclination to desert will perhaps not find the courage to do so if their decision is not fortified by a like-minded comrade."<sup>30</sup> Experience had taught German military authorities that Alsatians and Lorrainers often did not undertake the dangerous task of

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<sup>29</sup> Both Fischer and Kramer make similar observations. See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 110; Kramer, "Wackes at War," 120-121.

<sup>30</sup> General Erich Ludendorff to the Armee Oberkommando, March 8, 1917, M 33/2 681, HStAS.

deserting alone, but rather in small groups. Evidence suggests that the policy of keeping Alsatians out of the frontlines was only partially realizable and implemented. For instance, until his desertion in July 1918, Dominik Richert regularly took part in patrols and occupied forward positions as the commander of a machine gun unit.<sup>31</sup>

It is impossible to ascertain how many potential Alsatian deserters were dissuaded by the enactment of this order. What is certain is that the dispersal of Alsatians had significant unintended ramifications. Military formations in the German army were organized along regional lines. A soldier from Munich could expect to serve in a regiment surrounded primarily by fellow Bavarians, a soldier from Berlin with fellow Prussians. Despite the variety of individual soldier's social and political backgrounds, they shared a fundamental set of cultural and regional references. These preexistent common ties served to cement ties of comradeship with one another and helped maintain the cohesion of the unit around a regional identity even in cases of disillusionment with Imperial military service. This unofficial support structure was absent for soldiers from the *Reichsland*.

Imperial military officials' distrust of Alsatians meant that although regiments bearing the moniker "Alsatian" did exist, they were primarily made up of troops drawn from the interior of Germany.<sup>32</sup> The dispersal of Alsatians throughout the ranks precluded the development of similarly scaled group-regional solidarity. The continual rotation of military units from West to

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<sup>31</sup> See Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Kramer misinterprets the composition percentages of these regiments. Citing a figure of only 25.5% of the soldiers in the XV. Army Corps as originating from Alsace-Lorraine, he suggests this figure demonstrates the failure of German mobilization efforts. In fact, the low percentages of Alsace-Lorrainers in regiments like the 132nd Lower-Alsatian Infantry Regiment and the 143rd Lower-Alsatian Infantry Regiment that were both part of the XV. Army Corps was a result of German suspicion of the national loyalties of *Reichslanders* and their unwillingness to countenance large numbers of them serving together in singular units. See Kramer, "Wackes at War," 107-108.

East and East to West also meant that Alsatians could be incorporated and removed from their units more than once. Dominik Richert reported that he had been forced to change regiments four times by 1917.<sup>33</sup> Not only did this preclude the development of long-term relationships, but it also limited Richert's movement up the ranks. Even though he had been continually serving since October 1913, he had not yet been promoted to a non-commissioned officer.<sup>34</sup> When Alsatians were brought together in large assemblies, it was often at moments when they had been identified as security liabilities by German military authorities. Richert described a train ride to Freiburg after he and fellow Alsatians were pulled from their units on the Western Front, "While underway the Alsatians gleefully railed against the Prussians and one heard expressions that could scarce be called patriotic."<sup>35</sup> Thus the common regional experience that Alsatians shared was not necessarily the rigors and ultimately horrors of military service, but rather what was perceived to be their unwarranted victimization by Imperial officials. Alsatian soldiers certainly developed friendships and close feelings of comradeship with non-Alsatian soldiers. Ultimately, however, individual Alsatians' experiences of being targeted and labelled suspect for fears of what they might do, rather than their actual actions, created a self-understanding at odds with a larger German identity.

The actions of Imperial military authorities served to confirm this sense of difference among Alsatian soldiers serving in the German army. The orders that were directed against the imagined homogenous and undifferentiated disloyal *Reichslander* soldier articulated officials' understanding that Alsatians and Lorrainers were in fact somehow not quite "German." For

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<sup>33</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 238.

<sup>34</sup> This promotion would not occur until January 1918.

<sup>35</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 87.

instance, an internal note to the formations within the Argonne Army Group restricted the activities and movements of Alsatian soldiers by relating, “It is forbidden to allow Alsatians to take part in patrols. They are not to be allowed to hold posts in the foremost lines if they have not earned absolute confidence through a long period of service and even then, they are only allowed to stand a double post in tandem with a German.”<sup>36</sup> The wording of this final point is noteworthy. The identification of Alsatians by their state of origin, while the comrade with whom they were required to stand watch simply bore the moniker “German,” articulates an important distinction that was made by the higher levels of the German military hierarchy. Even in cases of longstanding service there was something different that set Alsatians apart from “ordinary” Germans that instinctively made their national loyalty suspect while naturalizing it among their non-Alsatian, “German” comrades.

Yet the reasoning behind these “mixed” postings as expressed by General Erich Ludendorff suggests that the driving motivation was not strictly punitive. Ludendorff instructed, “Always use Alsace-Lorrainers together with “old German” men. Boost the comradely sense of honor so that each feels himself bound to contribute to the honor and reputation of his formation and so avert desertion. At the same time, it is to be kept in mind that often any measures that have the appearance of special treatment is adduced as distrust and which acts as an irritant and affects even the good elements.”<sup>37</sup> Ludendorff’s orders are significant for several reasons. First, he continues to make the differentiation between “old Germans” and soldiers from the *Reichsland*. Second, the quote also suggests that German military authorities accepted and even

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<sup>36</sup> St. Generalstab der Armee, Abteilung IIIb to the Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Herzog Albrecht, September 20, 1918, M 30/1 330, HStAS.

<sup>37</sup> Erich Ludendorff to all Army Groups, December 2, 1917, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

encouraged the development of local and immediate ties that superseded a larger German national loyalty. No doubt this decision reflected the more immediate and greater military concern to prevent desertions, but it also shows the innate assumption of Imperial military officials that calls to protect the German Fatherland had less traction among Alsatian soldiers than their inner German counterparts. Thus even in their efforts to include Alsatian soldiers, they were simultaneously imagined as different. Finally, Ludendorff's comment on the negative consequences of seeming to single out Alsatian soldiers for special treatment demonstrates once again that German military authorities were well aware of the problem, but in practice proved unable to translate these calls for tact down the ranks. In the end, Imperial officials proved unable to fundamentally change their treatment of Alsatian soldiers because they were never able to overcome the image of the suspect *Reichslander* in their own minds.

Another role that Alsations were increasingly pushed into by Imperial authorities was that of rear-area laborers. An order that originated from the 34th Reserve Infantry Regiment related that as a result of the desertion of three soldiers from Alsace, the remaining Alsations were to be removed from the front and put to work behind the lines strengthening positions. They were to be kept under the supervision of an officer and work from 7 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon. During their scheduled working period the Alsations were not be allowed to smoke or speak with civilians or other members of their regiment.<sup>38</sup> The indignation and humiliation felt by certain Alsations after they were separated from their German comrades and transferred to rear areas is articulated in a letter that a certain Alsatian, Eugen, wrote to his family in May 1918. Eugen's description of his treatment and reaction to it was so stark that after it was read by censors,

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<sup>38</sup> St. Generalstab der Armee, Abteilung IIIb to the Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Herzog Albrecht, September 20, 1918, M 30/1 330, HStAS.

German military authorities ordered an investigation into its allegations. The account and official reaction warrant the text of the letter being quoted in full,

My Dearest!

I want to again tell you that I am once more in my old battery in the Regiment. As I told you in my last letter, we Alsatians were withdrawn from the Regiment and the front. We were taken back to a forest camp. The most beastly part was that escorts accompanied us and kept us under surveillance. It seemed to me as if I was in a prison camp.

In the meantime, our regimental commander interceded for us and managed to secure our return to the regiment. It was very good of him, still, we would have all preferred if we could have left it behind, even if it was as prisoners, because of this dishonor and disgrace done to us! This is the thanks that one receives after nearly six years of soldiering and four years of faithfully fulfilling his duty.

I declared to my battery leader that I did not want to, nor could I, occupy sensitive positions (*Vertrauensposten*). I would not be able to take it anymore if I was once more treated as untrustworthy! My battery leader said he had the same trust in me as before and I should take up my old service, which I now have done. Still I can hardly bear it because this dishonor and humiliation that has been done to us still rankles me.

Now, dear father, what do you think about this story? Advise me on what I should do. I would prefer and it would be best for me if you were able to reclaim me. I am completely indifferent as to what and where, only away from here. My whole life I will never forget this time and dishonor that has unjustly been done to me. The lords above probably believe that we Alsatians have no spark of a sense of honor because otherwise they would not treat us so. Now enough with this chapter or else you would want to weep with rage that you have to put up with such a thing. Otherwise I am well, which I hope is also true for you all. How is it that I do not receive any more mail from you? I have not received anything this month and I don't know what I should think.

Many greetings to you all from your Eugen.<sup>39</sup>

Several aspects of Eugen's letter are revealing about his own experiences and the general policies of German authorities towards Alsatians. First, the differentiation in Eugen's attitude and descriptions between the "lords above" and his own regimental commander and battery leader is striking. Rather than seeing all German officers as a single oppressive unit, he distinguished between his immediate superiors who demonstrated their trust in him and acted as

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<sup>39</sup> Eugen to his Family, May 25, 1918, M 30/1 330, HStAS. Emphasis in original.

his advocate and the higher anonymous staff officers who unjustly victimized himself and his fellow Alsatians. Eugen's understanding of sympathetic and supportive local officers bears a striking resemblance to the pension applicants' view of the local versus distant national authorities during the Imperial period. Similarly, lower ranking officers' advocacy and intercessory role on behalf of their Alsatian soldiers closely mirrors the actions of local and regional officials in peacetime. Eugen's letter also articulates an expectation of reciprocity. He felt that the Imperial government owed him a certain amount of respect and consideration in return for his six years of loyal soldering.<sup>40</sup> The fact that officials failed to recognize this service and treat him as suspect disillusioned Eugen and dampened his German national feelings.

To their credit, military authorities began an investigation to the allegations made in Eugen's letter. The final report confirmed the basic facts of Eugen's narrative. On May 21, 1918, the Field Artillery Regiment 67 had received an order that all Alsatians and Lorrainers should that same day be removed from the frontline service. Accordingly, 14 non-commissioned officers and 68 cannoneers were withdrawn and conducted to an assembly point in a forest camp. Commissioned officers were explicitly excluded from the roundup. The report confirmed the presence of non-Alsace-Lorrainers at the camp, but disputed their purpose. According to the account, the "German" non-commissioned officers had been sent to accompany the soldiers and raise their spirits as it was expected that they would be depressed by their removal from the Regiment. It also dismissed the idea of the Alsace-Lorrainers being purposefully accompanied by non-*Reichslanders* and kept under surveillance. The report closed by admitting that the

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<sup>40</sup> Jahr likewise recognizes the sense of reciprocity between Alsatian soldiers and their officers when he writes, "In all diesen Briefen wird immer wieder formuliert, dass Loyalität zu einer Gesellschaftsordnung nicht erwartet werden kann, wenn der Gleichheit an Pflichten keine Gleichheit der Rechte entspricht." Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten*, 276.

“forest camp” was a former English prisoner-of-war camp that was surrounded by wire.

However, it attempted to mitigate this observation by relating that the barracks were “good” and the Alsace-Lorrainers given ample materials to build their own beds and pallets. They also were allowed to leave the camp with permission.<sup>41</sup>

Despite their efforts to deflect the majority of Eugen’s recorded experiences and even if they had had the best of intentions, it is difficult to understand how German authorities who had the foresight to send an “old and experienced” officer in an attempt to raise the spirits of the Alsace-Lorrainers could be so oblivious to the context in which the soldiers from the *Reichsland* were held. The events described by Eugen and the subsequent response from Imperial authorities clearly illustrates the lack of tact and counterproductive nature of German wartime policies towards Alsatians. These strategies were counterproductive in the sense that by choosing to treat Alsatians as an undifferentiated, nationally suspect mass, German military leaders may have prevented a few desertions, but in the process disillusioned and alienated the mass of Alsatian soldiers, who like Eugen, may not have been rabid German nationalists, but who loyally fulfilled their military duties. Thus in the end, German authorities discriminatory policies and actions themselves were responsible for turning Alsatians into the disloyal subjects that they had always suspected them as being. Perhaps, as historian Christoph Jahr suggested, the desertion of Alsatians is in itself not surprising. What really is astounding is that a majority of Alsatian soldiers chose not to.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Report from the Feldartillerie Regiment 67, August 6, 1918, M 30/1 330, HStAS.

<sup>42</sup> Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten*, 282.

## Reasons behind Alsatian Desertions

It should not be surprising that Alsatian soldiers' primary motivations to risk life and limb to desert from German military service widely varied given that their backgrounds and experiences were as numerous as the soldiers themselves. In this regard, Imperial military authorities' obsessive suspicion of the *Reichsland* soldiers' national loyalties is a boon for historians. A special surveillance depot was created in Mulhouse during the war to monitor and report on the correspondence between mobilized Alsatian soldiers and their families. In an extended April 1918 memorandum, the Mulhouse surveillance officer compiled an account in which he sought to identify the primary causes of Alsatian desertion as it was expressed in the letters. The surveillance officer broke the motivations down into five broad categories that included an anti-German disposition, kinship with family members living in France, the length of the war, and "special" treatment in the form of leave denials or poor treatment by their direct superiors.<sup>43</sup> Despite the attempt to create distinct categories and provide letter excerpts that were illustrative of each specific grouping, common themes emerge from the selections that defy the Surveillance Officer's (and German military authorities') efforts to reduce Alsations' desertion motivations to a specific classification.

A common "familial" metaphor that multiple Alsatian soldiers utilized to express their relationship with Germany was that of a stepchild. In this construction, Alsations saw themselves as related, but never fully accepted as members of the German national "family" and saw little cause to hope for a change of circumstances in the future. Filled with these convictions and witness to the variety of significant and insignificant discriminations they faced in the German army, it was natural that many Alsations would turn their hopes to an alternative and

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<sup>43</sup> Report from Mulhouse Überwachungsoffizier, April 18, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

perhaps better future. The well-publicized construction of Alsatians as patriotic heroes in French propaganda was doubtless a more attractive role to play for *Reichsland* soldiers than that of the suspect traitor. It is important to note that multiple letters suggest that the pro-French swing of many Alsatians' attitudes was a result of their experiences and observations in the German army and not a manifestation of pre-existent pro-French sentiment.

The Mulhouse Surveillance Officer described the letters from individuals collected in "Group I" as including statements that either expressed an anti-German attitude or articulated clear French sympathies. Thus a Josef Ficht in the 219 Reserve Infantry Regiment wrote to his Uncle Xaver Ficht in Guebwiller,

Dear Uncle...It's all the same to me, come what may. Holdout, endure, and hold your tongue says a proverb, which is also true for the high, proud Prussian militarism. Yes, I can tell you, I too appreciate it, as I am indifferent. You can perhaps have little notion of all the things and all the events I have observed under this iron regime. I have resolved from this day forward to do no more harm to my parental Fatherland, my abiding fellow combatant France. Finished! That is certain. We are still Prussia's stepchildren (if we will remain so - - ?) With the birth defect of being E—I [the original wording must have been indecipherable, as the Surveillance officer guessed that Ficht had either written jackass (*Esel*) or Alsatians (*Elsäßer*)]...<sup>44</sup>

The letter suggests that Ficht did not begin his military service as a francophile German combatant. Instead, his "rediscovery" of his French heritage appears to have been prompted by his negative observations and experiences in the German army.

The letters that fell into "Group II" were identified as demonstrating the writer's lack of German national feeling and total indifference if Alsace belonged to Germany. A certain Private Bermann from Mulhouse-Dornach wrote to his wife Julie that

I want to ask you to once more write a petition for me. If it is of no use then I will have been the longest in the war and will go someplace where it is better. It is really all the same to me if I am punished or not, because even if one is sent to the hole, one would still be better off than at the front, where common people are only treated as good cattle. And so all of one's love for the Fatherland dies away. I believe, my dear, that my letter has deeply saddened you. But

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<sup>44</sup> Mulhouse Überwachungsoffizier, "Auszüge aus Briefen elsäbische Heeresangehöriger, welche Fahnenflucht beabsichtigen," April 18, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

unfortunately, I cannot do anything about it. What is even more sad is that one must dance [when the superiors] whistle. It is sad that so many people are well-kept in hunger, misery, and privation and that they will be led to slaughter in this field because this is no longer a war, but rather a ghastly murder and butchery.<sup>45</sup>

In this selection, it is clear that Private Bermann was disillusioned with the war and his superiors. Yet the letter also raises two additional points. In keeping with Josef Ficht's previous letter, it appears that Bermann's disenchantment with the German cause and the war in general was a product of his military service and not a preexistent pro-French disposition. This is evident the reference to a "love of the Fatherland" that had dissipated. One potential source for this disintegration is suggested in Bermann's request that his wife file a final petition on his behalf. This likely was an application for leave or discharge. In the former case, German authorities were particularly reluctant to grant leave to soldiers from the *Reichsland* on account of their suspicion that furloughed Alsatians might not return to their units. Imperial authorities worried that learning about the conditions at the front and witnessing the conditions at home might create a mutually negative influence upon the province's civil population and the returning soldiers.<sup>46</sup> The result of this repeated leave denial on Alsatians' morale is evident in that Bermann claimed to be the longest serving soldier in what we can assume was his unit. Thus a lethal blow was dealt to Bermann's morale through a combination of war weariness and grievances against the discrimination he experienced as an Alsatian.

The letters that the Mulhouse Surveillance Officer categorized in "Group III" were characterized as containing complaints regarding the treatment Alsatians were subjected to

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<sup>45</sup> Mulhouse Überwachungsoffizier, "Auszüge aus Briefen elsässische Heeresangehöriger, welche Fahnenflucht beabsichtigen," April 18, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

<sup>46</sup> Maureen Healy has observed a similar effort among Habsburg authorities in wartime Vienna to prevent occupants of the battlefield and home front from being exposed to the everyday realities of the other sphere. See Maureen Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.

within their troop formation. Thus in an excerpt that echoed Eugen's earlier letter, a certain Eugen Eschmann from the 353rd Infantry Regiment wrote to his wife to describe his own and his fellow Alsatians' reaction to being pulled from the frontlines and accompanied by escorts. Eschmann related that as they marched the 70 men started singing the first verse of *La Marseillaise*, wandered hither and thither, and took impromptu rests whenever they wished to spite the German lieutenant in charge of accompanying them. He reported widespread approval and dark hilarity that reigned in the ranks of the evacuated Alsatians when a "jokester" characterized their current state and hope for the future as, "Saw action in 1914/15/16/17, earned the Iron Cross, and happily taken prisoner in 1918."<sup>47</sup> After further describing the ordeal, Eschmann concluded to his wife,

After such treatment we can no longer feel German, as you yourself must concede. Hopefully, Alsace will not remain German, so that we finally know where we belong and will no longer be seen and treated as stepchildren because four years of wartime surveillance while German soldiers is already long enough.<sup>48</sup>

Several aspects regarding Alsatians' "pro-French" manifestations are evident in Eschmann's letter. First, the motivation to sing the French national anthem and delay the progress of their evacuation was clearly done in response to their removal from their units and part of an effort to annoy and shock their German chaperones. At another level, the deep offense that many Alsatians took to being singled out and suspected, despite their wartime accomplishments is expressed in the rueful dark irony of the "jokester's" statement. Angry and disgusted after it

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<sup>47</sup> Mulhouse Überwachungsoffizier, "Auszüge aus Briefen elsäbische Heeresangehöriger, welche Fahnenflucht beabsichtigen," April 18, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS. Dominik Richert reported similar expressions of pro-French sympathy after his regiment was transferred West, while the Alsatians that were in its ranks were ordered to remain behind on the Eastern Front. See Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 224-225.

<sup>48</sup> Mulhouse Überwachungsoffizier, "Auszüge aus Briefen elsäbische Heeresangehöriger, welche Fahnenflucht beabsichtigen," April 18, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

became evident that loyal service and sacrifice were insufficient to earn the trust of German officials, Alsatians were willing to countenance an alternative.<sup>49</sup> These manifestations of “pro-French” sentiment signaled a capitulation to official stereotypes. In the end, Alsatians were just living up to Imperial military authorities’ expectations.

One motivation that Imperial military authorities did not ascribe to those Alsatians who decided to desert was cowardice or lack of martial spirit. General Erich Ludendorff wrote to Chancellor Georg von Hertling in 1918 that, “The reasons for this treasonous conduct are in no way primarily committed out of unsoldierly cowardice, character ruination, or dissatisfaction with the circumstances of service. In fact, the main source of the idea develops from the belief that Alsace-Lorraine will again become French, the ultimate victory of France, and Germany’s voluntary release [of the provinces] in the peace treaty.”<sup>50</sup> Ludendorff’s attribution of the increasing number of Alsatian desertions to their interpretation of the current course of the war reflects an attempt to deflect the singular role of the German military in souring a significant number of Alsatians to the Imperial war effort.

Redirecting blame for desertions went hand in hand with the view promoted by some official German circles that the desertions and resulting denaturalization of Alsatians who voluntarily “emigrated” was potentially positive. This position is evident in a memorandum that was sent from the representative of the General Command of the XV Army Corps to the Ministry

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<sup>49</sup> My position stands in contrast to that of Alan Kramer in his discussion of anti-German sentiment on the Alsatian home front, which he suggests resulted from “not merely a reaction to German suspicions: it was an underlying mentality, rejuvenated by the experience of military rule and wartime mobilization.” See Kramer, “*Wackes at War*, 110. In this context “underlying mentalities” can also be read as “preexistent/inherent mentalities” and as such Kramer effectively precludes Alsatians the power to instrumentally and freely choose their national loyalties based upon their perceived self-interest.

<sup>50</sup> Erich Ludendorff to Reichskanzler Georg von Hertling, February 1, 1918, M30/1 107, HStAS.

of Alsace-Lorraine. Advocating the maintenance of the citizenship revoking process for deserters he wrote, “the denaturalization procedures must be continued for political reasons. For one, on account of its deterrent effect, but also above all, so that by the conclusion of the peace the *Reichsland* will be cleansed of elements who are not inwardly committed to the German Reich.”<sup>51</sup> From this point of view, the fires of war could be interpreted as a light that illuminated the darkest corners of German citizens’ hearts and revealed their “true” loyalty and colors that during peacetime would have remained shrouded in shadow. As a result, and particularly for Alsace, German authorities postulated that those individuals who deserted had never been truly “German” and the Reich was well rid of them. This self-serving justification may have provided some measure of self-comfort to Imperial authorities, but it failed to fundamentally address the underlying issue that in many cases they themselves were responsible for the disillusionment and alienation of Alsatian soldiers, who might not have been raving German patriots, but who under normal circumstances would have loyally fulfilled their military service obligations.

### **Pensions and Support**

The First World War confronted Imperial officials with the daunting task of having to provide some form of support to an unprecedented number of its citizens. The mobilization of all levels of German society removed millions of primary breadwinners from their households. A soldier’s pay in many cases was not enough to bridge the earnings gap between pre-war and wartime incomes. Moreover, the carnage of the conflict left thousands of widows, fatherless children, and disabled soldiers who needed to be kept on sound economic footing in the present and prepared for a productive future. German authorities recognized these challenges soon after

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<sup>51</sup> Stellvertreter Generalkommando des XV. Armeekorps to the Ministerium Elsaß-Lothringen, December 21, 1917, M30/1 107, HStAS.

the advent of hostilities and moved quickly to alleviate some of their most salient manifestations. In discussing the types of support and pensions that were available to Alsatian soldiers and their families, it is useful to broadly classify the eligible populations into three categories. The first and largest group that benefitted from official aid was the families of currently mobilized soldiers. Here a combination of private and governmental initiative was utilized to assuage some of the worst hardships brought about by the absence of the household's primary earner. The second type of support was directed at soldiers whose physical or mental wounds made it impossible for them to continue their active military service at the front. The third category of aid recipients was made up of women and children whose husband and father had been killed in the current conflict.

In examining Imperial policies towards each of these groups, it is necessary to differentiate between the short- and long-term goals of the support. The short-term intention of official aid was to provide immediate sustenance and lessen any direct emergency facing the applicant. The long-term goal of wartime support, particularly when it came to disabled veterans and war widows, was to provide the requisite skills to return them to functioning and contributing members of society. Taken together the object of short- and long-term assistance measures were to minimize the conflict's disruption of the prewar economic and social order in the present and future. The study of Imperial Germany's support of the families of its Alsatian combatants, disabled soldiers, and war widows is an important counterpoint and presents a decidedly different narrative than the experiences of mobilized Alsatian soldiers. In stark contrast to the discrimination that Alsatian soldiers experienced, German civil officials went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the wellbeing and reintegration of civilian Alsations whose lives had been most disrupted and altered by the current conflict. Paradoxically, while Alsatian

soldiers were handled as suspect at the front while their disabled comrades and dependents were treated as German at home.

### **Care for the Families of Mobilized Soldiers**

The lack of widespread war enthusiasm in Alsace at the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 is well-documented.<sup>52</sup> However, the reluctance of the Alsatian population to celebrate the coming of the conflict was not mirrored in their willingness to donate their own money to support mobilized soldiers' families. The *Kreisdirektor* of Haguenau reported to the Regional President of Lower Alsace in August 1914 that "immediately after the outbreak of the war all communities of the district were seized with a joyful willingness to sacrifice and care for the dependents of mobilized men."<sup>53</sup> The *Kreisdirektor* continued to say that giving had reached such a degree that not only had the immediate emergency for funds been overcome, but that sufficient reserves had been saved to mitigate the dislocation caused by the departure of the principle breadwinner for the next several months. The purpose of the report, however, was not to simply boast about his constituents' generosity. Instead, describing the current state of support funds was part of a larger plea to temporarily cease further donation campaigns.

The *Kreisdirektor* utilized a twofold justification for his position. On the one hand, he argued against the drive on the grounds of the extra work it would demand of local civil officials, who were already inundated with different orders from military authorities. On the other hand, and more importantly, he contended that it was in the interest of maintaining the population's willingness to work and sacrifice to refrain from making unnecessary demands. He explained,

As mentioned, at this time, there exists no emergency in Haguenau, nor in the country, apart from the areas directly affected by the war. After the communities and people have already made great

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<sup>52</sup> See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 101; Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace*, 115.

<sup>53</sup> Kreisdirektor Jerschke to Bezirkspräsident Otto Pöhlmann, August 31, 1914, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

sacrifices for necessities that already arose, such as the provisioning of food, stocking of hospitals, victuals for the troops and transports of the wounded, and the Red Cross' and similar organizations' collections, it might be better to wait on further appeals and demands in order to maintain the spirit of sacrifice.<sup>54</sup>

The *Kreisdirektor*'s comment is significant in that it reveals the high wartime demands that were placed on the Alsatian populace, the assumption that the war might drag on long enough to necessitate further donations, and finally that the willingness of the population to sacrifice was not limitless. The *Kreisdirektor* concluded by arguing that in order to maintain the spirit of giving it was crucial for donors to observe that at least a part of their gifts were being utilized to aid the needy in their own communities and district. Taken in this light, the willingness of the residents of Haguenau and its surrounding communities to donate and sacrifice was done for the benefit of their immediate neighbors rather than of Germany or even Alsace as a whole. Thus the support of the war effort was intrinsically tied up with the local.<sup>55</sup>

Imperial authorities had a specific idea of the purpose and role of wartime official aid. Ensuring that the families of its soldiers did not fall into poverty while their primary breadwinner was mobilized was identified as a key issue in the success of the German war effort. Reich's Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg wrote to *Statthalter* Hans von Dallwitz in 1916 that "In the interests of the Fatherland it is absolutely necessary...that soldiers fighting on the front for the Fatherland know that their families are adequately supported, so that their willingness to fight will also be strengthened."<sup>56</sup> In this statement, Bethmann-Hollweg expressly

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<sup>54</sup> Kreisdirektor Jerschke to Bezirkspräsident Otto Pöhlmann, August 31, 1914, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

<sup>55</sup> This stands in contrast to Alan Kramer's claim that "ambivalent attitudes such as Alsatian regionalism" were temporarily muted by the outbreak of hostilities in relation to pro-French and pro-German national sentiment. See Kramer, "Wackes at War," 107.

<sup>56</sup> Reichskanzler Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg to Statthalter Hans von Dallwitz, December 3, 1916, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

articulated the mutual expectations and stakes in the relationship between mobilized soldiers and the German government. The willingness and enthusiasm of Alsatian (and German) soldiers to continue fighting for the Reich was intimately tied to the Reich's ability to support their families at home. The aid to soldiers' families was not intended to reach a degree that would allow the recipients to enjoy a better lifestyle than the one they lived during peacetime. Instead, German officials intended the amount of aid to bridge any shortfall between peace- and wartime incomes. A report from the mayor of Strasbourg in 1916 related that "...support of families should only be a substitute for the earlier real earned livelihood of the combatant...people who have not been supported by the combatant nor those without a demonstrable need for support have a claim."<sup>57</sup> This statement demonstrates the limited scope of official aid, but also authorities' determination that individuals who were not supported by the combatant during times of peace nor those lacking a genuine need should be the beneficiaries of official support.

Limiting the expenditure on aid to only those eligible was an important consideration for Imperial authorities. The original guidelines for the support of actively serving soldiers had been promulgated in February 1888. They authorized support for the wife of the mobilized man and children under the age of 15 and secondarily to older children, siblings, and ascendant relatives, so long as they were needy and had received support from the man prior to his conscription.<sup>58</sup> Revisions to the original 1888 legislation were passed in August 1914 after the outbreak of hostilities. In this version, children born out of wedlock, but recognized and supported by their

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<sup>57</sup> "Berechtigung auf Familienunterstützung," November 4, 1916, 75 MW 28, AMS.

<sup>58</sup> "(Nr. 1771) Gesetz, betreffend die Unterstuetzung von Familien in den Dienst eingetretener Mannschaften. Vom 28. Februar 1888." *Reichsgesetzblatt*, no. 7, 1888, 59.

fathers were also eligible to receive payment.<sup>59</sup> The most critical element of any application for aid was that the petitioner be deemed to be needy. As the mayor of Strasbourg articulated in 1916, “Neediness, in all cases, is the absolute prerequisite for the granting of support.”<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, although an individual had to be judged to be in poverty in order to receive combatants’ aid, a precise definition of “needy” was not provided until 1916. This legislation set a yearly income of 1,500 marks as the maximum yearly income for support recipients.<sup>61</sup>

The payment of support to the families of mobilized men also provides an important example of organization and initiative from below. In a session of the “State Committee for the Care of Families and Dependents of Combatants in the Field” (*Landeskomitees zur Fürsorge für die Familien und Angehörigen der im Felde stehenden Krieger*) in June 1915, the city of Strasbourg’s desire to extend financial aid to a larger circle of soldiers’ dependents than provided by the current legislation was a topic of debate. The resolution that was finally adopted read,

Hereafter an expansion of the group [considered needy dependents of combatants] is to occur, to take into account not only those needy dependents as described by the February 28, 1888 and August 4, 1914 legislation, but also those individuals with an especially close relationship with the combatant, for example parents of actively serving men and old foster parents, who adopted the young men as orphans and cared for them as their own parents.<sup>62</sup>

The State Committee promised a portion of 168,000 marks to each of the Alsatian communities to support this expansion. The amount that was dedicated here to the care of parents and foster

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<sup>59</sup> “(Nr. 4438) Gesetz zur Änderung des Gesetzes, betreffend die Unterstützung von Familien in den Dienst eingetretener Mannschaften, vom 28. Februar 1888 (Reichs-Gesetzbl. S. 59). Vom 4. August 1914,” *Reichsgesetzblatt*, no.53, 1914, 333.

<sup>60</sup> “Berechtigung auf Familienunterstützung,” November 4, 1916, 75 MW 28, AMS.

<sup>61</sup> “(Nr. 5036) Bekanntmachung, betreffend die Unterstützung von Familien in den Dienst eingetretener Mannschaften. Vom 21. Januar 1916,” *Reichsgesetzblatt* Nr. 14, 1916, 56.

<sup>62</sup> *Landeskomitees zur Fürsorge für die Familien und Angehörigen der im Felde stehenden Krieger* to the sämtliche Kreisdirektoren mit Ausnahme derjenigen von Mülhausen, Colmar, Gebweiler, Thann und Altkirch, June 7, 1915, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

parents is less significant than the resolution is as an example of local level administrators identifying and acting upon perceived inadequacies of national policy. In this particular case, the *Landeskomitee*'s extension of support to a larger pool of beneficiaries anticipated legislation in January 1916 that would adopt such an increase into national law.<sup>63</sup>

Large firms and industry provide another example of privately organized and initiated support for mobilized soldiers and their families. An unaddressed report from the Strasbourg Chamber of Commerce related that,

Because the current legislated support in many cases is insufficient to prevent the dependents of mobilized men from falling into bitter distress, the principle [firms] see it as an obligation of honor to ensure that the care of their employees' families is not left to public charity, and instead themselves – so far as it is in their power – will take up their care.<sup>64</sup>

The willingness of firms and large industries in Strasbourg to adopt some responsibility in caring for the families of their mobilized employees fits into the larger paternalistic tradition that characterized big business in Alsace.<sup>65</sup> The form of this aid varied between businesses. For example, the Firm of Wolf Netter and Jacobi undertook to pay the full salaries of its mobilized married salesmen and technical officials for the months of August and September 1914. The dependents of all mobilized unmarried salesmen and technical officials would receive a 1/3 of their wages for the month of August. While the wives of married workers who had been called to the colors would receive 1 M per day and each child under 15 would receive .20 M.<sup>66</sup> The

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<sup>63</sup> See "(Nr. 5036) Bekanntmachung, betreffend die Unterstützung von Familien in den Dienst eingetretener Mannschaften. Vom 21. Januar 1916," *Reichsgesetzblatt* Nr. 14, 1916, 55-56. The legislation that was passed on January 21, 1916 provided support for parentless grandchildren, step-parents, siblings and children, "guiltless" divorcees, and foster parents and children.

<sup>64</sup> Handelskammer zu Straßburg, "Untitled Report," August 8, 1914, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

<sup>65</sup> See Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace*, especially 48-63.

<sup>66</sup> Eugen Jacobi to Geheimrat Dr. Dickhoff, August 8, 1914, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

Adler & Oppenheimer Leather Factory took a similar approach in delegating a wage of 1.20 M per day for the wives of its mobilized workers and .20 M daily for each child, while similarly paying the full salaries for August and September of their clerks who had been mobilized. In contrast to Netter and Jacobi, the funding for this support came from the firm, but non-mustered workers likewise contributed a certain percentage of their own salaries.<sup>67</sup>

Imperial officials needed all the help they could muster to meet demands of thousands of petitioning families. Evidence suggests that initially the combination of official and local initiative was sufficient to provide some form of aid to the vast majority (approximately 84.9%) of cases. This is evident in a report from the Regional Governor of Lower Alsace, Pöhlmann to *Statthalter* Dallwitz in October 1914.<sup>68</sup> The information broke down as follows:

**Table 7: Families Eligible for Wartime Assistance and Accomplished Cases, October 1914**

District of	Number of Families Eligible for Aid	Number of Claims Accomplished	Percentage of Total Claims Accomplished
Erstein	4,200	3,884	92.5%
Haguenau	3,400	3,082	90.6%
Molsheim	5,000	3,737	74.7%
Sélestat	5,700	4,668	81.9%
Strasbourg-Land	5,100	4,663	91.4%
Wissembourg	2,400	1,801	75%
Saverne	3,800	3,300	86.8%
Total	29,600	25,135	84.9%
Strasbourg-City	9,024	N/A	N/A

<sup>67</sup> Adler & Oppenheimer LederFabrik A.G., “Untitled, Unaddressed, and Undated Report,” 27 AL 497, ADBR.

<sup>68</sup> Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann to Statthalter Elsaß-Lothringen Hans von Dallwitz, October 8, 1914, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

Pöhlmann submitted a similar report to Dallwitz in March 1915.<sup>69</sup> The comparison of the number of eligible families for aid gives a sense of the way in which the prolongation of the war corresponded to a rise in the number of families needing some type of assistance.

**Table 8: Families Eligible for Wartime Assistance and Accomplished Cases, March 1915**

District of	Number of Families Eligible for Aid in March 1915	Number of Families Eligible for Aid in October 1914	Difference
Erstein	4,035	4,200	-165
Haguenau	5,500	3,400	+2,100
Molsheim	5,200	5,000	+200
Sélestat	5,864	5,700	+164
Strasbourg-Land	5,840	5,100	+740
Wissembourg	2,500	2,400	+100
Saverne	5,902	3,800	+2,102
Strasbourg-City	8,529	9,024	-495
Total	43,370	38,624	+4,746

Thus in a period of less than six months the number of families eligible for some form of aid increased by 4,746. Although I do not possess the statistics to make similar comparisons further into the war years, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the number of families judged to be “needy” only increased as the war continued and the economic strains on the homefront intensified. It should also be noted that utilizing the number of families eligible for aid has the potential of distorting our perception of the numbers of individuals involved. The example of Strasbourg in the 1915 report illustrates the discrepancy between the number of families and individuals involved in these claims. The 8,529 eligible families in the city of Strasbourg encompassed some 20,967 people.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann to Statthalter Elsaß-Lothringen Hans von Dallwitz, March 22, 1915, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

<sup>70</sup> Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann to Statthalter Elsaß-Lothringen Hans von Dallwitz, March 22, 1915, 27 AL 497, ADBR.

## Care for the War Disabled

The combination of a new industrial style of warfare and the scale of the armies of the First World War astronomically increased the number of debilitating wounds and proportionately created a significant population of war disabled whose care and needs required attention in all of the combatant countries. Already by 1916, some 10,000 soldiers with differing degrees of disability as result of bodily mutilation or sickness had been discharged and returned to the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>71</sup> Not all of these individuals were eligible or registered with local aid committees. The study of the institutions and retraining programs founded during the war to facilitate the reintegration of disabled Alsatian veterans demonstrates that German authorities had indeed made provisions and planned for the transition to postwar society long before summer of 1917.<sup>72</sup>

The most important of these assistance institutions was the State Welfare Office for the War Disabled and Surviving Dependents (*Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene*) that had district chapters across Alsace and Lorraine and which was signed into existence by *Statthalter* Hans von Dallwitz on June 3, 1915.<sup>73</sup> Approximately 2,984 war disabled veterans had registered themselves with their local state welfare offices by March 1916.

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<sup>71</sup> “Die Kriegsinvaliden- und Kriegshinterbliebenenfürsorge in Elsaß-Lothringen 1916,” *Nachrichten* no. 12, 2, 8 AL 1/1654, ADHR.

<sup>72</sup> Whalen, *Bitter Wounds*, 104. Whalen argued that for the majority of the war the German government refused to take up the problem of pensions for disabled veterans. Whalen’s observation, however, misses that the emphasis of disability care for Imperial officials was never creating funds to support war invalids, but rather on constructing the institutional framework that would facilitate their reentrance into the workforce and wider reintegration into German society as a whole.

<sup>73</sup> “Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Nachrichten der Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide* Nr. 16, 9, 8 AL 1/1658, ADHR.

German officials created a general set of guidelines and goals for their administrators tasked with disability relief in an attempt to establish uniformity in action. The objectives for the State Welfare Office for the War Disabled and Surviving Dependents were outlined in the instructions that were sent to the collective district directors of Alsace and Lorraine as,

The goal of aid activities [for the disabled] is to secure the best possible curative treatment and make all combatants who have been damaged through injury, amputation, and physical or mental illness fully functional members of economic life in consideration of their personal and economic circumstances. The disabled should not become beggars, but rather taxpayers, they should not consume wealth, but rather create it. The war invalid organ grinder of the '70s must not reemerge. It is not the role [of the aid activities] to secure a provisional livelihood. This is the responsibility of the Reich's welfare laws. Rather, medical knowledge and experiences plus all cultural and economic facilities and achievements should work together in order to effect an extensive compensation for the existent disability.<sup>74</sup>

This quote provides a critical summation of Imperial authorities' aspirations for the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. A wide definition of disability was the foundation for the treatment of the war injured. Negative historical precedents were clearly in officials' minds with the emphasis on returning the disabled soldier to an occupation in civilian life rather than the dole. Finally, it is evident that the responsibility for the war disabled rehabilitation was conceived of as a profoundly modern and collective responsibility, involving the sum of scientific and social advances and German society as a whole.

From the opening months of the war, Imperial authorities were disinclined to simply award a monetary pension to disabled veterans. This reluctance stemmed from the belief that idle consumption of a pension was not in the interest of the state or disabled veteran and sooner, rather than later, would create "an army of dissatisfied state pensioners [who] very soon would have been weaned from the blessing of regular work and become a burden to their families,

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<sup>74</sup> "Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge," 3-4, June 5, 1915, 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

communities, and finally themselves.”<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, such a group of work-shy individuals would prove a long-term drag and hindrance to the growth of the German economy. As a result it was judged that, “It is not enough that after the conclusion of his medical treatment that the wounded combatant simply be released home with a supply of money, rather he must, in accordance with his capacity to work, be led from the ranks of the fighters to the ranks of the working men for the common good.”<sup>76</sup> Connecting the “ranks of fighters” and “ranks of the working men” was a deliberate strategy on the part of Imperial officials. Although their wounds had made the disabled incapable of further service on the battlefield, their remaining strength and skills could be redirected and if necessary retrained to make an immediate contribution to the German war effort in the short-term, but also in a longer trajectory would benefit postwar Germany.

Several other guiding principles emerged out of Imperial officials’ assumption regarding the rejuvenating power of labor. Local officials were advised that “it must be insistently made clear [to the war disabled] that joy in work will wake again the joy of life.”<sup>77</sup> A critical caveat of this position was that true joy could only be found in genuinely fruitful labor. In practice, this meant that local officials were instructed to find the war disabled real occupations rather than just temporary or unskilled jobs. Closely tied to this notion was the belief that the war invalid should be a producer rather than a mendicant. This was expressed with the directive that, “The

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<sup>75</sup> “Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Nachrichten der Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide* no. 16, 1, 8 AL 1/1658, ADHR.

<sup>76</sup> “Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Nachrichten der Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide* no. 16, 1, 8 AL 1/1658, ADHR.

<sup>77</sup> “Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Nachrichten der Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide* no. 16, 2, 8 AL 1/1658, ADHR.

disabled should create, not only consume value. His life must once again have substance. He should be a wage earner, a working man, and not a beggar.”<sup>78</sup>

In order to meet these lofty and ever increasing demands, Imperial officials laid out a specific series of step-by-step measures designed to facilitate the reintegration of the war disabled into civilian society. The rehabilitation process began in military hospitals even before the injured soldier was discharged. The German military was in control of this first stage rehabilitation that encompassed the physical treatment of wounds and which, if necessary, included the cost of outfitting the patient with prosthetics. The second step of therapy began concurrently with the physical recovery in the form of vocational counseling. It was believed that discussions of post-discharge jobs should begin as quickly as practical in the recovery process in order to prevent the patient from falling into a “mental lethargy” and “pension psychosis.”<sup>79</sup> As the State Welfare Office wrote, “It is necessary that the disabled as early as possible be reassured about their future and indoctrinated to the belief that they, in spite of their physical loss, do not need to lose the hope for a later [occupational] advancement through their own strength.”<sup>80</sup> In these initial stages, close cooperation and coordination between military and civilian authorities was essential to both identify and start treating eligible veterans. The final two steps of the rehabilitation process, reeducation (if necessary) and employment placement (if necessary), occurred after the individual’s official discharge and was the responsibility of local

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<sup>78</sup> “Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge in Elsaß-Lothringen,” *Nachrichten der Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide* no. 16, 2, 8 AL 1/1658, ADHR.

<sup>79</sup> Ruth Underhill, *Provisions for War Cripples in Germany*, ed. by Douglass C. McMurtie (New York: Red Cross Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men, 1918), 18-19, World War I Subject Collection, Box No. 27, Hoover Institution Archives (hereafter cited as HIA).

<sup>80</sup> Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide to the Bezirkspräsident, August 10, 1915, 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

civilian officials.<sup>81</sup> The costs of the care of the disabled soldiers was to be divided between the Reich and State. The Reich was to pay for the disabled veteran's the physical treatment and pension, while the state was responsible for the costs associated with vocational advice, placement, and reeducation when necessary. Vocational retraining was only undertaken in instances where the injury made it impossible for former soldier to fulfill the requirements of his former job.

A disabled soldier was not simply released into civil society even after he had completed all of the officially prescribed reintegration steps. Liaison/vocational advice officers were tasked with occasionally checking on the wellbeing and progress of the injured veterans and finding out if there was anything further that could be done to better their care.<sup>82</sup> The liaison officers were to fulfill multiple roles for their charges that might range from acting as an employment advocate, to medical care coordinator, to booster of discouraged spirits.<sup>83</sup> Above all, an emphasis was placed on respecting the wishes of the disabled and on treating and getting to know him as an individual. Thus a Red Cross translation of the pamphlet, "Guiding Principles for Vocational Advice and Re-education," wrote "The adviser, through continued friendly intercourse with the cripple, must win his confidence and learn to know him on the human side as well as on the economic side, must take all the factors of the situation into consideration and only then give his

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<sup>81</sup> "Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge," 4-11, June 5, 1915, 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

<sup>82</sup> Kreisdirektor Umhauer, Altkirch to Kaiserl. Ministerium in Straßburg, July 14, 1916, 8 AL 1/ 1655, ADHR.

<sup>83</sup> Underhill, *Provisions for War Cripples in Germany*, 22. World War I Subject Collection, Box No. 27, HIA.

advice.”<sup>84</sup> In this manner, in an ideal scenario, German officials crafted and differentiated their advice to the specifics of each individual case.

Local authorities’ first preference was that the returning injured soldier take up his old occupation or one closely associated with it. This necessitated working with and occasionally compelling local employers to find ways to accommodate the disabled individual as much as possible. Imperial officials envisioned a societal wide coordination and cooperative effort undertaken by themselves, employers, workers, representatives of Laborer- and Clerical Workers Insurance, medical delegates, and the major representatives of Trade, Industry, Handcrafts, and Agriculture to reintegrate the war disabled into civil society.<sup>85</sup> An example of the voluntary incorporation of the war disabled is evident in a note written by Regional President of Lower-Alsace Otto Pöhlmann in which he informed the Imperial Ministry in Strasbourg that the returning Strasbourg city workers were being placed, as far as possible, in their prewar positions with the same wages, “as if they had not been engaged.”<sup>86</sup> Even more importantly from the perspective of the returning injured veterans, was that they were to be paid full wages without consideration of the amount they might receive as part of their disability pension from the Imperial government. The opportunity to earn an income in excess to their prewar levels was a unique goal of official policy towards disabled veterans that in general focused on aiding recipients in either maintaining or returning to their previous social position.

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<sup>84</sup> Underhill, *Provisions for War Cripples in Germany*, 38, World War I Subject Collection, Box No. 27, HIA.

<sup>85</sup> “Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge,” 1, June 5, 1915, 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

<sup>86</sup> Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Pöhlmann to the Kaiserliche Ministerium in Strasbourg, October 21, 1916, 47 AL 44/1, ADBR.

However, as is not surprising, such an idealized cooperation was difficult to sustain (if it ever existed) as the war dragged on and the wartime shortages caused by the British blockade began to take a serious toll on German industry. A lack of raw material increasingly necessitated the closing or scaling back of certain factories. In such instances, disabled veterans, with their curtailed labor abilities could easily become some of the first targets for cuts. Recognizing this tendency, Minister of War Hermann Freiherr von Stein wrote advocating the use of even the most severely war disabled by saying,

...even those whose working ability has been reduced by 50% or more still have much to offer. Therefore it must be made clear to both public and private employers that limited labor is better than none at all and above all it should be emphasized that it is the direct social duty of everyone to care for the severely war disabled who made their sacrifice in the interest of the general good. The war invalid must be brought to the awareness that it is not out of pity that they are cared for, but rather that his labor is in demand. In such a manner he will gradually come to feel himself to be a useful member of the community.<sup>87</sup>

Von Stein went so far as to suggest that if a position was not available for the severely injured soldier, employers should create a job by letting someone else go, particularly a woman. The State Welfare Office in Colmar had a different suggestion when it became evident that it was easier for war invalids to find employment in municipal and state positions rather than private enterprise. Local officials proposed tapping into employers' self-interest by making the delivery of raw materials and state contracts contingent upon their employment of severely disabled soldiers in appropriate positions.<sup>88</sup>

Not surprisingly, such an ambitious undertaking was plagued with a number of inefficiencies and problems. From the beginning, District Committees complained about the

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<sup>87</sup> Memorandum from Hermann Freiherr von Stein, September 6, 1918, 8 AL 1/1657, ADBR.

<sup>88</sup> Stadt Colmar Ortsausschuss für Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge to the Bezirkspräsident Oberelsaß, October 24, 1918, 8 AL 1/1657, ADHR.

lack of coordination between vocational advisers, liaison officers, and the Committee. In many cases, rather than acting as a continual source of advice and support, both of the former groups undertook only a single conversation with the returned war disabled soldier.<sup>89</sup> In addition, as previously alluded to, the slowdown of German consumer industries corresponded to a rise in unemployment that made it more difficult to place newly arrived war invalids and in many cases eliminated the jobs of those who had already been placed. The increasing scarcity of employment and the threat that they might lose their jobs to a disabled veteran likewise limited the support for official placement efforts among workers and their unions. Finally, even if work was found, it was increasingly less likely to be near the applicant's hometown, which made many individuals reluctant to accept the position. The unique location of Alsace on the frontlines also played a role in limiting the jobs that the Alsatian war disabled could take, even if they professed a willingness to travel. A report from Mulhouse's mayor in 1917 related that lately applications for exit permits to travel to the east bank of the Rhine from local residents had been severely curtailed. The mayor described a recent instance in which "Suitable work was arranged for a disabled individual, but because his exit was not approved, he is once again reliant upon payments from unemployment aid."<sup>90</sup>

Much of the previous discussion could be skeptically viewed as merely rhetorically expressed good intentions on the part of Imperial authorities. Without a doubt, it certainly was more difficult to put these measures into practice. However, archival evidence demonstrates that local officials took seriously their assignment to ease the transition of disabled Alsatian soldiers

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<sup>89</sup> "Niederschrift über die Sitzung des Ortsausschusses Colmar für Kriegsinvalidenfürsorge vom 16. November 1916," 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

<sup>90</sup> Bürgermeister Zoepfeel to the Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvaliden und Kriegshinterbliebene in Straßburg, July 6, 1917, 8 AL 1/1656, ADHR.

to civilian life. Regular reports regarding the number of claimants and the success of their reintegration in an economic and occupational sense were submitted to the State Welfare Office from communities and districts such as Colmar and Mulhouse from 1916 to the end of war. An even more exemplary case is the painstakingly detailed individualized reports from the State Welfare Office for War Disabled and Surviving Dependents of the District Committee of Ribeauvillé that not only recorded the name of each returned disabled soldier in their jurisdiction, but also described the individual's injuries and the efforts made to reintegrate them into the local work force. These individualized accounts give the historian an idea of the numbers of petitioners involved, the difficulties and successes associated with their care, and ultimately the lengths officials went to attempt to find placements for returned disabled soldiers. It is worth quoting two cases as they appear in the Ribeauvillé District Committee's report in their totality.

1. War invalid August Berrel, born on April 6, 1893 in Altweier, single, during the war served last with the 52nd Reserve Field Artillery Regiment, before the war farmer and postal assistant in Altweier, left arm lame, gut shot, thigh wound, and shell splinter to the chest, healed well, discharged with a monthly pension of 60 M. The accommodation of this war invalid from the beginning was very difficult. The District Committee applied to many positions without success. In order to remedy the difficulties with his accommodation, a commercial vocational training was applied for at the State Welfare Office at the St. Stephen's Home, which was approved on September 16, 1916. The costs of the care and commercial vocational training for the period from June 26 – August 30, 1916, a sum of 287 M was taken over by the State Welfare Office, to which Berrel added 66 M of his military pension. He successfully passed vocational training in all possible clerical work, which provided a better possibility of being placed in a similar position. He published a newspaper advertisement to this effect in the *Alsace-Lorraine Help Wanted ads (els. lothr. Stellenanzeiger)*, which was answered by several firms for the employment of a war invalid. Meanwhile, a position of a tax executory with the tax collector's office in Ribeauvillé and Reichenweiser opened up and he applied. Berrel will take over this position by order of the Directors of Direct Taxes on November 7, 1916, from which he can earn approximately 1,500 M before taxes, which in addition to his pension provides a good livelihood and [his case] is therefore taken care of.

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17. War invalid Alfons Roelly, born on December 8, 1896 in Guebwiller, married, two children, coffin maker before the war, during the war served with the 172nd Infantry Regiment, demobilized with a monthly pension of 37.50 M as a result of chronic nephritis brought about by

the exertion of campaigning. After his release he believed he could no longer take up his previous occupation on account of his complaints and wished to effect a job change. The District Committee contacted the earlier employer, Firm Weibel through local liaison officers so that at the beginning he [Roelly] could be tasked with easier work. This step had the wished for success. The Firm Weibel - which by the way shows itself to be especially accommodating to the war disabled of the Kayserberger Valley – rehired Roelly, assigned him to easier work and secured him lasting employment. In special consideration of his status as a war invalid, Roelly will start with a daily wage of 3 M that with his pension make up his means of subsistence.<sup>91</sup>

Considering the scope of their assignment, limited resources, and continually burgeoning petitioner base, the efforts of the Ribeauvillé District Committee should be judged a success.

Light manufacturing in Ribeauvillé, like many non-war essential industries across Alsace and Germany suffered a significant downturn during the conflict. Still, the District Committee reported with just a hint of self-congratulation that,

Accomplishing 65 aid cases in a quarter can be registered with full satisfaction and earns double acclaim in a district in which there is no active war industry, that has been upset through the circumstances of war, and within which many factories and business stand still. It is proof that the District Committee and all of its liaison officers are fully conscious of their duty and who selflessly work in the care of our discharged war disabled and sick combatants.<sup>92</sup>

It is important to note that the year in which the Ribeauvillé District Committee was congratulating itself and commenting upon the difficult employment situation was 1916. Two full more years of war and hardship stood before them. However, the continued success of the Committee is suggested in its final communication on October 15, 1918 when it reported that a total of 609 discharged war disabled and sick former soldiers had registered with them since the inception of their agency in 1915. Of these individuals 466 had been returned to work in their

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<sup>91</sup> *Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene Kreisausschuss-Rappoltsweiler* to the Kaiserliche Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene, January 8, 1917, 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

<sup>92</sup> Report from the *Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene Kreisausschuss-Rappoltsweiler*, October 10, 1916, 8 AL 1/1655, ADHR.

old or a new position.<sup>93</sup> The factors that contributed to the incompleteness of the remaining 143 cases were in many instances the result of circumstances beyond the control of the Ribeauvillé District Committee, such as an individual's recall to military service or death. Regardless, a placement percentage of 76.5% of disabled and sick veterans during wartime was a significant accomplishment.

### **Pensions for Surviving Dependents**

The years of conflict and rising casualty rates created an ever increasing number of war widows on the German home front. War widows, perhaps more than anyone else, faced the prospect of downward social mobility with the permanent loss of the primary wage earner. For that reason, Imperial officials took an active interest in the short- and long-term support of fallen soldiers' dependents. The source of the funding to soldiers' survivors played a critical role in its public perception, the importance of which was recognized by Imperial officials. The Combatants' Support Department in Karlsruhe wrote in 1916 that, "It is self-evident that the surviving dependents of soldiers in cases of need will not be referred to public poor relief, but rather will be supported from voluntary war relief."<sup>94</sup>

Just as German authorities recognized the necessity of providing adequate support for the families of mobilized living soldiers in order to maintain their morale, they recognized that evidence of their determination to care for the dependents of fallen soldiers would likewise affect the willingness of current soldiers to continue their service. Simply providing support in itself was also insufficient. The "thanks of the Fatherland" would seem paltry if the families of dead

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<sup>93</sup> Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene Kreisausschuss-Rappoltsweiler to the Kaiserl. Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene, October 15, 1918, 8 AL 1/1657, ADHR.

<sup>94</sup> Note from Stadtgemeinde Karlsruhe Kreigerunterstützungsamt, May 9, 1916, 75 MW 28, AMS.

soldiers were lumped together and received the same type of compensation as the rest of Germany's poor. However, the direct payment of war aid funds to survivors, similarly to disabled soldiers, was designed to be a temporary measure. Imperial officials' long-term goal was to facilitate the recipients' return to a functioning and contributing member of society. With this in mind, the articulated purpose of survivors' aid was,

It should be the first goal to strive to place the war widows in a position that will preferably allow them, with their own strength, to further lead their household and to raise and educate their children, so that they will someday be able to earn their own livelihood and the social position preferably correspondent to the father's [pre-war] occupation.<sup>95</sup>

Preventing widespread social and economic disorder was built into the long- and short-term goal of care policies for surviving dependents of soldiers. In practice, this took the form of direct payments of support during wartime and the long-term intention that survivors be assisted in establishing a "solid footing" from which they themselves could rebuild their lives.

It is easier to articulate good intentions than to enact them. In practice, the payment of support for the dependents of fallen soldiers was a disorganized and drawn-out process. Thus a Jakob Frey from Sulzbach petitioned the Regional President of Upper-Alsace in November 1916 for a onetime "mercy payment" (*Gnadenlohnung*), honorary gift, and support after his son Leo, who had been his primary source of support, was killed in fighting around Langemarck in 1915.<sup>96</sup> Jakob Frey's application for "support for parents of combatants" (*Kriegselterngeld*) was still under consideration in January 1917. The fact that it was the bereaved elder Frey who personally had to appeal to regional officials in order to have his case considered and then nearly a year following his son's death speaks to the inefficiency of the award process. In another case,

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<sup>95</sup> Kaiserliche Statthalter in Elsaß-Lothringen Hans von Dallwitz to the Kreisdirektors, December 6, 1915, 8 AL 1/1654, ADHR.

<sup>96</sup> Jakob Frey to Bezirkspräsident Colmar, November 25, 1916, 8 AL 1/1654, ADHR.

the widow of Joseph Kuntz wrote to the Regional President of Upper-Alsace in September 1916. The widow related that her husband had died in February 1915 and that she had submitted her petition for survivors' aid in August 1915. To date she had received no response and neither the local mayor or district director could provide her any further information on the status of her claim.

The surviving dependents of soldiers fallen in the current conflict often had to turn to requests for temporary relief. For instance, the National Foundation for the Survivors of the War Fallen" (*Nationalstiftung für die Hinterbliebenen der im Kriege Gefallenen*) reported the number of dependents who as a result of "urgent need" had been granted a support by their organization in 1916. The table is useful to get an idea of the number of individuals involved, as well as the amount of aid that the National Foundation was able to give to them.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> "(Nr. 3330) Militärhinterbliebenengesetz. Vom 17. Mai 1907," *Reichsgesetzblatt* Nr. 21, 1907, 214-233. Labels of eligibility were drawn from the Military Law of Surviving Dependents that was passed on May 17, 1907.

**Table 9: Number of Dependents Eligible for Aid in Lower-Alsace**<sup>98</sup>

District of	Total Number of Eligible Widows and Orphans	Total Number of Eligible Parentless Orphans	Total Number of Ineligible Widows and Orphans	Total Number of Relatives in the Ascendant Line Eligible for Support for Combatants' Parents
Strasbourg	247	2	-	119
Strasbourg-Land	5	-	-	11
Erstein	51	4	1	28
Haguenau	59	14	7	40
Molsheim	80	7	5	125
Sélestat	86	1	10	152
Wissembourg	51	3	6	51
Saverne	61	6	4	102
Total	670	37	33	628

**Table 10: Amount of Aid Paid to Support Eligible Dependents in Lower-Alsace**

District of	Amount Given to Eligible Widows and Orphans (M)	Amount Given to Eligible Parentless Orphans (M)	Amount Given to Ineligible Widows and Orphans (M)	Amount Given to Relatives in the Ascendant Line Eligible for Support for Combatants' Parents (M)
Strasbourg	12,350	50	-	5950
Strasbourg-Land	630	-	-	1,040
Erstein	7,280	325	200	2,735
Haguenau	2,860	630	120	2,000
Molsheim	5,450	300	150	6,190
Sélestat	8,770	200	360	10,980
Wissembourg	3,640	150	650	3,135
Saverne	5,885	300	200	8,670
Total	46,865	1,955	1,680	40,700

<sup>98</sup> Nationalstiftung für die Hinterbliebenen der im Kriege Gefallenen, "Nachweisung über die Zahl derjenigen Witwen und Waisen und der verwandten aufsteigender Linie, welche in Folge dringende Notlage für eine Unterstützung aus der Nationalstiftung in Elsaß-Lothringen in Betracht kommen und über die Höhe der etwa erforderlichen Beihilfen im Jahre 1916," 27 AL 499, ADBR.

**Table 11: Number of Dependents Eligible for Aid in Upper-Alsace<sup>99</sup>**

District of	Total Number of Eligible Widows and Orphans	Total Number of Eligible Parentless Orphans	Total Number of Ineligible Widows and Orphans	Total Number of Relatives in the Ascendant Line Eligible for Support for Combatants' Parents
Altkirch	14	5	2	26
Colmar	66	1	-	98
Colmar-City	10	-	1	4
Guebwiller	101	3	18	150
Mulhouse	81	1	1	78
Mulhouse-City	44	3	-	61
Ribeauvillé	49	13	3	104
Thann	-	-	-	-
Total	365	26	25	521

**Table 12: Amount of Aid Paid to Support Eligible Dependents in Upper-Alsace**

District of	Amount Given to Eligible Widows and Orphans (M)	Amount Given to Eligible Parentless Orphans (M)	Amount Given to Ineligible Widows and Orphans (M)	Amount Given to Relatives in the Ascendant Line Eligible for Support for Combatants' Parents (M)
Altkirch	1,292	250	160	1,445
Colmar	1,750	60	-	5,420
Colmar-City	780	-	60	220
Guebwiller	8,260	190	880	7,100
Mulhouse	5,925	100	50	5,880
Mulhouse-City	3,860	90	-	5,000
Ribeauvillé	7,320	1,200	200	8,365
Thann	-	-	-	-
Total	29,187	1,890	1,350	33,430

<sup>99</sup> Nationalstiftung für die Hinterbliebenen der im Kriege Gefallenen, "Nachweisung über die Zahl derjenigen Witwen und Waisen und der verwandten aufsteigender Linie, welche in Folge dringende Notlage für eine Unterstützung aus der Nationalstiftung in Elsaß-Lothringen in Betracht kommen und über die Höhe der etwa erforderlichen Beihilfen im Jahre 1916," 27 AL 499, ADBR.

Lacking further comparative data, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the number of earlier and later claims on the National Foundation's resources. However, like the support given to the families of mobilized men, the eligibility restrictions were eased in regards to aid to dependent survivors as the war progressed. An article from the *Straßburger Korrespondenz* in 1918 related that the requirement that eligible recipients, if not a wife or child, be an ascendant relative had been nullified. In the future, siblings, foster children, children out of wedlock, and other relatives would be eligible for aid if the deceased soldier had helped support them.<sup>100</sup> As a result, it is certain that the number of recipients of surviving dependents' aid increased significantly.

### **Wartime Support for French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War Veterans**

Before moving on to examine France's treatment of Alsatians during the First World War, the effect of the conflict on pensions for French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans also warrants discussion. An outcome of the renewal of hostilities with France might have led to a curtailment of pensions awarded to those Alsatians who had fought against Germany during the two states' previous clash. Evidence suggests, however, that this was not the case. Imperial officials continued to utilize the pre-war guidelines to award monetary support to French Alsatian veterans throughout the conflict. However, their strict adherence to the legislated procedures for awarding aid was not without complications, which became increasingly severe as the war dragged on.

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<sup>100</sup> *Straßburger Korrespondenz* Nr. 7, January 1, 1918, 8 AL 1/1656, ADHR.

Imperial authorities continued to consider the new pension petitions from French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans throughout the years of the First World War. A certain Mathias Weissend wrote in his application for combatants' assistance in 1915, "I took part in the 1870/71 campaign as an Alsatian on the French side, was involved in the battle of Sedan, and taken prisoner on September 1, 1870. I was kept at the prisoner-of-war depot in Greitz until March 20, 1871, when I was released to return to my home."<sup>101</sup> Weissend's open acknowledgement of his service in the French army is important. Given the current state of Franco-German relations, he might have related his participation in the conflict, but downplayed the fact that he had been an enemy combatant, a sort of wink-and-nod to the Imperial officials who were reviewing his application. Despite this lack of constraint, Weissend's application was approved and he was awarded a yearly pension of 150 M. In a different case, German officials demonstrated that they were not only willing to approve new combatants' aid petitions, but also were willing to reconsider past rejections. Josef Weibel's initial request for combatants' assistance was rejected on the grounds that he possessed French citizenship. Despite the setback, Weibel reapplied in December 1916 on account of his "urgent need" and after proving he possessed Alsace-Lorraine state citizenship, had his application approved for a yearly sum of 150 M.<sup>102</sup> However, just as was the case before 1914, not all applications for combatants' assistance were granted.

German authorities continued to utilize pre-war criteria in deciding whether or not to approve a petition. The case of Franz Anton Dietsch is illustrative. Dietsch had served as a French soldier in the 1870/71 conflict and now had a son fighting for Germany. However, both his applications for a war disability pension and combatants' assistance were rejected. The

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<sup>101</sup> Mathias Weissend to the Kreisdirektor Colmar, July 13, 1915, 3 AL 1/2031, ADHR.

<sup>102</sup> Josef Weibel to the Kreisdirektor Colmar, December 23, 1916, 3 AL 1/2031, ADHR.

former on the grounds that it could not be proven that the invalidities he claimed were a result of his military service and the latter because officials judged that the amount of property he owned did not qualify him as “needy.”<sup>103</sup> Taken as a whole, these few exemplary cases demonstrate that despite the renewed conflict with France, French Alsatian Franco-Prussian War veterans, like their German counterparts, continued to be the beneficiaries of German paid pensions.

The worsening economic situation and increasing privations on the German home front correlated to an increasing inundation of aid requests to Imperial officials in Alsace. In this case, despite the benefits that continued to be approved for French Alsatian veterans, German officials’ persistence of maintaining the pre-war requisites for veterans’ assistance was a two-edged sword. A note from the Ministry of Alsace-Lorraine highlights the different wartime challenges for veteran pensioners and the Imperial government’s stance on the increased number of pension petitions,

Applications for the granting of combatants’ assistance according to the Reich’s laws of May 22, 1895 and May 19, 1913 have been submitted on account of the complications to [the petitioner’s] livelihood caused by the present war, for example in regards to the general inflation, expulsion from a place of residence, and mobilization of sons to military service. In most cases, such deterioration of the petitioner’s position cannot be recognized as permanent and so this assessment must be left out of consideration according to Article 4 of the execution instructions regarding the granting of aid to war combatants.<sup>104</sup>

The results of these instructions was that although the number of French Alsatian soldiers receiving combatants’ assistance continued to expand during the conflict, its maintenance of pre-war standards excluded a large number of veterans whose personal situations had been altered (sometimes catastrophically) by the war. In practice, this meant that only a minority of new

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<sup>103</sup> Kreisdirektor Colmar to Franz Anton Dietsch, February 13, 1914, 3 AL 1/2031, ADHR.

<sup>104</sup> Unterstaatssekretär of the Ministerium für Elsaß-Lothringen, Abteilung für Finanzen, Handel und Domänen to the Kreisdirektors und Polizeipräsidenten in Straßburg und Metz, December 13, 1915, 3 AL 1/2031, ADHR.

applicants would be eligible for benefits. The results of this official failure to take into account wartime circumstance was felt by unsupported and maintained former soldiers alike. Even those veterans fortunate enough to receive some measure of support found these sums increasingly insufficient to survive in the changed economic circumstances. This was poignantly expressed in a petition to the District Director of Colmar in 1918 by a group of disabled French Alsatian veterans.

To the Imperial District Authorities in Colmar,

The poor old disabled refugees, who for three years have had no home and who find themselves in great hardship and poverty take the liberty of sending a petition to the Imperial district authorities in order to share their complaint with the venerable men.

Six months have passed since the poor invalids were to be granted an additional support of 8 M. However, we have until now not received a single penny of this addition and on the contrary for 70% of us our disability pensions have been unjustly taken away. The disabled who should receive 26.30 M [a month] have only been paid 7.50 M, so that to the present day 15.20 M have been subtracted. These poor invalids' belongings have been destroyed by fire and the enemy's bullets and they find themselves now in great hardship and poverty. A larger grant would therefore be desirable in order to help them out a little of the suffering they have found themselves in since the war's beginning. Since this deduction, the poor veterans and invalids have bewilderedly wandered around like shadows with their canes and crutches, asking one another with heavy hearts and tears in their eyes, "What will become of us?" and "What must we still suffer?" This unjust deduction breaks our hearts and will be the death of us. Many of these old invalids are old soldiers who participated in the difficult Italian campaign and battles of the 1870/71 war. These old veterans deserve better than to be handled this way. They deserve humane treatment and no deduction from their state guaranteed pensions. Many of these poor invalids also have sons in the army, who for many years have been pulled from one battlefield to the next in Russia and France. These warriors are in the prime of their lives and when they are ordered forward they are able to achieve their objectives. What said these warriors when they learned of this deduction from their parents? They certainly shook their heads and did not wish fortune for those responsible for this unjust deduction. Many of these sons have already fallen and given their last breath for the Fatherland, leaving behind poor wives and children. How is the widow to react when the old disabled grandfather with a heavy heart comforts the widow and his grandchildren and tells them of this unjust deduction?

An important accommodating consideration: there are disabled refugees in the home for the elderly at Baslerstr. 33 in Colmar that have continued to receive their full disability pension and also the 8 M increase. These invalids have had an account opened for them at the bank in Munster, Alsace. 60% of their pension has been deposited in this account. They will first receive this money that has been put aside after the end of the war so that they will not be a burden on their communities when they return to their homes. We demand the same treatment as those in Baslerstr. 3 and the reimbursement of the six months of deductions and also the monthly [8 M

increase] that has never been paid and that they be recorded in the bank account. When we return to our homes, we will be able to use this little saved money so that we will likely not need to make requests from our communities.

Signed: The Bereaved Invalids of the Prebendary House<sup>105</sup>

The petition illustrates a number of important themes that bear similarities and differences from the pre-war addresses to officials. First, the fact that the petitioners would bother to write officials at all suggests confidence that their concerns would be addressed. That the appeal is directed at local level officials demonstrates again the assumption of French Alsatian veterans that local authorities would be more responsive to their requests than more distant regional and national figures. Second, the petitioners consciously directed their argument for a renewal and repayment of their pensions at a number of different levels. The emotional rhetoric of the letter was clearly intended to appeal to officials' humanitarian sensibilities by highlighting the plight of the elderly and poor disabled veterans that was a result of withholding a portion of their aid. However, the petitioners did not stop with an appeal to Imperial authorities' sense of charity. A clear sense of expectant entitlement is articulated in the application. At one level, the veterans are making their claim to support in their own right with lines such as "state guaranteed pensions" and the fact that the disabled former soldiers "deserved" to be treated in a more humane way. However, beyond the fact that the petitioners were old and poor, the application fails to address why these old men "deserved" better treatment from the Imperial German government. The strongest justification for greater consideration appears to be founded on the current wartime service of the solicitors' sons. The petition articulates a sense of mutual obligation. In return for their sons' sacrifices, the German government was bound to aid their parents in their time of need. Moreover, the potential of real

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<sup>105</sup> Die Trauerenden Invaliden des Pfründnerhauses to the Kaiserliche Kreisdirektion in Colmar, July 5, 1918, 3 AL 1/2031, ADHR.

consequences for failure to live up to this commitment is unsubtly suggested with the phrase that the mobilized sons “would not wish fortune for those responsible for this unjust deduction.” Finally, in the highlighting of another group of French Alsatian veterans who allegedly received everything they did not, the “Bereaved Invalids of the Prebendary House” articulated the belief that the Imperial government had a responsibility to ensure that all of its veteran pensioners were treated equally.

District authorities did make an official inquiry into the petition’s allegations. In his report, the Colmar Police Commissioner related that the Regional President of Upper Alsace, Albert August Wilhelm von Puttkamer, had ordered that any refugee pensioner living in the nursing home or Prebendary house was only to receive 7.50 M of their monthly pensions. Those pensioned disabled veterans who were being supported entirely by refugee aid funds were not to receive any additional pension support for the duration of their stay.<sup>106</sup> No doubt Imperial authorities concluded that individuals already being supported free of charge in the Prebandary house did not warrant being the double beneficiaries of their peacetime pensions. At its heart, the decision was prompted by a larger German policy that individuals receiving pensions or other forms of wartime aid should collect enough to sustain themselves, preferably at their prewar social status, but that no recipient should enjoy benefits that allowed them to enjoy a lifestyle in excess of their prewar situation. With this logic, the disabled veterans had no need for their full pensions because a large part of their peacetime expenses had been eliminated with the care they received in the Prebandary house. In the end, during the First World War, Imperial officials were willing to allow pensioners and other aid recipients to live at a level slightly below their peacetime social status, rather than enjoy undue wartime advantages. The petition demonstrates

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<sup>106</sup> Polizeikommissar Colmar to Kreisdirektor Colmar, July 25, 1918, 3 AL 1/2031, ADHR.

that the recipients of this aid did not share the government's reasoning. Instead of focusing on the actual support they were receiving, they fixated on the amount of money that was being withheld from them. The pensioners did not or chose not to see the tradeoff between their current care and the lessening of their support funds, instead chalking up the deduction to "injustice" on the part of German officials. Such feelings were fertile ground for the growth of resentment against Imperial authorities and would make them more open to non-German alternative solutions.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Alsations under the Tricolor**

“I think only of surviving, I think only of hunger and how to no longer be hungry. I think only of thirst and how to no longer be thirsty. I no longer see the dead. I hope to be able to sleep at least three out of twenty-four hours in order to recover a little and forget. I think that I am still alive and that the others are dead. But never...never in ten months on the Russian front and in the few weeks at Verdun, have I thought of “French Alsace” (*l’Alsace française*).”<sup>1</sup>

~Jean Lechner reacting to the statement that Alsace will return to France after the war, April 24, 1916.

To the west, the outbreak of the First World War posed a set of challenges and opportunities for French authorities. A large number of Alsations with German citizenship were present in France in 1914. This included temporary and seasonal workers and more or less permanent unofficial migrants who were avoiding German military service. James A. Logan, who was serving as the Chief of the U.S. military mission with the French army, estimated in December 1914 that there were currently 8,000 Alsations interned in various camps in France and another 13,700 who were free, but under police surveillance.<sup>2</sup> This total of some 21,700 Alsations was more than twice the number of Germans (9,200) and nearly twice the number of Austro-Hungarians (10,900) present in France. French propaganda portrayed Alsations as French patriots and reluctant Germans. Authorities’ actions just prior to and following the advent of war, however, would demonstrate their recognition that the “riddle” of the borderland could not be so easily solved. Consequently, French officials set about the difficult task of creating and implementing a practical system that would consistently and reliably define and

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<sup>1</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 107-108.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from James A. Logan, June 18, 1915, 119-120, James Addison Logan Papers, Box No. 13, HIA. It should be noted that it is not clear from the source if Logan utilized the term “Alsation” as it was defined by French officials or used it describe any individual originating in the *Reichsland*.

differentiate “authentic” Alsatians from “Germans”, separate the “reliable” from the “suspect” elements, and begin the process of reintegrating both the internees, as well as those Alsace-Lorrainer soldiers who would become Entente prisoners-of-war during the course of the conflict.

The case of Alsace posed a significant problem for existent French citizenship legislation. Events would demonstrate that being born and raised in Alsace was an insufficient basis for residents of the *Reichsland* to claim the moniker of “true” Alsatian. Such a policy, although consistent with French law, would have automatically made French citizens out of thousands of children of German immigrants that had relocated to the province during the Imperial period. It was believed that the wholesale undifferentiated naturalization of this German population would create significant difficulties in the reassertion of French sovereignty over Alsace and Lorraine. As a result, French officials turned to a model that delineated citizenship and pro-French sympathies in a genealogical and temporal manner. “Alsations of French origin” were defined as those individuals who had a paternal ascendant or themselves had lived in Alsace and possessed French citizenship prior to the Treaty of Frankfurt. Evidence demonstrates that French authorities were so committed to this ideal of the existence of an “authentic” Alsatian that they staked their own national security on it. Yet even meeting the prescribed criteria was not enough to guarantee a positive designation, as actions and attitudes of an individual in the current conflict were also closely evaluated.

The importance of Alsations to the French war effort and goals cannot be overestimated. More than their physical deeds and accomplishments, the military service of Alsations in the French armed forces provided critical symbolic currency to the French claim that Alsace and Lorraine had never ceased to be French. Their presence was used to justify the postwar reassertion of French sovereignty over the provinces. Two types of Alsations with German

citizenship were identified and targeted by French officials. The first were individuals who were already resident in France at the commencement of hostilities or crossed the Franco-German border to avoid mobilization in the German army. The second group was comprised of German Alsatians soldiers who either voluntarily deserted or were taken prisoner during the course of hostilities. Alsatians from either group that chose to enlist were given the option of fighting on the Western Front against the Germans or service in the French colonies.

A wide range of factors encouraged some Alsatians to sign up for French military service. Some volunteers were motivated by francophile sentiment and enlistment was the quickest route to French citizenship. Many others, however, had more instrumental motivations that had little or nothing to do with pro-French sympathies. Moreover, French authorities were not above actively “encouraging” Alsatians to join the army. One of the most obvious forms of the system of incentive and threat was the creation of a separate series of camps for prisoners-of-war from the *Reichsland*. Most of the depots were so-called “special camps” in which Alsatian inmates were the beneficiaries of unique privileges not extended to their German comrades. Those Alsatians who refused the special treatment were sent to a penal camp.

Alsatians in French captivity were stuck between a rock and a hard place. Facing potential hard labor if they did not consent to be housed in the privileged camps, if they did agree, Imperial officials immediately became suspect of their German national loyalties. The mere presence of a German Alsatian soldier in the special camps was enough to have any type of wartime aid revoked from their families in German controlled Alsace. Given the increased difficulty of conditions on the home front, such as loss could be devastating. Overall, examining official discussions among Imperial military and civilian authorities regarding the consequences for suspected individual’s families and the withdrawal of wartime aid demonstrates that

Germany remained a *Rechtsstaat* during the First World War, but at the same time failure to move beyond a literal interpretation of existent legislation also created difficulties for a society faced with the unprecedented demands of modern industrial warfare.

### **Delineating French Policy**

An important source that provides a window on the French vision of an Alsace and Lorraine reattached to the *Patrie* is provided by the records of the *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine* that met from 1915 until 1919. The Conference was an advisory committee that was formed in February 1915 by the French government and given the task to “prepare the documents and investigate solutions for the future reunification of administrative system of Alsace-Lorraine to France.”<sup>3</sup>

A fundamental stance that was taken by French officials at the outbreak of hostilities was that Germany had nullified the terms of the Treaty of Frankfurt through their declaration of war on August 3, 1914. This position was critical in shaping much of the subsequent policies towards Alsace and its population. The resolution that was adopted at the March 1, 1915 meeting of the *Conférence* read, “The *Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine* expresses the unanimous opinion that the Treaty of Frankfurt has been annulled as a result of Germany’s declaration of war on France. In consequence, Alsace-Lorraine, which has never ceased to protest the German

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<sup>3</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale), 1:1-2. The purpose of the Conference evolved over the course of its existence. It was reorganized in 1917 and created the “*Service d'Alsace-Lorraine*.” This reorganization also corresponded to a shift in the Conference’s efforts to actively educate and cultivate a particular image of Alsace and Lorraine to the French public through a series of films and lectures across France. See Joseph Schmauch, “Préparer la réintégration des provinces perdues: La Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine et les Services d’Alsace-Lorraine à Paris,” in *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre*, ed. Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008), 285-300.

conquest, can only be reinstated under French sovereignty, without retrocession, plebiscite, or any other form of consultation.”<sup>4</sup> The French position that the Treaty of Frankfurt had been abrogated by the German declaration of war was significant at several levels. First, it meant that any portion of Alsace and Lorraine reconquered by French troops was not occupied German territory, but rather French soil. It also meant from the French perspective that any individual Alsatian or Lorrainer who found themselves in France either at the moment of the outbreak of hostilities or through the various tides of war could potentially be considered a French citizen.

The Franco-Alsatian dynamic during the First World War is also interesting because it inverted traditional notions of martial bravery. The desertion of German Alsatian soldiers for French authorities was not a sign of cowardice or treachery, but rather of patriotism and heroism. This was true for Alsatians who fled immediately to France at the outbreak of hostilities and those who deserted directly from German lines. Major General de Castelnau described the tribulations of Alsatians in the former category in May 1916 as,

Born in Alsace since its annexation by Germany, they have had the moral energy to resist the pressure of Germany authority and retain feelings of attachment to their true homeland (*Patrie*). The war came. They ignored the [German] mobilization orders at the risk of the attendant reprisals against themselves and their families and property. They have done more. They voluntarily came and engaged in our ranks, knowing that if they fell into the hands of the enemy they would be treated not as prisoners, but traitors.

The Alsace-Lorrainer volunteers are, therefore, entitled to special consideration from their comrades and the sympathy of their officers.<sup>5</sup>

Alsatians who deserted from the German army were likewise heralded as brave men. As disgusted German authorities would relate in a certainly exaggerated report, Alsatian deserters were received as national heroes with flags and music on the day of their arrival in French lines

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<sup>4</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919*, 1: 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Lt. Colonel Albert Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1923), 66-67.

and given good food, wine, and tobacco. The francophile former mayor of Colmar, Daniel Blumenthal told them, “I know that you all are deserters. In doing so you have proved yourselves to be good Alsatians. Be proud of it.”<sup>6</sup> Pro-French author Marie Harrison wrote,

...if you ask what Alsatian and Lorraine men think of the Alsace-Lorraine problem surely the answer lies in these heroic desertions. Intermittently, there are published in the papers of Alsace-Lorraine the names of these splendid men. They were intended to be held up to scorn all over the country, but they are held in all reverence and honor, and they so continue to be held.<sup>7</sup>

*Reichsland* deserters who subsequently chose to enlist in the French army were further recognized by the awarding of the French *Croix de Guerre* for their courageousness in crossing to French lines.<sup>8</sup> In this manner Alsatian deserters to France were not only recognized and celebrated for an action that would in normal wartime circumstances be condemned in the harshest terms and met with punishment that ranged from imprisonment to execution, but they were also held up as the paragons of patriotic virtue and decorated for their “bravery.” Naturally, a difference in perspective was responsible for the exceptionally positive reception of an otherwise denounced act. Alsations crossing to French lines were not “deserters” in the traditional sense for French authorities – a fact that some archival sources physically highlight by referring to such individuals in quotations as “‘deserters’ of the German army.”<sup>9</sup>

Despite the obviously self-serving nature of this interpretation of Alsations’ desertions, this officially promulgated French attitude proved to be a brilliant strategic move. Towards the

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<sup>6</sup> “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>7</sup> Marie Harrison, *The Stolen Lands: A Study in Alsace-Lorraine* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1918), 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> “Instructions sur l’Admission des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l’Armée Française, dressé par Lt.-Colonel Carré” 2nd ed., October 15, 1918, 56, AJ 30 242, Archives Nationales (CARAN) (hereafter cited as AN).

<sup>9</sup> Major de l’Armée, 3 Bureau Service des Alsaciens-Lorrains to Inspection Générale des Prisonniers de Guerre, December 12, 1917, AJ 30 243, AN.

latter part of the war, this stance, combined with the notion that Germany had nullified the terms of the Treaty of Frankfurt, played an important role in shaping the actions of some Alsatians mobilized in the German army. General Erich Ludendorff identified the real effect of these positions when he wrote, “The prevalent sophism in France that Germany’s declaration of war broke the Frankfurt Treaty and without further ado Alsace-Lorraine was done to free deserters from all moral and legal misgivings, in other words to interpret it as a patriotic duty.”<sup>10</sup>

For their part, German authorities immediately ascribed political and national feelings as motivating any Alsatian desertion. If such a taxonomy existed, Imperial officials would have also placed Alsatian deserters in a hierarchy above “ordinary” German deserters. In his report regarding the war participation of Alsace-Lorrainers in 1917, General Quartermaster von Hahndorff described regular German deserters as “completely dysfunctional bad soldiers” that provided little useful information to the enemy. Alsatians and Lorrainers, on the other hand, were “good soldiers” with a “craftiness” that enabled them to earn the trust of their superiors, while all the while collecting information and making sketches that would prove invaluable to the enemy, ““he is a proper deserting spy (*Überläuferspion*).”<sup>11</sup> This observation provided justification to suspect even the faithful serving Alsatian. German officers could never be completely certain that the loyalty of a *Reichslander* did not stem from a desire to gain their confidence, learn their secrets, and betray them to the enemy. Such assumptions are another illustration of the obsessive suspicion that Imperial authorities directed at Alsatians and an example of the distasteful present to which France offered an attractive alternative.

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<sup>10</sup> Erich Ludendorff to Reichskanzler Georg von Hertling, February 1, 1918, M30/1 107, HStAS.

<sup>11</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 317.

## **Laying the Foundation: French Efforts to Define and Reintegrate Alsatians**

French authorities began laying the basis for the postwar restoration of Alsace and Lorraine to France during the conflict. An important element of the re-integrative process was defining who and what constituted an Alsatian. The fundamental distinction that French officials made was between “native” inhabitants of the provinces and German immigrants. Individuals who fell into the former group were often interchangeably referred to in official documents as “authentic” or “true” Alsatians, while the label “German immigrant” was a pejorative term that designated undesirability.<sup>12</sup> However, even this seemingly straightforward dichotomy required additional definitive elaboration. After more than forty years of German rule, immigration, and marriages, the makeup of the borderland population could not be encompassed in such a black and white categorization. For instance, what was the status of the children of German immigrants who had been born in Alsace? In this regard, French authorities were clear. Instructions in a confidential report entitled, “Summary of the Current Administrative Instructions in Effect Concerning Alsace-Lorrainers of French Origin” related that, “Alsace-Lorrainers of French origin are not to be confused with persons born on the territory of Alsace-Lorraine to German parents (children of immigrants). These last are to be classified among the Germans.”<sup>13</sup> In this instance, birthplace and upbringing in the province was insufficient to be labeled an “authentic Alsatian” for French authorities. Instead, officials turned to a genealogical

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<sup>12</sup> For an example see le Général Humbert, Commandant la 3e Armée to le Général Commandant en Chef, April 6, 1916. N 16 1584, Le service historique de la Défense à Vincennes (hereafter cited as SHD Vincennes).

<sup>13</sup> Commission Interministerielle des Alsaciens-Lorrains, “Résumé des Instructions Administratives Actuellement en Vigueur concernant les Alsaciens-Lorrains d’origine français,” 1, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

definition to more “accurately” categorize the provinces’ population and identify francophile elements.

In the instructions regarding the admission of Alsace-Lorrainers into the French army, which will be discussed in greater detail below, Lieutenant Colonel Carré defined Alsace-Lorrainers as, “All individuals are Alsace-Lorrainers of French origin who themselves were French or who possess a paternal ascendant who was French on May 20, 1871 and would have continued to be French if not for the intervention of the Treaty of Frankfurt. Every Alsace-Lorrainer of French origin is presumed to have French sentiments.”<sup>14</sup> This definition is important because it provides insight into a fundamental assumption of French citizenship policy towards the “lost provinces.” First, it was reiterated that simply being born and raised in the Alsace was insufficient to guarantee French sympathies – at least for the children of German immigrants. In contrast, the definition assumed that pro-French sentiment survived among “true Alsatians” and was transferred across paternal generations. Its use as the guidelines for determining Alsatians’ and Lorrainers’ military eligibility in the French military denotes a genuine official investment in this definition and the linked belief that this innate French sympathy was a stronger influence than more than forty years of German education, military service, economic integration, and acculturation to Germany.

The status of a spouse or children from cases of “intermarriage” between “true Alsatians” and “Germans” was another complicating factor to French authorities’ attempts to create simple population classifications. The discussions regarding this issue that occurred during the April 19, 1915 meeting of the *Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine* illustrate the different positions and

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<sup>14</sup> Lt. Colonel Carré, *Instruction sur l’Admission des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l’Armée Française*, 2nd ed., October 15, 1918, 2, AJ 30 242, AN.

justifications of the committee members. In this debate it was made clear (and as the previously mentioned genealogical definition suggests) that French sentiment was perceived to be a paternally passed trait. This patriarchal guiding principle reflected the content of the French Civil Code, which articulated the assumption that children's national sentiments followed those of the father. Gender, therefore, was seen as critical in determining French sympathies. During this meeting, the dialogue centered on what the status of children should be who had an Alsatian father and German mother or a German father and Alsatian mother. In the existent understanding, only offspring of a "true" Alsatian male and German female would automatically become French.<sup>15</sup> However, delegates problematized this procedure and questioned whether national sympathies could be determined based on the nationality of the father alone. It was observed that the reverse might actually be the case, as mothers were more influential in determining the milieu in which the children were raised.<sup>16</sup> In this formation, it was more likely that the children of Alsatian women would have pro-French sympathies than those raised by a German woman. Ultimately, the Conference was unable to solve this dilemma and adopted a proposition that the progenies of "mixed marriages" should be given the choice of whether or not to reclaim French nationality upon reaching the age of majority. The issue would be left to postwar French policy makers to address.

The presence of thousands of individuals originating from Alsace and Lorraine in France or French occupied territories during the war necessitated moving beyond theoretical definitions to practical implementation of these definitions. French authorities categorized Alsace-

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<sup>15</sup> Weil, *How to be French*, 61. French authorities' trust of the influence that French husbands had upon their wives was not without some question, as some German women who were married to French men were also interned at the beginning of the war.

<sup>16</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d'Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919*, 1: 90.

Lorrainers who possessed German citizenship, but who were currently in France into four categories. The first group was made up of individuals who had been in France at the outbreak of hostilities. These Alsace-Lorrainers were to receive a white identification card that indicated French authorities' uncertainty regarding their national attitudes, but were not to be viewed as suspect and allowed to live in specific locations under minimal surveillance. The second and third categories were made up of Alsations and Lorrainers who had either voluntarily left the provinces, other enemy countries, or returned from an Allied country to France after the declaration of war. It was assumed that these individuals possessed French sentiment and were given tricolor card that placed them on the same footing as French and Belgian refugees.<sup>17</sup> The fourth group was made up of Alsace-Lorrainers who had been evacuated by French military authorities from areas of Alsace and Lorraine that had been temporarily occupied by French forces in the opening days of the war. In many cases, these individuals had been evacuated to evade German mobilization or had been detained in the interests of military order. Alsace-Lorrainers judged to be suspect through their anti-French statements or actions that threatened the national defense of France were to be detained for the duration of the war.<sup>18</sup>

Although it will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, it is also worth briefly mentioning the options that French authorities foresaw for the "German immigrants" in Alsace. From the outset, French officials were united in their conviction that the presence of a large population (250,000-300,000) of German immigrants and their descendants in a future French

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<sup>17</sup> Le Directeur du Refuge des Alsaciens'Ornans, "Maison du Refuge alsacien lorrain d'Ornans," M 882, Archives Départementales du Doubs (Hereafter ADD). In practice, this meant that the tricolor card holder could freely move in all of France outside of the army zones

<sup>18</sup> Commission Interministerielle des Alsaciens-Lorrains, "Résumé des Instructions Administratives Actuellement en Vigueur concernant les Alsaciens-Lorrains d'origine français," 2-4, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

governed Alsace was problematic. Yet the unanimity of belief did not translate into a shared program of action. The comprehensive expulsion of all “Germans” was never seriously discussed. Delegates viewed such an action as “inhumane and beneath the dignity of France.”<sup>19</sup> Important economic considerations also reinforced this view.

In truth, the status of German immigrants and their descendants posed a significant conundrum for existing French citizenship policy. If Germany had abrogated the Treaty of Frankfurt with its declaration of war and Alsace and Lorraine had correspondingly never ceased to be French, then any individual born on its territory was French in accordance with Article 8 of the Civil Code. This situation would make it impossible for French authorities to deny naturalization to the thousands of children of German immigrants currently residing in the province. This wholesale acquisition of French nationality was unacceptable.

The participants in the *Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine* in the spring of 1915 agreed that “Germans” residing in Alsace should not automatically acquire French citizenship after the return of the province, but that they should be given an option to be naturalized. However, even this seemingly clear policy was complicated by preexisting French citizenship laws. According to the Civil Code, a residency of ten years in France was necessary in order to be naturalized. Delegates discussed whether or not the years that the immigrants had already lived in Alsace should be counted towards this quota. The opposition argued, “The reason for this provision of the Civil Code is for a foreigner who has long resided among us and has a certain affinity for us

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<sup>19</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919*, 231. Christopher Fischer mistakenly relates that the *Conférence* took the position that “Germans residing in Alsace should, in general, be expelled.” See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 115. In fact, the *Conférence* concluded the only segment of the German population that should be considered liable for wholesale expulsion was German functionaries. “Ordinary Germans” on the other hand, should remain German and the French government would reserve the right to expel them. See *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine*, 2: 300-301.

that has resulted in a certain adaptation to the French milieu and mores. In Alsace-Lorraine the case is completely opposite. The immigrant has only served as an agent of Germanization...”<sup>20</sup> Delegates also expressed doubt in the acculturating power of the French state, by suggesting that German immigrants were “unassimilable” because of their extreme “foreignness.”<sup>21</sup> Yet despite their worries about the potential influence of German immigrants, the delegates of the *Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine* were cognizant that this population made up a significant portion of the province’s agricultural and industrial laborers. It was feared that making French naturalization requirements too stringent would drive many of these Germany originating workers out and so create a crisis in labor after the war. In the end, the Conference compromised and adopted a three year waiting period before German immigrants who had lived in Alsace prior to August 2, 1914 could apply for French citizenship.<sup>22</sup> This delay was reduced to a year for Germans married to an Alsatian.

The task remained to outline the manner in which “true Alsatians” possessing German nationality could become French citizens once authorities had provided the means of theoretically defining and differentiating “authentic Alsatians” from “Germans.” The (re-) naturalization procedure was delineated on three different lines: for men born before and after May 20, 1871 and for the wives of Alsatian men engaged in the French army. Either category of Alsatian males could become French by voluntarily enlisting in the French military for the duration of the war. Men born before the ratification of the Treaty of Frankfurt could likewise “reclaim” their French nationality by application of Article 18 of the Civil Code, which provided

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<sup>20</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919*, 1: 92-93.

<sup>21</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919*, 1: 231-232.

<sup>22</sup> *Procès-Verbaux de la Conférence d’Alsace-Lorraine 1915-1919*, 1: 95.

that the children of French citizens were themselves French. Men born after May 20, 1871 could likewise obtain French nationality through Article 10 of the Civil Code.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the wives of Alsatians who joined the French army did not acquire French nationality simultaneously with their husbands. Instead, they were required to submit a special request for reintegration and explicitly justify their application on the grounds of their husband's enlistment or through the stipulations of Article 10. This procedure made it clear that Alsatian women only possessed French nationality through the service of their husbands and not on their own merit. A final advisement to local officials related, "It is fitting to advise them [the wives] on the occasion [of their application] that their applications will be sympathetically considered and the Commission is prepared to carry out all the necessary verifications to facilitate the provisions proving their French origin."<sup>24</sup> This comment is significant because it marks a deviation for regular naturalization procedures. In the Civil Code, the nationality of the wife and children followed that of the husband and father. A French woman could lose her status by marrying a foreigner, while a French man's nationality would be extended to his wife—even if she was a foreigner. Thus this extra interest in the "origin" of the wife denotes an increased wartime suspicion of foreigners that was extended even to the partners of enlisted French soldiers.

As should be apparent from the previous discussion, voluntary military service was a key, if not the most important, avenue for Alsatians to acquire French nationality during the First World War. Yet, as is evidenced by the distinction made between a "white" and "tricolor"

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<sup>23</sup> Commission Interministerielle des Alsaciens-Lorrains, "Résumé des Instructions Administratives Actuellement en Vigueur concernant les Alsaciens-Lorrains d'origine français," 22-23, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

<sup>24</sup> Commission Interministerielle des Alsaciens-Lorrains, "Résumé des Instructions Administratives Actuellement en Vigueur concernant les Alsaciens-Lorrains d'origine français," 23, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

identification card, the “French roots” of a *Reichsland* originating individual in itself was insufficient to guarantee the rights and designation of a French citizen. Instead, factors such as demonstrated national convictions and actions in the current conflict were key. At the official level, an individual Alsatian’s francophile disposition was proved by either bearing arms or working in war munitions industries. Sorting officials were specifically instructed that an applicant’s service in the German army or that of his father was not to be reason alone to categorize them as suspect.<sup>25</sup> On the reverse side, an Alsatian of military age who failed to volunteer for French military service was automatically suspect in the eyes of French military authorities, who recommended that such individuals were to be refused an identity card and transferred from the Army’s zone of operations to the French interior.<sup>26</sup> French civilian authorities, however, blocked this action and argued that the only relevant consideration for the awarding or withholding of an identity card was the national sentiments of the applicant.

Alsations’ participation in the French war effort was valuable from a manpower standpoint, but was even more significant in its symbolic currency. French officials and Alsace-Lorraine associations in France publicized the purported presence of thousands of young Alsations and Lorrainers in their army as evidence of the provinces’ inherent French character. One such example noted,

Since the beginning of the war, 20,000 Alsations have voluntarily enlisted in our ranks and many among them have asked to be sent to our [the Western] front, regardless of the risks (death penalty) if they were to fall into German hands as prisoners. 33,000 deserters have left the ranks of the enemy and this number is not yet complete. Masses of Alsatian prisoners-of-war have asked to enter French ranks. In less than 3 years, 4,000 years of prison have been meted out to

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<sup>25</sup> Commission Interministerielle des Alsaciens-Lorrains, “Résumé des Instructions Administratives Actuellement en Vigueur concernant les Alsaciens-Lorrains d’origine français,” 10, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

<sup>26</sup> Présidence du Conseil to the Général Commandant en Chef les Armées du Nord et du Nord-Est, October 13, 1918, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

civilian men, women, and children [in Alsace], who have done nothing more than have a hint of French sympathy.<sup>27</sup>

The highlighting of Alsatians' service in the French army was a critical component of French propaganda that sought to convince both national and international audiences of the French heart of the provinces' populace and gain support for the return of Alsace and Lorraine to France without holding a plebiscite.

A central piece of evidence in the French argument that the "lost provinces" had never ceased to be French was the participation of Alsace-Lorrainers in the French military. Throughout the conflict and the Interwar period, French and Entente publications highlighted the "thousands" of Alsace-Lorrainers who joined the French army. A certain H.A. Adams wrote in March 1918 that, "Words count little. If Alsatians and Lorrainers limited their protests against belonging to Germany to talking, we might well question their sincerity. But when they back up their protests by willingness to sacrifice life and property, do we want other proof of their attitude?"<sup>28</sup> The French officer Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Carré, the man in charge of coordinating the screening and incorporation of Alsatians and Lorrainers into the French army, would boast in 1923 that approximately 17,650 Alsace-Lorrainers had voluntarily enlisted in the French army over the course of the war.

Taking this figure at face value as evidence of a massive exodus of young Alsatian and Lorrainer men from the provinces as some scholars have done, however, is misrepresentative.<sup>29</sup> As Carré himself would state, not all of these enlistees crossed the Franco-German frontier,

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<sup>27</sup> *L'Alsacien Évacué: Ce qu'il fut, Ce qu'il est, Ce qu'il sera, Ce qu'on lui doit* (Imprimerie G.C.T.A., 1917), 19, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

<sup>28</sup> Gibbons, "The Question of Alsace-Lorraine in 1918," 25.

<sup>29</sup> Both Fischer and Kramer adopt this figure. See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 104; Kramer, "Wackes at War," 111.

instead, “many of those [the 17,650] were established in France before the war, who having neglected to complete the overly complicated formalities or the too expensive components of our naturalization or reintegration laws, eagerly seized the opportunity offered to them by the law of August 5, 1914 to become French without spending a penny or in paying for the happiness ‘only’ for the cost of their lives, this price being within their reach.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, similarly to the figures of some 300,000 Alsace-Lorrainers who opted for French citizenship after the Franco-Prussian War, a significant number of Alsace-Lorrainer volunteers in the French army were already resident in France at the time of hostilities.

Carré does not mention that another possible motivation for a previous lack of French naturalization among the expatriate Alsatian community was that it allowed them to remain free of mandatory French military service. In any case, it is unclear whether individuals who enlisted did so to fight as Alsace-Lorrainers or simply as Frenchmen. Nor does he relate that Alsace-Lorrainers living in France in August 1914 were given the choice between confinement in an internment or prison camp or to “volunteer” for French military service.<sup>31</sup> Carré would later elaborate that the “flood” of some 3,000 Alsations and Lorrainers over the border in the opening days of conflict included “the elderly with gray hair, children of 16, eager to leave, take the French uniform, and burning to fight.”<sup>32</sup> Yet while some Alsations with German citizenship fled to France to protect themselves or their sons from Imperial military service, other Alsations who were resident in France chose to enlist or not return to Germany out of fears of French retaliation

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<sup>30</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1:325. Volume 4 of this anthology reprinted the content of a broadsheet that was posted at the beginning of the war.

<sup>32</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 27.

against their families still living there.<sup>33</sup> Other sources of recruits included the 1,000 enlistments from Alsatian men of military age that were evacuated from Upper Alsace by French military authorities and the approximately 1,650 Alsatians and Lorrainers that joined the French army after deserting from German lines.<sup>34</sup>

No doubt that among these border-crossing and enlisting individuals a number were motivated by francophile sympathies and a desire to fight in the French army. It should not be discounted, however, that an exodus to France was also a means by which Alsatians and Lorrainers could avoid frontline military service on either side. Nevertheless, 17,650 remains a significant number. Taking into account that “many” of these 17,650 individuals were already resident in France before the outbreak of hostilities, the negative influence that German discriminatory measures had against Alsatians’ willingness to continue fighting for the Empire, general war weariness, the increasingly evident faltering of the German war effort, and a range of self-interested instrumental reasons for *Reichslanders* to enlist in the French military, the final number becomes much less striking and can more accurately be said to reflect the vicissitudes of war and Alsace-Lorrainers’ own experiences more than evidence of overwhelming pro-French sentiment.

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<sup>33</sup> J. Rossé, M. Sturm, A. Bleicher, F. Deibler, J. Keppi eds., *Das Elsass von 1870-1932* (Colmar: Verlag Alsatia), 4:359.

<sup>34</sup> Rossé et al. *Das Elsass von 1870-1932*, 1: 253, 325. Beginning with the figure of 17,650 and subtracting the number of wartime enlistee immigrants (3,000), the “evacuated” volunteers from Upper Alsace (1,000), and the approximately 1,650 Alsatians and Lorrainer deserters from the German army that later enlisted to fight for France, we are left with a grand total of 12,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers that were present in France at the commencement of hostilities. Christoph Jahr cites Rossé, but mistakenly adds these figures. As a result, his final estimate comes out to be around 20,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers that took service in the French army. See Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten*, 270.

## Enlisting in the French Army

Two days after the German declaration of war on France, French authorities legislated the official procedure by which Alsatians could be incorporated into the French military and claim French nationality. The law of August 5, 1914, stipulated that Alsatians could utilize a voluntarily engagement in the Foreign Legion as a basis to request French nationality and after this formality could select a branch of the French military of their own choosing.<sup>35</sup> What might appear to be a meaningless and complicating exercise was in reality a legal necessity. According to French law, non-Frenchmen could only join the French Foreign Legion and were otherwise ineligible for service in the regular military branches. By signing with the Foreign Legion, Alsatians possessing German citizenship obtained French nationality and the associated right to choose what type of military service they wished to complete. It should be clear that in this context “Alsatians” as it was utilized in the August 5 law and elsewhere by French authorities described “Alsatians” as they were defined by French authorities, so “Alsatians of French origin.”

Over the course of the war, French officials would utilize several different taxonomic schemes to classify all the Alsatians living in their jurisdiction. One basic division was between the *réintégrés* (reintegrated) and the *engagés volontaires* (volunteers). Both groups had been in France before the war, but the *réintégrés* had already fulfilled the necessary steps to acquire French nationality. The *engagés volontaires* had neglected to take these necessary steps and were using their enlistment to “resolve” their nationality situation. Of the two categories, the

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<sup>35</sup> “Loi relative à l’admission des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l’armée française,” *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, August 6, 1914, R 901 84132, BABL.

*engagés volontaires* were the most numerous and had the option of choosing the location of their posting, while the *réintégrés* were not given such discretion.<sup>36</sup>

A second more comprehensive classificatory system was first published in a confidential booklet in 1916 entitled, “Instructions on the Admission of Alsace-Lorrainers into the French Army” and revised in 1918. The first category was made up of Alsatians who had opted and relocated to France before October 1, 1872. The second class of Alsatians encompassed the *réintégrés* established in France before the war, who through option or naturalization had already been the recipients of French nationality. Individuals who fell into either the first or second groupings were to be mobilized as any other French soldier with their appropriate age class. Alsatians in the third category were the *engagés volontaires* that were not French citizens at the beginning of war. These individuals had either been resident in France or crossed the border following the outbreak of hostilities and volunteered for French military service to take advantage of the law of August 5, 1914. The *engagés volontaires* in category three were able to choose the general geographic location of their posting. The fourth class was made up of Alsatians prisoners-of-war. These individuals, regardless of the front on which they were captured or the nationality of the capturers, were to be separated from their German comrades and conducted to special camps specifically designated for Alsace-Lorrainer POWS in France.<sup>37</sup> A final general differentiation that was made among the *engagés volontaires* was based on the location of their choice of service. Individuals who chose to serve in France against the Germans

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<sup>36</sup> “Resume du Rapport presente au ministere de la Guerre sur la situation des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l’Armee par l’Etat Major de l’Armee (3<sup>e</sup> Bureau) Reintegres et engages volontaire, Services Speciaux, Brevets de Nationalite,” February 8, 1916, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

<sup>37</sup> “Instructions sur l’Admission des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l’Armée Française,” 2nd ed., October 15, 1918, 2-11, AJ 30 242, AN.

were designated with the letter “A,” while those opting for service outside of Europe in the French colonies were denoted as belonging to group “B.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Putting Plans into Action: Opportunities and Challenges**

Already in 1913, before a shot had been fired in the conflagration that would become the First World War, French authorities began taking steps to implement contingent plans for the incorporation of Alsatians and Lorrainers into the French army in the event of war with Germany. Several cities were designated as assembly points for prospective Alsatian and Lorrainer recruits possessing German citizenship. These cities included Besançon, Nancy, and Reims. One important purpose of the collection points was to establish the identity, origin, and when possible the background of the individual volunteer’s paternal line. These steps were taken to screen out undesirable, “unauthentic” Alsatian elements, such as the children of German immigrants. A variety of different forms ranging from a birth certificate, to a German military service booklet, and marriage license were all potential identity affirming documents. However, the production of the requisite materials alone was not enough to establish an individual’s identity.

Another part of the screening process was an interview to be conducted in Alsatian patois. Details about the interrogated individual’s supposed hometown were asked in an attempt to establish the truth of their claim.<sup>39</sup> French authorities argued that it was impossible for a

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<sup>38</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> After his desertion, Dominik Richert reported that he was interrogated by a French Alsatian officer in dialect that asked him who the mayor was of his hometown in St. Ulrich and the name of a local bookbinder. See Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 382.

German immigrant, even a child who had grown up learning and speaking the Alsatian dialect, to perfectly reproduce all the idioms, turns of phrase, and vocabulary. In contrast,

From his earliest childhood, the young Alsatian will have only spoken dialect, will speak it freely at home and in public, and will not have been influenced by the German instruction that he received. Later in colleges and universities, his way of expressing himself will remain Alsatian pure from all alloys and all German turns of phrases and expressions. If necessary, an instinctive aversion to defend against the tendency to mix the two languages, which for him, are clearly so foreign from one another as the Alsatian and German souls.<sup>40</sup>

This extraordinary quote demonstrates the official imagining of a timeless, “authentic” Alsace.

In this construction, the “true” Alsations existed in sort of linguistic and cultural vacuum deliberately separate, free, and defended against German influence for over forty years. At its heart, the overt assumption of this statement is that the “true” Alsatian soul or essence is something that could not be reconciled with, learned by, nor transferred to “Germans” and Germany. The statement could perhaps be dismissed as another propagandistic argument for the return of Alsace to French sovereignty if it had been published. However, the fact that it was included in a confidential, for internal use, military instruction booklet that organized the procedures by which Alsations were to be incorporated into the French army demonstrates that French authorities themselves were invested in this understanding and at one level were willing to bet their military security on it.

Being judged to be an “authentic” Alsatian in itself not enough to guarantee a successful application to join the French army. The rank of individuals who served in the German army and their length of service were also important considerations. The military service of Alsations who served as ordinary soldiers or noncommissioned officers was not perceived as problematic. This was not the case for *Reichsland* soldiers holding particular officer ranks that required the vote of

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<sup>40</sup> “Instructions sur l’Admission des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l’Armée Française, dressé par Lt.-Colonel Carré” 2nd ed., October 15, 1918, 17, AJ 30 242, AN.

fellow German officers and an oath of loyalty to the German Emperor. Attempts to join the French army from these individuals were not to be viewed favorably since, “A good Alsatian always eluded this honor.”<sup>41</sup> French propagandists like Blumenthal would argue that less than a dozen *Reichslanders* held the rank of officer in the German army, while “thousands” of Alsace-Lorrainer officers and “hundreds” of Alsace-Lorrainer generals were present in the French army.<sup>42</sup> At its root, the primary difference between these two categories of Alsatian military men was the degree of voluntary involvement in their German military service.

The position that Alsations were fundamentally hostile to their inclusion in the German Reich and unwillingly served in the German military was the foundation of the French nationalist “Myth of Alsace” and a key component to the argument about the return of the province to France. The participation of regular soldiers in the German army fit into this imagining because their involvement could be portrayed as reluctant or forced. Yet this image was challenged by individuals who served more than the requisite two years in the German army. Thus an Alsatian forced evacuee by the name of Heiligenstein was told by a French officer that he was “more Prussian than Alsatian” because he had completed nine years of active service and consequently could not be viewed as possessing a “French-friendly attitude.”<sup>43</sup> Both Heiligenstein and those Alsations who voluntarily chose to act as an officer in the Imperial army and their obvious effectiveness that was recognized in the vote of their officer comrades essentially challenged the French nationalist construction. Ultimately, it was not the rank or even period of service itself

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<sup>41</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Blumenthal, *Alsace-Lorraine*, 55. Pro-French publications by H.A. Gibbons and Marie Harrison would also quote low numbers of Alsatian officers in the German army as proof of the pro-French sentiments of Alsatian soldiers.

<sup>43</sup> Heiligenstein to Dr. Karl, February 8, 1917, R 901 84132, BABL.

that was so troubling to French authorities, but rather the free-choice to swear loyalty and associate oneself with Germany that it represented. However, as the war progressed and combat took an increasing toll on the German officer corps, there was less room for self-determination. Writing from the context of the postwar period, Lieutenant-Colonel Carré reported that an increasing number of these Alsations officers that fell into French hands would claim it was impossible to refuse such a promotion. In a premonitory statement, Carré would label these individuals the “*malgré eux*” or “against their will.” The title “*malgré nous*” (“against our will”) would later become the well-known self-designation for Alsations who were forcibly incorporated into the German Wehrmacht and SS during World War II.

The second task of the sorting depots was to categorize the potential recruits into groups “A” or “B” and funnel them to the appropriate troop formations. The position of Alsations in category “A” in particular was potentially precarious. Individuals deemed to be German citizens taken prisoner by Imperial forces while fighting in the French army could potentially face trial and execution for treason. In this context, it was critical that French officials be familiar with German citizenship law in order to properly advise potential Alsatian recruits about the additional risks they might face fighting on the Western Front. For that reason, one of the first sections of the “Instructions Regarding the Admission of Alsace-Lorrainers into the French Army” carefully outlined and explained the intricacies of post-1872 German citizenship policies in relation to Alsace and the Empire as a whole. Thus the instructions discussed Imperial officials’ nullification of earlier “invalid” options, reluctance to recognize subsequent naturalizations and reintegration of Alsations, and the effect of the 1913 Delbrück law on

Alsatian emigrants' status.<sup>44</sup> Those Alsatians recruits who were deemed to likely still be considered German citizens under German law still had the option of serving on the Western Front, but they had to sign a waiver acknowledging that they understood the potential consequences of that decision. French authorities also took additional precautions to disguise the Alsatian background of recruits serving against the Germans. The primary form of this concealment consisted of the creation of an elaborate second identity. Alsatian soldiers with German citizenship were given a new military identity book (*livret*) that bore a *nom de guerre* and fictional place of origin that it was hoped would be enough to deflect German suspicion in the event of the bearer's capture.<sup>45</sup> In order to maintain the utmost secrecy, Alsatian recruits were advised to not share their true identities with their French comrades (although it is difficult to say how effective or widespread this advice was followed). The consequences for Alsatians discovered in German prisoner-of-war camps could be drastic. Christoph Jahr reports sentences that ranged from life in prison to execution.<sup>46</sup>

Alsatians enlistees who did not wish to fight against Germany on the Western Front or whose inability to speak French made such service impossible were classified as belonging to group "B." These Alsatians could be utilized anywhere with the exception of the Western Front. The majority of the Alsatian *engagés volontaires* served in the French colonies, particularly North Africa, where their presence allowed other French units to be transferred to the Western Front. In Algeria alone, Lieutenant-Colonel Carré cited a figure of 8,000-9,000 Alsace-Lorrainer

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<sup>44</sup> "Instructions sur l'Admission des Alsaciens-Lorrains dans l'Armée Française, dressé par Lt.-Colonel Carré" 2nd ed., October 15, 1918, 2-3, AJ 30 242, AN.

<sup>45</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Jahr, *Gewöhnliche Soldaten*, 269.

*engagés volontaires* who served in the colony.<sup>47</sup> Recalling again that Carré had previously gave the figure of 17,650 as the total number of Alsace-Lorrainers who volunteered for French military service during the course of the war, it becomes evident that the majority of these enlistees chose to avoid the heavy combat of the Western Front and the potential consequences of being captured by the Germans. French authorities also argued that service in the colonies was attractive to Alsatians because of the opportunity to serve in units primarily made up of and commanded by fellow Alsatians. In North Africa, Alsatians would comprise a significant portion of forces that took part in quashing a major rebellion in the area around Constantine, Algeria and those stationed in Tonkin were part of actions against Chinese pirates in September 1917 and January 1918.<sup>48</sup> *Reichsland* originating soldiers initially were also utilized on the Salonika Front, however, German sources reported that they were withdrawn after a number were executed by Turkish and Bulgarian forces after their capture.<sup>49</sup>

The incorporation of Alsatians into French forces was not a seamless process. For example, lacking enough German-speaking French officers from African units of the French Foreign Legion, officials initially turned to legionnaires of German origin to act as the non-commissioned officers of Alsatian units. However, the new Alsatians recruits proved resistant to the idea of fleeing service in the German army, only to be placed under the command of Germans in North Africa.<sup>50</sup> The German officers were withdrawn in favor of individuals of

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<sup>47</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 128.

<sup>48</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 146-147.

<sup>49</sup> “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>50</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 126-127.

Alsace-Lorraine origin who were familiar with the “language and mentality” of the soldiers, but problems persisted. In an extended report to Reich’s Chancellor Count von Hertling, the German embassy in Bern reported regarding the Alsatian and Lorrainer recruits serving in French military forces outside of Europe that,

They complain bitterly over the extraordinarily difficult service, over their inconsiderate treatment by French adjuncts and officers (they had been lied to and told they would serve exclusively under Alsatian non-commissioned and commissioned officers), also over their treatment as not fully Frenchmen and the strict surveillance that they are exposed to. A few have on account of attempted spying (which I assume means desertion) have been shot.<sup>51</sup>

Naturally, a historian must be wary about utilizing a German source reporting on the unhappiness of Alsations soldiers in the French army to draw conclusions about these individuals’ experiences. Some of the accusations are reminiscent of those directed against Germans themselves regarding the treatment of Alsations. It is certainly possible that Imperial observers simply reversed these criticisms and projected them on their French counterparts. However, evidence suggests that French officials were not blind to the challenges that Alsations faced serving in ranks with a majority of soldiers from the metropole. A memo from Major General de Castelnau from May 3, 1916 that was reprinted in Carré’s book informed corps commanders that it was their duty to inform their subordinates of the “particular merits” of the Alsations under their command.<sup>52</sup>

### **Why We Fight: Reasons Alsations Enlisted in the French Army**

Alsations residing in France or who crossed the Franco-German border to enlist in the French military did so for an assortment of reasons. Much of the literature at the time chose not

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<sup>51</sup> “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>52</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 66-67.

to delve deeper into motivations behind Alsatians' enlistment other than to point to it as evidence of the overwhelming francophile nature of the province. Undoubtedly, a significant amount of those Alsatians were motivated by feelings of French patriotism and a desire to see Alsace and Lorraine once again part of the Republic. This acknowledgement, however, should not lead us to ignore that not all enlistees were motivated by pro-French sentiment.

The archival record demonstrates that there was a significant instrumental usage of enlistment among Alsatian French recruits. For some Alsatians resident outside the provinces in neutral countries, French service offered a reprieve from a return to Germany. This was the case for a number of draft-dodging Alsatians in Basel, Switzerland. Due to their lack of residence permit, these individuals were faced with the prospect of being expelled from the canton and potential prosecution in Germany. In this situation, the French Foreign Ministry speculated that these individuals would be favorable to returning to France and taking service in the army in exchange for a temporary residency permit in Basel.<sup>53</sup> The actions taken in regard to Basel's "Alsatian colony" were part of a larger French wartime policy of providing French passports to Alsatians and Lorrainers located in neutral or allied countries for the purpose of returning to France and enlisting in the French army. These passports, however, were not always utilized by the recipient as they were intended. Prefect A. Milleteau of Doubs related that it had come to the Minister of the Interior's attention that some Alsatians and Lorrainers exploited the passport to come to France, but subsequently never appeared before a recruitment board or refused to enlist at the last minute.<sup>54</sup> In these latter cases, French military authorities often blamed the influence

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<sup>53</sup> President du Conseil Ministère de Affaires étrangères to the Ministre de l'Intérieur, February 15, 1916, AJ 30 243, AN.

<sup>54</sup> "5. Régime applicable aux Alsaciens-Lorrains venus en France pour s'engager," *Recueil des Actes Administratif* No. 4, 1917, 85, M 884, ADD.

of local Alsatians who had previously refused service in the French army.<sup>55</sup> This “bad influence” became another argument for their removal to the French interior.

Another example of the instrumental usage of French enlistment was made by Alsatians who sought to escape their current situation in France. Peter Meyer related to German authorities in a debriefing after his return in a prisoner exchange that a number of Alsatian prisoners-of-war in the St. Rambert camp chose to enlist in the French Zouaves and Artillery in order to escape forest work that they did not enjoy.<sup>56</sup> Another case of instrumental enlistment is evident in Karl Brannstedter’s description of an acquaintance Fiegenwald’s motivations. Both Brannstedter and Fiegenwald were interned in Besançon in 1915. One day, Fiegenwald told Brannstedter that he had joined the French army, an action that struck Brannstedter as completely out of character because previously he had known Fiegenwald as a “German minded” man. Fiegenwald explained that a doctor cousin living in France advised him to sign up for service in the French Foreign Legion with the confidence that his “weak and sickly condition” would be cause to have him declared unfit for service and discharged. Fiegenwald expressed confidence that this action would get him out of the camp and facilitate his return home. Events would unfold as Fiegenwald had anticipated, but instead of returning to Alsace, he found work in a commercial business and remained in Besançon.<sup>57</sup> Finally, some Alsatians determined to utilize the nationality bestowing benefit of August 5, 1914 enlistment law when it

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<sup>55</sup> Général de Division Vidal, Commandant la 7 Région to the le Général Commandant en Chef Service de la Circulation aux Armées, September 6, 1918, N 16 1584, SHD Vincennes.

<sup>56</sup> “Meyer, Peter; Res. 99/47:9:85 Straßburg i. E. Maler, künftig, Straßburg, Aloysiusstr. 17,” M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>57</sup> Verhandelt Kronenburg den 4. Juni 1918. Vorgeladen erscheint der Karl Brannstedter, Speditionsbeamter, 55 J.a. Rustbaumgasse 17 wohnhaft,” 116 AL 97, ADBR.

became apparent that Germany had lost the war. Thus on November 4, 1918, a certain Joseph Charles Bilher from Thann enlisted and “invoked the benefice of the law of August 5, 1914, by virtue of which Alsace-Lorrainers who contracted a voluntary engagement in the French army during the course of the war recovered the French nationality.”<sup>58</sup> Bilher had just turned 18 in 1918, but it seems singularly unfair that an individual with such a short and infinitely safer “war service” would receive the same benefits of Alsatians like Martin Bilger, who enlisted with the same expectations in September 1914.

Evidence also suggests that some Alsatians were forced into French military service because no other lay option was given to them. In 1918, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, carried an article in which an Alsatian Landsturmer from Thann related his experiences as a forced evacuee. The man and his fellow evacuated Alsatian comrades of military age were assured that they would be used to help with the harvest in the French interior. However, upon their arrival, work did not materialize and the Alsatians were told that whoever had no money had to become a soldier. Despite fierce refusals on their part, the Alsatians were subjected to a military medical exam. In his own case, the author was declared healthy and made a soldier, although he had been declared unfit for military service during four previous exams by German doctors. The men were eventually stationed on the Western Front, where the author succeeded in getting himself captured by the Germans.<sup>59</sup> Given the public nature of the document and the author’s obvious self-interest in convincing Imperial authorities that he had not volunteered, but rather been forcibly incorporated into the French army, the article’s content and accusations

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<sup>58</sup> “Récépissé,” Le Directeur des Affaires civiles et du Sceau, November, 4, 1918, AJ 30 302, AN.

<sup>59</sup> “Die Behandlung der Elsass-Lothringer durch die Franzosen,” *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 249, May 17, 1918, R 901 54444, BABL.

might be dismissed as purely propagandistic inventions. However, the content of the newspaper article closely mirrors that of a letter of complaint sent to the French mayor of Besançon by an anonymous Alsatian in 1915.

The author claimed that he and his fellow Alsations had been evacuated by French forces in September 1914. The deportees were told that they were to be transported to work in Champagne, France. This opportunity did not materialize and instead the Alsatian evacuees were encouraged to enlist in the French army, where they were promised that they would eat well, receive high wages, be abundantly supplied with tobacco, and that their families would also receive support. However, these promised funds rapidly petered out after only a month and “many” of the Alsations volunteered for frontline service when given the opportunity. As a result of the combination of this “willful misrepresentation” on the part of French authorities and the poor treatment they encountered, the author wrote that,

We have completely lost our pluck, which will not be easy to recover. Loud proclaims the French Minister of War that no Alsatian has been forced to the Front, which in fact has happened in many cases. I politely submit this appeal to you for us Alsations in acknowledgement of the memory of the days following our arrival in Besançon, when we Alsations showed our good faith and dedicated ourselves to the French army. Since then, we have always shown our good will to be French. [We submit this letter of complaint] in the hope that you will support us in this matter and lay it before the Minister of War in the expectation that within 14 days we will receive better treatment. Otherwise we will have to bring the matter forward ourselves, which will probably have a different outcome because we preliminarily conveyed it to you for the reason that we have only received this guidance in Besançon. To reiterate, in our Heimat we would have been good and would still have eked out enough to support our families without seeing armed action...<sup>60</sup>

The anonymous letter confirms several observations from the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* article. In both pieces, French officials initially promised Alsatian evacuees well paid civilian jobs that did not materialize. Consequently, enlistment in the French military was

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<sup>60</sup> To Monsieur Marie de Besançon from ein Elsässer für viele, March 7, 1915, M 879, ADD.

offered up as the nearly only viable option for Alsatians to support themselves. Both sources also suggest a certain amount of deception and bent rules were involved in the French recruitment of Alsatian soldiers – broken promises of good wages, hedged medical reports, and the not quite voluntary use of Alsatians at the front. Finally, the note articulates a sense of mutual reciprocity that closely resembles the bond formed between Alsatians and German officials during the Imperial period. The anonymous letter writer recalled the mayor’s attention to the cooperation that reigned between Alsatian evacuees and local French authorities at the beginning of the war. The Alsatians had fulfilled their side of the bargain by dedicating themselves to the French army. It was now up to the French government to ensure that they fulfilled their responsibility of providing better care to the Alsatian enlistees and their families. The promise to “bring the matter forward ourselves” was effectively a threat to make their complaints public, a prospect that might have proven to be potentially damaging for the imagined and projected Franco-Alsatian relationship.

Although it was rare, the archival record also indicates that some Alsatians utilized an enlistment in the French army as a means to facilitate their desertion to German lines. This was the case of Erwin Bassompierre from Saint-Amarin. Bassompierre had been interned along with his family in August 1914. The family was first transported to Besançon and from there to the camp of St. Remy in Provence. Bassompierre’s mother and sister were released to return to Switzerland, while Erwin and his father continued to be detained. Bassompierre claimed that throughout his time in the camp French authorities continued to pressure him to join the French army. Finally, in September 1917, he agreed with the condition that his father, whose health had steadily been deteriorating during captivity, be released. Not long after, his father was exchanged and sent to Switzerland. Erwin was determined to utilize his enlistment to facilitate

his own return to Germany. Aware that French soldiers received a seven day leave after four months of training, Bassompierre planned to use this period to desert across the Spanish or Swiss border. He wrote to the Prefect of Marseilles requesting permission to enlist in the French army, resisted efforts to send him to Africa, and finally managed to be incorporated into an infantry regiment in Troyes, France. While in his training he met a Swiss national who advised him to cross to Switzerland by way of the Franco-Swiss border town of Bossey-Veyrier. His initial attempt was foiled after he was detained by Swiss police. Eventually released, Bassompierre's Swiss friend was able to procure a new forged pass and after some adventure he was able to cross the border and unite with his parents in Lucerne.<sup>61</sup> This seemed like a fantastical story even to German officials at the time, but a report from Delegate Professor Partsch confirmed the basics of the Bassompierre's story from the detention of his family to his crossing of the Franco-Swiss border on May 26, 1918.<sup>62</sup>

### **Alsations in French Prisoner-of-War Camps**

"You can thank your stars that you are a prisoner. Hopefully your wounds are not severe and if God wills it, you will soon again be completely healthy. The main thing is that you are out of the fire and no longer hear the sounds of cannons."<sup>63</sup>

~Michel Gradt to his brother Valentin, February 15, 1916.

"Captivity is difficult, but for good German Alsations it is the most difficult."<sup>64</sup>

~Observation of Exchanged Alsatian Prisoner-of-War to German Authorities, November 3, 1916.

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<sup>61</sup> Report from Erwin Bassompierre, June 8, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>62</sup> Report from Delegierter Professor Partsch, June 15, 1918, M 30/105, HStAS.

<sup>63</sup> Michel Gradt to Valentin Gradt, February 15, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>64</sup> "Abschrift, Flülen," November 3, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

The Entente Powers actively sought to encourage Alsatians in the German army to desert. These efforts often took the form of propaganda leaflets dropped over German lines. The propaganda focused on particular themes in an effort to goad the resentment of any Alsatian reader. As might be expected, an important point of discussion was the suspicion and discrimination that Alsatians faced in the Imperial ranks. The leaflets also highlighted the alleged poor treatment of their families at home. Taken as a whole, the propaganda both overtly and subtly argued that for the past 40 years Alsatians had been treated as “second class citizens” and now in a time of war were handled as “second class soldiers.” The leaflets also sought to tap anti-immigrant feelings in the Alsatian reader. One example proclaimed, “Thousands of Germans, who brought their entire property over in a handkerchief came over the Rhine and set themselves up in our beautiful Alsace-Lorraine. Soon they had the first and best paid positions and took care to ensure that their children would be just as well accommodated.”<sup>65</sup> The quote brings to mind many of francophile Alsatian artist Hansi’s caricatures of German immigrants, who, always bespeckled and alternately short and rotund or tall and boney, with their belongings tied to a stick and held over their shoulder are pictured overrunning the provinces. The two page pamphlet closed with two paragraphs that provide an essential summary of the publically promulgated French position in relation to the Alsatians in the German ranks.

Why fight any longer for Germany? Come over to us and at the forward-most post call out “Alsatian” or “Lorrainer” and you will immediately be received as brothers. You will not be seen as prisoners, rather as children of former Frenchmen. With us you can earn money and no longer suffer from hunger. If someone tells you that you must enlist in the French army then you are being lied to. Thousands of your Alsatian and Lorrainer comrades who are already with us prove the opposite.

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<sup>65</sup> “Elsass-Lothringer! Für wen kämpft und leidet Ihr? Für wen haben Tausende und abermals Tausende Elsass-Lothringer ihr junges Leben opfern müssen?,” Great Britain, Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, Box No. 3, HIA.

So, dear comrades, come over to us, to France, where your forefathers, grandfathers, and fathers all felt happy, the country where you are not the slaves of the Prussian Junkers and military castes, but rather will be treated as respectable human-beings.<sup>66</sup>

For French officials who made the guarantees and Alsatians who either voluntarily accepted or found themselves in a position to take advantage of the offer, events would prove making promises was much easier than putting them into practice.

Thousands of Alsatians and Lorrainers would fall into the Entente's hands during the course of the conflict. Some had voluntarily deserted German lines, others had been involuntarily taken in the course of the fighting. Beginning in 1915, French officials took steps to separate soldiers originating in the German *Reichsland* from their inner German counterparts. Special camps specifically established for individuals originating from the *Reichsland* were established in St. Rambert-sur-Loire (Loire), Monistrol (Haut-Loire), Lourdes (Hautes-Pyrénées), and Paris.<sup>67</sup> The self-proclaimed purpose of these separate facilities was outlined by the commandant of the St. Rambert camp, Lieutenant Spinner, as,

The French government cannot bear to see the sons of those Frenchmen who fought and spilled their blood in the year 1870 for their Fatherland be treated as ordinary prisoners. It [the French government] wants to ease your life and transfer the debt of gratitude it owes your fathers to you. The government demands nothing from us [here speaking from the perspective of the listener] other than to lay aside the unfounded hate against France. We should receive good paying work, free entry and exit, civil clothes, and the like.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> "Elsass-Lothringer! Für wen kämpft und leidet Ihr? Für wen haben Tausende und abermals Tausende Elsass-Lothringer ihr junges Leben opfern müssen?," Great Britain, Director of Propaganda in Enemy Countries, Box No. 3, HIA.

<sup>67</sup> There also appears to have initially been a differentiation in the function of the privileged camps. Thus the Ministry of Alsace-Lorraine would report that the camps at Lourdes and Monistrol were for "reliable" Alsatians and Lorrainers, while St. Rambert functioned more as an educational and indoctrination camp for individuals judged to be not yet dependable. See Ministerium für Elsass-Lothringen to das Gericht der Königl. Sächsischen 45. Landwehr-Division im Felde, November 12, 1917, 116 AL 97, ADBR.

<sup>68</sup> Wilhelm Tröndle, "Meine Gefangenschaft als geborener Elsass-Lothringer in Frankreich von 11. Oktober 1916 bis 4. Mai 1918," 22 AL 99, ADBR.

In these “special camps,” Alsace-Lorrainer prisoners-of-war enjoyed a wide range of privileges that included everything from better transportation to the camps, superior food, more personal freedom, and better pay for labor. The separation of the Alsatian populace from the rest of German prisoners-of-war had a specific purpose. The privileged camps were the sites in which the process of “reintegrating” Alsations into French society commenced and they were also important sites of recruitment into the French army.

The example of the “privileged” prisoner-of-war camps demonstrates that in practice French authorities were more inclusive than their recorded policies would suggest. Any captured soldier who was born in the “lost provinces” was sent to one of the special camps – the effort to distinguish “authentic” Alsations from immigrant Germans did not occur until after their arrival at the special camps. Even then, “immigrant Germans” were allowed to stay if they desired.<sup>69</sup> The majority of German Alsatian soldiers who had the opportunity chose to remain in the privileged camps. The distinction that French officials made between inmates in the camps was based on their attitudes towards France. Those who protested against their separation from the general German prisoner population were categorized as suspect and sent to a penal camp at St. Genest-Lerpt, later Chagnat. “True” Alsations and Lorrainers were given the opportunity to enlist in the French army and upon their signature reacquired French nationality. Such individuals were grouped with “category three” Alsace-Lorrainers and given the option of serving in Europe or the French colonies. Evidence suggests that a minority of eligible former German *Reichsland* soldiers took advantage of this opportunity. Lieutenant-Colonel Carré wrote

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<sup>69</sup> “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, 1, R 901 84132, BABL.

that some 20,580 Alsatians and Lorrainers were interned in the Entente's prisoner-of-war camps. Of these men, some 1,650 would sign up to fight for France.<sup>70</sup>

The experience of former German Alsatian soldiers held in French captivity was far different than that of their German comrades. Imperial authorities spent a great deal of time collecting information on the privileged camp conditions and those Alsatians who chose to remain in them. At the time, this information was intended to be utilized for postwar prosecutions, but the result was to leave a significant archival record for historians. The process of pinpointing and sorting Alsatians and Lorrainers from the general population of German prisoners began soon after their capture. Following their identification as individuals born in the *Reichsland*, the eligible soldier was separated from his German comrades and conveyed to one of the four camps specifically designated for Alsatians and Lorrainers. Upon their arrival in the privileged camp, the Alsatian internees' German military uniforms were replaced with an English cut blue coat and French hat that bore the tricolor. Their ranks were converted from German to their French equivalents. Alsatian prisoners-of-war were required to work, but received a wage of 8 sous a day, while their German comrades received a daily wage of 4 sous. *Reichslanders* were also eligible for additional daily bonuses that could push their daily earnings up to 12-15 fr.<sup>71</sup> Further privileging their position was the opportunity that they were given to work outside the camps as farm laborers or in the war industries.

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<sup>70</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 153. Carré estimate of the number of Alsatian German deserters who subsequently enlisted in the French army is low when compared with French propagandist authors such as Marie Harrison who estimated the number to be 33,000 with "at least two-thirds" currently serving as French soldiers. See Harrison, *The Stolen Lands*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> "Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich," May 30, 1918, 2, R 901 84132, BABL.

Beyond acting simply as concentration points, the special camps were also utilized as opportunities to begin the process of reintegrating Alsatians back into the French national fold. This took the form of mandatory instruction in French for all inmates who did not have a mastery of the language.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, an emphasis was placed on physically acting out signs of loyalty to France. Thus inmates were required to stand at attention and salute the French flag while the chorus of *la Marseillaise* was played. Even more troubling from the perspective of German officials were reports from exchanged Alsatian inmates that related that showing the minimum enthusiasm for France was not enough for some Alsatians. Instead, in order to demonstrate their gratefulness for their privileged treatment and their pro-French attitude certain internees voluntarily took to publically ridiculing Germany and the Hohenzollern dynasty, singing *la Marseillaise* and shouting slogans such as “Viva la France,” and “Death to the Boches!”<sup>73</sup> However, not all Alsatians were so full of praise for their French captors. Dominik Richert reported after he was transferred to the St. Rambert camp, “The sympathy for France among everyone, which before had been so high, had now sunk below zero. One can hear everything else except ‘Viva la France!’.”<sup>74</sup> Not surprisingly, however, Imperial authorities judged Alsatians’ presence in the privileged camps to be incompatible with the honor of a “true German” and interpreted stay as evidence of their national unreliability.

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<sup>72</sup> Christopher Fischer concurs that the intent of such lessons and special treatment was to begin the assimilation process into France and further argues that the instruction was intended to turn the Alsatian POWs into promoters of the French nation among their fellow Alsatians. See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?*, 105.

<sup>73</sup> “Bericht über die Behandlung und Benehmen der kriegsgefangenen Elsass-Lothringer in Frankreich,” January 2, 1917, R 1501 112391.

<sup>74</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 388.

The mere presence of an Alsatian in the privileged camp was enough to have their national loyalties suspected by German officials. The basic reasoning behind this attitude was explained in a memo from the High Commando of the Duke Albrecht Army group as,

The single man is to be suspected of treason so long as he remains in the privileged camp for the reason that he does not voluntarily separate himself from the company of men who have enlisted in the French army or have, on account of the high wages, engaged to work in French munitions factories against Germany, although it would be possible for him through energetic protest to assure his transfer to a camp outside the privileged system. For this reason, all preliminary actions must be carried out against these people which are permitted as “suspicion measures” under German criminal law. This includes the confiscation of property, withdrawal of prisoners’ pay for their families, and confiscation of mail.<sup>75</sup>

The fundamental assumption behind this position that was alternately described in multiple internal reports and newspaper articles was that an “honorable” and “German” soldier would not long be able to endure such treatment and company before they would demand to be removed from it. Nevertheless, some German authorities recognized that an Alsatian’s presence in the privileged camp might not solely stem from a pro-French attitude. Thus, in the same report the Duke Albrecht High Command noted, “Next to the many notorious traitors to the Fatherland [in the privileged camps] there are a certain amount of those whose [presence] can be explained as stemming from weakness and indecisiveness rather than national depravity.”<sup>76</sup>

Different reports and testimonies to German officials from former inmates reveal a wide array of factors that motivated Alsatian soldiers to remain in the privileged camps that had nothing to do with pro-French sentiment. The hope that security would be less in the privileged camps and correspond to a better opportunity for flight led some Alsations to them. Sergeant Emil Fanger was described by an exchanged Sergeant-Major Faulhimmel as a “German man,”

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<sup>75</sup> Oberkommando der Herresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, July 7, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>76</sup> Oberkommando der Herresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, July 7, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

who had been initially held in a prisoner-of-war camp in England, but consented to be transferred to St. Rambert because he believed it would offer better prospects for escape and return to Germany. The discovery of his escape intentions and attempts to correspond with Germany reportedly led to his transfer to the Clermont-Ferrant military prison.<sup>77</sup> Familial considerations also were important for Alsatians in the privileged camps. An Alofons Feyler held in the Lourdes camp claimed that he did not request a transfer to the Chagnat-Gerzet penal camp because he feared that his family living in French occupied Alsace might be targeted for mistreatment and harassment if he showed his pro-German loyalties.<sup>78</sup> Another Alsatian wished to remain in contact with his parents who also lived in the French occupied portion of Alsace.<sup>79</sup> Fear of punishment, lack of real immediate consequences for themselves, and the belief in an eventual French military victory also played a role in encouraging Alsatians to stay in the privileged camps. As exchanged prisoner-of-war Wilhelm Tröndle reported,

A large part of the prisoners-of-war only recoil in view of the arranged punishment that is incurred as soon as they register themselves for a German camp (30-40 days of solitary confinement). Besides, the Chagnat camp is also described to them as a terrible penal camp. Another part [of the prisoners] has been lulled into a false sense of security, so long as the state support of their dependents at home continues to flow and the sending of money and packages through the prisoner-of-war care doesn't stop. The largest component, however, still believes in the re-conquest of Alsace-Lorraine by the French and should this not happen, they hope for a general amnesty that would allow them to return unprosecuted to their Heimat.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Oberkommando der Herresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, July 7, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>78</sup> Oberkommando der Herresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, July 7, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>79</sup> Oberkommando der Herresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, July 7, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm Tröndle to the Kaiserlich Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Bern, May 31, 1918, 22 AL 99, ADBR.

Complacency in the privileged camps was also certainly an important factor that kept Alsatian prisoners-of-war from asking for a transfer to an all-German prison. Peter Meyer described a group of some 50 Alsatis in St. Rambert that the camp authorities saw as pro-French, but who in reality were “German minded.” He suggested that the only reason they remained in the camp was that they lacked the energy to commit to leaving it. If given the choice, however, he had no doubt that these individuals would decide to return to Germany.<sup>81</sup> Thus it appears in many cases that German and French national feelings were secondary or lesser considerations for Alsatian prisoners-of-war made that were incarcerated in the French prisoner-of-war camps.

### **Recruiting for the French Army**

The process of identifying potential recruits for the French army among German Alsatian prisoners-of-war began almost immediately following capture. Throughout the process, French officials were not content to rely solely upon Alsatis’ supposed innate francophile convictions to guarantee their enlistment in the French military. A number of enticements that ranged from incentives to deception, and threats were utilized to rally Alsatian POWs to the French colors.

The recruitment process French officials utilized looked decidedly different for Alsatis who either possessed pro-German sympathies or chose not to join the French army. After his capture, a certain Xaver Rimmelin related that he and his fellow Alsatis were called one by one into an office and asked if they would naturalize themselves and enlist. At the time, Rimmelin was assured he would not be used to fight against the Germans, but rather would be assigned to either a police position in inner France or sent to Morocco or Algeria. Six of the 84

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<sup>81</sup> “Meyer, Peter; Res. 99/47:9:85 Straßburg i. E. Maler, künftig, Straßburg, Aloysiusstr. 17,” M 30/1 105, HStAS.

Alsations transported with him accepted the French offer.<sup>82</sup> Another Alsatian soldier gave a question-by-question description of his first post-capture interview,

“Ah, you are the Alsatian,” said the translator, taking my [German] hat and setting a French one in its place...I was brought to a different room and interrogated by the Lieutenant of the Camp through the translator. The first question was: “Are you German or Alsatian?” I answered, “I am Alsatian and German.” They: “An Alsatian is no German.” I: “I am German-Alsatian.” They, “Your father was French.” I: “Yes, but in 1871 my father became German. They: Alsace-Lorraine will again be French. I: I don’t believe that the success of the French is guaranteed. They: I should be placed in a camp with the other Alsations. I: I would like to remain with my German comrades, where I always was. More questions and answers followed and the result was that on account of “misconduct” I was confined for three days. Later I was interrogated two more times without success for them. I threw the French hat in an oven and borrowed one from a comrade until the time that my wife was able to send me another. So it goes, almost all of the Alsations, who do not want to go to the special camp, are badgered until they finally go.<sup>83</sup>

The narrator related that he considered himself lucky, as the severe wounding that had facilitated his capture also prevented him from receiving a harsher punishment for his anti-French attitude. He claimed that the situation for unwounded Alsations who refused to be separated from their German comrades was much more severe. Specifically, he related a case in which eight Alsations who refused to wear the French hat were made to serve 30 days in prison and another in which a young sergeant from Wissembourg was threatened with a pistol for wearing the ribbon that denoted he had received the Iron Cross.<sup>84</sup> A long 79 page report from the Badenese State Committee for the Care of Prisoners reported that Alsations interned in the camp of Besançon were forced to enlist by means that included threats, promises, and hunger.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Xaver Rimmelin, *Tagebuch aus französischer Gefangenschaft, 1914-1918*, 19, Signature 997, Deutsches Tagebucharchiv, Emmendingen (Hereafter DTA Emmendingen).

<sup>83</sup> “Abschrift, Flülen,” November 3, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>84</sup> “Abschrift, Flülen,” November 3, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>85</sup> Landesausschus der Badischen Gefangenenfürsorge to the Generalquartiermeister Grosses Hauptquartier, February 1918, M 30/1 107 HStAS.

French authorities also utilized misrepresentation of the current military situation in Europe and conditions in Alsace to convince Alsatian prisoners-of-war to enlist. This strategy was particularly effective among Alsations who were taken prisoner far from the battlefields of France. Several letters to a certain Emil Wernert, who was being held in Japan, from his brothers in Alsace are significant in that they reveal the type of information that Emil was receiving from his captors and the fact that his family opposed his agreement to enlist in the French army. His brother Karl wrote,

Dear Brother, we have received your letter from February 17, 1916 and therein saw that you have let yourself be deceived, don't associate yourself with such things. You must think that you have a father and two brothers in the field. You must not believe that Alsace will become French because the Germans are so far into France that they [the French] will not return to Alsace. Father has already been in the thick of it and now lies in a hospital in Dresden near Berlin. Viktor is training in Oberhoffen. Dear Brother, not a single goat has been injured in Alsace and there is no famine. You must not believe it and if you have done it [enlist], then you are an idiot. Above all else, you must think that father and your two brothers are fighting [for Germany]. Since mamma read the letter she has cried every day. Dear Brother, if you have done this then you will regret it later when you are no longer allowed in your homeland (*Heimat*).<sup>86</sup>

Based on Karl's response it is evident that Emil's previous letter had referenced the inevitability of a French victory and destruction and hardship in Alsace as factors playing into his decision to enlist in the French army. It suggests that Emil's captors were able to control the type of information prisoners had access to and demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy. Emil's family's concerns revolved around the fact that, as a French soldier, he could conceivably wind up fighting against his own father and brothers. Moreover, their own certainty of a German victory appeared to forever preclude Emil's return to Alsace.

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<sup>86</sup> "Abschrift eines Breifes an Mar. Artl. Emil Wernert Kriegsgefangenensendung in Fukucka b/Hakata, Jappan Haus 5 (Feldpost), Absender: Karl Wernert in Gries Post Kurzenhausen Hassensprung No 152, Unt. Elsass," February 17, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

## German Responses

Imperial authorities could do little to directly affect an Alsatian once they had fallen into French captivity and were safely ensconced in a privileged camp. But in many cases, although they were not able to immediately and directly punish the Alsatian internee, German officials did attempt to prevent prospective desertions and force Alsatians out of the privileged camps by putting pressure on the individuals' families that remained in their jurisdiction. Imperial military authorities in particular argued for the punishing of family members of Alsatians who had deserted to enemy lines.

The observation that many Alsace-Lorrainer German soldiers chose to desert to the enemy shortly after their return from home leave led German military officials to conclude that most undertook their traitorous action with their family's knowledge and consent.<sup>87</sup> As a result, General Paul von Hindenburg advocated that, "I therefore hold it to be necessary that the immediate relatives of Alsace-Lorrainers who have undoubtedly deserted themselves be viewed as unreliable, suspected of espionage or at least with pro-French interests, [that they] be removed from their residences, housed in concentration camps, and be put to forced labor."<sup>88</sup> He justified these deterrent measures by arguing that families would pressure their loved one not to desert once they knew the consequences for themselves. *Statthalter* Hans von Dallwitz responded to Hindenburg's demand later that month by saying that such punitive actions would undoubtedly make an impression upon Alsatians, but he found little justification for such measures in existing

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<sup>87</sup> Geheim Feldpolizei bei der Heeresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to Armee-Oberkommando 19, March 10, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

<sup>88</sup> Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres Paul von Hindenburg to Reichskanzler Bethmann-Hollweg, November 3, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

German law. He suggested that a milder form of “protective custody” could only be utilized in instances where family members had been convicted by the courts for their role in the desertion and direct evidence of their knowledge of the deed was present. Above all, Dallwitz implored German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg to consider the political ramifications of such an action and contended that such punishment needed to be implemented for the families of all German deserters and not just Alsace-Lorrainers.<sup>89</sup> Bethmann-Hollweg finally responded to Hindenburg in December 1916. He related that only measures that were provided for under current German law could be taken against the families of deserters. As German citizens, therefore, their confinement in concentration camps and forced labor were out of the question. Bethmann-Hollweg did suggest that a law that would come into effect in December 1916 would give the legal justification for the detention and movement restrictions of individuals judged to be a danger to the Reich, but reiterated Dallwitz’ concern that such measures must be taken against the families of *all* deserters and not just those from the *Reichsland*.<sup>90</sup> This month-long discussion between German civilian and military officials is important in that it demonstrates the extremism of the highest levels of the German military and the more moderating influence of the civilian administration.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, it shows the latter parties’ insistence on a preexistent legal basis for any type of punitive action taken against deserters’ families. Thus the fact that family members

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<sup>89</sup> Kaiserlich Statthalter Elsaß-Lothringen Hans von Dallwitz to Reichskanzler Bethmann-Hollweg, November 18, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>90</sup> Reichskanzler Bethmann-Hollweg to Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres Paul von Hindenburg, December 14, 1916, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>91</sup> This moderating influence in the government was absent when the Germans returned to Alsace from 1940-1945. The resultant lack of constraint radicalized official policy against the families of suspected Alsatian deserters and the penalties promoted by Hindenburg would be freely utilized. It is critical here, to note their pre-World War II precedents.

themselves were German citizens and entitled to punishment according to legal means trumped the fact that their loved one had acted in a traitorous manner.

Archival evidence does suggest that the “alternative measures” that Bethmann-Hollweg suggested were already occurring at the time of the previous official discussion and continued throughout the conflict. Thus, a certain Adelheit Wetterwald was put into “protective custody” in April 1915 and later expelled from the army zone of operations in May 1915 after her husband Leodegar failed to report for service in the German army. She and her children were relocated to the area near Wissembourg, Alsace. Imperial officials did not believe her story that Leodegar had left without informing her of his intentions at the beginning of September 1914 and instead found it more likely that she shared his anti-German feelings.<sup>92</sup> A later February 1918 note in response to Adelheit’s request to be allowed to return to her home in Dürrenbach was rejected by the High Command of Army Unit B for the threefold reason that “politically unreliable people” could not be tolerated in the zone of military operations, that the German minded populace would not understand her return, and that the buildup of a French sympathetic population might endanger the security of the German war effort and that of the Reich as a whole.

Despite the fact that confinement in concentration camps and forced labor were removed as a viable punishment option, Imperial authorities continued to be convinced of the important deterrent role that Alsatian soldiers’ families could play in preventing desertion or moving their loved ones out of the privileged camps. The measure that was most frequently utilized to effect this pressure was the revocation of governmental wartime aid. In this case, while recourse to German law had protected the families of Alsatian deserters from the most extreme forms of

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<sup>92</sup> Armee Abteilung B Oberkommando to the Kreisdirektion Weissenburg, February 7, 1918, 414 D 2767, ADBR.

official retaliation, the wording of existent legislation proved to be problematic for deserting soldiers' families and Imperial officials alike.

The cases of Johann Eckart and Widow Mathern from Wahlenheim are illustrative. Johann Eckart wrote to Regional President Otto Pöhlmann in January 1918. Eckart related that he himself had served and that three of his sons were currently serving in the German army. His fourth and youngest son had also been mobilized but had been captured by the Russians in July 1917. Since that time, his wartime monthly aid of 10 M had ceased. Eckart speculated that his son might be believed to have deserted to Russian lines, but had not received any specific information nor was he aware of any direct confirming evidence. He requested that Pöhlmann look into the matter and correct the situation.<sup>93</sup> A subsequent internal report revealed that the son had deserted to the enemy and according to Section 11a of the law from February 28, 1888/August 4, 1914 the familial support to parents of deserters was to cease. The article in question did not make a distinction for parents with multiple serving sons. Thus the fact that Eckart had three other sons that were currently serving in the German army could not have any bearing on the revocation of his parental support.<sup>94</sup>

Widow Mathern's case followed the same pattern. She also had three sons currently serving in the German army, one of whom was a non-commissioned officer and another who had received the Iron Cross. The fourth son had also fallen into Russian captivity – on the same night as Eckart's son – and was likewise presumed to have deserted by German military

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<sup>93</sup> Johann Eckart to Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann, January 30, 1918, 113 D 8, ADBR.

<sup>94</sup> Kreisdirektor Hagenau to Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann, March 19, 1918, 113 D 8, ADBR.

authorities.<sup>95</sup> The son's suspected desertion had also led to the termination of Widow Mathern's parental support. The wording of the same law was similarly cited that prevented her from receiving aid based on the service of her other three sons. In the Widow's case, the District Director of Hagenau had attempted to facilitate her support by her hometown's poor relief funds, only to be told by the Wahlenheim mayor that the community was not in a position to provide any assistance. The District Director then wrote to Pöhlmann requesting the transfer of 200-500 M to Wahlenheim so the mayor could give the family 30 M a month from the poor relief funds.<sup>96</sup> Pöhlmann would respond in April 1918 saying that the funds would recommence being paid to parents of deserters, so long as they had another son in service. Both Eckart's and the Widow Mathern's cases demonstrate that reliance on existent law could protect Alsatians with German citizenship from the caprice of German military officials, while simultaneously acting as a handcuff to local civilian authorities struggling to appropriately respond to the full range of unprecedented and unforeseen situations that accompanied the prolonged mobilization of German society.

Not all Alsatians willingly acquiesced to being separated from the general population of German prisoners-of-war and placed in the special camps. Archival evidence suggests that French officials were not content to allow any potential "authentic" Alsatian to be lost from the fold. Alsatians related to German authorities that French authorities sought to change the minds of *Reichsland* prisoners-of-war that declared themselves to be German and refused placement in special camps through a combination of threats and punishment. These "loyal Alsace-

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<sup>95</sup> Witwe Mathern to to Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann, February 12, 1918 and Kreisdirektor Hagenau to Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann, March 20, 1918, 113 D 8, ADBR.

<sup>96</sup> Kreisdirektor Hagenau to Bezirkspräsident Unterelsaß Otto Pöhlmann, March 20, 1918, 113 D 8, ADBR

Lorrainers” were reportedly separated from their Alsatian comrades that did not oppose their placement in the special camps and sent to a camp at St. Genest-Lerpt/Chagnat. The Alsatian inmates described St. Genest-Lerpt/Chagnat as a “penal camp.” In 1918, a former prisoner Wilhelm Tröndle estimated that the camp held 1,360 prisoners of which 300 were Alsations.<sup>97</sup> Alsatian internees were subjected to dirty and verminous camp conditions, labor intensive work such as stone breaking and canal building, general privation, and the withholding of mail.<sup>98</sup> The intention of such treatment was obvious to internees, who saw these hardships as intended to break their will to remain in the penal camp and take the easier path that was being offered to them in the special camps. Nor did the initial refusal and transfer to a penal camp correspond to a loss of interest on the part of French officials.

Reportedly in 1916, Lieutenant Spinner traveled to St. Genest-Lerpt/Chagnat and made the prisoners there an offer to cease their “anti-French attitudes,” come to St. Rambert, and receive better food or face worse conditions doing drainage work at Puy de Dome. The author claimed that all but 12 new arrivals agreed to this invitation.<sup>99</sup> If the immediate physical hardships that inmates faced in St. Genest-Lerpt/Chagnat were insufficient to change their attitudes, camp officials allegedly sought to allay any belief that their torment would end after the conclusion of hostilities by describing the hypothetical fate that awaited them following a

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<sup>97</sup> Wilhelm Tröndle, “Bericht über das Gefangenenlager Chagnat par Gerzat,” May 31, 1918, 22 AL 99, ADBR.

<sup>98</sup> Postüberwachungsstelle des stellv. XXI. Armeekorps Saargemünd to the Kriegsministerium, April 19, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS; Wilhelm Tröndle, “Bericht über das Gefangenenlager Chagnat par Gerzat,” May 31, 1918, 22 AL 99, ADBR; “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, 19-20, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>99</sup> “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-lothr. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, 19-20, R 901 84132, BABL.

French victory. In July 1916, the “High Commander of Prisoner-of-War Camps in France” allegedly addressed the St. Genest-Lerpt/Chagnat Alsatian inmates,

“You are Alsace-Lorrainers, but poor Alsace-Lorrainers, because I am unaccustomed to seeing Alsace-Lorrainers in Prussian uniforms. I speak to you as an officer who fought in the 1870 war as a lieutenant. Pay attention to what I say to you, for I am completely serious. What do you think you will do when Alsace is French? You there!” – “I don’t believe that it will become French.” – “Yet, it will be French.”... “Now, let us suppose that it is French, what will you do then?” “I will go to Baden, Colonel.” (Camp commandant: “That is always the last word!”) – “And you?” – “I will go to Germany.” – “So, you are certainly able to do what you want, provided that we let you go, and we do have you. But what about your parents and your property? After the war everything in Alsace that is not genuinely French will be eradicated with the greatest energy. Your names stand on the black list, through this your families are sufficiently suspect. The constabulary colonels for Upper- and Lower-Alsace, like Lorraine, have already been chosen. They are the most energetic Frenchmen who in Northern France have broken many miners’ strikes. They will receive the order to keep your families under strict surveillance. You yourself will never be allowed to see Alsace again, because you will be banished from the state and immediately transferred over the Rhine. Unfortunately, we cannot do this to your families, but they, and our constabulary know how to very well, will be punished and punished again for every trifle until they follow you over the Rhine. This is the only thing your behavior will achieve.”<sup>100</sup>

A different account by Wilhelm Tröndle likewise confirmed a threat of postwar banishment from Alsace.<sup>101</sup>

Imperial authorities, for their part, also sought to emphasize to Alsations that their postwar fate was bound up in their wartime actions. Thus a newspaper article that was proposed by the General Command of the XXI Army corps related that deserters to the enemy were profoundly mistaken in their hope that they would receive a postwar pardon. The article stated, “The crime of desertion is so grievous and traitorous that at no time will any form of pardon be exercised for these people.”<sup>102</sup> The definitive proof that German officials fully intended to

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<sup>100</sup> “Abschrift: Die Behandlung der els.-loth. Kriegsgefangenen in Frankreich,” May 30, 1918, 21-22, R 901 84132, BABL.

<sup>101</sup> Wilhelm Tröndle, “Meine Gefangenschaft als geborener Elsass-Lothringer in Frankreich von 11. Oktober 1916 bis 4. Mai 1918,” 22 AL 99, ADBR.

<sup>102</sup> Stellv. Generalkommando XXI. Armeekorps, July 10, 1917, 414 D 2767, ADBR.

prosecute any Alsatian suspected of desertion to the fullest extent of the law in the postwar period is evident in a massive tome in the *Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin* in which the names, service record, and details surrounding the capture of over 7,712 Alsations was recorded.<sup>103</sup>

The same fate also awaited individuals convicted of the lesser crime of failing to report for their requisite German military service. Most of these individuals had been resident or fled to neutral countries in order to escape mobilization. Unlike the deserters, however, they were given a onetime amnesty option by Kaiser Wilhelm II to return to Germany and sign-up for military service before July 15, 1917. This opportunity was described as, “Whoever has not yet found the courage to return has only one more chance to not miss out on the favorable conditions. Otherwise these people will be ostracized as renegades, their Germanness torn from them and their Fatherland forever closed to them.”<sup>104</sup> The situation for many Alsations in the privileged camps was particularly grim because German authorities were automatically prone to suspect the national loyalties of any that maintained their residence there. In effect, by assuming the disloyalty of its *Reichsland* prisoners-of-war, Imperial officials effectively created a disincentive for these interned former German soldiers to hope for a German victory. For their part, German authorities also found themselves in a lose-lose situation, as any policy and action they took to curtail desertions among its Alsatian soldiers and punish those in the privileged camps often rebounded to alienate those internees who were not anti-German and strengthen the ties of the internees to France. For example, the stoppage of mail that Imperial officials imposed upon letters and packages sent to the privileged camps in an attempt to punish inmates, only served to

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<sup>103</sup> See 69 AL 658, ADBR.

<sup>104</sup> Stellv. Generalkommando XXI. Armeekorps, July 10, 1917, 414 D 2767, ADBR.

facilitate the creation of new Franco-Alsatian networks as the prisoners-of-war reached out for help to relatives and acquaintances living in France.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, enemy propaganda took advantage of such measures to argue for that Alsatians remained pro-French at heart.

### **Alsations in Russian Prisoner-of-War Camps**

Until 1916, only Alsatian and Lorrainers taken prisoner on the Western Front were sent to the special camps. However, French authorities' overall goal was to collect all *Reichsland* POWs in France. Naturally, the global scale of the conflict and challenges of coordinating the movement of eligible individuals with allies complicated the attainment of this objective. The German policy of sending many Alsatians to fight on the Eastern Front meant that a substantial number of prisoners would require repatriation from Russian camps. As early as December 1914, the French government began working with their Russian counterparts to set up a system that would identify Alsatian and Lorrainer prisoners-of-war already in Russian camps and future entrants. To this end, preliminary screening points were established in Moscow and Duenabourg (present day Daugavpils, Latvia). A depot for identified Alsace-Lorrainers was established in Kaschira on the outskirts of Moscow. Despite this cooperation, the identification process was initially complicated by the fact that the Russian sorters only considered individuals from the *Reichsland* who spoke French to be "Alsace-Lorrainers."<sup>106</sup> The result of this differing definition was that the majority of Alsatians and Lorrainers remained with their Austro-German comrades and many were transported to prisoner-of-war camps in Siberia. Dominik Richert, an

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<sup>105</sup> Postüberwachungsstelle des stellv. XXI. Armeekorps Saargemünd to the Kriegsministerium, April 19, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

<sup>106</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 80-82.

Alsatian conscript who had served in the German army from August 1914 refrained from deserting until he was stationed on the Western Front in summer 1918 because, “I did not trust the Russians, it was told to us that the German prisoners would be sent to Siberia to work in the mines, where most soon died as a result of cold and deprivation.”<sup>107</sup>

Between August 1916 and March 1918, French authorities repatriated some 5,861 Alsatians and Lorrainers from Russia.<sup>108</sup> The transportees often manifested pro-French sentiment upon their arrival in France. Local authorities were met by inmates singing *La Marseillaise* and waving various homemade flags, some bearing French colors and others the colors of Alsatian cities such as Strasbourg and Guebwiller. A portion of the Alsatians and Lorrainers who took part in this and similar celebrations and who agreed to be transported to France undoubtedly did so out of feelings of French patriotism. At another level, however, it is equally likely that the celebration reflected a general relief to be anywhere besides a Russian prisoner-of-war camp. Even in the “privileged” Kaschira camp, typhus had been a problem and taken a toll on its Alsace-Lorrainers inmates. Moreover, as German military officials reported to one another, failure to demonstrate sufficient “French spirit” in the sense of singing *la Marseillaise* and saluting the French flag could lead to deportation to Siberia.<sup>109</sup>

Regardless of their exact motives, Alsatians in Russian prisoner-of-war camps were stuck between a rock and a hard place. Faced with potential deportation to Siberia if they did not agree

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<sup>107</sup> Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben*, 161. By 1918, however, Richert had become so disillusioned with his German service that he resolved to attempt to desert to Russian lines at the first opportunity. The chance did not present itself and he would have to wait until summer 1918 to successfully desert on the Western Front.

<sup>108</sup> Carré, *Les Engagés volontaires Alsaciens-Lorrains pendant la guerre*, 101, 123.

<sup>109</sup> Stellvertretender Generalstab der Armee Abteilung III to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, September 30, 1916, R 1501 112391, BABL.

to transport to France, on the German side any Alsatian was automatically labeled as a traitor who was transported from Russia to France.<sup>110</sup> Imperial officials took this position because it was believed that transport to France would only occur if the individual involved had agreed to either enlist in the French army or work in French munitions factories.<sup>111</sup> Although this designation had little immediate effect on the Alsatian soldiers themselves, it had an immediate impact upon their families still living German Alsace. Similarly to the residents of the privileged camps, the families of individuals transferred from Russia were no longer eligible for governmental aid.

The withdrawal of this aid could be absolutely devastating. The desperation is palpable in one intercepted letter from an Alsatian wife to her husband, August Engel, who had been taken prisoner in Russia, but subsequently transferred to the St. Rambert camp in France. She wrote,

I must again share with you our difficulties. The children and I no longer receive any support because you are said to have enlisted in France. I and L. no longer receive support. What am I supposed to do now with the six children? Perhaps it would be best if I took the children and hung myself and them then we wouldn't need anything anymore...I sit there with the children, who to make matters worse are sick, and have nothing behind or before us. I must cry the entire night...adieu dear man we will see one another again heaven.<sup>112</sup>

Beyond the words themselves, the emotional agitation in which the letter was written is evidenced by the intermittent comments by the censor/transcriber that reported some sections as

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<sup>110</sup> Bezirkspräsident Unter-Elsass Otto Pöhlmann to Kreisdirektor Molsheim, August 11, 1917, 113 D 9, ADBR.

<sup>111</sup> Geheim Feldpolizei bei der Heeresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to Armee-Oberkommando 19, March 10, 1918, M 30/1 107, HStAS.

<sup>112</sup> Der Postüberwachungsstelle Hagenau i. Els. to the Stellvertr. Generalstab der Armee. Abt. IIIb, Berlin, October 11, 1917, 113 D 9, ADBR.

“nearly unreadable” or “unreadable.” The archival record does not record the outcome of this particular situation.

Yet automatically labeling Alsatians transferred from Russia to France as traitors was problematized by news that some of the former Russian-interned soldiers were being sent to the “penal camp” of St. Genest-Lerpt/Chagnat.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, the blanket labeling of transported Alsatians as treasonous was not without its opponents. The High Command of the Duke Albrecht army group expressed sympathy for the Alsatian soldiers interned in Russia, “One thinks on the many prisoners, who after endless suffering are transferred from Russia to France and have signed up for this transport in order to escape the hopeless depression of Russian captivity.”<sup>114</sup> Such men simply lacked the strength of character and resolve to choose the harsh conditions of the penal camp over the easy life of the privileged camps. They were weak, but they were not traitors. For their part, the Strasbourg City Support Office argued that given the seriousness of the consequences for soldiers’ families, the suspicion of desertion was insufficient cause to withhold support. Instead, such a step should only be taken after a court or the individual’s military formation judged them to be in dereliction of their military duty.<sup>115</sup> Writing in April 1918, the Reich’s Chancellery wrote to the various German state governments, including Alsace-Lorraine, that support should only be withdrawn in cases of absolute certainty of desertion because the unjustified and mistaken revocation of support was damaging to the

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<sup>113</sup> Der Postüberwachungsstelle Hagenau i. Els. to the Stellvertr. Generalstab der Armee. Abt. IIIb, Berlin, October 11, 1917, 113 D 9, ADBR.

<sup>114</sup> Oberkommando der Herresgruppe Herzog Albrecht to the Kriegsministerium, Berlin, July 7, 1918, M 30/1 105, HStAS.

<sup>115</sup> Bürgermeister amt Strassburg i. Els. Unterstützungsamt, “Verhandlungs-Niederschrift,” November 29, 1917, 113 D 9, ADBR.

resolve of the German home front to persevere and could be used for propagandistic purposes in enemy countries.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Reichskanzler des Innern to the sämtliche Bundesregierungen, April 8, 1918, 113 D 9, ADBR.

## Conclusion to Part II

The effects of the war continued to reverberate for Alsatians long after the guns finally fell silent on November 11, 1918. For Alsatians in the German army, the future was profoundly uncertain, as they slowly began making their way back home from battlefields across Europe and the globe. Alsatians who were “German immigrants” or their descendants found themselves barred from reentry into the province or interned after attempting to cross the Rhine. Ultimately, a certain proportion of these individuals would find themselves expelled from the province that in many cases had been the only homes they had ever known. The future was also uncertain for “authentic Alsatians,” who were likewise subjected to a screening process as they sought to reenter Alsace. Although it was understood that Germany would have to give up Alsace and Lorraine, it was unclear what reception Alsatians who served in the German armed forces could expect in the new “French Alsace.” Alsatian German veterans returned to a home that toasted the victory of their former enemy and were witness to the celebration of their defeat. Issues that included the citizenship status of former German Alsatian soldiers and the disability and survivors’ pensions were immediate concerns. In addition, the memory and memorialization of Alsatians’ participation in the First World War would likewise become an important postwar development and consideration. For what and whom had the Alsatians who served in the German army fought and died for? What did it all mean? These questions were studied, debated, and fought out over the course of the Interwar period and are the subject of Part III.

# **Part III**

## **Reuniting the National Family: French Policy Towards and Treatment of German Alsatian Soldiers and War Widows, 1918-1939.**

### **Introduction**

“It is the sad fate of the borderland to suffer without hope, to fight without goal, to experience in all events only suffering and in doing so be so broken apart to internally distance themselves from the events and to only search for the puniest of advantage. In this fate, the Alsatians were faceless and homeless (*vaterlandlos*) and they once had a good and honorable place in German history.”<sup>1</sup>

~Dr. Hans Wildermuth

“In the evening the girls went with the French, just as they had with the Germans. Arm in arm the pairs went to the movies or for walks.”<sup>2</sup>

~Observation from the Diary of Josephine and Clara Bohn, December 1, 1918

“We must always keep in mind that one cannot hold an entire people responsible for the actions of a few idiots. We Alsatians would also fare poorly if we were to be judged by the actions of a few of our fellow citizens.”<sup>3</sup>

~ President du Cercle des Etudiants, Zillhard to Herr Schneider, October 23, 1919.

The euphoric reception of French troops as they entered Alsace behind evacuating German forces in November 1918 seemed to confirm the French nationalist narrative of a patiently waiting francophile populace. In a scene that was repeated time and again, French soldiers were met at the outskirts of Alsatian villages by a delegation of local notables and

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hans Wildermuth, “Im Oberelsaß im Landwehrfeldlazarett,” N 278 4, Bundesarchiv-Militär, Freiburg (Hereafter BA-Freiburg).

<sup>2</sup> Josephine Bohn and Clara Bohn, *Kriegschronik 1914-1919*, Signatur 898, DTA.

<sup>3</sup> President du Cercle des Etudiants, Zillhard to Herr Schneider, October 23, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

children in folk costumes and accompanied into town, where they were greeted by the site of tricolor festoons and met by cheering crowds chanting “Long live France, long live French Alsace!” Alsatian veterans also played a key role in the reception. One group by their presence, another in their absence. Alsations who had fought for France in the Franco-Prussian War presented gifts to the French *poilus* signifying their thanks and symbolically connecting the two martial efforts. The largest group of Alsatian veterans, however, was not present to witness the French arrival. These were the ex-soldiers who only weeks before had been mobilized in German armies across Europe. Their absence critically shaped the local reception of French soldiers. It is questionable whether the former German soldiers would have so enthusiastically welcomed the army that had been their enemies such a short time ago. The absence of German Alsatian veterans was also significant at another level. For local people, the arrival of French troops appeared to definitively signal an end to the war, its associated privations, and the imminent return of their loved ones from the German army.<sup>4</sup> The jubilant reception was also motivated by genuine happiness among elements of the Alsatian populace. Some of whom had idealized pre-1870 French rule as much as French nationalists had idealized Alsations’ French patriotism. This image was heightened by promises from a diverse range of French officials such as Georges Clemenceau, Joseph Joffre, Raymond Poincaré, and Alexandre Millerand, who swore that Republican France would forevermore respect Alsatian rights and traditions.<sup>5</sup>

Although the *Reichsland* would technically remain part of Germany until the Treaty of Versailles went into effect on January 10, 1920, French officials began a rapid assertion of French sovereignty over the provinces. The fundamental goal of this campaign was to “cleanse”

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<sup>4</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 135.

<sup>5</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1:654-655.

Alsace and Lorraine of the most egregious vestiges of the German Imperial period. An integral component of this effort was realized through the enactment of a range of policies designed to limit the influence and presence of Germans in Alsace. Strict border checkpoints were established that regulated the number of German entrants into the province. German authorities protested that while the so-called “old” Alsatians could pass unhindered back and forth across the border without special permission,<sup>6</sup> “old” Germans were only allowed to visit the former *Reichsland* after careful scrutiny of their entrance applications that were often seemingly arbitrarily rejected.<sup>7</sup> The inability of most “old” German (usually male) residents to gain entrance to Alsace placed tremendous pressure on their families, particularly their wives, still in the province. The unlikelihood of reentry meant that wives were confronted with the choice of either remaining in the *Reichsland* and taking care of the family’s prewar property or joining their spouse in Germany and leaving their possessions behind.<sup>8</sup> For those wives who chose to remain in Alsace, they were further isolated from their husbands by a French stoppage of mail between Germany and Alsace that began on November 21, 1918 and continued sporadically into summer 1919.<sup>9</sup> These circumstances required wives to continue activities and roles that they had

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<sup>6</sup> “Zusammenstellung über Proteste gegen das Vorgehen der französische Besatzungsbehörden in Elsass-Lothringen, namentlich gegen wirtschaftliche Massnahme,” R 901 80941, BABL.

<sup>7</sup> Ref. V.L.R. v. Friedberg, July 27, 1921, R 901 25396, BABL. German reports from August 1920 related that of approximately 800-1000 entrance applications a month, French officials were granting approximately 53%. See Note to the Auswärtiges Amt, August 20, 1920, R 901 25935, BABL.

<sup>8</sup> Elsass-Lothringischer Bevollmächtigter to the German Armistice Commission, January 19, 1920, R 904 13, BABL.

<sup>9</sup> Reichspostminister to the Deutsche Wako, July 6, 1919, R 904 7, BABL.

initially embraced in wartime, such as taking over the role of bread-procurer and acting as their own advocate to local authorities.<sup>10</sup>

The supposition that the entire reassertion of French sovereignty in Alsace continued to be based upon was the belief of the fundamental incongruity between “Alsatian” and “German.” The latter could never be the former, regardless of their birthplace or length of residence in the province. Nor could the former, unless in cases of gross perversion of their nature, be the latter. In other words, French policy was designed to be inclusive of Alsatians and not Germans. The French government’s differentiation between the two groups was based primarily on descent, previous citizenship, actions, and residence location – factors independent of the principles of *jus soli* that had been enshrined in the 1889 French citizenship law. In their view, the ethnic identity card system and Triage Commissions they oversaw that targeted ethnic Germans was not an exclusionary undertaking directed at the population of the province because a German was not and could not ever be an Alsatian. In the end, the study of French authorities’ actions in Alsace after the First World War demonstrates that regardless of the supposed expansiveness of French citizenship law for migrants who crossed French borders, it proved to be exclusionary and restrictive when French borders moved across people.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, French policy in Alsace towards the German element of the population demonstrates the limits of French officials’ confidence in the assimilatory power of Republican institutions. The flipside of the French

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<sup>10</sup> See Belinda Davis, *Homefires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Healy, *Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire* for a description of the changed roles of women during World War I.

<sup>11</sup> Brubaker argued for a conception of French citizenship policy that emphasized its inclusiveness and willingness to assimilate outsiders. See Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 108. This study suggests that we learn just as much about a state’s citizenship policy by examining the population elements that are excluded, than included.

assumption of the unalterable “Germanness” of ethnic Germans was the imagining that “true” Alsace and Alsatians were an insulated time capsule of French sentiment.<sup>12</sup> French confidence in regards to Alsatians’ national sentiment resided in their faith in the population’s French loyalty, not on the confidence of assimilation. This officially created dichotomy of German/Alsatian left little room for national ambiguity and nuance.

Alsatian veterans and their war widows who had been mobilized into Imperial armies and fought against France might have been a significant challenge and tension in this worldview. French officials were ultimately able to reconcile the majority of German Alsatian ex-soldiers to the established French nationalist narrative by characterizing them as reluctant and unwilling conscripts in the German military. The situation was more problematic for Alsatians who appeared to have willingly cooperated with the German government, such as career officers, volunteers, and soldiers receiving commendations for their wartime actions in the German army. These latter individuals were contradictions to the German/Alsatian opposition and consequently found themselves the subject of intense investigation. If anything, French authorities were more hostile to these segments of the Alsatian population than even the German elements residing in the province because they were perceived to have acted in a manner contrary to their “true” nature. As this example suggests and will be seen in greater detail below, Interwar French authorities did not recognize a uniquely Alsatian narrative. Instead, Alsatians’ experiences had to be made to fit into the official redemptive tale that characterized the population as long-suffering, ardently anti-German Frenchmen and women holding out or – ideally – actively

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<sup>12</sup> This connection is evident in contemporary pro-French publications like that of Gabriel Séailles, who argued against the need for a plebiscite in Alsace and Lorraine after World War I to determine the national commitment of the provinces’ population. Séailles wrote, “Alsace-Lorraine becomes French, because it has never been anything else.” See Gabriel Séailles, *Alsace-Lorraine: The History of an Annexation*, trans. Elsie and Émile Masson (Paris: French League for the Rights of Man, 1916), 52.

campaigning for the return of French rule. French authorities would rely on these assumptions and utilize their control of Alsace's borders, citizenship policy, military service, pensions, and memorialization to shape the province's population and memory of the German interregnum in the postwar period.

### **Iron Crosses in the Garden: German Alsatian Veterans' Homecomings**

"But we are the victors, forgotten Alsatians, Alsatians treated like the enemy, the social outcasts. We return home where our population curses German soldiers."

~"Old Alsatian" German Officer Jean Lechner describing Strasbourg in December 1918

Few other soldiers of the First World War experienced a homecoming quite like the Alsatians who had fought in the German army. German Alsatian soldiers returned neither as victorious heroes nor lauded as former combatants who had valiantly defended their nation for four years against the combined might of much of the industrial world. Instead, Alsatian soldiers who had fought for Imperial Germany returned home as veterans of an enemy army. In Alsace, they encountered a euphoric atmosphere and population that ceremonially welcomed and celebrated the victory of their recent enemies, while rejoicing at their own defeat. Compounding their estrangement, German Alsatians veterans found themselves to be subjects of suspicion for the newly empowered French administration. They faced potential detention in quarantine camps and a stiff interrogation at the border. Still, despite the inconvenience of a delayed homecoming, these Alsatians could count themselves fortunate. Thousands of their comrades arrived at the borders of the province only to be informed they were not "true Alsatians" at all and as a result would not be allowed to return to their homes and families.

The division between "authentic" and "false" Alsatians was a differentiation that French officials had begun making on a limited scale during the course of World War I. The distinction

between “old Alsatians” and “old Germans” in 1919 marked the first official program that screened and judged the desirability of the province’s population based on descent.<sup>13</sup> It marked the first articulation of the idea in the Alsatian borderland that national loyalty was at one level transferable through blood kinship. Thus it was the French who introduced an exclusionary model of citizenship into Alsace, but the remaining Western Powers effectively acquiesced and codified this conception when they ratified the text of the Treaty of Versailles. The study of the experiences of returning former German Alsatians soldiers, however, likewise demonstrates that it would be an oversimplification to characterize postwar French citizenship policies as solely reflecting elements of *jus sanguinis*. For although Alsatian heritage was the foundation upon which residents of the province based their claim for membership in the French nation, descent alone was insufficient.

A second critical element in the official sorting of the “nationally suspect” from the “nationally reliable” revolved around an evaluation of Alsatians attitudes and actions under German sovereignty, particularly during the war. An Alsatian judged to be “germanophile” was as unwelcome in French Alsace as any German. Alsatians who had served as German officers or in the Imperial administration were especially likely to receive a negative designation. If anything, French officials directed a greater degree of hostility towards Alsatians who had “turned” than at Germans living in the province. The French antagonism towards Alsatians with

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<sup>13</sup> For the remainder of the chapter any reference to “Alsatians” will be individuals defined as such by French authorities unless I feel there is a chance for some confusion without the addition of the “authentic” adjective. In a similar manner any reference to “old” Germans should be understood to be a utilization of contemporary French descriptions of German migrants and their descendants. I will likewise drop the “old” adjective and refer to these individuals as “Germans” unless I believe it is necessary to specify the population I am addressing. It should go without saying that these officially ascribed categories did not necessarily reflect the self-understandings and identities of the residents of the province they were created to label.

pro-German sentiments was motivated by the fundamental assumption that “pro-German” and “old Alsatian” were completely incompatible identities and sentiments. Republican officials believed that it was only natural that a German would fight in the Imperial army and express pro-German sentiment. Germany was their Fatherland after all. Alsatians, however, who willingly adopted germanophile sympathies and voluntarily assumed a position of leadership in resisting the return of French sovereignty contradicted the French nationalist construction of population ground under the boot of German oppression and intransigently francophile. By choosing to throw their support behind the oppressor they were acting against their nature, making their actions doubly traitorous.

Alsatian soldiers who were released from the German army began arriving back in the province beginning on November 22, 1918. The reception of the individual veterans depended upon their classification by French officials. However, despite the differentiation between “old Alsatians” and “old Germans” there were certain commonalities of experience. This included the first interactions that the returning soldiers had with French authorities. Checkpoints were established at various border train stations and on the Rhine bridges between Alsace and Germany. French officials inspected soldiers’ papers, searched them for hidden weapons, and often temporarily interned them in empty German barracks until their papers could be verified and their nationality and identities confirmed. The distinction made between Alsatians and Germans was critical in determining the probability of an ex-soldier’s chance of re-entering Alsace. This is aptly demonstrated by official figures that were produced for publication in the press regarding the number of Alsace-Lorrainer prisoners-of-war who were repatriated to the province.

**Table 13: Ethnic Backgrounds of Prisoners-of-War Repatriated to Alsace**

	Card A	Card B	Card C	Card D	Total
Colmar	5616	123	0	0	5739
Strasbourg	7675	100	0	25	8700
Metz	3500	1500	0	0	5000
Total	16791	1723	0	25	18539

The table divided up the former prisoners according to the identification card they received.<sup>14</sup> The meaning of the different categories of identification card will be broken down in greater detail in the following section. For the moment, suffice it to say that A-Cards denoted a “pure” Alsatian, B-Cards indicated that the individual possessed some “old” Alsatian lineage and German ancestry, while D-Cards indicated that the individual was an “old” German. In light of these statistics only .001% of prisoners-of-war directly repatriated to Alsace and Lorraine did not possess any “old” Alsatian blood. French authorities did not permanently exclude “old” German prisoners-of-war who had resided in the *Reichsland* prior to the war from a return to the provinces. However, they were required to be first “repatriated” to Germany, where they were to remain until their applications for entrance into Alsace or Lorraine had been approved.<sup>15</sup>

Differences in policies between French officials’ and popular interpretations of French policy contributed to the confusion that surrounded the return of Alsatians and Germans to Alsace. In the aftermath of the war, Marshall Foch had guaranteed that anyone that lived in Alsace prior to 1914 and was forced to temporarily leave the province for familial or economic

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<sup>14</sup> “Résumé des questions traitées à la Réunion des Inspecteurs d’Alsaciens-Lorrains,” August 8, 1919, 121 AL 359, ADBR.

<sup>15</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Président du Conseil, September 10, 1919, 121 AL 358, ADBR.

reasons would be allowed to return. This provision, however, was applicable solely to the civilian population of the *Reichsland*. Demobilized soldiers were explicitly excluded.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, families of ex-soldiers, long separated from their loved ones interpreted Foch's order in a more inclusive light. Thus a certain Joseph Erbe, whose brother Paul had been arrested attempting to return to Alsace and deported with a number of other German civilians to an internment camp in Dijon, very confidently informed German Chancellor Erzberger that Foch had agreed to the free return of any demobilized soldier, including officers, that lived in Alsace before the war.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, Erbe contended, his brother's detention was illegal. The situation was further muddled by different repatriation policies among French officials. For instance, the French commander of the V occupation zone located in Karlsruhe only approved entry into the provinces to "old" Alsatians and Lorrainers.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, his counterpart in the IV occupation zone headquartered in Frankfurt approved the entry of demobilized military personnel into Alsace and Lorraine, provided that they had resided there before August 1, 1914. Yet despite the approval of their entrance applications in Frankfurt, former soldiers from Alsace continued to be arrested at the border by French guards.

### **The Return Home: The Case Study of Jean Lechner**

The experience of returning German Alsatian officer Jean Lechner is an instructive case study. Lechner completed four years of active service in the German army, was awarded the

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<sup>16</sup> Reichsminister Erzberger to Leg. Sekr. Dr. Roediger, March 19, 1919, R 904 Wako Berlin Räumung von Elsass-Lothringen Verhaftungen, BABL.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Erbe to Reichsminister Erzberger, March 3, 1919, R 904 Wako Berlin Räumung von Elsass-Lothringen Verhaftungen, BABL.

<sup>18</sup> Lt. Schoenbach to the Deutsche Wako, March 11, 1919, R 904 7, BABL.

Iron Cross First and Second Class, and was discharged at the rank of officer. Notwithstanding these accolades, Lechner regularly expressed anti-war sentiments and ambiguity in regards to his German national identity in his wartime diary. Lechner did not immediately return to Alsace after the Armistice, but rather waited until his regiment was officially dissolved on December 2, 1918. Arriving at Kehl two days later, he was met by French soldiers of Alsatian origin who confiscated his bags and took him aside for questioning. The fact that Lechner was also a German officer increased the intensity of his interrogation. German sources report that former and current officers in Alsace were required to register with local police officials, who required that all weapons, military insignia, and military clothing be handed over. The officers were subsequently ordered to fill out a detailed and identification card and have their picture taken like “dangerous criminals.”<sup>19</sup> In Lechner’s case, the proceedings lasted five hours before being broken off for the day. Lechner found himself transferred to Strasbourg, not as a free man, but in a column of German soldiers to be detained in the Saint Marguerite barracks in Strasbourg.

Throughout the ordeal, Jean Lechner repeatedly complained that none of his interrogators believed he lived in Strasbourg. Finally, at around one in the morning on the day of his arrival in the Saint Marguerite barracks, Lechner located a French officer who listened long enough for him to explain that he was an Alsatian and a German officer and lived only a five minute walk from his current place of internment. If Lechner had hoped that such a revelation would lead to his immediate release he was mistaken. The French officer led him before a group of around 10 French Alsatians who began another two hour round of intense interrogation that included questions on everything from his Strasbourg address to the familial details of his local baker and

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<sup>19</sup> Note from Kriegsministerium Mobilmachunabteilung, April 3, 1919, R 904 6, BABL.

the types of trees that grew on his street.<sup>20</sup> Even then, Lechner only successfully obtained his release after a newly arrived French Alsatian soldier recognized him from a pre-war swimming club and confirmed his identity to the assembled panel. Fortunately for Lechner, prior to his border crossing attempt, he had hid his two Iron Crosses in the inner lining of his jacket, where they remained undiscovered by his French interrogators. Upon the advice of his father, Jean buried both medals in the family garden.

Over the next several weeks, Jean Lechner described the euphoria of the atmosphere in Strasbourg. Lechner found himself unable to identify with the excitement for France nor the hatred of Germany. Happy only to be alive, he wrote, “I do not believe that any [German] Alsatian soldier returning from the front could shout such things.”<sup>21</sup> He was disenchanted with the absence of apparent celebration for the return of peace saying, “Many women are wearing Alsatian costumes and crying in the street ‘Long live France, long live French Alsace!’ But I never hear shouts of ‘Long live peace on earth!’”<sup>22</sup> Lechner’s lack of enthusiasm was difficult for his parents to understand and even more so for their neighbors who began interpreting his indifference to the French victory as evidence of pro-German sentiment. Ultimately, his parents were able to ameliorate the situation by explaining how difficult the fighting at the front had been. A symbolic personal act that Jean Lechner undertook in recognition of Alsace’s transfer of sovereignty and to demonstrate his reconciliation with France was the translation of his wartime journal from German to French. He then destroyed the German original, perhaps in the hope of signaling the close of a violent chapter in his life and the opening of a peaceful future. Alas,

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<sup>20</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 165-166.

<sup>21</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 167.

<sup>22</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 166-167.

only twenty-two years later events would necessitate the resurrecting of Jean Lechner's personal German memories and experiences, along with his medals from the family garden.

Jean Lechner's story is useful in that it provides a complete narrative of one Alsatian veteran's homecoming experience. A study of archival sources, however, suggest that Lechner's entrance was relatively easy – even in comparison to many of his fellow “old” Alsatian comrades. At the official level, demobilized soldiers returning from anywhere east of France that resided in Alsace and fulfilled the criteria of being an “authentic” Alsatian were to be funneled to Rastatt and Darmstadt, where they would spend 2-3 weeks in a quarantine camp. Following this period of seclusion, Alsatian soldiers could proceed provided that they wore civilian clothes and had been regularly discharged from the German army.<sup>23</sup> French officials wrote that they regretted the necessity of the delay in repatriating Alsations, but that, “‘genuine’ Alsace-Lorrainers must understand that taking such measures [were necessary] to avoid the repatriating undesirable Germans.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Alsatian Homecomings for German Soldiers**

The process and length of detention was much more prolonged for returning soldiers who French authorities labeled German. The difficulty for Germans to obtain permission to enter Alsace and Lorraine after World War I is evident in a statistic from the German Armistice Commission that reported that up to the date of March 1, 1919 only six of approximately 1,000

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<sup>23</sup> “Auszug aus den Bestimmungen für die neutrale Zone und das besetzte Gebiet,” R 901 25935, BABL. Interestingly, the French only recognized the validity of discharge papers from German military authorities, while rejecting those of Soldiers' councils.

<sup>24</sup> *Projet de Note à faire paraître dans la Presse*,” 121 AL 358, ADBR.

applications had been approved.<sup>25</sup> The trouble that “old” Germans had in returning to their prewar residences in Alsace caused a number of logistical and economic problems. From a logistical standpoint, the inability of German veterans to cross to their homes in Alsace led to the buildup of a significant population of ex-soldiers in border towns such as Kehl and Rastatt, which strained the communities’ resources that were already stretched thin by four years of conflict and Allied blockade. German officials also protested the delayed homecomings for “old” Germans at an economic level. They argued that the continued detention of returning soldiers at the border threatened them with individual ruin in the short- and long-term. The immediate concern was that the ex-soldiers did not possess the financial resources to sustain themselves for an extended period of time in the border communities, while their inability to return to Alsace and re-found their prewar occupations and businesses directly endangered their own long-term financial security and indirectly the continuing economic health of the province as a whole. Moreover, the Germans warned of the potential political ramifications of such economic losses by suggesting that such individuals would potentially gravitate towards Bolshevism.<sup>26</sup>

The lengthy sojourns on Alsace’s borders also took an emotional toll on the former servicemen. German officials protested to their French counterparts that,

It is also bitter and painful for demobilized soldiers – the majority of whom have been separated from their families for a long time – who now, the war being over for them and yearning to be reunited with their loved ones and resume their civilian jobs, find themselves prevented from

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<sup>25</sup> Waffenstillstandskommission (Spa) to Reichsminister Erzberger, March 1, 1919, R 904 7, BABL.

<sup>26</sup> “Zusammenstellung über Proteste gegen das Vorgehen der französische Besatzungsbehörden in Elsass-Lothringen, namentlich gegen wirtschaftliche Massnahme,” R 901 80941, BABL.

doing so and for no discernable reason, because the notion that these people could be a danger to the security of the occupational forces in Alsace-Lorraine is impossible.<sup>27</sup>

The text of the note also reveals an important point of disconnect between French and German officials' view of the Armistice. On the German side, it is evident that authorities viewed the cease fire as a definitive conclusion to the war.<sup>28</sup> The French appear more cautious and concerned that a renewal of hostilities could still occur, a potentiality that clearly made the presence of thousands of German soldiers in Alsace undesirable. Importantly, this difference in Franco-German interpretations of the Armistice provides another instance in which we are privy to the near completeness of French officials' investment in the francophile Alsatian narrative and the idea that French national loyalty was transferable across generations. As one French source explained, "It is indispensable that the distinction [between "authentic" and "false" Alsations] be made because it would be appalling to return "genuine Germans" (*vrais boches*) under the sole pretext that they were born [in Alsace] and that they claim to have become good Frenchmen."<sup>29</sup> French authorities were convinced that as long as they were successful in separating out the "authentic" from the "false" Alsations, a designation that ultimately hinged on an individual's heritage, that the province would be secure - even in the event of a renewal of hostilities. At its heart, the quote also expresses unease at the ability of France to assimilate individuals of German descent in the French national family.

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<sup>27</sup> "Zusammenstellung über Proteste gegen das Vorgehen der französische Besatzungsbehörden in Elsass-Lothringen, namentlich gegen wirtschaftliche Massnahme," R 901 80941, BABL.

<sup>28</sup> It is ironic that German authorities utilized the justification that there were too few Germans wishing to return to Alsace to pose a security threat to the French government, particularly in light of the fact that throughout the *Kaiserreich*, the same argument had been made and rejected by Imperial officials in relation to former French soldiers wishing to return to the province.

<sup>29</sup> "Projet de Note à faire paraître dans la Presse," 121 AL 358, ADBR.

The arrest and extended imprisonment of a number of returning Alsatian soldiers also confirms the importance of French occupational authorities' interpretation of the potential impermanence of the Armistice. A report submitted in December 1918 informed German authorities that the French were interning all soldiers of German heritage that were returning to the province even if they possessed Alsace-Lorraine state citizenship. In addition, it recounted that a few German Reserve officers who had been demobilized before the French occupation had also been arrested.<sup>30</sup> Beyond simply interning the returning soldiers of German heritage, reports reached German officials of French occupational authorities arresting German civilians of martial age in Alsace and transporting them to France, where they were reportedly treated as prisoners-of-war and put to work cleaning up the areas of the former frontlines.<sup>31</sup>

In one instance, German sources alleged that a certain Karl Heidiger, whose parents were “old” Germans was arrested in Alsace after his demobilization. Informed by French officials that he was a prisoner-of-war, Heidiger was subsequently sent to northern France, where he worked rebuilding destroyed villages for forty-nine days.<sup>32</sup> French sources do not corroborate German reports regarding the type of work interned Alsatians were assigned. However, they do acknowledge the arrest and evacuation to the French interior of “all enemy soldiers who find themselves already on the territory occupied by our troops.”<sup>33</sup> One of the interned German

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<sup>30</sup> “Bericht des geheimen Regierungsrates Schlössing über Ausweisungen und Verhaftungen in Elsass-Lothringen,” December 22, 1918, R 904 6, BABL.

<sup>31</sup> Report from Adolf Steinecke, May 19, 1919, R 904 6, BABL.

<sup>32</sup> “Die Verhaftung, Internierung und Abschiedung von indésirables in Elsass-Lothringen,” R 1603 2344, BABL.

<sup>33</sup> Le Général de Division Nudent, Président de la Commission Interalliée Permanente d’armistice to Général von Hammerstein, Président de la Commission Allemande d’armistice, July 1, 1919, R 904 19, BABL.

Alsations estimated that there were currently 350 Alsations currently being held by the French in various camps and forts across the country.<sup>34</sup>

## **Not by Descent Alone: Evaluating the Actions of Returning Veterans**

A close study of the experiences surrounding the homecomings that awaited Alsations who served in the German army likewise demonstrates that heritage alone was insufficient to guarantee French citizenship and permanent admission into the province. French officials also closely investigated the wartime actions of returning ex-soldiers wishing to cross the border into Alsace. Being judged to have gone beyond one's duty, for instance serving as an officer or being awarded an elite military medal, corresponded to greater scrutiny and a higher degree of likelihood of being detained or excluded from the province entirely. Three short case studies illustrate instances in which "old" Alsatian lineage was insufficient to guarantee a returning German Alsatian veteran a place in the new French Alsace.

In the first case, a German source reported the experience of a certain Walter Kößler from Strasbourg, who had received the Iron Cross First Class for his service in the German army during the 1914-1918 war. Kößler allegedly made the mistake of openly wearing the decoration as he was crossing the bridge from Kehl to Strasbourg and was accosted by a French officer who tore the Iron Cross from his chest and exclaimed, "What is this? We have a German here. This is no Alsatian." He was subsequently arrested. Marshall Pétain happened to be visiting the city at that time and a patriotic incensed crowd gathered around Kößler, spitting and jeering at him

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<sup>34</sup> "Wallenstein, Max, 36 Jahre, Kaufmann aus Colmar i/El," R 904 19, BABL.

yelling, “Kill him, the Schwob!.”<sup>35</sup> A subsequent report argued that Köbler’s case was typical of other young Alsatians’ experiences that had served in the German army and been promoted to Reserve officer, a status that automatically made the recipient guilty of “high treason” in the eyes of the French.<sup>36</sup> Köbler was eventually released and could count himself lucky with only the temporary detention.

French officials were not so forgiving in the case of Marzellus Gassmann from Mulhouse. Gassmann was an “old” Alsatian whose father fought for France during the Franco-Prussian War and was married to a woman who likewise possessed Alsatian lineage. Gassmann’s national transgression was that he had worked on the staff of the German propaganda newspaper *Gazette des Ardennes* that was published in occupied areas of Belgium and France during the war. He was arrested in Mulhouse by French authorities following his demobilization on November 15, who promised the same fate to anyone else associated with the newspaper. The author of the report assured the German Armistice Commission that Gassmann had only taken the position after being ordered to by the General Staff on account of his familiarity with the French language. His participation was in the fulfillment of his duty as a soldier, rather than a result of conviction.<sup>37</sup> A subsequent report from the General Staff of the Field Army to the German Armistice Commission related that French newspapers were reporting that Gassmann had been transferred to Amiens to appear before a military tribunal. He was

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<sup>35</sup> “‘Wochenbericht’ Elsass-Lothringen to Deutsch-Schutzband für Grenz- und Auslandsdeutsche,” May 21, 1920, R 1603 2344 BABL.

<sup>36</sup> “‘Wochenbericht’ Elsass-Lothringen to Deutsch-Schutzband für Grenz- und Auslandsdeutsche,” May 29, 1920, R 1603 2344, BABL.

<sup>37</sup> W. Paprycki to the Deutsche Wako, March 14, 1919, R 904 Wako Berlin Räumung von Elsass-Lothringen Verhaftungen, BABL.

expected to serve as a witness against a French colleague that had similarly worked at the *Gazette*.<sup>38</sup> Both notes requested the intervention of the German Armistice Commission on Gassmann's behalf. The outcome of the case has not survived.

Finally, the experience of a Philipp Oster from Schönburg demonstrates that French officials could decide to exclude "old" Alsatians on suspicion alone. In his report on the relevant events to German authorities, Oster claimed to be of "pure" Alsatian descent. He had been demobilized in Westphalia and detained attempting to enter Alsace. After being kept in poor conditions in a prison for two days, Oster was interrogated by a French officer who accused him of being a Spartacus agent. His statement gave no indication about why French authorities' suspicions had been pointed in this direction; perhaps he had been demobilized by a Soldiers' Council. Despite his denials of political involvement, Oster and his travelling companion were returned to prison for a further two weeks before being released to return to Germany. Both men wrote to the German government requesting that their interests be represented to French authorities relating, "We protest the fact that as Alsatians, French authorities have not allowed us to return to our homes. I myself have a wife and child in Alsace. I must return home in order to care for my family. We request measures to be taken so that we might return to our homes. Naturally we only want to return home if we have the French guarantee that we will not be subject to further unjust imprisonment."<sup>39</sup>

These three brief examples demonstrate that French officials utilized a combination of evaluatory measures that took into account the lineage of individual returning soldiers, as well as

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<sup>38</sup> Generalstab des Feldheeres Abt. IIIb to Wako (Berlin), March 9, 1919, R 904 Wako Berlin Räumung von Elsass-Lothringen Verhaftungen, BABL.

<sup>39</sup> "Abschrift Badischer Landesverin vom Roten Kreuz, Elsass-Lothringer Vertriebenen-Fürsorge," March 24, 1919, R 904 7, BABL.

their wartime actions in their initial screenings. The gateway to French citizenship was opened by an individual's forbearers' residence in Alsace prior to 1871. Yet ultimately, an Alsatian's eligibility for membership in the French nation hinged upon French officials being able to fit the applicant's wartime experiences and actions into the French national narrative that conceived of Alsatians as unwilling/forced members of the German military and state. Alsatians who appeared to voluntarily associate themselves with German rule were problematic in this construction and warranted a greater investigation that increased the likelihood that they would be excluded from the postwar French province.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Citizenship in Alsace during the Interwar Period**

“Under German sovereignty the Alsace-Lorrainers felt like second-class citizens, but they feel themselves to be treated as third-class citizens by the French.”<sup>1</sup>

~Quotation from an article, “The French Military Regime in Alsace-Lorraine,” in *Vorwärts*, October 23, 1919

The Treaty of Versailles laid the groundwork for French citizenship policy in Alsace during the Interwar period. The section of the Treaty that was devoted to Alsace demonstrates that the document was both future oriented and reactive. The clauses that described the “authentic” Alsatian” reveal the manner in which French authorities imagined and sought to shape the population of Alsace in the postwar period. In contrast to the policies utilized by Imperial authorities after the Franco-Prussian War, citizenship in 1918 moved from a primarily performative model to one that emphasized the importance of descent. Eligibility to be included in the nation transformed from an agreement to accept the sovereignty of the new government and abide by its laws to a model that prioritized ethnocultural considerations, previous nationality, and place of residence. Aspects of French nationality policies that were enacted in Alsace after World War I fundamentally contradict the idea of French citizenry being defined exclusively as an “expansively as a territorial community” and not as a “community of descent.”<sup>2</sup> The increased exclusivity of postwar French citizenship guidelines was accompanied by official

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<sup>1</sup> “Französische Militärherrschaft in Elsass-Lothringen,” *Vorwärts* no. 543, October 23, 1919, R 1603 2344, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, x, 5, 109-110. Both notions are argued by Brubaker.

efforts to sift the population of Alsace and separate the nationally loyal from the nationally suspect. Descent alone was insufficient to guarantee the awarding of French citizenship to Alsatians in the postwar period. Instead, an investigation of the national heritage of an individual was accompanied by a simultaneous examination of their actions during the period of German administration and the war. The former of these tasks was accomplished through the introduction of identification cards that were intended to relay the bearer's national heritage at a glance, while the latter was undertaken by Triage Commissions charged with policing the postwar population. The net result of these policies was widespread voluntary and forced expulsion from Alsace. Forced emigration in particular would leave a legacy of bitterness in the province that would come back to haunt the borderland with a vengeance in 1940. Throughout the process, nationality policies that combined and relied on elements of *jus soli*, *jus sanguinis*, and other considerations challenged existent French citizenry legislation and conceptions of nationhood. In Germany, authorities found themselves similarly tested and forced to adapt existent legislation to fit the changed postwar citizenship landscape.

### **Citizenship Policy in Alsace as Articulated in the Treaty of Versailles**

The most important assumptions and guidelines for postwar French citizenship policy in Alsace were enshrined in the annex of the Treaty of Versailles. The Annex divided the population of Alsace into three categories based on their right to acquire French citizenship. The first group was made up of the individuals who “reclaimed by right” (*réintégrés de plein droit*) their French nationality. There were two ways an Alsatian could be judged to belong to this category. First, these individuals were “Persons who lost their French nationality by the application of the Franco-German Treaty of the 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1871, and who have not since that date

acquired nationality other than German nationality.”<sup>3</sup> Second, any resident of the province that was a descendent of individuals described in the first category would likewise automatically “revert” to French citizenship, so long as their paternal line did not include a German who had migrated to the province after July 15, 1870.

Taken together, both clauses reveal significant assumptions by French officials regarding the population of Alsace. French authorities invested everything in the nationalist image of Alsace as a long-suffering francophile and eternally anti-German province. French officials were convinced that any Alsatian who had experienced life as part of the French nation prior to the signing of the Treaty of Frankfurt would unequivocally cling to that memory, which was powerful enough to sustain national loyalty to France through forty-seven years of German rule. The involuntary bestowal of French citizenship on the descendants of the pre-1870 population is premised upon a similar assumption. This was the belief that French *male* citizens would have necessarily passed the love for France on to his children and grandchildren perhaps through blood, but certainly through upbringing. Interestingly, however, one German male ascendant was sufficient to taint the entire national pedagogical enterprise and force such individuals to apply for naturalization.<sup>4</sup> The conception of French citizenship outlined in the Treaty of Versailles marked a distinct departure from republican, assimilatory notions of *jus soli* that had been codified in the 1889 French citizenship law, but it did not yet amount to a “racial”

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<sup>3</sup> “The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany,” 47, PH2 357, BAM.

<sup>4</sup> “The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany,” 47, PH2 357, BAM. It is this clause in addition to French officials’ investment in the notion that the “French heart” of Alsace was maintained by the population that lived in the province prior to the German annexation in 1870 that problematizes Brubaker’s contention that “Frenchness” was not inherited. See Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*, 109-110.

conception of “Frenchness” as has been suggested by Laird Boswell.<sup>5</sup> For French authorities individuals encapsulated in these two groups were the only undisputed “authentic” Alsatians who resided in the province and had a *right* to be awarded French citizenship. This position was confirmed by the French Court of Appeals on May 18, 1927 when it ruled that only residents of the provinces that reclaimed by right their French nationality qualified as Alsatians and Lorrainers of French origin.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent French actions and policies in the Alsatian borderland would reveal that “old” Alsatian descent in itself was insufficient to guarantee an individual a place at the French national table. The actions of applicants during the years of German administration and particularly during the war would also need to be taken into account. An important caveat to the automatic bestowal of French citizenship to residents of the borderland is already apparent in the above quoted sentence from the Treaty of Versailles. The phrase “who have not since that date acquired nationality other than German nationality” in effect penalized individuals who had had second thoughts about belonging to France during the Imperial period. The provisions of the Treaty of Frankfurt had given the residents of Alsace and Lorraine until October 1, 1872 and October 1, 1873 to opt for French citizenship and permanently relocate to France. Any Alsatian who moved to France during the options period or afterwards, but ultimately chose to return to

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<sup>5</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 2000, 144, 160. As mentioned in the introduction, considering the differing 19th century understandings of “race,” I believe it is more accurate to refer to the pre-1940 citizenship prerequisites enacted in Alsace as relying on “ethnocultural” rather than “racial” considerations. Patrick Weil has argued that the “racist option” began to surface in French naturalization debates in the 1920s, but was associated with anti-Algerian and anti-Muslim thought. Throughout the Interwar period, “racialists” would be but one of multiple strands of competing nationality policy that would only triumph under the Vichy regime. See Weil, *How to Be French*, 168-169.

<sup>6</sup> Sénat to the Président du Conseil, March 14, 1928, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

Alsace and reassume German citizenship, was not eligible for the automatic conferring of French nationality in 1919.

French Alsatian veterans were a group who were significantly affected by this provision. Many Alsatian soldiers who had fought for France during the Franco-Prussian War had initially remained in the French army and completed their contracted period of service in order to receive their full pensions and enlistment bonuses. After their time in the ranks was completed, many returned to Alsace and applied to be naturalized as German citizens. These individuals were not permitted to “reclaim by right” their French citizenship and instead had to apply to be naturalized. This distinction in the manner in which they acquired their French citizenship would have a significant impact upon the aid they were able to obtain from French authorities and their overall status in the Alsace during the Interwar period.

A critical difference between the Franco-Prussian War and First World War peace settlements was the voluntariness of the postwar nationality choice. In 1871, the residents of Alsace and Lorraine were free to choose whether they wished to remain French or become German. Regardless of their decision, the persons and property of the individual optant was guaranteed. The only requirement was that any inhabitant of the provinces that chose French citizenship was required to emigrate from the newly formed *Reichsland* and establish their permanent residency in France. In contrast to the earlier freedom of choice, the Treaty of Versailles did not make provisions for nationality options. People who originated from Alsace who the French judged to be “old” Alsatians automatically became French citizens. They were not given an option to decline their “reintegration.”<sup>7</sup> In effect, the treaty privileged the French

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<sup>7</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Ministre de la Guerre, October 11, 1921, 121 AL 307, ADBR.

state's right to claim its ideal citizenry over the individual's right to choose their ideal state. The extension of French citizenship to Alsatians did not apply to only that specific segment of the population living in the borderland, but wherever they were to be found.<sup>8</sup>

Just as Alsatians did not have a say in whether or not they received French citizenship on January 10, 1920, in certain cases the French state also claimed the exclusive right to approve the release of Alsatians from their French citizenship. The group primarily affected by this decision were military aged men, who in accordance with Articles 17 of the Civil Code, could only be discharged from their French citizenship if they had fulfilled their martial duties or were given explicit permission by the government.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Alsatian males could technically not “freely” choose to give up French citizenship and take up another nationality until they were no longer eligible for any form of French military service – after their fortieth birthday.<sup>10</sup> Certain local level French officials broadly interpreted the provisions of the Versailles Treaty to mean that *no* Alsatian could be naturalized to another nationality without the agreement of the French government.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Deutsche Delegation für elsass-lothringische Friedensfragen to the Auswärtiges Amt, April 28, 1920, R 901 35527, BABL. In this regards, French policy resembled that articulated in the 1913 German nationality law that allowed ethnic Germans living outside the Reich to maintain their German citizenship so long as they were not naturalized in their country of residence.

<sup>9</sup> The principle of “perpetual allegiance” had been instituted by Napoleon in 1809. Patrick Weil points out that the 1889 law removed this prerequisite for everyone but French men of military service age. See Weil, *How to be French*, 31, 239. Eric Lohr has argued that a requirement that naturalizations be approved by the state from which an emigrant left was a common practice in the eighteenth century. See Lohr, *Russian Citizenship*, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Deutsche Botschaft, Paris to the Auswärtiges Amt, September 15, 1925, R 901 35529, BABL.

<sup>11</sup> Polizeipräsident Frankfurt a/M to the Regierungspräsident Wiesbaden, August 26, 1921, R 901 35527, BABL.

The Treaty of Versailles created a second category of residents in the province who could “receive on demand” French citizenship. This section of the Annex described a potpourri of different residents of Alsace who had a right to apply for naturalization before the Treaty went into effect on January 10, 1920. These groups included (but were not limited to) individuals who possessed at least one ancestor who lost their French citizenship as a result of the Treaty of Frankfurt, an “old” German who had been born in the province and fought for France during the war, and the husband or wife of any Alsatian who had rightfully reclaimed their French citizenship. Military service in the French or allied army during World War I and marriage were the only routes that allowed an “old” German to receive French citizenship within the space of a year. German sources accused French authorities of utilizing their positions to pressure Alsatian spouses to convince their partner to be naturalized as French. This low-level manipulation was alleged to most often occur when an “old” Alsatian wife was applying to receive an exit permit to see her husband in Germany, since many of the “old” German husbands had difficulty crossing into Alsace after 1918.<sup>12</sup> Should the German husband not make use of the naturalization opportunity within the year, the Alsatian wife would lose her French citizenship.

The third category of the borderland population whose citizenship status was discussed in the Treaty of Versailles were Germans who resided in the province prior to the outbreak of war. French authorities considered any resident of Alsace to be German if they had migrated to the province during the Imperial period or were the descendant of a German immigrant. The Treaty expressly forbid any “old” German from automatically receiving French citizenship. It did, however, offer an avenue to French naturalization, provided that the applicant had lived in the *Reichsland* before August 3, 1914 and lived for an unbroken period of three years in the

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<sup>12</sup> Note from the Deutsche Passestelle, May 8, 1920, R 901 25935, BABL.

provinces after November 11, 1918.<sup>13</sup> Given the previous discussion of the difficulties many “old” German Alsatian soldiers encountered attempting to return to the province after the war, it is evident that they were at a distinct disadvantage when it came to the naturalization application process.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of citizenship policy, the Treaty of Versailles also reflected French authorities’ determination to proactively eliminate issues that had remained contentious in Franco-German relations throughout the Imperial period and at the same time, restrict Germany’s ability to meddle with the internal affairs of Alsace. Article 53 explicitly forbid the German government from asserting German nationality over any resident of the former *Reichsland* that the French government identified as French.<sup>15</sup> This clause was particularly significant for Alsatians of military age. In theory, Article 53 would effectively prevent Germany from becoming a safe haven for any Alsatian who French authorities deemed to have value – especially young men liable for French military service. The Article sought to remove the ambiguity that surrounded the nationality issue during the *Kaiserreich* by effectively codifying French definitions and removing the legal basis for Germany to contest individual cases.

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<sup>13</sup> “The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany,” 47-48, PH2 357, BAM.

<sup>14</sup> I have not found any archival evidence to support Patrick Weil’s assertion that the Treaty of Versailles “made it easy” for Germans that had migrated to Alsace prior to 1914 to obtain French nationality. See Weil, *How to Be French*, 241. This is especially true if the post-1871 naturalization process is compared to that following the First World War. In addition, the later discussion of required French military service for “old” Germans of military age that sought to remain in the province also refutes this observation.

<sup>15</sup> “The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany,” 39, PH2 357, BAM.

## Putting Policy into Practice: Identification Cards and Triage Commissions

Writing and codifying policy is in the end, however, much less complicated than putting these intentions into practice. In order for French officials to be able to judge if a resident of Alsace had automatically received French citizenship or was eligible for naturalization it was necessary to systematically classify the population of the province. The official categorization method adopted by French authorities revolved around an identification card system that divided the population into four groups, A, B, C, or D. The letters corresponded exactly to the different classifications of citizenship that were outlined in the Treaty of Versailles. “A” card holders were those residents of the province described in the first section of the Annex that themselves possessed French citizenship prior to May 10, 1871 or were the descendant of such individuals. “B” cards indicated that the bearer had at least one forbearer who was not of “pure” Alsatian stock; these were the residents of Alsace who could apply for French naturalization within the year of the ratification of the Treaty. “C” card holders were non-German foreigners who could also apply for naturalization within a year, so long as they were resident in Alsace before August 3, 1914. Finally, “D” cards were given to the residents of the *Reichsland* who themselves or their descendants had migrated from states that had been France’s enemies during the war. The majority of these recipients were Germans who had migrated to Alsace after the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>16</sup> A French newspaper article from 1923 reported that from the signing of the peace treaty to March 1921, some 78,000 Germans had been naturalized as French citizens and a further 70,434 Germans were resident in the provinces.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1:527-529.

<sup>17</sup> “En Alsace: La question des Allemands,” *Echo de Nationale*, August 24, 1923, R 901 35528, BABL.

French officials would rapidly discover that the application of seemingly straightforward classifications was problematic in the borderland. Family units and their members could not be categorized as a group and given a single corresponding identity card. Instead, the widespread intermarriage of the German and Alsatian population meant that an array of different identity cards were regularly issued within the same family. For instance, if an “old” Alsatian (“A” Card) married a woman with some German ancestry (“B” Card) their minor children would follow the nationality of the father, while adult children would receive “B” cards. In another situation, the children of an “old” Alsatian (“A” card) and an “old” German woman (“D” card) would receive “B” cards.<sup>18</sup>

The conferral of an identification card did not correspond to an awarding of French citizenship. The particular card that a resident of Alsace received, however, did reveal their ethnic classification from the official French perspective and in so doing disclosed their particular avenue to French citizenship according to the Treaty of Versailles. In the period between November 1918 and January 1920, the cards became a vehicle for identification and discrimination. The grade of an individual’s identity card determined their freedom of movement, ability to change money, vote, and job prospects in Alsace. The identification cards also had a profound impact upon the way in which Alsations viewed one another. The ethnic classification of the populace provoked societal divisions within the former *Reichsland*.<sup>19</sup> An approximate breakdown of the population of Alsace and Lorraine was that out of a total population of 1,894,950, 1,082,650 or 59% received A-Cards, 183,500 or 10% collected B-

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<sup>18</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1:529.

<sup>19</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 144.

Cards, 55,000 or 3% got C-Cards, and 573,800 or 28% were given D-Cards.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the identity card a resident of Alsace was issued would have a deep impact upon their experience in the newly French province.

The classification of the population of Alsace was a critical step in the reassertion of French sovereignty over the provinces. French authorities were convinced that a certain sifting of the population was necessary to excluded individuals judged to be irreconcilable to French rule. The undertaking of actively separating the population would be left up to the Triage Commissions. Laird Boswell has remarked on the inauspiciousness and symbolically significant title of the Commissions. “Triage” in the 1914-1918 war was associated with the sorting of the wounded at French field hospitals between those who could be treated and those who could not be saved. The use of the word in the postwar context of the former *Reichsland* implied a sorting of the population between “those deemed fit to belong to the national community and those who were not.”<sup>21</sup> French Premier Georges Clemenceau first ordered French troops to establish Triage Commissions in Alsace even before the cease-fire had been declared in November 1918. They would function until the French Chamber ratified the Treaty of Versailles on October 27, 1919. The Triage Commissions were tasked with identifying the “undesirable” elements of the Alsatian and Lorrainer population and deciding on an appropriate course of action that could range from surveillance in Alsace, to detention in the Interior of France, or expulsion to Germany. Director General Paul Valot related that he defined suspect individuals as those,

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<sup>20</sup> Mémoire de l’Agent du Gouvernement Allemand au sujet du droit des “Français par réclamation” d’intenter une action devant le Tribunal arbitral mixte,” October 15, 1925, R 901 35529, BABL.

<sup>21</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 2000, 145. Despite the martial connotations of the word, the Triage Commissions were charged with sorting the civilian population. Returning German Alsatians soldiers would be called before separate military commissions. See Rossé et al, *Das Elsass*, 1:532.

‘People, who before November 11, 1918 expressed pro-German sentiment or participated in anti-French demonstrations, those who had denounced others [for pro-French sentiment], those who had lent their aid before or during the war to our enemies in an objectionable manner, those who were deported in 1914 and by reason of the Bern Accord were returned home and used this opportunity to advise the Germans about affairs in France and the enlistment of their fellow [Alsace-Lorrainer] citizens in the French army, and those that accepted rank in the German army under conditions which could make their loyalism suspect.’<sup>22</sup>

Historians have since identified additional targets of the Triage Commissions, such as German labor leaders, former civil servants and state employees, women of “questionable” virtue, and “cultural mediators” such as teachers, religious leaders, and regionalists.<sup>23</sup> This wide array of potentially suspect actions allowed French authorities to bring charges against any individual thought to represent a latent problem for the new political regime. From the beginning, the Triage Commission trials were fraught with inconsistency and abuse. Boswell argues, “The commissions de triage were little more than sham trials that openly trampled on the rights of the accused.”<sup>24</sup> Defendants were not allowed to speak on their own behalf, nor allowed to confront their accusers.

The legacy of the Triage Commissions in Alsace was and continues to be contentious. The “sham trials” have been pointed to as one of the first French actions that caused widespread disillusionment among the Alsatian population and contributed to the growing *malaise-alsacien* that came to characterize the relationship between the province and France during the Interwar period.<sup>25</sup> Historians of the Interwar period argued that the French did not anticipate the larger

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<sup>22</sup> Rosse et al., *Das Elsass*, 1: 530.

<sup>23</sup> Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 2010, 131-132, Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 149.

<sup>24</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 147.

<sup>25</sup> David Allen Harvey, “Lost Children or Enemy Aliens? Classifying the Population of Alsace after the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), 553. The term *malaise alsacien* was utilized to describe the disillusionment of the Alsatian population with French rule. Harvey has cited a variety of factors that contributed to the disappointment with French policies including

ripple effect of the Triage Commissions. The trials embittered not only the accused, but also alienated their families, relatives, and wider circle of friends, who were direct observers of the injustices.<sup>26</sup> Considering that historians estimate that approximately 15,000 cases were brought before Triage Commissions in Alsace-Lorraine,<sup>27</sup> it is likely that a large percentage of the population had some type of connection with at least one triage defendant. Contemporary sources argued that Alsatians had been willing to acquiesce to a moderate “cleansing of the province,” but that ultimately French zealotry pushed the process too far and trampled on people’s rights in a way that echoed the German military dictatorship that the Alsatians had just escaped.<sup>28</sup> However, assigning all the blame to French officials would be misplaced. The entire triage process would have sputtered to a halt much earlier without the widespread popular practice of denunciation. Many of these anonymous local accusations, however, were not motivated by the pure francophile sentiment that French authorities wished, although they were often couched in national and patriotic rhetoric. Instead, the denunciations articulated pre- and wartime grievances and jealousies.<sup>29</sup> In the end, Alsatians’ popular memory of the Triage Commissions would not recall their own participation, but rather the injustice of French actions. Hatred of the trials united Alsatians of disparate religious, social, and political backgrounds.<sup>30</sup>

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economic difficulties, the clash between French centralization efforts and Alsatian particularism, struggles over language and religion, and the overall realization on both sides that the idealized France and Alsace was a figment of nationalists’ imagination.

<sup>26</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1:534.

<sup>27</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 148.

<sup>28</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1:534.

<sup>29</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 148, 157.

<sup>30</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 158.

## Postwar Expulsions and Voluntary Emigration

Both voluntary and forced emigration characterized the immediate postwar years in Alsace. The expulsions were an essential component of the French campaign to “cleanse” the province of the most egregious vestiges of the German administration and population deemed irreconcilable to France. Germans made up the largest contingent of expellees, but postwar national “sorting” efforts like the Triage Commissions also ensured that the “germanophile” elements of the Alsatian populace were also excluded. The forced migrations after 1918 marked a dramatic break with post-Franco-Prussian War residency and citizenship policies. The element of choice and proprietary protection was eliminated for many residents of Alsace after the First World War. In some cases, the expellees were given only twenty-four hours’ notice to pack 30-40 kilograms of luggage and a maximum 2,000 marks per adult and 500 marks per child and report to French authorities at a border crossing.<sup>31</sup> In other cases of voluntary emigration, some Germans found themselves caught in limbo between expulsion and residency.<sup>32</sup>

The nature of the expellees’ departure from Alsace was also a point of acrimony. French authorities were not content to allow those excluded from the province to quietly slip over the border to Germany. A pamphlet written by the Committee of Exiled Alsace-Lorrainers to the German National Assembly in Weimar accused French officers and officials of deliberately

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<sup>31</sup> “Dokument Nr. 38: Ein Ausweisungsbefehl/1919,” Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, vol. 4, 407.

<sup>32</sup> Professor W. Ignatius, “Wie ich 1919 aus Strassburg herauskam,” *Wir 143er* 3, no. 14 (August 20, 1931), 10, 1483 Stadtgeschichtliches Institut Bühl (hereafter cited as SGIB). Professor W. Ignatius was fired from his job, had his bank accounts in Alsace frozen, and having not yet received permission from French authorities to emigrate was unable to access the funds of his bank account in Berlin. Consequently, the family was forced to sell off their furniture one piece at a time in order to make ends meet.

exposing expellees to the physical and oral abuse of an Alsatian mob on the day of their departure by assembling them in Strasbourg's busiest square.<sup>33</sup> German sources further highlighted the supposed callousness and pettiness of the new French administrators by reporting the systematic search of expellees' luggage and their persons in order to prevent the expelled from leaving Alsace with more than the allotted financial resources. A particular point of objection was that French border agents separated the sexes and forcibly strip searched women expellees in front of white officers and colonial troops.<sup>34</sup> The body searches endangered not only the women's honor, but also their physical wellbeing. It was alleged that the meticulousness of the French investigative measures left women and children dangerously exposed to the cold elements in the beds of open trucks for hours at a time.<sup>35</sup>

In some cases, only the male head of household was targeted for expulsion, leaving families with an agonizing choice of separation for an unknown period of time or potential financial ruin through the loss of their possessions. This was often the case if the wife was judged to be a "pure" descendent of the pre-1871 French citizens. The case of Gustav Emil Arndt, a German immigrant who had resided in Hombourg-Bas since 1903 is illustrative. Arndt wrote from Germany to the President of the French Republic appealing his recent expulsion from Lorraine. Arndt described himself as an apolitical, harmless, and hardworking miner who enjoyed a faultless reputation among the populace of Hombourg-Bas. He claimed that the

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<sup>33</sup> Ausschuss vertriebener Elsass-Lothringer (Freiburg) to the Deutsche Nationalversammlung (Weimar), February 11, 1919, R 904 15, BABL.

<sup>34</sup> "Schamlos Übergriffe französischer Offiziere gegenüber ausreisenden und ausgewiesenen deutschen Frauen," R 1603 2344, BABL.

<sup>35</sup> "Schamlos Übergriffe französischer Offiziere gegenüber ausreisenden und ausgewiesenen deutschen Frauen," R 1603 2344, BABL.

denunciation was a neighbor's act of revenge after Arndt refused to give false testimony on his behalf. Arndt described the effect of the expulsion on his family,

As a born Lorrainer, I cannot expect my wife to follow me to Germany. If my return is not approved, it would cause a lasting separation and must lead to the break-up of our marriage. This separation would strike my family very hard. The upbringing of the children and the providing for the family would exceed my wife's strength!<sup>36</sup>

Arndt's plea to the President attempted to present himself and justify his return to Lorraine at a number of symbolically significant levels. The careful attention to characterize himself as "apolitical" and "harmless" was intended to dispute the automatic official assumption that his expulsion had been motivated by his own pro-German sentiment. In fact, the petition suggested that Arndt was in this lamentable position because he was *too* honest and honorable, refusing to compromise his integrity and bear false witness. An argument that he supported by referring to the "faultless" reputation he enjoyed prior to this incident, thereby effectively making the entire community of Hombourg- Bas his character witnesses. The argument also contained an economic component. Highlighting his occupation and industriousness intimated that it would be to the benefit of province and France itself to allow him to return. Finally, Arndt's letter contained a twofold familial argument. On the one hand, his reluctance to ask his wife to join him in Germany was motivated by the recognition that as an "old" Lorrainer she was an important member of the local and French national family. On the other hand, however, he recognized that his continued exclusion from the province would lead to a breakdown of his marriage and ultimately the proper functioning of his family, as his wife would be unable to fulfill both roles of caregiver and provider. In the end, therefore, it was in France's self-interest to include, rather than exclude, Arndt from the French national family. Unfortunately, the

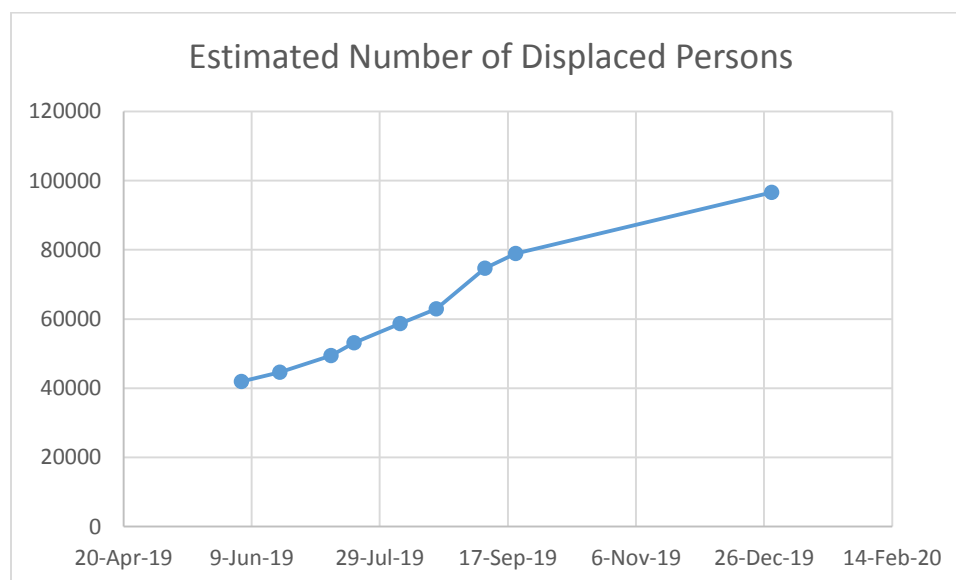
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<sup>36</sup> Bittgesuch des Bergmanns Gustav Emil Arndt von Nieder-Homburg (Lothringen) um Aufhebung eines Ausweisungsbefehls," December 12, 1919, R 901 35565, BABL.

outcome of this case must remain in doubt. German authorities reported that Arndt had de-registered with Spandau officials in February 1920 and had moved to an unknown location. Perhaps he was able to make it home to Lorraine after all.

The chaotic nature of the postwar period and inexact record keeping makes any attempt to count the number of Germans and Alsatians expelled from the province after 1918 at best an estimation. Historians and contemporary sources have generally agreed upon a number that ranges from 110,000<sup>37</sup> to 114,000<sup>38</sup>. A small sampling of reports I recovered from German archives covering the latter half of 1919 recounts that just up to the going into effect of the Treaty of Versailles on January 10, 1920, some 96,600 residents of the borderland had left Alsace.<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 10: Estimated Number of Displaced Persons from Alsace, June-December 1919**



<sup>37</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 141.

<sup>38</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1:523.

<sup>39</sup> Reports from Reichsministerium des Innern Abteilung für Elsass-Lothringen, June 5-December 29, 1919, R 901 35566, BABL.

**Figure 10 (cont'd)**

Date	Estimated Number of Displaced Persons
June 5, 1919	41,980
June 20, 1919	44,573
July 10, 1919	49,387
July 19, 1919	53,094
August 6, 1919	58,707
August 20, 1919	62,898
September 8, 1919	74,712
September 20, 1919	78,924
December 29, 1919	96,600

Yet statistics alone insufficiently describe the tremendous personal and societal disruption caused by the expulsions. Many of the German expellees had been born in the *Reichsland* and had deeper ties to Alsace than their “home” areas of Germany from which their ancestors had migrated. German authorities observed of the expellees that,

For the majority [of the “old” German expellees] their expulsion would mean more than economic ruin if they are robbed of their Heimat and their previous existences, if they are torn from cherished relationships and forced to begin a new life in foreign places where they have no relations to come to their aid.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the immediate human and financial costs, the expulsions of the German population in the years after the 1918 German defeat set a disastrous precedent and dangerous benchmark for the victor in the borderland.

Archival sources indicate a number of cases in which residents of Alsace instrumentally utilized the postwar issue of citizenship to their advantage. Two examples involved Alsatians escaping a prewar relationship. In Germany, a lawsuit was brought against Alsatian Petty

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<sup>40</sup> “Zusammenstellung über Proteste gegen das Vorgehen der französische Besatzungsbehörden in Elsass-Lothringen, namentlich gegen wirtschaftliche Massnahme,” R 901 80941, BABL.

Officer Second Class Hugo Schnebler by a young woman named Magdalena Hansen. Hansen alleged that in 1911 while still a minor she and Schnebler were engaged to be married and she eventually became pregnant. After Schnebler learned of her pregnancy he broke off their engagement “without any reason.”<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, the case was unable to advance because Schnebler was in Alsace and German authorities were unable to acquire the necessary information to determine his citizenship. In another case, the roles were switched and an Alsatian woman utilized her new status to escape her marriage to a German man. The plaintiff in this case, Jakob Birk, was a veteran and reported to German officials that after his demobilization he had returned to Alsace and been treated “as an Alsatian” and allowed to travel freely within the province and to France. Birk alleged, however, that his relationship with his wife had rapidly deteriorated after the arrival of the French. Not speaking French, while his wife was fluent, he inquired one day about what she was saying to her parents, to which she ominously replied, “You will soon see what is coming.” On May 18, 1919 he was called before the local French commandant in Erstein and informed that his naturalization was invalid. Birk chose to voluntarily leave Alsace rather than be expelled. Shortly thereafter his wife had applied for a new pass under her maiden name. Birk alleged that this practice was common and encouraged by French authorities because, “This has the purpose to document that the woman wishes to separate from her husband on account of his nationality.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Report from the Oberlandesgericht, Celle, June 4, 1920, R 901 30083, BABL.

<sup>42</sup> Testimony of Jakob Birk, June 3, 1919, R 904 15, BABL.

## Germany and the Alsatian Expellees

For Germany, the elimination of the *Reichsland* had significant ramifications in terms of its citizenship policies. In the 1913 National and State Citizenship Laws (*Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetzes*), Germans were defined as individuals who possessed the citizenship of a particular German state (*Staatsangehörigkeit*).<sup>43</sup> It was through this state membership that Bavarians, Hessians, Prussians, or Alsatians earned their German nationality (*Reichsangehörigkeit*). The elimination of Alsace as a political entity therefore removed the intermediary state membership that was necessary for national citizenship.<sup>44</sup> The loss of Alsace-Lorraine state citizenship was overcome in the majority of cases by the expellee applying for citizenship in the German state in which they settled. Alsatians' postwar naturalization applications make it clear that an ethnocultural connection to Germany was only one of several factors considered by German officials.<sup>45</sup> In justifying their petitions for the new state citizenship Alsatian applicants drew upon any connection they possessed with the state, such as military service, a spouse's former membership, familial ties, and current residency.

This same route to German citizenship, however, was not available to the Alsatian population resident in countries outside of Germany. In these cases, the lack of intermediary provincial citizenship necessitated the awarding of a direct form of national citizenship

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<sup>43</sup> "(Nr. 4263) Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitgesetz. Vom 22. Juli 1913," *Reichs-Gesetzblatt* Nr. 46, 583. Section 2 of the law specified that for the purposes of the citizenship law Alsace-Lorraine was to be considered a federal state (*Bundesstaat*).

<sup>44</sup> Contrary to Andreas Fahrmeier's observation, a unique "Alsace-Lorraine" citizenship existed in Imperial Germany that functioned as the necessary intermediary state membership for residents to be citizens of the German Empire. See Fahrmeier, *Citizens and Aliens*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Sammartino, "Culture, Belonging, and the Law," 57-72. Sammartino discusses naturalization policies and practices in Interwar Germany.

(*unmittelbare Reichsangehörigkeit*). The manner in which postwar German officials utilized this direct national inclusivity to meet contemporary challenges represented an adaptation and departure from the original purpose of the legislation, which had been designed for individuals living in German protectorates (*Schutzgebiet*) or former Germans and their descendants who had emigrated from the country.

The examination of Alsatians living in areas external to the province's national claimants complicates the dichotomous geographic construction of the "Alsace-Lorraine question" by demonstrating the existence of a web of transnational networks that crossed Swiss, Austrian, German, and French political borders. While German authorities were motivated to assist the "old" Alsatians out of a desire to maintain a linkage to ethnic Germans living outside the postwar political boundaries of the German state, they did not feel obligated to approve every naturalization petition simply because the applicant had at one time possessed German nationality.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the process of evaluating and independently judging naturalization applications proved to be a forum in which German authorities could exert a minimal, but nonetheless symbolically significant, resistance against resented postwar French policies and at a secondary level also provided the means to screen unwanted elements from the immigrating Alsatian population.<sup>47</sup> For their part, Alsatians' applications demonstrate a strategic interaction with German officials and naturalization motivations that combined elements of genuine national

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<sup>46</sup> Stefan Wolff, "Introduction," in *Coming Home to Germany? Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. David Rock and Stefan Wolff (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 1-18. Wolff examines the return migrations of ethnic Germans from areas of central and Eastern Europe following the First and Second World Wars.

<sup>47</sup> Eli Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany: Ethnicity, Utility, and Nationalism* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 4, 144. Nathans discusses German officials' evaluation of the "utility" of ethnic German citizenship applicants during the Imperial period.

sentiment with an appreciation of the tangible benefits that accompanied maintaining their German nationality.

Weimar authorities who wished to naturalize the “old” Alsatian applicants as Germans faced several significant obstacles to their efforts. Article 53 of the Treaty of Versailles led some officials to fundamentally question whether or not Germany could naturalize any Alsatian who was claimed by France. Another complicating factor related to the peace settlement was German authorities’ uncertainty as to whether or not any German naturalizations of Alsatians would, like all other German Alsace-Lorraine state citizenship, be nullified after the Treaty of Versailles went into effect. In this light, old Alsatians living abroad could only be granted direct German nationality after January 10, 1920.

The problem with this scenario was twofold. First, there was the potentiality that during the application process the petitioners could become “stateless,” which would complicate their ability to maintain residence in Switzerland or Austria. Second, having received French nationality, French authorities might not relinquish their claim upon the individual, particularly if they were male and of military age. The potential peril to an old Alsatian claimed by both Germany and France was the threat of arrest and impressment into French military service should they cross into French territory. German authorities rejected the notion that French law could dictate German naturalization decisions. However, in the end, there was little German authorities could do to protect old Alsatians of disputed nationality. This was demonstrated by the case of Albert Haenel, who had been awarded Prussian and German citizenship when he had taken up a bureaucratic position in Prussia. Haenel was, however, arrested and interned for failure to complete his French military obligations after he returned to Alsace to attend his sister’s funeral and only released after promising to report to the French consulate in Berlin. The

advice that the Prussian Minister of the Interior relayed for Haenel was to refrain from travelling to either the French occupied portion of Germany or France, lest he be arrested as a deserter.<sup>48</sup>

The initial attempts by old Alsatians living outside Germany and France to gain a particular German state citizenship and German officials' responses revealed widespread misunderstanding and uncertainty on the part of both petitioners and officials regarding German postwar citizenship policies. Yet it also demonstrated the willingness of Weimar officials to "bend" the existent citizenship laws in order to "save" a willing Alsatian for Germandom. Initially, German officials took the position that Alsatians who were naturalized prior to the going into effect of the Treaty of Versailles on January 10, 1920 would remain German despite the terms of the peace settlement. This judgment was increasingly challenged by other German authorities who argued that Article 53 of the Treaty would nullify *any* German claims on Alsatians, regardless if the naturalization had recently occurred. The proponents of this view argued that although it was unavoidable that any "old" Alsatian would become French, there was nothing to stop the German government from re-naturalizing Alsatians upon their application.<sup>49</sup>

There was also confusion on the part of the applicants who resided outside France and Germany. Instead of immediately applying for direct German nationality, applications from foreign residing Alsatians often began with an attempt to gain a particular state's citizenship. The case of Paul Jakob Kieffer is illustrative. Kieffer resided in Vienna, but first submitted an application for Prussian citizenship. In order to support his petition he utilized a plethora of justifying factors. He wrote, "I would like to remain German because I am an Alsatian of German nationality, completed three years of active serve in the Prussian Ulan Regiment No. 6

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<sup>48</sup> Preussische Minister des Innern to the Polizeipräsident Berlin, February 5, 1926, R 901 35529, BABL.

<sup>49</sup> IIIb 20349, December 12, 1919, R 901 30081, BABL.

in Hanau, campaigned in the 1914/1918 conflict from beginning to end, earlier lived for an extended period in Prussia, and have absolutely no desire to be French. Furthermore, my wife is Prussian and my forefathers immigrated to Alsace before it was German.”<sup>50</sup> Kieffer contended that all of these factors cumulatively contributed to his “feeling” Prussian and having a strong sympathy for the state. The convincingness of Kieffer’s argument was demonstrated when the German ambassador wrote to the German Foreign Office recommending the approval of his application.

War service in a provincial military formation was regularly utilized as justification to claim citizenship in a German state. For their part, German officials likewise looked to the wartime record of applicants to ascertain if the individual had fulfilled or shirked their martial responsibilities. Alsations’ widespread efforts to highlight their military service as a means to further legitimate their applications and German authorities’ evaluation of wartime records once again demonstrates the intimate connection between martial responsibilities and national inclusion.

German officials identified old Alsatian veterans as comprising a large percentage of applicants residing outside of Germany and France seeking direct citizenship. The German ambassador in Zurich explained the situation, “From the [Alsatian] soldiers it is repeatedly emphasized that they do not want to be members of a state against which they served for years as German soldiers.”<sup>51</sup> Others mentioned they opted for German citizenship in order to protect their sons from French military service. The case of Viktor Monigny is illustrative. Monigny was of Alsatian descent, but since 1913 had been living near Vienna. In explaining the

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Jakob Kiefer to the German Ambassador in Vienna, September 19, 1919, R 901 30080, BABL.

<sup>51</sup> Generalkonsulat, Zurich to the Deutsche Gesandtschaft, Bern, May 24, 1921, R 901 35527, BABL.

motivations for his application he wrote, “My attitude is as before German from the bottom of my heart and it is my most ardent wish to be able to remain so.”<sup>52</sup> Monigny also highlighted his period of service in the Bavarian army from 1915-1919 and that his brother resided in Munich. That the German ambassador found these particular points of his argument compelling is evident in their reiteration in a letter of support that was sent to the German Foreign Office.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, despite his lack of residence in Bavaria, authorities in Munich declared themselves ready to approve Monigny’s application so long as the provisions of the peace treaty had not yet come into force.<sup>54</sup> The willingness of Bavarian officials to expedite Monigny’s application is even more noteworthy when it is taken into account that at the same time, the Bavarians were demanding that other German states strictly adhere to the existent naturalization laws in order to avoid a “foreign infiltration” of Austrian-Galician and Russian-Polish Jews.<sup>55</sup> It demonstrates a simultaneous desire to cling to the old order in order to exclude unwanted groups, while at the same time illustrating a willingness to break with precedent policy in individual cases in order to save “desirable” elements.

This case is important because it falls in the transitory period of uncertain sovereignty in Alsace. Although the French would not officially regain full control over the province until January 10, 1920, they had already begun introducing French laws and legislation since their

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<sup>52</sup> Viktor Monigny to the German Ambassador in Vienna, October 3, 1919, R 901 30080, BABL.

<sup>53</sup> Specifically, the ambassador observed, “I think his [Monigny’s] request for acquisition of Bavarian citizenship should be approved on the warmest of terms in view of the fact that his parents were old Alsatians, that he himself declares that he is German with his whole heart and served in the Bavarian army from 1915 until 1919.” See German Ambassador in Vienna to the Auswärtiges Amt, October 9, 1919, R 901 30080, BABL

<sup>54</sup> Ministerium des Innern, Munich to the Auswärtiges Amt, November 29, 1919, R 901 30081, BABL.

<sup>55</sup> Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen*, 354.

reoccupation of the area in November 1918. The fact that Alsace was still, however, technically a part of Germany in November 1919 was utilized by German officials as justification to circumvent the as yet inactive provisions of the peace settlement. In the end, Monigny was awarded direct German citizenship because of his lack of residency in Bavaria and the fact that the process of naturalization could not be completed prior to January 10, 1920.

In another case, “old” Alsatian Alfred Weisz related to German officials in Zurich that,

Despite my old Alsatian heritage, I am not infatuated with France and hope that in consideration of my loyal service during the war that my application will quickly be approved, because I urgently need the proper papers in order to obtain permanent residence in Switzerland.<sup>56</sup>

Weisz’ statement reveals his awareness of German beliefs regarding Alsatians pro-French sentiments and sets out to explicitly refute this assumption. Moreover, his statement reveals an expectation of reciprocity. Weisz argued that his service in the recently ended war entitled his application to a speedy consideration and a positive decision by German officials – despite the fact that he openly declared his intention to remain in Switzerland.

Military service could often make up for other deficiencies in an application. Local German consulate officials in Switzerland and Austria often worded their support for the Alsatian veterans’ applications by framing it as a “gain for Germandom.” Thus commenting upon the case of Johann Marie Hornung, the German ambassador in Bern related that,

Hornung is a combatant and pensioner. Even though a material gain is not expected from his re-naturalization it nonetheless is in line with the inexpensiveness and in the spirit of the new National and State Citizenship Law (*Reichs- and Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*) to reincorporate someone who with weapons in hand defended Germandom for four and a half years and through no fault of their own lost their German nationality (*Reichsangehörigkeit*). The application will therefore be approved here.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Alfred Weisz’ Testament at the German Consulate in Zurich, April 15, 1920, R 901 30082, BABL.

<sup>57</sup> German Ambassador in Bern to the Auswärtiges Amt, May 18, 1920, R 901 30082, BABL.

Although it is not articulated in Hornung's petition letter nor in the resultant letter of support to the Foreign Office from German consulate officials in Bern, German authorities were also aware that the higher pensions paid by Germany were a strong attractant to the war disabled and survivors of soldiers killed during the war.<sup>58</sup>

It was not only old Alsatian veterans themselves who drew upon their military service to justify applications for German citizenship. Women whose husbands had been Alsatians and killed while fighting for Germany during the recent conflict utilized their spouse's sacrifice as a means of furthering their applications. Alsatian war widows had a vested interest in maintaining their German citizenship. Becoming stateless or French meant that they no longer would be eligible to receive the provision for dependents that Germany had bestowed upon the survivors of wartime casualties. Widows chose to apply for German citizenship for both practical and personal reasons.

The widow Hedwig Appredevis informed German consular officials in Basel that although she and her children had the option to apply for French citizenship based on her husband's "old" Alsatian heritage, she would prefer to remain German "because my husband lost his life during his German war service and because my children and I receive 123.48 M monthly."<sup>59</sup> The mention of her late husband's war service and death for the Reich indicates a sense of reciprocity on Appredevis' part. An expectation that on account of her husband's sacrifice German authorities would not only continue to provide her family with a monthly stipend, but also look favorably upon her nationality application. At another level, just as some "old" Alsatian veterans did not wish to be a part of the state they had spent four years fighting, so

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<sup>58</sup> Preussische Minister des Innern to the Polizeipräsident Berlin, February 5, 1926, R 901 35529, BABL.

<sup>59</sup> Widow Hedwig Apprederis to the deutsche Gesandtschaft, Basel, June 18, 1920, R 901 30083, BABL.

too did some Alsatians' war widows not wish to be a citizen of the state that killed their husbands.

The application of Lina Klein is also exemplary. Klein herself was originally from Bavaria, but had received Alsace-Lorraine state citizenship after her marriage to Alsatian Georg Ludwig Klein. Klein related that her husband had been killed in France, but because the nationality of the children followed that of the father, she and her children were now faced with the prospect of becoming French citizens.<sup>60</sup> As a result, she applied to be re-naturalized as a Bavarian citizen and also requested that the same status be extended to her children. The rhetoric and evidence Klein mobilized in the application reflected what she believed German authorities considered important when judging a naturalization petition. Klein did not base her claim on her own previous connection to Bavaria, but instead on the fact that her husband had died as a member of a Bavarian military unit. She further sought to strengthen her argument by relating to German officials a conversation she allegedly had with her husband prior to his death. Klein wrote, "I also want to say that my husband was ever of a good German attitude and in 1915 himself said that in the event that Alsace became French he wished to be accorded Bavarian citizenship."<sup>61</sup> Thus, Klein portrayed herself as fulfilling the last wishes of her husband who had made the ultimate sacrifice on the field of battle for Germany. It was a compelling argument and earned her the support of German officials in Zurich, who oversaw and hastened

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<sup>60</sup> Incidentally, Klein was only partially correct in this evaluation of her position. According to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles her children would have automatically received French citizenship, while she would have had to apply within a year to be naturalized as a French citizen.

<sup>61</sup> Copy of Interview with Karolina Klein-Schwartz from German Consulate in Zurich, October 15, 1919, Nr. I 8268, R 901 30080, BABL.

the process of awarding the Bavarian citizenship to the family, so it could be completed before the Treaty of Versailles went into effect.

In another case, German consulate officials in Zurich supported the application of a widow Emilie Diemunsch by observing,

Because the applicant, who according to the Schaffhausen police enjoys a faultless reputation, is a war widow whose husband died for the Fatherland whilst loyally fulfilling his duty as a soldier, and by her earnest interest in preserving her and her children's Germanness that has been manifested through her efforts to secure direct German nationality (*Reichsangehörigkeit*), I am able to warmly support her application.<sup>62</sup>

Thus in the applications from old Alsatian veterans and their survivors we are witness to a range of factors that included the fulfillment of military obligations, personal national loyalties, pre-existent familial connections, reputation, and evidence of sacrifice for Germany as being important elements of a successful naturalization petition.

Alsatian parents whose sons had been killed while fighting for Germany likewise drew upon this sacrifice to justify the continuation of their German citizenship. This was the case for Antonin Charrière who had been born in Switzerland, but naturalized as an Alsace-Lorraine citizen. Both of Charrière's sons had fought for Germany in the First World War. The first son, Hans, had lost the use of his arm following a serious wounding and the younger son, Georg, had been killed defending Tsingtau from the Japanese in 1914. Reporting on Charrière's application, officials from the German consulate in Bern reported that "Nothing derogatory here is known about Herr Charrière. He is German minded...His naturalization can be expected to be a gain for Germandom. The application is therefore highly recommended."<sup>63</sup> The process of basing a citizenship claim on the actions and sacrifices of a descendent must be seen at one level as an

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<sup>62</sup> Generalkonsulat Zurich to the Auswärtiges Amt, July 5, 1920, R 901 30083, BABL.

<sup>63</sup> Köcher in Bern to the Auswärtiges Amt, March 16, 1920, R 901 30081, BABL.

attempt to maximize the symbolic resonance of an application, yet it also marked an interesting shift in nationality based on ascendants to an avenue that was made possible by the actions of the younger generation.

Not all applications for direct national citizenship were approved. In fact, the decision to award German citizenship to former residents of Alsace and Lorraine became a point of pushback for German authorities against the resented French policies. A memorandum from Berlin reported that there was no part of the Treaty of Versailles that forced Germany to extend German citizenship to former Alsace-Lorrainers who had been rejected by the French.<sup>64</sup> The details of the case of Karl Hagemann is instructive in that it reveals the manner in which German authorities evaluated and judged naturalization applications and at a broader level provides insight into the officially drawn boundaries of national belonging in the postwar period. A close study of Hagemann's application reveals several key points of difference with other citizenship attribution attempts. He was born in Basel as the illegitimate son of a naturalized Alsatian and fulfilled his two years of active military service from 1904-1906. Following the outbreak of World War I, Hagemann reported for duty but was rejected on account of a cardiac defect, but subsequently served in an officially prescribed non-combatant role from March 1916 until July 1918. He was recalled to service in October 1918, but chose not to report because his wife was gravely ill. As a result of his failure to appear, Hagemann was indicted for desertion, a decision that was later reversed in December 1918 by the general amnesty order. Following the end of hostilities Hagemann learned he was in danger of becoming stateless and consequently petitioned French officials in Mulhouse for French citizenship. His application was turned down and

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<sup>64</sup> Memorandum from Berlin, June 26, 1923, R 901 35528, BABL.

subsequently turned to German authorities. Hagemann closed the testimony by relating he planned on permanently residing in Switzerland and had no intention of settling in Germany.<sup>65</sup>

Hagemann's frankness to German officials regarding his earlier inquiry to French officials, the fact that he declared his intention to permanently reside in Switzerland and not return to Germany, and the charge of desertion (even if it was later struck down) contradicted the fundamental purpose of the direct citizenship at several levels. First, the fact that German citizenship was clearly Hagemann's second choice rankled the pride of Weimar authorities who even in defeat saw membership in the German nation as something valuable and second to none – especially France. Second, by declaring the unlikelihood of his return to Germany, Hagemann effectively burst the nationalist idealization that saw the use of direct German citizenship as a means to maintain the awardee's connection to Germany and left open the possibility (no matter how slight) of the recipient one day returning to the Reich. Hagemann's obvious instrumental desire for German nationality articulated what was present to different degrees in other applications from foreign residing old Alsatians but remained unstated. For instance, when the German consulate in Vienna asked applicant Friedrich Fischesser about the likelihood of his migrating to Bavaria in order to take up Bavarian citizenship, Fischesser tactfully responded that "...currently I am not in the position to dwell within Bavarian territory, for that reason I am requesting conferment of German national citizenship (*Reichsangehoerigkeit*)."<sup>66</sup> Fischesser's statement with its vague reference to existing relocation hindrances and lack of definitive timeframe for a return, nonetheless did not completely discount the possibility of a return to

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<sup>65</sup> Testimony of Karl Hagemann taken at the Generalkonsulat, Zurich, January 9, 1920, R 901 30081, BABL.

<sup>66</sup> Friedrich Fischesser to the German Consulate in Vienna, April 26, 1920, R 901 30083, BABL.

Bavaria in the future. Finally, German authorities mention of Hagemann's failure to completely satisfy his duties as a German citizen during the war and its use as one of several reasons to turn down his application for direct citizenship, demonstrated that a single failure of national obligations could negate years of otherwise faithful service.

The study of the foreign residing old Alsatian population and its interaction with local consulate and distant German state officials demonstrates the existence of a transnational network that crossed German, French, Austrian, and Swiss borders. Moreover it highlights the instrumental use of German nationality amongst both the Alsatian petitioners and the direct citizenship awarding German authorities. Many of the former sought to maintain their German citizenship out of a genuine national conviction, but successful applicants also benefited from the continuation of German sponsored monetary subsidies and protection for themselves or their children from French military service. For their part, German officials utilized the application process as a means to exclude "unworthy" elements and as a means for limited push back against resented postwar French policies. In the end, the study of expatriate old Alsatian communities demonstrates the connection between military service and national inclusion, provides an outline of the boundaries of German citizenship in the postwar period, and should again remind us that national belonging involves more than just blood or residence location. Instead, as the case of the old Alsatian applicants from Switzerland and Austria demonstrates, national citizenship was a status earned through personal conviction, reputation, service, and sacrifice.

The citizenship policies that were established by the Treaty of Versailles played a critical role in determining the experiences of veterans of the German army who resided in Alsace. The Treaty's creation of three distinct categories of citizens in the province introduced a hierarchy that established and prioritized descent, previous citizenship, and place of residence as key

determining factors in judging the “worthiness” or “authenticness” of an individual’s right to remain in Alsace in the postwar period. French authorities sought to realize their vision of an Alsace cleansed of German influence by utilizing identification cards and Triage Commissions that were intended to assist in the process of reasserting French sovereignty over the province. In the end, however, French efforts to separate and distinguish population elements of Alsace had the opposite effect of their original intention. Far from further securing French power, the trials and expulsions quickly disillusioned many residents of the province and made them fundamentally question their assumptions about France.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Alsations' Service in the French Military during the Interwar Period**

"I request that the Association of Alsace-Lorrainers apply all its influence on the proper Reich's authorities to ensure in the coming peace talks that all Alsace-Lorrainers who were mobilized on the German side and swore an oath to the German flag, whether they participated in combat or not, be freed from later French military service."<sup>1</sup>

~Pastor E. Westthal to the elsass-lothringische Auskunftsstelle, November 19, 1918.

"There is no need to call up the class of 1918. Such a measure would be similar to that taken by the Germans in 1871, which exempted the class born in 1850 from all military obligations. It should be noted on this subject that the situations are not exactly comparable because the German [actions] were aimed at a [population] who were foreigners to them, while we are recovering Frenchmen."<sup>2</sup>

~"Report...on the Question of Incorporating the Alsace-Lorrainers," September 15, 1919.

"Before making the Alsace-Lorrainers good soldiers, it is essential to make them good Frenchmen."<sup>3</sup>

~Colonel Bourdeau to the Ministre de la Guerre, July 11, 1919.

From the outset, French authorities intended that "old" Alsations should quickly be incorporated into the French military. In this respect, their actions were similar to their German counterparts in 1872. A fine, but crucial difference existed in French authorities' understanding of the purpose of martial service. After the Franco-Prussian War, Imperial authorities had believed that time spent in the German army would be one of the best ways to reconcile Alsations with Germany. In 1918, French officials saw service in the French ranks as a way to

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor E. Westthal to the elsass-lothringische Auskunftsstelle, November 19, 1918, R 901 86420, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> "Rapport au Commissaire Général de la République sur la question de l'Incorporation des Alsaciens-Lorrains (classes 1918-1919)," September 15, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>3</sup> Colonel Bourdeau to the Ministre de la Guerre, July 11, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

(re)acclimate “authentic” Alsatians to French language and culture.<sup>4</sup> Critically, however, military service did not need to educate “true” residents of the province to be good French patriots because in authorities’ minds they already were and predisposed to be so by their bloodlines. In the French ranks, recruits from the former *Reichsland* would be (re)introduced to the French language and mores and so (re)awaken the latent pro-Francophile sentiment that officials were convinced resided in every Alsatian. Military service was also a path to citizenship for the “old” German population, but the requisites involved longer periods of enlistment in non-regular French forces. Ironically, in their efforts to optimize the effectiveness of the martial experience, French authorities adopted policies that resembled German actions during the Imperial period. The population of Alsace, recognizing the similarities, reacted as they had under German administration and utilized similar rhetoric to argue that they were being treated as untrustworthy second-class citizens.

### **Setting the Terms of Military Service**

The military duties owed by residents of Alsace to the French state after World War I were closely tied to the individual’s identity prescribed to them by the French government. French authorities were careful to specify that only “Alsace-Lorrainers” could volunteer for regular French military service. “Alsace-Lorrainers” were only those individuals who had automatically received French citizenship according to the Treaty of Versailles or had the right to reclaim their French citizenship.<sup>5</sup> This distinction was important because French officials

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<sup>4</sup> In 1918 only 3.8% of the population of the Lower-Rhine and 6.1% of the Upper-Rhine spoke French. See Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians*, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Commissariat Général de la République to the Ministre de Guerre, October 13, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

moved quickly to begin incorporating military-aged Alsatians into the French army. The decision to require Alsatians who had already served in the German army to complete a period of service in the French military was controversial and met with significant amount of pushback from the Alsatian populace. Another point of contention was the length of compulsory military service. In France recruits were required to serve three years, while their German counterparts served two. Ultimately, French authorities would mitigate the amount of time that Alsatians had to spend in the French army. This was accomplished by including an individual's period of service in the German army towards the necessary three year French total. Additionally, German Alsatians soldiers who had been demobilized after the November 11 armistice could also count the time they spent at home.<sup>6</sup> The net result of these rules was a significant reduction of the number of young Alsatian men forced to complete double military service and the amount of time they had to serve. Initially, French officials had intended that Alsatians and Lorrainers who were a part of the classes of 1917, 1918, and 1919 would be incorporated in the same manner and with the same service requirements as any other Frenchman. In the end, however, only Alsatians of the 1919 class were called up and served total of three months in the French army.<sup>7</sup> Residents of Alsace who did not automatically receive French citizenship, but were eligible to apply for naturalization within a year could receive the same benefits as the "old" Alsatians of their class. An important caveat to this provision was that the naturalization application had to

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<sup>6</sup> "Rapport au Commissaire Général de la République sur la question de l'Incorporation des Alsaciens-Lorrains (classes 1918-1919)," September 15, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>7</sup> "Note relative aux conditions d'application de la loi de recrutement aux Alsaciens-Lorrains des Classes 1918 et 1919," October 17, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

be submitted within a month of the ratification of the peace treaty. Later applicants would be forced to serve the full three years.<sup>8</sup>

The “volunteerism” of an Alsatian was a key consideration for French authorities and could potentially positively or negatively affect an individual’s experience. French authorities rewarded pro-French volunteerism among the Alsatian population. Individuals who had volunteered for the French army before November 11, 1918 were to be freed from any further military obligation, regardless of the amount of time they had served. “Old” Alsations who enlisted after the armistice were to be freed after six months of service.<sup>9</sup> French statistics for the month of October 1919 from the cities of Strasbourg and Colmar provide an approximation of the number and age distribution of “old” Alsations who decided to volunteer for French military service. The figures reported were as follows:

**Table 14: Class Distribution of Volunteers from Strasbourg and Colmar, October 1919<sup>10</sup>**

Class Year	Number of Volunteers	Class Year	Number of Volunteers
1899	1	1911	4
1900	1	1912	2
1901	0	1913	2
1902	0	1914	1
1903	4	1915	1
1904	0	1916	0
1905	0	1917	0
1906	1	1918	16
1907	3	1919	32
1908	2	1920	22
1909	0	1921	22
1910	0	1922	1
		Total	115

<sup>8</sup> “Rapport au Commissaire Général de la République sur la question de l’Incorporation des Alsaciens-Lorrains (classes 1918-1919),” September 15, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>9</sup> “Note relative aux conditions d’application de la loi de recrutement aux Alsaciens-Lorrains des Classes 1918 et 1919,” October 17, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>10</sup> “Compte-Rendu sur les engagements volontaires des Alsaciens Lorrains pendant le mois d’octobre 1919,” November 3, 1919, 121 AL 314.

The statistics show that the great majority (80.9%) of Alsatians who volunteered for French military service were individuals from the classes of 1918 and beyond, who had not completed or only partially fulfilled their military service requirements in the German army. Evidence that the individuals who voluntarily enlisted were motivated by a desire to serve six months or less as opposed to three full years is evident in another enlistment trend that Table 14 illustrates. The chart is striking in that only a negligible amount of Alsatians who had fought in the war and completely fulfilled their military obligations chose to reenlist in the French military. In July 1922, French sources would report that 2,200 Alsatians and Lorrainers had either voluntarily enlisted or re-enlisted in the French army since 1919.<sup>11</sup>

Not all volunteers, even if they were Alsatians, were unconditionally accepted into the ranks of the French regular army. Potential applicants were required to produce a number of officially endorsed certificates that attested to the individual's morality and French loyalism. In order to meet this latter prerequisite, the prospective volunteer was required to be endorsed by two local notables with "known French sentiment," the mayor, and officially certified by a local administrator. The bestowal of loyalism certificates proved to be troublesome from both the prospective volunteer and French authorities. Officials complained about the difficulty of obtaining all the necessary signatures and the uneven application of the volunteer requirements. For example it was reported that it was especially difficult to receive loyalism papers in Strasbourg and Saverne in comparison to other communities.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to M. le Garde des Sceaux Ministre de la Justice, July 10, 1922, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

<sup>12</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Généraux Commandants Supérieurs des Territoires d'Alsace-Lorraine, September 22, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

Moreover, volunteerism could also have adverse consequences if it occurred in the wrong context. Any prospective Alsatian volunteer for French military service who had served in the German army was only to be admitted after a “rigorous” investigation of the circumstances surrounding their entrance into the German ranks, their wartime actions, and national sentiment.<sup>13</sup> Any hint at personal willingness to serve beyond the minimum duties in the German army was met with suspicion by French authorities. The newspaper *Matin* reported a case involving an Alsatian career officer that was argued before a French appellate court. The individual involved had joined the Imperial army in 1884 and following the 1914-1918 conflict decided to remain in the German army and was subsequently promoted to colonel in 1920. Two years later the officer decided to return to Alsace and apply for French citizenship under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. The application was rejected by both a tribunal in Colmar and later appellate court on the grounds that the applicant had remained in the German army after the Armistice and for that reason could not take advantage of the treaty clause that provided for the full integration of Alsatians into French nationality.<sup>14</sup>

The military service requirements for members of the class of 1920 also illustrate how critical it was for Alsatians to prove they had been “forcibly” incorporated into the Imperial army. In the latter stages of the war, a certain number of Alsatians from the class of 1920 had been called early to the German colors. Similarly to earlier policy, these individuals were permitted to count the time spent in German ranks towards the three year French service requirement. This benefit, however, was only extended to individuals who had been drafted into

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<sup>13</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Généraux Commandants Supérieurs des Territoires d’Alsace-Lorraine, September 22, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

<sup>14</sup> “Un colonel allemand voulait redevenir français,” *Matin*, Jne 30, 1928, R 901 35529, BABL.

the German military. Young men who had voluntarily enlisted were forced to complete their three full years of service.<sup>15</sup>

A similar situation existed for Alsatians who had served as officers in the German army. A French decree from February 24, 1920 fixed the conditions by which German Alsatian officers could receive an equivalent French rank. Alsatian recruits from the 1918 class and older could request to take a special course during their first exercises in the French army. After they completed the program they were made eligible to be promoted to the correspondent rank in the French military that they had held in the German army. This opportunity, however, was only available to Alsatians who had been involuntarily promoted by their superiors. Alsatians who had willingly served as active officers in the German army were forced to enlist as regular soldiers in the French army with the rest of their class.<sup>16</sup> Distinguishing between “voluntary” and “compulsory” promotion would likely have been a difficult task for French authorities. It appears, however, that the transfer of rank was not widespread in practice. A newspaper, *La Dépêche de Strasbourg*, reported that the law remained dead letter because of the intransigence of French soldiers from the interior who refused to serve under former German officers. The author related a conversation regarding the matter he allegedly had recently held with a French veteran, who summed up refusal by saying “I would never salute an officer who had served in the livery of the King of Prussia!”<sup>17</sup> The writer went on to point out that it was unfair to judge Alsatians on their actions in the Imperial army while they were German citizens and also

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<sup>15</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Général Gouverneur Militaire de Metz, September 21, 1920, 121 AL 311, ADBR.

<sup>16</sup> “Reserveoffiziere,” *La République* Nr. 71, March 11, 1920, 121 AL 309, ADBR.

<sup>17</sup> “Les Alsaciens et Lorrains Officiers dans l’armée française,” *La Dépêche de Strasbourg*, December 30, 1920, 121 AL 309, ADBR.

remarked that there were a myriad of reasons why a young soldier would accept an officer's stripes.

Despite these concessions, French authorities continued to face significant opposition at the local level on the issue of Alsatians serving in the French army. This was particularly the case for young soldiers who had served in the German army. Some newspapers in Alsace reported that even the most ardent supporters of France among the ex-German Alsatian soldiers displayed a reluctance to further engage in the military profession after having already completed three years of military service.<sup>18</sup> One article acknowledged the concession made by the French government to Alsatian public opinion when dual serving Alsatian classes were assigned an abbreviated period in the French ranks. Yet the article remarked, "In our opinion, it would have been better if these young people had been completely freed from military service in consideration of their previous service, just as had occurred after 1870 with the 'slippage class'."<sup>19</sup> Other newspaper articles were more direct in their criticism of the call-ups. The *Freie Presse* described the frustration among demobilized Alsatian soldiers, who happy to be free from "Prussian militarism," had had just enough time to return to their prewar civilian jobs and lives before being called to the French army. The *Freie Presse* acknowledged that the former German Alsatian soldiers who returned home after the armistice were advantaged over their compatriots that had enlisted in the French army during the war and were forced to remain mobilized while peace negotiations were ongoing. However, the author likewise pointed out that in 1871

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<sup>18</sup> "Revue de la Presse Alsacienne," September 16, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>19</sup> "Von unsern Conscrits," *L'Alsacien* Nr. 79, February 27, 1920, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

Imperial officials had gifted unserved time to French Alsatian veterans.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the best summary of the “old” Alsatian position is provided in a quote from *Der Elsässer*. In this article the author observed,

We are convinced that service in the French army is not comparable to how Prussian militarism treated its soldiers. But a soldier is a soldier and force is force, whether it is mildly or harshly administered. We are no longer in the mental frame of mind to once again play the soldier. We have, even if still young in years, traveled far beyond our age so that we view military service only as a chore from which one should spare us, as the Germans did in 1871.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, a certain degree of pushback against Alsatian reluctance was also present in the province. Some Alsatian newspapers took the position that the service of young Alsatian men in the French army was both reasonable and desirable. As an article in the *Unterlander Kurier* read, “Alsations are from time immemorial renowned as a soldiering people and with pride our fathers and grandfathers recounted of their time spent under the French flag. Our 20 year olds, who are blood of our blood, will no doubt think nothing else.”<sup>22</sup> The statement was a veiled threat. The article’s intimation that all “true” Alsations would welcome the opportunity to emulate their forbearers’ service in the French ranks was accompanied by the unarticulated suggestion that those who did object might not be full-blooded Alsations at all.

French policies that diminished the amount of time that Alsations were required to serve in the French army were not extended to Germans of military age that were resident of Alsace and sought to obtain French citizenship according to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. The peace settlement had made provisions for Germans obtaining French citizenship, but French

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<sup>20</sup> “Einberufung der Elsässer und Lothringer,” *Freie Presse* Nr. 207, September 8, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>21</sup> “Zur Einberufung der Jahresklassen 18 und 19,” *Der Elsässer* no. 246, September 8, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>22</sup> “Einberufung der Jahresklassen 18 und 19,” *Unterlander Kurier*, September 2, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

officials were not willing to allow a significant population of military aged men with questionable national loyalties simply to remain idly in the province. Instead, “old” Germans would earn their place and claim to membership in Alsace and the larger French nation through military service. French authorities claimed that this martial requirement was not motivated by a fear of large numbers of “old” Germans residing in the province, for as the Minister of War explained,

If Germany had remained powerful, it would be dangerous to too easily admit a large number of its subjects for naturalization. However in the current circumstances, which promise that Germany will not be a concern for many years to come, it is possible without imposing excessive conditions to grant to these [German] subjects resident on French territory, French nationality. The fact of having to serve in the Foreign Legion and not taking into account previously accomplished [military] service like the other Alsatians and Lorrainers seems to be a sufficient aggravation to the normally imposed naturalization obligations.<sup>23</sup>

In practice, French policies stipulated that Germans who belonged to the 1918 and subsequent classes were required to enlist for a period of three years of service in the French Foreign Legion.<sup>24</sup> This commitment had to occur within two months of the going into effect of the peace treaty. Following the completion of their three years of service the “old” German recruit would be naturalized and freed from any further military obligations. Germans from older classes who were still eligible for service in the active reserves according to French military law were required to enlist for a minimum one year of service in the Legion. These individuals would also

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<sup>23</sup> Le Président du Conseil, Ministre de la Guerre to the Commissaire Général de la République, July 27, 1919, 121 AL 307, ADBR.

<sup>24</sup> It is this requirement that must make us question Patrick Weil’s observation that the Treaty of Versailles “made it easy for Germans who had emigrated to Alsace-Moselle – before or during its attachment to France – to obtain French nationality.” See Weil, *How to be French*, 241. At a minimum, it cautions us against making general, “one-size-fits all” statements regarding French policies in Alsace after 1918.

be naturalized, but still required to perform the legal military duties correspondent to their age in the French army.<sup>25</sup>

### **Official Purpose and Goals of Alsatian Military Service**

French authorities, just as their German counterparts before them, hoped that the French military would be a reconciliatory institution. Authorities sought to expose Alsatian recruits to the French *milieu* in order to maximize the assimilatory power of the military experience. A fundamental goal of these efforts was a near complete immersion of the young Alsatian men in French language and customs. French officials were convinced that such absorption could only take place in a context in which recruits were continually surrounded by French culture. This assumption by default meant that young Alsations could not be garrisoned in Alsace, lest they gravitate towards the familiar local culture rather than that of France. The decision was justified with the observation that stationing the Alsations outside the province was “necessary to melt Alsace-Lorraine into the French nation and teach Alsace-Lorrainers the French language.”<sup>26</sup> Yet French authorities were wary that too complete an immersion might lead to disorientation and disillusionment among Alsations. As a result, officials ordered soldiers from the former *Reichsland* to be incorporated into regiments external to the province, but maintained the recruit’s proximity to home by stationing them in areas of northeast France that bordered Alsace; geographically covering the area that stretched between the cities Besançon, Reims, and

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<sup>25</sup> “Rapport au Commissaire Général de la République sur la question de l’Incorporation des Alsaciens-Lorrains (classes 1918-1919),” September 15, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>26</sup> “Propositions relatives au Recrutement,” June 21, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

Charleville-Mézières.<sup>27</sup> The Minister of War explained the decision by writing, "...in this way the necessity of placing Alsace-Lorrainers in a milieu of French language and mores will be reconciled with the desire to disorient the men as little as possible who are not already re-accustomed to our dialect and traditions."<sup>28</sup>

The same logic (with a little suspicion thrown in for good measure) dictated that Alsatian recruits be kept from serving in the French armies that were occupying Germany. The provisional military governor of Strasbourg, de Boissieu, outlined the main points of this reasoning when he wrote that Alsatians with little or no knowledge of French would naturally seek out relationships with the population of the Rhineland and the Saar that spoke their language. This tendency would inhibit the development of their French language skills and would supposedly combine with the preexistent influence of Alsatian recruits' German education for a result that had little chance of furthering their "French spirit."<sup>29</sup> De Boissieu actually was articulating a position against this argument. He related that "numerous" Alsatian families had proven their attachment to France during the war and being treated different than any other French citizen was offensive. De Boissieu saw consequences beyond upsetting elements of the pro-French population in Alsace by arguing, "These ostracizing measures go against rallying already hesitant elements [of the Alsatian population] to the French idea and it is also urgent to

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<sup>27</sup> "Einberufung der Jahresklassen 18 und 19," *Unterlander Kurier*, September 2, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>28</sup> Le Président du Conseil, Ministre de la Guerre to the Commissaire Générale de la République, August 3, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>29</sup> Le Général de Division de Boissieu provisoirement Gouverneur Militaire de Strasbourg to le Commissaire Général de la République, October 25, 1921, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

not give credence to the thought that "Alsace is treated as a colony by France."<sup>30</sup> He closed by suggesting that Alsatians should be allowed to serve anywhere that French soldiers were stationed.

De Boissieu's argument mirrored the articulated concern of the Military Governor of Strasbourg, General Hirschauer, who reported a significant decrease in the number of Alsatian enlistments in spring 1919. Hirschauer related that while 710 young men had enlisted in March only 369 had signed up for service in April. He blamed this drop-off on the limited number of regiments that Alsatians and Lorrainers could join.<sup>31</sup> French military authorities remained split on the matter. General Degoutte of the Army of the Rhine conveyed his willingness to incorporate Alsatians who had volunteered and served with the French army during World War I in the army of occupation, but refused to accept former German Alsatian soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Earlier the Commissioner General in Strasbourg had argued for allowing young men from Alsace to enlist in the Armies of the East, but was against the service of any Alsatian in the armies of occupation. The Commissioner went so far as to argue that Alsatians should be removed from any corps destined for use in the occupied areas, thereby inadvertently echoing the wartime policy of Imperial German officials of transferring Alsatians from potentially sensitive positions for posts on the Eastern Front.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Le Général de Division de Boissieu provisoirement Gouverneur Militaire de Strasbourg to le Commissaire Général de la République, October 25, 1921, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

<sup>31</sup> Général Hirschauer, Gouverneur Militaire de Strasbourg to Commissaire Général de la République, May 4, 1919, 121 AL 314.

<sup>32</sup> Général Degoutte to le Commissaire Général de la République, October 20, 1921, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

<sup>33</sup> Le Commissaire Général de la République to the Marchal de France Commandant en Chef, April 24, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

The geographic location of Alsatian recruits was not the only consideration of French officials. The placement of the young men within the various border regiments was also seen as important. French authorities sought to strike a balance between too thinly dispersing or too densely concentrating the Alsatians within French military units. It was believed that recruits in the former situation were likely to feel isolated and turn inward, while individuals in the latter position would likely not venture far beyond the social circle of their Alsatian comrades, thereby lessening the intended assimilatory power of the army service. Instead, French military authorities advocated creating small groups of Alsatians within the ranks, preferably led by an Alsace-Lorrainer officer who would be familiar and sympathetic to the problems the recruits faced. This officer would be charged with acting as the men's mentor and their advocate – particularly against the stereotypes and discrimination of which mobilized Alsatians were increasingly complaining.<sup>34</sup>

Attention to the types of Alsatian recruits who were serving together was an additional consideration that complemented the policy of distributing the young men in small groups within their French regiments. The Military Governor of Paris recommended not grouping volunteers who had served in the German ranks with Alsatians who had not. He explained this position, “Many [Alsatians who served in the German ranks], despite themselves, retain a questionable mentality and one cannot put them without risk in contact with their compatriots who are likely susceptible to bad influence.”<sup>35</sup> The Governor's statement suggests an official position that saw Alsatians as not having emerged ideologically unscathed from the time they spent in the German

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<sup>34</sup> Unaddressed memorandum signed by G. Lagrue, August 12, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

<sup>35</sup> Le Général de Division Berdoulat to the Président du Conseil, Ministre de la Guerre, June 7, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

ranks. Even if they were unaware of it, the ex-German soldiers had the potential to negatively impact the morale of the new Alsatian recruits. Consequently, the recruits should be shielded from the veterans.

### **Alsations' Experiences in the French Ranks**

French authorities began the program of incorporating Alsations into the ranks of the regular French army with high hopes and expectations. Officials repeatedly spoke of “gradual acclimating” the young men to French culture and emphasized the importance of instructor’s having patience with new recruits from Alsace.<sup>36</sup> The initial ease of the call-ups and transportation of the Alsations to their new regiments seemed to justify this optimism. French authorities received word of young men from the province being well received in garrison towns. This confidence was quickly tempered, however, as the challenges of incorporating German speaking volunteers and conscripts into French military formations became increasingly apparent.

A confidential report of an incident from Belfort related that the support and enthusiasm of local French townspeople towards the Alsations rapidly disappeared in the face of purported repeated provocations. The author related that this disillusionment was not the result of the young men singing songs in German or their conversations in dialect, but rather the belligerency against innocent bystanders that accompanied their tendency to drink to excess. The report detailed how a group of approximately 30 drunk Alsations tore up a café after have been refused further drinks. Another section reported that townsfolk had heard about an Alsatian recruit’s response to his noncommissioned officer’s question about whether he would have shot him if he

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<sup>36</sup> Unaddressed memorandum signed by G. Lagrue, August 12, 1919, 121 AL 313, ADBR.

had seen him in a trench during the war. The soldier, who had previously served in the German army, was alleged to have replied, “Oh yes, because then there would have been one less of you.”<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile back in Alsace, newspapers regularly ran articles featuring the alleged grievances of local recruits currently garrisoned outside the province. An array of issues appeared to be troubling young Alsatian men in France. Among others the articles included complaints about the lack and poor quality of food, their lodgings, being called and treated as *Boches*<sup>38</sup> by their officers and fellow French soldiers, unequal leave, lack of understanding of the French language, being condemned for speaking German or dialect, and a lack of reading materials in German.<sup>39</sup> One example of the unjust treatment that local recruits received from French military authorities revolved around the consignment of Alsatians to a penal battalion in North Africa. The affair was sparked in December 1920 when the Mulhouse newspaper, *Der Republikaner*, purportedly received a letter signed by forty-eight Alsace-Lorrainers currently garrisoned in South Tunisia claiming that they were sent to North Africa to work in a penal battalion without prior notification or explanation as a result of crimes they described as being nothing more than “youthful indiscretions.” Sentences ranged from eight days to six months. The authors complained about poor treatment and spoiled food. *Der Republikaner* rhetorically asked its readers “With this treatment does French militarism want to surpass the ample and well-known Prussian methods?” The article closed with the provocative and symbolically significant statement that Alsace was no *Reichsland* nor colony and warned French officials to

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<sup>37</sup> Rapport from Commissaire Central Bessiere, February 17, 1920, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

<sup>38</sup> *Boche* was a derogatory name for Germans.

<sup>39</sup> See 121 AL 311; 121 AL 313, ADBR.

investigate the case lest “French patriotism” be stigmatized in the same vein “Prussianism” had been.<sup>40</sup>

The article set off a flurry of official correspondence that observed that the German military did not have specific disciplinary regiments. German military authorities had preferred to deal with such matters internally. Rather than making an exception for Alsace-Lorrainer soldiers who were unfamiliar with this policy, the Commissioner General suggested a reform of the law to lessen the amount of time such convicts were to be denied being stationed in the French metropole.<sup>41</sup> The Military Governor of Strasbourg, Humbert, reacted strongly against this proposal writing that in its severity French law was superior to German legislation. He suggested it would be a comfort for all “honest Alsatians” to know their soldier sons were being kept clear of any “contamination” and went so far as to argue that “Any benevolent measure taken in consideration of a single party is hardly in the interest of the population and risks, in my opinion, being interpreted as an act of weakness that discredits French authority.”<sup>42</sup> He advocated maintaining the current policy, a position with which the Commissioner General subsequently agreed. Meanwhile *Der Republikaner* kept up its campaign, observing that the French law of December 6, 1905 stipulated that only individuals judged to be a danger to public safety and that had a minimum of six months imprisonment behind them were to be considered

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<sup>40</sup> “Soldatenleben,” *Der Republikaner*, December 4, 1920, 121 AL 309, ADBR.

<sup>41</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Généraux Gouverneurs Militaires de Strasbourg et de Metz, December 14, 1920, 121 AL 309, ADBR.

<sup>42</sup> Général de Division Humbert to the Commissaire Général de la République, December 28, 1920, 121 AL 309, ADBR.

for transport to Africa – a category that the “harmless youthful indiscretions” committed by the Alsatians hardly fulfilled.<sup>43</sup>

The tendency among French authorities to vigorously investigate purported instances of mistreatment of Alsatians is born out in the archival record. In general, the complaints articulated in the Alsatian newspapers were deemed to be largely unfounded. As the Commissioner General informed the Minister of War in 1920, “It is needless to say that the great majority of incorporated Alsace-Lorrainers have declared themselves to be very satisfied with their lot.”<sup>44</sup> The Commissioner General concluded that some degree of dissatisfaction among recruits was inevitable given the communal nature of barracks life, but that the widespread movement to publish misleading reports on service conditions and local incidents reflected a systematic campaign by a few bad apples among recruits. At the same time, despite his belief in the groundless nature of most of the complaints, the Commissioner was cognizant of the potential negative impact that such stories could have on public opinion in the Alsace. He therefore concluded that it was “indispensable” to exercise all influence that might have an adverse effect upon the population and future recruits. In spite of this recognition, it is unclear the success that official efforts had in curtailing the flow of negative reports. A letter received by a Deputy from the Lower Rhine reported on the negative attitude toward French military service that the writer had encountered in the countryside around Strasbourg. The author recited a list of complaints that had become familiar to French authorities, but included a more troubling

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<sup>43</sup> “Die Auswuchse des Militarismus,” *Der Republikaner*, January 5, 1921, 121 AL 309, ADBR. An official internal report related that 67 Alsace-Lorrainers were currently serving in battalions in North Africa – most for a crime involving theft. See “Les Alsaciens et Lorrains de la Classe 1920 envoyés aux Bataillons d’Afrique, January 11, 1921, 121 AL 309, ADBR.

<sup>44</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to Ministre de la Guerre, March 17, 1920, 121 AL 311, ADBR.

statement. He wrote, “I know some boys who enthusiastically left home for their French garrisons, even if they had already served in Germany, but who returned completely disillusioned.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the recruits who had done double service in both armies allegedly preferred the German to French army remarking on the better quality of food, less petty discipline, and greater orderliness of German officers. Such reports from their sons were ostensibly also undermining the morale of parents.

### **Controversies**

The national status of Alsatians of military age who sought to retain their German citizenship was a point of contention between France and Germany throughout the Interwar period. Although the French had explicitly attempted to avoid such disputes with the inclusion of Article 53 of the Treaty of Versailles, most of the nationality controversies after the First World War continued to revolve around issues of military service and citizenship and so closely resembled those disagreements of the Imperial period. The primary change was the reversal of Germany’s and France’s roles. The clashes that occurred reflected Weimar officials’ interpretation of Article 53. German authorities did not dispute the fact that all “old” Alsatians automatically became French citizens after the peace accord went into effect. Their objection arose from the idea that France could continue to dictate the terms of German citizenship policy after January 10, 1920.

In practice Weimar officials took the position that although Alsatians had lost their German nationality, there was nothing stopping them from applying for naturalization and so

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<sup>45</sup> “Copie d’une lettre reçue d’un Député du Bas-Rhin,” April 2, 1920, 121 AL 311, ADBR. Emphasis in the original.

reacquire their membership in the German nation. French authorities acquiesced in the majority of such cases – except in instances where the German naturalization applicant was an “old” Alsatian of military age. Article 17 of the Civil Code explicitly required that young men possessing French citizenship complete their military service or receive an exemption from French authorities in order for their naturalization in another country to be considered valid.<sup>46</sup> A young man of military age failing to secure this release was still considered to be French and liable for arrest for failure to complete his French military service. During the interwar period, French authorities actually took steps to make it even more difficult for a young man to set aside French citizenship without completing his military service.

In April 1923, legislation was enacted that extended the period of military service from the existent requirement of 18 months of active service and two years in the reserves by a further 16 ½ years in which the conscript would be part of the “first reserve” (*première réserve*). The result of this law was that it became practically impossible for men to “lose” their French citizenship before the age of 40. Weimar officials took a relatively cavalier view of the situation saying that France’s unwillingness to release their claim on an “old” Alsatian need not affect German authorities’ decision to recognize them as German.<sup>47</sup> The result in multiple cases was that German officials recognized that Alsations of military age technically possessed both French and German citizenship simultaneously. Unfortunately for the individual involved, German

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<sup>46</sup> The principle of “perpetual allegiance” was first established by Napoleon in 1809 to keep French citizens from being naturalized abroad without the permission of the French government. The French citizenship law of 1889 removed this requisite for all French persons *except* young men of military age. See Weil, *How to be French*, 31, 239.

<sup>47</sup> Dr. Max Schwalb, “Elsass-lothringische Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen,” in *Sonderabdruck aus Zeitschrift für Völkerrecht* ed. by Dr. Max Fleischmann and Dr. Karl Strupp (Breslau: J.U. Kern’s Verlag, 1927), 34-35, R 901 35529, BABL.

conviction could not translate into diplomatic protection if the naturalized German “old” Alsatian of military age crossed to French territory. Just as in the Imperial period, such individuals were liable to be arrested for their failure to complete their military service.<sup>48</sup>

Certain elements of the military eligible population in Alsace in the Interwar period proved to be just as reluctant to serve in the French military as they had been to complete German service during the Imperial period. Edmund Ungerer’s case shows the complexity of mixed Alsatian and German families’ positions in the postwar period when it came to military service. Ungerer was an Alsatian and received an A-card, but on account of a denunciation in 1920 feared he would be expelled and consequently preemptively migrated to Germany with most of his family. His wife, who was born in Lübeck, had received a D-card. The couple’s four sons were all B-card holders. Ungerer informed German authorities that his sons were being held liable for the same military service as a “full Frenchman,” despite the fact that as B-card holders they did not enjoy full citizenship rights in Alsace. His eldest son, Arnold, who had been born in 1889 was a French citizen and still eligible for military service. The second son, Walter, was also considered a French citizen and liable for military service until 1930, despite being awarded Badenese state citizenship. The third son, Gotfried, had emigrated from Alsace and taken up employment in Lübeck. Despite leaving France with an exit visa stamped “no return,” Gotfried had received a summons to report for French military exercises. Ungerer sought to resolve the situation by informing French officials that his son was working in Germany and did not wish to face the potentiality of fighting against the flag that he had served under during the war. The official French response informed Ungerer that he was required to pay a 1,576 fr. manumission fee – a debt he attempted to pay off in order to once and for all free

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<sup>48</sup> Reichswehrminister to the Auswärtiges Amt, July 24, 1923, R 901 35528, BABL.

Gotfried from his precarious situation. Finally, Ungerer's youngest son had been born in 1905. As a result, he was considered a French citizen and eligible for French military service until 1945, despite the fact that he also possessed German citizenship.<sup>49</sup>

The case of Karl Bergmann illustrates the reluctance of certain Alsace-Lorrainers to serve again in the French military after having fought for Germany in World War I, as well as the instrumental usage of that service to justify protection from the German state. Bergmann's case came to the attention of German officials after he was arrested by Turkish police in Constantinople as a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. Bergmann claimed to be from Upper-Alsace and to have served in an airship battalion in Mannheim from 1916 to 1918. He had been demobilized and returned to Alsace, where he worked in an automotive factory until he received a summons to complete French military service in 1919. In response, Bergmann fled to Switzerland, but returned in 1922 after his mother fell ill. He was subsequently arrested by French authorities for desertion and chose to join the French Foreign Legion in order to escape a prison sentence. Once he arrived in Syria, he took an opportunity to desert to Turkey.<sup>50</sup> Bergmann did not have any identification papers that could confirm his citizenship. He claimed to belong to the category of residents of Alsace and Lorraine who had not received French citizenship automatically, but were given the option of applying for naturalization within a year. In theory, Bergmann's apparent non-use of this clause should have meant he retained his German citizenship. As a result, he was appealing to the German Division of the Swedish Embassy for German papers. German authorities were unable to verify Bergmann's citizenship and as a result

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<sup>49</sup> Edmund Ungerer to the Reichswehrminister, April 14, 1923, R 901 35528, BABL.

<sup>50</sup> Legation de Suede, Constantinople to the Auswärtiges Amt, February 18, 1924, R 901 30086, BABL.

denied him a German passport, but related that they were willing to give him a German identity card that would allow him to return to Germany, but not remain in Constantinople.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Auswärtiges Amt to the Königliche Schwedische Gesandtschaft-Deutsche Abteilung in Konstantinopel, R 901 30086, BABL.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Pensions for Alsatians during the Interwar Period**

For German Alsatian veterans and war widows, the Interwar period was defined by a struggle to realize equal pension payments with their counterparts from the interior of France. To the individuals involved in these efforts to achieve pension parity, the position of the French state was particularly maddening. French authorities had regularly stated in the aftermath of their re-assumption of sovereignty in Alsace their intention to put Alsatians and Lorrainers as quickly as possible on the same footing in regards to laws and status as their French counterparts. This desire in regards to pension payments was articulated as early as the Franco-German Baden-Baden Accord in March 1920, when French representatives informed their German counterparts that their government was considering paying German Alsatian veterans and widows according to French pension rates. This intention would not be codified until April 17, 1923. The bill extended the provisions of pension legislation that had been made law in France in March 1919 to Alsatian and Lorrainer veterans of German military service.

Pension eligibility revolved around the French definition of an “authentic” Alsatian and Lorrainer. Only Alsatians who had resumed or reacquired their French citizenship through the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles could receive support. The benefits these individuals received included perks such as an extended period of financial support following their demobilization and later the undifferentiated awarding of Combatants’ Cards. Yet the privileges that Alsatian ex-soldiers enjoyed were not what came to dominate their Interwar memories. Instead, German Alsatian veterans would increasingly see themselves as victimized by what they perceived to be the discriminatory policies of the French government. Much of this resentment stemmed from the enactment trajectory of Interwar French pension legislation in Alsace. In

general, the support laws that were passed in France would first be extended to French Alsatian veterans and later to former German Alsatian soldiers. The belated and unequal enactment of French pension legislation in Alsace was the target of significant discussion and controversy.

Three groups whose needs required the immediate attention of French authorities in 1918 were disabled veterans, war widows, and veterans of the Franco-Prussian War. The goal of official efforts towards members of these groups was to return them to their pre-war occupations or retrain them for jobs equal to their current physical abilities. These efforts were bogged down from the beginning, however, over questions ranging from who should have preference for privileges and who should be eligible to receive pensions. Here again, the seemingly obvious dichotomy that separated Alsatians and Germans was difficult to distinguish in practice. In fact, for many Alsatian ex-soldiers and war widows, the more relevant and immediate differentiation that French pension legislation made was between veterans of the French and German armies. French officials found themselves in the unenviable position of on the one hand being criticized by German Alsatian veterans for the partiality of the award system that unfairly discriminated against them, while on the other hand they were receiving petitions from French Alsatian ex-soldiers that argued the government was not privileging their own treatment enough. At the official level, French provincial authorities also found themselves periodically at odds with their counterparts in Paris over different national policies in Alsace. In language that closely mirrored that of regional authorities in Alsace during the Imperial period, local authorities repeatedly sought to warn the central government of the harm being done to popular opinion in the province by the apparent official indifference to the population's recent history. Compounding the difficulty of the French position was the shifting levels of popular support for the different groups of veterans to receive official aid.

In the peace negotiations that followed the First World War, French authorities attempted to ensure that there would be no repeat of the controversy about whether or not Germany or France bore the responsibility to pay Alsatians' pensions. Article 62 of the Treaty of Versailles explicitly made the German government accountable to pay all civil and military pensions that had been earned in Alsace and Lorraine up to the date of November 11, 1918.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, an early draft of Article 62, called upon the French government to assume the payment of pensions for German Alsatian soldiers who had become French through the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>2</sup> Although this clause was ultimately amended to give full pension payment responsibility to Germany, it suggests that Entente and French authorities were mindful of the influence that the government financing the support payments would have over their clientele. In the end, the decision was made to not take on this extra debt. Nevertheless, French authorities attempted to ameliorate German influence on Alsatian pension beneficiaries by making themselves the intermediary paymaster. The text of the treaty specified that the German government would annually transfer to France the funds necessary to pay Alsatians and Lorrainers' pensions for that year. The pension award amount was to be equivalent to that which the recipient would have received had they remained German subjects.

German and French representatives met again in Baden-Baden in early 1920 to hammer out the specifics of pension payments for Alsatians and Lorrainers. The subsequent agreement confirmed Germany's payment obligations and the delivery methods that had been outlined in the Treaty of Versailles. The convention also provided a number of clarifications and additions

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<sup>1</sup> "The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany," 40, PH2 357, BAM.

<sup>2</sup> "Part III, Section V: Alsace-Lorraine." *Secret Letters of James A. Logan Jr.*, vol. 1, 84, James Addison Logan Papers, Box No. 7, HIA.

to the initial agreement. The definition of a pensioner was explicitly extended beyond retirees and the disabled to include widows, orphans, and parental dependents. Germany reiterated its responsibility to support eligible recipients as if they were still German citizens.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the Baden-Baden negotiations, the Alsatian veterans and war widows who would receive their German pension payment through French intermediaries were specified to be individuals who had been either reinstated or reacquired their French citizenship through the provisions of the peace settlement. In practice, this meant that the recipients were the so-called “old” Alsatians of the province. The remaining “old” German pensioners who were eligible to receive a German pension were to receive their financial support directly from the German government.<sup>4</sup> In the end, however, Germany was only forced to support Alsatians’ and Lorrainers’ pensions for eight years. In March 1926, an Arbitral Tribunal at The Hague exonerated Germany from further pension payments prescribed by Article 62 of the Treaty of Versailles, judging them to have been included in the Dawes’ Plan annuities.<sup>5</sup>

That French authorities did not consider all veterans of the German army living in Alsace to be equal was apparent from the moment of the soldiers’ release from the Imperial army. This was evident in the reception the veterans received when they attempted to return to their homes

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<sup>3</sup> Deutsche Delegation für elsäß-lothringische Friedensfragen to the Präsidenten der Französischen Delegation für die Anwendung des Friedensvertrags auf Elsaß-Lothringen, R. Brugère, 4, March 3, 1920, R 3901 8976, BABL.

<sup>4</sup> Deutsche Delegation für elsäß-lothringische Friedensfragen to the Präsidenten der Französischen Delegation für die Anwendung des Friedensvertrags auf Elsaß-Lothringen, R. Brugère, 5, March 3, 1920, R 3901 8976, BABL. In 1920, German authorities estimated that approximately 1,000-1,200 war disabled veterans, 500-600 war widows, and 300 other pensioners that had earned their claims before the 1914-1918 war and who remained German citizens continued to live in the Alsace and Lorraine. See the note from Referat Sieler, July 29, 1920, R 3901 8976, BABL.

<sup>5</sup> Sous-chef de Bureau chargé du Service to the Directeur de la Dete Inscrite Ministère des Finances, December 6, 1929, 97 AL 120, ADBR.

in the province. A similar difference in treatment was also apparent in the financial support that the former German soldiers received in the months following their discharge. French officials approved a post-discharge financial outlay to support demobilized Alsatian veterans that gradually decreased over a period of six months.<sup>6</sup> This half-year of aid marked a dramatic extension of the comparable period of six weeks of support provided for under German law. In effect, the funding was a temporary continuation of the wartime financial allocations that had been provided to the families of mobilized soldiers. French authorities utilized the funds from the Imperial government's wartime welfare account in Alsace and Lorraine and additional money they expected to be repaid in German reparation payments.<sup>7</sup> It was estimated in November 1918 that there were 12,821 families in Strasbourg receiving a military allocation.<sup>8</sup> The eligibility requirements to receive the six month support from the French government was that the ex-soldier or his wife needed to hold an A or B identity card. The German D-Card holders were not eligible for the extended support payments. The goal of these funds was to be a financial bridge for the veterans between their military service and their reentrance into their civilian occupations.

In practice, it appears that the awarding of French support was even more exclusive. A certain Mrs. Josephine Henmann wrote to the Director of the Office of Support in March 1920 complaining that the support for her family had been ended because her husband possessed a B

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<sup>6</sup> Kriegsunterstützungsamt to the Bürgermeister, Strasbourg, February 2, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS. During the first two months following their discharge the Alsatian ex-soldier would receive the full amount of support. In the following two months the rate would be 2/3 of the original and then 1/3 of the original for the final two.

<sup>7</sup> "Guide pour les employé de l'office des allocations et pensions militaires chargés du service spécial des allocations," 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>8</sup> Note to the Préfet du Bas-Rhin, 1, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS.

identity card. She wrote, “As I am an [Identity Card] A, for the life of me I cannot understand [the reason for the support stoppage], especially because Minister President Millerand explicitly and often assured us that there is only one class of Frenchmen and that in France there are no second-class Frenchmen.”<sup>9</sup> Henmann’s note represents an important example of the French state’s practices being challenged in terms straight from its own rhetoric. Here, an obvious reference to French authorities’ proclamations that all Frenchmen were equal. The notion that Alsatians were second-class citizens during the Imperial period was a well-known criticism of the German government that was easily resurrected against French authorities in instances of obvious discrepancies between official actions and rhetoric.

An interesting continuity in French postwar and German wartime support policies regarding combatants’ families was the French decision to not provide aid to families whose family member had deserted from the Imperial army. Such families would only be approved for support if their husband or son had subsequently joined the French army after their desertion.<sup>10</sup> Such a distinction over Alsatians’ motivations to cross to French lines had not been made during the war. Deserting individuals from the *Reichsland* had been met with a celebration that reversed the previously established prejudice against dereliction of military duty. Consequently, in this postwar policy, French authorities demonstrated a return to pre-war standards of military behavior in regards to Alsatians. Wartime desertion would now only be commended and rewarded if the individual had definitively proved that their actions were inspired by a desire to fight for France. Desertion for desertion’s sake was no longer considered to be an act of French patriotism.

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<sup>9</sup> Frau Josephine Henmann to the Direktor des Unterstützungsamtes, March 19, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>10</sup> “3. Nachtrag zur Anweisung vom 26. Februar 1919,” April 7, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS.

French authorities often discussed pensions for war widows in tandem with disabled veterans. Both groups were similar in that they were made up of individuals who required immediate and potentially long-term state aid. Moreover, the eligibility requirements for women whose husbands had died from wounds, sickness, or accident while serving in the ranks of the German army were nearly identical to that for war invalids. War widows' husbands who would have been reinstated or reclaimed their French citizenship had they survived the war could receive state sponsored benefits. In contrast, Alsatian women who had married a "German" who had died during the war initially lost their right to support on November 17, 1919. This order would be rescinded one year later and the affected individuals were granted retroactive payments.<sup>11</sup> This change of policy is another example of the halting and sometimes conflicted nature of French policy in postwar Alsace. Additionally, both cases demonstrate that in the immediate postwar period, women acquired their right to support through their husbands' French citizenship and not by their own ethnic heritage.

### **The Role of Veterans' Associations and Pensions**

Veterans' associations in Alsace flourished during the Interwar period. The Prefect of the Upper Rhine reported in 1939 that the departmental chapter of the *Union Nationale des Combattants* (UNC),<sup>12</sup> a nationally constituted veterans' league, had 20,000 members in his

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<sup>11</sup> Commissaire Général de la République to the Préfets, November 22, 1920, 8 AL 1/1661, ADHR.

<sup>12</sup> In his study of veterans' associations in Interwar France, Chris Millington has observed that each ex-combatants' group had its own general stance in regard to domestic and international politics. Specifically he cites important difference between the *Union fédérale* (UF) and the *Union Nationale des Combattants* (UNC), the former of which was more radical and open to reestablishing relations with Germany, while the latter was conservative and continued to reject a rapprochement with until the early 1930s. See Millington, *From victory to Vichy*, 4, 30. It is worth further study to examine the strength of the UNC in Alsace, particularly given its anti-German stance.

department.<sup>13</sup> A myriad of different motivations caused ex-soldiers to join veterans' leagues. Some of the most common were factors such as French patriotism and a desire to maintain the wartime comradery of the ranks. Yet an additional practical consideration inspired widespread Alsatian participation in ex-servicemen's organizations like the UNC. In the former *Reichsland*, certain pension benefits were only available to former soldiers who were members of regionally constituted veterans' associations. For instance, membership in a veterans' group was necessary to receive a Combatant's Card, the possession of which made the bearer eligible to receive a pension from the French state. Interwar veterans' organizations are significant in the study of French pension policies towards former German soldiers because they were a meeting point between former German and French Alsatian veterans. Moreover, the official requirement that Alsatian veterans receiving pensions belong to these groups demonstrates the important role that French authorities envisioned the former-combatants' groups playing in the reconciliation of Alsatians to France. The Prefet of the Upper Rhine argued that the veterans' leagues' members formed an important bloc against the Alsatian autonomist movement<sup>14</sup> and "little by little won over doubtful elements to the French idea."<sup>15</sup> Thus a goal of the French veterans' organizations was to win the hearts of Alsatians for France, an assignment similar to their Imperial German counterparts' efforts to act as ambassadors of Germandom.

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<sup>13</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Président du Conseil Ministre de la Défense Nationale et de la Guerre, July 10, 1939, 98 AL 255/1, ADBR.

<sup>14</sup> Philip C. Bankwitz, *Alsatian Autonomist Leaders, 1919-1947* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1978). Bankwitz discusses the growth of the Alsatian autonomist movement during the Interwar period.

<sup>15</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil, February 11, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR

Membership requirements are an important point of study in examining French veterans' associations in Alsace. Eligibility bylaws outlined the ideal constituency of the group and at the same time explicitly identified what a member was not. On the surface, the membership requirements of Alsatian veterans' associations appeared to be remarkably inclusive. For instance, the statutes of the Alsatian regional group of the UNC from the early 1920s related that the group was open to "All Alsatians without exception and without consideration of the uniform they wore [so long as they seek to act] for the good of Alsace and to strengthen the French consciousness of its members and provided that they have not proved to be unworthy of the province through their words or deeds."<sup>16</sup> The apparent freedom of any Alsatian who served in the military to join a veterans' group, regardless of the flag they served under was, however, tempered by the latter clause that advised prospective members that the association did not consider all ex-soldiers nor their service equal. In fact, in their service, certain soldiers had proven themselves undeserving of membership in the UNC and even more seriously unfit for a place in Alsace.

The full meaning behind this phrase became apparent in the next paragraph of the statutes when Alsatians who had served as officers in the German army were explicitly forbidden from joining the UNC. This rejection was justified by the French perception that attaining the rank of officer signaled a strong degree of voluntary cooperation with the German administration. This impression was strengthened by the loyalty oath that officers were required to swear to the German *Kaiser*. Archival sources indicate a degree of inconsistency in this policy. In the margins of the same UNC bylaws booklet an undated handwritten note related that the

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<sup>16</sup> Union Nationale des Combattants Groupe Régional d'Alsace, *Statuts* (Strasbourg: Bloch & Jacob), 1, 121 AL 294, ADBR.

association currently allowed former German officers to join after an investigation and if three current members of the organization vouched for the applicant.<sup>17</sup> It appears, however, that this apparent openness was not maintained throughout the Interwar period. In 1931, the Alsatian newspaper *L'Elsässer Kurier* criticized the UNC's associational newspaper, *Voix du Combattant*, for advocating the exclusion of former German officers from its ranks.<sup>18</sup>

In order to be accepted into the ranks of the Interwar French veterans' organizations, German Alsatian ex-soldiers had to reconcile themselves to publically acquiescing to a particular interpretation of their wartime service. This was the official French narrative that portrayed Alsatians in the German ranks as a reluctant conscripts who faced continual abuse and ostracism from their fellow German soldiers and who secretly longed for France. This narrative was embodied in an UNC recruitment article in 1919. The article read,

We know that unfortunately many [of you] were forced to wear a uniform that was abhorrent to you and that it was absolutely impossible for you to join your French comrades. Your lot was to suffer and serve a master that despised you. You drained that bitter cup to its dregs. We also know that among these men, who are our fellow countrymen, were often those who truly worked marvels, bravely crossing the firing lines to reach your French brothers, rescuing wounded Frenchmen, and rendering aid of all sorts to our refugees. We also are mindful that you managed to fence with German barbarism and exercised all your wiles to serve the just French cause, thereby often unconsciously securing justice.<sup>19</sup>

In short: all Alsatians were German soldiers against their will and had naturally aided the French cause. This was the case even if at the time the events occurred the individual was unconscious of their pro-French action – the UNC “knew” the motivation behind their deeds. There was no

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<sup>17</sup> Union Nationale des Combattants Groupe Régional d'Alsace, *Statuts* (Strasbourg: Bloch & Jacob), Written on Inside Front Cover, 121 AL 294, ADBR.

<sup>18</sup> “Von der U.N.C.: Gegen den Kriegsinvalidenverband – Was soll dieser Angriff?,” *L'Elsässer Kurier* no 36, February 12, 1931, 98 AL 255/1, ADBR.

<sup>19</sup> “Union nationale des Combattants,” *Mülhauser Tagblatt* no. 104, May 6, 1919, R 904 8, BABL. Other acts of resistance that Alsatians supposedly undertook during the war included Alsatian doctors declaring healthy young Alsatian males as unfit for service or Alsatian soldiers sabotaging munitions.

room in this narrative for ambiguity regarding the willingness of an Alsatian soldier to serve in the German army – thus explaining the association’s prejudice against officers, but as will be seen, also against ordinary soldiers who had volunteered for German military service.

Former Alsatian soldiers themselves also contributed to the perpetuation of this nationalist myth by assuming its rhetoric. The self-bestowed moniker “*malgré nous*” (“against our will”)<sup>20</sup> best exemplifies the adoption of the official victimization narrative by some German Alsatian veterans. The title indicated the Alsatians’ reluctance to serve in the German army, but even more significantly is representative of the simplified revisionist interpretation of Alsatians’ experiences during the Imperial period. Contemporarily, the expression “*malgré nous*” is loaded with symbolic capital in the province. The two words encompass the terrible experiences of a generation of young Alsatian men in the German army on the Eastern Front, but it is associated with the 1939-1945 conflict rather than First World War. Thus we see the victimization narrative that would come to dominate the memory of World War II rooted in Alsatians’ depictions of their experiences during the Great War.

Despite the unanimity in purpose and goals that might appear present in the official requirement that Alsatian support receivers belong to a regionally based veterans’ association, the Interwar veterans’ league landscape in Alsace was fractured and often antagonistic. Different groups of ex-soldiers rhetorically clashed over everything from who should receive French benevolence, to the national leanings of competing organizations, and ultimately, whether some associations should even be allowed to exist.

The wartime army that an Alsatian ex-soldier had fought in regularly played an important factor in the postwar veterans’ associations he joined. Not surprisingly, the national martial

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<sup>20</sup> “La Retraite du Combattant et les ‘malgré nous’,” *Lorrain*, November 2, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

backgrounds of a group's members shaped the tenor of its policies and positions in relation to the postwar question of pensions. In general, Alsatian ex-soldiers who had fought in the French army advocated a more restrictive awarding of state support, while those organizations that encompassed ex-German soldiers sought more inclusive policies. Combatants' Cards were an important context that saw clashes between former French and German Alsatian soldiers. Associations made up of former French soldiers. For instance, The Federation of Alsatian and Lorrainer Volunteers (*Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains*) objected to the undifferentiated awarding of the Cards to any Alsatian or Lorrainer who had been mobilized into the German army, particularly since Frenchmen from the interior were required to prove a minimum of three months of service in a combatant unit. The Federation also questioned the benefit of requiring that all Alsatian ex-soldiers join a regional veterans' group. It argued that such an obligation would attract many individuals who were only interested in material benefits of membership and have a deleterious impact upon associational life as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

Accusations that a rival association did not have a genuine commitment to developing members' connection and love of France was a regular feature of Interwar veterans' league rhetoric in Alsace. One example is provided in a complaint brought by the Federation of Alsatian and Lorrainer Volunteers against the Union of Disabled (*l'Union des Invalides*) in Strasbourg. The Federation, already resentful of the inclusivity of French policy towards German veterans complained to French authorities in 1930 that the Union was accepting all veterans into their membership, had invited notorious Alsatian autonomists to speak at their

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<sup>21</sup> Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains, "La situation des Alsaciens et Lorrains ayant servi dans l'armée allemande au point de vu des avantages accordés aux anciens combattants," February 7, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

congress, and was supported by all the anti-French newspapers in the Upper- and Lower-Rhine.<sup>22</sup> Although articulated in national terms, the underlying issue in many of these clashes was the competition to attract adherents and the influence that was associated with larger memberships.

Both of these phenomena are evident in a confrontation that occurred between the leadership of the “Saverne Association of War Disabled Veterans” (*Vereinigung der Kriegsbeschädigten Zaberns*) and representatives of the Association of the War Disabled in Alsace and Lorraine (*Verband der Kriegsinvaliden in Elsass und Lothringen*). The regional association of disabled veterans publically opposed the creation of the unaffiliated Saverne group because “This [the Saverne] association can achieve nothing if it is not allied with us, who represent the masses and inexorably move towards our goal.”<sup>23</sup> An important motivation for the *Verband* to oppose the creation of alternative Saverne association was the belief that disabled veterans exerted more influence with French officials when they could portray themselves as acting on the behalf of the majority of disabled veterans in the provinces.<sup>24</sup>

The criticism of lack of influence was, however, not utilized in the confrontation that occurred when members of the *Verband* took the opportunity during the time for public comment at the Saverne group’s inaugural meeting to verbally attack the group. A certain Comrade Esslinger accused the Saverne association’s leader of being one of the most vocal proponents of the German veterans’ leagues during the Imperial period. This allegation was no doubt intended

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<sup>22</sup> Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains, “La situation des Alsaciens et Lorrains ayant servi dans l’armée allemande au point de vu des avantages accordés aux anciens combattants,” February 7, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

<sup>23</sup> “Der erwartete Gegenzug,” *L’Invalide de Guerre* nr. 4, September 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Lanthier has identified a similar goal to consolidate smaller associations in order to create larger and more influential organizations among Interwar war widows. See Lanthier, “Women Alone,” 154.

to call into question the national credentials of the Saverne group's leadership in the minds of its potential members. The *Verband* utilized a different tactic at the first meeting of the UNC in Alsace. Representatives of the *Verband* chastised the UNC for its national partisanship and sought to portray themselves as the most authentic and best representatives of *all* veterans living in Alsace and Lorraine.<sup>25</sup> The representatives of the *Verband* related that their association advocated equality of treatment for all disabled veterans in Alsace and Lorraine, regardless of the uniform they had worn during the war and their heritage. Although attacking the Saverne group for its supposed ties to the Imperial period and the UNC for its failure to represent the interests of all veterans from the former *Reichsland* might appear to be conflicting stances, the *Verband* reconciled these two positions by differentiating between “voluntary and enthusiastic” support of the German regime, a “crime” to which the leader of the Saverne group was supposedly guilty, and the understanding that while 5/6 of Alsatian and Lorrainer disabled veterans had fought in the German army they had done so against their will. In the end, the *Verband*'s description of Alsations' and Lorrainers' reluctant participation was the same narrative that had been articulated in the previously mentioned UNC recruitment article. The leadership also contended that any invalided ex-soldier descended from “old” Germans had a similar right to equal treatment if they had been given permission by the French state to remain in the provinces.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Ein Erfolg,” *L'Invalide de Guerre*, nr. 2, August 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

<sup>26</sup> “Denkschrift des Verbandes an den Herrn Commissair-Général de la Republique,” *L'Invalide de Guerre* nr. 4, September 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

## Franco-Prussian Veterans' Pensions

French Alsatian veterans of the Franco-Prussian War played a central symbolic role in the celebratory reunification festivities that accompanied the French advance into Alsace after the November 11 Armistice. French authorities and the press praised the old soldiers as zealous guardians and keepers of the French memory in Alsace through forty-seven years of German rule. It was natural for the veterans of the 1870/71 to expect that France's gratitude would perhaps be reflected in more lenient and generous pension payments. These hopes were rapidly dashed. Instead, much to their chagrin, French Alsatian veterans found their petitions for official support rejected or accepted with the same justifications that had been utilized by Imperial officials. This occurred because French authorities decided against applying French law to the pension payments of Franco-Prussian War veterans in the former *Reichsland*. Thus Alsatian ex-soldiers like certain Clement Bihl were informed that it was not possible to approve their application for support because "his situation could not be considered as needy in the sense of the law."<sup>27</sup> The law in question remained the 1895 German pension legislation.

The decision to maintain existent German pension policy in Alsace was not the result of legislative lethargy on the part of the French government. Instead, French authorities decided to maintain the Imperial annuity eligibility guidelines and payment rates because "the permanent relief established for needy veterans by the laws of the [German] Empire from May 22, 1895 and May 19, 1913 is much more favorable than those provided by France."<sup>28</sup> In the end, the French decision to retain German pension law in the former *Reichsland* was made in the best interest of the veterans who were already receiving support from the state. Yet for those French Alsatian

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<sup>27</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Sous-Préfet d'Altkirch, September 29, 1925, 1 AL 2/1188, ADBR.

<sup>28</sup> Directeur de l'Intérieur to the Préfet du Haut-Rhin, November 6, 1919, 8 AL 1/1484.

ex-soldiers who once again found their pension applications rebuffed, but now by the same authorities who had very recently publically celebrated their patriotism and commitment to France, the policy was perceived to be indicative of the poorer treatment of Alsatian veterans in relation to their interior counterparts. French authorities were caught in a catch-22. The decision to apply French legislation to Alsace would have broadened the eligibility pool and appeased the new applicants, but at the same time the lower rates would antagonize ex-soldiers already receiving pensions. This latter group could then make the compelling and troubling argument that *Germany* cared for *French* veterans better than France. Such considerations encouraged French authorities to maintain the 1895 and 1913 German legislation.

French authorities readily adopted and applied German pension guidelines in Alsace. In fact, certain French officials found themselves utilizing the same rhetoric once used by their Imperial German counterparts to request that the letter of the law not be applied so zealously. Paul Valot, the Director General of Alsace and Lorraine Services, wrote in 1927 requesting that regional pension officials in Strasbourg not so strictly interpret the statutes of the 1913 law. Valot related that although many French Alsatian veterans did not exactly meet the “neediness” guidelines of the law, they nonetheless still had a difficult time supporting themselves and their families. In language unmistakably reminiscent of Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst letters to Bismarck, Valot justified this loosening of regulations by saying,

The number of these veterans is diminishing day by day. During the period of German occupation these former soldiers were the strongest supporters of the French idea. The amount of aid is relatively small. I would ask you to discuss with the Director of Finance whether it would be possible to less strictly interpret the texts and favorably receive a greater number of veterans' requests, who although they do not live in poverty may find themselves in a very precarious position.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Directeur Général des Services d'Alsace & Lorraine to the Directeur du Service du Statut local, du Personnel et des Pensions, January 10, 1927, 97 AL 95, ADBR.

A subsequent, rather admonitory note, related that authorities in Strasbourg were only following the law and that officials needed to be conscientious of budgetary constraints.

Disability pensions to French Alsatian veterans during the Interwar period provide another instance in which it is evident that French law, whether purposefully or unintentionally, discriminated against Alsatians who had opted for French citizenship immediately after the Franco-Prussian War, but were subsequently naturalized as German citizens. According to a French law that was passed in 1924, French Alsatian veterans of the Franco-Prussian War that had been automatically reintegrated into French citizenship according to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles received a permanent pension according to the German law of 1901. In 1930, the Minister of the Interior wrote to the Minister of Pensions informing him that a “second category” of disabled Alsatian soldiers from the 1870/71 conflict existed that were being denied the benefit of the 1924 French law. These individuals had initially opted for France in 1871, but subsequently returned to Alsace and been naturalized as German citizens. According to the Treaty of Versailles, such individuals did not automatically receive French citizenship because they had possessed a nationality other than German in the Imperial period. Consequently, these individuals were forced to apply for naturalization, regardless of whether or not they possessed “old” Alsatian heritage. The French Alsatian veterans in this category were not eligible for the 1924 law because they had not automatically received French citizenship on January 10, 1920. Ironically then, in the long run, French Alsatian soldiers who in 1871 had utilized the provisions of the Treaty of Frankfurt to break off their engagement in the French army early in order to take up German citizenship were better off than those Alsatians who had opted for French citizenship, completed their military service, and then made the decision to return to the province.

## **Pensions for Disabled Veterans and War Widows of the First World War**

The scale of societal mobilization during the First World War was unprecedented. From 1914 to 1918 millions of young men left civilian occupations to temporarily serve as soldiers. The nature of modern industrial warfare left many of these recruits with permanent physical and mental disabilities. As a result, a daunting prospect faced by the governments of the victorious and vanquished nations alike in 1918 was the reintroduction of these “damaged” individuals into civilian life. Re-employing the disabled in their former jobs or retraining them for another occupation more appropriate to their current level of physical ability was perceived to be the essential step in the reintegration of these veterans into civil society. As has already been seen, German authorities began the process of re-education and occupational placement even while the conflict continued to rage on both the Eastern and Western Fronts. As a result, when French authorities resumed sovereignty over Alsace and Lorraine in 1918, they inherited a population already familiar with the pre-existent German disability program and a significant number of Alsatian ex-soldiers whose needs it had been created to serve. An Interwar history estimated that on November 11, 1918 there were already 10,000 disabled soldiers receiving official support in the provinces with a further 15,000 applications under consideration. An additional 20,000 war widows and orphans and some 5,000 dependent parents were also in need of support.<sup>30</sup> Faced with the challenge of taking over the governance of the provinces and meeting the needs of these individuals, French authorities would adopt and adapt German disability institutions and policies to their own purposes. Officials did not make a differentiation in treatment between Alsatians who had fought in the German and French armies. Instead, they took the position that any Alsatian or Lorrainer whose health or functioning had been permanently damaged by an illness

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<sup>30</sup> Rossé et al., *Das Elsass*, 1: 517.

or injury incurred during the 1914-1918 conflict was eligible to receive disability support. The critical and restrictive distinction they did adopt, however, was to make an applicant's "authentic" Alsatianness or Lorrainerness the deciding factor in their pension eligibility. Thus the instructions specified that only war invalids that were holders of the A- or B-Identification Cards should benefit from official disability support.<sup>31</sup>

French authorities, for all their desire to eliminate the vestiges of Imperial rule in Alsace and Lorraine maintained existent German institutions in the immediate months and years following the Armistice. This was particularly true in regards to the care of disabled Alsatian veterans. On January 23, 1919, the French High Commissioner created the Organization for the Support and Re-education of Alsatian and Lorrainer War Disabled (*Oeuvre de patronage et de rééducation des invalides de guerre alsaciens et lorrains*), which was replaced on November 18, 1919 by the Institute of the Disabled, Discharged, and War Widows of Alsace and Lorraine (*Institut des mutilés, réformes et veuves de guerre d'Alsace et Lorraine*). Neither organization was a new creation, but rather were a renamed and reorganized version of the State Welfare Office for the War Disabled and Surviving Dependents (*Landesfürsorgestelle für Kriegsinvalide und Kriegshinterbliebene*) that had been founded by the German *Statthalter* in June 1915.<sup>32</sup> The primary purpose of the Institute to provide job training and serve as an employment agency for the disabled veterans and war widows remained the same. The new eligibility requirement that French authorities did include was the explicit instruction that the individuals permitted to utilize the Institute's services were required to have had their French nationality restored or reacquired

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<sup>31</sup> La Commissaire de la République pour la Bass Alsace to Président de la Commission Municipale Strasbourg, October 2, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS.

<sup>32</sup> "Stadt und Land," December 9, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS.

through the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>33</sup> During their training an enrollee was to receive 187.50 fr. a month with a further small addition if the individual had dependents. Many of the re-trainees found this sum insufficient to support their families and as a result did not complete their re-education programs. French authorities deplored this situation observing, “The disabled who avoid retraining and are unused for domestic production represent as many precious elements lost for the reconstruction of our workforce that has been ravaged by the war.”<sup>34</sup> Thus despite their limited capacity, French authorities, just as their German predecessors, valued the work of the disabled and saw it as a reservoir that could be tapped to ameliorate some of the labor shortages caused by wartime casualties.<sup>35</sup>

Returning the disabled and war widows to work was perceived to be a mutually beneficial arrangement for France and the individual. Retraining and finding lasting work for war widows and invalids would eliminate a significant and lasting financial outlay by the state. Moreover, having an occupation would provide the retrained individuals a sense of purpose and aid in their reintegration into postwar society. As the meeting minutes of the Demobilization and Finance Commission articulated the matter, “Generally, financial support does not help the people. Appropriate work must be created for them. Through energetic measures the state and city must make it possible for these individuals to be accommodated in public establishments.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> “Décret déterminant les conditions de la rééducation professionnelle des mutilés, réformés et veuves de la guerre en Alsace et Lorraine et créant l’Institut des Mutilés, Réformés et Veuves de Guerre d’Alsace et Lorraine,” *Journal officiel*, December 2, 1919, 774, 75 MW 20, AMS.

<sup>34</sup> Le Vice-Président du Comité provisoire d’administration de l’Institut des Mutilés, Réformés et Veuves de guerre d’Alsace et Lorraine, “Rééducatoin professionnelle et allocations d’entretien,” December 29, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS.

<sup>35</sup> “Bericht an die I. & II. Kommission betreffend Unterstützung für arbeitslose Kriegsinvaliden,” February 3, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>36</sup> “Niederschrift über die Sitzung der Demobilmachungs- und Finanzkommission am 15.11.19,” November 17, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS. French authorities also expressed the belief that simply raising

In practice, however, despite their good intentions and calls for “every public corporation to employ a certain percentage of these people who have sacrificed their health in the war,” local officials found it difficult to enforce their desire to reserve a certain percentage of jobs in public institutions for the war disabled.<sup>37</sup> As this statement also suggests, French authorities’ tended to focus their efforts finding employment on behalf of disabled veterans over that of war widows.

### **Seeking Fairness: German Alsatian Veterans and the Search for Equality of Treatment**

Beyond the immediate focus of finding work, one of the most central concerns for disabled former German Alsatian soldiers during the Interwar period was achieving equality in treatment with those Alsatis who had fought for the French. These confrontations took place over issues such as medical care, job placement, and pension amounts. The general trend of French policy in regards to disabled Alsatian veterans was to first extend benefits to those ex-soldiers who had fought for France and later to the former German combatants. The movement to end this differentiation was often led by Alsatian representatives in Paris and provincial authorities, but prompted by the petitions and complaints from the German Alsatian ex-servicement. French officials in Alsace justified their opposition to the different standards in treatment between the two groups of ex-soldiers to their Parisian counterparts by describing the negative effect the disparity had upon popular opinion in the province. Similarly to regional Imperial authorities before them, local French officials were willing to step in and provide the

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support rates would not solve the problem because it would make the recipient complacent and uninterested in finding work.

<sup>37</sup> Circulaire from the Präsident des Gemeindeausschusses Peirottes, November 18, 1919, 75 MW 20, AMS.

necessary support in individual cases, even if the legislation had not yet been explicitly extended to Alsace. For their part, the ex-German soldiers also actively and publically voiced their objections to what they perceived to be unwarranted discrimination against them by the French government.

Ongoing medical care was essential for individuals who had been maimed during the First World War. Hospitalization and medical costs were early issues in which the gap in treatment between former German and French combatants became evident. In March 1920, the Prefect of the Lower-Rhine wrote to the mayors of his province to inform them that the French law from March 31, 1919 that guaranteed disabled veterans free access to medical, surgical, and pharmaceutical resources had not been extended to Alsatians who had been injured in the German army.<sup>38</sup> Despite this apparent instance of discrimination and illustrating an initial period of inequality that characterized much of French pension legislation, we can see local French authorities taking the initiative and assisting former German soldiers, even if existent French legislation did not yet make the provisions. The Prefect of the Lower-Rhine, for example, informed the mayors of his province that German Alsatian ex-soldiers could also receive free medical care that would be paid from the provincial budget. A critical caveat of this allowance, however, was that hospitalizations had to be preapproved by the Prefect, otherwise the treatment might not be covered.

Securing and maintaining work appropriate work for the disabled veteran in light of their injuries was another central concern of the afflicted ex-soldiers and local officials after the Armistice. During the war, the prolongation of hostilities and the accompanying economic slowdown had already placed a severe strain on the ability of German officials to find jobs for

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<sup>38</sup> Préfet du Bas-Rhin, H. Juillard to the Maires, March 27, 1920, 75 MW 24, AMS.

those individuals with a certain degree of physical incapacity. Employment opportunities for the disabled remained restricted after the war, particularly when the injured were competing with the healthy for jobs. French national authorities largely left local and municipal authorities in Alsace the task of finding employment for disabled veterans.

Although occupational retraining for every war widow and disabled soldier was a goal for French officials, in practice many of the disadvantaged were placed in any available open position. Even those that went through the retraining program could not be guaranteed employment in the postwar period. The Demobilization and Finance Commission in Strasbourg in November 1919 addressed the issue of finding work for disabled veterans. Various occupational suggestions that were floated for employing the disabled included everything from temporary work in Reims helping to rebuild the city, to local positions in mobile occupations such as a postman or messenger or seated jobs in an office environment, and finally total support for individuals with a 100% disability.<sup>39</sup> Menial jobs such as street sweepers or cemetery caretakers were rejected for their limited duration and work hours, as was also the idea that Strasbourg should re-establish a public works program to temporarily employ out-of-work disabled veterans until a more permanent position could be found. This latter suggestion was rejected with the observation that “The brunt of support payments, which is the responsibility of the state, would again fall to the city...”<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, in practice, despite their goal to find

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<sup>39</sup> The Commission related that of the total 103 interviews some 19 individuals were fit for rebuilding work in Reims, 35 for mobile occupations like messengers and postmen, 43 could only perform seated work, and the final 6 were incapable of doing any form of labor and would have to be supported by the state.

<sup>40</sup> “Niederschrift über die Sitzung der Demobilmachungs- und Finanzkommission am 15.11.19,” Novemebr 17, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS. In the postwar period, the city was responsible to pay for ¼ of the costs of retraining and supporting disabled veterans, while the state was to take over the remaining ¾. Up

lasting employment for disabled veterans, city officials settled for any position that would provide a temporary wage for the out-of-work ex-soldiers. Files from the Municipal Archives in Strasbourg demonstrate that city authorities actively sent out letters of inquiry to different city offices asking if they were employing disabled veterans and if they could find work for any more. Despite these efforts, even when a position was found for a permanently injured ex-soldier, city officials regularly received notes informing them that the individual had been laid off because the respective office had been forced to cut back on its personnel.<sup>41</sup>

The difficulty and at times impossibility of finding work for disabled ex-soldiers led to an increased strain on public support coffers. Existent monthly support rates did not keep up with the rising cost of living. As a result, French officials were barraged with a multitude of complaints and petitions from disabled veterans requesting an expansion of their monthly allowance. Unfortunately, the high costs of the additional outlay precluded a general increase in support and as a result the majority of requests were denied. Similarly to the Imperial period, disabled veterans who found their demands ignored or rejected by local authorities turned to their regional superiors for help.

In one such instance, a group of 60 war invalids from Strasbourg wrote Commissioner General Alexander Millerand after the city failed to meet their request for emergency aid. The appeal related to Millerand that the current maximum amount provided for disabled veterans was insufficient to cover the increase in living expenses and as a result most of the disabled had fallen into poverty and been forced to sell their possessions of value. The appeal acknowledged

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to April 1, 1919, Germany bore this financial responsibility, which the French were supposed to assume after that date.

<sup>41</sup> For an example of such inquiries and responses see 75 MW 20, AMS.

the efforts of municipal authorities, but related they were reluctant to extend further aid when the repayment of the costs by the French government remained in doubt. The petitioners informed Millerand that they were turning to him in a final act of desperation, writing “We ask only that we be given a way to earn a living and be provided with work that we are still able to do. And taking into consideration that we have been without work for so long, we ask for a raise in the amount of support and that an exceptional emergency sum be approved that would allow us to reestablish ourselves.”<sup>42</sup> The ultimate goal that the disabled veterans’ collectively articulated in this petition, which was a characteristic of similar entreaties, was the expressed desire that authorities find the war invalids gainful employment. The petitioners’ demands reflected the wartime shift in the perception of the purpose of official aid from that of permanent financial outlay to a temporary measure that should be awarded until the individual was able to reestablish themselves in a vocational and financial sense.

Despite their frequent complaints, when it came to levels of official financial support, the war disabled were a privileged group in postwar Alsatian society. Unemployed ex-soldiers who had been permanently injured during their military service received higher rates of support than their civilian counterparts and local authorities nearly bent over backwards in their efforts to assist the men in reincorporating themselves back into civilian life. At first these officially sponsored labors took the form of creating temporary jobs, with the overall goal of finding the disabled appropriate and lasting occupations. From the outset, veterans whose working capability or health had been lastingly affected by an injury or illness acquired during their military service received an amount of financial support that was 75% higher than that provided

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<sup>42</sup> Lauber, Seyller, Brechenmacher to Alexandre Millerand, November 25, 1919, 75 MW 2, AMS.

by regular poor relief.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, a public works program was instituted by local authorities in Strasbourg that employed some 280 war invalids in temporary work sawing wood and breaking stones.<sup>44</sup> Once this public works program was discontinued in October 1919, those disabled veterans who lost their employment received a further 50% increase in support.<sup>45</sup>

This final augmentation proved to be problematic for French authorities as it created a class of disabled veterans that was receiving more aid than war widows or their comrades whose injury prevented from doing any form of labor. Officials observed that ex-soldiers with 100% disabilities would find it unjust that their inability to work was keeping them from receiving a higher pension payment.<sup>46</sup> Despite their priority of caring for “old” Alsatians, French authorities also made provisions to support the war widows of fallen soldiers judged to have been “German.” These families were approved to receive the same amount of support as a civilian on ordinary poor relief in the postwar period.<sup>47</sup> The decision to not pay the additional 25% in support money was motivated by municipal authorities’ observation that the French government had suspended the payment of support to disabled “old” German soldiers. The policy seemed to indicate, therefore, that financial repayment for any additional outlays from the city’s coffers

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<sup>43</sup> It should be noted, however, that the amount of poor relief had been increased 50% above prewar levels, making the difference between military and civilian recipient only 25%. See “Bericht an die I. & II. Kommission betreffend Unterstützungsätze für arbeitslose Kriegsinvaliden,” February 3, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>44</sup> “Notiz,” July 3, 1919, 75 MW 20, AMS.

<sup>45</sup> “Niederschrift über die Sitzung der Demobilmachungs- und Finanzkommission am 15.11.19,” November 17, 1919, 75 MW 1, AMS.

<sup>46</sup> “Bericht an die I. & II. Kommission betreffend Unterstützung für arbeitslose Kriegsinvaliden,” February 3, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>47</sup> “Bericht an die I. & II. Kommission betreffend Unterstützung für arbeitslose Kriegsinvaliden,” February 3, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

would not be forthcoming.<sup>48</sup> The decision to make disabled German veterans eligible for support from Strasbourg's poor relief bureau might have slightly improved their financial situation, although regular complaints from fellow "Alsatian" veterans regarding the supposed inadequacy of the higher pension amounts suggests that this sum would have only been of minimal help. Yet at the same time, making "old" German veterans eligible only for poor relief "charity" was a public and visible statement about their lower status in relation to their "authentic" Alsatian counterparts in postwar French Alsace. This is evident in the fact that this very solution had been rejected for needy "old" Alsatian veterans. A representative of the Office of War Assistance in Strasbourg had argued that transferring the responsibility of paying the support to out-of-work disabled veterans to the Administration of Poor would have a very adverse impact upon the war invalids' morale.<sup>49</sup>

The difference in payment amounts to Alsatian and German families is evident in the following table that was provided by the French government to provincial authorities as a reference when awarding support to ex-combatants' families. The different support amounts to the two different groups created not only an economic advantage, but also reflected differences in status. Alsatian families were more valuable to the French state than their German counterparts.

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<sup>48</sup> "Bericht an die I. & II. Kommission betreffend Unterstützung für arbeitslose Kriegsinvaliden," February 3, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>49</sup> Note to the Kriegsunterstützungsamt and the Maire, March 18, 1920, 75 MW 2, AMS.

**Table 15: Support to be Paid to German and Alsatian Military Families<sup>50</sup>**

	Minimum Subsistence for German Families	Minimum Subsistence for Alsatian and Lorrainer Families
Spouses without Children	105 frs.	125 frs.
Spouses with 1 Child	120	140
2	130	150
3	145	170
4	150	175
5	165	195
6	175	205
7	190	220
8	195	230
9	210	245
10	220	255

The issue of “Alsatianness” and French citizenship being passed through a living paternal figure again became an issue in pension payments to war widows and their families. A letter to Strasbourg’s Mayor Peirottes in 1924 related that the writer, a certain Wicky, had been informed by the Bureau of Pensions in Alsace and Lorraine that not all children of Alsatians who had been killed during the war had a right to a pension. Specifically, this was the case when a child came from a “mixed” marriage between an Alsatian father and a German mother. Such children possessed French citizenship according to the Treaty of Versailles, but could not receive any financial support if their mother still possessed her original German nationality.<sup>51</sup> Wicky observed that “It is absurd that war widows whose husbands died as Alsatians in the war and whose children are French at this present time are unable to receive any benefits for herself or her children and so are abandoned to poverty.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Guide pour les employé de l’office des allocations et pensions militaires chargés du service spécial des allocations,” 75 MW 2, AMS.

<sup>51</sup> Wicky to Peirottes, Maire de la Ville de Strasbourg, December 29, 1924, 75 MW 38, AMS.

<sup>52</sup> Wicky to Peirottes, Maire de la Ville de Strasbourg, December 29, 1924, 75 MW 38, AMS.

The scarcity of suitable employment for disabled veterans made any vacant position highly sought after and could easily generate discontent if it was perceived that not all applications were being equally considered. As early as September 1919, the Association of the War Disabled in Alsace and Lorraine was publishing open letters to French authorities in their newspaper complaining about the inequality of treatment between Alsatians who had been injured in the German army and those that had been disabled fighting for France. Their specific grievance was that local French officials were prioritizing disabled French ex-soldiers for positions in the local administration reserved for war invalids in general. For the Association, this discrimination was all the more galling because its membership was primarily made up of A and B identity card carriers. The article claimed that disabled former German Alsatian veterans were being told that their applications would only receive consideration after the majority of invalid French Alsatian veterans had been provided with positions.<sup>53</sup>

That French authorities in Alsace did indeed prioritize the claims of ex-soldiers who had fought in the French army over those that were mobilized in Imperial German formations is evident in the archival record. A note from the Railroad Committee to the Commissioner General in Strasbourg confirmed that disabled French Alsatian veterans had a “right of preference” to railroad jobs.<sup>54</sup> This practice was endorsed by French military authorities. In a report on the issue, they justified this distinction with the argument that every Alsatian or Lorrainer who had suffered a permanent and debilitating injury fighting in the ranks of the French army had a *right* to the reserved occupations that was guaranteed to them by French

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<sup>53</sup> “Denkschrift des Verbandes an den Herrn Commissair-Général de la Republique,” *L’Invalide de Guerre* nr. 4, September 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

<sup>54</sup> La Commission des Chemins de fer de Campagne d’Alsace et Lorraine to the Commissaire Général de la République, June 4, 1919, 121 AL 372, ADBR.

legislation passed on April 17, 1916. In contrast, it was a *favor* for the French government to extend such benefits to Alsatians who had fought and been disabled in the German army.<sup>55</sup>

French civilian officials in Alsace disputed this differentiation between invalid Alsatian veterans and warned of its consequences in the province. The Commissioner General in Strasbourg reported that “The fundamental principle upon which the work of the Direction of Military Affairs rests has stirred up a profound and legitimate emotion in our recovered provinces.”<sup>56</sup> He argued that it was inadvisable to make such a distinction between disabled German and French veterans. The Commissioner General’s position was shared by the Director of the Interior in Strasbourg. The Director proposed making all disabled Alsatians eligible for the reserved jobs. The basis for this privilege was not to be their military service and bodily sacrifice, but rather their shared status as Frenchmen. Consequently, he proposed that the army in which a candidate served should have no bearing on their placement in a reserved occupation. Instead, the critical requirement was that the individual have either automatically been reintegrated or reclaimed their French nationality through the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>57</sup>

German Alsatian disabled veterans also continued their agitation for equality of opportunity in job placement and enlisted the aid of their provincial representatives. In one instance, a law that was passed in France on April 26, 1924 obligated particular businesses to employ a certain amount of war disabled. According to the text of the law, any “war victim” who benefited from the March 31, 1919 French pensions’ law qualified to be considered for such

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<sup>55</sup> Note pour la Direction des Affaires Militaires, July 31, 1919, 121 AL 372, ADBR.

<sup>56</sup> Note pour la Direction des Affaires Militaires, July 31, 1919, 121 AL 372, ADBR. In response to this observation a later reader wrote, “How did they know?” – presumably referring to the military’s report.

<sup>57</sup> Le Direction de l’Interieur to the Commissaire Général, July 17, 1919, 121 AL 372, ADBR.

positions. In Alsace, however, German Alsatian veterans complained that most local officials refused to apply the law to them, arguing that it was only applicable for ex-soldiers who had served in the French army. German Alsatian ex-servicemen responded to these decisions by pointing out that nowhere did the legislation specify that the applicant had to have served in the French army and publically questioned if their exclusion reflected their status as “second-class Frenchmen.”<sup>58</sup>

The disabled former German soldiers of Alsace utilized carefully chosen rhetoric with which to frame their demands for equality in treatment. The Association of the War Disabled in Alsace and Lorraine, perhaps mindful of the Director of Military Affairs’ earlier report, related that “We do not want charity. We want our right to work, which is fixed by law and sharply reject any feelings of pity. We do not want work and pensions out of pity, but rather because of it is the law and our right.”<sup>59</sup> The author informed his readers that “In our hearts we are good Frenchmen, but we demand that we should be treated as such.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, a Dr. Pflieger who was a representative from the Upper-Rhine, informed the government of the discrepancy in the law’s application and pointed out that creating two classes of Frenchmen was illegal.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Deputy Peirottes from the Lower-Rhine regularly wrote to the President of the Chamber of Deputies informing the President that he was continually receiving petitions regarding discrimination in the application of the employment legislation. These criticisms had

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<sup>58</sup> “Klage der elsässischen Invaliden,” *Presse libre*, September 19, 1925, 75 MW 21, AMS.

<sup>59</sup> “Der erwartete Gegenzug,” *L’Invalide de Guerre* nr. 4, September 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

<sup>60</sup> “Der erwartete Gegenzug,” *L’Invalide de Guerre* nr. 4, September 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

<sup>61</sup> “Der Artikel 18,” *Le Journal des Invalides, Veuves, Orphelins et Ascendants de Guerre d’Alsace et de Lorraine*, November 1, 1925, 75 MW 21, AMS.

little effect. Ultimately, it appears that the arguments of provincial civilian authorities, disabled veterans' groups, and the political representatives of Alsace were unsuccessful. In 1924 the Minister of Pensions in Paris would confirm that a French law passed in January 1923 that made provisions for employing disabled veterans was not applicable to former German Alsatian soldiers.<sup>62</sup> The law was not legislatively extended to Alsace until January 1927.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to finding and having equal opportunity for employment, the question of parity in state monetary support was never far from the minds of disabled Alsatians who had fought in the German army. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, German authorities agreed to continue to pay the pensions of Alsatian war invalids who had been injured in their service. French authorities, took this sum and multiplied it by a factor of 1.25 to take into account the exchange between German marks to French francs (Compare columns 1 and 2 of the following table). The resultant payment scales were printed in the Alsatian newspaper, the *Freie Presse* in December 1919.<sup>64</sup> The award amounts listed for German and French veterans were the minimum a disabled soldier would receive. Other injuries could increase the monthly stipend. For example, if a German veteran in the first table had been totally blinded he would receive 81 fr. a month. This amount would be added to a total disability pension to equal a monthly sum of 186 fr. (81 + 105=186). Thus the total monthly payment for a blind German Alsatian veteran

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<sup>62</sup> Le Ministre de la Guerre, des Pensions, des Primes et des Allocations des Guerre to the Général Commandant, Strasbourg, January 10, 1924, 121 AL 372, ADBR.

<sup>63</sup> "Loi relative à l'application, dans les départements du Haut-Rhin, du Bas-Rhin et de la Moselle, des lois du 30 janvier 1923 et du 18 juillet 1924 réservant des emplois à certaines catégories de militaires et aux veuves et orphelins de guerre, de la loi du 26 avril 1924 assurant l'emploi obligatoire des mutilés de guerre, et des dispositions des lois des 1 avril 1923 (art. 7), 31 mars, 17 avril et 18 juillet 1924 concernant l'avancement des fonctionnaires, candidats fonctionnaires, agents, sous-agents et ouvriers civils de l'Etat, anciens militaires ou démobilisés," *Journal officiel de la République française* no. 23 January 28, 1927, 1082.

<sup>64</sup> "Die Wahrheit!," *Freie Presse* no. 284, December 9, 1919, 121 AL 306, ADBR.

came to a total of 232.50 frs. Looking at the table for French monthly pension rates (Column 3) it is evident that French veterans received a higher amount than that paid to disabled German ex-soldiers. At this point, if the pension payments had remained static in Germany, Alsatians who had suffered a permanent injury during their German military service would have at least been better off than their German counterparts. The problem was that Germany on June 1, 1919 increased the amount paid to their disabled veterans by 40%. The changes in monthly payments are reflected in Column 4. The monthly payments to Alsatians did not enjoy a similar growth and instead remained at the pre-reform levels. French authorities explicitly denied various petitions from the war disabled and widows to increase their pensions on the grounds that the existent 1.25 conversion rate applied to the new award amounts would have created too great an expense for the French government.<sup>65</sup> The result of this decision was that the disabled ex-soldiers who had served in the German army received less of a monthly allotment than either their German or French counterparts.

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<sup>65</sup> "Rapport au conseil consultatif relatif à un projet de décret modifiant les conditions de paiement des pensions militaires allemandes," 121 AL 371, ADBR.

**Table 16: Monthly Amount of Pension Rates for German, French, and German Alsatian Disabled Veterans**

Disability Percentage	Monthly Amount of Support Paid to Disabled German Veterans on November 11, 1918 (In francs)	Monthly Amount of Support Paid to Disabled German Alsatian Veterans on November 11, 1918 (Previous Column Multiplied by 1.25) (In francs)	Monthly Amount of Support Paid to Disabled French Veterans (In francs)	Monthly Amount of Support Paid to Disabled German Veterans after June 1, 1919 (In Marks)	Monthly Amount of Support that Disabled German Alsatian Veterans would have Received According to the New German Rates
10%	21.75	27.20	20	30.45	38.07
15%	25.15	31.45	30	35.25	44.06
20%	28.50	35.65	40	39.90	49.87
25%	31.90	39.90	50	44.70	55.88
30%	35.25	44.05	60	49.35	61.69
35%	42.60	53.25	70	59.65	74.56
40%	46.50	58.15	80	65.10	81.38
45%	50.45	63.05	90	70.65	88.31
50%	-	75	100	84	105.00
55%	64.50	80.65	-	90.30	112.88
60%	69	86.25	120	96.60	120.75
65%	73.50	91.90	130	102.90	128.63
70%	78	97.50	140	109.20	136.50
75%	82.50	103.16	150	115.50	144.38
80%	87	108.75	160	121.80	152.25
85%	91.50	114.40	170	128.10	160.13
90%	96	120	180	134.40	168.00
95%	100.50	125.65	190	140.70	175.88
100%	105	131.25	200	147	183.75

Not surprisingly, the shortfall between their own pensions and those received by both German and French disabled veterans was a source of complaint for the ex-German war invalids in Alsace. The Association of the War Disabled in Alsace and Lorraine demanded equality for all of the war disabled.<sup>1</sup> In October 1921, as a means to address the disparity in financial support in the short-term and as precursor to more comprehensive legislation, French authorities approved a measure that awarded French pension payment rates according to German calculated disability percentages.<sup>2</sup> This decision was intended to create greater parity in the support received by disabled German Alsatians soldiers and French invalid veterans. However, the action created a new set of complexities in the relationship between Germany, France, and Alsatian veterans of the former's military service. In order to assess the degree of disability according to German guidelines, it was necessary for German authorities to physically examine and evaluate each individual applicant. As a result, former German Alsatian veterans now possessing French citizenship were required to cross the border and travel to Freiburg to be examined by a German review board. The notifications of these evaluatory reviews regularly occurred so closely to the appointment date that the ex-soldiers did not have enough time to secure the requisite passes or visa in order to cross the border.<sup>3</sup> In response, German officials exempted their former soldiers from the requirement.

The French decision to give German authorities this type of access and power over ex-soldiers who had fought in their ranks who were now French citizens marks a departure and

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<sup>1</sup> "Denkschrift des Verbandes an den Herrn Commissair-Général de la République," *L'Invalide de Guerre* nr. 4, September 1, 1919, 121 AL 371, ADBR.

<sup>2</sup> "Rapport au Président de la République française," *Journal Officiel de la République Française* nr. 299, November 5, 1921, 12,358.

<sup>3</sup> Reichsarbeitsminister to the Reichsminister des Innern, May 11, 1923, R 901 25936, BABL.

seeming contradiction to previous policy. The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that the French government was to be the intermediary between the German Alsatian veterans and the German state in regards to pension payments. Ultimately, the French government would follow through on its intention that it had stated as early as March 1920 during the Baden-Baden negotiations to put disabled Alsatians and Lorrainers on the same level as permanently injured French ex-soldiers on April 17, 1923, when the French pension legislation from March 31, 1919 was extended to the provinces.

The equalization of payments to Alsatian veterans, however, did not signal an end to their agitation. The 1923 legislation relied upon the division of the province's population into three categories established by the Treaty of Versailles to determine award eligibility. Only those German Alsatian ex-combatants who fell into the categories of "authentic" residents of the province were able to acquire French rates of support. In 1923, this differentiation was accepted by the majority of veterans' groups in the province. The passage of time and the solidification of their own pension claims led to increased popular support among disabled veterans' associations in the former *Reichsland* to provide equal support to the "old" German disabled soldiers who continued to live in the provinces. This change in position was met with annoyance at the official level. In 1938, faced with proposed legislation to amend the exclusion of "old" German veterans that was backed by deputies from the former *Reichsland* and the Union of the War Disabled, Veterans, and Victims of War in Alsace and Lorraine (*Union des invalides, anciens combattants et victimes de la guerre d'Alsace et de Lorraine*), the French Minister of Finances pointed out that disabled soldiers' associations in Alsace and Lorraine had approved the initial marginalization when the legislation was passed in 1923.

The popular campaign to extend French pension rights to disabled “old” German veterans justified their demands on the longevity of the applicants’ residence in Alsace and their fulfilment of French citizens’ duties. Proponents of equal treatment pointed out that these individuals had been French citizens for more than a decade and that the nineteen years of residency should have been enough time to have assimilated French norms. From a procedural standpoint, the “old” German veterans’ possession of French citizenship indicated that they had completed all the necessary requirements outlined in the Versailles Treaty to achieve that status. Moreover, in many cases, the sons of these men had also served in the French army.<sup>4</sup> The popular campaign was supported by the deputies from Alsace and Lorraine, but also provincial officials. The Prefect of Moselle concluded that there was not much difference between “old” German veterans that had been naturalized after three years living in Alsace and Lorraine and those elements of the borderland population that had been allowed to naturalize within a year.

### **Combatants’ Cards and Pensions**

In the Interwar period, the French government created a system of benefits that was also extended to non-disabled French ex-soldiers. A provision of the Finance Law passed on December 19, 1926 provided for the creation of the “National Office of the Combatant” (*l’office national du combattant*). The fundamental responsibility of the National Office was to look out for the material and mental wellbeing of French veterans. Another essential function was to regulate the awarding of “Combatants’ Cards” (*carte du combattant*) to French veterans of the First World War. Eligibility guidelines were outlined in legislation that was passed on June 28,

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<sup>4</sup> Préfet de la Moselle to the Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat à la Présidence du Conseil, January 1, 1937, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

1927. In order to qualify for the Card an applicant was required to have served a minimum of three months in a military formation that the government designated as an active service unit. Individuals could also obtain a Card if they had been wounded or contracted an illness in any of these corps, even if they had served less time than three months.<sup>5</sup>

Provisions were also made to award Combatants' Cards to Alsatian and Lorrainer veterans who had served in the German army. In contrast to the service requirements of French ex-soldiers, residents of the former *Reichsland* were to be awarded a card regardless of the type of unit they were in and their length of service. Specifically, the decree stated that "Alsations and Lorrainers who became French through execution of the Treaty of Versailles, who were mobilized during the 1914-1918 war, are affiliated with a regional 1914-1918 veterans' association that in turn is linked to a national group of soldiers or the disabled [are eligible for the Combatant's Card]. The exception to this are those Alsace-Lorrainers who were career officers."<sup>6</sup> Again, for the purposes of the legislation, French authorities considered "Alsace-Lorrainers" to be individuals who had been reintegrated or reacquired their French citizenship within a year of the going into effect of the Treaty of Versailles. Despite these specifications, the decree was exceptional in its inclusivity. The majority of Alsations who had been mobilized into the German army were made eligible for the Combatant's Card. This favor is all the more remarkable when it is considered that among their French counterparts, only a minority of confirmed combat veterans received this benefit.

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<sup>5</sup> "Attributions et fonctionnement de l'office national des combattants," *Journal officiel de la République française* no. 155 July 4 and 5, 1927, 6935.

<sup>6</sup> "Attributions et fonctionnement de l'office national des combattants," *Journal officiel de la République française* no. 155 July 4 and 5, 1927, 6935.

French authorities' willingness to approve the nearly wholesale attribution of the Combatant's Card to ex-soldiers from the former *Reichsland* was a result of the difficulty in determining if particular German military formations had served as frontline units. Rather than go through the process of requesting the relevant information from German authorities, officials deemed it easier to award all mobilized Alsatians and Lorrainers a Combatant Card. For the ex-German Alsatian soldiers the prerequisite that replaced the three months of service in an active formation was the requirement of being affiliated with a regionally based veterans' group. Under these conditions Alsatians who had volunteered and fought for France faced a potential disadvantage to the ex-German combatants. French authorities could easily check the amount of time Alsatian men had spent at the front in the French army. As a result, a potential paradoxical situation emerged in the province, where all ex-German Alsatian soldiers would receive the Combatant's Card while only some of the men who had risked charges of treason to serve France would be eligible. Recognizing the impossibility of the situation, French authorities decided to give all Alsatian and Lorrainer ex-servicemen the cards.<sup>7</sup>

The wholesale attribution of Combatant's Cards to all ex-soldiers from the former *Reichsland* was not unchallenged – even among Alsatian veterans' groups. In particular, the Federation of Alsatian and Lorrainer Volunteers was opposed to the decision. In an extended report Federation members complained that awarding the Card to all ex-soldiers devalued its prestige. The memorandum observed,

It follows then, that for those from the interior of the country the Card is only accorded to an elite group, a policy which corresponds to all veterans' desires that only those who actually ran a risk by participating in war operations and only after a serious investigation into their service records [should receive the Card]. The Alsatians and Lorrainers are being likened to that elite, even if

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<sup>7</sup> Laval to Général Bourgeois, Sénateur du Haut-Rhin, June 25, 1930, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

they were only mobilized a single day in the German army and even if they only served in a garrison far from the front or in a factory or did agricultural work.<sup>8</sup>

The Federation particularly objected to giving the Card to “old” Germans who had been naturalized, contending that this could not have been the intention of the French legislature.<sup>9</sup> In a response that would later prove to be evidence of the conflicted and halting nature of French policy in Alsace, Pierre Laval would defend the French administration saying that there was no ambiguity of interpretation in the Combatant’s Card law and that all former soldiers in Alsace and Lorraine were eligible to receive a Card.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, however, it appears that the resistance to awarding all Alsatian and Lorrainer veterans was minimal and not perceived at the official level to be particularly problematic. This changed over the course of 1930. The Finance Law that was passed in April of that year provided for an annual annuity of 500 to 1200 francs for any Combatant Card holder who was at least fifty years old.<sup>11</sup> This law immediately changed the tenor of the discussion surrounding the awarding of the Cards to veterans in Alsace and Lorraine. Simply following the letter of the law would have meant awarding *all* Alsatian and Lorrainer ex-soldiers with a pension – a policy that would be sure to generate opposition from the majority of French veterans, particularly since they were already resentful of the undifferentiated awarding of Combatants’ Cards. French

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<sup>8</sup> Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains, “La situation des Alsaciens et Lorrains ayant servi dans l’armée allemande au point de vu des avantages accordés aux anciens combattants,” February 7, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

<sup>9</sup> Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains to Paul Valot, April 26, 1930, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Laval to Wallach, Président de la Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains, May 23, 1930, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>11</sup> “Note relative aux conditions d’attribution de l’allocation du combattant aux Alsaciens et Lorrains ayant servi dans l’armée allemande et plus particulièrement aux soldats ayant appartenu aux ‘Landsturminfanteriebataillone,’” 98 AL 257, ADBR.

authorities recognized the backlash they would face from all segments of French society if they privileged former enemy combatants, even if they were now technically French citizens, over their own soldiers. The Prefect from Moselle pointed out that the wholesale attribution of pensions to veterans from the former *Reichsland*, a group who as a whole had done nothing to contribute to the French victory, would be sure to alienate a large number of French veterans who saw the pension as a reward for their sacrifices.<sup>12</sup> A similar sentiment was articulated when the Federation of Alsatian and Lorrainer Volunteers rhetorically asked,

While the free state pensions benefit French veterans who actually risked their lives to save the country, is it conceivable to grant this pension to all those mobilized in the German army, even if did not face any danger or even volunteered to bear arms against France?<sup>13</sup>

The opposition also argued that the situations surrounding the military service of “old” Alsatians and “old” Germans in the Imperial military was fundamentally different. The former had been mobilized into the army despite their reservations, while the latter had been serving their Fatherland.<sup>14</sup> Here again the established French nationalist narrative regarding the supposed unwillingness of “authentic” Alsatians to cooperate and voluntarily contribute to the German war effort played a key role in determining postwar French policies.

In addition to popular opinion, French authorities also had budgetary considerations to take into account. The expenditure necessary to provide support to all the veterans of the three departments would require a significant financial outlay well in excess to other French

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<sup>12</sup> Préfet de la Moselle to the Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat à la Présidence du Conseil, January 1, 1937, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>13</sup> Fédération des engages volontaires Alsaciens et Lorrains, “La situation des Alsaciens et Lorrains ayant servi dans l’armée allemande au point de vu des avantages accordés aux anciens combattants,” February 7, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

<sup>14</sup> Préfet de la Moselle to the Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat à la Présidence du Conseil, January 1, 1937, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

departments. Consequently, a decree promulgated on November 4, 1930 specified that Alsatians and Lorrainers, regardless of the army they served in, were only eligible for the Combatant's Card annuity if they had fulfilled the same service prerequisites as their interior French counterparts. Thus although all Alsatian and Lorrainer veterans possessed the Card, only those who could prove at least three months of service in an active war zone or been evacuated for a wound or sickness contracted during their service would receive the support.<sup>15</sup>

The problem with this official decision, even if it was made in the interest of creating equality in treatment for most ex-soldiers who were French citizens, was the precedent that had been set by the undifferentiated awarding of the Combatant's Card to Alsatian and Lorrainer veterans. The Prefect of the Upper-Rhine observed that if the pension was not awarded to every ex-soldier who possessed a Combatant's Card, French authorities would be creating a veritable "second-class" of Card carrying former soldiers who were not eligible for a pensions and a population who did not exist outside of the former *Reichsland*.<sup>16</sup> Alsatian ex-soldiers who were Card holders but found themselves ineligible to receive financial support were liable to focus on this inequality in application of the legislation rather than the fact that they were already receiving "special treatment" according to the awarding guidelines of the Combatant's Card. The result was that Alsatian veterans could easily point to this as evidence that ex-combatants in the provinces were treated differently and seemingly less favorably than their interior French counterparts. The government's position was not strengthened by the fact that the two largest

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<sup>15</sup> "Règlement d'administration publique pour l'application de l'article 201 de la loi de finances du 16 avril 1930 instituant l'allocation du combattant," *Journal officiel de la République française* no. 261 November 6, 1930, 12,438.

<sup>16</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil, February 11, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

veterans' associations in Alsace, the UNC and the Union of the Disabled, Widows, Orphans, and Ascendants (*l'Union des Invalides, Veuves, Orphelins et Ascendants*), came out in support of awarding combatant's pensions to any Card carrier.

Unfortunately for French officials, the problem of holding ex-German Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers accountable to the same requirements as French veterans was the same that had motivated the decision to award Combatants' Cards to all of them in the first place. In determining the type and duration of an Alsatian veteran's service French officials could not simply request the pertinent information from Paris. Instead, the records of the approximately 250,000 eligible ex-soldiers from Alsace and Lorraine were located in Germany. The necessity of establishing an applicant's service record required that French authorities enter into a direct and sustained close contact with German officials. This was particularly the case to gauge the eligibility of the approximately 60,000 soldiers from the former *Reichsland* who had applied for a disability pension based on an injury they suffered during their time in the German ranks.<sup>17</sup> The addition of the financial stakes to particular Card holders increased the pressure on French officials to verify the eligibility of the ex-German Alsatian veterans and to do so quickly. Despite the challenge of obtaining the relevant military service records of Alsatian ex-soldiers from German sources, archival evidence suggests that French authorities were able to acquire the necessary information and that they tended to approve applications. In 1935, the Office of the Disabled, Combatants, and Victims of the War reported that they had received 42,180 files of Alsations and Lorrainers who had served in military formations in the German army that were

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<sup>17</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Sous-Secrétaire d'Etat à la Présidence du Conseil, February 11, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

reputed to be non-combatant units. Of these cases some 37,432 or 88.7% had been approved, while the remaining 4,748 had been rejected.<sup>18</sup>

Further muddying the waters of Combatants' Cards and pensions in the former *Reichsland* was the increasingly exclusiveness of eligibility guidelines. In November 1930, around the same time that the order was being circulated that only Alsatians and Lorrainers who served in an active combat zone were eligible for an annuity, French officials received the additional instruction that only veterans who had reacquired their French nationality through the first and second sections of the nationality annex of the Treaty of Versailles could receive the yearly support payment. In practice, this excluded all "old" German veterans who had obtained their French citizenship through a later naturalization.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in 1937, French authorities would take the step of revoking the Combatant's Cards of any Alsatian and Lorrainer who had volunteered for service in the German military during the war. Thus in contrast to German pension policy during the Imperial period, French eligibility guidelines actually became more exclusive as time progressed.

### **Differentiating between Former German Alsatian Soldiers**

The fundamental principle that shaped all official French pension legislation and actions in Alsace during the Interwar period was the distinction made between "authentic" Alsatians and "old" Germans. However, French authorities made a further differentiation beyond this

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<sup>18</sup> Office National des Mutilés, Combattants et Victimes de la Guerre to M. Perreau-Pradier, Député, March 9, 1935, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>19</sup> "Instruction pour l'application du décret du 4 novembre 1930, pris en exécution de l'art. 301 de la loi du finances du 16 avril 1930 instituant l'allocation du combattant," November 14, 1930, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

dichotomy, effectively creating three categories of former German soldiers who were consistently excluded from French pension payments. These three groups consisted of “old” Alsatian career officers, individuals who had volunteered for service in the Imperial army, and “old” Germans who had been naturalized as French citizens after the war. Although individuals from these three groups shared the common experience of the denial of their military pensions, at an official level the justification for their marginalization dramatically differed. Moreover, at the popular level, the different groups’ causes would receive varying levels of support in the former *Reichsland*.

### **“Authentic” Alsatian Career Officers**

“Old” Alsations who had been career officers in the German army found their calls for pension equality regularly opposed by both French officials and the Alsatian populace. French authorities’ reluctance to put former German officers on equal footing as French career officers is evident in the debates that surrounded extending sections 59 and 60 of France’s March 1919 pension legislation to them.<sup>20</sup> French officials argued that these provisions had not been extended to professional German Alsatian ex-officers in 1923 because “it would be unusual for the French treasury to pay for services rendered by soldiers whose profession was to prepare for war and in case of conflict with France to command German soldiers against this country.”<sup>21</sup>

A serious effort to extend the benefits of Articles 59 and 60 to Alsatian career officers occurred in 1932. Proponents justified their proposed legislation by observing that there would

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<sup>20</sup> “Loi modifiant la législation des pensions des armées de terre et de mer en ce qui concerne les décès survenus, les blessures reçues et les maladies contractées ou aggravées en service,” *Journal officiel de la République française* no. 91 April 2, 1919, 3387-3388. The articles provided pensions for disabled career officers and re-enlistees in the amount proportional to their rank at the time of injury with the addition of a disability pension correspondent to their degree of infirmity.

<sup>21</sup> Ministre des Finances to the Président du Conseil, February 8, 1938, 98 AL 245, ADBR.

not be a significant economic outlay because there were only approximately 200 individuals who would benefit from the expansion. More importantly they argued, “The project has a very great importance from a political standpoint, given that it puts Frenchmen who served in the war in the German army and ex-French soldiers on the exact same footing in regards to the right to a mixed pension.”<sup>22</sup> The justification for the bill was not connected to an individual’s pension rights, but rather that the legislation was important from a political perspective because it furthered the process of eliminating differences in the treatment of the Alsatian population in comparison to their inner French counterparts. The remark that the bill would be positively affecting “Frenchmen” who had served in the German army invoked the image of the Alsatian as the reluctant German soldier. This argument did not convince French legislators and failed to pass.

The initial failure of the bill did not signal an end to public or individual pressure to change the law. In 1934, a certain Jean Jerg petitioned French officials to reconsider their stance on withholding certain pension rights from former professional soldiers and volunteers. Jerg was clearly aware of the arguments against his position observing, “It seems we are blamed and treated as ‘preparers of war’. That we have in our capacity as non-commissioned officers voluntarily prepared many contingents of German youth for war against France. But nothing is further from the truth.”<sup>23</sup> He went on to argue that non-commissioned officers formed a cohort of stability in the administration and were motivated solely out of material considerations rather than German patriotism. Jerg reminded French officials that, “When we reached an age to make

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<sup>22</sup> “Rapport fait au nom de la commission d’Alsace-Lorraine sur la proposition de la loi de M. Sturm et plusieurs de ses collègues tendant à rendre applicables en Alsace et en Lorraine les articles 59 et 60 de la loi du 31 mars 1919 sur les pensions militaires d’invalidité et le cumul partiel,” Nr. 220 Chambre des Députés Session de 1932, 2, 98 AL 245, ADBR.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Jerg to the Président du Conseil, December 11, 1934, 98 AL 245, ADBR.

the decision [to become a career officer] our homes (*petit pays*) were under German domination. It was why we were able only to enlist in the German army, just as we would have taken service in the French army, probably with more heart and spirit, if our province had not been separated from France.”<sup>24</sup> Jerg protested against his and his fellow re-enlistees’ exclusion from the benefits of Articles 59 and 60 by arguing that they were merely fulfilling their martial duties for the government that held sovereignty in Alsace at the time. After echoing official arguments that the financial outlay to meet he and his comrades’ needs would be minimal, Jerg closed by observing, “France has but one class of children. All under that title are equally dear, she does not make a difference between them. What she grants to one, she grants to the other. We would like our case to be settled with this in mind.”<sup>25</sup> The fact that Jerg’s petition failed is evident in that deputies from Alsace and Lorraine were still attempting to pass the legislation in 1938.

Despite his inability to affect real change in his situation, Jerg’s appeal posed a direct challenge to central state officials’ attempts to simplify the categorization of the borderland population. Jerg vigorously contested the idea that he had taken up the occupation of career soldier in the German army for any reason other than personal benefit. Although this represented Jerg’s attempt to establish that he did not harbor pro-German sentiment, the alternative scenario he proposed must have been just as, if not more, troubling to French authorities. French postwar policy was guided by the assumption that residents of the borderland were either committed to France or Germany. Blood was perceived to be the most accurate predictor of an individual’s national loyalties, but actions also needed to be taken into account. Jerg’s statement that he would have just as willingly served in the French army had Alsace been French introduced a

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<sup>24</sup> Jean Jerg to the Président du Conseil, December 11, 1934, 98 AL 245, ADBR.

<sup>25</sup> Jean Jerg to the Président du Conseil, December 11, 1934, 98 AL 245, ADBR.

third, more troubling variable. It suggested the existence of an ambiguous element of the borderland population that was not committed to one nation or the other, but rather to their own self-interest. Not only did this challenge the French idea that the Alsatian population was inherently francophile, but it also problematized the notion that the government could somehow screen out the “good” from the “bad” Alsatians. If this was true, how could French sovereignty ever be truly assured if some Alsatians would willingly trade in their association with France if a more advantageous option appeared? Lastly, Jerg’s invocation of France’s self-styled public image as a national family of equals, where no group enjoyed unfair advantage over another, is a clear instance of an individual adopting the state’s own rhetoric to argue against a perceived contradiction in its policy.

### **“Old” German Ex-Soldiers**

In contrast to the “career officers,” “old” German veterans who had been naturalized as French citizens received widespread public support in their efforts to obtain a Combatant’s Card. Veterans’ groups in Alsace were one of the strongest supporters of an initiative to award a Combatant’s Card to all ex-soldiers living in the area of the former *Reichsland*, regardless of the heritage or how they came to be French citizens. The “Union of War Disabled, Widows, Orphans, Ascendants and Veterans of Alsace and of Lorraine” (*L’union des invalides, veuves, orphelins, ascendants de guerre et anciens combattants d’Alsace et de Lorraine*) publically sympathized with the “bitterness and disappointment” felt by the “old” German veterans living in Alsace who had been naturalized, paid taxes, and perhaps even had a son serving in the French army, but who could not receive a Combatant’s Card or a pension because of their German origin.<sup>26</sup> The cause of the naturalized veterans was also adopted by certain interior French

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<sup>26</sup> L’union des invalides, veuves, orphelins, ascendants de guerre et anciens combattants d’Alsace et de Lorraine, “Rapport sur le droit à la carte et la retraite du combattant des citoyens français, anciens soldats

veterans' organizations. The *Journal des Mutilés et Combattants des Veuves et de toutes les Victimes de la Guerre* published an article written by the Vice-President of the National Federation of Republican Combatants, Grüneisen, in 1938 that described naturalized Alsatians as "our comrades" and questioned the denial of the Combatant's Card and the associated benefits to them. Grüneisen wrote,

What is the real reason for this flagrant injustice? These men who were born here, resided here before the war, and who have remained here, have proven their commitment to France. Is it their fault that they fought against their will in the German ranks and did they not face the same humiliations because of their status as Alsatians and Lorrainers? Is not their eagerness to claim French citizenship after the Armistice and their attitude since the end of hostilities incontestable proof of their loyalty to France? Is it asking too much for them to be treated the same as their comrades who were reinstated [into French nationality], who likewise had to serve in the German army?<sup>27</sup>

An interesting element of Grüneisen's argument is that he rejected the notion of difference in war experience between "old" Alsatians and "old" Germans by suggesting that both groups faced hostility and suspicion in the German ranks due to their origin from the province. An implication here is that Imperial authorities themselves did not believe in the notion that blood somehow predisposed an individual towards a particular national loyalty. Instead, despite the fact that their parents were "German", their children who had been raised in Alsace were also perceived to be potentially nationally suspect. Grüneisen also challenged the *jus soli* rhetoric of French citizenship law by pointing out the naturalized veterans' length of residence in France and their record of loyal service.

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de l'armée allemande qui ont acquis la nationalité française en execution du §3 de l'annexe a la section V partie III du Traite de Versailles," February 11, 1931, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>27</sup> Ch. Grüneisen, "La carte du combattant aux Alsaciens et Lorrains naturalisés," *Journal des Mutilés et Combattants des Veuves et de Toutes les Victimes de la Guerre* nr. 1,127, September 4, 1938, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

A further dimension in the argument for attributing Combatant's Cards and the associated support to naturalized "old" German veterans was added by the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1940, A. Geis, the President of the United Committee of Veterans' Associations in the Upper Rhine, wrote to French authorities in Paris protesting that former Alsatian soldiers who had achieved their French citizenship through naturalization were still not eligible for the Combatant's Card or a pension.<sup>28</sup> Geis justified the extension of the same rights to all Alsatian veterans by arguing that many of the naturalized Alsatians had been mobilized in 1938 and had sons currently wearing the French uniform. Thus not only had these ex-German soldiers fulfilled their duties as Frenchmen during peacetime, they and their sons had also responded to the call to defend France against renewed German aggression.

The official French stance on this issue was articulated in a note from the Director of the Department of Alsace and Lorraine in Paris to the President of the National Federation of Republican Veterans. Earlier, the President had written asking about the French government's discrimination against Alsatian and Lorrainer veterans living in the provinces. The Director responded that,

I do not want to leave you with the impression that the cause you are supporting is that of Alsatians and Lorrainers to which the Government has refused their right. The concerned parties, today French citizens, are those former Germans descended from German parents who were domiciled in Alsace-Lorraine before August 3, 1914, for whom the Treaty of Versailles, taking into account their territorial attachment to Alsace-Lorraine, simplified access to our nationality by means of common law naturalization that reduced the period of residence on our soil from ten to three years in order to apply for French nationality. The measure that you are demanding in their favor would not be the satisfaction of the law, but - it is important to say - an act of pure benevolence.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> A Geis, Président du Comité d'Entente des Associations d'Anciens Combattants du Haut-Rhin to René Besse, Ministre des Anciens Combattants et Pensionnés, February 20, 1940, 98 AL 255/1, ADBR.

<sup>29</sup> Présidence du Conseil, Direction Générale des Services d'Alsace et de Lorraine to the Président de la Fédération Nationale des Combattants Républicains. 98 AL 256, ADBR; Paul Valot, Vice-Président du Conseil to the Ministre des Anciens Combattants et Pensionnés, June 13, 1939. 98 AL 256, ADBR.

The Director concluded by saying he was not completely opposed to the principle of extending benefits to certain veterans who fell into this category, but warned of the far-reaching economic consequences for the government that comprehensive legislation would create. Instead he argued that decisions should be made on a case by case basis.<sup>30</sup> In another case, a French official, Chantemps, made a similar distinction to Deputy Meck from the Lower-Rhine. Meck had evidently inquired about the protests in Alsatian newspapers regarding the withholding of Combatants' Cards to Alsatian veterans. In his response Chantemps quickly summarized the postwar differentiations in citizenship in Alsace, ensuring that he highlighted that the members of the third group were Germans who had been resident in the province prior to August 3, 1914. He informed Meck that the present confusion of the matter in the press was that members of this group were being referred to as "Alsations and Lorrainers."<sup>31</sup>

Both the statement from the Director of the Department of Alsace and Lorraine and from Chantemps are remarkable for what they reveal about official French views regarding naturalized German ex-soldiers living in the provinces. The Director and Chantemps continued to make the differentiation between "authentic" Alsations and "old" Germans, even if the adjectives themselves had been dropped from the language of the letters. In this mindset, the government was not denying benefits to "Alsations and Lorrainers" per se, but rather to individual Germans. Thus a German in 1918 was still a German in 1939 even after they were naturalized and had

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Valot articulated this basic position in a memorandum to the Minister of Veterans and Pensions on June 13, 1939.

<sup>30</sup> The Vice-President of the Council articulated similar financial concerns in a memorandum to the Minister of Veterans and Pensions on June 13, 1939. See Paul Valot, Vice-Président du Conseil to the Ministre des Anciens Combattants et Pensionnes, June 13, 1939, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>31</sup> Chantemps to Député Meck, November 27, 1938, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

possessed French citizenship for nearly two decades – a time roughly equivalent to half the lifetime of any young man who had been of active military service age during the First World War. Their former status as “old” Germans trumped any right they might expect as French citizens to receive a Combatant’s Card and pension.

It is also important to note that certain veterans’ organizations supported a more restrictive awarding of French citizenship and Combatant’s Cards. Thus a representative of the “United Committee of the Societies of the Disabled and Veterans of Metz and Moselle” wrote to the Prefect of Moselle protesting against any resident of Alsace and Lorraine receiving French citizenship or a Combatant’s Card that was not of “old” Alsatian heritage and had not automatically become French when the Treaty of Versailles went into effect.<sup>32</sup> The author wrote wholeheartedly supported the government’s efforts to integrate elements of the provinces’ French descended population into the French national family. The association, however, strenuously objected to naturalizations of Germans, many of whom “yesterday were Pangermanist agitators.” The group also protested against awarding naturalized “old” Germans the Combatant’s Card, calling the policy “an undeserved insult absolutely unnecessary to their national quality.”<sup>33</sup> Twenty-six associations affixed their names to the petition.

### **“Authentic” Alsatian Volunteers for German Military Service**

The third category of former German Alsatian soldiers that experienced discrimination in relation to the awarding of Combatant’s Cards and pensions were “old” Alsations who had volunteered for military service in the Imperial army. Unlike “old” Alsatian career officers and

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<sup>32</sup> Comité d’Entente des Societes et Mutilés et Anciens Combattants de Metz et de la Moselle to the Préfet de la Moselle, March 19, 1928, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>33</sup> Comité d’Entente des Societes et Mutilés et Anciens Combattants de Metz et de la Moselle to the Préfet de la Moselle, March 19, 1928, 98 AL 256, ADBR

“old” German soldiers, however, the official policy of marginalizing Alsatian volunteers became increasingly restrictive over the course of the Interwar period. Thus, in 1937, nineteen years after the end of the war, French authorities moved against Alsatians who had volunteered for service in the German army by revoking their Combatants’ Cards. The disruptiveness of the decisions was heightened by the fact that in many cases denying ex-volunteers a Card was not simply a matter of withholding them since *all* ex-soldiers in the former *Reichsland* had been granted Combatants’ Cards when the law was extended to the provinces in 1930. Instead, while no more new Cards were to be issued to individuals in this category, those who had previously received the card were told of its revocation at the time they submitted an application for its renewal.<sup>34</sup>

Authorities themselves received conflicting directives. The Prefect of the Upper-Rhine related that he had received instructions in January and April 1937 that confirmed the revocation of the Cards, only to be followed up in July with directions to approach the former volunteers’ applications more favorably. The changing position of central authorities perhaps partially accounts for the unevenness of application of the Combatant Card guidelines between the three departments. For instance, the Departmental Committee in the Upper-Rhine did not make the distinction between the three categories of Alsatian veterans, while their counterpart in the Lower-Rhine refused to grant Combatant Cards to “old” Germans, and those in Moselle had a tendency to refuse Cards to ex-soldiers from the second category that had been given permission to apply for naturalization within a year.<sup>35</sup> Such administrative inconsistency was utilized by

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<sup>34</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Vice-Président du Conseil Direction Générale d’Alsace et de Lorraine, May 9, 1939, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>35</sup> L’union des invalides, veuves, orphelins, ascendants de guerre et anciens combattants d’Alsace et de Lorraine, “Rapport sur le droit à la carte et la retraite du combattant des citoyens français, anciens soldats

veterans' groups like the "Union of Disabled, Widows, Orphans, Ascendants of War and Veterans of Alsace and of Lorraine" to argue that the French government would be better off not differentiating between groups of Alsatian veterans.

The change in this stance is partially explained in a memorandum between Paul Valot, the Vice-President of the Council and the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Pensions. Valot related to the Minister that although he and the State Council agreed that the spirit of the 1930 law should preclude the awarding of Combatants' Cards to war volunteers. However, the clause only specifically mentioned excluding former officers and so there was nothing legally standing in the way of the Minister evaluating and deciding on applications on a case-by-case basis. Valot related that he saw the merit of maintaining this flexibility in order to respond to changing conditions and different applications. He did remain firm that any potential approval of a Combatant's Card for individuals in this category should only occur after an intense investigation of the factors that motivated the applicant to enlist.<sup>36</sup>

Regardless of official motivations to exclude Alsatian soldiers who had volunteered for service in the German army, the decision was met with widespread condemnation across Alsace. The popular outrage was reflected in the news summaries that French officials regularly collected from the Alsatian press. The *Dépêche de Strasbourg* labeled the decision a "phenomenal gaffe"<sup>37</sup> and the *Journal d'Alsace et de Lorraine* published a protest resolution

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de l'armée allemande qui ont acquis la nationalité française en execution du §3 de l'annexe a la section V partie III du Traite de Versailles," February 11, 1931, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Valot, Vice-Président du Conseil to the Ministre des Anciens Combattants et Pensionnes, June 13, 1939, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

<sup>37</sup> "A propos de la pension des engages volontaires Alsaciens dans l'armée allemande," May 8, 1937, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

passed by the Federation of Alsatian and Lorrainer Volunteers.<sup>38</sup> The *Neue Basler Zeitung* wrote that “The crime of these volunteers is that they voluntarily put themselves at the disposal of their former Fatherland before they were forcibly enlisted.”<sup>39</sup> This comment articulated the counterargument of individuals and groups against the pension revocation. These sources estimated that only 1-2% of Alsatian volunteers had been motivated by German nationalism to enlist. Instead, the newspapers contended that many young Alsatian men had volunteered for the German army not out of national conviction, but, quite oppositely, because volunteering was one of the best guarantees to prevent oneself from being killed. The *Freie Press* claimed that the vast majority of Alsatians who had volunteered and chosen to serve in non-combatant units like the 15th Train Battalion, rather than waiting to be drafted and be given the more dangerous assignment of serving as an infantry soldier.<sup>40</sup> The Prefect of the Upper-Rhine similarly looked beyond German patriotism to explain the voluntary enlistment of many young Alsatians. His suggestions echoed the alternative theories that were put forth in the Alsatian news, but added a further consideration that young Alsatian men who volunteered were actually able to better ensure that they would not be pitted against French forces.<sup>41</sup>

The pensions issue in Alsace had not been settled at the time of the outbreak of the war in 1939. Although naturalized “old” German ex-soldiers living in the province would be mobilized into French forces along with “authentic” Alsatian veterans, individuals in the former category

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<sup>38</sup> “A propos de la pension des engages volontaires Alsaciens dans l’armée allemande,” May 8, 1937, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

<sup>39</sup> “Der Kuß Frankreichs für das Elsaß,” *Neue Basler Zeitung*, April 22, 1937, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

<sup>40</sup> “A propos de la pension des engages volontaires Alsaciens dans l’armée allemande,” April 24, 1937, 98 AL 257, ADBR.

<sup>41</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Vice-Président du Conseil Direction Générale d’Alsace et de Lorraine, May 9, 1939, 98 AL 256, ADBR.

continued to have their requests for pensions denied by the French government. From French officials' perspective, their pension policies must have appeared both generous and reconciliatory. France had adopted the responsibility of paying pensions for the majority of Alsatian ex-soldiers who had fought against them in the most bloody and destructive war in French history. Moreover, these individuals enjoyed equality of payments with their counterparts from France proper and were even granted some privileges that latter group did not receive. French policy was not exclusive because all "true" Alsations could take advantage of its benefits. They need not concern themselves with the "old" German population because this category of people was the responsibility of their German Fatherland. The picture became more complicated when it came to excluding "old" Alsatian career officers and volunteers from financial support, but could be justified by the observation that these individuals through their cooperation with the German regime were acting in an "unnatural" manner and so lost their automatic claim to French citizenship and the benefits associated with it. The landscape of pension support would undergo a complete overhaul following the Nazi conquest and defeat of France in 1940. Hitherto excluded categories of ex-soldiers could find themselves suddenly "in," while those accustomed to official support could be excluded from the financial benefit and the province itself.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **Memory and Memorialization in Interwar Alsace**

An important element in the postwar French re-assumption of sovereignty in Alsace was a campaign to expunge the province of the legacies of the previous German administration. The screening and separation of the population living in Alsace was the demographic element of a three part campaign to reintegrate Alsace into France. The other two prongs of the postwar transformation consisted of efforts to mold the landscapes of remembrance in the province in a physical and mental sense. In these latter two efforts, French authorities sought to fundamentally alter and refashion the funerary and monumental space of the former *Reichsland* and shape the memory of Alsatians' involvement with the German government in a particular manner. It is impossible to definitively separate the final two endeavors since the built monuments were each endowed with a particular narrative and symbolism that the builders sought to convey to the audience. Taken as a whole, all three efforts were designed to promote a vision of Alsace's past that fit into the French national narrative of an *über*-patriotic francophile people, patiently and steadfastly tolerating the "German yoke" until such time as France could return and reclaim its rightful sovereignty over the province. Memorials and the dead themselves became important sites of debate over Alsace's past and future in the French state.

#### **The Legacy of the German Past: Imperial Monuments and War Graves in Interwar Alsace**

German observers critically contrasted the French treatment of German war graves and monuments after 1918 to the supposedly more humane and honorable Imperial policies following the Franco-Prussian War. Germany and France had codified their duty to care for the soldiers' graves that lay on their territory in Article 16 of the Treaty of Frankfurt. A certain G.

Fischer recalled that “already” by 1897 the local veterans’ association in Metz was decorating the memorials and graves of some 12,624 German and 9,812 French soldiers. He nostalgically remembered that “There was never a differentiation made between German and French graves. The fallen combatants were no longer enemies to us and often Germans and Frenchmen rested together in a single grave.”<sup>1</sup> Not only did local German veterans care for the graves of their onetime enemies, the Imperial government gave permission for French national memorials to be built on German soil at places like Wissembourg and Mars-la-Tour. In both these incidents the *Souvenir français* that took charge of the dedication ceremonies demonstrated that their interest lay not honoring the memory of its brave fallen soldiers, but rather as a venue to showcase an “orgy” of “French chauvinism.”<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to the respect that had been shown to French monuments and war graves during the Imperial period and the war years, German sources reported the widespread vandalism and destruction of German memorials that had been built to honor the dead and military formations of the Franco-Prussian War. Newspaper articles reported incidents like the 4. Magdeburg Infantry Regiment Nr. 67’s monument that stood near the battlefield of Gravelotte being thrown into a nearby stone quarry or the bronze from the various memorials being harvested to make victory medals.<sup>3</sup> Such incidents led one German newspaper to ironically

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<sup>1</sup> “Die Kriegergräber und Denkmäler von 1870 bei Metz: Erinnerungen von G. Fischer, Eisenbahn-Direktor i.R., Darmstadt (Kriegsfreiwillige von 1870),” *Elsass-Lothringische Mitteilungen* no. 44, November 2, 1930, R 80 3, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> “Die Kriegergräber und Denkmäler von 1870 bei Metz: Erinnerungen von G. Fischer, Eisenbahn-Direktor i.R., Darmstadt (Kriegsfreiwillige von 1870),” *Elsass-Lothringische Mitteilungen* no. 44, November 2, 1930, R 80 3, BABL.

<sup>3</sup> “Die Kriegergräber und Denkmäler von 1870 bei Metz: Erinnerungen von G. Fischer, Eisenbahn-Direktor i.R., Darmstadt (Kriegsfreiwillige von 1870),” *Elsass-Lothringische Mitteilungen* no. 44, November 2, 1930, R 80 3, BABL.

comment, “Such are the actions of a nation that supposedly is fighting for justice and civilization, although in the Alsatian and Lothringer cities and on the battlefields the so-called “barbarians” never damaged, but rather in the most loving manner protected and decorated them.”<sup>4</sup> These critical journalists chose not to remember that some German newspapers had called for the destruction of French memorials in Alsace during the war, although the policy was never carried out.<sup>5</sup> In fairness to French authorities, the monuments’ destruction had not been the result of an official order, but rather been accomplished through individual initiative among Entente soldiers (not necessarily all French) and sometimes by the local population. The French government would eventually decide to restore those monuments judged to have a “funerary character” to their original locations, while the others would be placed in museums for their historical value. This plan, however, came under attack by local populations. In 1923, the *Souvenir français* proposed placing the monuments in German military cemeteries.<sup>6</sup> It was even evident that the rest of the dead was not immune from being disturbed by the French. Many Germans were outraged about the systematic French campaign in the late 1920s to exhume and transfer the bodies of German soldiers who had been killed in World War I and the Franco-Prussian War to larger military graveyards in order to consolidate the space being taken up by the dead and make the task of caring for the graves easier.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Copy of newspaper article entitled “Französische Kultur” sent to the Deutsche Waffenstillstandskommission, Berlin, April 7, 1919, R 904 7, BABL.

<sup>5</sup> Rossé et al, *Das Elsass*, 1:504.

<sup>6</sup> Marie-Noële Denis, “Le Monuments aux Morts de la Grande Guerre en Alsace: Un compromis avec l’histoire,” in *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre* ed. Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008), 374.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the remains of German soldiers in Corny, Faily, Charly, Emery, Tremery, Fleivy, Noveant, Arry, Sanry s/Nied, Orny, Pournoy-la-Grasse, Ponty, Remilly, Pange, Les Etangs, Conde-Northeim, Vaudoncourt, Courcelles-Chaussy, Ogy, Colligny, Maizeray, Courcelles s/Nied, Ivry, Vaux, Jouy-aux-

The transfer and consolidation of surviving Imperial monuments and the bones of German soldiers into cemeteries reflect the French desire in a symbolic and material sense to consign the memory of the Imperial period to the past. The relocation of both the monumental and organic evidence of the German victory and period of sovereignty to select graveyards unsubtly told both Alsatians and the Germans themselves that the interlude of Imperial ascendancy was over and would never again return. Moreover, the amalgamation of the evidence of German presence in Alsace into a limited number of locations kept such artifacts from regularly intruding upon the Alsatian public's consciousness and recalling that there was ever a period in which the province had not been part of France. Placing German martial monuments in museums or cemeteries took these symbolically laden structures out of their original context and so robbed them of much of their original meaning, making them more of historical curiosities of a past age than emblems of victory.

At the same time that French authorities were consolidating the number of German military graveyards, they were creating national cemeteries for their own dead in the former *Reichsland*. The combination of practical and symbolic considerations that motivated French officials to intern their dead in Alsace and Lorraine is illustrated by examining the establishment of a military cemetery in Sarrebourg, Lorraine. This National Cemetery would eventually contain the remains of some 13,300 French soldiers who had died in German captivity. Sarrebourg had been chosen as the site due to its proximity to a theatre of war that had seen combat from the opening of hostilities in 1914 to the Armistice in 1918. The cemetery was physically integrated into the larger French military efforts and sacrifices during the First World

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Arches, Gorze, Ars s/Moselle were all transferred to the military cemetery at Ancy. "Renseignements sur le regroupement des ossuaires allemands et franco-allemands de 1870," R 80 3, BABL.

War by situating it alongside the road to Verdun. Moreover, in a symbolic and physical sense the cemetery was definitive evidence that the provinces lost in 1871 had been returned. The bodies of the French soldiers lay claim to the ground in which they were buried. At the same time, the thousands of French grave markers also provided an eternal testament to both local and international audiences of the blood sacrifice that had been made to assure Alsace-Lorrainers' place in the French national family.<sup>8</sup>

France had suffered horrifically during the war and it certainly was not without cause that Sarrebourg, situated in the vicinity of the Franco-German border, would serve as a destination and collection point for the bodies of Frenchmen who had died in Germany. For Alsatians, however, the legacy of the conflict became problematic when the line between the defensive reasons that France went to war in 1914 was blurred with the myth of the conflict being waged solely to reclaim Alsace and Lorraine. France had gone to war with Germany in 1914 in response to the German invasion, not specifically to restore the provinces. In the hands of French nationalists, however, France's wartime sacrifice became a symbolic weapon to bludgeon the population of the former *Reichsland* into submission if they were perceived to be acting in a manner contrary to France's interests.

The invocation of France's wartime sacrifice occurred in diverse contexts that ranged from attacks against the growth of Alsatian particularism, to donation calls for so-called "sacrificial offerings" (*Opfergabe*) to support the widows and orphans of French soldiers. Anselm Laugel, the well-known francophile co-editor of the periodical *Revue alsacienne illustrée*, in a speech attacking the Alsatian autonomist movement railed, "One should not forget

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<sup>8</sup> Francis Grandhomme, "En Quête de Reconnaissance: L'inauguration du Cimetière national des prisonniers Sarrebourg, 1926," *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre* ed. Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008), 401.

that France sacrificed 1.4 million of its children to extract Alsace and Lorraine from Germany's claws."<sup>9</sup> Here Laugel explicitly suggested that the desire to return the annexed areas to France and save the population was responsible for the entirety of France's wartime deaths. A similar blurring between France's reasons for going to war in 1914 and the return of Alsace was also given visual representation. In one exemplary image, four women are clothed in traditional Alsatian dress that is uncharacteristically colored black in mourning. The supplicants have been brought to their knees and struck silent by the realization of the extent of French sacrifice on their behalf. A large admonitory inscription is etched into the rock above their downcast heads reads, "Alsace do not forget that 1,500,000 French soldiers died for your liberation."<sup>10</sup> Another example is provided by a broadsheet soliciting money from the Alsace-Lorrainer population for the survivors of French soldiers. The paper argued,

Our thankfulness to France is unending and can know no boundaries because for us France spilled her lifeblood in the most generous manner, for us France fought the murderous fight and France has with loving care spared our land from the horror of war. Such a debt of gratitude can never be repaid. We want to show as a sign of our thankfulness to the brave men who offered up their lives for us through our honor and support of their survivors...Alsations and Lorrainers fulfill your obligation of honor!<sup>11</sup>

None of the above cited examples were government sponsored. In both these cases it appears that an individual or element of the Alsatian population took it upon themselves to remind their fellow provincials about France's wartime sacrifices. Alsations themselves were certainly aware and sympathetic to the sacrifices that France had made during the war. Yet French authorities and society at large were unable to acknowledge Alsatian sacrifice in its own

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsations?*, 146.

<sup>10</sup> "L'Alsace n'oublie pas que quinze cent mille soldats français sont morts pour sa délivrance," World War I Subject Collect, Box No. 5, HIA.

<sup>11</sup> "Die Opfergabe der Befreiung – den Witwen und Waisen der für das Vaterland gefallenen französischen Soldaten das dankbare Elsass-Lothringen," R 9350 830, BABL.

right. Instead, if it was to be acknowledged at all, the Alsatian story had to be integrated into the larger redemptive French narrative. This stance was physically articulated in the exhumation and transfer of “old” Alsatians’ bodies who had died as German soldiers to French national cemeteries. The French failure to recognize the ambiguity of the Alsatian experience coupled with the overuse and misapplication of the sacrificial legacy of the World War calloused Alsatians to its plea and lessened its symbolic currency.

The bodies of German soldiers were not the only corpses on the move in the postwar period. At the same time as the other cemetery and monument transfers, French authorities began a process of “reclaiming” or “rescuing” the bodies of Alsatians from German military graveyards and transferring them to French national military cemeteries. The effort itself appears to have been the result of a shared initiative from the official and familial level. The willingness of French authorities to exhume and transfer an Alsatian’s body from its resting place among other German soldiers was predicated on the evidentiary establishment of the individual’s “worthiness” as an “authentic” Alsatian. As such, candidates were those Alsatian soldiers who would have become French citizens had they survived the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

The willingness of French officials to bury Alsatian dead who had indisputably died in the service of Germany reflected the power of the postwar French narrative that Alsatians in the German army had worn the German field grey uniform, but been French at heart. This narrative was given concrete form in the war monuments of Rosheim and Guebwiller, Alsace. Carved into the Rosheim monument is an image of a French *poilu* adorned with the laurels of victory extending his hand in fellowship to an Alsatian soldier who has discarded his German *pickelhaube* and opened his uniform to reveal a tricolor rosette pinned above his heart. Joan of

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<sup>12</sup> For a number of such cases see 98 AL 241, ADBR.

Arc presides over the scene embracing both men in a sign of the unity that has been reestablished with the restauration of the lost province to France. The selection and physical removal of Alsatians' bodies from German military cemeteries based solely on their heritage again highlights the French investment in the notion that the possession of "old" Alsatian blood was sufficient to judge what the "real" national sentiments of the deceased were, despite the fact that this blood had been spilled in service to an enemy state.<sup>13</sup>

In postwar Alsace even the manner in which the province's dead were commemorated at an individual level was a matter of state interest. The precedent of the government distinctly recognizing their war dead had been set during the war. In April 1916, the French government codified a law that created an honorary diploma for the families of French officers and soldier who had died during the present conflict. Along with the deceased's name, rank, and military formation, the certificate bore a patriotic slogan stating that "The Motherland Gratefully Recognizes the Dead of the Great War."<sup>14</sup> In April 1920, the Prefect of the Upper-Rhine informed his superiors that German officials had asked that he serve as their intermediary in dispensing an illustrated commemorative diploma bearing the inscription "Died for the Fatherland" to the families of Alsatian soldiers who had been killed while serving in the German ranks. Without further instruction, the Prefect declared he would file the certificates without

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<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson has written on the tendency of nationalists to claim the authority to represent what the dead "really meant" to say or "really wanted," regardless if the dead themselves took or understood such a position in their lifetimes. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 198. Katherine Verdery's book *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* similarly examines the political use and symbolic investment in bodies in post-socialist Eastern Europe. See Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> "Loi instituant un diplôme à remettre aux familles des officiers, sous-officiers et soldats des armées de terre et de mer morts pour la Patrie depuis le début des hostilités," April 27, 1916, 121 AL 369, ADBR.

transmitting them.<sup>15</sup> French authorities' immediate response agreed that the transmission of such a document would be "inopportune," but recognized that such a certificate was desirable.

The Interior Director in Strasbourg suggested that a diploma be created similar to the one provided to the families of fallen French soldiers. The certificate would contain the individual soldier's name, rank, and place of death – but exclude the name of his military formation. Furthermore, the note made no mention of including a patriotic slogan. The document would be bestowed to all "old" Alsatian families who had reclaimed their French nationality by right and those elements of the borderland population that had been naturalized within a year after the Treaty of Versailles went into effect.<sup>16</sup> French military authorities rejected the idea of a commemorative diploma without a patriotic motif, arguing that the proposed model would only be a "simple sheet of paper" that nearly duplicated the content of the death certificate and pose an unnecessary and significant expense for the French state. In further elaboration, the note stated,

The appropriateness of this kind of diploma also seems questionable. Families animated by French sentiment will have no desire to display such a certificate. And if there exist Alsace-Lorrainers who are willing to exult in having a child killed under the German flag, it seems undesirable to give them an opportunity to reach this goal with the proposed diploma.<sup>17</sup>

The note closed by saying that either form of commemorative certificate would cause more trouble than they were worth and instructed that the prefects destroy them.

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<sup>15</sup> Le Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Commissaire Général de la République, April 19, 1920, 121 AL 369, ADBR.

<sup>16</sup> Directeur de l'Intérieur to the Directeur des Affaires Militaires, April 28, 1920, 121 AL 369, ADBR.

<sup>17</sup> Le Colonel Directeur des Affaires Militaires to the Directeur de l'Intérieur et de l'Administration générale, May 4, 1920, 121 AL 369, ADBR.

The French reluctance to recognize the military dead of Alsace as soldiers who had fallen in the ranks of the German army was not reciprocated among the Alsatian population. In the absence of an official certificate, some Alsatian families utilized commercial means to commemorate their deceased loved one. A dispute between a firm that supplied private memorializations and its Alsatian customers drew in regional authorities in 1929. The controversy surrounded the commemorative product of the firm of one Henri Riverd located in Cahors, France. Parents of soldiers killed during the war could pay Riverd's company to produce an enameled funerary ornament that bore a photograph of their dead loved one, an epitaph, as well as any military medals he had been awarded during his military service. Riverd's company became the subject of an official inquiry after the Prefect of the Upper-Rhine wrote to his counterpart in Lot that a great many of Riverd's Alsatian customers had their "French sensibilities" offended by the decision to place a large image of the Iron Cross next to the photograph of their son. Consequently, some of the affected parties were refusing to pay the remainder of their bill.<sup>18</sup> Riverd wrote a letter to the local police commissioner defending himself in the subsequent investigation. He related that each plate was produced according to a template that the customer chose, therefore it was impossible that any Alsatian family had received an Iron Cross on their plaque if they had not explicitly ordered it. Like any good businessman (and any number of his competitors), Riverd argued that he was responding to customer demand. He speculated that the issue had come to a head because he had recently undertaken a campaign to collect on unpaid debts – many such cases had been successfully resolved, but a few had chosen to utilize the pretext of the Iron Cross to justify their lack of payment. As a sign of his French goodwill, Riverd offered to use a chemical process to remove

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<sup>18</sup> Préfet du Haut-Rhin to the Préfet du Lot, March 7, 1929, 98 AL 241, ADBR.

the Iron Cross free of charge from any dissatisfied customers' plaque after the balance of their bill had been paid. In a parting shot, Riverd closed by relating that he was a Lorrainer and sufficiently acquainted with the mindset of Alsatians to know that they were more "francophobe" than "francophile."<sup>19</sup>

The Riverd controversy demonstrates that Alsatian families, regardless of their supposed French sympathies, sought out and were willing to pay for commemorative pieces beyond that provided (or not provided) by the French government. The commercialized nature of individual remembrance pieces allowed the customer to play a central role in shaping the manner in which their fallen loved one was remembered. The evident variety of Riverd's plaque templates at one level reflects his customers' variable tastes, but more critically, it also illustrates popular dissonance regarding the memory of the dead. Families could choose to remember their loved one as a soldier by including his military medals or as a heroic civilian who died fulfilling his duty to his nation by leaving them absent. Either way, the demand for alternative forms of individual commemoration reflects a feeling of incompleteness, if not dissatisfaction, among fallen soldiers' families with the official narrative that was conveyed in commemorative pieces produced by the government. Riverd's justification that the form of his wares reflected his customers' desires and that he was not alone in offering alternative commemorative pieces suggests that the image of the Iron Cross was requested frequently enough to warrant its own template. Thus contrary to French official desires, a significant number of Alsatian families chose to remember and commemorate their loved ones for their service and accomplishments in the German army. This revelation need not mean that the buyers were poor or even reluctant French citizens, as Riverd's closing comment alluded to, but he was clearly hoping to utilize

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<sup>19</sup> Henri Rivard to the Commissaire de Police de Cahors, April 5, 1929, 98 AL 241, ADBR.

preexistent official frustration with the *malaise alsacien* in an effort to evoke French authorities sympathy and support for his position.

### **Building War Memorials in Interwar Alsace**

It was not sufficient to tear down the monuments of the previous German regime or physically and symbolically relegate them to the graveyard. French authorities believed it necessary to provide alternate cenotaphs and narratives in Alsace that projected the image that the French return to power corresponded to the reestablishment of the “true” natural order in the province, rather than the re-conquest by a foreign power. Monuments to the Alsatian war dead were important sites in which this new narrative could be given concrete form. In some cases, the population of Alsace had taken an active role in tearing down the physical edifices of the Imperial period and now would take a similarly proactive position in the reconstitution of the province’s monumental landscape. The creation and symbolic content of a war memorial was, however, not a matter of unanimous popular and authoritative cooperation nor a simple imposition of official ideology and remembrance forms on the local populace. Instead, a certain degree of negotiation occurred between authorities and Alsatian population.

Most of the memorials built to the Alsatian war dead occurred between 1921 and 1924. Monuments took a multitude of forms ranging from plaques with inscriptions to statues of soldiers or symbolic representations of Alsace. Certain structures were more common than others. Not surprisingly, there is a dearth of figures wearing German uniforms. Marie-Noële Denis cites the monuments at Kegenheim and Rosheim as two examples, but as the previously discussed Rosheim monument demonstrates, the German uniform of the soldiers is only present to show what the Alsatian soldier is not. A requirement that war memorials’ designs be preapproved by the departmental architect helped ensure that the monuments conformed to

official parameters.<sup>20</sup> The editors of the Interwar multi-volume work, *Das Elsass* that was published in the early 1930s described memorial dedications as a muzzling experience. Specifically, that only the rare and brave dedication speaker dared to suggest that those Alsatians who had honorably fallen in the German ranks were doing their duty.<sup>21</sup> This process, however, did not go uncontested. Christopher Fischer cites an instance in which the Alsatian newspaper, *Elsässer*, published an article arguing that the French government needed to recognize that all Alsatians, and not just those serving in the French army, ““had died for the Fatherland. Only when the current administration took steps to include all Alsatians could the reintegration of Alsace into France be completed.””<sup>22</sup> Later constructed memorials, such as the one built on the *Place de la République* in Strasbourg in 1936 would eschew such patriotic imagery in favor of the theme of sacrifice. The ambiguity of the Alsatian experience in World War I was also reflected in the inscriptions on memorials. Instead of the officially adopted “Died for France” (*Mort pour la France*) or “Died on the Field of Honor” (*Morts au champ d’honneur*) epitaph, monuments such as the one in Strasbourg simply read “To Our Dead” (*À nos morts*).<sup>23</sup>

### **Case Study: Strasbourg’s War Memorial**

The construction of the memorial on the *Place de la République* in Strasbourg illustrates the types of discussions and considerations that surrounded the building of war monuments in the latter part of the Interwar period. The process of planning and construction the memorial began

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<sup>20</sup> Denis, “Le Monuments aux Morts de la Grande Guerre en Alsace,” 368, 370-371.

<sup>21</sup> Rossé et al, *Das Elsass*, 1:323.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Fischer, *Alsace to the Alsatians?*, 171.

<sup>23</sup> Denis, “Le Monuments aux Morts de la Grande Guerre en Alsace,” 369.

in 1935 after Henry Levy, the representative of a committee wishing to see the construction of a war monument in Strasbourg, proposed the project to the mayor. Levy argued for the desirability of erecting such a cenotaph by observing that Strasbourg was one of the few cities that did not have a memorial to its dead. He elaborated by saying,

Our population, however, has a memory cult and I am convinced that all those who have lost someone dear in the upheaval and particularly those who cry not knowing where their loved one lies, experience the need on the Day of the Dead to reflect before a monument immortalizing the sacrifice of the disappeared.<sup>24</sup>

In Levy's mind the Strasbourg memorial would serve as a symbolic grave and remembrance space for those Strasbourg families whose fallen loved one did not have a known resting place. Once word of the proposal became public, local newspapers also added that a monument to the city's dead would provide a hitherto absent focal point for the annual November 11th commemorations.

The early print discussions regarding the prospect of constructing a municipal war memorial reveal that Levy's initiative was not the first of its kind. In the first years after the war a group sought to build a memorial that was in line with the "official attitudes" at the time. The proposed project would not have been a cenotaph to the dead, but rather a "victory monument." The monument was to feature a goddess of victory seated on a horse with a group of soldiers to the left and right. Only the necessary money for construction was lacking. However, as the author of the article explained, "Strasbourg in the aftermath [of the war] did not take kindly to the victory monument, so much so that only a part of the original project was completed. Two stone revolutionary soldiers that were eventually dedicated separately on Broglie Square."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Henry Levy to the Maire de Strasbourg, February 5, 1935, 154 MW 24, AMS.

<sup>25</sup> "Gefallenendenkmal für Strassburg?," *Neue Zukunft*, February 23, 1935, 154 MW 24, AMS.

In 1935, the contemporary Strasbourg population believed that the construction of the monument must be popularly backed and have the input of all levels of Strasbourg society, with careful attention paid to the voices of veterans and soldiers' survivors. By including a multitude of opinions, municipal authorities hoped to ensure the final memorial did not symbolically privilege the war or victory over honoring the city's fallen sons. The editors at the *Neue Zukunft* argued that "A monument of this type must carry the approval of the native circles, otherwise, instead of being a subject of reverence, it will become an object of quarrels. Past experience has shown that the survival of such a [contested] work cannot be safeguarded for all time."<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, the public planning of the form of the monument should be matched by a popular campaign to raise the necessary funds to build the memorial. In effect, all of Strasbourg should be responsible for funding the construction lest one individual or group gain too much influence through their financial backing of the project.

Few contentious issues arose during the planning phase of the monument. The one aspect of the memorial design that generated discussion revolved around the language of the inscription. The original plan called only for a French epitaph with the words "To Our Dead 1914-1918" (*À Nos Morts 1914-1918*). At the city commission meeting, a certain Mr. Dahlet argued that it would be an impiety for the inscription to only be in French considering that most of the dead that the monument was commemorating had died in a German uniform and "less than 1%" spoke any French. He demanded that at a minimum the phrase "For Our Dead" (*Für unsere Toten*) be added to the design.<sup>27</sup> In a letter to the mayor, Henry Levy argued against Dahlet's position by suggesting that the short length of the inscription made a German translation

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<sup>26</sup> "Gefallenendenkmal für Strassburg?," *Neue Zukunft*, February 23, 1935, 154 MW 24, AMS.

<sup>27</sup> "Kommissionssitzung vom 4. März 1935," 154 MW 24, AMS.

unnecessary. Moreover, he contended that the inclusion of such an epitaph could be seen as a bearing a particular political message – a goal that the planners had specifically sought to avoid. In the end, only the French dedication was left on the monument.

The monument was completed and with much fanfare dedicated in the fall of 1936. The final shape of the memorial took the form of a woman clad in traditional Alsatian dress sadly holding two dying, naked soldiers in her arms. The feminine figure represented Alsace, while the nudity of the men she held focused on their commonality of origin and tragedy of their fate rather than the particular uniform they wore. Although it was wrong in nearly all of the other details, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* grasped the intended effect of the memorial saying, "...a German like a Frenchman can be shaken by the monument because both can bow their heads before it and neither need be ashamed of themselves..."<sup>28</sup> Even in the absence of a German inscription, it is evident that many contemporaries viewed the Strasbourg memorial as a reconciling structure that did not cast blame, but rather, perhaps more so than any earlier monument embraced portraying the ambiguity of Alsations' efforts in the 1914-1918 war.

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<sup>28</sup> "Denkmal," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, August 25, 1935, 154 MW 24, AMS.

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Claims from Afar: The Interwar Practices of Belonging in Alsatian Regimental Veterans' Associations, 1918-1938**

“The wanderer who walks along the western slope of the Black Forest roughly between Baden-Baden and Offenburg encounters at especially scenic and beautiful settings newly erected memorial stones and monuments that force him to halt and linger a few minutes in solemn contemplation. These are emblems of remembrance built by regiments of the old Wehrmacht with a view of the sadly lost, but never forgotten land, of their garrison city in Alsace, the splendid Vosges and beyond the eternal German Rhine.”

~Major A.d. Dittler speaking in Bühl at the groundbreaking of the memorial for fallen members of the 4. Lower Alsatian Infantry Regiment Nr. 143, May 6, 1928.

The settling of accounts following World War I led to a dramatic reconfiguration of the political and demographic landscape of Europe. The general confusion caused by the end of hostilities, the breakup of established empires, and the creation of a multitude of new, supposedly ethnically homogenous nation-states led to widespread instances of voluntary and forced population migrations. Within this context, the return of the historically contested provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France was portrayed by the victors as the righting of a historic wrong and a victory for international justice. French officials rapidly set about cleansing Alsace and Lorraine of the most egregious vestiges of German political, economic, and martial institutions. An essential component of this process was an evaluation of the provinces' population and the separation of the nationally-suspect from the nationally-loyal. Individuals judged to be potentially disruptive to the process of national reintegration were expelled from the province. German soldiers who had been garrisoned in Alsace during the Imperial period and who had fought as “Alsatian” regiments during the conflict made up a significant contingent of the expellees.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’,” 141. Boswell suggests that approximately 300,000 Germans lived in Alsace- Lorraine prior to the war. Between 1918 and late 1920,

This chapter focuses on the commemorative and memorialization activities of the 132nd and 143rd Lower-Alsatian regimental associations during the Interwar period. Within the framework of this dissertation, the chapter is unique in that it temporarily shifts the analytical focus outside Alsace and concentrates on the effect that the loss of the province had on a group of primarily non-Alsatian former-combatants. The study of Interwar German Alsatian veterans' associations provides a definitive example of the process by which Alsace was invested with nationalist symbolism and emotional significance by vanquished external actors following its change in sovereignty. In their own minds, members of the 132 and 143rd associations linked the "unjust" loss of the province to Germany's contemporary troubles and their own personal difficulties in the postwar period. The chapter demonstrates that officially sanctioned prohibitions and corporeal absence did not prevent excluded individuals from maintaining and even strengthening their psychological affiliations with Alsace. The associations' memorials, commemorative rituals, and a variety of remembrance triggers were specifically designed and utilized with the intention of evoking particular kinds of memories and emotional responses among participants. The resultant imagined representation of the province shaped members' contemporary attitudes towards the Weimar Republic, France, and Alsace. The 132nd's regimental monument in Oberkirch and the 143rd's in Bühl were not only memorials to the regiments' fallen comrades, but the physical manifestation of the spiritual and emotional claims of belonging to Alsace that transcended contemporary national borders.

The study of Interwar Alsatian regimental association contributes historiographically to the literature of citizenship, veterans' associations, and the study of memory and emotion. This

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110,000 were expelled. Approximately 70,000 German military personnel were garrisoned in the provinces on the eve of the war.

chapter calls for an expansion of the spectral view of citizenship to include the assertions of individuals who do not claim a particular general nationality, but instead maintained a right of belonging and membership to a space from which they have been excluded. It argues for the need to go beyond a state's assertion of control over a particular region and include the claims made by groups to a particular space even if they are not recognized by the currently sovereign state. The study of the organizational life of the former Alsatian regiments demonstrates that members built a community and identity based upon their shared experience of prewar service in and postwar marginalization from Alsace. These former soldiers claimed and acted out a form of emotional and mental citizenship to the province through regular performative acts of commemoration in local chapter meetings, yearly national reunions, and through the construction of regimental memorials that were symbolically constructed on the heights of the Black Forest overlooking their former garrison cities.

The chapter's focus on the Interwar commemorative and memorialization practices of the 132nd and 143rd Alsatian regiments fills a significant hole in existing veterans' historiography. In general, although German First World War veterans have received significant attention, these works primarily focus on nationally constituted associations or more local communities of memory.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, regimental associations, like that of the 132nd and 143rd, were

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<sup>2</sup> For studies of the national veterans' groups see Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten, 1918-1935* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1966); James M. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Roger Chickering, "The Reichsbanner and the Weimar Republic, 1924-26," in *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 4 (December 1968), pp. 524-534; C.J. Elliott, "The Kriegervereine and the Weimar Republic," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no 1 (January 1975), pp. 109-129; and for French veterans Antoine Prost, *Les anciens combattants et la société française, 1914-1939* Vols. 1-3 (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques vol Histoire, 1977). For a focus on more local commemorations see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

intermediary organizations situated between these two poles of communal and national communities of remembrance and combined elements of both. The membership of a regimental association could theoretically be as diverse as the backgrounds of the men who served in its ranks, irrespective of any political, religious, social, cultural, or economic differences amongst the former soldiers. This breadth of eligible membership has parallels with local remembrance and memorialization activities, which initially focused on the commemorated individuals' commonality of origin and downplayed or ignored any factor that might have divided them.<sup>3</sup> The 132nd and 143rd associations reflected these elements, but differed from the local commemorative groups in their national constituency. National veterans' organizations in Germany, like *Stahlhelm* and the *Reichsbanner*, enjoyed higher membership numbers, but in general were limited in social geography because of their particular political agendas or other membership specificities.<sup>4</sup> In sum, Alsatian regimental associations' members reflected a numerically limited,<sup>5</sup> yet wide cross-section of the postwar German population similarly to local

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<sup>3</sup> See Tim Grady, "A Common Experience of Death: Commemorating the German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1923" in *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Edited by Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, the German veterans' organization *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold, Bund der republikanischen Kriegsteilnehmer* was a national association, but had little draw from any former soldiers who did not share the group's republican political convictions. Similarly, groups like the *Reichsbund der Kriegsbeschädigten, Kriegsteilnehmer und Kriegerhinterbliebenen* shared a common experience of disability or loss that attracted a very specific segment of former soldiers and war widows despite the group's national breadth.

<sup>5</sup> Only a minority of the men who filled the 132nd and 143rd regiments' wartime ranks chose to join their respective association in the postwar period. For instance, at "war strength" the 143rd regiment was to contain 68 officers and 3,074 non-commissioned officers and men. The postwar membership numbers reported by the association were 1,028 members in 1928 and 1,068 in 1939. See *Nachweisung über abgelieferte Beträge zum Denkmal der Ortsgruppen*, *Wir 143er*, no. 5 (July 4, 1928), 5, MSG 3 2402, BAM and "Traditionsverband des ehem. 4. Unterels. Infant. Regts. 143 (im NS Reichskriegerbund) Verzeichnis der Mitglieder (Stand vom 1. Februar 1939)," *Wir 143er* 10, no 58 (February 28 1939), 1-6, MSG 3 2405, BAM. The 132nd association's membership was reported at 1,160 in 1932 and 1,918 in 1935. See "Übersicht über die Bundesfinanzen, Stand der Beitragszahlung 1932 am 31.12.32,"

remembrance communities, while sharing the characteristic of a national constituency with larger organizations.

The primary impetus of existent German veterans' leagues historiography has been a focus on large anti- or pro-republican national associations.<sup>6</sup> These excellent studies have greatly advanced our understanding of the inner workings and commemorative practices of organizations like *Stahlhelm* and the *Reichsbanner*.<sup>7</sup> Yet their focus on leagues dominated by a particular political agenda and the "culture of contestation" between opposing organizations risks creating an overall perception of the postwar veterans' movement in Germany that is excessively "black and white" (or "black, red, white" versus "black, red, gold" if you will), a model in which former combatants' groups and their members of opposing ideological doctrines rarely interacted - aside from moments of confrontation.<sup>8</sup> It is here, in such a seemingly polarized organizational landscape that the study of regimental associations can make a significant contribution to the existing historiography. Regimental leagues were a point of intersection between nationalist/reactionary and republican/progressive leagues. They served as a "gray area" in

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*Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 40 (March 1934), 7, MSG 3 1176, BAM and "Geschäftsbericht für 1933 (Sommer) bis 1935 (Mai)," *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 46 (October 1935), 5. MSG 3 1176, BAM.

<sup>6</sup> For studies of the national veterans' groups see Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten, 1918-1935* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1966); James M. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Roger Chickering, "The Reichsbanner and the Weimar Republic, 1924-26," in *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 4 (December 1968), pp. 524-534; C.J. Elliott, "The Kriegervereine and the Weimar Republic," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, no 1 (January 1975), pp. 109-129.

<sup>7</sup> Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm Bund der Frontsoldaten, 1918-1935*; and Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*.

<sup>8</sup> For example Ziemann writes "...contestation and disunity were key elements of war remembrances in Weimar Germany." Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*, 23, 62-94.

which members with convictions from across the political spectrum continued to coexist and interact long after the policies of their larger counterparts had weeded out such difference.<sup>9</sup> Regimental associations provide the focused context within which we can witness the full spectrum of leftist and rightist solutions to perceived problems within postwar veterans' groups and German society as a whole. In the 132nd and 143rd Alsatian regimental associations, militant conceptions of *revanche* coexisted alongside milder, less belligerent ideas of reversing the most egregious wrongs of the Treaty of Versailles. Ultimately, opinions regarding the final form of a "reconstructed" Germany were numerous and varied according to their articulator and the contemporary time and context. Thus a focus on veterans' leagues with singular political commitments risks missing the wide range of forms that notions of "restoration" took within the former combatants' community and its evolution over the Interwar period. It is to this subject and the associations' members' reaction to the rise of National Socialism that the remainder of the paper is dedicated.

The Alsatian regimental associations expressed their claims of belonging to Alsace in their commemorative rites and memorialization practices. Each of these activities gained their symbolic resonance through a deliberate arousing of particular emotions and memories among the participants. At one level, members of the Alsatian regimental associations were drawn together through the simple desire to maintain the memory of their military service and reconnect with former comrades. However, a formative cohesive element for the organizations was the

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<sup>9</sup> This occurred at different times for different groups. Volker Berghahn observes that *Stahlhelm* only moved to the anti-republican right after the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were announced. See Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm*, 18-19. Similarly, Roger Chickering argues that the *Reichsbanner* pursued a socialist agenda once the political and economic stability of the Weimar Republic had been (temporarily) achieved. See Chickering, "The Reichsbanner and the Weimar Republic," 528-533.

shared “chosen trauma” of members’ exclusion from Alsace.<sup>10</sup> Yet regardless of the depth of the psychological shock engendered by the 1918 defeat, both the memories and the emotions associated with the event had a “shelf life” and were vulnerable to decay with the passage of time.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Alsatian regimental association leaders in their local chapter and national association meetings and in the ceremonies surrounding the organizations’ memorials utilized a range of artificial remembrance triggers to “re-muddy” the waters of memory. The intent of causing participants to “re-experience” their nostalgic and painful memories of Strasbourg was to combat emotional demobilization. It was for this reason that the decision was taken to situate the regimental memorial in full view of Strasbourg. The close spatial proximity to the unattainable city unvaryingly heightened the emotional resonance of the commemorative rites as participants were able to mentally engage and imagine themselves once more in their former barracks.

Memorials and commemorative rites are tangible embodiments of their sponsors’ ideological values and agendas. The final form of both commemorative methods is a culmination of a complex process of selective remembering and forgetting that seeks to highlight particular memories, while downplaying or forgetting others. This phenomenon has been labeled the “primacy effect.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in any bounded association of people, each participating individual contributes elements of their own recollections to the group’s collective memory. However, some members have more influence within the band and as a result have a greater

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<sup>10</sup> Maruška Svašek. “The Politics of Chosen Trauma: Expellee Memories, Emotions, and Identities,” in *Mixed Emotions: Anthropological Studies of Feeling* ed. by Kay Milton and Maruška Svašek, (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 199, 203.

<sup>11</sup> See Emmanuel Sivan and Jay Winter, “Seeing the Framework,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* ed. by Emmanuel Sivan and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Sivan and Winter, “Seeing the Framework,” 14, 27-28.

power of interpretation than others. This does not mean that a monument or group leaders are able to unilaterally impose their desired ideological messages upon ordinary members and viewers. Emotion and memory are neither solely the product of official manipulation nor wholly uncontrollable. Instead, the meaning of commemorative practices and memorials are never fixed, but rather are in an ongoing state of redefinition as a result of the interplay between the intended message, contextual considerations (setting, time period, contemporary politics, economic concerns, etc.), individual memory, and collective remembrance practices.<sup>13</sup>

Two closely linked emotions that have a particular relevance in describing the commemorative and memorialization practices of the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations are *ressentiment* and hate. Max Scheler defined *ressentiment* as a particularly virulent, enduring, and re-experienced sentiment of hate and animosity. *Ressentiment* in individuals and groups is a reaction to a perceived injury and is the outcome of an undischarged build-up of “particularly powerful” impulses for revenge, envy, an impulse to detract, spite, *Schadenfreude*, and malice.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is not solely the combination and presence of these factors that may lead to the development of *ressentiment*. Instead, a fundamental element of *ressentiment* is a profound feeling of impotence that stems from an inability to act out or express these sentiments,

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<sup>13</sup> Much work has been done on the interplay between individual and collective memory. For exemplary works see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Winter and Sivan, “Setting the Framework,”; “AHR Conversation: The Historical Study of Emotions,” *The American Historical Review* (2012) 117 (5): 1487-1531, and Lucien Febvre, *Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past* in *A New Kind of History from the Writings of Febvre* ed. by Peter Burke. Translated by K. Folca. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, Trans. by Lewis B. Coser and William W. Holdheim (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998), 29.

particularly revenge.<sup>15</sup> The members of the Alsatian regimental associations were fully conscious of their powerlessness to reverse the postwar settlements that deprived them of their former garrison city and second “Heimat.” The *ressentiment* stemming from this realization and the bitterness engendered by successive French violations of Germany’s sovereignty colored their memorials and commemorative ceremonies throughout the entirety of the Interwar period.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the commemorative practices of the Alsatian regimental associations, it is important to have a sense of the overall number of individuals who participated in their activities. Although neither the 132nd nor the 143rd organizations regularly reported their membership numbers until the 1930s, it is clear that a limited number of the men who had filled the regiments’ ranks during wartime chose to join their respective regimental association in the postwar period. In 1923, the officers’ chapter of the 132nd complained that only a minority of former 132ers belonged to the association and speculated that this lack of participation likely stemmed from a range of factors that included personal reasons, not knowing the addresses of former comrades, and the ongoing French occupation.<sup>16</sup> Two other factors that likely accounted for low participation rates were political differences (although in the early 1920s the associations would insist they were “above” party politics) and the difficult economic situation in postwar Germany. Nonetheless, despite these difficulties the 132nd regimental

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<sup>15</sup> Here I am purposefully using the term “sentiment,” as an “enduring emotion” that persists over an extended period of time and is punctuated by short outbursts of emotion. See Aaron Ben-Ze’ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 76, 83.

<sup>16</sup> “Bericht über die ordentliche Mitgliederversammlung am 24.3. in Berlin,” *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 18 (April 1923), 14, MSG 3 1175, BAM.

association membership rose from 1,160 in 1932<sup>17</sup> to 1,918 in 1935.<sup>18</sup> The membership rolls of the 143rd experienced periods of fluctuation during the late 1920s and early 1930s, but reported membership numbers of 1,028 in 1928<sup>19</sup> and 1,068 in 1939.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Ressentiment, Hate, and the Commemorative Practices of Alsatian Regimental Associations***

The cessation of hostilities in 1918 did not simultaneously signal a social and emotional demobilization of the German populace. Instead, in Germany, the end of the war and its revolutionary aftermath led to an augmentation of the prewar trends of dichotomized domestic politics. The use of wartime propaganda had thoroughly impressed a “spirit of hatred and intolerance” on German civilians. The result was an increased tendency to view the world in terms of dichotomous categories of “black and white,” “us versus them,” and “friend versus foe.”<sup>21</sup> In a later historical context, Richard Bessel has argued that a hatred born from their terrible wartime experiences created an “emotional bond” between Germans in East Germany following World War II. Bessel traces back this legacy of hatred to National Socialism by

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<sup>17</sup> “Übersicht über die Bundesfinanzen, Stand der Beitragszahlung 1932 am 31.12.32,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 40 (March 1934), 7, MSG 3 1176, BAM.

<sup>18</sup> “Geschäftsbericht für 1933 (Sommer) bis 1935 (Mai),” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 46 (October 1935), 5, MSG 3 1176, BAM.

<sup>19</sup> “Nachweisung über abgelieferte Beträge zum Denkmal der Ortsgruppen,” *Wir 143er*, no. 5 (July 4, 1928), 5, MSG 3 2402, BAM.

<sup>20</sup> “Traditionsverband des ehem. 4. Unterels. Infant. Regts. 143 (im NS Reichskriegerbund) Verzeichnis der Mitglieder (Stand vom 1. Februar 1939),” *Wir 143er* 10, no. 58 (February 28 1939), 1-6, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>21</sup> Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany*, 16.

arguing that it was an “emotional foundation of the movement.”<sup>22</sup> Yet without denying the horrors that accompanied the later conflict, the original brutalizing and hate generating event for many Germans was the First World War. In fact, many policies that were enacted during World War II had their roots in the previous conflict.<sup>23</sup> Thus, if we are to follow this poisonous legacy to its source our discussion must include an examination of the emotional inheritance that the “Great War” bequeathed to the Interwar period. The commemorative acts of the Alsatian regimental associations demonstrate that hatred and nostalgia were powerful rallying and unifying points long before the exponential explosion of membership in the Nazi party.

A strong, unintentional, element of *ressentiment* is evident in the commemorative practices and memorialization activities of the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations. To members of the Alsatian regimental associations, the anger and bitterness associated with the loss of Alsace stemmed from their perception of the undeservedness of Germany’s defeat and their own personal contemporary circumstances. This feeling of unmerited loss stemmed from two primary sources: their belief that the German army had been undefeated in the field and the closely associated conviction of the inferiority of French soldiers. The “stab in the back” legend that permeated conservative German circles in the Interwar period found regular expression in mediums surrounding the commemorative practices of the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations. In 1931, the Oberkirch newspaper, *Der Renchtäler*, reprinted a message by Pastor Nobiling at the 132nd Regiment’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, “We say it full of pride and will

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Bessel, “Hatred after War: Emotion and the Postwar History of East Germany,” in *History & Memory* 17, No. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2005), 210, 196.

<sup>23</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Liulevicius examines the ideological legacies of German soldiers’ experiences in Eastern Europe during the First World War.

always say it: undefeated in the field and full of deep pain add, stabbed from behind! Thus came to pass, what had to happen: the shameful peace that is no peace and the enslavement of our people for one hundred years.”<sup>24</sup> The comment is blatantly laced with a current of victimization regarding the terms of the Treaty of Versailles that found resonance in many parts of German society. Nobiling’s quote also tapped into the associated contempt for the “Victor who was no Victor” who currently occupied the Regiment’s former barracks.

The mediocrity and unsoldierly demeanor of the French point was regularly “proved” in association members’ disparaging remarks and observations regarding the professionalism of the French soldiers who were currently garrisoned in Strasbourg. One element of this derision was physically expressed in the regimental papers through quotation mark enclosed references to French as the “Victors of the World War.” An article in *Der Renchtäler* observed, “indeed the old garrison of Strasbourg is no longer politically German. But just as humans cannot order the sun and moon to stand still, neither can the ‘victors,’ who were no victors in an honest fight, simply command the erasure of German values even with the most severe dictated peace.”<sup>25</sup> In 1938, 143<sup>rd</sup> association president Fritz Rust reported on the unsoldierly conduct of the swarms of French soldiers he observed on a trip to Strasbourg, “Always again the same impression: off duty these soldiers make a catastrophic impression; slovenly and unclean, all in all, undisciplined.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Anlässlich des 50-jähr. Regimentjubiläums des Inf. Regts. 132 in Oberkirch,” *Der Renchtäler: Allgemeines Anzeigebblatt und Amtliches Verkündungsblatt für den Amtsbezirk Oberkirch*, June 6, 1931, 2017, Stadtarchiv Oberkirch (Hereafter SAO).

<sup>25</sup> “Herzliches Willkommen in Oberkirch zum 50.-jähr. Bestehen des Unterels. Infanterie-Regiments 132,” *Der Renchtäler: Allgemeines Anzeigebblatt und Amtliches Verkündungsblatt für den Amtsbezirk Oberkirch*, May 30, 1931, 2017, SAO.

<sup>26</sup> Fritz Rust, “Le Quatorze Juillet: Allerei Betrachtungen zum französischen Nationalfeiertag,” *Wir 143er* 10, no. 56 (November 15, 1938), 9, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

“Hate” is key word associated with *ressentiment* and accurately describes 132nd and 143rd members’ sentiments towards their former wartime foes, especially the French. Interestingly, however, the hatred of the 132nd and 143rd associations remained predominantly unacknowledged. For all their anger and bitterness over the postwar fate of their country and their own personal situations, members attributed and ascribed hatred and other negative emotions not to themselves, but to their earlier foes. Instead, association members publically adopted and projected the nobler image of themselves as a community united by a shared bereavement and undeserved loss (Alsace). Throughout the Interwar period, the associations continued to identify France as their hereditary and sworn enemy, but even in the earliest postwar publications rarely characterized their sentiment towards the French as hate.

Regimental newspapers portrayed a deep, abiding, and unreasonable hate of all things German as a constituting element of “Frenchness” and the cornerstone of French policies in Alsace. For 132nd and 143rd members, French hatred was demonstrated in a multitude of irrational actions taken throughout the Interwar period. The introductory comments of the 132nd regiment’s roll of honor characterized French odium as an annihilating rancor, “The Regiment’s accomplishments in war and peace for the greatness and safety of the Fatherland, and what the hate of the enemy wishes to destroy for all time, is indelibly buried in the hearts of its members and will eternally live on in the hearts and spirits of its people.”<sup>27</sup> This will to eliminate all vestiges of German influence in Alsace was demonstrated to members from the moment French forces reoccupied the province in November 1918. Both the 132nd and 143rd newspapers reported the symbolic vandalism of three stone statues of the German emperors that were located

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<sup>27</sup> Bund aller Kameraden des ehem. Inf. Regts. Nr. 132, “Ehrentafel des 1. Unter-Els. Inf.-Regiments Nr. 132 Strassburg i. Elsass,” MSG 3 1181, BAM.

above the main entrance of the Strasbourg post office. The story went that one evening a crowd of overly patriotic, “naturally French,” students gathered and beheaded the three statues. The heads were put in a sack and delivered to French General Gourand. Although the articles commended Gourand for distancing himself from the act, they condemned the French authorities who did not subsequently remove the statues. As late as 1934, the headless German monarchs maintained their “vigil” and led *Wir 143er* to acerbically remark, “Viva la culture!”<sup>28</sup> A final piece of evidence that was used to demonstrate France’s “laughable nationalism” was the Frenchification of street and business names. A 143rd Major X wrote, “I noticed that in contrast to my last visit to Strasbourg in 1922 that the translation of company names had made significant progress. One now sees only French company names and only the pharmacies hang bilingual signs. The street names are German and French but very arbitrarily translated, for instance a street named after town council member Spieß today is the “rue des hellébardes[sic]” [Halberds Road] and the street named after Professor Kalb is “rue des veaux” [Calves Street].”<sup>29</sup> The contemporary French street names were literal German to French translations of the two men’s last name.

If they needed any further evidence of the depths of French loathing, members of the 132nd association could also point to French hate reaching across postwar German borders and impacting their commemorative activities. French occupation authorities in the Saar banned all German regimental associations in the occupied areas. The leadership of the 132nd Officers’ association initially scorned the prohibition as “laughable” and ineffective in 1922. They pointed

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<sup>28</sup> “War’s Dummheit oder Niedertracht?,” *Wir 143er* 7, no. 40 (February 29, 1936), 6, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>29</sup> Major X, “Allerheiligen 1925,” *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 33 (December 1925), 5, MSG 3 1175, BAM.

to the statistic that only 3 of the 20 members who lived in the area had been forced to leave the association. Yet the interdiction was no longer a laughing matter by the time of the regimental memorial's dedication in 1925. Instead, the only participation that the former 132nd members from the Saar, Alsace-Lorraine, and the Rhineland had in the ceremony was the mention that they were unable to attend because of the French occupation.<sup>30</sup> The bitterness engendered by the seemingly wanton French disregard for German sovereignty and members' impotence of action in the early 1920s led to a rare acknowledgement of hate in the rhetoric of the 132nd officers' association. In discussing the occupation of the Ruhr, the officers' newspapers articulated members' frustration who could only sit in a "powerless rage and hold out until we again have the strength to cleanse Germany of our hated hereditary enemy."<sup>31</sup>

### **Evoking Nostalgia, Articulating Memory: The Role of the Regimental Newspaper**

The regimental newspaper played a pivotal role in maintaining the cohesiveness of the regimental associations, attracting additional former members, and was one of the primary means through which members maintained their connection to the broader regimental organization.<sup>32</sup> The regimental newspapers fulfilled multiple roles. These included relaying contemporary

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<sup>30</sup> "Denkmalsweihe und 2. Regimentstag des 1. Unter-Elsäss. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132 am 6. und 7. Juni 1925 in Oberkirch/Baden," *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 6 (August 1925), 4, Husaren, SAO.

<sup>31</sup> "Bericht über die ordentliche Mitgliederversammlung am 24.3. in Berlin," *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 18 (April 1923), 14, MSG 3 1175, BAM.

<sup>32</sup> In the case of the 132<sup>nd</sup> Regiment there existed two such periodicals: one for the officers and the *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden* published by the general regimental association. The 143<sup>rd</sup> Regiment had only a single regimental paper, *Wir 143er*.

information that was of interest to members (such as the associations' bylaws, reports regarding the actions of other regimental chapters, and informing members of the date and location of future regimental reunions), providing a forum in which individual members could report important happenings in their own lives and reestablish connections with former comrades, and finally, to retell the important events in the history of the regiment. This section focuses on an analysis of two particular genres of stories that can be described as "expulsion" and "pilgrimage" narratives. The purpose of the former type of story was to maintain members' resentment towards the French for the manner in which Germans had been expelled from the province. The latter stories took the form of a member describing and relating their impressions of Strasbourg on the occasion of their first return to the city since its change in sovereignty.

The "expulsion" tale focused on the vindictiveness and injustice of French officials in their handling and expulsion of elements of Alsace's "old German" population following the signing of the Armistice in November 1918. The label "old German" was given to individuals who were either descendants of or had themselves emigrated from Germany to Alsace after 1871. The callousness of French authorities was contrasted to the more humane post-1870 emigration policies of the Imperial German Reich. The purpose of these stories were twofold. First, they were informative articles, since many of the regimental associations' members had not been present in Alsace to witness the expulsions firsthand. Second, their highlighting of French chauvinism and the seemingly blinding, irrational hatred of all things German served to maintain reading members' indignation at the manner in which their fellow countrymen, and in some case own families, were expelled. A key experience accompanying the expulsions that had a critical influence upon the later ability of 132nd and 143rd members to mentally engage with Alsace was the participation of segments of the native Alsatian population in the taunting and tormenting of

the expellees. Thus the physical exclusion of the German population from Alsace was thus simultaneously accompanied by a mental alienation from the Alsatian populace.

“Pilgrimage” stories that documented an association member’s first return to Strasbourg in the postwar period were also popular foci of regimental newspapers.<sup>33</sup> The narrators of these stories acted as surrogate visitors for their fellow association members who were unable to return to the city. Many of the return narratives emphasized the intensifying degrees of emotion that accompanied the crossing of national borders and other boundaries. The first major symbolic and physical boundary that the returnees encountered was the Rhine. The drama of the crossing event was heightened and drawn out by the traversing of the politically neutral, connecting bridge on foot, which allowed the details of Strasbourg to slowly come into focus as the returnee drew near. Several authors, such as 143rd Major Isenburg, expressed that it was at this point that they fully comprehended the loss of Alsace and Strasbourg. He described the setting and the emotions evoked saying, “As I reached the exact middle, I was struck, as if stabbed through the heart, below me in a dirty, yellow flood the steady current of Father Rhine continued to roll northwards. Before me, on the Alsatian side, I can already see a few streetcars bearing French inscriptions advertising German firms.”<sup>34</sup> Once across the bridge, returning visitors were given little opportunity for emotional recovery as they passed through Strasbourg’s outskirts and entered the city. The initial primary experience related by association authors was a sense of physical and emotional disorientation that was only alleviated upon sighting the beautiful and

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<sup>33</sup> See Brian Lambkin, “The Emotional Function of the Migrant’s ‘Birthplace’ in Transnational Belonging: Thomas Mellon (1813–1908) and Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919),” *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 29, no. 3 (2008), 315–329.

<sup>34</sup> Major Isenburg, “Nach zwanzig Jahren in unsere alten Garnison,” *Wir 143er* 2, no. 8 (July 31, 1930), 2, MSG 3 2403, BAM.

“eternal” cathedral. Isenburg related the calming effect of the church saying, “A flood of memories overcomes me. I enter. A dignified silence surrounds me. I walk through the central nave, past the jube, to the astronomical clock. All unchanged.”<sup>35</sup> An anonymous 132nd author similarly found comfort in the Dom, “In the evening I wandered into the dark cathedral. It was Sunday evening and the time of confession. It could have been 1904 or 1902. Nothing had changed in the building, sound, air, or in my feelings.”<sup>36</sup>

Finding the familiar, even if it was only an island in a sea of difference, had a reassuring effect on both Isenburg and the anonymous author and allowed them to recollect themselves and venture out again into the disorienting city. The cathedral fulfills a similar role in several other “return” narratives and regimental visitors often revisited throughout their stay. It is not coincidental that the cathedral had this reassuring role. “Master Erwin’s Dom”<sup>37</sup> had long been claimed by German nationalists and both the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations as proof of Alsace’s German heritage. Moreover, as Strasbourg’s largest and most striking landmark, it was the one prominent feature of the city that was distinctly visible from the regimental memorials and was featured as a silhouette on both associations’ regimental flags.<sup>38</sup> The emotional resonance of the written descriptions was demonstrated in letter to the editor that was published in *Wir 143er* in 1930. The author offered Isenburg heartfelt thanks for his return-

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<sup>35</sup> Major Isenburg, “Nach zwanzig Jahren in unsere alten Garnison,” *Wir 143er* 2, no. 8 (July 31, 1930), 2, MSG 3 2403, BAM.

<sup>36</sup> “Strassburg,” *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 37 (December 1926), 2, MSG 3 1175, BAM.

<sup>37</sup> This title was in reference to the German architect responsible for the design of the cathedral, Erwin von Steinbach.

<sup>38</sup> Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, 168. Confino identifies a similar trend in Heimat iconography to focus on the church towers, “the leading symbol of the Heimat community, local, regional, and national, was the church tower, the symbol of the spiritual and intimate community.”

journey story. He elaborated by relating that the descriptions of the once familiar places in Strasbourg had evoked a multitude of his “glorious” old memories that had brought unbidden tears. The writer defiantly closed the letter by saying these personal remembrances were “memories that no revolution or anyone else can rob us of.”<sup>39</sup>

An unrecognizable Alsatian population also played an important role in creating a sense of disorientation and disconnect among association members who returned to visit Strasbourg in the later postwar period. Several of the authors related stories of encounters with individual Alsations who wistfully recalled the Imperial German period, but in general, regimental visitors noted Alsations’ seeming indifference to the transfer in sovereignty. The editor of *Wir 143er*, Major Isenburg, observed that the crowds on Gutenberg square “scuttled, pushed, and drove in a confusion, cried and chatted, loafed and laughed, just as they had in our time, as if the war and the change in nationality had never occurred.”<sup>40</sup> In the end, he was forced to conclude that Strasbourg made an overwhelmingly French impression. In 1936, 143rd Major a. D. Gerloff utilized descriptors that reflected the growing prevalence of National Socialist ideals in the 143rd Association when he expressed his sense of disconnect with Strasbourg and wrote that despite the few familiar places,

one still feels oneself to be a stranger, because you no longer know anyone in the city and are no longer greeted as you once were. The people who today enliven the streets look different. The differences in race are sharply recognizable. The French type, with the French facial expressions and clothes dominates. The language is, at least according to my observations, mostly French. In such an atmosphere it is difficult to wake *feelings of home*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Offener Brief,” *Wir 143er* 2, no. 9 (September 20, 1930), 8, MSG 3 2403, BAM.

<sup>40</sup> Major Isenburg, “Nach zwanzig Jahren in unsere alten Garnison,” *Wir 143er* 2, no. 8 (July 31, 1930), 2, MSG 3 2403, BAM. He also would go on to claim that although the blue-collar Alsations continued to speak the Alsatian dialect, the “Bürgerslüt” spoke French and wore fashions similar to those that were popular during the Second French Empire.

<sup>41</sup> Major a. D. Gerloff, “Kehl a. Rh. – Strassburg i.E.,” *Wir 143er* no. 45 (December 25, 1936), 3, MSG 3 2405, BAM. Emphasis mine.

The key observation to take from these return stories is that members were able to recognize the city and mentally situate themselves within it when the contemporary population was absent – such as in the silence of the cathedral. The overwhelming consensus among the “returners” was that no matter how much they might wish differently, “Straßburg” had indeed become “Strasbourg.” Standing over the grave of a fallen friend, an anonymous author gave a sense of the extent of the loss and disconnect he felt in the contemporary city, “I was happy that his final journey brought him back to our collective “Father city” and that his earthly remains were not forever lost to us...Now I know where other comrades and I can find him. I do not want to let this *last* piece of Strasbourg earth that belongs to us out of my sight.”<sup>42</sup> The last emotion of many of the narratives is then, one of estrangement and disillusionment with the city.

A final, fundamentally alarming observation that “pilgrimage” associations members invariably commented upon and which was tied into the general contempt for French soldiers was the deteriorating condition of their former regimental barracks. Writing in 1930 about a return visit to Strasbourg, Isenburg reported in increasingly outraged tones his observations of a former guardhouse of the 143rd that had been converted into a restaurant, the old exercise yard that was “5/6” overgrown with grass, and the state of the old officers’ mess, whose general disrepair made him wonder how any officer could be comfortable in such a pigsty (*Schweinestall*).<sup>43</sup> This incredulity and bitterness no doubt stemmed in large part from

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<sup>42</sup> “Straßburg,” *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 37 (December 1926), 5, MSG 3 1175, BAM. Emphasis mine.

<sup>43</sup> Major Isenburg, “Nach zwanzig Jahren in unsere alten Garnison,” *Wir 143er* 2, no. 8 (July 31, 1930), 4, MSG 3 2403, BAM. This final perception coupled with reports of the disgraceful condition the French left the messes and houses in Trier, confirmed to Isenburg that the “Frenchman is a downright piglet” (*ausgesprochenes Ferkel*).

association members' belief of Germany's unmerited defeat, but the nearly unrecognizable state of their former barracks also fundamentally threatened the crucial imaginative component of members' postwar commemorative practices by making it more difficult to evoke and "re-experience" and "reinsert" themselves into their idealized memories of their Strasbourg service. This observation demonstrates again the key facilitating role that the distance between the regimental memorials and Strasbourg played in allowing members to reengage with their "imagined" space. The critical dimension of these "unchanged" spaces was their ability to evoke powerful emotions that allowed visitors to see themselves "in the same spot" and "witness" again a past incident they associated with it. Members of the 132nd and 143rd associations sought to address the sense of estrangement in the selection of the location for their regimental memorials.

### **Embodied Nostalgia: Alsatian Regimental Memorials**

A central concern that the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations shared with many veterans' organizations across Europe in the postwar period was the construction of a monument honoring their comrades who died during the First World War. While many German veterans' associations built regimental memorials in their garrison cities, this option was precluded for the 132nd and 143rd associations. French authorities had proscribed the commemoration or memorialization of former German military formations in Alsace. This interdiction, in addition to the inability of visiting individual members to mentally orient themselves and engage with the contemporary city of Strasbourg, gave the physical setting of the regimental memorial a critical symbolic role in the recreation of a proxy Alsatian Heimat. Both the 132nd and 143rd associations chose to emulate other Alsatian regiments and construct their memorials on the heights of the Black Forest overlooking their former garrison cities. The 132nd Regiment selected a location that faced the Rhine Valley and Strasbourg in Oberkirch and held dedication

ceremonies over the weekend of June 5-7, 1925. The 143rd Regiment chose a similar geographic vantage in Bühl. The dedication ceremony was held over the weekend of August 4-6, 1928.

The space, location, and setting were intended to maximize the power and effect of the monument. Association members' visible proximity to Strasbourg but tragic inability to "grasp" and physically experience the city multiplied the emotional impact of both the memorial and the commemorative rites that occurred in its proximity. Bühl's mayor Edwin Grüninger confirmed the symbolic centrality of the 143rd monument's location when he wrote to the local forestry office that "the memorial to the 143rd Regiment's fallen simply has *no* value if an unobstructed view over the Rhine valley to the Strasbourg cathedral was not ensured."<sup>44</sup> The location of the monument ensured that visitors to the regimental memorials could not help but be reminded of the loss of Alsace and the injustice of the postwar settlements. The *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden* described the effect of the memorial dedication and location as, "Oberkirch! You gave us painful and sorrowful memories of our dead, a blazing yearning for our Strasbourg, and belief in the resurrection of our people. None of us will ever forget the memory of those consecrated hours of June 7, 1925, there on the forested heights of the Black Forest in view of oft contested Strasbourg the fate of the German people and its heroic sons stood painfully bare before our souls and nearly exploded our hearts."<sup>45</sup> Paradoxically, although the locations of the Alsatian regimental memorials in Baden were representative to association members of the backwards nature of the postwar world, the limited interaction between participants and the city and the separation between the monuments and Strasbourg intensified the emotions surrounding

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<sup>44</sup> Edwin Grüninger to Forestamt Bühl, July 7, 1928, 1483, SGIB. The letter was requesting the removal of two cherry trees that partially obstructed the view from the memorial. Emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 6 (August 1925), 2. Husaren, SAO.

the commemorative acts and was necessary to facilitate members' mental engagement with what was an "imagined" space.

The distance between Alsace and the heights of the Black Forest allowed members to remain "above the fray" and psychologically engage with and insert themselves into a familiar and idealized prewar memory of Alsace that bore little resemblance to the contemporary city.

Former 143rd Captain Giessen expressed the tension between contemporary reality and memory in 1925,

There is doubtless some truth in what I hear from many acquaintances who do not wish to return to the old city and risk muddying their fair memories, still, it is difficult to turn entirely from a city in which we experienced the best years of our youth and the highpoint of our state, even if such a visit causes emotions to seize the heart over what is lost.<sup>46</sup>

The 132nd author who reported on the events of the "Regimentstag" in Saarbrücken in 1935 remarked on the tendency among members to idealize their service periods in Alsace,

Now you have a strange epiphany: the longer you are here, the more the painful memories fade and only the good ones remain. What remains in your memory is the happy period of your soldiering and the abiding comradeship that you found in your Company. We all think back with joy on our time of service...on the beautiful garrison Strasbourg, its cathedral, and on our maneuvers in Alsace...<sup>47</sup>

Strasbourg signified a carefree youth and a strong, respected, and unbowed Germany for regimental association members. This is aptly portrayed in an article published in the 143<sup>rd</sup> regimental paper in the months building up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Regiment's transfer to Strasbourg. Heinrich Klotz, a participant in the original move, recalled of his service period "How proud we were! This school in the best army on earth was, for us young rascals, so valuable! There we were first formed into men, you saw it in everyone, whether they were with

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<sup>46</sup> Hauptman Giessen, "Aus den Briefen des Hauptman Giessen," *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* no. 2 (November 1925), 6, MSG 3 2401, BAM.

<sup>47</sup> "Saarbrücken 1935: Regimentstag vom 22. bis 24. Juni 1935," *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, 46 (October 1935), 3, MSG 3 1176, BAM.

the Prussians or not! Our relatives looked upon us young soldiers with pride and the girls were first attracted to the uniforms – and rightly so!”<sup>48</sup> Speaking at the Regimental reunion at Siegen in 1936, Isenburg wistfully observed how “carefree” they had been in the days when they “wore the red epaulettes with the golden numbers.” He maintained that this untroubled feeling persisted among the 143ers even as outside events, such as the Second Moroccan Crisis in 1911, hinted at the “knife edge” that Europe was standing on: “we soldiers were accustomed to not worrying too much about world affairs. We did our duty, unburdened by the cares of the future, happily and undaunted in the eternal unison of the Imperial service.”<sup>49</sup> Why should we have worried? Isenburg asked, “the power of Imperial Germany seemed established for all time and the unprecedented victories in three wars continued to radiate even in the last decade of the century. Who at that time seriously thought of war? No one! We exercised loyal and brave field service, completed our maneuvers, and practiced our parade marches on the Esplanade.”<sup>50</sup> Klotz enthusiastically encapsulated his memories of garrison life in Strasbourg: “It was the best time of our lives! We were young, we were healthy, we were the Kaiser’s soldiers!”<sup>51</sup> However, while on the one hand memories of Strasbourg brought to mind nostalgic and idyllic memories of youth, it held a darker, more troubling symbolism that was not lost on association members. Major Gerloff from the 143<sup>rd</sup> association identified this second symbolic dimension, “Above all

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<sup>48</sup> Heinrich Klotz, “Weisst Du noch Kamerad?,” *Wir 143er* 10, no. 56 (November 15, 1938), 8, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>49</sup> Major Isenburg, “Der 12. Regimentsappell in Siegen am 13., 14. und 15. Juni 1936,” *Wir 143er* 8, no. 42 (June 13, 1936), 5, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>50</sup> Major Isenburg, “Der 12. Regimentsappell in Siegen am 13., 14. und 15. Juni 1936,” *Wir 143er* 8, no. 42 (June 13, 1936), 5, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>51</sup> Heinrich Klotz, “Weisst Du noch Kamerad?,” *Wir 143er* 10, no. 56 (November 15, 1938), 8. MSG 3 2405, BAM.

else, we old soldiers see in the transfer of the old German borderland to France as a grievous loss of prestige for our Fatherland.”<sup>52</sup> It is not surprising that much of the rhetoric surrounding the associations’ activities took on subliminal and at times overt revanchist elements.

The distance between Alsace and the heights of the Black Forest was simultaneously representative to association members of the injustice of Germany’s weakened state and the better future they sought. In the ceremony surrounding the laying of the cornerstone of the 143rd’s memorial, Major d. D. Dittler observed, “The view of our holy Strasbourg cathedral that looms before us in the distance, is a view towards an unfortunately distant goal to which we all aspire, a goal that will not let us go.”<sup>53</sup> Dittler believed that the renewal of Germany would be a long and arduous process akin to laying one grain of sand upon another. The future association leaders hoped they were laying the foundation was freeing Germany from the shackles of the Treaty of Versailles. Dittler reiterated this position at a 143rd regimental reunion in Bühl in 1931 and explained, “And what other place in our German Fatherland is better suited for us old 143ers than Bühl, where our towering monument reminds us of our dead and our glorious regiment, where, in view of Strasbourg, we renew our oaths to not stop or rest until our sorely tested people have reached the goal for which our comrades died: an outwardly and inwardly free, united, and great German Fatherland.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Major a. D. Gerloff, “Kehl a. Rh. – Strassburg i. E.,” *Wir 143er* 8, no. 45 (December 1936), 4, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>53</sup> Major a. D. Dittler, “Weiherede, gehalten bei der Grundsteinlegung zum Denkmal der I.R. 143 von Major a. D. Dittler,” *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* 34, no. 4 (Mai 1928), 3, MSG 3 2402. BAM.

<sup>54</sup> “Bühl 4-6 Juli,” *Wir 143er* 3, no. 14 (August 20, 1931), 3, 1483, SGIB.

In addition to the view of Strasbourg, the placement of the memorial sites within the communities of Oberkirch and Bühl and the monuments' physical form was also significant. Ultimately, the differences regarding the location and the structure of the memorials reflected diverging views about the role and purpose of the monument between the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations.

No roads led directly to the 132nd memorial. The proximity of the ruined medieval Schauenburg Castle symbolically situated the regimental monument in the trajectory of German history and created an atmosphere that was more conducive to reflection. The purpose of the memorial was clarified to members of the Berlin chapter of the 132nd officers' association in 1926 as:

for us 132ers who have lost our Heimat in magnificent Alsace and lovely Strasbourg this spot will be the place to which we feel drawn to think about our old Regiment. Here at the foot of the monument we will sit and remember the beautiful times of peace and the glorious war deeds we experienced beyond the Rhine.<sup>55</sup>

The form of the memorial was deliberately chosen to reflect the values of the regimental dead and those of contemporary association members. This is evident in response to a local initiative to move the memorial site. Major Fritz Hieronymi wrote to Oberkirch authorities that members of the 132nd association wished to avoid an "artistic," multi-block memorial and instead envisioned a monument that consisted of a large natural boulder that bore a bronze plaque inscribed with few words and which would be situated high in the Black Forest. He explained the association's preference for the design saying, "The rough, raw, and unstylized stone, just as it was created in nature, is more appropriate for our regimental comrades who fell in France and

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<sup>55</sup> "Bericht über die Mitgliederversammlung am 27. März 1926 zu Berlin," *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 35 (May 1926), 9, MSG 3 1175, BAM.

Belgium than this new, artistic design. I can't help but say that the other design for the spot on the ridge behind the castle was 10 times, even 20 times better than the new one at the new location."<sup>56</sup> Another probable (albeit unarticulated) reason for the choice of a single boulder was that it would prove easier and more impressive when moved should the contemporary postwar situation be reversed and the 132nd association be allowed move the memorial to its "rightful place" in Strasbourg. Hieronymi's explanation and his intimation that the 132nd organization would have to reevaluate its decision to situate the memorial in Oberkirch was sufficient to force local officials to retract their previous objections and allow the monument to be established on the originally proposed site.

The quiet and reflective location of the 132nd's monument stood in stark contrast to that of the 143rd association. An article in the *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* argued that "regimental memorials should not, as gravestones, be erected in quiet, lonely places, but rather...in spots where the current of life flows past them."<sup>57</sup> This statement reflected a belief often expressed amongst the leadership of the 143rd association that the regimental memorial should serve as a reminder of past German glories and an example for the youth of the present to emulate. Major Dittler argued that the memorial might cause the many "fools" who liked to believe "new-age ideas" and flout the past might be prompted to rethink their revolutionary ideas after an evening spent in quiet contemplation before the 143rd's memorial.<sup>58</sup> The memorial was

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<sup>56</sup> Fritz Hieronymi to Meyer-Kehl, Bürgermeister Oberkirch, Gugelmaier-Oberkirch, Baron v. Schauenburg, and Architekt Esch-Mannheim, "Gefallenen Denkmal bei Oberkirch," 2015, SAO.

<sup>57</sup> "Wo soll unser Ehrenmal hin?," *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er*, no. 7 (September 1927), 2, MSG 3 2401, BAM.

<sup>58</sup> Major a. D. Dittler, "Weiherede, gehalten bei der Grundsteinlegung zum Denkmal der I.R. 143 von Major a. D. Dittler," *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* 34, no. 4 (Mai 1928), 3. MSG 3 2402. BAM.

designed in the “artistic” form that had been rejected by the 132nd. The monument’s shape was that of a symmetrical cross lying on its back and built to a height of 12 meters. One arm of the cross faced Strasbourg and bore the visage of a young, Stahlhelm clad soldier, who gazed across the Rhine valley, holding eternal watch over Strasbourg.

Despite the planning and sustained efforts by the Alsatian regimental associations to invest their monuments with particular symbolism and emotions, it is important to note that the emotional and symbolic significance of the individual memorials was not static over the Interwar period. This was demonstrated by a controversy that developed in the 143rd association as a result of the rescinding of a decision to hold the 143rd Regiment’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Bühl. Fundamentally, the underlying issue in the dispute was a simmering resentment among 143rd association chapters in Baden over an increasing tendency during the Interwar period to shift reunions and other association gatherings away from the regiment’s memorial to more northern and central locations.<sup>59</sup> But the nature of the disagreement simultaneously demonstrates that the longevity of the monument’s emotional and symbolic significance differed amongst organizational chapters and members.

The protest letter that was authored by the Badenese 143rd association chapters did not explicitly articulate their grievances in terms of a loss of their region’s prestige. Instead, they invoked established organizational rhetoric to argue that it was current members’ responsibility to commemorate and honor the Regiment’s war dead. The cover letter opened with the volley that “It is impermissible that our beautiful memorial that was built to honor our fallen comrades continue to bloom clandestinely as a wallflower or forget-me-not. Memorials are also cenotaphs.

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<sup>59</sup> These regimental meetings occurred in Erfurt (1932), Eschwege (1935), Siegen (1936), and Nordhausen (1938).

Consequently, these holy sites upon which these memorials have been built must occasionally host large, well-attended, events and not, as is the case for Bühl, only be considered for one reunion and one representatives' day (*Vertretertag*) over the course of 12 years.”<sup>60</sup> Asking why the decision to have the celebration in Bühl was being annulled, especially after it had the support from the southern German members of the association, the petition went on to observe: “The memorial has been standing for 12 years. It was built with an expenditure of over 12,000 RM. Only once during this long period has a reunion occurred in Bühl. Reunions have taken place in all parts of western and middle Germany and it is now time to think about Bühl, in terms of the interests of the community and those the 143rd comrades who live in southern Germany.”<sup>61</sup> The petition and cover letter illustrate that the resentment had both a geographical and an “established” versus “newcomer” component, but also revealed in a broader sense the different levels of commemorative and emotional symbolism that were invested in the site.

There is little from the 143rd associations' sources that would account for the lessening of Bühl's symbolic preeminence. One possibility is suggested in a comment made by Fritz Rust shortly after he assumed the position of association's presidency in 1937. In an address to all association members printed in *Wir 143er* he wrote “our Regiment became homeless through the dishonorable treaty of Versailles: now all of Germany is our Heimat and garrison! Everywhere we want to wear and show our pride in the number 143.”<sup>62</sup> This articulated belief was in line with broader National Socialist policies of shifting emphasis away from the importance of the

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<sup>60</sup> Landesgruppe Baden Kameradschaft ehem. IR 143 to the Kameradschaft d. Traditionsverbandes IR 143, June 5, 1939, 353 55 349, SGIB.

<sup>61</sup> “Antrag der Landesgruppe Baden zum Vertretertag am 17.6.1939 in Hagen W. beschlossen in der Kameradschaftversammlung am 4.6.1939 in Bühl/Baden,” 353 55 349, SGIB.

<sup>62</sup> Fritz Rust, “An alle ehem. 143er,” *Wir 143er* 9, no. 51 (December 20, 1937), 1, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

local to the national.<sup>63</sup> Another possibility for the move away from the location-specific and the intentionally emotion-laden atmosphere of the regimental memorial is given by Monica Black, who argues that the Nazis sought to transform the way that Berliners and Germans in general viewed death into a vision that was at once more stoical and masculine and downplayed the elements of sorrow. Specifically, Black contends that “Sorrow clearly assumed an exclusively feminine character for the Nazis: it was a problem of mothers and wives and of women unable to control their emotions in public. Sadness, tears, ‘emotionalism’ – these were precisely the opposite of the stoicism and selflessness Germans were expected to demonstrate in the face of death.”<sup>64</sup> Given the increased use of National Socialist rhetoric and influence within the 143rd association, it is not surprising that organization leaders would attempt to shift the focus of their commemorative activities away from the emotionally laden memorial site.

### **“Coming Home” – The Critical Role of Oberkirch and Bühl in Commemorative Activities**

Once their regimental memorials were constructed, members of the 132nd and 143rd Alsatian regimental associations turned to planning an appropriate dedication ceremony. The approach of the Regimental reunion and memorial dedication was accompanied by a campaign in both the 132nd and 143rd regimental newspapers and in the local Oberkirch and Bühl press to generate excitement and attract attendees, while at the same time informing participants of the mutual expectations that the communities and regimental associations had of one another. In effect, the residents of Oberkirch and Bühl became the surrogates for an Alsatian population that

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<sup>63</sup> Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 212.

<sup>64</sup> Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 103.

had disillusioned association members and the physical space of the towns served as a stand-in for the spaces of “Straßburg” that were denied the group.

The papers of the 132nd Regiment are particularly useful in revealing the orchestrated pageantry of the dedication ceremonies. At the behest of town officials, in the weeks prior to the dedication weekend local papers in Oberkirch repeatedly ran notices requesting that local people turn out in numbers to welcome the veterans (in traditional local dress (*Renchtal Tracht*) when possible) and participate in the weekend’s festivities. Additionally, it was “wished and expected” that residents who lived along the planned parade route deck their homes in flags, flowers, and fir branches, the latter being provided by the town officials in order to give the visitors a good impression of Oberkirch.<sup>65</sup> The overall coordinated structure of the event demonstrates that the primary purpose of the dedication ceremony was not to simply to give individual members and survivors another opportunity to mourn the loss of a fallen comrade or loved one, rather the service and memorial were designed to impress upon the attendees that the dead should be honored and remembered in a particular way, in this case, as the embodiment of the old martial values of loyalty and self-sacrificing love of the Fatherland.

The reception of former members of the Alsatian regiments provided the former soldiers the homecoming celebration that they had been denied in Strasbourg. On June 5, 1925, the majority of visiting 132nd members arrived in a single group at the Oberkirch train station, where they were received with salvos from saluting guns, music, flag-waving crowds, the City Council, and members of the local veterans’ association. After a welcome speech from Oberkirch’s Mayor Fellhauer, the visitors received their housing assignments and were escorted

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<sup>65</sup> “Untitled and Unattributed Newspaper Clipping,” 2015, SAO.

by “small, barefooted lads who took hold of ‘their’ 132er and led them to their quarters.”<sup>66</sup> The overall effect of this reception on veterans of the 132nd regiment was neatly summarized by the *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden*, which observed that any comrades who had previously harbored doubts regarding the placement of the regimental memorial in Oberkirch found themselves disarmed by the local population, who “with genuinely open hearts accepted every man and soon it seemed that a close and amicable relationship had long existed between the residents of Oberkirch-Geisbach and the Infantry Regiment 132.”<sup>67</sup> The *Karlsruhe Tageblatt* agreed, observing that the members of the 132nd were met in Oberkirch with a pomp and circumstance that could not have been matched by many far larger cities and, moreover, that a celebration of this magnitude had not been seen on the streets of Oberkirch since before the war.<sup>68</sup>

In a physical and symbolic sense, the capstone event of the reception day occurred at 10 pm when the 132nd veterans paraded to a vantage point where they witnessed a fireworks display that illuminated the Schauenburg castle ruins and the regimental memorial (which they had yet to visit). Afterwards, the parade returned to the Oberkirch schoolyard where taps was played and members then returned to the aptly named inn, “Stadt Straßburg,” for the concluding part of the day’s festivities.<sup>69</sup> Three years later the 143rd association would receive a similar

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<sup>66</sup> “Oberkirch,” *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie Regiments Nr. 132*, Nr. 32 Oktober 1925, 3, MSG 3 1175, BAM.

<sup>67</sup> “Denkmalsweihe und 2. Regimentstag des 1. Unter-Elsäss. Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132 am 6. und 7. Juni 1925 in Oberkirch/Baden,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 6 (August 1925), 4, Husaren, SAO.

<sup>68</sup> “Regimentstage,” *Karlsruhe Tagblatt*, no. 261. June 8, 1925, 2015, SAO.

<sup>69</sup> *Renchtal Zeitung*, June 6, 1925. Reprinted in *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unter-Els. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 6 (August 1925), 7, Husaren, SAO.

reception in Bühl for their memorial dedication. In a thank you note to the residents of Bühl, 143rd association leader Major Dittler demonstrated that the location of the regimental memorial and a tangible demonstration of the population's acceptance of the association were inextricably intertwined in creating a "feeling of Heimat." Dittler wrote: "The keen participation by Bühl's and its surrounding areas' residents in the memorial dedication, the cooperation of all of the local associations, the city choir, the veterans' association, and not least the heartfelt speech of Chaplain Huber was recognized with grateful hearts by all 143ers as a sign that we expellees from Alsace have found a new Heimat in beautiful central Baden."<sup>70</sup>

### **Dedication of the Memorial**

The central event of the weekend for both the 132nd and 143rd Regiments was scheduled on the second day of the festivities and revolved around the dedication of their respective memorials. Several recurrent themes emerged in the content and rhetoric of the dedication proceedings and illustrate the multidimensional symbolism of the Alsatian regimental monuments. The dedication speeches reveal that the memorials were to act as a cenotaph for fallen comrades, a representation of Germany's past and future, and as a way to honor the living.

Most explicitly, the 132nd's and 143rd's monuments were built to honor the Regiments' dead and act as a surrogate grave for those comrades who were buried in France, Belgium, or had no known final resting place. In his sermon, evangelical Pastor and former 132nd officer Lieutenant Nobiling intoned that "the memorial is dedicated not to a single individual or deed, rather to the 4600 fallen members of the 132nd Infantry Regiment. With it we hope to express

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<sup>70</sup> Major a. D. Dittler, "Dank der Bundesleitung ehemaliger 143er. An die Einwohner Bühl und Umgebung," 1483, SGIB.

our thanks and partly payback their sacrifice.”<sup>71</sup> The debt of gratitude to the fallen was a hereditary obligation that extended beyond the lives of those surviving members of the Regiment to include their descendants, who were charged with maintaining the monument and preserving the memories of the glorious deeds of the Regiment. The future caregivers’ participation in the dedication and subsequent commemorative activities was crucial because it was not enough that members’ descendants be aware of the 1918 defeat and expulsion from Alsace. Instead, it was critical that they be taught how to feel about them.<sup>72</sup> In his dedication speech at the cornerstone laying ceremony of the 143rd’s memorial, Major Dittler stated that “our memorial should first be seen as a cenotaph for our loyal and brave comrades who gave their lives for our Fatherland. It should function as proof to their parents, widows, and relatives that their sacrifice is recognized and appreciated by those for whom it was offered.”<sup>73</sup> Both regiments completed the symbolic internment by sealing a list of the names of the regiments’ war dead in their monuments.

The promise held out to the families of the regiments’ war dead through the memorialization was immortality. During the dedication ceremony of the 143rd’s memorial, Chaplain Huber told the assembled participants, “A soldier’s death conquers death.”<sup>74</sup> However,

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<sup>71</sup> “Regimentstag der 132er, verbunden mit Denkmals-Einweihung in Oberkirch,” *Renchtal-Zeitung* 19, no. 91, (June 8, 1925), 2015, SAO.

<sup>72</sup> Svašek, “The Politics of Chosen Trauma,” 209.

<sup>73</sup> Major a. D. Dittler, “Weiherede, gehalten bei der Grundsteinlegung zum Denkmal der I.R. 143 von Major a. D. Dittler,” *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* 34, no. 4 (Mai 1928), 3, MSG 3 2402, BAM.

<sup>74</sup> Major a. D. Dittler, “Was die Presse über unser Fest schreibt,” *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* 4, no. 6 (August 1928), 10, MSG 3 2402. BAM. The idea that those who died in wartime would somehow transcend death is a fundamental component of Mosse’s “Myth of the War Experience.” Mosse argues that the Myth drew upon traditional Christian liturgical means of consolation and the death and resurrection of Christ to promise that those who had sacrificed themselves during the war would be resurrected. See Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 32.

transcending death did not come without consequences. Commemorating and memorializing the war dead for their martial accomplishments and sacrifices and as members of their respective regiments in effect kept them permanently mobilized. At an explicit level the regimental monuments prioritized the roll of the fallen not as a father, son, brother, husband, or any other civilian category, but rather as the martially loaded title of “hero,” “comrade,” or “soldier.” Implicitly then, the memorial denied the families of the fallen power over their loved one’s symbolic legacy and meaning of their death and instead left it to the purview and deployment of their former military formations.

The memorialization and commemoration of the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations’ war dead contained a distinct, albeit transformed, liturgical element. The “cult of the fallen soldier” that regimental association members helped advance through the building of their war memorials and commemoration of the dead was part of a larger development of the “civic religion of nationalism.”<sup>75</sup> The regimental dead were venerated with Christ-like rhetoric as individuals who had made the ultimate act of devotion by laying down their lives so that Germany and the German people might live. This is evident in the introductory comments of a “guestbook” that the 132nd association left for visitors to sign at their memorial. Readers were informed, “The monument built in memory of the dead heroes by their loyal comrades stands not far from here. Direct your steps there and in reverence hail the dead who died for you. Let your gaze wander from this beautiful spot of earth over the Rhine to Strasbourg and Master Erwin’s proud cathedral, in whose shadow the Regiment once held the border watch, as now the spirits of

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<sup>75</sup> George Mosse, *The Nationalism of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 1-12, 16.

its dead do.”<sup>76</sup> At a 143rd regimental reunion in Siegen in 1936 the sacrifice of the dead was characterized as “They died in the belief of Germany’s right, in its greatness, and in its ultimate victory. They died so that we might live.”<sup>77</sup> The symbolic internment of their names in the regimental monument sanctified the immediate surrounding area and speakers at the commemorative rituals informed participants that they were standing on holy ground. In 1931, 143rd member Major Gerloff described the sacrosanct nature of the memorial, “Here we stand on hallowed ground, hallowed by the pastors’ consecration, hallowed by the profound meaning of this cenotaph, and hallowed through the unforgettable location of this place, from which we can look over to German Alsace that was once was our Heimat.”<sup>78</sup>

Speakers at both of the dedication ceremonies instilled the monuments with a temporal symbolism that represented Germany’s past, present, and future. In his speech accepting the obligation to care for the 132nd’s monument on the behalf of Oberkirch, Mayor Fellhauer related that “for you all who are assembled here, this monument will be a constant reminder of the time when so many Germans willingly sacrificed themselves and died for their Fatherland and of the heroes with whom you fought bravely shoulder to shoulder.”<sup>79</sup> The glorious past was contrasted to the bleak present in several speeches that highlight an element of subdued resentment and anger to the festivities that had previously not been so blatantly articulated. Without hesitation Pastor Nobiling condemned the Versailles Treaty as the cornerstone of Germany’s postwar

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<sup>76</sup> *Gästebuch des Bund ehem. 132er*, SAO.

<sup>77</sup> “Totenehrung,” *Wir 143er* 8, no. 42 (June 13, 1936), 6, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

<sup>78</sup> “Bühl 4-6 Juli,” *Wir 143er* 3, no. 14 (August 20, 1931), 4, 1483, SGIB.

<sup>79</sup> “Regimentstag der 132er, verbunden mit Denkmals-Einweihung in Oberkirch,” *Renchtal-Zeitung* 19, no. 91, (June 8, 1925), 2015, SAO.

troubles. He labeled the burdens of the treaty as unprecedented in world history and which left Germany dishonored and sought to reduce its population to “slaves” and “helots.” Major Hieronymi began his dedication speech by thanking the authorities and population of Oberkirch, memorial architect Esch, and sculptor Contini for their work that produced such a striking and dignified memorial. However, he quickly escalated Nobiling’s rhetoric by observing that despite the overwhelming welcome in Oberkirch, members of the 132nd Regiment retained only “guest rights” to the community. The memorial had been built in the wrong place. Rejecting the contemporary state of affairs, he predicted that members’ descendants would someday resolve what today seemed “unsolvable” and erect the memorial in its rightful place:

I see the stone stir and slowly move down familiar streets to its proper place, over there to that place to which we all aspire. To that place where we learned discipline, subordination (Unterordnung), love for the Fatherland, and loyalty to the old Regiment.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, in a comment that captured both the note of defiance and hope for a better future that characterized the dedication speeches, the *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden* printed, “From the heights of the Black Forest it [the memorial] whispers and sighs: ‘we are still here – we are still here,’ thousands of believing hearts join the cry, ‘Germany will never perish, soon Germany will rise again!’”<sup>81</sup>

Another symbolic dimension that was evident in the 132nd and 143rd’s memorials and dedication ceremonies is an undertone of self-veneration and a desire to honor the living veterans of the regiment. Major Fritz Hieronymi’s dedication speech expressed the hope that one day the

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<sup>80</sup> “Oberkirch,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unter-Els. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, 6 (August 1925), 5, Husaren, SAO.

<sup>81</sup> “Oberkirch,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unter-Els. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, 6 (August 1925), 2. Husaren, SAO.

individuals for whom the memorial was built and the erectors themselves would be held in equal esteem and appreciated in their own right:

I see the day coming when this stone stands in its proper place, when the presentation march is intoned, when our glorious laurel decorated regimental flag will be dipped, not only in memory of the brave dead, which we honor today with the erection of this stone, but rather also in memory of those who today unveil it, those who their entire lives carried with honor loyalty to their regimental colors and their Alsatian Heimat – always keeping it in mind – but never speaking of it...<sup>82</sup>

Irrefutably, the regiments' fallen had made the ultimate sacrifice, but up to the point of their death, all serving members of the regiment had experienced the same trials and coped with the same conditions. Thus, the primary difference that separated the surviving veterans of the regiment from the men they were currently honoring was the timing of their death. When the last surviving member of the regiment passed on, members' descendants were to be entrusted with the responsibility for the maintenance of the memorial, care for its tradition, and honoring the regiment *as a whole*, thus blurring the distinction between living and dead that contemporarily was so clear.

Surviving regimental comrades saw themselves as tasked with the responsibility of rebuilding Germany and the segment of German society most qualified to do so.<sup>83</sup> In effect, regimental association leaders envisioned the regiments' war dead and current association members as playing distinct, yet complimentary pedagogic rolls for contemporary German society. The roll of the regimental association in the present was to lay a firm base for their descendants to build upon, while the dead represented the embodiment of self-sacrificing love of the Fatherland that would be necessary to restore Germany. This dual purpose was demonstrated

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<sup>82</sup> "Oberkirch," *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unter-Els. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, 6 (August 1925), 5, Husaren, SAO.

<sup>83</sup> The self-tasked and self-perception were not unique to German veterans' groups, as interwar French ex-servicemen's associations similarly perceived themselves. See Millington, *From victory to Vichy*, 3.

during the festivities surrounding the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the 132nd Regiment in 1931. The *Renchtäler* printed a front-page article by 132nd member, Hans Rödiger that argued that the living 132nd comrades were the caretakers of the seed of a new, free, strong, prestigious and united Germany that even now had begun to sprout from the bones of the Regiment's war dead. He wrote, "Every highest good that must be present when once again the iron dice are rolled has been guarded in our German military and regimental associations. This forces every old German soldier to recognize the duty of the hour, to assist in the preparation of our youth for this decisive hour through word and deed and their own example."<sup>84</sup>

### **Remembrance Triggers**

In addition to the placement and form of their memorials, the 132nd and the 143rd regimental associations utilized a variety of methods designed to evoke and intensify a particular memory and emotion associated with Strasbourg and their military service. These remembrance triggers consisted of acts or artifacts that engaged one or more of participants' five senses and served to heighten the emotional state of association meetings and memorial dedications. In effect, members' memories of their period of service in Alsace were given a greater degree of tangibility through the engagement of sight (pictures of Strasbourg and Alsace), hearing (Alsatian songs and regimental marches), touch (objects such as the regimental flag or rifles smuggled out of Strasbourg in 1918), and taste and smell (serving Alsatian foods). Although these acts were often mentioned only in passing in the regimental newspapers, the regularity of

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<sup>84</sup> Hans Rödiger, "Herzliches Willkommen in Oberkirch zum 50-jähr. Bestehen des Unterels. Infanterie-Regiments 132," *Der Renchtäler: Allgemeines Unzeigeblatt und Amtliches Verkuendigungsblatt fuer den Amtsbezirk Oberkirch* 66, no. 124, (May 30, 1931), 2017, SAO.

their occurrence, their temporal breadth, and the fact that they were mentioned at all demonstrates that they were a key facet in association life.

The most frequently utilized remembrance trigger was music. Songs had the power to draw the singers' or listeners' memories temporarily to a specific moment in their own lives associated with the regiment or Alsace. An article in the October 1931 issue of *Wir 143er* observed,

We all know how happy and excited a former soldier is when he hears his regiment's music at a concert or other performance. It is as if an electric current flows through his limbs. Unbidden his thoughts return to the parade ground. He sees himself and his comrades in rank and file and hears the rhythmic parade step. He thinks about the elegant uniform, carefree time, and on the old garrison city and the joy he experienced returns.<sup>85</sup>

But, beyond facilitating members' recollections of the past, songs held the additional power of being able to color perceptions of Strasbourg in the present. Thus, Wilhelm Hausenstein speculated his familiarity with all the sad songs about Strasbourg was partially responsible for generating a subtle feeling of melancholy that he experienced during a return visit to the city. He wrote, "One always sings the verses a bit to oneself as one strolls across Gutenberg square and turns towards the cathedral."<sup>86</sup> The most popular of these "sad" Strasbourg songs among chapters of both the 132nd and 143rd associations was "O, Straßburg, O Straßburg." The original song related the departure of a young soldier to fight in Strasbourg, his parents' ultimately unsuccessful attempt to free him from military service before he was killed, and the

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<sup>85</sup> "Unsere Parademärsche und die Regiments-Musik," *Wir 143er* 3, no. 15 (October 20, 1931), 8, MSG 3 2404, BAM.

<sup>86</sup> Wilhelm Hausenstein, "'O Straßburg-du wunderschöne Stadt...' Aus einem Notizbuch von Wilhelm Hausenstein-Einnommen der „Berliner Börsenzeitung“ Nr. 271 vom 20 Nov. 1931," *Nachrichten des Vereins der Offiziere usw. des ehemaligen 1. Unterelsässischen Infanterie-Regiments Nr. 132*, no. 59 (March 1933), 2, MSG 3 1176, BAM.

lament of his mother. In April 1925, an additional verse to the song was printed in the 132nd's memorial program. The closing lines read:

- ... , o Straßburg, o Straßburg, wir holen dich zurück.  
4. O Straßburg, o Straßburg, mir tut das Herz so weh, wenn ich auf deinen Zinnen die Trikolore seh'.  
5. O Straßburg, o Straßburg, wir schwör'n dir's in den Tod: Bald weht auf deinen Zinnen die Flagge Schwarz-Weiss-Rot.<sup>87</sup>

A crucial difference between the older stanzas and newer verse is that the mourning mother has been exchanged for an anonymous protagonist, who, although likewise in pain, plans a reversal of the present situation. The emotional power of such “remembrance triggers” used in conjunction with the memorial dedication ceremonies is evident in an article in the 132nd officers' paper that described the powerful and contrasting emotions that even a distant view of their former garrison could generate in members: “Strasbourg – die Heimat! Images pass by, wishes are awakened. Burning eyes scan the distance. It must lie there. There – an agitation, a flush passes through the crowd. Clearly, visible to every eye, standing above a sea of fog – the cathedral! O Strasbourg, our Strasbourg! Eyes glow, but lips quiver...If they could hear, our brothers beyond the Rhine, they would know that no one among us has forgotten them.”<sup>88</sup>

Finally, it is worthwhile to momentarily dwell on the reception of the regimental associations' activities at an individual level. The 132nd's and 143rd's regimental newspapers are the main surviving source for both organizations' activities. Both sources admittedly reflect the views of the leadership and the ideals they sought to project – which may or may not have

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<sup>87</sup> “Einweihung des Denkmals fuer die Gefallenen im Weltkriege 1914 – 1918 des 1. Unterelsässischen Inf.-Reg. No. 132 frueher in Strassburg i.E. und Zweiter Regiments-Tag,” 2015, SAO. Interestingly, although both verses were initially printed in the bulletin, attempts were made to censor the second verse. This is true for two out of the three brochures owned by the Stadtarchiv Oberkirch.

<sup>88</sup> “Oberkirch,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unter-Els. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, 6 (August 1925), 5-6, Husaren, SAO.

been shared equally amongst the majority of members – and often emphasize the group actions of the association while neglecting the view of the ordinary individual. Yet the newspapers periodically give brief glimpses into this more private sphere. Thus, in its reporting on the departure day of the 132nd's memorial dedication, the author described the early morning occurrences as, "a few foreigners [here non-Oberkirchers] appear in the streets, delighted at the dewy morning. They appear to have a goal – to visit the memorial one last time. Anonymous early risers have already been there and one exchanges a quiet greeting and thanks to them. Loving hands arrange wreaths and bows so that it should look beautiful for those who will still come."<sup>89</sup> We can never be sure of the form and content that these individual encounters with the memorial took. It is impossible to say if these lone visitors simply greeted a lost comrade or swore vengeance on their behalf. It is safe to assume though that every individual did not recall or honor their fallen comrades in a solely officially prescribed manner. A surviving 132nd's memorial guestbook from a later and very different contemporary context (post-World War II) bears inscriptions that do not speak of revenge, but rather of comradeship, honoring the dead, and a longing for their former Heimat.<sup>90</sup>

### **Revenge Fantasies?: *Revanche* and the Alsatian Regimental Associations**

The verbalized and non-expressed nostalgia for the strong, unbowed Germany of the Kaiserreich that permeated the rhetoric and symbolism of the memorial dedications often came at the expense of the contemporary Weimar Republic. It must be emphasized, however, that the

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<sup>89</sup> "Oberkirch," *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unter Els. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, 6 (August 1925), 8, Husaren, SAO.

<sup>90</sup> *Gästebuch des Bund ehem. 132er*, SAO.

membership of the 132nd and 143rd regimental associations were not vehement opponents of the German republican government throughout the entirety of the Interwar period. In fact, in the early 1920s, organization leaders expressed their empathy at the difficult position of the government and focused their rancor at the postwar settlements and the foreign parties responsible for them. In the immediate postwar years the associations publically portrayed themselves as operating on a plain above politics. Historians such as James Diehl have called such associational non-partisan rhetoric “fiction.”<sup>91</sup> This observation, no doubt is true to a degree, but incidents such as the 143rd association’s consideration of including a rabbi in the dedication of their regimental memorial along with Catholic and Protestant clerics in 1928 suggests that not all discussions of inclusivity were disingenuous.<sup>92</sup> Yet despite this early period of inclusiveness, the overall trajectory of the Interwar period saw a gradual restriction of the

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<sup>91</sup> Public declarations of non-partisanship were also utilized by larger veterans’ associations like the republican *Reichsbanner* and conservative *Stahlhelm*. The *Reichsbanner*, started as a coalition of the SPD, DDP, and Zentrum mobilized to protect the Republic, but which gradually moved towards a primarily Social Democratic organization. Chickering argues that the move away from non-partisanship was a result of the return of economic and political stability that caused the intra-associational disputes between the different parties to once again come to the fore. See Chickering, “The Reichsbanner and the Weimar Republic,” 528, 532. Diehl makes a similar comment in regards to the more conservative minded veterans’ organizations. These groups likewise sought to maintain their position as “nonpartisan,” “national” organizations, but in practice this meant primarily an avoidance of issues that would serve to divide the consensus of the non-socialist parties. Interestingly, Diehl argues that this “fiction” originated during the Kaiserreich, but was developed into a “fine art” during the Weimar period. See Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany*, 8.

<sup>92</sup> Both Tim Grady and James Diehl note that anti-Semitism was not present at consistently high levels or widespread during every phase of the Interwar period in veterans’ associations. Grady argues that despite growing levels of anti-Semitism in the postwar period that in different areas close relationships continued to exist between Jews and non-Jews. See Grady, “A Common Experience of Death, 189. More directly pertinent for the purposes of this paper is Diehl’s observation that even a group such as *Stahlhelm* that would become virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Republic, initially allowed both Jews and Social Democrats to join their ranks, provided that they had completed 6 months of service at the front. See Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany*, 96.

associations' membership and the radicalization of the leadership. The progression to this opposition is evident in the following two examples.

In the descriptions of the commemorative ceremonies surrounding their respective monuments, accounts from both the 132<sup>nd</sup> and 143<sup>rd</sup> sources related that along with the state colors of Baden (yellow and red), the Imperial colors black, white, and red were prevalent in celebration decorations. The 132<sup>nd</sup>'s *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden* described the memorial site as, "Flowers upon flowers and wreaths with the colors of the old Reich cover the monument that loyalty and unity created. It calls to us to hold high these two values in the future and to keep quarrels and dissension away from our ranks and to defend Germany's honor and resurrection."<sup>93</sup> The "subtlety" of this act stood in direct contrast to the dispute that shook the 143<sup>rd</sup> association beginning in June 1932 over the increasing influence of National Socialism. The controversy stemmed from a clash between Major Isenburg, who in addition to being editor of the 143<sup>rd</sup>'s regimental newspaper was a member of *Stahlhelm*, and a certain Comrade Overzier, who was the leader of the 143<sup>rd</sup> chapter in Cologne. The disagreement originated over the supposed "political" content of the regimental newspaper. Overzier accused Isenburg of improperly utilizing the regimental newspaper as a platform to support a National Socialist agenda. Associational President Major Dittler, who likewise was a member of *Stahlhelm*, declined to allow an elaboration of Overzier's case, but permitted Isenburg to mount an extended defense of his editorship and attack on his critics. Isenburg began by differentiating between "politics" and "party politics." Politics, he argued, were an inevitable consequence of everyday life in contemporary Germany; "party politics" were forbidden by the association's bylaws.

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<sup>93</sup> Pastor Nobiling, "Predigt," *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des I. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 6 (August 1925), 16. Husaren, SAO

Although the league would not debate over the merits of individual candidates, Isenburg contended that the organization must be political in an “above party” sense.<sup>94</sup> He categorically denied a desire to turn the newspaper into a “Nazi organ” and in a bitingly derisive and anti-democratic tone claimed that the content of the newspaper reflected the majority of association members’ beliefs and as such was in-line with the “god-damned democracy’s” precepts. The crescendo of Isenburg’s attack and the point when he drew an explicit line in regards to association membership came when he bellowed, “The door stands open for the Comrade Worker to enter and make himself comfortable in the national camp and become a national man. Yet if he is so dim-witted that after 13 and a half years he cannot recognize that to be ‘red’ and a 143er is not compatible then he can go to hell. He doesn’t belong to us!”<sup>95</sup> The article described the gathering’s reaction by observing that Isenburg’s “impassioned” speech had been interrupted on multiple occasions with spontaneous applause and ended with a lasting ovation. We should not assume, however, that this apparent show of widespread support for National Socialist ideals signaled an associational wide unity on the matter. The ideological agenda of the 143rd association’s leadership was met with significant pushback from certain circles within the organization.

Majors Dittler and Isenburg were to discover that the demarcation of belonging and exclusion within the regimental community was not so simple and that Overzier and his supporters would not be put down so easily. A mere five months later, Dittler related his intention to resign his leadership of the organization at the end of the year, citing his weariness of

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<sup>94</sup> “Bericht über die Vertretertag in Erfurt am 21. Mai 1932 im Restaurant Horst Kohl,” *Wir 143er* 4, No. 19 (June 1932), 8, MSG 3 2404, BAM.

<sup>95</sup> “Bericht über die Vertretertag in Erfurt am 21. Mai 1932 im Restaurant Horst Kohl,” *Wir 143er* 4, No. 19 (June 1932), 9, MSG 3 2404, BAM.

being the “trashcan” (*Mülleimer*) for the entire association. Isenburg gave greater context to the decision by observing, “It is a crying shame, especially right now, when we are pushing in the black-white-red direction (naturally above politics, but strictly national) against the black-red-‘mustard’ aligned currents. Cologne (Center) is in continual opposition. Now I stand alone in my battle. But I fight on!”<sup>96</sup> Isenburg’s tone was not so steadfast in another note portentously written on January 25, 1933. In the letter, he wrote that the 143<sup>rd</sup> association found itself in a great crisis brought on by the continual complaints of the Cologne chapter’s “Centrist element” and his own tenacious will to remain true to “national ideals.” He outlined the current state of the dispute as,

The Cologne chapter has complained about Dittler and I and the entire matter has been transmitted to the advisory council...It is especially the members of the Essen chapter, who are responsible for organizing the 1933 regimental reunion and who have already chosen the primary troublemaker Overzier/Cologne, as the speaker...I will propose the motion to rename the association the “Association of National 143ers” (Bund nationaler 143er) and further recommend that the Düsseldorf chapter be dissolved because of its red tone and communist members. There the people are disgusted if someone appears at a Bierabend with an Iron Cross, there they ostentatiously do not stand when the “Deutschlandslied” is played, etc...<sup>97</sup>

Isenburg related that he would likely resign in protest and that all the “truly national” local chapters would follow him - destroying the association. He would then attempt to found a new 143<sup>rd</sup> organization free from the “Novemberlings” and the “Center Fat Cats” (*Zentrumsbonzen*).<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Major Isenburg to Edwin Grüninger, December 8, 1932, 1483, SGIB.

<sup>97</sup> Major Isenburg to May Grüninger. January 25, 1933. 1483, SGIB. Ziemann cites a similar rejection of the wearing of military decoration by members of the *Reichsbanner*’s chapter in the Franconian town of Hof as an expression of their “‘fundamental opposition to the imperialist war.’” See Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*, 73.

<sup>98</sup> Major Isenburg to Mayor Grüninger, January 25, 1933, 1483, SGIB.

Ultimately, it is likely that this confrontation never occurred. Hitler's appointment to the Chancellorship marked a dramatic turning point in the history of the 143<sup>rd</sup> association. Isenburg retained his editorship and in a front page article in the February 1933 issue of the regimental newspaper dispensed with any fictions of nonpartisanship when the opening piece declared, "The nation arises, it stands in a broad front and in honest rage against capriciousness and party rule, against disbelief and lies, against stupidity and foolishness, against the power of fragmentation, deliberate class warfare, and crass materialism."<sup>99</sup> Surviving sources do not include any definite indication of how the original intra-associational dispute was resolved. It is evident because of several further mentions of him in 1936 and 1939 that Overzier remained a member and leader of the 143<sup>rd</sup>'s Cologne chapter. On the occasion of the publication of the 50th issue of the 143<sup>rd</sup> association's regimental newspaper in 1937, Isenburg would reflect on this period of conflict by saying,

I forced the 143ers to recognize color. That was not possible with a colorless, so called "strictly neutral" religiously constructed script, rather only with a newspaper which pulsed with glowing patriotism and presented a sharp struggle against all of the private, Jewish, anti-national, in short – the "red mess" (*roten Schweinerei*), the longer the time, the sharper the struggle! With my regimental newspaper, perhaps I have contributed a small part to this educational work. That is my boast today as I publish the 50<sup>th</sup> issue!<sup>100</sup>

It is unlikely a coincidence that the featured congratulatory note in the following issue came from Cologne. A Comrade Roth conveyed the chapter's deep thanks to Isenburg for his efforts and observed, "The editor with his unbending will and his great love of the Fatherland succeeded

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<sup>99</sup> Major Isenburg, "Kameraden vom Regiment 143!," *Wir 143er* 5, no. 23 (February 28, 1933), 1, 1483, SGIB.

<sup>100</sup> Major Isenburg, "50mal 'Wir 143er,'" *Wir 143er*, 9, no. 50 (October 31, 1937), 1, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

in producing a newspaper in a strict above politics sense.”<sup>101</sup> Despite the victory of radicals in the association, this example of internal opposition provides an important caveat to our understanding of the degree to which former combatants have been portrayed as overwhelmingly welcoming the rise of National Socialism.

A similar caution in regards to making homogenizing overgeneralizations about the desire for revenge against the French amongst all members of the 132nd and 143rd associations is also advisable. The existence of a strong element of *revanche* among Interwar German veterans’ association is a firmly established piece of historiography. It is taken for granted that a majority of German veterans sought “revenge” for the “betrayal” of the Versailles Treaty and actively campaigned for or at least passively hoped for the fall of the Weimar Republic and reversal of Germany’s postwar losses. Certainly such elements were present among various members and found regular expression in the associations’ commemorative practices. Yet *revanche* was a sentiment, although prevalent, that was limited and varied according to the contemporary time, context, and circumstance. Thus the portrayal and assumption of *revanche* as a monolithic and undifferentiated sentiment, misses the different degrees and envisioned forms that *revanche* took within the association membership and its evolution over the Interwar period. Just as association members were divided by their politics, their understandings of “*revanche*” differed.

The militancy of the different dedication speeches might make it appear self-evident that the ultimate goal of the associations was a war of revenge to set right the wrongs of the Treaty of Versailles. Likewise, it is easy to dismiss the nominal denial of a desire to renew hostilities that

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<sup>101</sup> Comrade Roth, “Gedanken zur Jubiläumsnummer,” *Wir 143er* 9, no 51 (December 1937), 2, MSG 3 2405, BAM.

usually followed such “score-settling” declarations. But it is problematic to accept one component of these speeches as expressions of genuine sentiment, while dismissing others as purely disingenuous. Although most association members’ nostalgia and hopes for the future coalesced around aspirations for a restoration of prewar German military and political stature, they remained sharply divided on the means to that end and the final form this rebuilding would take. The militant form found expression in a speech by Major General Baron von Liliencron at the 143rd’s memorial dedication in 1928. Von Liliencron contended that whether or not the dead of the 143rd Regiment had died in vain was a question that remained to be decided. It was the living members of the Regiment who would play the deciding roll in the final answer to this question. He continued by saying that “Comrades! The battle that will decide either the existence or destruction of the German people, which began in 1914, is still not over, on the contrary, we stand in its midst!...The war of annihilation opened by our enemies against us in 1914 is not over and has merely taken a new form! Perhaps we have a second Thirty Years War which the German people must fight through!”<sup>102</sup> Despite the overt militancy of the speech, von Liliencron explicitly denounced another conflict and took pains to situate this statement in the broader effort of rebuilding Germany, “This renewal of our Fatherland is what we must live and work for. We do not want a war of revenge, the shield of our soldiers’ honor is bare and unsullied, but we want a well-fortified, strong, and happy Germany and that it should be Germany in its entirety!”<sup>103</sup> Likewise, *Wir 143er* editor Isenburg sardonically identified himself as a pacifist in the sense that “I myself would rather sit in freshly ironed pants at my desk than in

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<sup>102</sup> “Weiherede gehalten von Generalmajor Frhr. v. Liliencron, Schleswig,” *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* 4, no. 6 (August 1928), 4, MSG 3 2401. BAM.

<sup>103</sup> “Weiherede gehalten von Generalmajor Frhr. v. Liliencron, Schleswig,” *Bundesblatt des Bundes ehemaliger 143er* 4, no. 6 (August 1928), 4, MSG 3 2401. BAM.

a water filled hole in Flanders...In this sense we are all pacifists.”<sup>104</sup> But Isenburg disdainfully dismissed proponents of the notion that war could be abolished by doing away with the soldierly profession as “idiots” and likened it to the idea that sickness could be eliminated by getting rid of doctors and pharmacists. In the end, both 143rd leaders publically renounced renewed hostilities while at the same time articulating their belief that a rearmed Germany was the best guarantee of peace.

One of the reasons why the expressed revanche sentiment of the regimental associations should be viewed in part as a rhetorical device is that members were well aware of the infeasibility of any immediate form of German military action. Thus a local newspaper in Oberkirch, *Der Renchtäler*, in an article welcoming members of the 132nd association for the Regiment’s fiftieth anniversary could observe in 1931, “Fight for the Fatherland and for freedom, but no longer with the weapons of war. They were taken from us. But rather through education about what our brothers, fathers, and grandfathers have accomplished for Germany and through instruction about what stands before us if we do not strengthen the German will to defend ourselves.”<sup>105</sup> Likewise, the *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote prior to a 143rd regimental reunion that, “If it were up to us old soldiers, we would take back our beloved German Alsace. Then we would finally be clear of the “lie of war guilt” (*Kriegsschuldlüge*), then we would have broken our chains. We would prefer to die liberated today than slowly bled

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<sup>104</sup> Major a. D. Isenburg, “Nie Wieder Krieg,” *Wir 143er* 4, no. 17 (February 1932), 8, MSG 3 2404, BAM.

<sup>105</sup> “Herzliches Willkommen in Oberkirch zum 50-jähr. Bestehen des Unterels. Infanterie Regiments 132,” *Der Renchtäler: Allgemeines Unzeigebblatt und Amtliches Verkündigungsblatt für den Amtsbezirk Oberkirch* 66, no. 124 (May 30, 1931), 2017, SAO.

white through lasting enslavement and be sentenced to racial death.”<sup>106</sup> The article continued, however, by precluding the possibility of a military solution to the present situation by saying that in its weakened state, the contemporary German military would be destroyed in less than 24 hours, ultimately concluding that “We will not affect any change with violence.”

Members also utilized a more humanitarian justification for the unfeasibility of a renewed conflict. The 132nd author who reported on the 1935 regimental reunion in Saarbrücken put his faith in Hitler’s wartime frontline service as a guarantee that a renewal of hostilities would not occur. He argued, “Through the reestablishment of general military service the Führer gave Germany back its honor. The Führer did this not in order to lead to war because the Führer was a front soldier and knows the terrors and harm of war. But it is a known fact that the disarmament of a country makes its neighbors “conquest happy” (*eroberungslustig*). In Germany we want peace because we need peace. But we want a peace of honor and equality.”<sup>107</sup> Even more surprising, the author later demonstrated his resignation in regards to the loss of Alsace by writing, “Henceforth, we will probably have to concede that our old, beloved Strasbourg garrison will not see any German soldiers in its walls in the foreseeable future and our beloved 132nd will probably not be reconstituted...But the spirit of the regiment lives and will never die!”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> “In Dienst der Tradition: Begrüßungsartikel der Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung v. 15. Mai,” *Wir 143er* 4, no. 19 (June 1932), 10, MSG 3 2404, BAM.

<sup>107</sup> “Saarbrücken 1935: Regimentstag vom 22. bis 24. Juni 1935,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 46 (October 1935), 1, MSG 3 1176, BAM.

<sup>108</sup> “Saarbrücken 1935: Regimentstag vom 22. bis 24. Juni 1935,” *Nachrichtenblatt für alle Kameraden des 1. Unterels. Inf. Rgt. Nr. 132*, no. 46 (October 1935), 4, MSG 3 1176, BAM.

## Conclusion

The combination of the Nazis' rapid consolidation of power and the early public rhetorical alignment of their leadership with National Socialist ideals might suggest that the space for opposition within the Alsatian regimental associations disappeared after 1933.<sup>109</sup> However, both the 132nd and 143rd associations refrained from officially joining the National Socialist *Reichskriegerbund* (*Kyffhäuserbund*) until threatened with dissolution in 1938.<sup>110</sup> Both leagues were compelled to bring their bylaws in line with those of the Nazi organization as part of their incorporation. In 1925, membership in the 143<sup>rd</sup> association was open to any individual who could prove their service in the regiment and had committed national convictions.<sup>111</sup> The associational laws of 1938 required that members have a "National Socialist attitude" and be of German-blooded descent.<sup>112</sup> Although I do not yet have the sources to verify it, I believe that the belated conformation of associational bylaws to the National Socialist program, the continued leadership of republicans like Overzier, and the persistence of the so-called "red" associational chapters like Düsseldorf and Essen after 1933 suggests that the opposition did not disappear and

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<sup>109</sup> Historian Benjamin Ziemann makes such an assumption in his recent monograph on the commemorative practices of the *Reichsbanner* by observing that "...only with the Nazi seizure of power in early 1933 were republican war memories effectively silenced and suppressed." Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*, 277.

<sup>110</sup> In comparison, the *Reichsbanner* was dissolved in 1933. See Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations*, 277. Pro-monarchist veterans groups followed in 1934. See Elliott, "The Kriegervereine and the Weimar Republic," 126. *Stahlhelm* succumbed in 1935. See Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm*, 263-274.

<sup>111</sup> "Satzungen Bundes ehemaliger 143er," *Bundesblatt des ehem. 143er*, no. 2 (November 1925), 1, MSG 3 2401, BAM.

<sup>112</sup> "Satzungen des Bundes ehem. 143er," *Wir 143er*, no. 53 (April 1938), 4, MSG 3 2405, BAM. If they had not been so already, Jewish members of the association were to be expelled along with any members married to Jews. Although given the anti-Semitic turn in the rhetoric of the associations following 1933, it is doubtful that many Jews remained in the association to expel.

hints at the continued existence of a subculture of “republican war memories” in certain chapters of the regimental association.

The Nazi defeat of France and the subsequent reoccupation of Alsace in 1940 appeared to validate all the efforts made by members of the 132nd and 143rd regiments to care for the tradition of their Regiments and keep the memory of a German Alsace alive in the hearts of its members. Some members, such as Fritz Rust, decided to return to Strasbourg. Rust founded a new chapter of the 143rd association that at one point claimed to have 151 active members.<sup>113</sup> For the first time, veterans from the 132nd and 143rd regiments that had remained in Alsace were able to make official visits to their respective memorials in Oberkirch and Bühl. A group of 18 former 132ers from Strasbourg signed the regimental guestbook on March 23, 1941, “After over 20 years of separation from our Fatherland, thanks to our Führer, we are able today on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our Regiment to honor our fallen comrades in the name of the chapter of the Association of former Officers and Comradeship Strasbourg.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Verzeichnis der Mitglieder des Traditionsverbandes des ehem. 4. Unterels. Inf. Regts. 143, 1 April 1941,” *Wir 143er* 12, August 30 1941, 15, MSG 3 2406, BAM.

<sup>114</sup> *Gästebuch des Bund ehem. 132er*, SAO.

## **Part IV**

# **Hostilities Renewed: World War II and the Alsatian Experience, 1939-1945**

## **Introduction**

“The triumph over undefeated and betrayed Germany has provided you entry into German Strasbourg. Swollen by feelings of glory, you proclaim to the world that the key to the city is once more in French hands and will never again be given up. Perhaps the French proverb has slipped your mind that one should ‘never say never,’ perhaps you also momentarily forgot that there are more than a few historical examples that could warn you.”<sup>1</sup>

~Richard Sternfeld, *Tägliche Rundschau*, December 20, 1918.

“We did not undertake this necessary deliverance of Alsace for reasons of revenge or retaliation. We have only done it because it was in the interest of Alsace. And we have only done what France did much more radically before us in 1918. The great difference between then and now, however, lies in that disregarding a few exceptions, we have evicted foreigners, while the French expelled Alsatians and Germans from their German homeland.”<sup>2</sup>

~Excerpt from Speech by the Gauleiter of Alsace, Robert Wagner

Adolf Hitler, Nazi Führer and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht declared that Alsace, Lorraine, and Luxemburg would cease to be army operational areas beginning on August 10, 1940. The order marked the end of the so-called “Phoney War” that saw Great Britain and France declare war on Germany on September 3, 1939 after its invasion of Poland. Aside from a minor and temporary offensive into the German Saarland, French forces did not seriously engage

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Sternfeld, “Man soll niemals ‘niemals’ sagen!: An Herrn Raymond Poincaré” in *Tägliche Rundschau* Nr. 650, December 20, 1918, R 901 56157, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> “Die Rede des Gauleiters Robert Wagner,” *Der Aufbruch des Deutschen Elsass: Die erste nationalsozialistische Kundgebung im Elsass, 20. Oktober 1940 in Strassburg* (A.G. Kolmar: Verlag “Alsatia,” 1940), unpaginated.

with German forces until the “Battle of France” began on May 10, 1940. Relying on mobile armored units, German armies pushed British forces back to the beaches of Dunkirk and then turned south. Paris was entered on June 14, 1940 and a Franco-German armistice was signed on June 22. Although marking only a fraction of the time, the 1939-1940 conflict was more disruptive for the population of Alsace than that of the 1914-1918 war. Following the declaration of war on Germany, France had undertaken widespread evacuations of the areas around the border with Germany in Alsace and Lorraine. Consequently and in contrast to the situation after the First World War, civilians joined the population of demobilized soldiers making their way back to their homes in the province. Returnees were greeted upon their arrival by a dramatically different governing order, as despite the armistice agreement to respect the French borders of 1939, Nazi authorities rapidly took steps to incorporate Alsace and Lorraine into the Third Reich. A three pronged policy designed to shape the population of Alsace was adopted by German administrators. Measures included a screening of the returning evacuees, a prohibition on the re-entrance of population elements deemed “undesirable,” and the expulsion of unwanted elements that were already within the province’s borders. This campaign of negative categorization was accompanied by a positive program that privileged “desirable” elements, often by rewarding them with the goods and property of the expelled.

The events that unfolded over the next four years of German occupation would sear themselves into the memory of Alsatians. The collective trauma that the province experienced as a part of the Third Reich between 1940 and 1944 did more to eliminate any feelings of nostalgia for German governance than decades of French rule and nationalist propaganda. Nazi actions in Alsace during the Second World War were founded on Imperial and Interwar precedents. At the

same time, however, the Nazi program radicalized these precursor policies and implemented them with a thoroughness and intensity absent in the original forms.

A significant aspect of the transition between French and German sovereignty in 1940 was the degree to which Nazi policy deliberately and mockingly mimicked French actions in 1918. The precedent had been already set by Hitler, when he forced French authorities to sign the Armistice agreement in the same train car that had been used in the November 11, 1918 ceasefire. The similarities were intended to spite the French and symbolically demonstrate a definitive reversal of the Interwar European order. At the same time, however, Nazi policies marked a dramatic radicalization of earlier French precedents. This was evident in an array of settings ranging from language to population policy. One of the factors that paved the way for this escalation was the structure of Nazi governance in Alsace and Lorraine. The governing administrators of the provinces, Gauleiters Robert Wagner and Josef Bürckel, answered only to Hitler. Hitler's general stance of non-interference and lack of any other oversight gave both men the freedom to utilize whatever means they felt necessary to facilitate the germanization of the provinces. The period of Nazi administration of the provinces during the Second World War marked a critical reversal of the relationship between regional and central authorities. During previous administrations, local officials had been the moderating influence. This situation was reversed from 1940 to 1945, as it was central authorities who urged greater caution and discretion in Wagner's and Bürckel's policies.

German Alsatian veterans who had remained in the province following the First World War were perceived by Nazi officials to be an important source of reliable local men for service in minor, but nonetheless significant, administrative roles such as Block-leaders, policemen, and district leaders. The Nazi inclination to trust ex-soldiers who had fulfilled their martial duties as

German men and citizens marked a refinement of French officials' expectations regarding the nature of Alsatians. In the Nazi case, however, the trust in Alsatians was based on the real service that an individual had accomplished for the state, while their French counterpart's was constructed on the assumption of the alleged inherent francophile commitments of the province's populace. The enduring power of this assumption continued to be demonstrated by French officials throughout the period of Nazi occupation of Alsace. Various reports written by French authorities argued that the "traitors" who collaborated with German occupational authorities were not "authentic" Alsatians, but rather Germans who had been allowed to remain in Alsace after 1918.<sup>3</sup>

## **Evacuees, Internees, and Expellees: Population Policy in Alsace during World War II**

The population of Alsace and Lorraine was in a tremendous state of flux following the German victory over France in 1940. French authorities' evacuation of the provinces involved approximately 300,000 people who had been spread across France and Belgium. Nazi authorities would be preoccupied over the next several years in securing the return of "German" Alsatians and Lorrainers to the provinces. The definition of who was considered an evacuee was important because Nazi officials did not wish all inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine to return to the provinces. This entailed creating a preliminary definition of "genuine" residents, as well as a classification of the "true refugees." Instructions from December 1940 related that individuals considered to be Alsace-Lorrainers were those "who were born in Alsace-Lorraine and whose parents and ancestors were of German descent (*deutschstämmig*) and German speaking

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<sup>3</sup> "Rapport sur la situation religieuse et politique de l'Alsace occupée," December 31, 1940, Claude Paillat Papers, Box No. 347, Subject File 10, HIA.

(*deutschsprachig*).<sup>4</sup> The specificity of this description was intended to prevent the return of “undesirable” elements such as Jews and Frenchmen from the Interior. Nazi authorities defined refugees as “people, who since the beginning of the martial contest with France (September 1, 1939) have fled or been evacuated.”<sup>5</sup> This order was designed to screen elements of the population that were deemed suspect on account of their actions. For instance, Alsatians who had resided in France prior to the current war were not be automatically allowed to return to the province along with the wartime refugees.<sup>6</sup> Even “genuine German originating” Alsatian refugees could prove themselves to be untrustworthy in the eyes of Nazi officials. Individuals who delayed or refused repeated German calls to return to the province risked being permanently excluded.

In Alsace, Gauleiter Robert Wagner promulgated an order in April 1942 that set July 31, 1942 as the return deadline for all Alsatian refugees and demobilized soldiers. Individuals who had not come back or registered their intention to return with local Nazi authorities by this date were to have their property confiscated.<sup>7</sup> Although the majority of evacuees and refugees from the border provinces would return to their homes, a significant number would remain permanently absent during the period of Nazi occupation. In many cases this was certainly done for reasons of self-interest, but various Nazi authorities would periodically complain that the lack

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<sup>4</sup> “Befehl Nr. 44 für Sperrlinien- und Flüchtlingswesen,” December 3, 1940, R 83 Lothringen 7, BABL. I will discuss the intricacies of National Socialist citizenship policy in Alsace below.

<sup>5</sup> “Befehl Nr. 44 für Sperrlinien- und Flüchtlingswesen,” December 3, 1940, R 83 Lothringen 7, BABL.

<sup>6</sup> “Erste Anordnugn vom 11. May 1942 zur Durchführung der Verordnung über die Rückkehr von Flüchtlingen nach dem Elsass vom 20. April 1942,” R 43 II 1339, BABL. Nazi officials were instructed to wait until specific legislation had been made regarding these individuals.

<sup>7</sup> “Verordnung über die Rückkehr von Flüchtlingen nach dem Elsass vom 20. April 1942,” R 43 II 1339, BABL.

of a complete return was a result of French officials' obstructionist actions that sought to discourage the refugees from going home.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 17: Numbers of Alsatians Refused Reentry into the Province and their Backgrounds<sup>9</sup>**

<b>Former Residents Not Allowed to Return to Alsace</b>	
Jews	17,893
Frenchmen of the Interior	34,044
Mentally Ill	1,600
French Military Personnel	18,000
Total	71,537

The table illustrates that the three main groups of returnees denied entrance into Alsace after the June 1940 Armistice were Jews, Frenchmen of the interior,<sup>10</sup> and French military personnel. Jews and Frenchmen were rejected by Nazi authorities for their supposed innate racial and ethnic traits. The category of “French military personnel” is vague in the sense that no indication is given as to whether or not these soldiers were originally from the province or rather made up French army units stationed in the borderland. Given the French penchant for stationing Alsatians outside the province, it is likely that most of the soldiers were from other parts of France and garrisoned there in the pre-war period. Thus, the Nazi refusal to allow them to return to their residences is reminiscent of French policy in 1918 that did not permit German

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<sup>8</sup> Höhere SS und Polizeiführer bei den Reichsstathalter in Württemberg und Baden to the Reichsführer SS und Chef der Deutsche Polizei im Reichsministerium des Innern, October 5, 1940, R 83 Elsass 3, BABL.

<sup>9</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung Robert Wagner to Stellvertreter des Führers Reichsleiter Martin Bormann, April 22, 1941, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>10</sup> Unless I believe there is a chance for confusion, I will abbreviate subsequent references to “Frenchmen of the interior” simply as “Frenchmen” for the sake of brevity in the remainder of Part IV. Just as was the case with the “old” Germans and Alsatians of the Interwar period, the designation “of the interior” reflects contemporary usage of the term and is not intended to convey the self-understandings and identities of the labeled population.

soldiers who had been stationed in Alsace to cross the new Franco-German border and rejoin their families.

Alsations who had been forcibly evacuated and interned as suspect elements by French authorities were a second group seeking to return to the province from France in 1940. Individuals who had been interned for their German sympathies were eligible to be compensated for any losses they suffered. Alsations in this category were described as “ethnic Germans who made an extraordinary sacrifice on account of their “Germanness” (*Deutschtum*).”<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that Nazi authorities were readily willing to recognize the victimization of these individuals and compensate their suffering, local officials were instructed to exercise caution and thoroughly examine each case prior to any award. This carefulness was intended to ensure that the individual concerned had in fact been interned by the French for their German sentiment and not for other reasons, such as belonging to the communist party. Even if an Alsatian had been detained for their pro-German leanings, they could negate this “virtue” by actions perceived by Nazi authorities to be disloyal. Thus internees who had joined the French Foreign Legion, French army, or signed up to work in French war industries while under arrest were to be excluded from recompense for any financial damages suffered as a result of their detention.

Nazi authorities’ screening of the incoming residents of Alsace was accompanied by a simultaneous campaign to remove certain residents of the province who remained within its borders. The expulsion policies in 1940 represented a continuation and radicalization of French policies from 1918. Nazi officials defined expellees as “Alsations and Lorrainers, who after the armistice on June 26, 1940 were evicted by German agencies and authorities from Alsace and

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<sup>11</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, Verwaltungs und Polizeiabteilung to the Landkommissare und Oberstadtkommissare, November 13, 1941, R 2 29941, BABL.

Lorraine on account of criminal or political contamination or through the clearing of the language border in occupied and unoccupied France.”<sup>12</sup> Residents liable for eviction included groups who had been designated as undesirable returnees, such as Jews and Frenchmen. In the case of expulsions, however, this list would be significantly expanded. Jews began being expelled in July 1940 and other “undesirables” on August 11.<sup>13</sup>

In Alsace, Gauleiter Robert Wagner undertook an expulsion campaign in which cases were not judged individually, but rather categorically. Thus all members of the pro-French organizations like the *Souvenir Français*<sup>14</sup> and the “*Malgré nous*” combatants’ association were evacuated without any consideration of why former soldiers had become members.<sup>15</sup> Alsatians’ actions during the First World War were another important consideration for Nazi authorities. There was no place in the new German Alsace for individuals who had volunteered for service in the French army.<sup>16</sup> Career officers in the French military were another group singled out for suspicion and exile from the province.<sup>17</sup> Expulsion targets were not only residents of the province with some degree of martial connection. They were joined by a range of individuals whose presence was judged to be undesirable in the border province. A table created by Gauleiter Robert Wagner for authorities in Berlin in 1941 provides a twofold illustration of the

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<sup>12</sup> Der Höhere SS und Polizeiführer, “Grundsätzliche Anweisung über die Rückführungen von Elsässern und Lothringern nach dem Elsass und nach Lothringen,” September 3, 1942, R 186 2, BABL.

<sup>13</sup> “Rapport sur l’occupation allemande à Metz et sur les expulsions de population d’Alsace et de Lorraine,” 2 AG 617, AN.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Friedrich Spieser to Reichsminister Dr. Meissner, November 16, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>15</sup> “Allgemeiner äusserer Eindruck im Elsass,” R 49 721, BABL.

<sup>16</sup> “Alsaticus” to the Führer und Kanzler des Deutschen Reichs, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>17</sup> Ministre Défense Nationale to the Delegation Française in Wiesbaden, August 29, 1940, 2 AG 490, AN.

number of individuals on the move during the first years of the Second World War and the population elements that Nazi officials sought to remove from Alsace.

**Table 18: Numbers of Absent and Expelled Alsations and their Backgrounds<sup>18</sup>**

Resident Population on February 15, 1941	1,061,168
Reich Germans in this Number	11,008
Alsatian Population	1,050,160
Resident Population according to a French Census on March 8, 1936	1,219,381
Difference Between the Population Counts of February 15, 1941 and March 8, 1936	169,211
<b>The Difference in Numbers is Explained as Follows:</b>	
<b>Deported to the Interior of France:</b>	
Jews	3,255
Frenchmen of the Interior	935
Mixed Families who support France	2,381
Career Criminals	171
“Gypsies”	672
Alcoholics and Prostitutes	738
Homosexuals	161
Enemy Foreigners	1,797
French Speakers ( <i>Patoisfranzosen</i> )	1,626
Francophile Alsations	12,054
Total	23,790
Remaining 169,221-23,790=	145,431
<b>Former Residents Not Allowed to Return to Alsace</b>	71,537
Remaining 145,431-71,537=	73,894
<b>Number of Alsations Employed in Germany on February 15, 1941</b>	35,180
Remaining 71,537-35,180=	38,714
<b>Foreign Residents who had not Returned</b>	7,484

<sup>18</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung Robert Wagner to Stellvertreter des Führers Reichsleiter Martin Bormann, April 22, 1941, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

**Table 18 (cont'd)**

Remaining 38,714-7,484=	31,280
<b>Alsations in France who could Return</b>	31,280

Wagner's table gives a figure of 95,327 individuals who the Nazis forcibly prevented from permanently residing in Alsace. Nazi authorities judged Alsatian residents' "worthiness" to remain in the province according to their supposed racial and ethnic makeup, their sexual orientation, and by their actions. The 31,280 Alsations who had not yet returned to the borderland were the individuals who Wagner would later target in his order that set July 31, 1942 as the deadline to return to Alsace. The passing of this date led to an increase in the number of expelled residents. In September 1942, Nazi sources reported that around 105,000 people had either been evicted from the province or not returned.<sup>19</sup>

The process by which suspect elements were identified and expelled by Nazi authorities from Alsace mirrored that of French authorities in 1918. Many of the individuals who would eventually be expelled from the province had been brought to the attention of Nazi officials through denunciations. In a letter condemning the practice to Hitler, an anonymous writer, "Alsaticus," described the denunciations as primarily motivated by revenge.<sup>20</sup> Nazi authorities reached a similar conclusion and would later make false accusations a crime with potentially severe ramifications. Thus similarly to 1918, certain Alsations utilized the installment of a new political regime as an opportunity to attack their local rivals and enemies. In many cases,

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<sup>19</sup> "Bericht über die Sietzung am 19.9.42," R 49 721, BABL.

<sup>20</sup> "Alsaticus" to the Führer und Kanzler des Deutschen Reichs, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

denunciations represented an expression of personal interest rather than commitment to National Socialist ideals.

In the same letter, Alsaticus depicted the expulsion process to Hitler. He related that in surprise visits, German police informed targeted residents that they had one to three hours to pack a 30-50 kilogram suitcase and were allowed to only bring with them a total of 2,000 francs. The individual or family was subsequently transported to unoccupied France, but made to pay 1,600 frs. in transportation costs.<sup>21</sup> Alsaticus' description of Nazi actions in 1940 suggests they were deliberately similar to those taken by French authorities in 1918. This was true down to the weight of the suitcases that the expellees were allowed to bring with them, the maximum amount of currency they could take, and the required payment of their own transportation. These similarities were intended to spite the French and symbolically demonstrate a definitive reversal of the Interwar European order. At the same time, the Nazi expulsion policies marked a radicalization of earlier French policies. This is evident in regards to the transportation costs. While the French had forced German expellees to pay transportation costs for the five kilometer journey from Strasbourg to the Badenese border,<sup>22</sup> the amount had been a final irritant that reflected French authorities' vindictiveness, rather than a serious financial commitment for expellees. In contrast, in 1940, the 1,600 frs transportation cost to unoccupied France represented 80% of the evicted individual's financial resources. The subsequent confiscation of their property and savings in Alsace meant that no other sources of income would be forthcoming.

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<sup>21</sup> "Alsaticus" to the Führer und Kanzler des Deutschen Reichs, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>22</sup> Professor W. Ignatius, "Wie ich 1919 aus Strassburg herauskam," *Wir 143er* 3, no. 15 (October 20 1931), 6, MSG 3 2404, BAM.

The expulsion policy and the destination of expellees from Alsace were contested issues among Nazi authorities. Various local authors and central authorities in Berlin criticized the evictions as overly zealous and arbitrary. For instance, the undifferentiated decision to deport all members of the *Malgré nous* veterans' organization and the *Souvenir Français* was criticized for its lack of attention to the unique situation of the borderland. This was particularly the case for Alsatian veterans who had served in the German army during World War I. Certain Nazi officials correctly pointed out that the French had required the ex-enemy Alsatian soldiers to join a French veterans' organization in order to receive a combatant's pension.<sup>23</sup> Certain German officials alleged that this general expulsion order was not evicting committed French patriots, but rather individuals who had faithfully served the Second German Reich and were "small, brave, and harmless" people who were only interested in receiving a measure of financial support.<sup>24</sup>

That these expulsions could seem arbitrary was highlighted by various stories that emerged out of the borderland. One account that materialized in both the Alsatian and Lorrainer context involved two supposed "apolitical" brothers who were selected for deportation and placed in separate trucks. On the way to the French border one brother allegedly showed the German commander his Iron Cross and asked if that too was to be deported. The officer immediately removed the man from the transport, but informed the man that the truck carrying his brother had already crossed the French border.<sup>25</sup> The broader criticism being articulated was that the expellees were not the individuals who the Nazi government had any reason to suspect or fear. Thus Alsaticus related that the policies had not affected the francophile Alsatian

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<sup>23</sup> "Allgemeiner äusserer Eindruck im Elsass," R 49 721, BABL.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Friedrich Spieser to Reichsminister Dr. Meissner, November 16, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>25</sup> "Allgemeiner äusserer Eindruck im Elsass," R 49 721, BABL.

bourgeoisie, who by and large had not returned to the province, but rather “little people,” like workers and farmers, whose eviction led to widespread lamenting and resentment among the ordinary populace because of their many familial and friendship ties.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond the regularity of deporting certain Alsatians who had loyally fulfilled their citizenship duties under the *Kaiserreich*, certain Nazi officials criticized the loss of German blood to France. A secret memorandum to Heinrich Himmler, in his capacity as the *Reichsführer for the Consolidation of the German People*, argued that the Third Reich had no interest in delivering “racially good” elements to France.<sup>27</sup> The presence of such individuals would only strengthen and work to the benefit of the French people and create a potential group of skilled leaders who could once again challenge Germany. The alternative that was suggested was to resettle individuals with “desirable” racial characteristics to the German interior, where their interactions with “proper-minded” Germans would sway them in time. Even if the Germanization project was unsuccessful with adults, Nazi authorities were convinced that these individuals’ children could be saved for the Reich.<sup>28</sup> The destination of the expellees, however, was another point of contention among Nazi regional and central authorities. In June 1942, for instance, Heinrich Himmler wrote Wagner requesting that the Gauleiter no longer send undesirable elements to the east. Himmler worried that such standing policies would cause the east to become popularly perceived as a penal colony, a perception that would likely create

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<sup>26</sup> “Alsaticus” to the Führer und Kanzler des Deutschen Reichs, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>27</sup> Note to the Reichsführer-SS, Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, May 27, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>28</sup> See Dr. Friedrich Spieser to Reichsminister Dr. Meissner, November 16, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL and Der Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer bei den Reichsstatthaltern in Württemberg und Baden, May 4, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

significant problems in terms of attracting “racially desirable” German settlers to the area.<sup>29</sup> As an alternative, he suggested sending potentially dangerous elements from Alsace to German concentration camps and resettling other harmless elements in Germany. It appears that Himmler ultimately lost this battle as a subsequent note reported that the expellees from Alsace were to be resettled in the Ukraine.<sup>30</sup>

Among Nazi authorities, the Commander in Chief in France, Dr. Werner Best, in particular, was an opponent of expulsions from Alsace. In 1942 he wrote a long note to Wagner lecturing the Gauleiter on the “basic concepts of National Socialism.” The memorandum contained explanations of Nazi ideology that must have been insultingly elementary for an Old Fighter like Wagner. For example one part related,

The basic belief of National Socialism is that a people (*Volk*) are a homogenous body, whose parts, because they are of the same blood, cannot be separated by borders. The natural aspiration of every healthy people must be to unite all people of the same blood if by chance they have been torn from the body of the *Volk*...<sup>31</sup>

Another section reminded Wagner that Nazism looked beyond the present individual to subsequent generations in order to ensure the overall health and longevity of the German bloodline. This detailed description was part of Best’s argument against Wagner’s policy of setting a deadline for Alsatians to return to the province or face permanent exclusion and confiscation of their property. Best recited Nazi ideology as a means to urge Wagner to think beyond immediate goals and consider that the Gauleiter was not only excluding individual Alsatians of German origin from the Reich, but also generations of their German-blooded

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<sup>29</sup> Heinrich Himmler to Robert Wagner, June 18, 1942, Daniel Lerner Papers, Box No. C5, Folder 5, HIA.

<sup>30</sup> “Auszug aus dem Aktenvermerk des SS-Gruppenführers Greifelt über seinen Vortrag beim Reichsführer-SS am 10.8.1942,” September 2, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>31</sup> Militärbefehlshaber (Paris) Dr. Werner Best to Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass Robert Wagner, February 17, 1942, NS 19 2271, BABL.

descendants. These German-blooded individuals living in France could potentially form a kernel of leadership and resistance to challenge Germany, a threat all the more serious in Best's opinion because, as he observed, "Germans can only be seriously endangered by other Germans."<sup>32</sup> Instead of exclusion, he argued for the reformability of German blooded peoples, pointing to the "millions of German communists" who had been won over to National Socialism and urged Wagner to be lenient with German-originating Alsatian adults in consideration of their children who could be taught to become "good Germans" and support the National Socialist cause.

Local authors such as Alsaticus also sought to downplay the presence and label of "francophile element" for much of the Alsatian population by pointing to the unique trajectory of the Franco-German borderland. According to Alsaticus, after 1918,

The residents could do nothing else than be loyal French citizens, especially after Germany's leader publically renounced the claim on Alsace-Lorraine. How many had to adopt loyal attitudes in order to defend their vital interests in Alsace-Lorraine? How many were forced, for a variety of reasons, to join the so-called patriotic associations?<sup>33</sup>

Alsaticus sought to defend the Alsatian populace by suggesting that for the majority of individuals judged to have pro-French sentiment, their cooperation had been a result of personal interest rather than francophile conviction. Moreover, Alsaticus sought to deflect full blame from the individuals targeted by Nazi authorities, arguing that German leaders had publically renounced their claim on the province. The seemingly straightforward, but nonetheless complicated question that was behind these observations was "given the circumstances in Alsace after 1918, what would you have had the populace do?"

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<sup>32</sup> Militärbefehlshaber (Paris) Dr. Werner Best to Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass Robert Wagner, February 17, 1942, NS 19 2271, BABL.

<sup>33</sup> "Alsaticus" to the Führer und Kanzler des Deutschen Reichs, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

Resettled Alsatians did not simply accept their situation, but rather actively petitioned Nazi authorities to return to their homes. In justifying their requests, applicants often drew upon their previous service to the German state during the First World War. The case of Ernst Meisburger is exemplary. Meisburger was from the Altkirch area and wrote to Hitler in March 1943 relating that he and his wife had been resettled to the vicinity of Stuttgart on account of his military-aged son Ernst's disappearance. Meisburger claimed that he had had no prior knowledge of his son's plans to evade German military service. Moreover, Meisburger included a description of his wartime record in the German army; a testimony that highlighted the temporal breadth of his service, promotion to the rank of sergeant, being wounded five times, and receiving both the Iron Cross First and Second Class.<sup>34</sup> Meisburger's exemplary service in the German army caused his application to immediately catch the eye of Nazi authorities. After an inquiry, the Commander of the Security police in Strasbourg related that in addition to the flight of his son, Meisburger had been the local group leader of the "*Croix de feu*," an association noted for its strong pro-French chauvinism. Moreover, after the arrival of German armies, Meisburger had not joined the Nazi party. The Commander related, "I have considerable misgivings against revoking Meisburger's resettlement. His service in the world war alone should not be sufficient to create such a precedent for the resettlement action of Altkirch."<sup>35</sup> The statement demonstrates that although Nazi authorities were committed to portraying themselves as honoring the sacrifices of the German frontline fighter, when it came down to a choice

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<sup>34</sup> Ernst Meisburger to the Führer des Gross-Deutschen Reichs, March 30, 1943, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

<sup>35</sup> Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD Strassburg to the Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, May 11, 1943, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

between furthering National Socialist policy and making an exception for a former German soldier, the former was privileged.

Head of the Reich Chancellery Dr. Hans Lammers, however, disagreed and took a more conciliatory position writing, “A man, who in the World War was awarded the Iron Cross I Class and wounded multiple times can through reasonable and skillful handling very quickly be won over to the German cause, even if he lapsed during the French period.”<sup>36</sup> Lammers’ position marks a break with observable pre-existent official practices in Alsace. During both the *Kaiserreich* and the Interwar period, local and regional officials had been at the forefront of cautioning national authorities in Berlin and Paris to temper their policies in Alsace. In Meisburger’s case and as will be seen throughout the chapter, central authorities now urged regional authorities to exercise a degree of discretion and moderation in the borderland. The reversal of this process is partially explainable due to the unique relationship between the Gauleiters and national authorities. Both Robert Wagner and Josef Bürckel were answerable directly to Hitler and had no other intermediary superiors to temper their actions. Hitler had given both Gauleiters the assignment of securing the Alsace-Lorraine borderland for Germany and gave the men significant autonomy to proceed in the manner they deemed most appropriate.

Despite the inaction and unresponsiveness of Nazi authorities to his petition, Meisburger wrote again to Hitler in September 1943. The language of the second letter that he utilized to justify and frame his request was significantly altered. This time in describing his military service Meisburger wrote,

As a former sergeant in the German army from 1912-1918, having been decorated with the Iron Cross I and II Class, and through and through being a true German man, I cannot understand these [resettlement] measures...I naturally condemn my son for abandoning his Fatherland, a

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<sup>36</sup> Note from Reichsminister Dr. Lammers, June 10, 1943, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

crime for which he will have to pay, but I swear up and down that my wife and I do not bear the smallest guilt [for his actions]....<sup>37</sup>

Here Meisburger's tone has changed from merely mentioning his service in the German army during the First World War to making it the forefront support for his demand to return and evidence of his "German manhood." Moreover, he portrayed himself as siding with Nazi authorities in identifying his son's evasion as a "crime." Meisburger also rephrased his arguments regarding the contemporary service he could do for the Third Reich if he were allowed to return home. He rhetorically asked, "What use are my wife and I to the Fatherland when we sit idly in Weil am Rhine?" This time the letter closed by saying, "Dear honored Führer, I assure you that I will only endeavor to work and devote myself to Greater Germany (*Grossdeutschland*), so that the final victory (*Endsieg*) for our beloved Fatherland must come to pass."<sup>38</sup> Meisburger's second attempt was also unsuccessful. Nonetheless, his efforts represent a demonstrable example in which an individual challenged, albeit respectfully, the decision taken by Nazi authorities. Similar to Alsations during the Imperial and Interwar periods, Meisburger appealed to Hitler over the heads of regional authorities in the hope that his case would come to a more favorable conclusion. Moreover, his second letter is a clear example of Meisburger adopting National Socialist rhetoric in his attempt to gain approval for his application to return home. Despite its ultimate failure, it nonetheless demonstrates the agency and resourcefulness of local Alsations in the face of the power of the state.

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<sup>37</sup> Ernst Meisburger to Adolf Hitler, September 22, 1943, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

<sup>38</sup> Ernst Meisburger to Adolf Hitler, September 22, 1943, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

## **Expulsions from Lorraine: A Comparative Example**

It is worthwhile to take a brief detour to discuss expulsion policy as it was enacted in Lorraine by Gauleiter Josef Bürckel for comparative purposes. An official tabulation put the number of Lorrainers expelled from the province during the Second World War at 102,039.<sup>39</sup> Despite the similarity in numbers of expellees between Alsace and Lorraine (105,000 versus 102,039), at the time, it was Bürckel who was most associated with radical population policies. This likely reflected the fact that in Alsace most of the expellees had originally been evacuated by the French government, but not allowed to return by the Nazi administration, while in the case of Lorraine most of the deportees were displaced by direct Nazi intervention – at Bürckel’s order.

The expulsions from Lorraine were also the subject of debate among Nazi officials. Bürckel’s policies were perceived to be even more general and arbitrary than Wagner’s. To some central authorities in Berlin, it appeared that Bürckel’s actions were not focused on removing undesirable elements, but rather a specific percentage of Lorraine’s population.<sup>40</sup> State Secretary of the Interior Ministry Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart criticized the wholesale deportation of members of French Nationalist Associations and argued that a differentiation needed to be made between the fanatical leaders of such organizations and the ordinary members who were likely only associated with the group out of necessity. He also disparaged Bürckel for targeting and

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<sup>39</sup> Memorandum from the Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei des SD in Lothringen-Saarpfalz, April 2, 1943, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>40</sup> Permanent Military Tribunal of the 10th Military District, seated at Strasbourg, “Minutes of Examination or Confrontation,” 34. A set of documents (in English translation) from the files of Raymond Jadin (French lawyer) dealing with the examinations of ex Gauleiter Robert Wagner, Philip (William R.) Collection, Box No. 4, Item 34, HIA. Interestingly, at his postwar trial Robert Wagner would claim that Hitler wished to expel 1/3 of the Alsatian population from the province.

characterizing “old Germans” who had been naturalized as French citizens during the Interwar period as having “denounced their Fatherland.” Instead, Stuckart argued that these individuals had helped maintain a “German consciousness” in Lorraine and kept the memory of Germany alive.<sup>41</sup> Other Nazi authorities professed the worry that expulsions from Lorraine of racially desirable individuals would only work to the detriment of the Reich and the benefit of France and potentially contribute towards creating greater parity between the German and French race.<sup>42</sup>

Bürckel’s response to these allegations highlights his reasoning behind the expulsions, but also provides insight into the governance of the Franco-German borderland under Nazi occupation. Bürckel began his defense by taking the position that Stuckart’s criticism of his policies had more to do with personal animosity and jealousy than disagreement with his actions in Lorraine.<sup>43</sup> Bürckel assured Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick that he would not undertake such large-scale expulsions without the Führer’s personal approval. He denied the wholesale expulsion of members of the *Malgré nous* combatants’ association, saying that families whose fathers had honorably served in the German army would be allowed to remain. Bürckel did make an important distinction when it came to identifying “Volksdeutsche,” believing that there was a significant difference between an individual being identified as a racial German and evincing a loyalty to that birthright. For Bürckel, descent alone was not enough to prove a family’s commitment to their “Germanness.” Instead, he contended that the language of

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<sup>41</sup> Reichsminister des Innern, Dr. Stuckart to the Reichsführer SS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei SS-Gruppenführer Heydrich und Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei Min. Direktor Kritzinger, December 19, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>42</sup> Militärbefehlshaber in Frankreich, Stülpnagel to the Reichsminister des Innern, Stuckart, April 28, 1941, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>43</sup> Josef Bürckel to Frick, December 20, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

daily use was the most appropriate measuring stick to gauge the genuineness of a family's dedication to their German heritage. He supported this claim by observing that 90% of deserters from Lorraine during the First World War had supposedly originated from the province's French speaking zone and concluded by saying, "The evacuees are all people who have sworn themselves to France, who have continually refused to speak German, who according to their race are not German and with whom we would have struggled for hundreds of years and never achieved peace."<sup>44</sup> If anything, in Bürckel's mind, the borderland population needed to be even *more* committed to their Germanness than Germans of the interior. This was revealed in the content of a speech that the Gauleiter gave in spring 1941. He offered a four week period of grace in which residents that did not believe they could fully conform to the orders and measures of the Reich could immigrate to France and be fully compensated for any loss of property. The Chief of the Security Police in Lorraine observed, however, that "He [Bürckel] made it clear to those assembled that a border people must be animated by a uniform spirit and that any ambiguity in this regard would be cause for conflict and troubles for those individuals unable to commit themselves to the German Reich."<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, there was little central authorities could do to curtail the policies of Gauleiters Bürckel and Wagner given the autonomy of their position, aside from appealing to Hitler. The Commander in Chief in France did just that in May 1941, voicing his concerns regarding the larger ramifications of the expulsions and requesting that the activities and policies of the

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<sup>44</sup> Josef Bürckel to Frick, December 20, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum from the Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei u. d. SD Lothringen-Saarpfalz, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

Gauleiters be coordinated to present a set of unified policies.<sup>46</sup> Hitler's response was a rebuke. The memorandum read, "The Führer has responded that Gauleiter Bürckel alone is responsible for his political actions in Lorraine and it is not the task of the Commander in Chief in France to critique these measures."<sup>47</sup>

## **Unwilling to Let Go: French Protests during World War II**

Vichy French authorities did not sit back and idly observe Nazi actions in Alsace. Instead, they submitted a number of protests regarding Nazi policy. The basis for French objections was that the territorial integrity of France had been guaranteed by the armistice, but that Nazi actions in Alsace and Lorraine amounted to a de facto annexation of the provinces.<sup>48</sup> Specific objections included the takeover of Alsace and Lorraine's governance by Nazi administrators, the firing of local and regional French officials, the removal of bishops known for their pro-French sympathies, the Germanization of place and personal names, the enactment of German law in the provinces, the selective repatriation of evacuees, expulsions, and confiscations of expellees' property.<sup>49</sup> Due to the disproportionate strength between Nazi

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<sup>46</sup> If Bürckel was criticized for his over use of expulsions, Wagner was condemned for his widespread use of the death sentence to punish crimes in Alsace. A phrase that summarizes what was perceived to be the diametrically opposed policies of Bürckel and Wagner was that "In Lothringen [Bürckel's] policies seek to cleanse the province and then educated the populace, in Alsace, [Wagner] educates first and cleanses later..." See "Die elsässische Frage," R 43 II 1339a, BABL.

<sup>47</sup> Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei to the Reichsminister des Innern, June 3, 1941, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

<sup>48</sup> Französische Abordnung bei der Deutschen Waffenstillstandskommission to the Vorsitzenden der Deutschen Waffenstillstandskommission, General der Infanterie von Stülpnagel, September 3, 1940, R 43 II 1334, BABL.

<sup>49</sup> Französische Abordnung bei der Deutschen Waffenstillstandskommission to the Vorsitzenden der Deutschen Waffenstillstandskommission, General der Infanterie von Stülpnagel, September 3, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

Germany and Vichy France, there was little that French authorities could do to alter German policy beyond the submission of repeated protests. Nazi negotiators responded to French protests by simply ignoring them.

Faced with a Nazi administration that did not react nor even acknowledge their protests, French authorities adopted a new tactic that consisted of unfavorably comparing Nazi actions in 1940 with those of Imperial authorities in 1871. The fact that French authorities harkened back to Imperial policies rather than the precedent of their own actions in 1918 in Alsace and Lorraine was not lost upon Nazi authorities. Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart included a selection of French orders promulgated between September 1918 and March 1919 in a packet he sent to the Chief of the Reich Chancellery Hans Lammers. In an accompanying memorandum Lammers wrote, “From these orders it is clear that already during the armistice France took numerous measures that cannot be differentiated from a definitive annexation.”<sup>50</sup> He later concluded, “In view of these actions the current French government, which has instructed General Huntziger to forward the protest note, has no cause to complain about the preliminary administrative measures taken by the German government in Alsace an Lorraine.”<sup>51</sup> The packet and accompanying note demonstrate that French actions after the First World War remained a definitive point of reference and source of justification for National Socialist actions in Alsace.

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<sup>50</sup> Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart im Reichsministerium des Innern to Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei Dr. Hans Lammers, September 17, 1940, R 43 II 1334, BABL.

<sup>51</sup> Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart im Reichsministerium des Innern to Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei Dr. Hans Lammers, September 17, 1940, R 43 II 1339, BABL.

## **Ex-Soldiers in Occupied Alsace**

Former soldiers, both young and old, were an important focus of Nazi policy in the months following the unofficial annexation of Alsace. Officials sought to return the desirable elements of the Alsatian population that were still mobilized in the French army and utilize individual Alsatians who had proven themselves in the ranks of the German army during the First World War in a variety of local leadership roles. Nazi authorities had a clear conception of the type of ex-combatants that would be honored in Alsace. Similarly to their French counterparts in 1918, Nazi officials were especially suspicious of Alsatians who had been career officers and volunteers in the French military. The German re-assumption of power was also utilized as an opportunity to settle accounts with Alsatians who had failed to fulfil their service obligations in the German army during World War I.

Nazi officials were anxious to secure the repatriation of Alsatians and Lorrainers mobilized in the French army. This mandate, however, was problematic for French authorities who perceived a German demand to demobilize a specific group of French citizens from the French army as an infringement on their sovereignty. This was especially the case given that according to the armistice conditions, Alsace and Lorraine were to remain part of France. However, being the weaker party in the negotiations, French officials sought to gain German approval of a plan that would have provided for the release of Alsatian and Lorrainer volunteers at staggered intervals. Although not explicitly mentioned, the proposal was reminiscent of the Franco-German agreement in 1871 that allowed Alsatians who desired to return to the province the means to opt out of the remainder of their military service. This proposition was quashed by German General Stülpnagel who related that the German government demanded the immediate release and return to the provinces of *all* Alsatians and Lorrainers. The only caveat that Nazi officials would agree to was that soldiers whose families had been expelled from Alsace and

Lorraine could remain in France.<sup>52</sup> This stipulation is evidence that Nazi authorities were prejudice against particular types of Alsatian soldiers.

Local officials were instructed to treat and examine returning soldiers as any other Alsatian refugee. The implication was that the ex-combatants would undergo the same sorting process and be admitted or rejected based on the conclusion of an official investigation. Repatriation was not as simple for Alsatians who had served as active or reserve officers or were career soldiers in the French army. Individuals falling in this category were to be conveyed to temporary detention camps or “*Heimkehrlagern*” as they were more innocuously titled in Dijon and St. Dizier. Their release was only to occur after a more thorough inquiry.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Alsatians who were known to have fought against Germany during World War I or deserted from the German were ordered to be held as “educational prisoners” (*Schulungshäftlinge*) in the Vorbruck concentration camp. The purpose of their six week detention was to subject them to ideological instruction, following which they were to be allowed to return to their former occupations.<sup>54</sup> The case of returning Alsatian soldiers also demonstrates that an individual’s continued participation in an organization or activity judged to be counter to the interests of Germany could lead to exclusion from “Germanism.” Thus for the Nazis “Germanness” was not necessarily an innate and enduring trait, but could be withdrawn based on an individual’s actions. For instance, Nazi officials were instructed that “It is self-evident that released Alsatian and

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<sup>52</sup> “Compte rendu de l’entretien du Général Doyen avec le Général von Stülpnagel,” November 30, 1940, F 60 398, AN. Despite this ultimatum, over the next several years, periodic German reports would claim that French authorities were withholding or prolonging the release of “thousands” of Alsatians and Lorrainers.

<sup>53</sup> “Befehl Nr. 19 für Flüchtlingswesen,” August 31, 1940, R 83 Lothringen 7, BABL.

<sup>54</sup> Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Strassburg to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, December 11, 1941, R 83 Elsass 1, BABL.

Lorrainer French prisoners-of-war that wish to further serve as career soldiers in the French army are not to be regarded as ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutscher*).”<sup>55</sup>

Nazi authorities displayed a greater degree of confidence in Alsatians who had served in the German military during the First World War. Although this investment was not nearly as inclusive or thorough as its original French counterpart, Nazi authorities proceeded from the assumption that Alsatian German veterans had proved themselves in the service of Germany could be trusted to take on roles of authority. These positions ranged from Block-leader<sup>56</sup> to the police and district leaders.<sup>57</sup>

Jean Lechner, for instance, who had served the entirety of the war in the German army, been promoted to officer, and awarded the Iron Cross First and Second Class was a French official working in Colmar at the time of the Nazi conquest. Occupational authorities informed him that he would be allowed to retain his position as a result of his “exemplary actions” during the First World War and his “voluntary” joining of the Nazi party. Lechner initially refused, but was subsequently threatened to be deported along with his family to Königsberg, Prussia. He eventually relented and agreed to become the block-leader of the *Vogesen Ortsgruppe*.<sup>58</sup> His new post and associated activities required that he disinter his German war medals from the

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<sup>55</sup> “Befehl Nr. 49 für Sperrlinien- und Flüchtlingswesen,” January 1, 1941, R 83 Lothringen 7, BABL.

<sup>56</sup> *Der Aufbruch des Deutschen Elsass: Die erste nationalsozialistische Kundgebung im Elsass, 20. Oktober 1940 in Strassburg* (A.G. Kolmar: Verlag “Alsatia,” 1940), Unpaginated.

<sup>57</sup> For instance district leaders (*Kreisleiters*) Paul Mass, L. Manny, Renatus Hauss, Johann Keppi, Willi Worch, Josef Rosse, Dr. Richard Huber, Dr. Ludwig Benmann, and Karl Hueber were all born in Alsace and had fought in the German army during World War I. Many of them had resettled in Germany following the conflict, but returned to the province after the Nazi reconquest.

<sup>58</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 173-174.

family garden and add a new coat of paint to cover the rust.<sup>59</sup> In another case, a memorandum advocated that, “Police troops and gendarmes should first of all be recruited from the old soldiers who fought in the field-grey armies and their sons. One cannot forget the distinction won by former Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers who fought on the German side during the world war.”<sup>60</sup> Both Lechner’s selection and the memorandum were animated by the same assumption that former German Alsatian veterans were a kernel of German loyalty around which the Nazis could integrate and construct a functioning administration in Alsace. Moreover, as is evident from the quotation regarding the recruitment of police, Nazi authorities assumed that the sons of German veterans would be prone to share the same national inclinations as their fathers.

Significant similarities existed between National Socialist policies and those of the previous Imperial and French Republican administrations. Nazi officials, often in a mockingly imitative manner, based and justified their actions on precedents set by French authorities after the First World War. However, there should be no confusion that the period of Nazi administration of Alsace during the Second World War was marked by an unprecedented willingness among officials to employ violence against the population of the province in order to realize their radically altered and ordered vision of the Franco-German borderland. Alsace technically remained part of France for the entirety of the Second World War. The province’s “incorporation” remained unofficial and unacknowledged from the German side. Nonetheless, Nazi authorities would forcibly draw Alsations into their project to realize a new European order. The realization of this project required a general remolding and reeducation of the populace.

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<sup>59</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 173-175.

<sup>60</sup> “Die elsässische Frage,” R 43 II 1339a, BABL.

National Socialist officials would utilize a variety of forums such as citizenship policy, military service, pensions, and memorialization projects to achieve this radical new vision.

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **Belonging under the Swastika: Citizenship in Alsace during the Period of Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944**

“The citizenship of the German Reich will not be given away, but rather bestowed as an honorable recognition for a proven unambiguous attitude.”<sup>1</sup>

~ *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten*, September 2, 1942

“If someone comes to me and declares....that ‘I am no German, I am French,’ in other words, ‘I feel French,’ to them I can only reply, “You are not a Frenchman, you are a German traitor. You are a traitor to your name, to your language, to your people, to your blood, fallen short of your own nature and destiny.”<sup>2</sup>

~*Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten*, March 29, 1943.

The exact nationality status of Alsatians remained unclear in the years following the Franco-German Armistice of June 1940. Although Germany had agreed to respect France’s 1939 borders, its policies and actions in the province clearly demonstrated that from the Nazi perspective, the victory over France had returned Alsace to the Reich. Despite the lack of an initial official and public direction from Adolf Hitler, central Nazi authorities instructed their regional and local counterparts that “native” Alsatians and Lorrainers were “to be treated as full-fledged members of the German ethnic community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Therefore measures must be avoided that could give native Alsatians and Lorrainers the impression that they are still seen as Frenchmen.”<sup>3</sup> Despite these instructions, a degree of uncertainty would continue to

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<sup>1</sup> “Volkstumskämpfer werden Staatsbürger: Weiter Erlass des Gauleiters über die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsass,” *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten*, September 2, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> “Du bist kein Franzose, du bist ein deutscher Verräter!” *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten*, March 29, 1943, R 83 Elsass 43, BABL.

<sup>3</sup> Reichsminister des Innern to the Obersten Reichsbehörden, November 5, 1941, R 43 II 1334, BABL.

persist in the ranks of the German bureaucracy regarding Alsatians' citizenship until August 1942, when Adolf Hitler officially extended the compulsory military service laws of the Reich to Alsace. This action was perceived by regional authorities to once and for all settle the question of whether or not Alsace was to be part of Germany. Nazi authorities were cognizant that any action on their part to officially incorporate Alsatians and Lorrainers into Germany would be met with opposition by the French. Officials like Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart would justify dismissing French objections by arguing that the French had treated Alsatians and Lorrainers as French citizens prior to the officials signing of the peace treaty in 1919.<sup>4</sup> Nazi citizenship policy in Alsace during the Second World War was both a continuation and dramatic break with previous Imperial and Republican precedents.<sup>5</sup>

### **Defining “Genuine” Alsatians: The Role of Residence, Descent, and Actions**

National Socialist citizenship policy in Alsace during the Second World War was the sum of three different measures that evaluated an individual's descent, previous citizenship, and actions. It is difficult to hierarchically rank the three elements because failure to fulfill any one could lead to the withholding of German citizenship or its provisional bestowal. What is clear is that “German origin” in itself was insufficient to lay a claim to citizenship in the Third Reich. Although this background was a critical requisite, an equally important aspect of Nazi citizenship policy evaluated the actions and attitudes of prospective Alsatian citizens. Past and present

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<sup>4</sup> SS-Gruppenführer Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, August 5, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>5</sup> Note from Dr. Peters, SS-Hauptsturmführer, January 21, 1943, R 69 1245, BABL. Interestingly, the archival sources from the Second World War are the only files from my period of study in which officials themselves made a clear juxtaposition between French citizenship policy that relied on *jus soli* in order to cope with its low birth rates and Germany's reliance on the principle of descent, *jus sanguinis*.

deeds were to play a key role in the final decision. Residents of Alsace who had performed service for Imperial Germany in the past or had the potential to do so for the Third Reich in the present and future were particularly sought after by Nazi authorities. Given the context of the ongoing war in Europe, it is unsurprising that military service in the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS were particularly valued and rewarded by German officials.

Descent was a key evaluatory category that Nazi authorities utilized in identifying “native” Alsatians and awarding German citizenship. Alsatians and Lorrainers were described as any individual who had been born in Alsace and whose parents and forefathers were German language speakers and of “German origin.”<sup>6</sup> In 1940, an Alsatian of “German origin” was defined as an individual who could prove they had a minimum of two German grandparents who were born in Alsace, Lorraine, Luxembourg or Germany.<sup>7</sup> Thus it was descent and ancestors’ residence location upon which an “authentic” Alsatian based their claim to German citizenship during World War II. National Socialist authorities did not pioneer the use of descent as a delineator of national belonging in Alsace. The element of descent-based citizenship evaluation that the Nazis did introduce to the Alsatian borderland was the notion of “fully alien blooded races” (*Vollfremdblütige*) that were considered suspect and undesirable in Germany and especially the borderland. Jews, Sinti and Roma, and blacks were all judged to fall into this category and on “no account” were to be judged to be of “German origin” regardless of their own and their ancestors’ length of residence in Alsace.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, unlike their French

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<sup>6</sup> “Befehl Nr. 44 für Sperrlinien- und Flüchtlingswesen,” December 3, 1940, R 83 Lothringen 7, BABL.

<sup>7</sup> “Sonderabdruck Nr. 82 aus dem Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern 1942 Nr. 35,” R 69 684, BABL.

<sup>8</sup> “Sonderabdruck Nr. 82 aus dem Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern 1942 Nr. 35,” R 69 684, BABL. Dieter Gosewinkel has described racialized National Socialist citizenship policy as marking the point of caesura with prior German citizenship practices. See

counterparts, local and regional Nazi authorities were given greater personal discretion in applying the label of “German origin.” Thus officials were instructed that the German origin of a Lorrainer could be denied if all of the applicant’s grandparents had originated from the French speaking area of Lorraine and if the individual in question was married to a Frenchwoman from the interior.

French actions in 1918 were an important point of reference for National Socialist citizenship policy. The domicile of residents on November 11, 1918 and the nationality status an individual received according to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles were both taken into account by Nazi authorities in determining an individual’s contemporary status in the Third Reich. The Nazi decision to utilize the date of the Armistice as a cutoff in evaluating the prior domiciles and prior citizenship of residents of Alsace and using these findings as determining factors in awarding contemporary German citizenship was reminiscent of French policy in 1918 that had labelled all migrants from Germany after 1871 “old Germans.”

The date that residents of Alsace migrated to the province played a critical role in establishing whether or not Nazi officials acquiesced to their continued presence. Individuals who had moved to Alsace after November 11, 1918 from France, regardless of any “old” Alsatian heritage they possessed were not to be considered “Alsatian” by Nazi authorities due to worries of their inherently francophile nature. On the other side, individuals who had migrated to Alsace from Germany after Hitler’s ascension to power on January 30, 1933 also tended to be viewed with suspicion. The timing of the migrants’ emigration caused Nazi officials to suspect the individual had left Germany and resettled in Alsace on account of their opposition to

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Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen*, 369-382. The analysis of Nazi nationality practices in Alsace suggests a greater degree of continuity with previous German citizenship than Gosewinkel sees in Germany proper.

National Socialism. Additionally, individuals who had immigrated to France before or during the First World War and received French citizenship, residents who had left the province after June 19, 1940, and those who had been forbidden to return, or expelled were not considered desirable Alsatians.<sup>9</sup>

Individuals who had been resident in the province prior to the November 1918 Armistice were evaluated using a different set of criteria. These people's "Alsatian- and Germanness" was determined by how they had acquired their French citizenship through the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>10</sup> Nazi authorities identified "Alsations" as those individuals who had automatically received French citizenship and those who had been allowed to apply for French naturalization within a year of the provisions of the peace treaty going into effect.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the position of "old" Germans who had resided in the province in 1918 and subsequently been naturalized as French citizens was more complicated. There were some elements of Nazi officialdom that viewed these individuals as traitors. For instance in 1941, a memorandum observed that "These naturalizations required a distinct application and proof of loyal attitude to the French state. For that reason, these people are in general no longer suitable to remain in the Western border areas."<sup>12</sup> The clear implication here was that individuals who were willing to renounce their membership in the German state and take steps to prove their loyalty to France could not be trusted to represent or build the Germany in the borderlands that National Socialists envisioned,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Wagner, "Verordnung über die Rückkehr von Flüchtlingen nach dem Elsass vom 20. April 1942," NS 19 2271, BABL.

<sup>10</sup> Specifically, those according to Article 79 Attachment 1. See "Auszug aus dem Reichsgesetzblatt," Nr. 90, August 23, 1942, R 69 684, BABL.

<sup>11</sup> Landkommissar Weissenburg to the Bürgermeister des Kreises, August 17, 1944, 414 D 3017, ADBR.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum to Reichsstatthalter von Baden und Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass Robert Wagner, October 11, 1941, R 49 721, BABL.

even if they were of “German origin.” Ultimately, this opinion would be suppressed.<sup>13</sup>

Residents of the province who met the conditions of having received their French citizenship through the peace treaty and who currently resided in Alsace were to be considered “Alsations.”

The final element of National Socialist citizenship policy in Alsace consisted of an evaluation of residents’ service to the state. During their occupation, Nazi authorities undertook a detailed campaign to categorize the Alsatian population along these lines. The resultant lists highlighted the individual’s accomplished or potential service to the state rather than their supposed racial background.<sup>14</sup> The categorization of Alsace’s populace according to prior and prospective contributions to the Third Reich state stands in stark contrast to the classification of populations in Eastern Europe that were judged upon their degree of reliability and “Germanness.”<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, this decision makes sense in light of contemporary National Socialist policy that had aspired to remove the great majority of “undesirable” elements from the Alsatian population, a process that technically should have been completed by 1942. On the other hand, the evaluatory emphasis on the past and potential future actions of the province’s populace demonstrates that descent alone was insufficient to guarantee membership in the Third

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<sup>13</sup> “Staatsangehörigkeit der Elsässer und Lothringer,” NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>14</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass to the Landkommissare und Polizeipräsidenten in Strassburg und Mülhausen, October 15, 1942, 414 D 3017, ADBR. Nazi authorities categorized the Alsatian population by dividing them up on both alphabetic and numeric lists. Alsatian volunteers for the German war effort were to be inscribed on “List A,” while those who had been conscripted for military service were placed on “List B.” Alsations included on four other numerical lists included: the members of the so-called Nanziger Group and family members of Dr. Karl Roos (List Number 1); Alsations described as “national fighters” (*Volkstumskämpfer*) who had been interned by the French for their pro-German activities and their families (List Number 2); German Alsatian veterans of the First World War who had been awarded the highest German military awards for their bravery, the severely war disabled, and the widows and orphans of German Alsatian soldiers who had fallen during the conflict (List Number 3); and finally, Alsatian members of the Nazi party and their families (List Number 4).

<sup>15</sup> Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany*, 223-234. Nathans outlines the creation of the *Volksliste* and its application in Eastern Europe.

Reich. German Alsatian veterans, war widows, and survivors of Alsatians who had been killed fighting in the German army during the 1914-1918 conflict were particularly well placed in regards to receive full citizenship on account of their earlier deeds in service to Germany.

German Alsatian ex-soldiers and war widows who had demonstrated their commitment to Germany through their deeds or physical sacrifice were automatically granted German citizenship by Gauleiter Robert Wagner. The text of the order read,

I hereby grant German citizenship to: 1) the bearers of the highest world war [military] decorations in recognition of their deeds in combat for Germany; 2) the severely war disabled of the world war, whose injury is attributable to wounding, as well as to the widows and orphans of world war participants, who fell or died following their wounding; in recognition of their hallowed sacrifice (*dargebrachten Opfers*).<sup>16</sup>

In a similar order on January 15, 1943, Robert Wagner extended German citizenship to parents of Alsatian men who had fallen in the ranks for the German army during the 1914-1918 war and the contemporary conflict.<sup>17</sup> The first order made it clear that Alsatians who had proved their mettle on the battlefield or made extraordinary physical sacrifices in the course of their German military service had gained the right to be German citizens through their actions. In the same vein, both the first and second pronouncements made it clear that the dependents of dead soldiers were not being granted German citizenship in their own right, regardless of their German origin or how the Versailles Treaty had conveyed their French citizenship. Instead, these individuals were the beneficiaries of their loved one's sacrifice, which the language of the decree elevated to a holy act.

German citizenship was also to be the reward for Alsatians serving the state in the present. Given the context of the wider war in Europe, it is unsurprising that military service

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<sup>16</sup> Robert Wagner, "Erlass Nr. 3 vom 18. September 1942," R 69 99, BABL.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Wagner, "Erlass vom 15. Januar 1943," R 69 684, BABL.

was emphasized as the means for Alsatians to prove their worthiness for citizenship in the Reich. An excerpt from the *Reichsgesetzblatt* from 1942 reported that “Those Alsatians, Lorrainers, and Luxembourgers of German origin acquire German citizenship by right if they are or will be conscripted into the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS...”<sup>18</sup> Adolf Hitler’s decision to extend compulsory military service to Alsace was understood by local and regional Nazi authorities as solving the rather sticky question of Alsatians’ and Lorrainers’ citizenship status. Before 1942, the exact standing of Alsatians and Lorrainers had been convoluted due to the provisions of the Franco-German Armistice that had agreed to respect France’s 1939 borders, but which at the same time saw the establishment of a German administration that seemed to signal the imminent incorporation of the provinces into the Reich. Hitler’s extension of German martial duties to the population of Alsace and Lorraine was interpreted as once and for all settling the question of the Führer’s intentions. Critically, it was Hitler’s decision to enact mandatory German military service in Alsace and Lorraine that prompted the extension of German citizenship to those previously discussed residents of Alsace who had proven themselves in their actions and sacrifices in the German military during the First World War and *not* the other way around.<sup>19</sup> The order in which German citizenship was extended to different groups in Alsace illuminates the priorities of the Nazi occupational regime. In this light, contemporary military service and the immediate contributions that Alsatians could make to the state were more important to Nazi authorities than that which had been accomplished or sacrificed for Germany in the past.

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<sup>18</sup> “Auszug aus dem Reichsgesetzblatt,” Nr. 90, August 23, 1942, R 69 684, BABL.

<sup>19</sup> SS-Gruppenführer Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, August 5, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

There were public and private discussions among Nazi officials regarding the connection between citizenship and military service. In terms of published policy, Nazi authorities were instructed that unrestricted German citizenship was to be extended to the Alsatian military enrollee and his wife and minor children the day of his entrance into the ranks. This full citizenship was to be awarded regardless of whether the individual had been conscripted or voluntarily enlisted.<sup>20</sup> Thus in this instance, from the standpoint of citizenship policy, the volunteer and conscript were of equal status. This was the public position. In private, Nazi officials were more selective in this early stage as to who should be allowed to enlist and receive German citizenship. In a note marked “secret” to Heinrich Himmler, Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart related that “Only those whose physical fitness and political reliability have been ascertained can be drafted. Those conscripts whose political reliability cannot be absolutely affirmed should be used in other organizations such as Organisation Todt.”<sup>21</sup> The ability to differentiate between the “reliable” and “untrustworthy” was a luxury of the victor and reflects ascendant Nazi power in Europe in 1942. The swiftly changing fortunes of the German war effort would rapidly dissolve such exclusive pretensions.

Surviving statistics for the town of Wissembourg, Alsace provide an example of the fluctuating numbers of the service evaluating lists over the course of 1943 and 1944.<sup>22</sup> The tables and graphs illustrate a telling story. Although the information they contain does not cover the entirety of the Nazi occupation in Alsace, they do demonstrate that the number of individuals

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<sup>20</sup> “Sonderabdruck Nr. 82 aus dem Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern 1942,” Nr. 35, R 69 684, BABL.

<sup>21</sup> SS-Gruppenführer Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, August 5, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

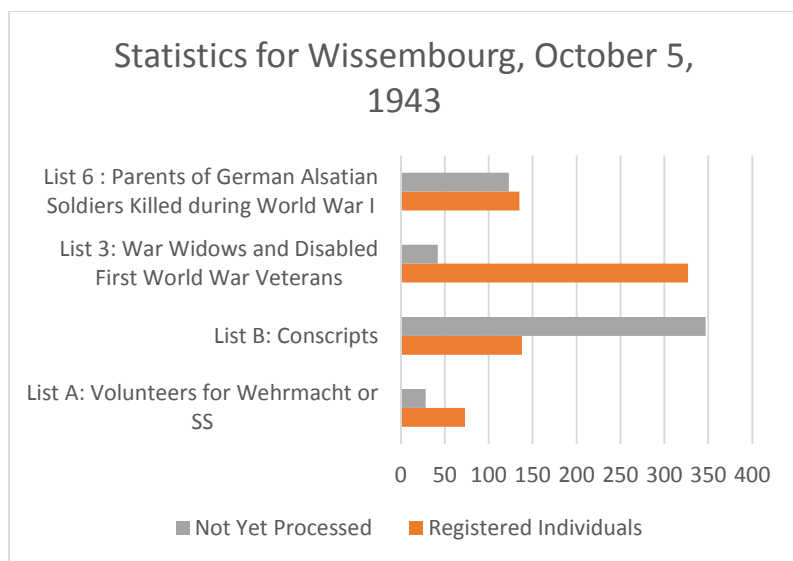
<sup>22</sup> See 414 D 3017, ADBR.

conscripted increased roughly four-fold between 1943 and 1944. Just as the decision to take the time to thoroughly assess the attitudes of individual conscripts in 1942 was a luxury of the victor, the rapid expansion of the number of draftees reflected the worsening position of Germany's war effort. Faced with the pressure of putting the maximum number of soldiers in the field for the German army, Nazi regional officials were forced to largely dispense with the notion of individual evaluations. Thus contrary to the drafters' intentions, the association of citizenship granting with military service resulted in Nazi policies that became more inclusive and expanded more rapidly in proportion to the failing of German power in Europe.<sup>23</sup>

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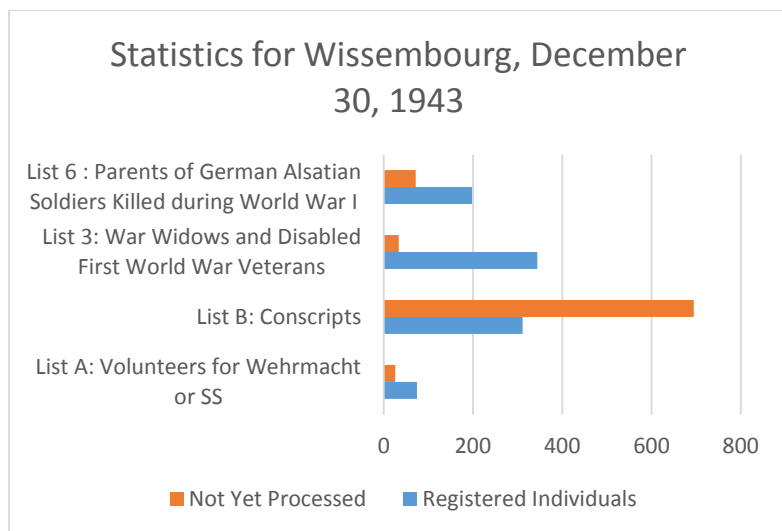
<sup>23</sup> Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany*, 228. In the geographic context of Eastern Europe, Eli Nathans has argued that the inclusiveness of the meaning of "German" decreased in proportion to the strength of the regime in a particular area. Thus two ethnic German grandparents were required in Wartheland to be included in the first two categories of the *Volksliste*, while only one ethnic German grandparent was necessary in the General Government. Nathans' argument does not address the issue of increased inclusiveness of "Germanness" in relation to the failing of Nazi power in Europe.

**Figure 11: Statistics for Wissembourg, Alsace, October 5, 1943**



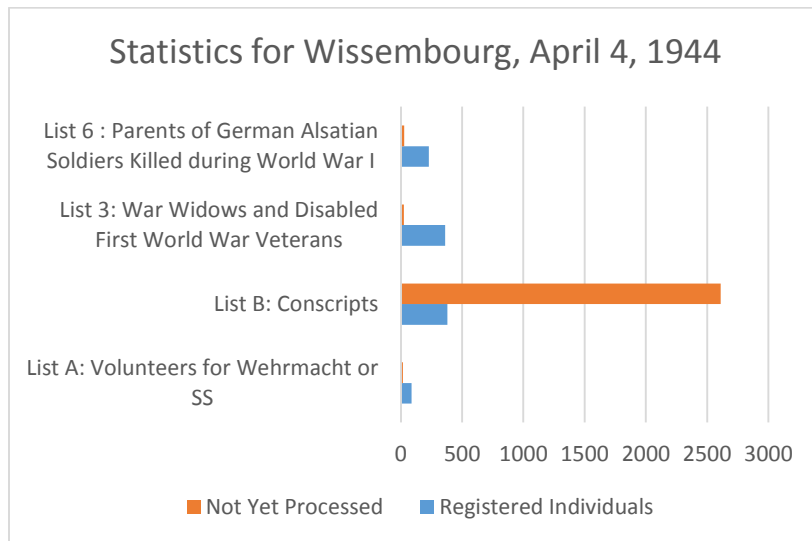
October 5, 1943	List A: Volunteers for Wehrmacht or SS	List B: Conscripts	List 3: War Widows and Disabled First World War Veterans	List 6 : Parents of German Alsatian Soldiers Killed during World War I
Registered Individuals	73	138	327	135
Not Yet Processed	28	347	42	123

**Figure 12: Statistics for Wissembourg, Alsace, December 30, 1943**



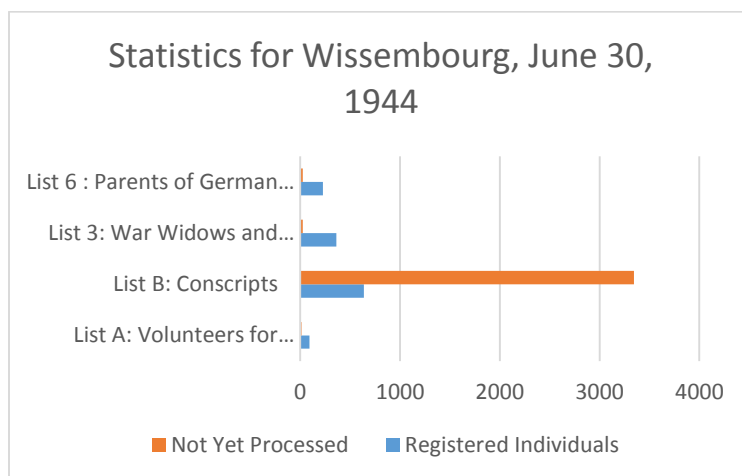
December 30, 1943	List A: Volunteers for Wehrmacht or SS	List B: Conscripts	List 3: War Widows and Disabled First World War Veterans	List 6 : Parents of German Alsatian Soldiers Killed during World War I
Registered Individuals	75	311	344	198
Not Yet Processed	26	695	34	72

**Figures 13: Statistics for Wissembourg, Alsace, April 4, 1944**



April 4, 1944	List A: Volunteers for Wehrmacht or SS	List B: Conscripts	List 3: War Widows and Disabled First World War Veterans	List 6 : Parents of German Alsatian Soldiers Killed during World War I
Registered Individuals	88	379	361	227
Not Yet Processed	17	2611	25	27

**Figure 14: Statistics for Wissembourg, Alsace, June 30, 1944**



June 30, 1944	List A: Volunteers for Wehrmacht or SS	List B: Conscripts	List 3: War Widows and Disabled First World War Veterans	List 6 : Parents of German Alsatian Soldiers Killed during World War I
Registered Individuals	93	636	361	228
Not Yet Processed	12	3343	25	26

## Different Types of German Citizenship

Once an Alsatian's German origin had been established, Nazi authorities were empowered to bestow either full (*unbeschränkte deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit*) or provisional (*Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf*) German citizenship.<sup>1</sup> Immediate full citizenship was reserved for residents with desirable racial backgrounds and who had completed or who would serve the Nazi state. Thus Alsatian youth who had volunteered or been conscripted into the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS were granted unrestricted citizenship. Meanwhile residents who had "proven themselves German" were also eligible. Thus Alsatian First World War veterans who had been recognized for their "exceptional service," individuals who had been persecuted by the French government for their German sensibilities, and members of the Nazi Party in Alsace all received full citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Individuals who fell into this category, their wives, and minor children were all granted unrestricted citizenship.

The other option for Nazi authorities was to award provisional citizenship to Alsatians of German origin who did not meet the criteria for automatic full citizenship. This option was made available for Nazi officials to utilize after August 1, 1942. *Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf* gave German authorities ten years to observe and evaluate the behavior of the prospective full citizen. If at any point during the probationary period the individual's "conduct

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<sup>1</sup> Nathans, *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany*, 220. Interestingly, Nazi sources in Alsace do not make the differentiation between *Reichsbürger* and *Staatsangehörige* that the Nuremberg Citizenship law created in 1935. According to the Nuremberg law, only individuals who were of "German or related blood who by his conduct shows that he desires and is fit loyally to serve the German Volk and State" were eligible for the status of *Reichsbürger*, while the status of *Staatsangehörige* was a subordinate citizenship designation. I suspect the absence of these two categories in Alsace reflected the province's unofficial status as a possession of the Third Reich.

<sup>2</sup> "Sonderabdruck Nr. 82 aus dem Ministerialblatt des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministeriums des Innern 1942 Nr. 35," R 69 684, BABL.

proved to not be suitable for further protection of the German Reich,” their provisional citizenship would be revoked and with it in all likelihood their avenue to German citizenship.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Nazi officials could at any time during the ten years remove the provisional label if the applicant performed a significant act for Germandom. If such an exceptional event did not occur, full citizenship would be achieved after the lapse of the probationary period. The reasoning behind this provisional citizenship awarding was articulated as,

The essence of this naturalization arrangement is that no automatic conferment of citizenship is intended and also that citizenship cannot be imposed on someone. Rather, the claim must be based on an individual being recognized as worthy to receive citizenship and earned through his clear national disposition and personal attitudes.<sup>4</sup>

This description makes it clear that citizenship in the Third Reich was a privileged status to be earned through service and mindset, not a standing to be awarded simply because the individual was of “German descent.” Unlike the Alsations who were given *unbeschränkte* citizenship, individuals who received provisional citizenship by law did not extend this status to their dependents. Instead, their wives and minor children would be required to submit an application and be considered separately. Interestingly, despite the fact that they had been resettled to the interior of Germany for suspicions of their “unreliability,” Alsations in this situation were also to be awarded provisional citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Staatsangehörigkeit der Elsässer und Lothringer,” NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>4</sup> “Einbürgerung nach Bewährung,” Unattributed Newspaper Article, R 69 684, BABL.

<sup>5</sup> The irony of this situation was not lost on the Reichsminister who observed, “It is a paradox that here people, who have been resettled on account of their political unreliability, be given German citizenship, while the basis for their resettling is a reason to not award it.” See “Verleihung der Staatsangehörigkeit auf Widerruf an ins Reichsgebiet abgesiedelte Elsässer, Lothringer und Luxemburger,” April 12, 1943, R 43 II 137, BABL.

## National Socialist Reforms of Imperial Citizenship Legislation

Examining the connection between citizenship and military service in the Third Reich demonstrates the degree to which Nazi policies were built on and broke with precedent German legislation. For example, an important goal of Nazi officials was to strengthen the Reich's connection to neighboring "German lands." Foreign nationals who had volunteered for service in the Waffen-SS and other volunteer formations in the German military to fight against the Soviets were to be the cornerstones of such relationships. A few of these non-German citizen combatants expressed a desire to receive German citizenship. Although the author of the memorandum appreciated the service and recognized the value of these foreign volunteers, he contended that maintaining their original citizenship along with their new German nationality would be more valuable from a political standpoint than simply adding another member to the German nation.<sup>6</sup> However, Nazi authorities recognized a potential twofold complication to this policy. The first was that an individual who had volunteered for German military service and received German citizenship was apt to lose his original nationality. Second, existent German citizenship legislation did not allow foreigners to be naturalized if they did not reside in Germany. The former problem was never given the chance to fully develop as the Nazi defeat made it a moot point. Nazi officials moved to solve the latter issue January 1942, when the obstructing sections of the 1913 legislation were abrogated and foreigners were granted the right to be naturalized even if their domicile was not in the Reich.<sup>7</sup> Although it ultimately overturned elements of the 1913 law, the 1942 legislation did represent a modification rather than an

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<sup>6</sup> Generalbevollmächtigte für die Reichsverwaltung to the Ministerrat für die Reichsverteidigung, December 6, 1941, R 43 II 137, BABL.

<sup>7</sup> "Verordnung zur Regelung von Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen," *Reichsgesetzblatt* Nr. 6, January 24, 1942, R 43 II 137, BABL.

overthrow of existent German citizenship policy. Dual citizenship for German nationals residing outside of the Reich had been provided for by the original 1913 legislation. In its original form, the so-called Delbrück law allowed Germans to maintain their Imperial nationality unless they were naturalized in their new country of residence.<sup>8</sup> In effect, the 1942 legislation provided for the reversal of this procedure. Now foreigners could become dual nationals by maintaining their original residence and status and being awarded German citizenship. Nazi authorities were not concerned about the development of a dangerous fifth column because such had already proven their loyalty and worth to the Third Reich individuals through their military service.

Another aspect of the 1913 legislation that proved overly confining to Nazi authorities was the issue of age restrictions on military service. According to the original law, an individual who failed to complete his mandatory military service before his 31st birthday would automatically lose his German citizenship. Nazi authorities contended that such policy benefited the offender who could delay their decision until right before the cutoff date and so nearly avoid military service in its entirety. The report concluded that “This arrangement contradicts military interests. It stands in opposition to the basic principle of the authority of the state because the release from citizenship cannot be surrendered to the will of the individual.”<sup>9</sup> The author went on to propose that the clause in the 1933 legislation regarding the deprivation of citizenship was more appropriate. This law sought to prevent the delay of military service by taking steps to dishonorably expulse the offending individual from state organizations and in particularly serious cases, the confiscation of the offender’s property. The same piece of legislation that

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<sup>8</sup> Weil, *How to Be French*, 186.

<sup>9</sup> Generalbevollmächtigte für die Reichsverwaltung to the Ministerrat für die Reichsverteidigung, December 6, 1941, R 43 II 137, BABL.

legalized non-domiciled foreigners receiving German citizenship also repealed the Section 26 of the 1913 citizenship law that from the Nazi perspective led to the “abuses” of military service to which they had originally objected.<sup>10</sup>

Studying the intricacies of National Socialist citizenship policy in Alsace during World War II demonstrates that Nazi authorities were not simply interested in returning and simply housing all “German blooded” people under the jurisdiction of the Third Reich. Automatically bestowing citizenship in the Third Reich on the far flung ethnic Germans of Europe would have worked contrary to Nazi geopolitical interests and arguably cheapened the status. For this reason the actions and attitude of prospective citizens of “German-origin” played a central role. This approach to citizenship is evident in Alsace. Nazi authorities would promote military service in Germany’s “final struggle” against Bolshevism as the most effective means for Alsatians to demonstrate their thankfulness for the return of the province to the Reich and show their “worthiness” to be German citizens. When events would demonstrate that Alsatians were less than enthusiastic participants in this relationship, officials took steps to forcibly ensure their participation.

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<sup>10</sup> “Verordnung zur Regelung von Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen,” *Reichsgesetzblatt* Nr. 6, January 24, 1942, R 43 II 137, BABL.

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Serving the Reich: The Incorporation of Alsatians into the Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht**

In mobilizing the Alsatians, Hitler has shown himself to not be superstitious...because fate has always obliged our compatriots to fight alongside those who are finally defeated: 1814-1815 – 1870-1871 – 1914-1918 – 1939-1940 – 1942-?<sup>1</sup>

“The Alsatians, along with the Lorrainer and Luxembourger soldiers at the front will bring us no luck and no miracle. It is striking that the setbacks that have befallen the German army on the Eastern Front have occurred since the Alsatians, Lorrainers, and Luxembourgers were used there. Is this not a cautionary portent from providence? History shows that Germany is always in a worse position with Alsatians and Lorrainers standing in the ranks of her army.”<sup>2</sup>

~Anonymous Letter to Adolf Hitler

“I have no desire to die for France or Germany.”<sup>3</sup>

~Alsatian Conscript Jean-Jacques Schoettel

“I would like to announce the death of my brother, who was killed on the Russian front in the *boche* uniform that he abhorred. He is dead, along with at least 3,600 of our comrades from Alsace and Lorraine. They are dead because they have been ‘delivered in defiance of all justice and by an odious abuse of force by a foreign power’. And you, Marshall of France, you are complicit in this heinous crime.”<sup>4</sup>

~Anonymous Letter from a “Frenchman in Alsace” to Marshall Philippe Pétain, October 27, 1943.

Nazi officials saw in military service a unique opportunity to bind together the disparate “German origin” populations of Europe. The belief in the assimilatory power of the military was an assumption that National Socialist authorities shared with their German and French

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<sup>1</sup> 2 AG 490, AN.

<sup>2</sup> “X X” to Adolf Hitler, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Jacques Schoettel, *Kriegstagebuch, 1943-1945*, 40, Nr 1553, DTA.

<sup>4</sup> Une Français d’Alsace au Marechal Pétain, October 27, 1943, 2 AG 491, AN.

counterparts from the *Kaiserreich* and Interwar periods. The conviction was widespread that fighting alongside Germans would reconcile Alsatians to the Third Reich and impart to them the appropriate worldviews more rapidly than decades of peacetime measures. This belief made Nazi officials willing to push through a program of forced military service even in the face of widespread local opposition. In January 1941, Heinrich Himmler wrote, “German tribes (*Stämmen*) that do not have at least a few of their sons participating in the present great struggle for freedom will lose all [German] self-awareness and it will not be recovered again for decades.”<sup>5</sup> Gauleiter Robert Wagner articulated a similar sentiment, saying that general military service for ethnic Germans in Alsace was a domestic political necessity.<sup>6</sup>

Initially, Nazi authorities had hoped that Alsatians would voluntarily enlist for German military service. This optimism was based on the assumption that a significant portion of the “German originating” elements of the province would gladly join the glorious campaign to snuff out Bolshevism and defend their “race.” However, the reliance on voluntariness also reflected Nazi officials’ initial uncertainty as to the exact status of Alsace and its population in relation to the Third Reich. As a result, authorities would only hesitantly take steps to incorporate Alsatians prior to receiving definitive official instruction from above. Once that directive was perceived to have been made clear, however, all avenues to enforce or realize the goal were on the table. Failure for an eligible individual to fulfill their military obligations was potentially lethal to the offender and had dire consequences for their families living in Alsace. In the end, historians

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<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Himmler to Kaul, January 30, 1941, NS 19 3517, BABL.

<sup>6</sup> Reichsminister des Innern, “Niederschrift über die Sitzung am 27. Oktober 1941, vormittags ½ 10 Uhr,” October 31, 1941, R 43 II 137, BABL.

estimate that approximately 130,000 Alsatians and Lorrainers were incorporated into units of the Waffen-SS or German Wehrmacht during the war. 40,000 of them would not return.<sup>7</sup>

Alsations were given the option to volunteer for military service in the Wehrmacht or *Waffen-SS* before conscription was officially extended to the province. To attract recruits, Nazi authorities began an intense propaganda campaign that eschewed discussions of the assimilatory purpose of German military service in favor of themes of gratitude. As one radio broadcast articulated it, the only way that Alsatians could truly demonstrate their thankfulness for the return of the province to Germany was to take up arms and assist Germany in its final struggle (*Endkampf*).<sup>8</sup> The results of the recruitment campaign were disappointing for Nazi authorities. Only an estimated 2,500-2,800 Alsatians voluntarily enlisted between the autumn of 1940 and summer 1942.<sup>9</sup>

Much more aggressive language was adopted after conscription was introduced in August 1942. A copy of Wagner's "appeal to the people" was printed in the *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten*. The selection read, "Alsace has duties of its own. Nothing will be given, for no one can live on gifts in this world of eternal struggle. Alsace must fight for its position in the new Europe. Only the active participation in this battle will secure a happy future for Alsace."<sup>10</sup> Wagner also invoked the legacy of the German Alsatian soldier in World War I, saying that he had no doubt that the current young men of the province would acquit themselves as well as their

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<sup>7</sup> Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 247-248.

<sup>8</sup> "Rundfunkreportage" attached to a memorandum from Der Führer SS-Oberabschnitts Südwest to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, February 10, 1941, NS 19 3517, BABL.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Laurent Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner: Le bourreau de l'Alsace* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2011), 38.

<sup>10</sup> "Die Wehrpflicht im Elsass eingeführt," *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten!*, August 26, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

fathers had alongside other Germans on the field of battle. The failing fortunes of the Nazi war effort brought out a more overtly coercive call from Wagner in November 1944. The Gauleiter wrote, “Every German fit for military service must see it as his holiest duty and honor to be the sword-bearer of his people and make use of his weapons under all circumstances and for as long as necessary until the enemy is thrown back and the people and Reich are free from all threat. To shirk this duty and honor will be counted as an irredeemable and fatal shame.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Military Service for French Alsatian Veterans**

The Alsatians who were discharged from the French army following the June 1940 armistice faced an unenviable unique set of circumstances following their demobilization that dramatically differed from the experiences of earlier ex-enemy Alsatian soldiers. Although the annexation of Alsace remained “unofficial” in the sense that the incorporation of the province into the German Reich was not publically acknowledged by Nazi authorities, an effective change in the sovereignty in Alsace had occurred. Unlike in 1871 or 1918, however, the governance transfer had not happened at the conclusion of hostilities, but rather in their midst. Former French Alsatian soldiers in the Second World were confronted with the unprecedented scenario of moving from active service in the French army to combat duty with the Germans. The changing of uniforms meant that they could also face their recent French comrades as enemies. This potentiality was recognized immediately by French Alsatian veterans, who attempted to utilize their service in the French army or internment in Switzerland as a means to lessen, if not eliminate, their military service obligations in the German military. Unfortunately for them, in a

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<sup>11</sup> “Rede des Gauleiters anlässlich Vereidigungsappell des ersten Volkssturmbataillon in Strassburg am 12. November 1944,” R 83 Elsass 27, BABL.

break with both Imperial and Republican precedents, Nazi authorities did not exempt recently demobilized Alsatians from the enemy army from military duties in the Waffen-SS or Wehrmacht.

Former French Alsatians soldiers utilized arguments that drew upon sworn oaths and previously accomplished service in the French army in their efforts to avoid incorporation into the German army. A number of French Alsatian soldiers had been interned in Switzerland at the conclusion of hostilities with France in 1940. Nazi authorities reported that the former internees were claiming an exemption from German military service on account of an oath they had sworn to Swiss authorities that promised they would not participate in future military service. The vow had been a requirement to secure their release. Ex-soldiers who fell into this category claimed that the German Wehrmacht did not have the authority to break this pledge and conscript them.<sup>12</sup> Both Wagner and the army command rejected this position, arguing that formerly interned Alsatians were not entitled to enjoy any sort of special treatment.<sup>13</sup> Other former French Alsatian soldiers sought alternate justifications as a basis from which to seek an exception to incorporation into the German ranks. A certain Eugen Weber acknowledged the potential value of German military service as an educational institution for Alsatians, but nonetheless argued that a significant inner struggle would occur within soldiers who had already served multiple years in the French army. Weber proposed garrison service for such individuals in lieu of frontline service.<sup>14</sup> This proposal would also be denied.

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<sup>12</sup> Report from Kreisleitung Altkirch, January 23, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>13</sup> Wehrkreiskommando V (Stuttgart) to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, April 29, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>14</sup> Eugen Weber to the Führer der 301 GE.B. Marscheinheit Stablock Preussisch-Eylau, March 22, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

Incorporating ex-French soldiers into the ranks of the German army was not a seamless process. Nazi authorities found themselves having to address fundamental issues such as the appropriate rank to assign Alsatians who served in the French army. Officials took the position that any rank that an Alsatian had earned in the Imperial German army could be awarded in the Third Reich's fighting forces. On the other hand, if the rank had been achieved in the French army and even if the prospective recruit had volunteered for German military service, they were to be given the "lowest enlisted rank" and "reeducated."<sup>15</sup> This policy once again demonstrates that "German origin" nor even a willing attitude were sufficient to guarantee Alsatians a privileged position in the Third Reich. Instead, only previous service to the German state would be recognized as sufficient to base a claim for exceptional treatment. Those Alsatians who had served in the French army were still viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. The ambiguity of their position was demonstrated in the later date of mobilization and the distribution of the former French soldiers in the ranks of the German military. It was not until September 15, 1943 that the first classes composed primarily of Alsatians who had already served in the French army were conscripted into the German military. Even after their mobilization, the former French Alsatian soldiers were viewed with a certain amount of distrust. In language strikingly similar to French military authorities during the Interwar period, Wagner recommended that Alsatian veterans of the French army not be stationed alongside unserved Alsatian soldiers in order to prevent the former from negatively affecting the morale and discipline of the latter.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Für die zum aktiven Wehrdienst einberufen Wehrpflichtigen aus dem Elsass gelten die folgende Bestimmung," R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>16</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, March 16, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

## Seeking Volunteers

From the moment of their reoccupation of Alsace, Nazi authorities intended that Alsatian youth should be incorporated into the German armed forces. The Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht in 1941 wrote that “It is desirable that increased efforts be made to give Alsatians, Lorrainers, and Luxembourgers the opportunity to participate in the German people’s freedom struggle and the defeat of Bolshevism.”<sup>17</sup> However, the unclear status of Alsace and its populace in relation to the rest of the Third Reich complicated the enactment of Nazi martial policies in the province in the years after the June 1940 armistice. Initially, Nazi authorities resorted to calls for volunteers to assist the ongoing German war effort.

Alsatians were first invited to join the Waffen-SS on October 1, 1940. The results, however, were underwhelming. A memorandum to Himmler in February 1941 related that 750 Alsatians had signed up for service in the Waffen-SS and only 58 of these applicants had passed racial and medical exams and been formally accepted.<sup>18</sup> Alsace’s identification as a “German land” whose incorporation in the Third Reich appeared imminent made these numbers all the more disappointing. Particularly when during the same time Nazi officials reported 101 volunteers for the Waffen-SS from Holland and another 651 from Romania and Yugoslavia.<sup>19</sup> For Himmler and the leadership of the SS, the frustration of this news must have been

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<sup>17</sup> Memorandum from the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, August 28, 1941, RH 15 226, BAM.

<sup>18</sup> Führer SS-Oberabschnitts Südwest to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, February 10, 1941, NS 19 3517, BABL.

<sup>19</sup> “Zusammenstellung der vom 1.10. bis 31.12.40 eingereichten Einberufungsvorgänge,” NS 19 3517, BABL. This particular memorandum reported 69 volunteers from Alsace and Lorraine.

compounded by the accompanying information that their rival organization the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) already had twelve fulltime units in Alsace.<sup>20</sup>

The Waffen-SS did not cease its attempts to recruit in Alsace despite the apparent lack of local enthusiasm. Gauleiter Robert Wagner ordered Block-Leaders to observe the families under their surveillance and judge if they had any sons who were the type of healthy and “morally flawless” recruits that the SS was seeking. The Hitler Youth would prove to be the most fertile source for Alsatian volunteers for the Waffen-SS.<sup>21</sup> A recruitment campaign in 1943 that occurred simultaneously in Baden and Alsace netted a total of 2,502 volunteers, 847 from Alsace and 1,655 from Baden.<sup>22</sup> The figures demonstrate increased recruiting success of the Waffen-SS in Alsace, but the comparative figures for Baden suggest that the enlistment figures remained well below that of Germany proper. At the same time, however, recruitment to the Waffen-SS was also discouraged by periodic propagandistic missteps on the part of German authorities. In one instance, a newspaper in Mulhouse published a story that claimed that an Alsatian Waffen-SS volunteer’s letter that had idyllically portrayed his service in the East and been published in local newspapers was a prewritten document that he had been ordered to sign.<sup>23</sup> The letter’s

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Wagner to Chef der Reichskanzlei Reichsminister Dr. Hans Lammers, January 19, 1944, NS 19 2202, BABL. The disparity in members of the SA and SS would persist throughout the period of the German occupation of Alsace. In January 1944, Wagner would report that 12,658 Alsatians belonged to the SA in comparison to 2,505 to the SS.

<sup>21</sup> Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner*, 36-37. The Hitler Youth was introduced in Alsace on September 2, 1940. Membership had initially been voluntary, but lack of local enthusiasm led Nazi officials to make participation mandatory after January 1, 1942.

<sup>22</sup> Obergebietsführer in Baden-Elsass to Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass Robert Wagner, March 22, 1943, R 83 Elsass 94, BABL.

<sup>23</sup> Obersturmführer Raab to the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, March 20, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL. The author described finding himself while fighting on the Northern Front in the East and the supposed unity of purpose, comradeship, and intention to destroy Bolshevism and establish a new order in Europe that collectively animated himself and his fellow soldiers.

official instigation was reported to be common knowledge in Mulhouse and was criticized for its “ineptness” and carelessness.<sup>24</sup> SS officials denied involvement on the matter, saying that the soldier’s mother had confirmed the letter’s authenticity after she was brought in and questioned. Although the Reich’s Propaganda Bureau in Baden sided with the SS, it ordered the discontinuance of the published letter campaign in Alsace, saying that a critical shadow of doubt had been cast on the legitimacy of the current and any subsequent documents.<sup>25</sup>

Failure to attract significant numbers to the Waffen-SS did not dissuade Nazi authorities from further efforts to induce Alsatians to join German military formations. This became evident in October 1941 when the *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten* announced that residents of the province were now free to join the German army. The article related that Alsatians from the birth cohorts of 1900 and younger could sign-up for placement in the Wehrmacht.<sup>26</sup> Individuals from these classes that had not served in the French army were eligible to be immediately placed in the German army. Former non-commissioned officers and ordinary soldiers from the French army could also enlist, but required approval from the higher echelons before they would be officially accepted. Only the status of prospective Alsatian volunteers who had served as regular officers in the French army was left unresolved. Local authorities were instructed that their standing would be addressed in a later regulation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Obersturmführer Raab to the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, March 20, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum from the Reichspropagandaamt Baden, May 18, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

<sup>26</sup> “Elsässer! Mit Genehmigung des Chefs des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht soll nunmehr auch euch Gelegenheit geboten werden, euch als Freiwillige am grossdeutsches Freiheitskampf in der Deutschen Wehrmacht,” *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten!*, October 12, 1941, R 43 II 1334, BABL.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum from the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, August 28, 1941, RH 15 226, BAM.

Once they enlisted, the Alsatian volunteer was to be the beneficiary of the same rights as all other German soldiers. Yet in discussions prior to the opening of the Wehrmacht to Alsatian volunteers, Nazi generals made it clear that not all Alsatians were equally welcome in the ranks. Thus the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht wrote in January 1941 that Alsatian volunteers would not be accepted if they had migrated to the province from any country besides Germany after 1918, if French was their primary language and the recruit did not have an understanding of spoken or written German, and finally, individuals who “through their attitude” had proven that they did not belong to the German nation.<sup>28</sup> This policy of exclusivity reflected the ascendant position of Germany’s military situation in early 1941. The failure of the invasion of the Soviet Union and the contraction of Nazi power across Europe would lead to a dramatic lowering of enlistment standards.

### **Mandatory Military Service Introduced in Alsace**

Nazi authorities’ contentment to allow Alsatians to choose whether or not they participated in Germany’s “liberation struggle” and the selectivity of German military recruitment was short-lived. This change in policy was largely the result of the disappointing voluntary enlistment numbers that did not live up to official expectations. Until obligatory military service was instituted in August 1942, only 2,100 Alsatians had joined the German armed forces and only 2,638 joined the SS.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, the change in Germany’s military situation in Europe increasingly necessitated a more complete mobilization of Alsace’s military aged male population. Alsatians did not welcome the return of mandatory

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<sup>28</sup> Memorandum from the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, January 30, 1941, RH 15 222, BAM.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace*, 196.

German military service to the province. Many responded by either evading their initial call up and seeking to cross into neutral Switzerland or by deserting to Soviet lines once they had been mobilized. Either option was dangerous. Dodgers and deserters risked swift capital punishment if caught. Moreover, recognizing their inability to take action against Alsatians who successfully orchestrated their escapes, Nazi authorities enacted a policy that held their families in Alsace responsible for their family member's action. Consequences included deportation to the interior of Germany or the East and the uncompensated confiscation of their property. Faced with these penalties, the majority of conscripted Alsatians would report and fulfill the letter of their military service requirements in the German military.

In their initial discussions on the institution of conscription in Alsace, Nazi authorities expressed their intention to only draft a circumscribed number of Alsatian youth.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the transcript of a meeting in October 1941 advocated drafting only "one or two" cohorts of Alsatians.<sup>31</sup> The number of youths from these classes was to be further limited by the instruction that conscripts should not have any prior service in the French army and after an investigation be deemed "politically reliable."<sup>32</sup> Robert Wagner's order that announced the initiation of mandatory military service in Alsace was published on August 25, 1942. The decree reflected this earlier discussed selectivity when it read that only "members of the German people living in Alsace" (*angehörenden deutschen Volkszugehörigen im Elsass*) were declared eligible for

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<sup>30</sup> Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner*, 67. The decision to conscript Alsatian youth was not uncontested among the National Socialist leadership. Field Marshall Keitel opposed the use of Alsatians.

<sup>31</sup> Reichsminister des Innern, "Niederschrift über die Sitzung am 27. Oktober 1941, vormittags ½ 10 Uhr," October 31, 1941, R 43 II 137, BABL. The Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht reluctantly agreed to this decision, articulating their desire for the enactment of a more general military draft.

<sup>32</sup> "Verordnung zur Regelung von Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen. Einführung der Wehrpflicht im Elsass," October 27 1941, R 43 II 137, BABL.

mandatory military service.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, although Wagner was the only Nazi official who signed the conscription order, the idea originated from the highest levels of the National Socialist state. The Reich Minister of the Interior suggested in October 1941 that the order should originate from Wagner and incorporate Alsatians into other formations of the Wehrmacht, as opposed to their own separate units. The Minister advocated this approach as a means of reuniting Alsace to Germany without an outright annexation declaration that would have strained relations with the Vichy government.<sup>34</sup> Thus the drafting of Alsatians of German origin into the Wehrmacht was the signal that Alsace was again part of the German Reich – even if Nazi authorities would never formally acknowledge the seizure (or the French protests raised against it).

Robert Wagner's decree was accompanied by a speech in which he presented a narrative of Alsatians' military service in the First World War that sought to draw a connection with the contemporary conflict. Wagner related,

You [Alsatians who fought in the German ranks during World War I] have, like soldiers from all other [German] districts, done your duty and so co-founded Germany's reputation for its immortal soldierdom (*unsterblichem Soldatentum*). But all the heroism of our people could not save the Reich. Germany's time had not yet come. Since September 1939 our people stand once again at war with the plutocratic powers of the world. This fight, however, is occurring under different, incomparable, and better conditions than before. What our great people and our brave soldiers could not achieve in the First World War will be achieved in the present struggle. Victory is ours and no one can tear it away from us. If now a mandatory military service law has been introduced in Alsace, it came to pass not only because it was the desire of the Reich, but even more so because it was the desire of Alsace.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht im Elsass (bzw. Lothringen)". NS 19 2202, BABL. French sources reporting on the order related that a more extensive call-up had occurred with members of classes from 1920-1924 being made liable for conscription. See "Introduction en Alsace du service militaire obligatoire," August 30, 1942, 2 AG 490, AN.

<sup>34</sup> Reichsminister des Innern, "Niederschrift über die Sitzung am 27. Oktober 1941, vormittags ½ 10 Uhr," October 31, 1941, R 43 II 137, BABL.

<sup>35</sup> "Aufruf des Gauleiter an die Bevölkerung" quoted in "Die Wehrpflicht im Elsass eingeführt," *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten!*, August 26, 1942, NS 19 2202, BABL.

Wagner's narrative drew a fine line between invoking the legacy of Alsatian German soldiers in the First World War and arguing that the circumstances of the present war were infinitely better and a German victory assured. In the end, the final quote suggested that the conscription law did not reflect the military needs of the Third Reich so much as the desires of the Alsatian populace.

The legacy of Alsations' experience in the German army during World War I was a problematic legacy for Nazi authorities. Sources from below cautioned military and national officials to avoid making the mistakes of the *Kaiserreich* in their treatment of Alsatian soldiers. Eugen Weber related that "the Alsatian should never again consider himself to be a second class German. Otherwise the entire political education of National Socialism would not differ from that of the political rulers of the world war and in vain you would attempt to cultivate such people into brave German soldiers."<sup>36</sup> Gauleiter Wagner was also keenly cognizant of the negative effect of Alsations' differential treatment in the German army during the First World War and vigorously confronted policies that seemed to discriminate against Alsations. His basic position was that Alsations had been awarded German citizenship the moment of their entrance into the German army and as Germans (*Reichsdeutsche*) they should not be subjected to any discrimination or special treatment.<sup>37</sup> Wagner requested that Hermann Passe, the leader of the *Wehrmachtsfragen* Department, make it clear to military authorities that the Alsations were German citizens. His reasoning behind this position is summed up in an earlier memorandum to Passe. He wrote, "It is impossible on one side to demand the highest sacrifice and feats of the Alsations, when on the other side they [German military authorities] do not want to recognize

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<sup>36</sup> Eugen Weber to the Führer der 301 GE.B. Marscheinheit Stablock Preussisch-Eylau, March 22, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>37</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass to the Parteikanzlei Herrn Ministerialdirigent Passe, August 14, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

their general basic rights.”<sup>38</sup> Dr. Robert Ernst was less tactful in his criticism of national authorities’ actions towards Alsatians and was nearly reported to the Nazi Party Chancellery for calling German officials’ identification of Alsatians as “Ethnic Germans from foreign Nations” “stupid,” given that the populace was living in the Reich. Ernst also emphasized the importance of military service saying, “...the Alsatian is neither an ‘ethnic German from a foreign nation, nor an ethnic German (*Volksdeutsche*), nor a non-Reichs’ German (*Nichtreichsdeutsche*), rather from the moment of their conscription they possess German citizenship and therefore assume all the rights and duties of a Reich’s German (*Reichsdeutsche*) and the corresponding treatment.”<sup>39</sup>

Knowing Wagner’s opposition to their differential handling, certain Alsatian soldiers wrote directly to the Gauleiter seeking his intervention on what they perceived to be injustices based on their origin in the province. Thus a certain Friedrich Casparty, from the district of Altkirch, requested that Wagner lift a general furlough ban to his locality that had been put in place by the local administrator.<sup>40</sup> A subsequent note from the Gauleiter indicated that he had reversed the district authority’s order. However, the re-identification of Alsace as a military operations area in fall 1944 led to home leave once again being refused to soldiers from the province.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass to the Parteikanzlei Herrn Ministerialdirigent Passe, March 27, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>39</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass der Generalreferent Robert Ernst to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung Persön. Abt. Gädeke, March 24, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>40</sup> Altkirch’s close proximity to the Swiss border made Nazi authorities especially suspect of individuals from this area.

<sup>41</sup> Local authorities in Alsace did not accept this as the primary motivator to end soldiers’ leave to Alsace, relating they thought it the result of an increasing number of desertions. See Ortsgruppenleiter von Hagenau to the Kreisleiter der NSDAP in Hagenau, October 14, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

Once conscripted and placed in the ranks, German military leaders remarked at Alsatian soldiers' lack of staying power. One memorandum that compared the number of Alsatians discharged for medical purposes to that of Badenese soldiers reported that only 14.1% of Alsatians had been released for reasons of an injury sustained at the front in comparison to 56.2% from Baden. Moreover, four times as many Alsatians had been discharged for reasons of "idiocy," twice as many for tuberculosis, and approximately one and a half times more for "internal diseases."<sup>42</sup> Despite Wagner's efforts to achieve equality of treatment for Alsatians in the German military, the observation of their poor behavior and political attitudes forced conscription's proponents to make excuses on their behalf. In one report, such difficulties were attributed to the French influence on Alsace since 1918 and pointed out that all Germans bore the guilt for this development. It called upon all German soldiers to aid in the Germanization of Alsatians observing, "It is an obligation of honor that every German national comrade (*Volksgenossen*) help the Alsatians overcome the errors of their tragic past."<sup>43</sup> In this context, the legacy of years living under French rule and the adoption of "French attitudes" was not a mistake to be forgiven, but rather an obstacle to overcome. One solution suggested to Himmler was that all of the conscripts from Alsace be given six weeks of "worldview" and political education at an SS training camp in Sennheim.

Alsatian soldiers who served in the German military during World War II also submitted their share of complaints regarding their treatment in the ranks. A number of grievances of soldiers from Alsace and Lorraine were identical to those expressed by their compatriots during

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<sup>42</sup> "Die Entlassungsgründe für die 163 Elsässer sind folgende:," R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>43</sup> "Für die zum aktiven Wehrdienst einberufen Wehrpflichtigen aus dem Elsass gelten die folgend Bestimmung," R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

the First World War. Gauleiter Josef Bürckel wrote to the Chief of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht, Wilhelm Keitel, in February 1944 relating that Lorrainers serving on the Eastern Front were having their leave requests denied on account of a number of desertions by their fellow provincial residents. Bürckel pointed out that punishing all for the actions of a few would not solve the desertion problem, as those committed to deserting would slip over to Russian lines, while the policy would only serve to alienate otherwise loyally serving Lorrainers who in turn might desert.<sup>44</sup> In addition to problems with their leaves, Dr. Ernst also complained about the removal of Alsatians from regiments transferred to France, their being turned down for special schooling, and not being accepted as reserve officers.<sup>45</sup> Alsatian conscript Guy Sajer reported a mixed reception from the German soldiers he served alongside on the Eastern Front. Certain men treated him like any other comrade, while others questioned the genuineness of his “Germanness.” A soldier bartender upon hearing Sajer’s accent accusingly referred to him as “one of those damned Alsatians pretending to be German.”<sup>46</sup> Another comrade attacked the ambiguity of Alsatians’ national loyalties saying, “Either you’re a German like us or you’re one of those worthless, feckless Frogs.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Lothringen Gauleiter Josef Bürckel to the Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht Generalfeldmarschal Keitel, February 3, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL. Archival evidence also suggests that Robert Wagner wrote similar letters to the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW). Perhaps as a result of the Gauleiters’ complaints the OKW would give out an order on February 17, 1944 that officially declared that Alsatian and Lorrainer soldiers be treated as their German counterparts. However, it is questionable how thoroughly this policy was put into practice as Nazi authorities continued to receive complaints about unapproved leave.

<sup>45</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass der Generalreferent Robert Ernst to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung Persön. Abt. Gädeke, March 24, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>46</sup> Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 323.

Opposition to conscription and discrimination in the ranks led many Alsatians to attempt to evade military service or desert. Either action carried significant consequences for the young man and his family back in Alsace. Gauleiter Robert Wagner published an order in October 1943 that made evadees' families accountable for their son or husband's action. The decree authorized the expulsion from the province of all family members who lived in the same household and the confiscation of all their property.<sup>48</sup> The Alsatian population did not quietly acquiesce to these measures. An anonymous writer addressed Hitler protesting the measures saying that "The hate that these measures have engendered cannot be described."<sup>49</sup>

Evading German military service was a deadly serious undertaking. This was demonstrated in 1943 when a group of young men from the town of Ballersdorf, Alsace and the surrounding area were apprehended attempting to flee to Switzerland. The young men had been determined to cross the border at all costs and so armed themselves with a few rifles and other weapons, which the members of the group who were French army veterans were given charge. During their border crossing attempt, the group encountered a German border patrol and a firefight broke out in which one border officer was mortally wounded and three of the young men were killed. All but one of the group members was captured and brought to Strasbourg. A trial took place on February 16, 1943 that lasted 5 ½ hours. Despite their attorneys' arguments for mitigating circumstances that included a lack of "German education" and previous service in the French army,<sup>50</sup> the young men were convicted and sentenced to death. Wagner declined to

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<sup>48</sup> "Verordnung über Massnahmen gegen Wehrpflichtentziehung vom 1. Oktober 1943," *Verordnungsblatt des Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass* Nr. 21, October 13, 1943, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

<sup>49</sup> "X X" to Adolf Hitler, R 43 II 1334a, BABL.

<sup>50</sup> Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner*, 77.

pardon the individuals and the sentence was carried out by firing squad the next day.<sup>51</sup> The families of the young men were arrested and deported to Germany. The swift trial, conviction, executions, and deportations were to be exemplary. Wagner's self-satisfaction is evident in a subsequent report that observed, "Total calm reigns in the district of Altkirch and the province. To date, the mustering has gone forward without any further mentionable difficulties...A number of people are against the interference, but it is fewer than that which accompanied the mustering of the 1920-1924 classes."<sup>52</sup> The *Strassburger Neueste Nachrichten* applauded the swiftness and legality of "National Socialist justice." The author further insulted the dead by denationalizing and deideologizing their flight by rejecting the idea that the escape attempt had been motivated by francophile or moral convictions. Instead, the newspaper concluded, "No political conviction, no force of despair, no misplaced national sentiment set weapons of rebellion to their hands, but only pitiful cowardice."<sup>53</sup>

Despite the potential consequences of their actions, Alsatians failing to report for their military service following their conscription continued to be a problem for Nazi authorities. Historian David Allen Harvey estimates that over the course of the war some 40,000 Alsatians would desert, "making the *Gau Oberrhein* 'one of the worst in the Reich' for recruitment."<sup>54</sup> Desertion and evasion would remain a significant problem for Nazi authorities for the entirety of their period of occupation in Alsace. It had reached such levels by January 1944 that an internal

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<sup>51</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsas Robert Wagner to Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei Reichsminister Dr. Hans Lammers, February 23, 1943, R 83 Elsass 33, BABL.

<sup>52</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsas Robert Wagner to Reichsminister und Chef der Reichskanzlei Reichsminister Dr. Hans Lammers, February 23, 1943, R 83 Elsass 33, BABL.

<sup>53</sup> "Situation en Alsace-Lorraine, Resistance et Repression," February 26, 1943, 2 AG 490, AN.

<sup>54</sup> Harvey, *Constructing Class and Nationality in Alsace*, 198.

memorandum recommended a shortening of the time between the notification of conscription and collection of the recruits from several days to only 3-6 hours.<sup>55</sup> This was particularly the case if the draftees lived in proximity to the Swiss border. The suggestion was ultimately denied for technical reasons and the recognition that recruits needed at least a week to put their affairs in order. Nazi authorities became so obsessed with the problem of Alsatian desertion that they targeted any symbol that was perceived to potentially indicate an Alsatian soldier's intention to escape German military service. Thus the Gestapo command in Strasbourg related to Wagner that a number of sources had indicated that Alsations in the Wehrmacht had adopted wearing emblems that bore the image of a stork while serving at the front.<sup>56</sup> It was speculated that the purpose of the badge was to identify the individual as an Alsatian in the event that he was taken prisoner or deserted to the enemy.<sup>57</sup> The commander recommended a Gau-wide prohibition against the sale of such emblems. Interestingly, Wagner was hesitant on the matter, questioning whether the wearing of the insignia was so frequent as to "be feared as a danger to the security of the state" and recommended that such a measure be taken only if the Gestapo was convinced of its absolute necessity.<sup>58</sup>

Although the temptation to evade German military service must have existed for conscripted Alsations, the certainty of lethal punishment if they were captured or the knowledge that their families would be held accountable kept most drafted Alsations from attempting to flee

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<sup>55</sup> Oberfinanzpräsident Baden to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung, January 31, 1944, R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

<sup>56</sup> The stork was a bird traditionally associated with Alsace and such badges were readily available in tourist stores and shops in the province.

<sup>57</sup> Geheime Staatspolizei Einsatz Kommando (Strassburg) to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung und Reichstatthalter Robert Wagner, May 5, 1944, R 83 Elsass 81, BABL.

<sup>58</sup> Note written on back of a memorandum from the Chef der Zivilverwaltung to the Gauwirtschaftskammer Oberrhein in Strassburg, May 20, 1944, R 83 Elsass 81, BABL.

German military service or encouraged their cooperation with Nazi authorities. Jean-Jacques Gross lived in Colmar and was forcibly drafted in the Wehrmacht. Gross contemplated attempting to evade his conscription. He was dissuaded from this course of action, however, by the knowledge that a school comrade had been detained and shot attempting to flee to Switzerland and his family had subsequently been deported. Gross noted that his parents were in poor health and would likely not fare well if expelled.<sup>59</sup> Similar considerations led Jean-Jacques Schoettel to report for his forced military service.<sup>60</sup> After at least one failed attempt, Gross would succeed in deserting to Russian lines on the Eastern Front. Nazi authorities informed his parents that he was “missing,” but they did not suffer any adverse consequences, perhaps because the nature of his capture could not be definitively proved to have been deliberate. Alsatians who were conscripted into the German military or civil service found themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place. With the periodic exemplary punishments in mind and knowing the consequences for their families if they sought to avoid German military or civil service, it must have been easier for most Alsatians to reluctantly acquiesce to conscription and service rather than assume the risk of fleeing.

While an individual’s failure to fulfill his civic duties had potential dire consequences, service to the National Socialist state could make up for other family members’ “sins.” This is evident in the case of Alfred Meyer. Meyer was alleged to have deserted to Russian forces. Despite this betrayal, Schall, who was the District Leader of Meyer’s hometown of Hindisheim, declined to recommend the family’s expulsion. The position was justified on account that another Meyer brother, Paul, was currently serving at the front and that the father, Georg, had

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<sup>59</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 227.

<sup>60</sup> Jean-Jacques Schoettel, *Kriegstagebuch, 1943-1945*, 9, Nr 1553, DTA.

acted as the Leader of the Local Farmers (*Ortsbauernführer*) and run his office peacefully. The service of these other family members led Schall to label the Meyer family as “politically reliable” and he declined to recommend their resettlement.<sup>61</sup> Reward was also dangled in front of Alsatian conscripts whose families had been resettled for unreliability. Soldiers who proved themselves before the enemy could request that their families be returned to their original homes.<sup>62</sup>

### **Alsations Comrades or Traitors?: The Soviet and French Reception of Alsations Soldiers**

Alsations like Jean-Jacques Gross and Jean-Jacques Schoettel who deserted on the Eastern Front in the hope of escaping the lethality of the conflict were to be bitterly disillusioned by the reception they received in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps. Gross was first transferred to a camp in the Caucasus Mountains, where he was put to work with other German POWs harvesting oil. He described his Alsatian origins to the camp’s commandant, who assured him that he would be transferred to another camp and from there be allowed to rejoin Allied forces in North Africa. The whole process was to be relatively easy because he was an Alsatian. Although Gross does not mention the camp commander specifically referencing it, the feasibility of such a scheme no doubt would appear more realistic to Alsations who were familiar with the French program during the First World War that had transferred a significant number of Alsations back to France from Russian prisoner-of-war camps. Instead, however, Gross was

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<sup>61</sup> Kreisleiter Schall to Chef der Zivilverwaltung, Persön. Abteil., May 4, 1944, R 83 Elsass 11, BABL.

<sup>62</sup> “Für die zum aktiven Wehrdienst einberufen Wehrpflichtigen aus dem Elsass gelten die folgende Bestimmung,” R 83 Elsass 5, BABL.

transferred to the Soviet Tambov camp,<sup>63</sup> which was reserved for Alsatians, Lorrainers, and Frenchmen who had volunteered for service in the Waffen-SS. There he learned of the impossibility of being repatriated to North Africa.

In Tambov, Gross discovered that all the promises made by Russian propaganda enticing Alsatians to desert were lies. Prior to their arrival the Alsatians had been promised that the camp had a library, laundry and theatre. Instead, Gross described Tambov as a “place of death, where hospitals served as the anti-chamber of death, where the morgue contained three times as many corpses as it could receive, where barracks were overcrowded and almost underground.”<sup>64</sup> Jean-Jacques Schoettel would estimate that 3,000-4,000 people died at Tambov, but no one kept any precise records.<sup>65</sup> In many cases, for those Alsatians stuck in Soviet prisoner-of-war camps the end of the hostilities in 1945 did not correspond to their immediate return home. Jean-Jacques Gross would not be released from Tambov until September 11, 1945.

Alsatians who were former soldiers of the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS faced an uncertain future after the end of hostilities in Europe. Interesting insight into the postwar sorting of the Alsatian ex-soldiers in the Soviet Union has survived in a German soldier’s chronicle.<sup>66</sup> Soldier Burkhard Einbeck was serving on the Eastern Front when the war ended and had been taken into Soviet custody. On the advice of an Alsatian friend in his unit, Einbeck claimed to be an Alsatian from Hagenau in order to avoid being sent to a Russian POW camp. For several weeks

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<sup>63</sup> Régis Baty et al., *Tambov: Le camp des Malgré Nous alsaciens et mosellans prisonniers des Russes* (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2010). The essays in this volume provide a more detailed examination of Alsatians’ experiences in Tambov.

<sup>64</sup> Lechner, *Alsace Lorraine*, 316.

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Jacques Schoettel, *Kriegstagebuch, 1943-1945*, 49, Nr 1553, DTA.

<sup>66</sup> Burkhard Einbeck, “Neunzig Tage Angst – Ein Stück Zeitgeschichte,” 65, Nr. 877/II, DTA.

after his detention, Einbeck was kept apart from the main population of German soldiers and housed with other soldiers from France. Eventually he was taken aside and interrogated by a panel of three French soldiers. Einbeck was asked to tell his interviewers details about his “hometown” and asked questions that ranged from his parents’ address to the number of churches, their names, number of steeples, and the type of memorial that stood before city hall. He had never been to Alsace, nor Hagenau, and attempted to bluff his way through the interrogation. Unfortunately, one of the three soldiers was from Strasbourg and informed Einbeck that *nothing* that he had related was true. The game up, Einbeck confessed his true background and related his intention to travel to France, marry his fiancé (who was French), and be naturalized as a French citizen. Hearing his story, the panel broke protocol and did not hand Einbeck over to the Russians, but rather allowed him to proceed on a westward bound transport.

Einbeck’s ordeal was not over. Subsequent French officials he encountered in Germany were not as willing to forward him to France and for a time he found himself sharing a cell with an Alsatian who had fought in the German army. Einbeck, who claimed that his long sojourn on the Eastern Front made him unaware of the events of the war in France, was told by the Alsatian that following the Armistice the British and Americans had handed over their German Alsatian POWs to the French. The Alsatian described the experience as, “...it was terrible, I swear to you. No explanation helped, we were judged to be traitors. There were daily beatings. They hate the Germans, let it be said. For weeks we have been moved around from camp to camp and here and there a prison. They say we should have gone into hiding with the Resistance – then the Wehrmacht would not have grabbed us.”<sup>67</sup> Einbeck alleged to have seen the abuse of four Alsations firsthand when he was included in their transport to another prison. As the Alsations

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<sup>67</sup> Einbeck, “Neunzig Tage Angst – Ein Stück Zeitgeschichte,” 95, Nr. 877/II, DTA.

were being unloaded, they were spit on and beaten bloody by the French guards that received them. After they drove away from the prison, Einbeck asked the French guard that was accompanying him why the Alsatians were treated in such a manner. The man replied, “Why do you care? I do not understand you. These men fought and fired [for Germany], while at the same time patriotic Frenchmen were being tortured in basements by the Gestapo.”<sup>68</sup> Both the description given by the Alsatian and the French guard’s explanation to Einbeck point to the ambiguous position that the returning German Alsatian veterans occupied in post-liberation France. The immediate postwar French reaction appears to have not taken into account the unique set of circumstances and compulsory forces that had led most Alsatians to the ranks of the Waffen-SS or the Wehrmacht. In the postwar period, the ambiguity of the Alsatian *malgré-nous*’ position would take center stage during the trial of 14 Alsatians who had been members of a company of Waffen-SS that massacred 642 men, women, and children from the town of Oradour-sur-Glane.

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<sup>68</sup> Einbeck, “Neunzig Tage Angst – Ein Stück Zeitgeschichte,” 109-110, Nr. 877/II, DTA.

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **Supported by the Reich: Pension Payments to Alsatian Veterans and War Widows during the Second World War**

National Socialist authorities moved relatively early in their occupation of Alsace to take charge of pension payments to Alsatians. The rapid assumption of pensions reflected the Nazi assumption of the permanence of their return to sovereignty in the province. However, practical considerations of necessity and legitimacy also pressured German officials to resolve the issue of pension payments for Alsatian veterans and war widows as quickly as possible. The end of immediate hostilities with France in 1940 left German authorities with a significant population of familial survivors and the war disabled ex-soldiers who had earned their claim to state aid while serving in the French army. Gauleiter Robert Wagner estimated that the number of Alsatians who had died as a direct result of their service to the French army totaled 1,632 with a further 758 severely disabled ex-soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the immediate needs of the veterans and war widows of the recent conflict, Nazi authorities were faced with the prospect of needing to continue the combatant's aid that had been initiated by French authorities to former soldiers of the First World War. In 1942, an estimated 22,500 cases had been settled and a further 500 still remained to be processed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note from the Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, Persönlich. Abt., January 24, 1944, R 83 Elsass 86, BABL.

<sup>2</sup> "Prüfungsbericht: Örtliche Prüfung der Ausgaben an Versorgungsgebühren Einzelplan XII (R) bei dem Sonderbeauftragten des OKW (Abtlg. Reichsversorgung) in Strassburg (Elsass). Vom 16.5. bis 2.6.1942," June 3, 1942, R 2301 4371, BABL.

The official transfer of Alsatian pension cases and payment to Germany occurred on August 1, 1941. Specifically, Germany took over the payment of support for eligible Alsatians of “German origin” and their survivors. Initially, Nazi authorities decided to maintain French payment rates, but to award them according to German law.<sup>3</sup> In taking control of pensions in Alsace, National Socialist officials set before themselves a significant task. Sources reported that some 167,315 pension files were transferred from various French repositories to Nazi authorities.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, Nazi officials were convinced of the success of their efforts. A self-congratulatory report noted, “The transition from the French to the German pensions law was a great accomplishment that is all the more to be appreciated because during the entire time the regular monthly payments to recipients also had to be provided.”<sup>5</sup>

The care for disabled Alsatian veterans was complicated by the dual jurisdiction of the Wehrmacht and civilian government in Alsace. Alsatians who had received their disability or survivors of men killed while serving in the German military were to be taken care of by the Wehrmacht’s Offices of Welfare and Support (*Wehrmachtfürsorge und Versorgungsämter*).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Prüfungsbericht: Örtliche Prüfung der Ausgaben an Versorgungsgebührrnissen Einzelplan XII (R) bei dem Sonderbeauftragten des OKW (Abtlg. Reichsversorgung) in Kolmar (Elsass). Vom 29.4. bis 15.5.1942,” May 15, 1942, R 2301 4374, BABL.

<sup>4</sup> “Zahlstelle,” R 2301 4373, BABL; Délégué Général du gouvernement français dans les territoires occupés to the Secrétaire Général aux Anciens Combattants, January 4, 1941, F 1a 3656, AN. This transfer of Alsatians’ pension files to German jurisdiction was problematic for Alsatians who lived in France, as they could not receive the correct pension payment without the information contained in their file. Ultimately, it appears that German authorities were willing to allow these individual files to be reclaimed upon application.

<sup>5</sup> “Prüfungsbericht: Örtliche Prüfung der Ausgaben an Versorgungsgebührrnissen Einzelplan XII (R) bei dem Sonderbeauftragten des OKW (Abtlg. Reichsversorgung) in Kolmar (Elsass). Vom 29.4. bis 15.5.1942,” May 15, 1942, R 2301 4374, BABL.

<sup>6</sup> The Wehrmacht’s Offices of Welfare and Support was, however, to be responsible for the retraining and job placement assistance for French Alsatian veterans of the 1939-1940 conflict, as well as any Alsatians who were disabled during their subsequent military service in the German military.

The Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht would order on March 4, 1942 that Alsatian former career soldiers of the German army were to be provided with the same payment levels and care as their interior German counterparts.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Robert Wagner was placed in charge of disabled Alsations and widows of men who had earned their claim to a pension after September 1, 1939 in the French army.<sup>8</sup> The close assignment of the two agencies would lead to periodic confrontations.

The transfer of Alsatian pension payments to the German government was not as thorough and straightforward as it might initially appear. German authorities willingly assumed the payment of pension responsibilities in Alsace that corresponded to similar provisions in German law. There were aspects of French pension law, however, that did not correspond to any existent pension legislation in Germany. In such cases, the pensioner in question was required to submit a special application to Nazi authorities. Several of these categories included groups such as soldiers' widows that had remarried or parents whose income exceed the maximum amount allowed under German pension eligibility laws. Up until March 31, 1942, Nazi authorities would report dispensing support to some 27,500 such cases.<sup>9</sup>

An unexpected category of pension recipient that emerges from the reading of archival sources are former volunteers for the French army and Foreign Legion. These ex-soldiers were doubly suspect in National Socialist officials' eyes because of their willingness to engage in the French military. In fact, such prospective pensioners were required to pass an examination by

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<sup>7</sup> "Zahlstelle," R 2301 4373, BABL.

<sup>8</sup> Report from the Sonderbeauftragter des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht für die Reichsversorgung, December 15, 1941, R 2301 4373, BABL.

<sup>9</sup> "Zahlstelle," R 2301 4373, BABL.

the political branch associated with the local welfare office. Extra support would only be approved after a positive outcome of the enquiry.<sup>10</sup> This investigation was undertaken in order to ensure that the Alsatian ex-soldier pensioners were politically and nationally reliable and to exclude those judged to be lacking. Those former French Alsatian volunteers who received a positive evaluation would also be the direct beneficiaries of Nazi official action. The French decision to utilize the conversion rate of 1 fr = 0.05 RM in paying out pension payments immediately pauperized these veterans. National Socialist officials in Alsace chose to intervene in cases of demonstrated need to increase the pension payments to the ex-army and Foreign Legion volunteers to the corresponding level stipulated by German law.<sup>11</sup> The Nazi decision to assist French Alsatian veterans who had willingly joined the French military is curious, particularly when it is considered that Alsatian volunteers for French military service had been a group explicitly targeted for exclusion from Alsace after the armistice. The only explanation for this seemingly contradictory policy was that National Socialist officials regarded the larger context of the decision to freely enlist critically important. Thus Alsations who had “turned traitor” and chosen service in the French army while Alsace had remained part of Imperial Germany during the First World War were not entitled to any leniency, while Alsations who had made their commitment during the period of French sovereignty were more tolerable. That is, so long as they had been deemed “worthy” in the investigation by local authorities.

The decision to provide extra benefits in itself was an anomaly in National Socialist pension policy. In general, Nazi authorities only reluctantly granted additional stipends. On the

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<sup>10</sup> Report from the Sonderbeauftragter des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht für die Reichsversorgung,” December 15, 1941, R 2301 4373, BABL.

<sup>11</sup> “Zahlstelle,” R 2301 4373, BABL.

one hand, this position was similar to that which Imperial officials had articulated during the First World War. During that conflict, it was judged that a veteran could not be judged to be “needy” if their contemporary economic hardship was a result of the present wartime circumstances and not a lasting condition. National Socialist authorities articulated similar policy by specifying that only individuals who were older than 65 or who were unable to work for reasons beyond their control would be eligible.<sup>12</sup> An important exception to this rule, however, was a broadening of the official understanding of “emergency” so that former soldiers and their survivors could more easily receive a “one-time support payment.”<sup>13</sup>

National Socialist pension policy in Alsace during the Second World War followed established policy in some aspects, but broke with precedents in others. For instance, the decision to take over pension payments for ex-French Alsatian almost immediately after their conquest marked a significant change in policy from Imperial and post-1918 Republican precedents. In both of the earlier changes in sovereignty, the newly empowered state had been content to allow the vanquished government to continue to pay pensions to their Alsatian veterans and war widows. Eventually, however, both administrations would assume the responsibility of bearing the costs of the support. Thus the lack of delay in 1940 signaled a shift in German policy to an “all or nothing” approach to Alsace. There would be no half-measures, Alsatians would or would not be completely German and treated as such. The creation of this dichotomy created significant problems for individuals judged to be “undesirable,” but at the

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<sup>12</sup> “Allgemeine Bemerkungen, Hinweise und Anregungen aus Anlass der örtlichen Prüfung bei den Sonderaufträgen des OKW (Abteilung Reichsversorgung) in Kolmar (Elsass) und Strassburg (Elsass) in der Zeit vom 29.4. bis 3.6.42,” R 2301 4371, BABL.

<sup>13</sup> Report from the Sonderbeauftragter des Oberkommando der Wehrmacht für die Reichsversorgung, December 15, 1941, R 2301 4373, BABL.

same time privileged those elements of the population that the Nazis wished to cultivate. This latter group could only with great difficulty complain that they were treated as “second-class Germans.” When it came to pensions in Alsace, the ethnic conception of “Germany” prevailed over that of the “active” citizen. Thus voluntary service in the French army or Foreign Legion was in itself insufficient to deny these groups German citizenship or their pensions, just so long as individual concerned was of “German origin” and their contemporary political attitudes did not antagonize local political officers. In fact, Germany actually provided a better system of support to ex-French Alsatian soldiers of the 1939-1940 conflict than France.

## **CHAPTER 15**

### **Erasing the Past for the Sake of the Future: The Rewriting of the Memorial Landscape in Alsace during the Second World War**

In 1940, German armies entering Alsace encountered a range of monuments that had been erected by French authorities to commemorate their victory in World War I. At the same time, there was an obvious dearth of memorials that had been built during the Imperial period. Memorialization was one of the fields in which Nazi officials and administrators were determined not to repeat the “mistakes” of their *Kaiserreich* counterparts when it came to eliminating French influence in Alsace. Nazi authorities would also draw upon precedents set by French authorities in 1918. The result was an intensive campaign of destruction and revising of the monumental landscape of the province. Interestingly, opponents to the policy of erasure would point out that Imperial German authorities had allowed “emblems of French courageousness” to be built and stand in the province, purposefully forgoing comparisons with French actions and instead holding up the example of their German forbearers to Nazi authorities.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, the demands of war and their abbreviated period in power prevented the Nazi memorialization project in Alsace from moving from its destructive to constructive phase.

The study of the reordering of memorials in Alsace during the Second World War also demonstrates the priorities of Nazi authorities. While Gauleiter Robert Wagner immediately commenced with the project of eliminating the materially expressed evidence of French rule, he was also not inclined to approve all proposed German memorialization projects. Thus in 1943,

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<sup>1</sup> “Die elsässische Frage,” R 43 II 1339a, BABL.

the Gauleiter ordered that the reconstruction of the West Prussian Grenadier Regiment Nr. 7's monument outside Wissembourg that had been built to commemorate the regiment's actions during the Franco-Prussian War and subsequently destroyed in 1918 be postponed until after the conclusion of the present conflict. Wagner and his fellow Nazi officials were focused on portraying and imprinting a particular image of the new Germany and it was one in which even the victories of the Kaiserreich played a minor or potentially competing role.

Nazi officials rapidly began the process of rewriting the monumental landscape of Alsace and Lorraine through a policy of removal. In Metz, for instance, statues that had been constructed after 1918, such as the ones to General Mangin, Belgium's King Albert I, and of General de Lafayette, whose inscription commemorated French and American soldiers who had died during the 1914-1918 conflict, were removed less than a month after German soldiers entered the city.<sup>2</sup> French monuments on World War I battlefields such as Hartsmannwillerkopf and one commemorating the French chasseur, so-called "blue devils" from the Ballon d'Alsace were also destroyed.<sup>3</sup> This removal of monuments constructed by the French to commemorate their victory in the First World War might easily be interpreted as simply a tit-for-tat response to the destruction, defacement, and relocation of the German memorials in 1918. Nazi authorities, however, took their efforts to expunge Alsace and Lorraine of French monuments a step further by targeting *any* memorial that was dedicated to commemorating the provinces' attachment to France. Thus in Strasbourg the statue of Napoleonic General Jean Baptiste Kléber and

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous ingénieur, "Rapport sur l'occupation allemande à Metz et sur les expulsions de populations d'Alsace et de Lorraine," May 22, 1941, 2 AG 617, AN.

<sup>3</sup> "Rapport sur la situation religieuse et politique de l'Alsace occupée," December 31, 1940, Claude Paillat Papers, Box No. 347, HIA.

monuments celebrating Marshalls Ney and Fabert and King Saint Louis in Metz that had been built prior to 1870 and allowed to stand unmolested by *Kaiserreich* officials were also removed.<sup>4</sup>

Not all French memorials in Alsace were targeted for removal. Memorials for soldiers who fell in the First World War in particular represented an ambiguity that Nazi authorities could not simply demolish or leave standing. Many of the monuments celebrated the memory of Alsatian soldiers who had fallen in the ranks of the German army. Destroying them ran counter to National Socialism's idealization and sanctification of the longsuffering and loyal German soldiers of the First World War. Moreover, it risked potentially alienating the families of these individuals, a population whose support was vital in reestablishing German governance over Alsace. At the same time, however, leaving the monuments as they stood was also out of the question, as some memorials celebrated the mythic connection between France and Alsace and nearly all bore French inscriptions. Nazi authorities' solution to this conundrum was to undertake a systematic erasure campaign to rid monuments of their French inscriptions, but also the names of individuals they judged to be unworthy of commemoration, such as soldiers who had fought and died in the French army and Jews.

In 1943, a report from Motz, the Government Building Officer in Alsace, gave a detailed breakdown of the number of monuments and plaques in different administrative districts in the province and whether or not the remembrance pieces had been altered. The figures broke down as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Anonymous ingénieur, "Rapport sur l'occupation allemande à Metz et sur les expulsions de populations d'Alsace et de Lorraine," May 22, 1941, 2 AG 617, AN.

**Table 19: Status of Monuments in Alsace in 1943<sup>5</sup>**

District	Not Altered	Prepared to be Altered (vorbereinigt)	Remodel Completed	Newly Constructed	Dismantled
Altkirch	9	81	-	-	4
Guebwiller	2	8	6	-	14
Hagenau	5	10	11	1	3
Colmar	7	16	14	-	10
Molsheim	2	10	28	6	13
Mulhouse	11	11	5	-	2
Ribeauvillé	-	17	5	-	5
Sélestat	10	10	16	-	10
Strasbourg Land	-	11	24	3	18
Thann	2	3	16	-	10
Wissembourg	13	20	8	2	5
Saverne	12	16	15	1	8
Total	73	213	148	13	169

The table tells two stories. First, it evidences Nazi authorities' determination to identify and transform or eliminate all material vestiges of the previous French regime. Of the 603 existent war monuments and plaques in Alsace before 1943 28% had been dismantled entirely, 24.5% had been remodeled, 35.3% had been prepared to be altered, and 12% had not been changed. Second, the fact that only 13 new constructions and the completed modification of a minority of the memorials suggests that Nazi officials were only able to partially enact their full intentions. This latter theme would become increasingly apparent as the war dragged on.

Gauleiter Robert Wagner was never able implement the Germanization of the Alsatian monumental landscape as thoroughly as he would have liked. Labor shortages and the classification of materials such as cement and later even natural stone as materials not to be

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<sup>5</sup> Reg. Baurat Motz, "Unbereinigte Kriegerdenkmale und Gedenktafeln mit französischen Inschriften im Elsass," October 15, 1943, R 83 Elsass 28, BABL.

utilized outside the war effort slowed the process of altering the memorials.<sup>6</sup> Evidence also suggests that the Alsatian population did not enthusiastically support the campaign. In many cases, their resistance did not take the form of outright vandalization of memorials, but rather neglect and disrespect. A certain Schoch reported that although many of the altered monuments were meticulously cared for, there were others that remained in an “unworthy” condition through inattention. Moreover, in at least one location, Schoch reported local youth using an animal sculpture that was a part of the war memorial as a “riding object.” This affront was compounded by the fact that none of the inhabitants of the community admonished the children. Schoch instructed mayors and other local officials to ensure that the monuments were properly maintained and suggested that severe punishments could be meted for any defacement.<sup>7</sup> Despite these setbacks, the program was only officially postponed until “after the war” in August 1944, as Allied troops were bearing down on the province.<sup>8</sup> At one level, the long delay in the final cancelation of the order reflected Wagner’s commitment to shaping the future memory of Alsations’ experiences under French rule during the Interwar period. However, the attacking of First World War memorials also served an immediate administrative purpose.

The importance of controlling the content and message of Alsace’s monumental landscape was demonstrated to Nazi authorities in an incident that occurred at Hochfelden, Alsace on the night of July 13/14, 1941. The police report that described the event related that

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<sup>6</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, Abteilung für Bauwesen to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, July 28, 1944, R 83 Elsass 28, BABL.

<sup>7</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, Verwaltungs und Polizeiabteilung to the Landkommissare, September 17, 1942, R 83 Elsass 28, BABL.

<sup>8</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, Abteilung für Bauwesen, August 11, 1944, R 83 Elsass 28, BABL.

following a “Jazz concert” at a local inn a column made up of approximately 60-80 youth from the community marched through the streets of Hochfelden singing “*La Marseillaise*” and other songs in German and French.<sup>9</sup> Once the ordered throng reached the town’s war memorial, an unidentified individual gave a short speech in which he claimed that the dead commemorated on the monument had laid their lives down not for Germany, but for France. Tricolor bunting and a flower bouquet were subsequently laid before the monument. Another participant wrote “To Our Dead Soldiers” (*À nos Soldats morts*) in chalk. Following the ceremony the train of youth once more moved off through the streets, accompanied and encouraged by the clapping of Hochfeld’s residents. The commandant’s report placed most of the blame for the action on the supposed nefarious influence of a young local vicar that commanded an inordinate amount of influence among the Catholic population that made up 90% of the town’s population. Local police responded to the incident on July 15 when they arrested eleven of the “gang members” who had been responsible for the demonstration and transferred them to the Vorbruck concentration camp.<sup>10</sup> Further punishments were imposed on the community including the stationing of extra policemen (the cost of whom was to be borne by the town), a nightly curfew, closing of the inn where the “Jazz concert” had been held, and a search of all the houses in Hochfelden for weapons and anti-German material. A total of 73 individuals would be arrested and sentenced to periods in Vorbruck ranging from two months to over a year.

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<sup>9</sup> Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Strasbourg to the Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass, July 18, 1941, R 83 Elsass 33, BABL. The next day the commander would increase the estimated number of participants to somewhere between 150-200.

<sup>10</sup> Report from the Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, Strasbourg, July 19, 1941, R 83 Elsass 33, BABL.

The incident at Hochfelden clearly showed that the Nazis' rewriting of Alsace's national narrative did not go uncontested by local people. Yet the event had an even more significant immediate lesson for local Nazi officials. The Hochfelden youths' utilization of the war memorial as a central ceremonial and symbolic icon to confirm Alsace's attachment to France only hardened and reiterated Nazi authorities' conviction that the province's bonds to France could only be broken once and for all by radical measures that completely rooted out anything or anyone that evoked the period of French rule. The severity of the consequences for the participants reflected the Nazi belief and policy that commemoration was not a harmless individual choice, but was an overt and potentially dangerous national and political statement. In effect, the young people of Hochfelden in their demonstration had utilized the local war memorial in the same manner as Nazi officials wished, but for a completely opposite purpose. While the speaker claimed that the commemorated individuals had laid down their lives for France, Nazi authorities sought (without great success) to prompt young Alsatian men to follow the example of their fathers and grandfathers and fight alongside their "German brothers."<sup>11</sup>

The negative campaign of erasure and eradication in Alsace was accompanied by discussions regarding the proper way to honor the dead of the past and present war. Nazi authorities made it point of emphasis to honor Alsations who had died in German uniforms during the First World War. Simple acts of acknowledgement were one way in which officials sought to distinguish their commemoration of the dead from their French predecessors. This is evident in a letter from a certain Georg Loegel and his wife to Robert Wagner in 1940. Loegel wrote to thank Wagner for a wreath that had been donated for the grave of their son Julius who

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent Bullière, "La Guerre Exposée: Du Haut-Königsbourg au Mémorial d'Alsace-Moselle," in *Boches ou Tricolores: Les Alsaciens-Lorrains dans la Grande Guerre*, ed. Jean-Noël Grandhomme (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2008), 404.

had died in the German army in 1918. Loegel related that “The uplifting feeling that [our son] sacrificed himself for a German Alsace and Germany has sustained us during these past twenty years despite all the crazed French victors’ disturbances, slights, and damage and [allowed us to] reject with contempt all their underhanded ingratiating attempts.”<sup>12</sup> This letter makes it clear that Loegel and his wife felt that Julius was finally receiving the proper recognition for his sacrifice under Nazi authority that had not been present during the French administration.

The impetus to honor dead “German” Alsations extended to individuals who had been killed in the recent conflict with France – even if they had died fighting against German forces. Alsation autonomist and National Socialist sympathizer Hermann Bickler wrote regional Nazi officials in 1941 to reiterate his call to inscribe the names of Alsations who had been killed in the recent conflict on local war memorials, “even if they unfortunately laid down their lives on the wrong side.”<sup>13</sup> Bickler observed that in the East, *Volksdeutschen* that had fallen in the ranks of the Polish army had their names included on plaques that bore the inscription “Fallen for People (*Volk*) and Fatherland.” Nazi officials were also faced with the question of whether or not to immediately memorialize Alsations who were dying as German soldiers. Wagner, however, ultimately decided to wait until after the conclusion of the conflict to include the additional names on the monuments.<sup>14</sup> There was a twofold motivation behind this decision. First, lack of appropriate skilled labor raised the potential issue of subpar work. Second, and most importantly, the continual adding of names to the memorial would have undoubtedly had a

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<sup>12</sup> Georg Loegel und Frau to Reichstatthalter Robert Wagner, November 24, 1940, R 83 Elsass 72, BABL.

<sup>13</sup> Kreisleiter Hermann Bickler to Regierungsrat SS-Sturmabführer Gädeke, April 1, 1941, R 83 Elsass 28, BABL.

<sup>14</sup> Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass to Chef der Zivilverwaltung im Elsass Abteilung für Bauwesen, November 1, 1943, R 83 Elsass 28, BABL.

demoralizing effect upon communities' morale that was already very reluctant or outright opposed to the incorporation of young Alsatian men into the Wehrmacht and SS.

## Conclusion

The German political regime that assumed power in Alsace in 1940 was vastly different than the one that had evacuated the province in 1918. The National Socialist administrators of the Third Reich transformed the parameters of belonging in Alsace and introduced a previously unexperienced level of coercion and violence to the reordering of the borderland's population. From the beginning the Nazi mission in Alsace was both punitive and radical. Punitive in the sense that German authorities utilized their return to sovereignty in the province to "settle scores" with certain segments of the Alsatian population, such as individuals who had volunteered for French military service during the First World War and post-1918 immigrants. In many cases the actions taken against individuals who fell into these categories were deliberately and mockingly designed to mimic French policies in 1918. Utilizing French precedents allowed National Socialist authorities to justify key elements of their governance policy like the unofficial annexation of Alsace. At the same time, the measures were to be definitive proof that the Interwar status quo had been reversed and a new order had established itself in Europe.

The radicalness of newly empowered National Socialist regime was demonstrated in the immediate post-armistice transition, citizenship laws, military service requirements, pensions, and in memorialization projects. In each of these areas, the Nazi program built upon the programs of its Imperial and French Republican predecessors, but would intensify and enforce their actions with a thoroughness and a degree of brutality previously unexperienced in the Franco-German borderland. Alsations during the period of Nazi occupation from 1940-1944 lost a great degree of their autonomy and ability to maneuver within the system that had been characteristic of earlier periods. This was partly due to the unique administrative setup of the

provinces that gave Gauleiters Robert Wagner and Josef Bürckel nearly complete discretion to “Germanize” the provinces as they saw fit. The only national official that Alsatians could appeal to ameliorate their actions was Adolf Hitler, whose general policy of non-interference allowed the Gauleiters to continually escalate the extremism of their policies. Many Alsatians were also limited in their decisions by their familial ties. The knowledge that any “disloyal” action was guaranteed to be met with a lethal response for the offender and simultaneous extreme consequences for relatives led the majority of Alsatians to fulfil their service requirements to the Nazi state. The increased difficulty in maneuvering for Alsatians is not to suggest that it was impossible. This chapter has shown that individuals continued to petition Hitler and both evade and desert their military duties in the German army. But these cases were a distinct minority and the individuals who undertook such actions were not guaranteed to find a better situation on the other side – as the many Alsatian inmates of the Soviet camp of Tambov could attest.

The irony of the second period of German rule in Alsace was that although it encompassed only a fraction of the time of either the previous Imperial and French Republican administrations, it has come to dominate Alsatians’ memory of their often conflicted past. The four years of Nazi rule did more than forty-seven years of at times clumsy Imperial German rule and twenty-two years of French governance to seal Alsatians’ attachment to France. The tragedy was the level of violence and personal suffering that the Alsatian population had to experience in order to effectively eliminate any nostalgia for Germany and effectively eliminate the province as a source of Franco-German tension. After the Allied reconquest of the province and unconditional surrender of Germany in 1945, French authorities would be left with the delicate task of making sense of the Alsatian trauma and once again sorting out the willing collaborators from the forced participants.

## Epilogue

“In the Bordeaux Protest of February 17, 1871, in the years of annexation from 1871 to 1918, and above all, between June 1940 and November 1944 and continuing today, the population of Alsace and of Lorraine have claimed their right to be eternally and unbreakably members of the French nation and have always defended this right against force and cruelty and given their blood and property. Germany has no right over us and wherever it takes this right is against our will.”<sup>1</sup>

~Resolution from the *l'Union des Invalides, anciens combattants et Victimes de la guerre d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, June 26, 1945.

“I have governed and directed this country in a legal manner only and animated by good intentions towards the population.”<sup>2</sup>

~Ex-Gauleiter Robert Wagner at his postwar trial defending the tactics of his administration during the Nazi Occupation, 1946.

Allied armies crossed the border into Alsace on November 14, 1944. Despite the liberation of Strasbourg less than ten days later, German forces would not be completely expelled from the province until March 19, 1945. Newly empowered French authorities found themselves once again faced with the task of re-establishing an administration in the province and evaluating the wartime actions of the Alsatian populace. In regard to this latter task, officials found themselves the “beneficiaries” of local initiative, as ordinary Alsations zealously denounced, detained, and occasionally personally punished their compatriots judged to have been overly eager to please German occupation forces. The so-called *épuration* or “cleansing” of Alsace in the postwar period was catalyzed by both popular and official initiative. The key consideration in an evaluation of an Alsatian’s wartime records revolved not around the form or

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<sup>1</sup> *l'Union des Invalides, anciens combattants et Victimes de la guerre d'Alsace et de Lorraine*, “Resolution,” June 26, 1945, 546 D 93, ADBR.

<sup>2</sup> Permanent Military Tribunal of the 10th Military District, seated at Strasbourg, “Minutes of Examination or Confrontation,” 34. A set of documents (in English translation) from the files of Raymond Jadin (French lawyer) dealing with the examinations of ex Gauleiter Robert Wagner, Philip (William R.) Collection, Box No. 4, Item 34, HIA

frequency of their interactions with German authorities, but rather the degree of voluntariness that characterized these relations. Young Alsatian men returning home from the ranks of the German armed forces illustrate this distinction. Those Alsatis who had been forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht or S.S. after August 1942, the so-called *malgré-nous*, were identified as victims of Nazism and beneficiaries of generous French policies. The opposite was true for Alsatis who had enlisted by their own free will. These individuals were perceived to be traitors and excluded from state aid and the French civic community. The suffering of the *malgré-nous* and the narrative of their own victimization came to dominate Alsatis' memory of the period of Nazi occupation. The *épuration* process that occurred on the local level and which culminated in the conviction of ex-Gauleiter Robert Wagner for crimes committed against the populace only served to endorse this interpretation. Yet in 1953, this storyline was fundamentally challenged after a small group of Alsatis found themselves being prosecuted as war criminals rather than identified as sufferers. The subsequent controversy and inner- and interregional discontent tore at Alsatis own self-understandings and the unity of French society as a whole.

### **Pensions for the War Disabled and Survivors of the Fallen**

The expulsion of German troops from Alsace and even the surrender on May 8, 1945 did not signal an immediate end of the conflict for the province. Thousands of Alsatian families waited anxiously for the return of sons, fathers, husbands, and brothers from various European theatres and Soviet prisoner-of-war camps. Tragically, this postwar reunion would not occur in some 25,000 cases. Support for survivors of the fallen and the thousands of disabled ex-soldiers would be an important postwar occupation of the French government. In contrast to pension policies after 1918, French authorities did not distinguish their care based upon the nationality of

the army in which the applicant earned their pension claim, instead immediately taking charge of the maintenance of both groups. Similarly to the situation following the Franco-Prussian and First World Wars, the population of military pensioners who required immediate state aid in 1945 were disabled veterans and families of soldiers who had died during the hostilities.

An ordinance that was promulgated on March 10, 1945 outlined pension support for the war disabled and war widows. Article 1 opened the decree by outlining the national parameters of belonging. Alsatian veterans who were “French either by descent or by reintegration in pursuant of the law of August 5, 1914 and the Treaty of Versailles” were made eligible.<sup>3</sup> Thus the basic tenets of French citizenship policy from the Interwar period remained constant. Moreover, the basic benefits that disabled veterans and war widows received continued to be based upon the provisions of the March 31, 1919 pension legislation. The primary alteration to annuity policy that reflected changed postwar realities came in regards to service eligibility. French authorities distinguished between claimants who had been conscripted or volunteered for German military service.

It [the decree] establishes a distinction between Alsatians and Lorrainers forcibly incorporated by way of conscription and those who have been enrolled through a voluntary act of engagement. The latter are only able to qualify for a pension after having provided proof that the alleged engagement was actually prompted by coercive means.<sup>4</sup>

In effect, draftees were identified as victims of Nazism and entitled to support, while volunteers for the Wehrmacht or S.S. were not eligible for state aid. The only exception to this statute was if the volunteer could prove that their enlistment had been motivated by threats of retaliation

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<sup>3</sup> “Ordonnance no. 45-364 du 10 mars 1945 portant application aux anciens militaires alsaciens et lorrains des pensions militaires fondées sur le décès ou l’invalidité,” F 60 550, AN.

<sup>4</sup> “Ordonnance no. 45-364 du 10 mars 1945 portant application aux anciens militaires alsaciens et lorrains des pensions militaires fondées sur le décès ou l’invalidité,” F 60 550, AN.

against their families or in circumstances that demonstrated a lack of real intention to cooperate in the German war effort.

Differentiations between Alsatian conscripts and volunteers appeared fairly straightforward according to the terms of the March 10 legislation. In practice, however, the “extenuating circumstances” clause provided local authorities with a significant amount of individual discretion in awarding a pension. Archival evidence does suggest that unless direct evidence proved that a claimant voluntarily enlisted in the Wehrmacht or S.S., French officials were often willing to give the young man the benefit of the doubt when it came to their presence in the ranks of the German military. For instance, a certain Paul Meyer as a soldier received a wound that caused an 85% disability. Despite having a Germanophile father and brother who had been active in the Hitler Youth, the French official evaluating Meyer’s application proposed that “In the absence of a mention on the service roll (*Wehrstammrolle*) and of irrefutable testimony, I believe it is appropriate to recognize Meyer’s version and give him the benefit of his disability pension.”<sup>5</sup> The information conveyed by the local service roll would have allowed French authorities to definitively ascertain whether Meyer had been conscripted or volunteered. In light of the decisive part played by the mobilization ledger, it seems too convenient that it was missing in Meyer’s and several other documented cases. The phenomenon of disappearing service rolls is perhaps indicative of multiple incidents of obfuscation undertaken by a local individual during the confused period of the liberation in order to mask the nature of their wartime relationship with German authorities. The tendency of local French officials to assume a claimant’s innocence until they were proven guilty, despite circumstantial evidence that might

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<sup>5</sup> Le Commissaire Principal, Chef du Service des Renseignements Généraux to the Sous-Préfet de Selestat, April 25, 1949, 546 D 96, ADBR.

suggest otherwise, is visible in other cases. For instance, a certain Jean-Baptiste Lammer's lack of voluntary enlistment and a "nervous disposition" were used to excuse his joining of the SA and hanging around German policemen during the occupation,<sup>6</sup> while the lack of direct evidence showing that André Keller freely joined the German army superseded his previous holding of a leadership position in the local Hitler Youth.<sup>7</sup>

The pension application of René Koffel is an example of how the "exceptional circumstances" clause could be utilized to excuse an Alsatian's voluntary enlistment. Koffel's application began by immediately establishing his French national background, relating that both of his parents had automatically received French citizenship according to the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. During the war, he had been conscripted into the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (R.A.D.) for three months. Near the end of this service, Koffel had learned he was to be sent to Russia to fight partisans. In response, Koffel enlisted in the Luftwaffe and was subsequently wounded in Italy. The Prefect of the Bas-Rhin closed the application by noting,

With respect to his engagement in the Luftwaffe contracted...only in order to delay his departure to the front, it [Koffel's case] certainly seems to fall into the category of those that occurred in circumstances absent of any real intention to cooperate in the enemy's war effort.<sup>8</sup>

Koffel's case illustrates that local authorities were often willing to give Alsatians the benefit of the doubt in instances of ambiguity in regards to their motivations for service in the German military. It appears that Koffel's application was approved.

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<sup>6</sup> Le Commissaire Principal, Chef du Service des Renseignements Généraux to the Sous-Préfet de Selestat, January 26, 1949, 546 D 96, ADBR.

<sup>7</sup> Report to the Préfet du Bas-Rhin, July 28, 1949, 546 D 96, ADBR.

<sup>8</sup> "Pension de certaines catégories de victimes Koffel René – Kintzheim," April 22, 1949, 546 D 96, ADBR.

War widows and the parents of fallen soldiers made up the bulk of non-disability military pension claims in the years immediately following 1945. Despite the willingness of French authorities to provide pensions for these individuals, the process was markedly slow and inefficient. In 1948, the Prefect of Bas-Rhin wrote to the Mayor of Strasbourg that “A great number of widows or military parents...have not yet obtained the liquidation of their pension claims. This situation, already so painful, if prolonged risks becoming tragic for most claimants.”<sup>9</sup> The letter went on to urge the mayor to supply all necessary materials from his office to applicants as quickly as possible. French authorities did make some allowances for the exceptionality of Alsatians’ experiences. For instance, families of conscripted Alsatian soldiers who were presumed dead on account of a lack of communication since the end of hostilities were eligible to have the period of their military allocation extended. This extra aid would serve as a bridge until a regular pension could be approved. The readiness of French officials to accommodate the needs of Alsatian draftees’ dependents was not present for the survivors of volunteers. Thus the Sub-Prefect from Selestat was informed that a certain Widow Dietz’ pension had been stopped because it had been determined that her late husband was a “fervent Nazi” who had volunteered for the German police.<sup>10</sup>

Although the deceased individual’s pro-German attitude and actions could disqualify his dependents from a pension, evidence suggests that the pro-German attitude and actions of dependents did not disqualify them from being pension beneficiaries. The case of René Loewenguth is exemplary. Loewenguth’s father, Xavier, had lost a leg in the 1914-1918 conflict and received a 100% disability pension. Moreover, he had been awarded the Belgian Order of

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<sup>9</sup> Préfet du Bas-Rhin to the Maire, March 17, 1948, 546 D 24, ADBR.

<sup>10</sup> Préfet du Bas-Rhin to the Sous-Préfet de Selestat, April 6, 1949, 546 D 28, ADBR.

Leopold for helping Belgian officers avoid capture and during the Interwar period acted as president of the local chapter of the *Union nationale des combattants*. This background led everyone in his community to assume he was an ardent French patriot. However, following the arrival of the Germans in 1940, Loewenguth surprised his neighbors by becoming an “ardent Nazi” and assuming the position of local party leader (*Ortsgruppenleiter*) and mayor. In December 1942, he had been suddenly expelled from the Party and imprisoned for embezzling vouchers. The elder Loewenguth had been arrested by French authorities during the liberation and subsequently sentenced to two years of prison, twenty years of national degradation, and ten years banishment from Alsace. His national degradation meant he was no longer eligible for his own disability pension.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to his father, René enjoyed a good reputation in his hometown throughout the war, in one instance telling a friend that “he was not a boche like his father.” René volunteered for service in the S.S., but fellow young men from his community agreed that his engagement stemmed from a desire to secure the eventual release of his father from prison rather than any personal commitment to National Socialism. Called up in 1943, a year ahead of the rest of his classmates, René survived the fighting on the Eastern Front and returned home to Alsace. However, the rigors of his service and a fragile constitution ruined his health and he died in September 1948 of tuberculous meningitis. The local official who compiled the report concluded that his investigation did not turn up any information that would have precluded René from receiving a pension. The ultimate outcome of this inquiry, however, must remain in doubt. It is likely, even if René had been awarded support, his parents would not have been ineligible to receive it. Earlier, French authorities had taken steps to prevent individuals convicted of

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<sup>11</sup> Report to the Préfet du Bas-Rhin, May 13, 1949, 546 D 96, ADBR.

*indignité nationale* from collecting a pension, regardless of how they came by their eligibility, for the duration of their national degradation.<sup>12</sup>

### **Settling Accounts: Postwar Épuration in Alsace**

The liberation of Alsace was followed by a period of popular violent retaliation against individuals judged to have collaborated with German occupational authorities. Local initiative proved to be an important catalyst for official action. Arrests of suspected collaborators began in Strasbourg soon after the city's liberation in November 1944. The high number of internees forced local officials to reopen the recently liberated "re-education camp" of Schirmeck and the Struthof concentration camp as detention centers. The number of inmates in both camps was approximately 4,600 by January 31, 1945, a significant figure considering that Alsace itself had not yet been fully liberated.<sup>13</sup> Compared to the purges that occurred across France, however, the inmates of Schirmeck and Struthof could consider themselves fortunate. In the 1950s, a study commissioned by the Comité d'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale would estimate that approximately 9,000 suspected collaborators were killed across France in the period immediately preceding and following the liberation. In this *épuration sauvage* (wild purge) most of those killed were not given any semblance of trial. Such executions were also reported in Alsace.<sup>14</sup> In this violent, unsanctioned *épuration*, some Alsatians took the law into their own hands and

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<sup>12</sup> Préfet du Bas-Rhin to the Maires du département, July 8, 1946, 546 D 24, ADBR.

<sup>13</sup> Vonau, *L'Épuration en Alsace*, 53. Vonau cites the number of 2,170 adults and 83 children interned in Struthof, while 2,038 individuals were detained in Schirmeck.

<sup>14</sup> René Para, "Une Épuration mesurée," *Alsace 1939-1945: La grande encyclopédie des années de guerre*, ed. Bernard Reumaux and Alfred Wahl (Strasbourg: La Nuée Bleue, 2009), 1613-1614.

directly punished local individuals they judged responsible for their suffering during the Nazi occupation.

One of the groups explicitly targeted by local initiative were those Alsatians who had volunteered for service in the German military. In one instance, the Patriotic Action of Selestat, urged the Prefect of the Bas-Rhin to take action against the enlistees for reasons of punishment and public order. The group's President described the willing recruits as threatening opportunists who had sought to share in the fruits of Nazi victory and so privileged their own personal gain over their loyalty to France. If voluntarily bearing arms against France was not enough, the President also observed that prior to their enlistment these individuals had often been active propagandists for the Third Reich and victimized their fellow Alsatians by acting as spies for the Gestapo and *Sicherheitsdienst*. Moreover, the report continued, the presence of volunteers was an imminent threat to contemporary public order. The potential for violence stemmed from the simmering tension between the enlistees and the *malgré-nous*. Young men who had been forced to serve in the German military harbored a great deal of resentment and rage stemming from their suffering in the ranks of the Wehrmacht and S.S. The President claimed that the identities of the volunteers were common knowledge in their home communities and that the former conscripts were fertile ground for troublemakers to insight to violence. The President sympathized with the desire to hold the enlistees accountable for their betrayal, but condemned mob rule, relating "the Patriotic Action wants an ordered, dignified, and legal *épuration*."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Président de l'Action Patriotique de l'Arrondissement Selestat to the Préfet du Bas-Rhin, May 15, 1945, 391 D 152, ADBR.

The radical, unofficial phase of the *épuration* would not be formally ended until special liberation courts were established by the state.<sup>16</sup> In Alsace, the *épuration* took on a dimension beyond punishing those guilty of acts judged to be “anti-French” during the period of Nazi occupation. A second, critical element was a concurrent effort to use the courts as a means to permanently assure the province’s attachment to France.<sup>17</sup> French officials were faced with the difficult task of separating the “genuine” bad Frenchmen from those who were the victims of circumstance. Existent judiciary statutes did not adequately encompass the range of behaviors and actions that French authorities sought to punish in the aftermath of the German occupation. As a result, a new type of offense, the so called *indignité nationale*, was created in the latter half of 1944 and made retroactively punishable.

The charge of *indignité nationale* encompassed a range of activities that included knowingly rendering direct or indirect assistance to Germany and its allies in France or abroad and undermining the unity of the nation, freedom of the French, or the equality between Frenchmen after June 16, 1940.<sup>18</sup> In effect, in the eyes of the state, an individual convicted of *indignité nationale* had “sinned” against their French citizenship by aiding Germany. The punishment for this transgression was *dégradation nationale*, which entailed a revocation of the rights the convict enjoyed as a member of the French nation. Among others, these consequences included the disqualification from voting, exclusion from public office, and removal from professional associations and unions. As Jean-Laurent Vonau has observed, the “long list of

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<sup>16</sup> Jackson, *France The Dark Years*, 577. The courts also were empowered to hand down death sentences. In total, including those killed during the *épuration sauvage*, some 10,500 individuals were executed for their actions during the period of the Nazi occupation.

<sup>17</sup> Vonau, *L’Épuration en Alsace*, 54.

<sup>18</sup> Vonau, *L’Épuration en Alsace*, 125.

dismissals, exclusions and restrictions made the convicted person a pariah, an individual ostracized from society, a person not to be associated with in a political, professional, and economic milieu and at the same time prevented from exercising their rights.”<sup>19</sup> The length of time an individual convicted of *indignité nationale* would be deprived of their civic rights was dependent upon the severity of their crime. Other sentencing options available to *épuration* judges ran the gamut from exile from Alsace to prison and death.

Voluntariness played an important role in determining the guilt of the accused and potentially the severity of their punishment. Yet different degrees of culpability were present even in seemingly straight-forward instances of willing participation. For instance, an Alsatian’s membership in the Nazi party was in itself insufficient cause for an *indignité nationale* condemnation. The benefit of the doubt, however, was not given to S.S. volunteers. From an official perspective, the difference between the two groups hinged on questions of ideological commitment and numbers. French authorities assumed that to be a voluntary adherent to the paramilitary S.S. required an Alsatian to possess a greater degree of investment in Nazi ideology than an ordinary Party member. Nor did membership in the Party necessarily indicate that the individual had actively worked against French interests. Ironically, the sheer number of adherents also worked in favor of Alsatian Party members. At the time of the liberation, there were approximately 35,000 members of the Nazi Party living in Alsace – too many to prosecute individually, while a much more manageable 2,000 Alsatians had enlisted in the S.S.<sup>20</sup> The officially supported trials and punishment meted out to the “small fish” that had benefited at the cost of their neighbors from the Nazi occupation was an important symbolic act for Alsatians at

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<sup>19</sup> Vonau, *L’Épuration en Alsace*, 130.

<sup>20</sup> Vonau, *L’Épuration en Alsace*, 125.

an individual level. It provided a measure of vengeance, but critically also confirmed the suffering Alsatian society had experienced under Nazi rule.

The trial of former Gauleiter Robert Wagner and seven co-defendants<sup>21</sup> in 1946 was the central penal event of the *épuration* period in Alsace. The group faced a litany of charges. The most relevant for this dissertation – and as Wagner himself believed at the time – the most serious charge against him revolved around the recruitment of Alsatians and the draconian punishments meted out against those that had sought to evade German military service. Point Six of the indictment specifically accused Wagner of causing “Frenchmen to bear arms against Frenchmen” in the years from 1940 to 1942 by recruiting Alsatians to voluntarily serve in the Wehrmacht while France was at war with Germany, while Point Seven broadened the indictment to include the conscription of Alsatians into the German army from 1942 to 1944.<sup>22</sup> Particularly damning for Wagner was prosecutors’ observation that while Gauleiter Josef Bürckel had only conscripted Lorrainers from the class of 1914, Wagner had incorporated 18 classes of young Alsatian men. As he was being questioned at trial, Wagner attempted to downplay his role in establishing conscription in the province by accepting responsibility for bringing the “opportunity of introducing military service” in Alsace to Hitler’s attention, but arguing that the enactment of the policy was Hitler’s decision alone. An additional indictment focused on the ruthless penalties that draft evaders and their families were subjected to under his administration. In this charge, Wagner’s decision to not pardon and in fact hasten the executions of the fourteen young men from Ballersdorf who had been captured attempting to flee to Switzerland in 1943

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<sup>21</sup> The other defendants included Hermann Roehn, Walter Gaedeke, Hugo Gruener, Ludwig Luger, Ludwig Semar, Richard Huber, and Adolphe Schuppel.

<sup>22</sup> Vonau, *Le Gauleiter Wagner*, 134.

came back to haunt the former Gauleiter. Wagner attempted to mitigate the notion that the executions were intended to be exemplary in order to intimidate the Alsatian population. Instead, he argued that the widespread publicity surrounding the death sentences was not motivated by a desire to "...terrorize the [Alsatian] population but only to keep it informed to prevent further infractions. I had good intentions in doing that."<sup>23</sup> The court did not find Wagner's defense of "just following orders" and the "goodness" of his objectives compelling. He was sentenced to death and along with three of his co-defendants executed outside Strasbourg on August 14, 1946. One of his last statements is alleged to have been, "Long live German Alsace."

Beyond the interests of justice, the trial and execution of Wagner and some of his most notorious associates was a milestone in Alsatians' postwar victimization narrative. The four men who were killed on August 14, 1946 were represented and understood to be the primary authors of the province's wartime suffering. The trial and questioning of the plaintiffs focused on what they as outsiders had done *to* Alsace and not presented any ambiguity in regards to the identity of the authors of Alsatians' suffering during the Nazi occupation. This is evident in the wording of Point Six of the indictment that accused Wagner of *provoking* young Alsatian men to voluntarily enlist in the German military from 1940-1942. Thus even in an act that by its nature was deliberate, the responsibility of the Alsatian enrollee was partially mitigated. The limited abnegation of accountability is particularly significant in light of the fact that pre-draft Alsatian

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<sup>23</sup> Permanent Military Tribunal of the 10th Military District, seated at Strasbourg, "Minutes of Examination or Confrontation," 34. A set of documents (in English translation) from the files of Raymond Jadin (French lawyer) dealing with the examinations of ex Gauleiter Robert Wagner, Philip (William R.) Collection, Box No. 4, Item 34, HIA.

volunteers should not have been able to argue that they feared retaliation for failure to complete their mandatory German military service since it had not yet been instituted.

Just as in the case of the post-World War I triage trials, Alsatians lost their taste for *épuration* relatively quickly and were increasingly criticizing the process already by 1947. This development in the province mirrored larger national trends. The establishment of courts and the increasing distance from the liberation corresponded proportionally to increased leniency in sentencing. In other words, as Julian Jackson has observed, “the date of the trial mattered more than the gravity of the crime.”<sup>24</sup> Popular support for clemency was given official form on January 5, 1951 when a law amnestied a number of acts previously prosecutable acts of collaboration.<sup>25</sup> Article Eight specifically provided a pardon for Alsatians and Lorrainers who had volunteered in the German army, so long as they had enlisted after August 25, 1942, belonged to a class that would have been called-up anyway by Nazi authorities, and so long as they had not been charged with a war crime.<sup>26</sup> The three conditions outlined by the amnesty demonstrate French officials’ continued reliance on the established nationalist narrative of “faithful” Alsace. Alsatians who volunteered after the institution of forced military service and those who belonged to one of the classes that Nazi authorities eventually conscripted could, without too much difficulty, be incorporated into the well-established image of the “reluctant” Alsatian soldier. At the same time, however, the stipulations also reveal a fundamental element of Alsatians’ support for *épuration*. Their acquiescence was founded upon the *épuration* process

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<sup>24</sup> Jackson, *France The Dark Years*, 587.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 138. *Dégradation nationale* was completely abolished by a bill that was passed on July 24, 1953.

<sup>26</sup> Vonau, *L’Épuration en Alsace*, 164.

ultimately cementing their status as wartime sufferers, if not the preeminent members of this category. Any suggestion that Alsatians had in some cases played the role of perpetrator was met with vigorous local protest and opposition. The preeminent challenge to this victimization narrative in the postwar period emerged in the trial of 14 Alsatians in 1953 for their role in the massacre of French civilians in the town of Oradour-sur-Glane in 1944.

### **Victims or Accomplices?: The Oradour-sur-Glane Trial, 1953**

The trial of the fourteen Alsatians began in Bordeaux in January 1953. The war crime being prosecuted occurred on June 10, 1944 in the small town of Oradour-sur-Glane in Haute-Vienne. That day a regiment of the Waffen-S.S. Tank Division, *Das Reich*, entered the town and after rounding up the populace, proceeded to slaughter 642 women, children, and men.<sup>27</sup> For the French, the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre became emblematic of Nazi barbarism and punishing the perpetrators was a central goal of the postwar period. Such a prosecution, however, was not unproblematic. Only a fraction of the 120 soldiers recognized as members of the regiment could be located after the war. Some had died in subsequent battles with the Allies, others had simply disappeared into the chaos of the postwar German landscape, and in at least one case the French were unable to secure the extradition of the commander of the *Das Reich* Division from the British. In the end, only 21 ex-soldiers of the regiment would be brought to trial. The accused in the Bordeaux process were prosecuted under a new French penal law that had been passed on September 15, 1948 and introduced the concept of collective responsibility for war crimes. The legislation stipulated that merely being present at the time of the commission of a war crime was

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<sup>27</sup> Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 1999. Farmer's book is an excellent study of the massacre and the way it was subsequently commemorated.

sufficient to be convicted.<sup>28</sup> One of the most troubling aspects about the background of the alleged perpetrators was that 14 of the defendants were Alsatians.<sup>29</sup> The subsequent trial, sentence, and ultimate amnesty would fundamentally divide postwar French society and pit different regions of France against one another, precisely during the period in which French authorities were attempting to reestablish national unity.

The Bordeaux trial was met with widespread condemnation and criticism in Alsace. An important standard-bearer of the protests was the veterans' association of the *malgré-nous*, *l'Association des Evadés et Incorporés de Force* (ADEIF).<sup>30</sup> Much of the sympathy in the province for the defendants came from an identification with their situation. As one ex-conscript, Michel Martini, elegantly articulated in a letter to the Mayor of Strasbourg,

If I had been thrown into the Das Reich Division and if I or one of the thousands of conscripted Alsatians and Lorrainers were forced to assist or even take part in the massacre of Oradour, I would perhaps today be in the place of those 12 unfortunates. Their case could be the case of every one of those forced conscripts between 1941 and 1944.<sup>31</sup>

Martini's letter illustrates why Alsatians were unable interpret the trial as simply a process against 13 individuals who originated in Alsace instead of an indictment against the entire province.

Alsatians' seeming inability or unwillingness to distinguish between the prosecution of war criminals and accusations against the province's population as a whole was not understood

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<sup>28</sup> Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 142-143.

<sup>29</sup> A further critical distinction between the Alsatian defendants was the voluntariness of their presence in the S.S. regiment. 13 of the individuals had been forcibly conscripted, while the fourteenth had enlisted. All subsequent calls for clemency on the Alsatians' behalf were directed at the draftees, while the lone volunteer was regarded with hostility.

<sup>30</sup> Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 143-144.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Martini to the Maire de Strasbourg, January 3, 1953, 208 MW 174, AMS.

or well received in some quarters of France outside the province. A certain Georges Portal living in Algeria wrote the mayor of Strasbourg relating that,

It would never have occurred to me, of course, to establish any type of correlation between Alsace and the Alsatian criminals of Oradour.

But since you have deliberately wanted it, I want to tell you that Alsace through the behavior of its representatives has been covered itself in shame.

I also want to express my outrage at the vile pseudo-patriotic blackmail exercised by you on France.

...

Veteran of 1914-1918, I have always rejoiced to have contributed in the past my own small measure to repairing the iniquity of 1871, but I tell you today: All those who take part in defending the murderers of the children and women of Oradour have ceased to be my countrymen.<sup>32</sup>

Portal's letter demonstrates that contrary to the assumption in some quarters of Alsatian society, the presence of Alsations alongside German defendants at Bordeaux was not what called into question the established narrative of patriotic Alsace. Instead, Portal was alienated by what he perceived to be Alsatian officials' instrumental usage use of that legacy coupled with accusations that Alsace had been abandoned by France in 1940 in an attempt to wring concessions from the current state – a practice he labeled as “pseudo-patriotic blackmail.” The letter is also a clear example of the emotion that the Bordeaux trial generated in French society as a whole. The process, far from bringing Frenchmen together in a common spirit of condemnation against Nazi crimes, instead served only to exacerbate and perhaps even worsen wartime cleavages in French society.

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<sup>32</sup> Georges Portal to the Maire de Strasbourg, February 20, 1953, 208 MW 174, AMS. The mayor of Strasbourg had organized a petition protesting the prosecution of the Alsatian forced conscripts that was collectively endorsed and signed by the mayors of communities in the Bas-Rhin. This is why Portal's and Martini's letters were addressed to Strasbourg's mayor. Emphasis in original.

For their part, Alsatians felt themselves increasingly victimized by the wider French public, who in their eyes demonstrated a galling lack of understanding and appreciation of the conditions in the province during the German occupation. In response, certain Alsatian patriotic groups and newspapers engaged in an unsavory contrast of the province's suffering with that of Oradour-sur-Glane. Thus in the face of the town's 642 dead, the number of 25,000 young men who had died as "innocent victims" in the Wehrmacht was put forth.<sup>33</sup> Although many Alsatians would publically recognize the tragedy of Oradour-sur-Glane, such comparisons created a hierarchy of suffering in which the massacre of the townspeople was implicitly the lesser crime. From the Alsatian perspective, the province's victimization should have been evident to all of France at the Bordeaux trial in the forms of the 13 Alsatian defendants had been *forcibly* conscripted into the S.S.

Two established narratives of the Alsatian experience were challenged during the Bordeaux process. At one level, Alsatians were acutely offended by the rhetoric of certain Parisian newspapers that utilized the heightened sentiment surrounding the trial to "unfairly drag the patriotic reputation of Alsace and Lorraine through the mud."<sup>34</sup> This statement indirectly acknowledged the recognition that the issue of Alsatian complicity in the Oradour massacre represented a potential challenge to the old French nationalist myth of patriotic Alsace

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<sup>33</sup> Note from Ministère de l'Intérieur, December 30, 1952, F 7 15341, AN. For instance, a motion adopted by the Conseil Général du Haut-Rhin related that the Conseil observed a moment of silence "to honor the memory of the Oradour-sur-Glane victims *and* the 25,000 forced Alsatian conscripts who fell in the ranks of the Wehrmacht," see "Une motion du Conseil Général du Haut-Rhin au sujet du procès de Bordeaux." F 7 15341, AN.

<sup>34</sup> Note from Arthur Kintzler, Président de la Fédération Nationale des Anciens de la Résistance, January 17, 1953, F 7 15341, AN.

unwillingly held captive by rapacious Germans. A declaration signed by the Upper- and Lower-Rhine Presidents of the ADEIF explicitly made this connection when they argued,

If the tragedy of the history of our homeland (*petite patrie*) brought our fathers for the first time to the ranks of a foreign army and we, their sons, have again experienced it, we must not all again become victims after each war.

The conviction of our twelve comrades at Bordeaux would likewise be our own and that of our fathers.<sup>35</sup>

The Presidents of the ADEIF perceived the placement of Alsatians alongside the docket with Germans as portraying the men as synonymous.<sup>36</sup> At another level, the trial endangered the victimization narrative that Alsatians had adopted to understand their experiences under German occupation and which had been specifically confirmed to them in the *épuration* trials and conviction of Robert Wagner. Specifically, the Oradour process threatened to impose an alternate storyline in which Alsatians were not only victims, but rather potential accomplices of Nazism at best and fellow perpetrators at worst. In fact, Alsatians' betrayal might even exceed the crimes of the Germans. A Socialist deputy from Limousin articulated the position that ““in this case, they [the Alsatians] are more guilty than German soldiers...An Alsatian had less right than a German to fire on civilians...”<sup>37</sup> It was this challenge to their understandings of their wartime experience that explains the depth and breadth of popular reaction in Alsace against the Bordeaux trial.

The Military Tribunal handed down the verdicts on February 12, 1953. The 13 Alsatian forced conscripts were given sentences that ranged from hard labor to imprisonment. The lone

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<sup>35</sup> “Declaration,” December 29, 1952, F 7 15341, AN.

<sup>36</sup> Alsatian protests on the matter were eventually enough to have the two groups separated.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 148.

volunteer in the group, Georges-René Boos, was sentenced to death for treason.<sup>38</sup> The news of the convictions was met with disbelief and anger in Alsace. The American consulate in Strasbourg reported a demonstration of approximately 6,000 people that took place in front of Strasbourg's war memorial, which in protest had been draped in black.<sup>39</sup> Similar demonstrations in front of local war monuments occurred in Haguenau, Schirmeck, Sélesat, Molsheim, and Schlittigheim. In other parts of Alsace, French flags were flown at half-mast and creped flags hung from many houses. The unrest in Alsace so alarmed French authorities in Paris that special legislation was drafted that provided for the full amnesty for Frenchmen who had been “‘forcibly incorporated into the German armies’.” The manner in which the law was proposed was loaded with reconciliatory symbolism. Sarah Farmer has observed that eight deputies from interior provinces, representing all the political parties (with the exception of the communists), were selected to submit the bill in order to demonstrate that the amnesty was a gesture from the entire nation.<sup>40</sup> The proposal was passed on February 18.

The reprieve of the 13 Alsatians was an ambiguous victory. Both official and foreign commentators urged Alsatians to temper their response and potential victory celebrations. French President Auriol addressed a delegation of Alsatian deputies saying, “‘I beg you not to welcome these men with triumphal arches and to think of the victims.’”<sup>41</sup> The problematic

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<sup>38</sup> Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 157. Boos' sentence would later be commuted to life in prison. He was awarded an early release.

<sup>39</sup> George Andrews to the American Secretary of State, February 17, 1953, 208 Z 6, AMS.

<sup>40</sup> Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 162.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 165.

nature of the success of Alsatian protests was also highlighted by the Communist Alsatian newspaper, *l'Humanité*, which observed,

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* wrote on Wednesday that the political noise in Alsace 'is stronger than the humane outrage and the call for vengeance' for the crime of Oradour. And is it so that 642 murdered children, women, and men should be brushed aside from people's memory and thirteen who took part in their murder be celebrated as heroes!<sup>42</sup>

The young men did receive a quiet homecoming in Alsace when they were released from the military prison in Bordeaux in the early hours of February 23.

There were no victors in the Bordeaux trial. French authorities claimed to have been motivated to utilize their power of amnesty in the interest of national unity.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the decision only hardened regional divisions between Alsace and Haute-Vienne. On the one hand, the residents of Oradour-sur-Glane and the surrounding region were outraged that individuals they judged to be responsible for the murders of their loved ones had been freed. While in Alsace, the amnesty was perceived to be confirmation that the conscripts should not have been put on trial in the first place. For their part, the amnestied Alsatians were happy merely to be able to return home to their families. They should have been. Many thousands of their compatriots caught up in the titanic Franco-German clashes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not so lucky.

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Alsace from the period of 1871 to 1953 had the dubious distinction of being incorporated for a time into all but one of the major political regimes that shaped the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Europe. A constant experience under each government was that the

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<sup>42</sup> "Wird die Stadtmusik die 13 'Helden' von Oradour empfangen?," *L'Humanité*, 208 MW 178, AMS.

<sup>43</sup> Farmer interprets the amnesty as evidence that "...the Assembly deemed the alienation of a poor, rural, leftist region to be less of a threat to national unity than continuing unrest in populous, prosperous Alsace." Farmer, *Martyred Village*, 167.

populace began its relationship with the state as a spoil of military victory. Ex-enemy soldiers and war widows were more representative of this status than any other population segment and a constant reminder to authorities of the province's recent history. German and French administrations sought to reconcile Alsatians to their respective nation with different degrees of commitment to inclusiveness and varying levels of willingness to utilize coercion. The nation-building projects of both states are evident in their postwar citizenship policies, incorporation of Alsatian youth into their armies, military annuities, veterans' associations' activities, and memorialization projects. The relationship between Alsatian veterans and war widows and the empowered state was never simply the latter impressing itself upon the former nor the former completely disengaging from the administrative structure created by the latter. Instead, local people, regional officials, and center state authorities engaged in a permanent complex process of petitioning, alliance, representation, and compulsion. In the end, surveying all four sovereignty transitions through the lenses of citizenship policy, military service, and pensions and seeing these subjects as embodying the larger overall goals of their respective administrations, the period from 1871 to 1918, despite its historiographic reputation for official repression, was the time in which membership in the ruling state was most inclusive of *all* residents living within Alsace.

Determining and policing the boundaries of national belonging was the most critical task set before newly empowered authorities in Alsace after each change in sovereignty. Official efforts to screen the population became increasingly intrusive following each conflict. The most tolerant postwar transition was the first. The combination of the year options period, protection of private property, and citizenship policy that was defined by birthplace or residency created an inclusiveness following the Franco-Prussian War that was unmatched in the later twentieth

century conflicts. A possible explanation for this openness lies in its connection to German unification. For much of the nineteenth century, Germans had applied the label of “foreigner” to other Germans from neighboring kingdoms.<sup>44</sup> It was reasonable that if Bavarians and Prussians could be taught to think beyond regional identities that a culturally Germanic people like the Alsatians could as well, just as would have been the case with Germans in the Austro-Hungarian Empire had the *Grossdeutschland* vision of unification prevailed. The rigidity of postwar citizenship conceptions in subsequent transfers of sovereignty reflected the actions of self-aware, established states that had distinctive notions of the identities of their nationals. Following the twentieth century conflicts, antagonistic notions of “Germanness” and “Frenchness” found expression at the regional level in the assumption that a fundamental incongruity existed between “genuine Alsatians” and Germans or, alternately, between “true Alsatians” and Frenchmen. In this construction, Alsatians could never be the other without a gross perversion of their nature. At one level, the ultimate goal of screening the borderland population in 1918 and 1940 was a desire to recreate the imagined population of 1870 and 1918 in the present. Notions of a similar objective, however, can only be taken so far. The definitions and methods employed to achieve this idealized community were drastically different. Although both regimes evaluated individual actions and utilized expulsions and confiscations, French ethnocultural definitions of Alsatians were markedly more inclusive than the radical racial categories of National Socialism. Furthermore, the willingness to employ terror and violence against the population of the province in 1940 is incomparable with 1918 precedents. France’s resumption of power in Alsace in 1945 did not entail a radical revision of the parameters of belonging, primarily because the province

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<sup>44</sup> At the time, a common south German electoral slogan was “better French than Prussian” and as late as 1863 a Prussian officer in Aachen was astonished to learn that local people referred to the state as “Putrid Prussia.” See Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War*, 30, 3 and Weil, *How to be French*, 178.

had technically never been annexed. Consequently, French authorities were not sifting through a new population, but rather judging if existent residents had betrayed their French nationality during the occupation.

One constant across four different changes in sovereignty in Alsace was the assumption by German and French authorities that military service would play a key role in reconciling Alsatians to their new homeland. The overall motivation behind the desire to include Alsatians in the ranks of the German or French militaries was the same. Recruits would be exposed to the national language, culture, learn to love the *Vaterland* or *Patrie*, and develop relationships with comrades from across the nation that ideally would create a common feeling of “Germanness” or “Frenchness” stronger than their regional ties. Ironically, however, Alsatians’ experience in the military immediately following the sovereignty transfers accomplished the opposite of authorities’ intentions. Rather than speeding Alsatians’ reconciliation to Germany during the Kaiserreich, the prospect of German military service more so than any other factor caused young men to opt for French citizenship. During the First World War, the discrimination Alsatians faced in the ranks of the Imperial army for many was the confirmation of their status of “second-class” soldiers and citizens and made a French alternative more attractive. In the Interwar period, Alsatians similarly encountered misunderstanding and discrimination in the ranks of the French army that was just as alienating as reintegrative. Alsatians’ experiences in the Wehrmacht and S.S. during World War II did more to turn Alsatians against the idea of being a part of Germany than the previous twenty years of French assimilation efforts. Yet even those young Alsatian men who had experienced time in the ranks of the German military found themselves dissatisfied in the French army after 1945 as their own wartime victimization remained unacknowledged. Assessed as an assimilatory institution, military service must be

judged to have had mixed results. Martial service appears to have been more effective in reconciling young men to France or Germany the further in time the distance from the sovereignty transfer, as evidenced by the decreasing number of shirkers and growing veterans' associations. It is also significant that the longer time lapse corresponded to an increasing number of years that new recruits would have spent under German or French schooling. Thus when it comes to military service, we can conclude that it was most effective when it was complemented by a program of national education.

This brief overview of the impact of Imperial martial policy on Alsatians might appear to contradict the idea that the period of the *Kaiserreich* was marked by a greater degree of inclusiveness of all residents in living in the province. A closer examination, however, proves otherwise. Thus the decision to completely exempt all former French soldiers who had actively served in the Franco-Prussian War from any time in the German ranks and delay mandatory military service a year until 1872 was not replicated in subsequent sovereignty transfers. After 1918, Alsatian members of the class of 1919 were required to spend three months in the ranks of the French army after already having fought for Germany and the period was longer for "old" Germans of military age who wished to be naturalized as French. During the Second World War, Alsatians who had been mobilized in 1940 were incorporated into the Wehrmacht and S.S. and used in active service. Following the Allied victory in 1945, Alsatians who had been mustered into the German military were encouraged to complete a period of service in the French army in order to demonstrate their commitment to France. Alsatian soldiers resented the prospect of double military duty, regardless of the nationality of the second army. Alsatians' alienating experience of being transferred to the Eastern Front during the First World War was mirrored by French authorities' decision to not utilize them in the postwar armies that occupied

Germany. Moreover, Alsatians were prevented from being garrisoned in the province under both administrations. Taken as a whole and not blind to the significant and alienating official missteps, Imperial authorities were equally and in some cases more circumspect in their approach to Alsatians' military service than subsequent administrations.

Pensions were the cause for the most immediate and sustained interaction between authorities and ex-enemy Alsatian soldiers and war widows. The awarding of pensions is, therefore, an important context to study official articulations of national belonging in a non-judicial and non-political forum. By and large, Alsatian petitioners formed an entitlement group that engaged with state authorities as individuals. Veterans and war widows in Alsace could not base their claims on service accomplished for the state currently in power in the province and as a result were forced to adopt different justificatory narratives that included arguments of reciprocity, duty, and the applicant's victimization. The general trajectory of German and French pension policy after 1871 and 1918 respectively included a period of greater exclusivity in which the needs of veterans who had fought in their own armies were addressed before those of the ex-enemy Alsatian combatants. In both states this was followed by a period of increasing inclusivity in which provisions were made for Alsatian veterans. Pension policy based on considerations of claimants' need alone rather than previous nationality characterized Imperial support until the defeat in 1918. In contrast, Interwar pension eligibility that was founded on how an applicant regained his French nationality and the nature of their involvement with the German military limited support to only a select group of "authentic" Alsatians veterans and war widows. In 1940, the Nazi regime's annuity policy was marked by a unique inclusiveness that immediately assumed pension responsibilities for all "true" Alsatians, while at the same time inaugurating a radical exclusiveness that might not only deny official support, but also

potentially permission to reside in the province and life itself. After 1945, French pension policy retained its basic characteristics of the Interwar period, with the addition of critical weight being given to the evaluation of a claimant's wartime actions during the period of Nazi occupation.

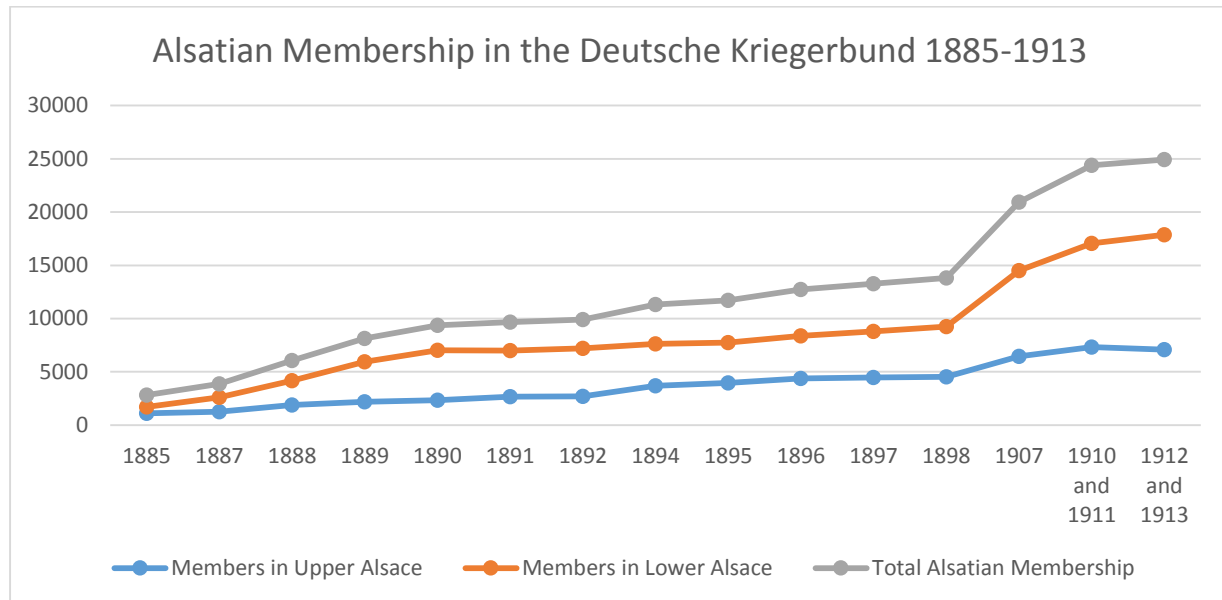
Pension programs reflected the larger principles of nation-building employed by the various political regimes. The inclusivity of Imperial practices reflected a willingness to open state membership and support to anyone prepared to recognize German laws and fulfil the duties associated with citizenship. Interwar France's willingness to support "genuine" Alsatians replicated authorities' primary goal to reconcile these individuals to the Republic, while reluctance to similarly provide for "old" Germans reproduced official ambiguity regarding the desirability and value of integrating these individuals. The immediate assumption of all pension responsibilities for "true" Alsatians by Nazi authorities was symptomatic of their racist worldview. There would be no toleration of national ambiguity in the populace. Alsatians were to be completely German or they would not be allowed to reside in the province. Post-1945 French authorities' annuities to the *malgré-nous* and declination of support for enlistees echoed wider national policy that was reconciliatory towards forced contributors under Nazi occupation, but unforgiving of voluntary involvement.

March 19, 2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the day on which the final shots fired in the Franco-German rivalry over Alsace occurred on the soil of the province. Today rather than being a point of contention between the two states, Alsace, and particularly Strasbourg, have become symbolic of Europeans' postwar efforts to come together and interact in a spirit of cooperation rather than conflict. This desire has physically manifested itself in Strasbourg in the form of the European Parliament building. Thus the space that was so divisive for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now a point marking Franco-German and a wider European

unity. This dissertation began by asking the question if the modern nation-state is capable of forgiveness and capable of tolerating alternative national narratives. At initial glance, the case of ex-enemy Alsatian soldiers and war widows between 1871 and 1953 would appear to confirm that Germany and France became increasingly effective in forcing Alsatians to conform to the official storyline in order to take advantage of state support. A closer study, however, reveals a more nuanced relationship. For although Alsatians were partially shackled by the need to publically acknowledge official postwar narratives regarding the nature of their experiences under the previous administration, the populace could also turn the “chains” of the authoritative construction into an effective weapon to influence the state. This ability reflected the larger capability of Alsatian veterans and war widows to comfortably exist both within and outside official categories under multiple political regimes. The parameters of belonging became increasingly stringent, but the resourcefulness of local people enabled many of them to successfully navigate the tricky postwar waters of multiple sovereignty transitions. In the end, perhaps the most important lessons that emerge from the study of Alsatian veterans and war widows between 1871 and 1953 are to be found in the ability of people to rebuild their lives and reconcile even after multiple instances of devastating conflict.

## APPENDIX

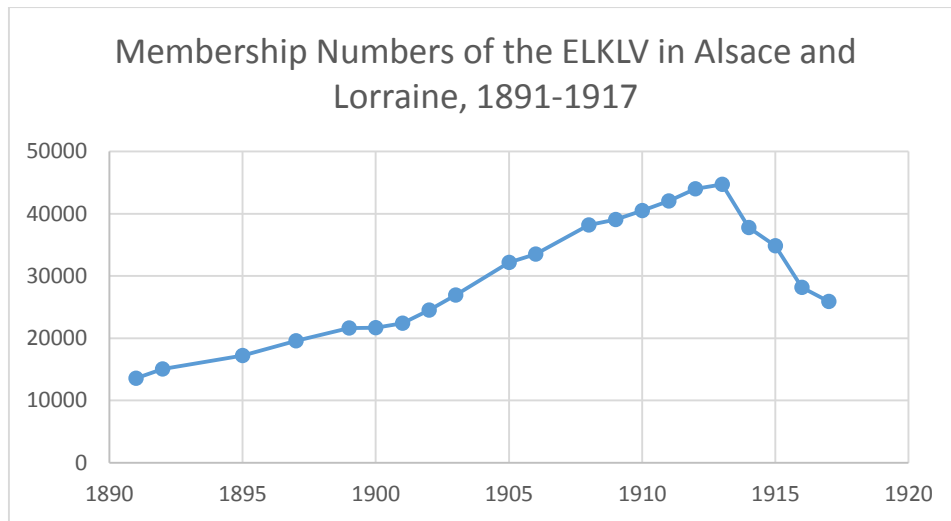
**Figure 15: Alsatian Membership in the Deutsche Kriegerbund, 1885-1913<sup>1</sup>**



Year	Members in Upper Alsace	Members in Lower Alsace	Total Alsatian Membership
1885	1116	1713	2829
1887	1250	2621	3871
1888	1886	4165	6051
1889	2186	5956	8142
1890	2356	7021	9377
1891	2675	7001	9676
1892	2710	7211	9921
1894	3704	7632	11336
1895	3956	7760	11716
1896	4380	8366	12746
1897	4483	8784	13267
1898	4545	9261	13806
1907	6445	14494	20939
1910 and 1911	7321	17071	24392
1912 and 1913	7085	17856	24941

<sup>1</sup> The membership figures in this graph and table come from the membership statistics reported in the annual reports (Geschäftsberichte) of the DKB. They are to be found in files 27 AL 170 A-B, ADBR.

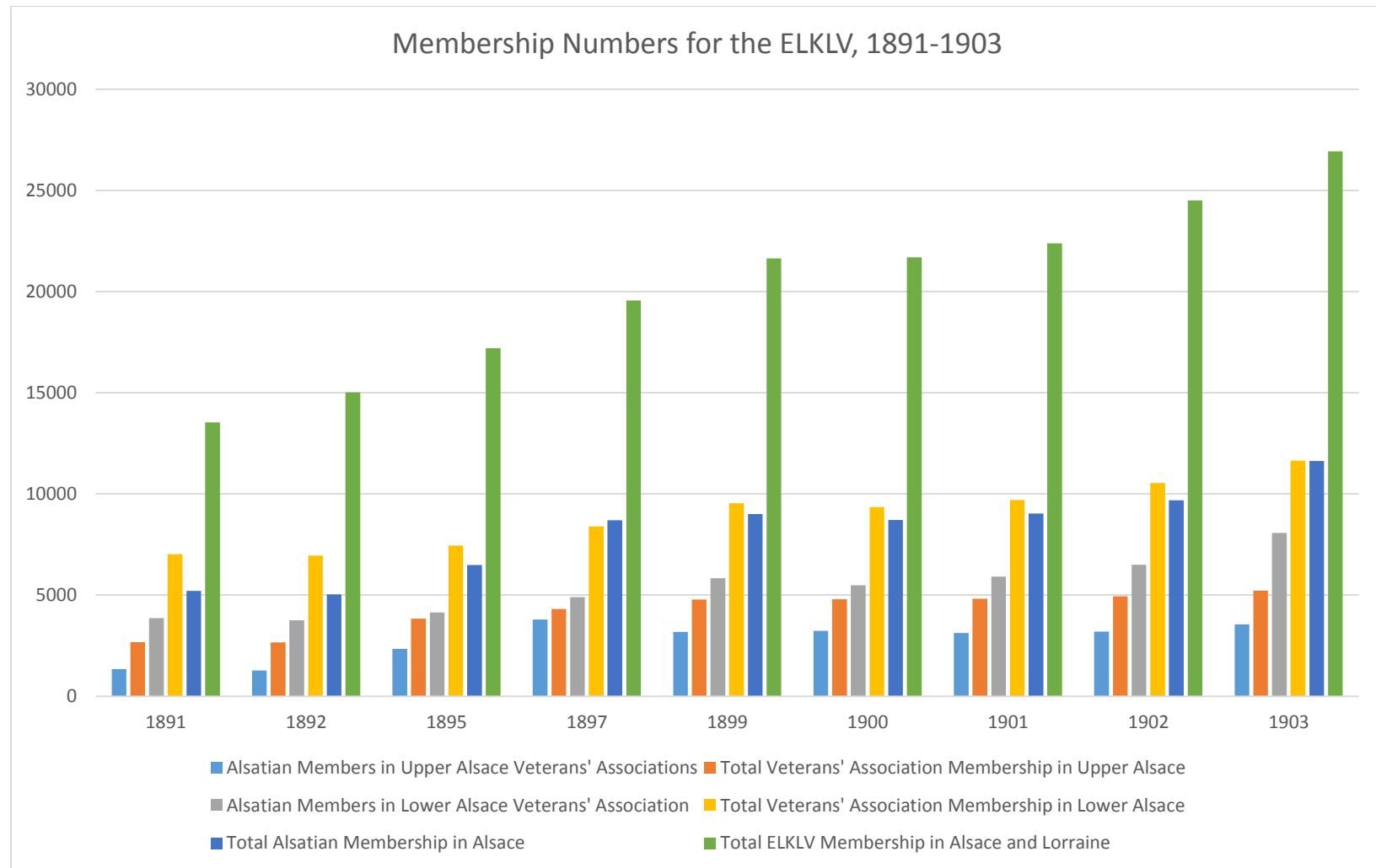
**Figure 16: Membership Numbers of the ELKLV in Alsace and Lorraine, 1891-1917<sup>2</sup>**



Year	Total Membership Numbers of ELKLV in Alsace and Lorraine
1891	13538
1892	15020
1895	17202
1897	19559
1899	21641
1900	21688
1901	22386
1902	24505
1903	26932
1905	32158
1906	33508
1908	38163
1909	39051
1910	40506
1911	42062
1912	44004
1913	44707
1914	37771
1915	34820
1916	28165
1917	25919

<sup>2</sup> The membership figures in this graph and table and those of Figures 8, 9, and 10 come from the membership statistics reported in the annual reports (Geschäftsberichte) of the ELKLV. They are to be found in the file 27 AL 221, ADBR.

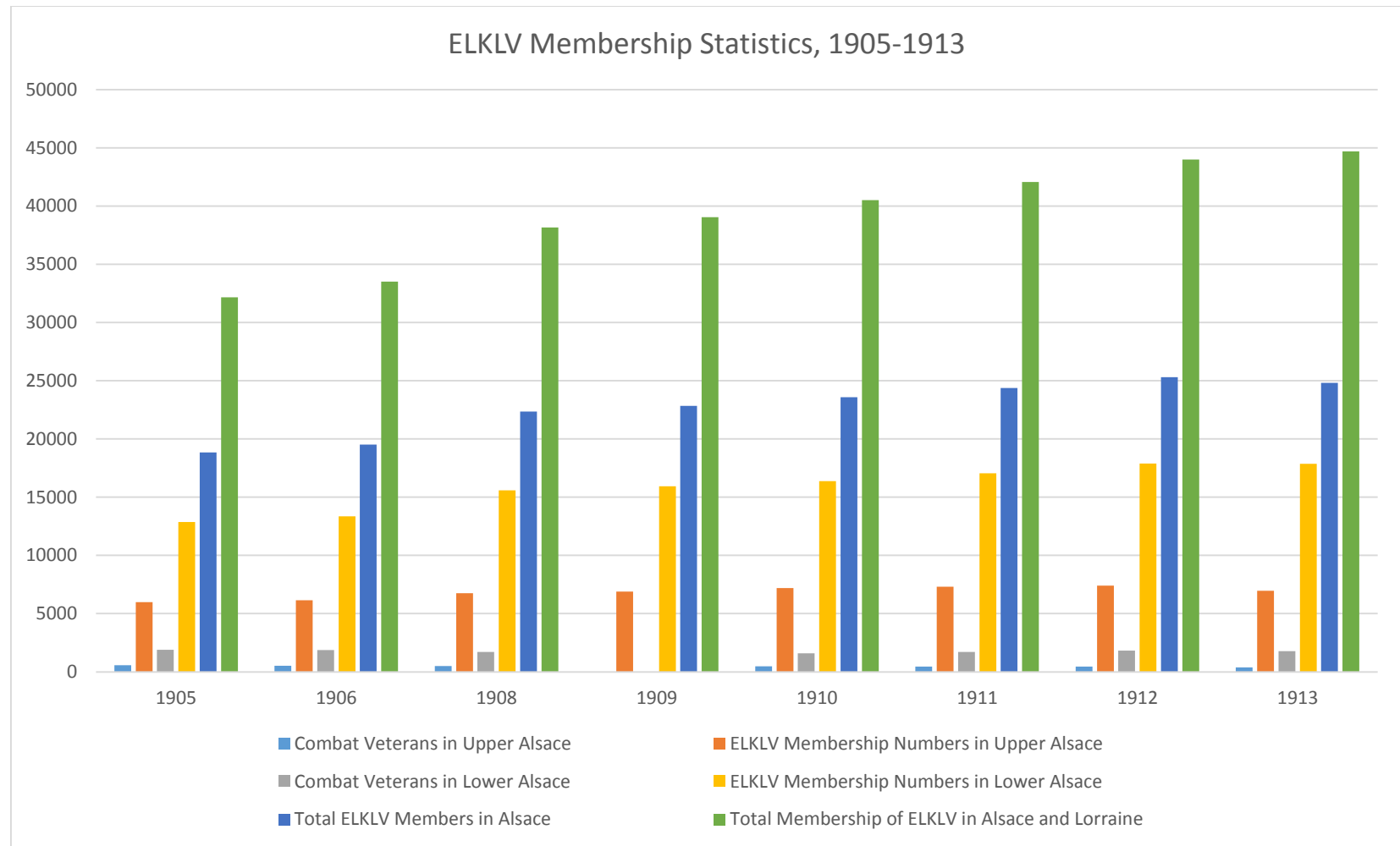
**Figure 17: Membership Numbers for the ELKLV, 1891-1903**



**Figure 17 (cont'd)**

Year	Alsatian Members in Upper Alsace Veterans' Associations	Total Veterans' Association Membership in Upper Alsace	Alsatian Members in Lower Alsace Veterans' Association	Total Veterans' Association Membership in Lower Alsace	Total Alsatian Membership in Alsace	Total ELKLV Membership in Alsace and Lorraine
1891	1341	2675	3862	7013	5203	13538
1892	1280	2666	3752	6954	5032	15020
1895	2346	3834	4146	7450	6492	17202
1897	3797	4315	4903	8397	8700	19559
1899	3174	4784	5835	9542	9009	21641
1900	3230	4794	5481	9352	8711	21688
1901	3126	4823	5910	9703	9036	22386
1902	3192	4938	6498	10537	9690	24505
1903	3558	5214	8072	11644	11630	26932

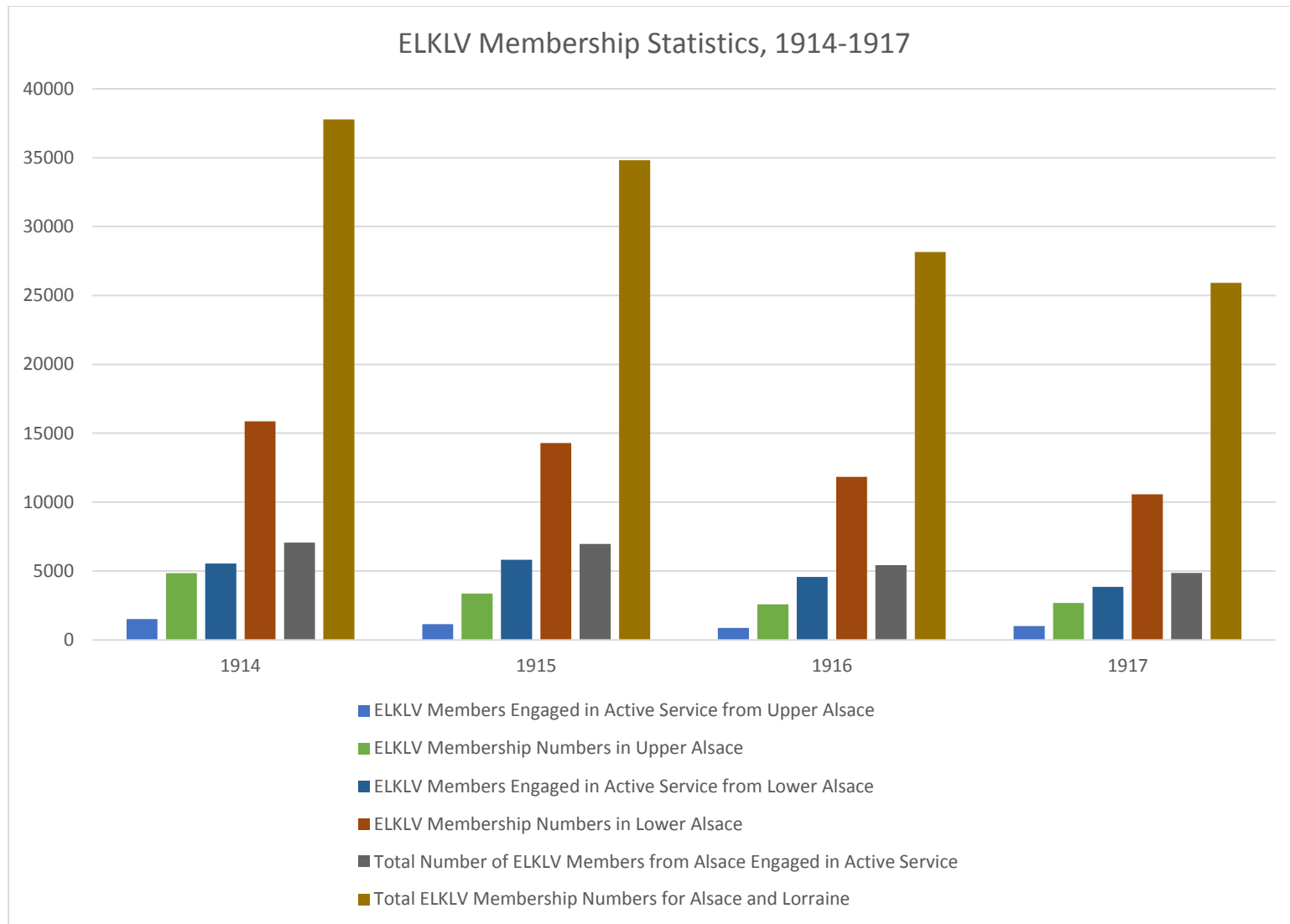
**Figure 18: ELKLV Membership Statistics, 1905-1913**



**Figure 18 (cont'd)**

Year	Combat Veterans in Upper Alsace	ELKLV Membership Numbers in Upper Alsace	Combat Veterans in Lower Alsace	ELKLV Membership Numbers in Lower Alsace	Total ELKLV Members in Alsace	Total Membership of ELKLV in Alsace and Lorraine
1905	572	5978	1894	12870	18848	32158
1906	520	6160	1868	13366	19526	33508
1908	493	6754	1721	15595	22349	38163
1909		6896		15940	22836	39051
1910	471	7197	1603	16379	23576	40506
1911	462	7321	1721	17059	24380	42062
1912	459	7403	1834	17894	25297	44004
1913	394	6973	1790	17856	24829	44707

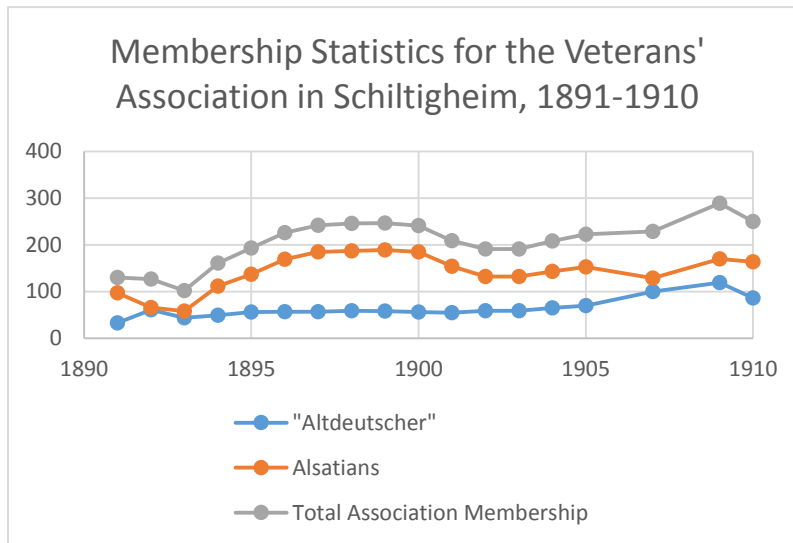
**Figure 19: ELKLV Membership Statistics, 1914-1917**



**Figure 19 (cont'd)**

Year	ELKLV Members Engaged in Active Service from Upper Alsace	ELKLV Membership Numbers in Upper Alsace	ELKLV Members Engaged in Active Service from Lower Alsace	ELKLV Membership Numbers in Lower Alsace	Total Number of ELKLV Members from Alsace Engaged in Active Service	Total ELKLV Membership Numbers for Alsace and Lorraine
1914	1517	4846	5550	15858	7067	37771
1915	1151	3372	5811	14292	6962	34820
1916	868	2589	4566	11834	5434	28165
1917	1008	2684	3854	10570	4862	25919

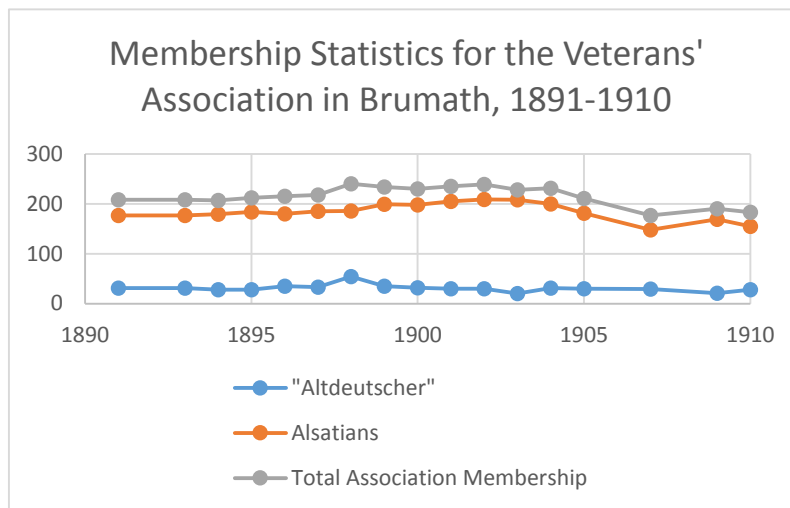
**Figure 20: Membership Statistics for the Veterans' Association in Schiltigheim, 1891-1910**<sup>1</sup>



Year	German Immigrants (Altdeutscher)	Alsations	Total Association Membership
1891	33	97	130
1892	61	66	127
1893	44	58	102
1894	49	112	161
1895	56	137	193
1896	57	169	226
1897	57	185	242
1898	59	187	246
1899	58	189	247
1900	56	185	241
1901	55	154	209
1902	59	132	191
1903	59	132	191
1904	65	143	208
1905	70	153	223
1907	100	129	229
1909	119	170	289
1910	86	164	250

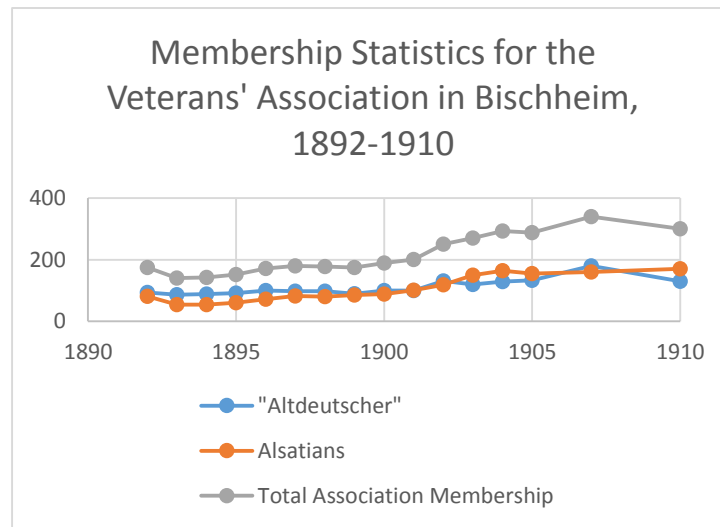
<sup>1</sup> See 398 D 136, ADBR. All of the statistics from Figures 6-9 came from a compilation of membership number reports.

**Figure 21: Membership Statistics for the Veterans' Association of Brumath, 1891-1910**



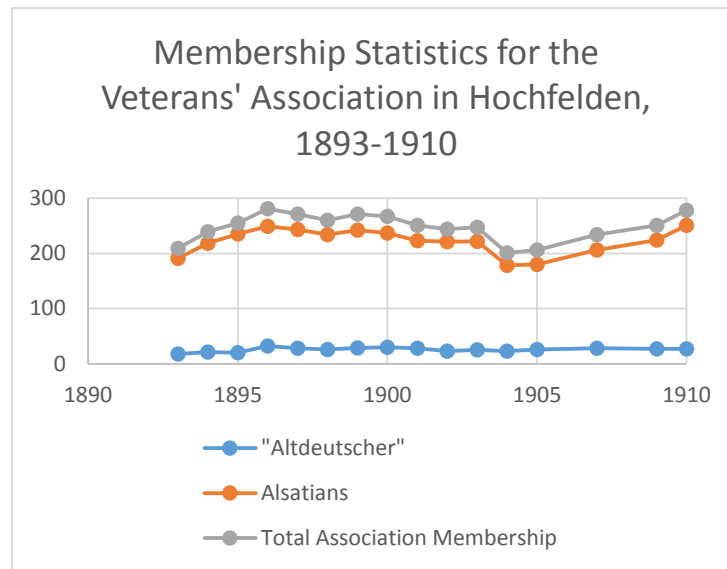
Year	German Immigrants (Altdeutscher)	Alsatians	Total Association Membership
1891	31	177	208
1893	31	177	208
1894	28	179	207
1895	28	184	212
1896	35	180	215
1897	33	185	218
1898	54	186	240
1899	35	199	234
1900	32	198	230
1901	30	205	235
1902	30	209	239
1903	20	208	228
1904	31	200	231
1905	30	181	211
1907	29	148	177
1909	21	169	190
1910	28	155	183

**Figure 22: Membership Statistics for the Veterans' Association in Bischheim, 1892-1910**



Year	German Immigrants (Altdeutscher)	Alsatians	Total Association Membership
1892	94	81	175
1893	86	54	140
1894	89	54	143
1895	92	60	152
1896	100	72	172
1897	98	82	180
1898	98	80	178
1899	90	85	175
1900	100	89	189
1901	100	101	201
1902	131	119	250
1903	120	150	270
1904	129	164	293
1905	133	155	288
1907	180	160	340
1910	130	170	300

**Figure 23: Membership Statistics for the Veterans' Association in Hochfelden, 1893-1910**



Year	German Immigrants (Altdeutscher)	Alsatians	Total Association Membership
1893	18	191	209
1894	21	218	239
1895	20	235	255
1896	32	249	281
1897	28	243	271
1898	26	234	260
1899	29	242	271
1900	30	237	267
1901	28	223	251
1902	23	221	244
1903	25	222	247
1904	23	178	201
1905	26	180	206
1907	28	206	234
1909	27	224	251
1910	27	251	278

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1 AL 157/3

1 AL 157/6

1 AL 157/8

1 AL 173/1

1 AL 190/1

5 AL 93

22 AL 99

27 AL 151

27 AL 169

27 AL 209

27 AL 318

27 AL 335

27 AL 497

27 AL 499

27 AL 891

27 AL 937

27 AL 939

27 AL 994

47 AL 44/1

47 AL 90

47 AL 92

69 AL 450

69 AL 462

69 AL 601

69 AL 651

69 AL 658

87 AL 87

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