

Victim Soldiers

German-Jewish Refugees in the
American Armed Forces during World
War II

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Abstract

Jews who served in the American armed forces during World War II has been a topic that has received significant attention from scholars. Yet among the subgroups of American Jews who served in the American military, were German-Jewish refugees, whose wartime experiences were quite different from those of their fellow native-born American Jewish G.I.s. This study looks at how and why German-Jewish refugees were a distinctive group in the American military.

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To all those German-Jewish refugees who fled Nazi-Germany and returned back in American uniform with dignity and bravery, I thank you for your inspiration. I dedicate this study to the memory of those of you who perished fighting.

Introduction

On one of those dreary December mornings [in 1918]—I was then sixteen years of age—I walked up to a window of the classroom on the third floor of the building before class had started and looked down upon the street. What I saw hit me like an electric shock. There on the street corner stood the “enemy,” a stranger who seemed to be from another world, the first soldier of the American occupation forces. With a map in his hands he tried to get his bearings, apparently bewildered and uncertain. In the unfamiliar uniform he was a figure both fascinating and awe-inspiring, harbinger of an uncertain future.

Thirty years later, a uniformed American stood once again on the same street corner. The generation that had seen the collapse of imperial Germany became witness to yet another foreign occupation. This time the whole of Germany was occupied by the armies of the Allies.

That American on the street corner was I.¹

—Joachim von Elbe

Between 1933 and 1943, approximately 90,000 German-Jews fled Nazi Germany and immigrated to the United States. Hitler had wanted to create an “Aryan” Germany, a Germany without Jews. Little did Hitler know that German-Jews such as Joachim von Elbe, whom he had victimized and who had fled Nazi Germany, would return in American uniform to help to defeat the German army. Some 9,500 German-Jewish refugees served in the American armed forces during World War II, the majority of

¹ Joachim von Elbe was born in Hamm, Germany in 1902, and grew up in the city of Neuwied. Von Elbe grew up to become a district government official. He was not raised as a Jew, but his grandmother was a descendent of the famous German-Jewish Mendelssohn family. When the Nazis came to power, Joachim von Elbe was discharged from his government position because he was considered a *Mischling* of the second degree. He immigrated to the United States in 1934. Drafted into the U.S. Army in October of 1942, he was transferred to Camp Ritchie for training in military intelligence. Von Elbe was then sent to Europe as an intelligence agent. Shortly after the war, he became a member of the legal department of the U.S. military government in Germany. Joachim von Elbe’s experience can be found in his autobiography: Joachim von Elbe, *Witness to History: A Refugee from the Third Reich Remembers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 1 n.1.

whom were sent to the European theater of operations.² Typical American soldiers fought for their country; German-Jewish refugees fought for the United States and for personal reasons. Unlike most victims of Nazi persecution, German-Jewish refugees as American soldiers had a means for revenge. German-Jewish refugees were not only enthusiastic about fighting, but their native knowledge about the enemy was unsurpassed; they knew the German language, the psychology, and geography better than any other group of American soldiers. As both German-Jewish victims and American soldiers, German-Jewish refugees were unique among those who served. They were Americanized by their military service, yet at the same time, they confronted and came to terms with their victimhood during their return to Germany.

The aim of this study is to explore two key questions. Why were German-Jewish refugees distinct not only among other soldiers, but also among Jews? And in what ways did their lives in Nazi Germany affect their military service?

² Previous less precise estimates hover at 7000. See Arnold Paucker "German Jews in the Resistance 1933-1945: The Facts and the Problems," *The German Resistance Memorial Center*, 1985, 58. My estimate is based upon data compiled from the following sources: Maurice R. Davie. *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 35, 38, 44. S.C. Kohs "Jewish War Records of World War II," *National Jewish Welfare Board*, 1946, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Immigration by region and selected country of last residence: fiscal years 1820-2004," Table 2, <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/yearbook/YrBk04Im.htm>. The equation is as follows: Total German-Jewish immigration from 1933-1943 (89,300), divided by percentage of males (43.5%), divided by the percentage of refugees between ages 18-44 who served in the Armed Forces (50%), divided by the percentage of German-Jewish refugees between ages 18-44 (49%), equals approximately 9,500 men who served in the American armed forces. A total of about 550,000 Jews served in the American armed forces, thus German-Jewish refugees were less than two percent of the total.

Armed Resistance?

Jewish victims responded to Nazi persecution in a number of ways. Raul Hilberg, a seminal scholar of Holocaust studies, has proposed five different categories of victim responses to the Nazis: “resistance, an attempt to alleviate or nullify the threat, evasion, paralysis and compliance.”³ According to Hilberg, the magnitude of destruction caused by the Holocaust was a result of almost completely passive responses— compliance and paralysis. In his view, few Jewish victims responded actively. Asserting that the general reaction pattern of Jews can be characterized by passivity and a lack of resistance, Hilberg had assumed that Jewish resistance was only limited only to armed resistance, and that any Jewish resistance “could not seriously impede or retard the progress of destructive operations.”⁴ Other scholars, such as Yehuda Bauer, have disagreed with what Hilberg has defined as resistance. They assert that not only were there many forms of unarmed resistance, but also that armed resistance has a wider scope than uprisings in ghettos, forests, and camps. Bauer’s definition of Jewish resistance is far broader than Hilberg’s: “any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters.” Bauer included, “Jews who fought as individuals in non-Jewish groups [as] the result of specifically Jewish concerns.”⁵ Another definition of resistance by historian of anti-Nazi resistance, Henri Michel has declared: “resistance was the maintenance of self-

³ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, Student ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 293-305.

⁴ *Ibid*, 294.

⁵ Yehuda Bauer, *The Emergence from Powerlessness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 27-33.

respect.” He wrote that “acceptance of defeat whilst still capable of fighting, was to lose one’s self respect; self respect dictated that one should not yield to the blandishments of collaboration.”⁶

While the subject of my study, German-Jews in the American armed forces during World War II, would appear to fall under Bauer’s and Michels’ definitions, there is a world of difference between the resistance of suffering Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe and the German-Jewish refugees who served the United States as soldiers in uniform, part of a well-fed, well-supplied army. Historian of German-Jewish resistance, Arnold Pauker, who was also a German-Jewish refugee who fought in the British Army, has argued that German-Jewish refugee soldiers saw it as their duty to serve their country just as any other soldiers did, and that refugee service in the military was not resistance at all.⁷

There is something that is special, however, about German-Jewish refugees who served in the American armed forces. Unlike most Jewish victims in Europe, who could not obtain arms to fight, they had arms because they were members of the American military. Unlike their fellow native-born American soldiers, they were victims fighting against the regime that had oppressed them personally. Like resistance fighters, German-Jewish refugee G.I.s were motivated by revenge, and the will to maintain their dignity. They were different as soldiers, yet the same as victims. Rather than calling German-Jewish refugee soldiers “resistance fighters”— because in the strictest sense they were not—I propose to call them “victim soldiers.”

⁶ Henri Michel, *The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe, 1939-1945* (London: History Book Club, 1972), 247.

⁷ Arnold Pauker and Raul Hilberg were Jewish refugees who fought in the Allied armed forces during World War II, yet neither would classify their service as a form of Jewish resistance.

The military service of German-Jewish refugees has seldom been discussed in the context of victim response. The story of German-Jewish refugees who took flight from Germany usually ends with their successful acceptance in the United States. Once free from the oppression of Nazi Germany, the victimhood of German-Jewish refugees vanishes. However, I stress that if one has been a victim, he remains a victim forever—this is to say that this aspect of their identity remained central and framed their service in the army. When they returned to Europe as soldiers, German-Jewish refugees had a victim’s vengeance to destroy the regime that had persecuted them.

Terminology:

The use of the term “Refugee?”

I have chosen to use the term “refugee” to describe the Jewish immigrants from Germany, rather than other language that has also been used, such as exile and émigré. The term exile implies that Jews in the United States were living in a foreign land as Germans. The vast majority of German-Jews who immigrated to the United States, however, had no intention of returning to Germany, and wanted to become Americans. The term exile better describes Jews who were expelled from Jerusalem in 586 BCE when the Babylonians conquered them. Jews who were expelled during the Babylonian exile remained Jews in Babylonia, and thus lived in exile. For German-Jewish immigrants, the United States was their new home. The word “émigré,” while more fitting than “exile,” still is not the most exact term. “Émigré,” does not necessarily denote the hazardous circumstances that caused Jews to flee. I therefore use the term “refugee”

as it indicates victim status and active desire to remain in the United States. “Refugee” was defined by the League of Nations at Geneva on 10 February 1938.

- a. Persons possessing or having possessed German nationality and not possessing any other nationality
- b. Stateless persons who have left German territory after being established therein and who are proved not to enjoy, in law or in fact, the protection of the German government;
- c. Persons who leave Germany for reasons of purely personal convenience are not included in this definition.⁸

Refugees who immigrated to the United States from 1933 to 1943 were not assigned a specific category in American immigration laws. Consequently, refugees experienced neither advantages nor disadvantages under United States immigration laws, nor were they distinguished by any statistics. Thus, I use the term “refugee” as it was described by the League of Nations in 1938 with no legal value to American immigration law.

Who is a Jew?

When I speak of the Jewish component of “German-Jewish refugee,” I do not refer to how German-Jews identified themselves, but how the Nazis identified Jews. Thus, anyone who fled Germany because the Nazis considered them Jewish or *Mischling*

⁸ George L. Warren “The Refugee and the War,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 223 (September 1942): 92-99.

of any degree by the First Regulation to the Reich Citizenship Act —the third of the Nuremberg Laws — I denote as Jewish.⁹ This is not to say that I agree in anyway with the Nazis definition of a Jew, nor do I agree with any racial theory. I am simply studying a particular group that the Nazis persecuted. This study does not deal with the religious component of Jewish identity, but rather the element that caused Jews to be persecuted as a whole group.

Who is considered a German?

My study focuses on only those refugees who were German-born and lived in the boundaries of Germany before the expansion of the Reich starting in 1938. Many other related studies include Austrians with Germans; I have not.

Sources

The topic of German-Jewish refugees in the Allied armed forces has received surprisingly little attention from scholars. The studies to date are short articles, and are not extensive analyses. The literature is even more scarce in the specific area of German-Jewish refugees in the American armed forces. Historian John P. Fox has written two articles in the *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* that discuss the role of German and Austrian

⁹ By Nazi law, a Jew was anyone who was descended from three or more grandparents who were full Jews by race. Someone who was descended from two such grandparents was a *Mischling* of the first degree and from one grandparent, a *Mischling* of the second degree.

Jewish refugees in Britain's armed forces.¹⁰ Other historians who have touched briefly upon the military service of German-Jewish refugees in the Allied forces during World War II include Walter Laqueur, Maurice Davie, and Arnold Paucker.¹¹

There are numerous publications concerning American-Jewish participation in the American military. Historian Deborah Dash Moore has recently published *G.I. Jews*, a study of American-Jewish military service through the eyes of fifteen Jewish soldiers.¹² All except one of her subjects (a Polish-born Jew) are American-born Jews. Statistical research about Jews in the American armed forces is compiled in various publications produced by the *Bureau of War Records of the National Jewish Welfare Board*.¹³ Since German-Jewish refugees made up less than 2 percent of the total Jewish participation in the American military, German-Jewish refugees are not separated in analyses of the overall participation by Jews. I shall argue in later chapters, however, that German-

¹⁰ See: John P. Fox, "German and Austrian Jews in Britain's Armed Forces and British and German Citizenship Policies 1939-1945," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 37 (1992): 415-459. And, John P. Fox, "German and Austrian-Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces 1939-1945," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 45 (1995): 21-50

¹¹ See: Walter Laqueur, *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees From Nazi Germany* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2000). Maurice R. Davie. *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947). And, Paucker, "German Jews in the Resistance."

¹² Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews How World War II Changed A Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). See also: J. George Fredman and Louis A. Falk, *Jews in American Wars* (Washington D.C.: The Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, 1954), Joseph W. Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat: " Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), Mac Davis, *Jews Fight Too* (New York: Jordon Pub. Co., 1945).

¹³ The Bureau of War Records of the National Jewish Welfare Board, *American Jews in World War II: The Story of 550,000 fighters for Freedom*, vol. 1 & 2 (USA: The Dial Press, 1947). And, National Jewish Welfare Board, *Compiling Jewish War Records of World War 2* vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946).

Jewish refugee military participation diverges from the general American-Jewish experience.

Historian Guy Stern has been the only person to date to publish any study focusing directly on German-Jewish participation in the American armed forces. Stern's analyses, which appear in the form of two articles in the *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, deal specifically with German-Jewish refugees in military intelligence.¹⁴ As Stern has noted, further research in the area is yet to come. "Chronicling the participation in the Second World War of Jews from Germany and Austria continues now as before to be a scholarly desideratum." Guy Stern's research was extremely helpful and inspirational in my own work.

Historian Steven Remy is also currently working on a study (not yet published) that parallels my own. Remy has shared with me pieces of his own project, "The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project," and it is cited throughout my study. Dr. Remy has been a great help, and a great influence throughout the course of my research.

Two documentary films have recently been produced that record the experiences of German-Jewish refugees in American armed forces during World War II. The first, *The Ritchie Boys*, documents the experiences of ten veterans who were trained at Camp Ritchie, the center for military intelligence during World War II.¹⁵ *The Ritchie Boys* deals specifically with soldiers who were trained in military intelligence, yet seven of the ten Camp Ritchie veterans who appear in the film were German-Jewish refugees. The other

¹⁴ Guy Stern "In the Service of American Intelligence: German-Jewish Exiles in the War against Hitler." *Leo Baeck Year Book* 37 (1992): 461-477. And, Guy Stern, "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of US Intelligence: The Post-War Years," *The Leo Baeck Yearbook* 40 (1995): 51-62.

¹⁵ *The Ritchie Boys*, dir. Christian Bauer (2004; Germany, Tangram Productions).

film that has been made, but is not yet in production, is *About Face*, which documents German and Austrian Jewish refugees who served in both the American and British armed forces during World War II.¹⁶ The director, Steven Karras, is also currently working on written research in the area. We have exchanged notes on our findings, and shared source material with one another.

This study draws upon numerous sources in order to build a framework for the experiences of German-Jewish refugees in the American armed forces during World War II. I have conducted several personal interviews myself, including interviews I conducted during a previous project while I worked at the Judaica museum. I also received interview transcripts from other scholars doing similar research. In addition, I have researched published memoirs and biographies of German-Jewish refugee soldiers, including Hans Habe, Victor Brombert, and Henry Kissinger. Perhaps the most useful primary source material were the hundreds of articles written in the German-Jewish refugee weekly newspaper, *Aufbau*. I reviewed writing from 1933 to 1945 written in both English and German in order to draw upon the experiences of German-Jewish refugees immigrating to the United States and serving in World War II. Most of the articles that I reviewed were in English, but I also had some German sections translated.

My Personal Interest

My personal interest in German-Jewish refugees who served in the American armed forces during World War II, began after I came across a collection of wartime

¹⁶ *About Face: The Story of Jewish Refugee Soldiers of World War II*, dir. Steven Karras (2006; Chicago, Buddy Pictures Inc).

correspondence written between my German-born grandfather Walter Spiegel, and his father (my great-grandfather) Julian Spiegel, while Walter was serving in the American army in Europe.¹⁷ As I read through the letters, I began to realize how particular Walter's experience was as a German-born American soldier. Not only did Walter's intellect influence his brilliant analyses of both German and American soldiers, but his own German background allowed him to perceive the perpetrator in a manner few other Americans could comprehend. I therefore became interested not only in Walter's letters, but also those German-Jewish-refugee soldiers, who, like him, also served during World War II.

The Scope of this Study

My analysis of German-Jewish refugees in the American armed forces during World War II begins much earlier than the soldiers' induction into the American military. As I have already indicated, German-Jewish refugees were different from other soldiers in the American military in that they themselves were victims of the Nazis. Many of them had been imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. I therefore devote the first two

¹⁷ Walter was born 7 November 1922 in Berlin, Germany. His father, Julian Spiegel, had designed German warplanes during World War I. In 1931, Walter immigrated to the United States with his mother, in order to reunite with Julian Spiegel who had immigrated a year earlier. Walter matriculated to the University of Pennsylvania in 1941. A year later, after the United States had entered the war, Walter enlisted in the army reserve. After basic training, he was sent to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at Lehigh University for further engineering training. When part of the program was cut, Walter was assigned to the 84th Infantry Division and sent to Europe. After being wounded, Walter was subsequently transferred to the 333rd Engineering Regiment. Walter Spiegel, personal interview, 5 December 2005.

chapters of my thesis to discussion of their lives growing up and their immigration to and adjustment in the United States. Chapter three of my thesis, which is perhaps the most important section, deals with how the German-Jewish refugee soldiers' experiences were often distinctive among soldiers, both because of the discrimination they faced, and the special positions in which they served. The last chapter deals with the experience of returning to Europe as soldiers and, more specifically, to the country of their birth.

It is important to note the limitations of that this study. I focus mainly upon German-Jewish refugee participation in Europe, and touch only briefly upon those who served in the Pacific. I also do not deal with German-Jewish refugee women in the American armed forces, even though they too participated. There were also German-Jewish refugees who died in combat, and were not able to record their stories; their tales are lost.

Because the exploits of soldiers are individual in nature, one study cannot embrace the entire German-Jewish refugee experience. I have tried, however, to draw from as many different sources as possible in order to explore the questions with which I began: Why were German-Jewish refugees distinct not only among other soldiers, but also among other Jews? And in what ways did their lives in Nazi Germany affect their military service?

- 1 -

From the Weimar Republic to Nazi Germany:

Growing Up Between Two Eras

German-Jewish refugees who served in the American armed forces during World War II typically were born between 1914 and 1927. Ironically, it was their fathers who made up the generation of German-Jews who fought against America in World War I.¹ Born before the Nazis came to power, the generation of German-Jewish refugees that served in World War II was raised during the Weimar period (1918-1933), and later lived through much of the Nazi era. In order to understand the later thinking and behavior of these men, it is important to examine in some detail the environment in which they grew up.

The Weimar era was a period of Jewish cultural renaissance.² Jewish artistic, literary, and scholarly expression flourished. This type of secular expression was not exclusive to the Weimar period, nor was it limited only to Jews. What made the Weimar period a true Jewish Renaissance was the emergence of distinctive Jewish expression. The Weimar era was at once a period of increased Jewish integration and acceptance and of heightened Jewish consciousness. A unique balance of secularism and Jewish distinctiveness enabled German-Jews to become both socially accepted and communally coagulated.

The German-Jewish population was composed of many types of Jews: Orthodox, Reform, secular, Zionists, and also many Jews who did not associate with Judaism, but were later deemed Jews by the Nazis. According to the German census of 1925, there

¹ Historian George Mosse explores the German-Jewish World War I experience: George L. Mosse. *The Jews and the German War Experience 1914-1918* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1977).

² For a detailed study of the Weimar period as a “Renaissance of Jewish Culture,” see Michael Brenner. *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

were 564,519 Jews in Germany (less than 1% of the overall German population), comprising a heterogeneous mixture varying in geographic distribution, occupation, class, customs, and intellectual characteristics.³ Despite their diversity, German-Jews had common trends. Measured against the overall population of Germany, German-Jews had distinct demographic patterns: Jews were more often employed in trade and commerce (61.3% compared to 19.4% of the overall population); Jews were not farmers (1.7% compared to 28.9%); almost half the Jewish population was self-employed (46% compared to 16.4%); and Jews made up a greater number of white collar employees (33% compared to 17%).⁴ Geographically, Jews tended to live in cities; over one-third of the German-Jewish population lived in Berlin.⁵ And politically, German-Jews leaned toward liberalism.

The majority of Jewish school children attended German public schools during the Weimar period. Still, a significant percentage attended Jewish schools, most particularly in urban areas. In Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Cologne for example, as many as a half of the Jewish youth attended Jewish schools.⁶ Jewish urbanization led to a steady decline in the number of Jewish elementary schools in rural areas of Germany. Conversely, in the capital city of Berlin, five new elementary schools opened between 1919 and 1927, but the ratio of Jewish students attending Jewish schools was never as

³ See Herbert A. Strauss "Immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America" *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16 (1971): 76.

⁴ Data for these statistics was taken from the 1933 German census figures, and was documented by Herbert A. Strauss, *Ibid*, 77.

⁵ See: Walter Laqueur. *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees From Nazi Germany* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2000), 1.

⁶ A detailed analysis of the rise of the Jewish education system (in contradicting previous studies of decline) can be found in: Brenner, 59-60.

high as in Germany's other major cities.⁷ Later during the Nazi years, Jews would only be allowed to attend Jewish schools.

Almost immediately after the Nazis came to power (30 January 1933), Nazi antisemitism afflicted the German-Jewish population. On 1 April 1933, the Nazis began a state-sponsored boycott of all Jewish businesses and of all Jewish professionals.⁸

Although ultimately unsuccessful, the psychological affects of the boycott struck directly at German-Jewish morale. Shortly after, on 7 April 1933, the Nazi government passed the "Law for the Restoration of Regular Civil Service" and the "Law Concerning the Admission to Legal Professions." These acts forced all Jewish civil servants and all Jews in judicial positions to retire. Within weeks of Hitler coming to power, the Nazis stripped Jews of many of their rights and privileges as citizens. Throughout 1933, the Nazis continued to pass antisemitic legislation barring Jews from various professions and social institutions; by the end of 1933, Jews were largely socially and politically disenfranchised. During 1933 alone, between 7 and 8 percent of Germany's Jewish population fled the country, mostly to other European nations.⁹

Antisemitic laws and edicts affected German-Jewish youth both directly and indirectly during this transition period. As historian Debórah Dwork notes, most of the legislation only affected the adult generation, and its "impact on the children's world was filtered through their parents."¹⁰ The boycott of 1 April, for example, crippled the business of the Jaburg family department store and forced the entire Jaburg family to

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W Norton, 2002), 69.

⁹ Ibid, 77.

¹⁰ Debórah Dwork, *Children With A Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 13.

move from Ihringen to the larger city of Freiburg. Carl Jaburg was seven years old at the time.

As soon as the Nazis came to power in 1933 [the Nazi leadership] made life miserable for my father and his business They started boycotting the store, and smashing windows We moved to the next largest city, Freiburg, and we opened up a smaller store. We did not believe that the Nazis would last very long, we thought it was only a temporary move In the city of Freiburg, life at that time was not yet difficult for Jews.¹¹

Jewish youth were directly affected by antisemitic legislation that forced them out of state supported schools. The first stage of this process started with the April 1933 legislation entitled “Law Against the Overcrowding of German schools.” This law established a quota of 1.5 percent total enrollment for Jews, yet proved to be ineffective due to many exemptions of Jewish students.¹² Still, this law was a psychological blow directly affecting children. Jews who remained in public schools were subject to blatant antisemitism in the educational system. In many instances, Jewish children had to sit apart from their classmates. Teachers and administrators barred Jewish children from school events. And no matter their academic caliber, Jewish children were often given

¹¹ Carl Jaburg was born in 1926 in Ihringen, Germany. In 1933, he and his family moved to the larger city of Freiburg. In 1941, he and his immediate family fled Germany, and immigrated to the United States. In 1945, he was drafted, and assigned to the Tank Corps. He was sent to the Pacific theater of operations. Carl Jaburg, video interview from the collection of “The Judaica Museum of the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale,” interview by Joshua Franklin, July 2004.

¹² Exemptions to the “Law Against the Overcrowding of German schools” law included Jewish children of World War I veterans, children of mixed marriages, and Jewish children of foreign citizenship. These exemptions made up a large percentage of the Jewish population. See: Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 94-106.

lower grades.¹³ The extent of antisemitism in the educational system varied, and was more prevalent in smaller towns than in larger cities like Berlin. As antisemitic legislation progressed, and more Jewish children began to be expelled from public schools, the ratio of Jews attending Jewish schools skyrocketed. In 1932, only 14 percent of the 60,000 Jewish school children attended Jewish schools, in 1934 the number increased to 23 percent, to 52 percent in 1936, and to 60 percent in 1937. In November 1938, Jews were altogether barred from public schools.¹⁴ Many social and communal ties of German-Jewish children had been forged without racial or religious distinction. The transition from public to Jewish schools prompted many of these children to confront their Jewish identity as something that caused them to be expelled from school. In the Jewish schools, however, German-Jewish youth found a new community; the segregation of schools only strengthened Jewish communal cohesion which, in turn, also strengthened German-Jewish sustenance.

As Jewish youth cohesion increased, so too did membership rates of German-Jewish youth groups. As the German-Jewish youth became segregated from the “Aryan” youth, Jewish youth groups became a source of camaraderie, distraction from the Nazi world, and hope for the adolescent Jews. In 1932, about 25 to 30 percent of German-Jews between the ages of twelve and twenty-five belonged to such Jewish youth groups (approximately 25,000 Jews).¹⁵ By 1936, Jewish participation in youth groups had increased to about 60 percent (approximately 50,000 Jews).¹⁶ Jewish youth groups adhered to many types of ideological orientations: there were religious groups such as

¹³ See Kaplan, 95.

¹⁴ Statistics from Kaplan, 103.

¹⁵ Ibid, 109.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Ersa, Zionist groups such as *Blau-Weiss*, Communist groups such as *Kameraden*, and even German-nationalist groups like *Schwarzes Fähnlein*. Antisemitic legislation limited the activities of many groups. They were prohibited to camp in public places, wear uniforms, and to appear in group formation. Tom B., a German-Jewish teenager at the time, was a member of the group *Schwarzes Fähnlein*, a group of both boys and girls. “I became very active in that group. Matter of fact, I became the leader of the group [*Schwarzes Fähnlein*] in Frankfurt. And the only thing we could do at that time of course was going for hikes and we had meetings every couple of weeks and just talked about general things.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, in many cases, Jewish youth groups played a significant role influencing their members’ political judgments and making younger people more eager to flee Germany. Zionist organizations such as *Blau-Weiss* trained Jewish youth for future life in Palestine by teaching Hebrew, kibbutz work, and Jewish history. Many of these German-Jewish young people eventually made their way out of Nazi Germany and a number of the young men later served in the American military. Indeed, many of those who trained for life in Palestine ended up in America, as few got entry papers for their desired destination. Many radical young Zionists thus came to find their way to America, and the young men among them into the United States Army.¹⁸

The event that caused the largest exodus of German-Jews from Nazi Germany, was the November Pogrom, also known as *Kristallnacht*, in 1938. If there was any bit of

¹⁷ For privacy purposes, Tom B.’s last name has been abbreviated. Tom B. was born 22 October 1916 in Hamburg Germany. On 9 November 1938, he was arrested and imprisoned in Dachau. In March 1939, after having been imprisoned for five months, Tom B. fled to England. In England, Tom was interned, and subsequently in November of 1940, he immigrated to the United States. After being drafted into the army, he served in the European theater apart of the 79th infantry division. Tom B., “The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project,” interview by Steven Remy, 9 July 2004.

¹⁸ See Laqueur, 7.

optimism about the security of Jews in Germany until that point, it was shattered by the state-sponsored, centrally organized pogrom against property on 9 November and the subsequent state-sponsored centrally organized action against the people on 10 November.¹⁹ The destruction of Jewish businesses and synagogues throughout the Reich was followed by the arrests of thousands of Jews throughout Germany. Those who were arrested were sent to concentration camps: 11,000 were sent to Dachau; 9,845 to Buchenwald; 9,000 to Sachsenhausen.²⁰ Erwin Weinberg, only sixteen years old at the time, was arrested with his father and shipped to Buchenwald.

I was picked up the morning after *Kristallnacht*, together with all [the] male Jews they [the Nazis] could find, and shipped to Buchenwald I was only sixteen. There was no extermination policy yet. The policy was to get rid of the Jews, get them out of the country. While my father and I were locked up in Buchenwald, my mother desperately tried to get me a student invitation from various places all around the world to get out. My father got out earlier than I did, he got out after three weeks, because he happened to have his discharge paper from the German army with him Many others had used it [their discharge papers] for toilet paper. I got out after about a month because my mother did get an actual invitation from a Yeshiva in England I was out of the country before the end of the year.²¹

For those like Erwin Weinberg and his father who were in concentration camps, the only way to be released was proof of readiness to emigrate.²² With visas in hand, the

¹⁹ Dwork and van Pelt, 101.

²⁰ See Kaplan, 122.

²¹ Erwin Weinberg was born on 3 January 1922 in Fulda Germany. His father was in the German artillery in the First World War. Erwin grew up with an Orthodox-Jewish background. After immigrating to the United States in 1940, he was drafted by the American military in February 1943. He served as an Air Force Intelligence officer in the European theater. Erwin Weinberg, "The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project" interview by Steven Remy, August 3, 2004.

²² Kaplan, 129.

Weinberg family wasted no time in fleeing the country; they left before the end of 1938. During the November Pogrom, at least one hundred Jews were murdered by the mobs, and many others perished while imprisoned in concentration camps.²³ In addition, many Jews took their own lives. After the November Pogrom, emigration from Germany became the highest priority within the German-Jewish community. The period from the November Pogrom until the end of 1941 proved to be the height of German-Jewish immigration to the United States; approximately 50,000 German-Jews immigrated to America during this time.²⁴

German-Jewish refugees who ended up serving in the United States military had emigrated from Germany at various points throughout the Nazi era, and some German-Jews (my grandfather among them) had come as immigrants during the Weimar era. These men's experiences with antisemitism and German culture varied greatly depending on their age and the year they emigrated. Many had been victimized to varying degrees, including those who had been imprisoned in concentration camps. All of these emigrants, however, would remember their past lives in Germany, and become victim soldiers in the American military as they served against the country in which they had been raised.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ This estimate is based on statistics from Davie, 29, 35.

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**Emigration from Germany and Immigration to
the United States**

American immigration policy in the 1930s made it extremely difficult for Jews in Germany and throughout Europe to obtain visas and flee to America. Because of the Great Depression, the government had feared that newcomers would not be able to find employment, and thus would become a burden on American society. Consequently, in 1930, in addition to the immigration quotas already established in 1917, 1921, 1924, and 1929, President Herbert Hoover requested that the State Department seek administrative means to curb immigration.¹ The solution to Hoover's aim was the reinterpretation of a provision in the Immigration Act of 1917, which "excluded persons likely to become public charges." Before the Depression, this clause —referred to as the LPC clause— presented no real obstacle for immigrants. After its reinterpretation, however, the United States required immigrants either to possess enough money to support themselves without a job, or to produce affidavits indicating that relatives or friends in the United States would support them if they could not find work. Moreover, the American government mandated consulates in Europe to require of immigrants other documents that were in many cases impossible to obtain in order to get a visa.² In the months following the Hoover administration's modifications to American immigration policy, immigration decreased 85 percent.³

¹ For a detailed analysis on American immigration policy during the 1930s, and the problems concerning the reaction of the United States to Europe's refugee problem, see: David Wyman. *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). And: David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

² Required documents for a visa were: passport, birth certificate, marriage certificate (if applicant was married), divorce or death certificates if husband or wife was previously married, police certificate, military certificate, photographs, and evidence of assets (proof of employment or proof of support). For a detailed record of refugee statistics, see Maurice R. Davie. *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947).

³ Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 4.

During the Roosevelt Administration (starting in 1933), immigration into the United States again began to increase, in part because of the greater flow of refugees out of Germany, and also because of changes made in American immigration policy. In 1935, Roosevelt directed the State Department to accord people forced to leave Germany “the most considerate attention and the most generous and favorable treatment possible under the laws.”⁴ Still, however, American immigration quotas remained largely unfilled. Only in 1939, in the wake of the November Pogrom (1938), was the German-Austrian immigration quota ever filled completely. Even a full quota, however, could not accommodate the demand for refugee immigration into the United States. Many bills were introduced into Congress—the Wagner-Rogers Children’s Bill, the Celler Bill, the King-Havenner Alaskan Bill— in order to expand the quotas for refugees. Sadly, there was no change in legislation to expand immigration quotas for refugees.⁵ In June 1940, United States immigration policy again became more restrictive, by prohibiting immigration directly from Germany and the rest of central and eastern Europe. This halved the refugee flow from Europe.⁶ By late 1941, the Nazis had given up upon their policy of forcing Jewish emigration, and taken on a policy of annihilation. This coupled with the restrictions of United States immigration policy, crippled immigration after 1941.

⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁵ For details on failed legislation, see: Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 67-115.

⁶ Ibid, 184-285.

**Percent of the German-Austrian Immigration Quota filled from 1933-1944
(27,370 immigrants)⁷**

Year % of Quota Filled	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	Average
	5.3	13.7	20.2	24.3	42.1	65.3	100	95.3	47.7	17.4	4.7	4.8	36.7

During the 1930s, in an effort to counter anti-refugee sentiment, various groups circulated information concerning facts and statistics about refugee immigration into the United States. Information was spread in newspapers, magazine articles, radio broadcasts, in speeches, and most particularly in pamphlets prepared especially for this purpose. An article in the German-Jewish refugee newspaper *Aufbau* on 15 July 1939 entitled “The Truth About Refugee Immigration: A Few Amazing Immigration Figures,” is one such example of a publication used to draw attention to the failure of the government to fill the immigration quotas.

Present U.S. Immigration Greatly Exaggerated: For the fiscal year ending June 30, 1938, the year of the so-called “great refugee immigration,” there was a net immigration into this country for permanent residence of only 43,685. Figures for 1938 appear even smaller when compared with the immigration figures of 1929, the last year before the depression, and figures for 1924, the high point of post war immigration. In 1929 there was a net immigration increase for permanent residence of 210,475; in 1927, the net increase was 603,107. In other words, the net immigration was only one-fifth that of 1929 and one-fifteenth that of 1924. Based upon a population of 130,000,000 the 1938 net immigration to this country represented less than 4/100 of one percent of our population.⁸

⁷ Data for this chart provided by the Immigration and Naturalization Services. Cf. Gertrude Krichesky, “Quota Immigration, 1925-1944,” *Immigration and Naturalization Service* 12 vol. II (June 1945): 156-159.

⁸ “The Truth About Refugee Immigration: A Few Amazing Immigration Figures.” *Aufbau* July 15, 1939: 1-2.

Even before the Roosevelt Administration ceased all immigration directly from Germany (June 1941), there were difficulties involved with immigrating to the United States directly from the Reich. Many Jews who endeavored to immigrate to the United States, therefore fled first to another country in Europe. After having trouble immigrating directly from Germany to the United States in 1933, Erwin Weinberg escaped to England.

After Hitler came to power . . . my father was trying desperately to get out of the country. We had already applied for visas to the United States where there was a quota and you had a certain number . . . And the contemplation was that we could get out about the end of 1940 . . . I got out [of Buchenwald] about the tenth of December in 1938, and I was out of the country before the end of the year. I went to England, to Manchester, where a yeshiva had accepted me as a student. [We were interned] about three months after the Germans invaded France . . . I wound up on a racetrack where they had no horse races, so they used the horse stalls to house the internees. As it happened, we left England at that time [October 1940] for the United States.⁹

Another reason why German-Jews tended to flee first to other European countries was because they preferred to live in a more familiar European environment. It was only after the Reich began to take over Europe, that other European countries could no longer provide refuge for Jews; German-Jewish refugees then tried to flee to the United States. Victor Brombert and his family, for example, escaped to France as soon as the Nazis came to power in 1933. When Germany defeated France and occupied

⁹ Erwin Weinberg, "The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project" interview by Steven Remy, August 3, 2004.

Brombert's new home, he and his family then immigrated to the United States.¹⁰

Erwin Weinberg and Victor Brombert were lucky enough to be able to immigrate with their entire families intact. Guy Stern's family on the other hand, was able to afford one only visa to the United States. Guy emigrated alone at age fifteen in 1937, leaving behind his parents and his sister. Many German-Jewish families broke up during various ordeals of flight from Nazi Germany.¹¹ Carl Jaburg and his family escaped deportation and fled to the United States in 1941; like Guy Stern, Carl Jaburg also left part of his family behind.

My father had three sisters living in America that had emigrated before World War I. They had given us affidavits [but] we had a very high quota number. In October 1940, the first deportations took place in Germany and it happened to be in our area. At that time they were deported to the concentration camp Gurs in France. Two policemen came to pick us up for deportation, and one happened to be a buddy of my father in World War I. He arranged to leave us behind When the other people were deported, our number came up in early 1941 At that time both my grandmothers had come to live with us, . . . we all had

¹⁰ Victor Brombert was born in Berlin in 1923. His family had previously fled to Germany from Russia during the First World War because of the Russian Revolution. In 1933, after Hitler had come to power, Victor and his family fled to Paris. In 1941 after France became occupied by Germany, Victor and his family again fled, and immigrated to the United States. Victor Brombert was drafted in 1943, and was trained at Camp Ritchie to become an interrogator of prisoners of war (IPW). He served in the European theater. For a detailed account of Victor Brombert's wartime experiences, see: Victor Brombert. *Trains of Thought: From Paris to Omaha Beach, Memories of a Wartime Youth* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).

¹¹ Guy (Guenther) Stern was born on 14 January 1922 in Hildesheim, Germany. In 1937, Guy immigrated to the United States alone. His family of five was able to afford only one visa to the United States. Guy was drafted into the United States Army in 1942. After training at Camp Ritchie, Guy served in the European theater as an interrogator of prisoners of war (IPW). After the war, Stern became a Distinguished Professor for German at Wayne State University in Detroit, and has written about German-Jewish refugees in American military intelligence in the form of two articles in *the Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*. For more information on Guy Stern, see: Guy Stern, "The Americanisation of Günther" *German Life and Letters* 51:2 (April 1998). Guy is also featured in the documentary film: *The Ritchie Boys*, dir. Christian Bauer (2004; Germany, Tangram Productions).

affidavits, but when we went to the German Consulate, my parents, my sister and I got visas [but my grandmothers didn't,] they were left behind, . . . deported to Theresienstadt and then to Auschwitz.¹²

Those like the Jaburg family, with family or friends in the United States, obtained visas with the affidavits from their associations abroad. Other refugees managed to obtain visas through work permits. Compared with immigrants admitted in the decades prior to the 1930s, who were primarily from the working and peasant classes, the vast majority of the German refugees and immigrants in the 1930s were middle class and were made up of white-collar workers, professionals, businessmen, and manufacturers.¹³ The most common occupations among German immigrants and refugees were physicians, professors, scientists, and engineers.¹⁴ Walter Spiegel (my grandfather) was eight years old when he immigrated to the United States in 1931 with his mother. The Spiegel family received visas because Walter's father Julian was given the necessary proof of employment papers when he was recruited as an engineer with the Fokker Aircraft Company of America. In an effort to save family they left behind, Julius Spiegel returned to Germany in 1935 to convince his wife's parents and his own mother to emigrate; his wife's parents came later that year; his mother in 1939.

No matter how or when they arrived to the United States, all German-Jewish refugees faced the challenge of adapting to life anew in American society. Many of them

¹² Carl Jaburg, video interview from the collection of "The Judaica Museum of the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale," interview by Joshua Franklin, July 2004.

¹³ See Maurice R. Davie and Samuel Koenig. "Adjustment of Refugees to American Life" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 262 (March, 1949): 159-165.

¹⁴ Estimates for the Professional and Commercial Occupations of the Refugee Immigrants admitted to the United States between 1933-1944 can be found in Herbert A. Strauss "The immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America" *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16 (1971): 78.

were captivated by the promise of freedom and security projected by the Statue of Liberty. They had found that the “golden door” of immigration, as described by the poem inscribed on the statue pedestal (written by an earlier Jewish immigrant, Emma Lazarus), was selective, and only partially open. Still, the German immigrants embraced their new freedom.¹⁵ The United States was a new land, with a new culture, in a world very much unknown to them. As the German-Jewish-born historian Walter Laqueur (who immigrated to Palestine, not the United States) has explained:

Most Germans in the 1930s had a general idea what life was like in the neighboring European countries but knew very little about America except some stereotypes: cowboys and Indians and the tremendously popular books of Karl May with the nineteenth-century Wild West as a background, the skyscrapers, Hollywood (including the gangster movies), chewing gum, big cars, and cheap products sold in certain chain stores.¹⁶

Contrary to optimistic perceptions of immigrant acceptance, German-Jewish refugees found that the attitude of the American public towards them was hostile, and that in order to find acceptance, they would need to Americanize quickly.

Americans in the 1930s were apprehensive about immigrants. They accused the newcomers of usurping American jobs and prolonging the Depression. This was illogical as immigration levels during the 1930s were so low that they could not have had a significant affect on American unemployment.¹⁷ But prejudice is not logical. An article in

¹⁵ Poem entitled “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus: Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

¹⁶ Walter Laqueur, *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees From Nazi Germany* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2000), 129

¹⁷ Davie, 373.

Aufbau entitled “Don’t Make Scapegoats out of Refugees” cautioned against the negative American attitude towards refugees.

Refugees desperately concerned about where and how they can start life anew, bereft of possessions and professional status, devote little time to demonstration of proof of their antagonisms or resentments toward their persecutors No greater harm could be done to those who have already suffered so much . . . than to permit . . . fear and suspicion of refugees from Germany We have equal need to guard against the hysteria which is the nurturing soil of indiscriminate prejudice against . . . Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Poles and Jews in particular at present.¹⁸

The years of the Great Depression were marked by antisemitism that was, as historian Leonard Dinnerstein has described, “more virulent and more vicious than at any time before or since.”¹⁹ Social clubs, hotels, and neighborhoods excluded Jews. German-Jewish immigrants came to find that many native-born Americans discriminated against them on two accounts: for both their German and their Jewish origins. The already prevalent job bigotry against the American Jewish population made it even more difficult for German-Jewish immigrants who were dually-profiled.

The negative attitude of the American environment towards German-Jewish immigrants forced them to acculturate rapidly into American society. Historian Herbert A. Straus has labeled this general trend as “speedy Americanization.”²⁰ They were culturally prepared to do so by previous generations of German-Jews who had integrated into society by replacing aspects of their ethnic identity with the surrounding general

¹⁸ George Warren. “Don’t Make Scapegoats Out of Refugees” *Aufbau* November 8, 1940 2.

¹⁹ For in depth analysis regarding Antisemitism in America, see Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁰ See Strauss, 91.

culture and, at the same time, maintaining Jewish social and religious ties. The values that had helped German-Jews integrate into German society – emphasis on education, high culture, and economic drive—also advanced the social integration of German-Jewish immigrants into American society. William Zuckerman, a German-Jewish refugee, explained why German-Jews were apt for Americanization through an editorial in *Aufbau*. German-Jewish refugees, he claimed:

have behind them several generations of the best liberal culture of western Europe which is nearest in spirit to America. Their terrible experience with Nazism has inflamed them with a hatred for nationalism in all its manifestations even as the older Jewish immigrants of the last generation were imbued with hatred of political tyranny, and it makes them even more suitable for Americanization than those first lovers of American culture who gave birth to the idea of the melting pot.²¹

Evidently, the formula worked: “[German Jewish refugees] are accelerating the melting process among American Jews to a speed which the country has never seen before.”

Some young German-Jewish refugees enrolled in school immediately after immigrating, others went straight to full time jobs, and many did both. A number of older refugees who were not able to complete their schooling in Germany worked full time and attended night school. Refugees from Germany were seldom able to emigrate from Europe with savings, thus the reestablishment of economic stability in the United States was a principal concern. In September 1938, a month after (the future Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger arrived to the United States (age 15 at the time), he enrolled in George Washington High School. Designated by the school as having a “foreign language

²¹ William Zuckerman, “. . . Even More Suitable for Americanization” 30 October 1942, 3.

handicap,” Henry Kissinger soon proved that he not only could keep up academically, he excelled in all subjects including English and American history. Like many German-Jewish refugees, Kissinger found that he needed to work in addition to his schooling, in order to help his family obtain an economic foothold in American society. Thus, a year after his arrival, Kissinger went to work full time at the Leopold Ascher Brush Company and continued his education through night school.²² Although Kissinger was an extraordinary person, his assimilation experience as a German-Jewish refugee exemplifies the common trend of speedy Americanization, and the need to work. Fred Howard, a German-Jewish refugee from Berlin, also had to work in order to support his family. Before he came to the United States with his mother at the end of 1939, Fred Howard had studied at a Jewish trade school in Berlin designed to teach skills to Jewish youth. When he arrived in New York, there was no time to continue his education. “I had to work. I came over with my mother. I was the breadwinner, a seventeen-year-old kid. My mother . . . had never worked.”²³

²² Henry Kissinger was born in Fürth, Germany on 27 May 1923. In August 1938, Kissinger and his family fled Germany and immigrated to the United States. Drafted into the army in early 1943, Kissinger was assigned to the 84th Infantry Division and sent to the European theater. Kissinger was subsequently fished out of the infantry, and became a part of the Counter Intelligence Corps. Henry Kissinger was later to become the 56th American Secretary of State from 1973-1977 while continuing to hold the position of assistant to the President for national security affairs, which he first assumed in 1969 until 1975. For a complete biography of Henry Kissinger, see: Walter Isaacson *Kissinger: a Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

²³ Fred Howard was born on 16 June 1922 in Waldenburg, Germany, a small town in Silesia on the border between Germany and Czechoslovakia. His family moved to Berlin in 1934. In early 1939, Fred’s father escaped Germany, and went to Shanghai. Months later, Fred Howard immigrated to the United States with his mother. In mid-1942, Fred was drafted into the United States Army. After being trained at Camp Ritchie, he was sent to the European theater as an interrogator of prisoners of war (IPW). Fred Howard, “The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project,” interview by Steven Remy, 11 August 2005. Fred Howard is also featured in the documentary film: *The Ritchie Boys*

In many ways, the experience of the German-Jewish refugee youth was typical of the American melting pot. There were many variances in the German-Jewish refugee experience, however, that suggest that this generation held on to certain social and religious ties with the German-Jewish immigrant community.²⁴ Evidence of German-Jewish neighborhood cohesion and German-Jewish religious institutions suggest that these immigrants were not simply mixed into the American melting pot, but rather lived a culturally pluralistic lifestyle. Within a more specific melting pot, however, German Jews did indeed assimilate into the American-Jewish community. Historian Herbert Straus has noted that the German-Jewish immigrants of the 1930s were attracted to American Jewish institutions set up by earlier waves of German immigrants. “In many American-Jewish institutions the thoughtful immigrant recognized, after a while, the organizing hand of the ‘German Jew’ of the nineteenth century – *B’nai B’rith*, theological and scholarly Jewish institutions, the American Jewish Committee, Reform Jewry, conservatism, even orthodoxy (as distinct from Eastern Chassidism or Talmud—oriented religiosity).”²⁵ In addition to joining American Jewish institutions, the 1930s German-Jewish refugees who remained in New York, settled in many of the already established ethnic Jewish neighborhoods, thus becoming socially intermingled with the already established New York-American Jewish population.

The invasion of Poland by Germany on 1 September 1939 further erased the differences between German-Jewish refugees and the American Jewish population; both hoped for the defeat of Nazi Germany. The American public, however, was strongly anti-

²⁴ For a detailed study on the acculturation patterns of German-Jewish refugees, see: Herbert Strauss, “The immigration and Acculturation of the German Jew in the United States of America” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16 (1971): 63-94.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 92.

war at this period of time, and resented the Jewish population for its pro-war stance. In his memoirs, Victor Brombert, a refugee who was born in Germany, lived eight years of his life as a refugee in France, and came to America in 1941, recalled his differing views from the American public. “The idea of America intervening in the European war and helping stem the tide of Nazism seemed out of the question. The mood was distinctly one of nonintervention. “Isolationism,” some called it [while] I very much hoped that this country would get into the war and help defeat Hitler.”²⁶

While American public opinion and government policy were strongly pro-British, the majority of the population did not support American involvement. Antisemitic accusations in Congress that Jews were fueling American commitment to the war abounded. But the most famous politicized expression of this sentiment came from the American hero Charles Lindbergh in a speech entitled “Who are the War Agitators?” (11 September 1941). Lindbergh accused American Jews of posing a dangerous threat to American interest by promoting their own interests. He noted that they sponsored their propaganda through “their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government.”²⁷

A few months after Lindbergh’s speech, on 7 December 1941, Japanese pilots bombed Pearl Harbor, and the United States declared war on both Japan (8 December 1941) and Germany (11 December 1941). American gentiles and Jews united against a common enemy. German-Jewish refugees were most particularly happy when the United States entered the war. “For me, December 7 was not so much a day that would live in infamy as a day of renewed hope—especially as Germany immediately declared war on

²⁶ Brombert, 233-240.

²⁷ See Edward S. Shapiro. “World War II and American Jewish Identity” *Modern Judaism* (1990): 66.

the United States Now that America was at war with Germany, I began to feel at home,” Victor Brombert recalled.²⁸ Soon after America entered the war, Brombert along with many other eager German-Jewish refugees were inducted into the United States military. As Fred Howard puts it on behalf of German-Jewish refugees who entered military service, “It was a rebirth, we could shed and we could investigate our past and do something about it . . . and simultaneously do something for this fantastic country [the United States] that permitted [us] to live.”²⁹

²⁸ Brombert, 241-242.

²⁹ *The Ritchie Boys*.

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In the Service

Motivations for Military Service

German-Jewish refugees were eager to fight a war against the country that had forced them to flee. For German refugee soldiers, there was no conflict of interest in fighting their “fatherland;” on the contrary, many desired vengeance against Germany. Even a German-Jewish refugee pacifist like Si Lewen, who immigrated to the United States in 1935, was eager to exact revenge. “I despise all wars, but this was different. I came out of Germany and ran away the moment Hitler came in; but I knew that I had to get back and do what I could . . . I knew I had to fight fascism.”¹ German-Jewish refugees had a personal vendetta to wage. The desire to serve in the American military was of course not unique to German-Jewish refugees, but their fight was personal. It is therefore not surprising that a survey conducted in early 1945 by the Jewish Welfare Board in cooperation with the National Refugee Service, has suggested that German-Jewish participation was slightly higher than the overall American population. Out of a

¹ Si Lewen was born on 8 November 1918 in Lublin, Poland. At age two, he and his family moved to Berlin. A product of the Jewish cultural renaissance during the Weimar era, Lewen became an artist at an early age. After Hitler came to power in 1933, Si Lewen and his brother decided to flee to France against their parents’ wishes. From France, they planned to immigrate to Palestine, but in 1935, before he and his brother could do so, their entire family received visas to the United States. By the time the war broke out, Si Lewen was a citizen and was able to volunteer for the military in 1942. Lewen was trained at Camp Ritchie. In the European theater, he was assigned to a loudspeaker responsible for persuading enemy soldiers to surrender. Si Lewen is featured in the documentary film: *The Ritchie Boys*, dir. Christian Bauer (2004; Germany, Tangram Productions).

group surveyed, 10 percent of Jewish refugees entered the American military compared to 8.9 percent of the total American population.²

Germany, the country of their birth, had betrayed German-Jewish refugees. As members of the American military, they were able to return as victim soldiers to fight the forces that had caused them to emigrate. As an anonymous German-Jewish refugee soldier quoted in *Aufbau* explained, “I, who have been robbed of all I possessed and driven out of my homeland, have so much more reason for wanting to get a whack at Hitler than has the average American citizen who has not yet suffered from him.”³ Like other servicemen, German-Jewish GIs served in all areas of the military and not necessarily in the European theater.⁴ But for them, service in the American military—whether on the home front, in the Pacific, or in Europe—was ultimately geared toward defeating Nazi Germany.

Although German-Jewish refugees were motivated by revenge, they, like other American soldiers, also desired to serve their country. In many cases, German-Jewish refugees felt an even greater responsibility to serve in the American military. German-Jewish refugees had both the aspiration to prove their new American loyalty and, also as victims of Nazi oppression, the heightened consciousness to defend America’s democratic values.

² The Bureau of War Records of the National Jewish Welfare Board, *American Jews in World War II: The Story of 550,00 Fighters for Freedom* vol. (U.S.: The Dial Press, 1947), 23-24.

³ See: David De Sola Pool, “Immigrant and U.S. Army,” *Aufbau*, 30 January 1942, 1.

⁴ Guy Stern has noted that the one expectation may have been Signal Intelligence. In all likelihood no German-Jewish refugee was involved in the joint British-American success of breaking the German code. Guy Stern “In the Service of American Intelligence: German-Jewish Exiles in the War against Hitler.” *Leo Baeck Year Book* 37 (1992): 461.

The loyalty of German-Jewish refugees was questioned both by American society and also by the American government. A right-wing faction of American society accused German-Jewish refugees of being an American fifth column, and the American government believed that German spies could infiltrate American borders in the guise of German-Jewish refugees. American right-wing publications often questioned the loyalty of German-Jewish refugees on account of their Jewish identity and their foreign background. *Curtiss' Weekly American Bulletin* for example, wrote in its 29 May 1940 issue:

America does undoubtedly suffer from the activities of foreign agents of all the great powers This is not to mention the most dangerous alien power operating in our midst—the international Jewish power, which has planted among us a “Fifth Column” about six million strong, and with power and secret influence of all proportion even to that number One of two good things are coming out of all this excitement (of war hysteria) — proposals for cutting down on immigration, and for the registration and control of aliens. No other great power so coddles its aliens as does the USA.⁵

In June 1940, Congress passed the Alien Registration Act, which required all aliens in the United States 14 years of age or older to register and be fingerprinted. Fearing that German espionage was being carried out through German immigrants, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collected information concerning possible spy suspects. On the night of 7 December 1941 and in the months following, the FBI arrested the most dangerous suspects, and subsequently interned many of them for the duration of the war;

⁵ Excerpt from the 29 May 1940 issue of *Curtiss' Weekly American Bulletin* as quoted in the *Aufbau* article: James Wayne, “Anti-Alienism and Anti-Semitism” *Aufbau*, 21 June 1940, 3.

a small portion of those arrested were German-Jewish refugees.⁶ In order to prove their American loyalty, serving in the American military was thus also a way for German-Jewish refugees to refute any perceptions of them as disloyal.

As victims of Nazi oppression and Hitler's dictatorship, German-Jewish refugees felt a heightened responsibility to defend America's borders, and the democratic ideals upon which the United States was founded. Guy Stern has noted how German-Jewish refugees found it particularly important to defend democratic ideological values. "We [German-Jewish refugees] were committed to this war for personal reasons as well as ideological ones. Freedom was at stake not just in Europe but also worldwide."⁷ The American military enabled German-Jewish refugees not only to pursue their personal vendettas against Germany, but also to serve the United States, the democratic country that offered them freedom and a new home.

In the Armed Forces and Outside the Military Melting Pot

During World War II, the United States military for the first time integrated people from all over the country into diverse units that transcended state lines, economic class, and ethnic origins in order to unify the troops into a cohesive force. In many cases

⁶ Most of the suspected enemy aliens taken into custody were subsequently released. Of the 23,000 taken into custody after 7 December 1941, only about 10,000 were ever interned. Although there was a small portion of German-Jewish refugees who were arrested, few if any, were interned and proven to be apart of any form of German espionage. For a more complete description of the government's policy toward refugees during the war, see: David Wyman. *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985). And: See Maurice R. Davie. *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947).

⁷ *The Ritchie Boys*

German-Jewish refugees remained outside this American military melting pot.⁸ Other groups such as Japanese Americans, who were interned, and African Americans, who were segregated and suffered discrimination by the American military during World War II, also did not fall into this integration scheme. This is not to say that their experiences in the military did not Americanize them. On the contrary, in addition to becoming American citizens, many German-Jewish refugee soldiers felt that their wartime experiences in Europe caused them to appreciate and understand American culture better. Still, German-Jewish refugee soldiers were a distinctive group throughout the war; in many cases, their heritage shaped the work they were assigned.

Before the war had started, German Jews had steadily acculturated into the American community, and assimilated into the American Jewish community. Yet at the same time, German-Jewish refugees maintained many social and religious ties. While in the army, their Americanization process continued. Yet just as German-Jewish refugees before the war tended to retain social and religious cohesion, the concentration of German-Jewish refugees in certain military fields, as well as the discrimination they faced as enemy aliens, prompted them to become more conscious of their German-Jewish background.

German-Jewish refugees suffered discrimination from their “enemy alien” categorization and, in some cases, due to their religion. At the same time, their experience with the German language, psychology, culture, and terrain, along with their enthusiasm for revenge, made them not only distinctive, but also a powerful weapon in the American

⁸ For analysis of racial segregation during World War II see Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II*. (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2000).

military. Rabbi David De Sola Pool, chairman of the National Jewish Welfare Board, recognized this at the time, and explained the military value of German-Jewish GIs in an *Aufbau* article on the “Immigrant and U.S. Army.” “Taking it all in all, the refugees are enriching the United States Army not simply with additional man-power, but often with valuable technical qualifications of knowledge and experience, together with a burning enthusiasm to right the wrongs which Nazism has unleashed on the world.”⁹

German-Jewish Refugee Soldiers as Enemy Aliens

When the United States entered World War II, many German-Jewish refugees who had not been in the country long enough to become citizens were classified by the American government as “enemy aliens.” Since American immigration policy had not distinguished between German-Jewish refugees and German immigrants who were viewed as possible spies, the American government imposed various restrictions upon German-Jewish refugee enemy aliens. Enemy aliens suffered various limitations, frustrations, and discrimination. Restrictions were imposed on their freedom of movement, their right to live in areas designated as necessary to defense, their ability to be naturalized, and their possession of certain articles including cameras, short-wave radios, and firearms.¹⁰ Enemy aliens were also prohibited from enlisting in the military. Even the first drafts of enemy aliens tended to be sporadic and depended upon the

⁹ David De Sola Pool, “Immigrant and U.S. Army,” *Aufbau*, 30 January 1942, 1.

¹⁰ Davie, 192-194.

attitudes of local draft boards.¹¹ In addition, the FBI conducted background checks on enemy aliens before they were accepted into the armed forces. Those enemy aliens who were drafted were limited to certain areas of military participation.¹² German-Jewish refugees who had already been naturalized before the war, were in the same category as American citizens.

Of the five million aliens registered in 1940, approximately 1,100,000 were classified as enemy aliens.¹³ For the most part, German-Jewish refugees had shown great enthusiasm to become naturalized American citizens; the vast majority had applied for permanent visas into the United States immediately after they arrived. Whether aliens of enemy nationality or American-born citizens, all male residents in the United States within the designated age range were required to register for the draft and were eligible for military service under the Selective Training and Service act of 1940.¹⁴ Enemy aliens, however, were first required to undergo investigation before they could enter military service.

In the first year of the war, the armed forces did not trust enemy aliens with weapons. Thus, with few exceptions, the American military therefore initially assigned

¹¹ Guy Stern, "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of US Intelligence: The Post-War Years," *The Leo Baeck Yearbook* 40 (1995): 51-52.

¹² Previous to the United State's entrance to World War II, the American government had obtained information concerning possible enemy infiltration through the Alien Registration Act of 1940. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) compiled a list of the people who they thought posed a significant threat to national security, and on the night of December 7th, began arresting these suspects. German-Jewish refugees however, were not well represented on this list of suspects. See Maurice R. Davie. *Refugees in America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 193.

¹³ Davie, 193-194.

¹⁴ The Selective Training and Service act of 1940 created the first draft in American history during a time of peace. Any male within the age range who was a resident of the United States was eligible for military service. See Davie 193.

drafted enemy aliens to non-combat units. After basic training, German-Jewish refugees were detailed to units like the Medical Corps and the Ordinance Corps. Like many enemy aliens, Victor Brombert was suddenly transferred into the Medical Corps. “The news did not thrill me,” he recalled years later. “I felt disappointed and vaguely humiliated. Why was I not to be a fighting soldier? When I joined the group [the Medical Corps], I noticed that quite a few of the trainees were also European refugees—recent arrivals who, like myself, had not yet become U.S. citizens.”¹⁵ These restrictions did not apply to those enemy aliens who were drafted or enlisted after the Armed forces changed their restrictive military policies, or to those who were drafted before the United States entered World War II, and were not yet considered enemy aliens. Siegmund Spiegel, for example, had been drafted in 1940 and was sent to Georgia for infantry training.¹⁶ The Army did not transfer him to a non-combat group once the war had started; he remained in the First Infantry Division, became naturalized, and was then shipped overseas to take part in the 8 November 1942 invasion of North Africa.

On 20 March 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9106, which “except[ed] certain persons from the classification of “Alien Enemy” for the purpose of

¹⁵ Victor Brombert. *Trains of Thought: From Paris to Omaha Beach, Memories of a Wartime Youth* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 257.

¹⁶ Siegmund Spiegel was born in Gera Germany. In early 1940, he immigrated to the United States. Six months after arriving in New York, he was drafted into the army. Spiegel was assigned to the First Infantry Division, and was sent overseas as part of the African campaign in 1942. He saw combat on three continents before being seriously wounded in Normandy. Siegmund Spiegel is featured in the documentary film: *About Face: The Story of Jewish Refugee Soldiers of World War II*, dir. Steven Karras (2006; Chicago Buddy Pictures Inc).

permitting them to apply for naturalization.”¹⁷ Thus, many German-Jewish refugees who had been classified as enemy aliens, were again able to apply for citizenship pending a background investigation. The naturalization process took at least five years, and those German-Jewish refugees who were not yet citizens could not enlist in the military. For those who were drafted, Congress issued a provision in the Second War Powers Act of 27 March 1942, providing for the expeditious naturalization of members of the United States armed forces serving at home and abroad.¹⁸ Under this new legislation, German-Jewish refugees who had served honorably in the armed forces for at least three months were eligible for naturalization.

German-Jewish refugees of enemy alien status who had been drafted into the army needed to be naturalized before they were shipped overseas.¹⁹ Naturalizing non-citizens before they were shipped overseas was an important procedure for psychological reasons as well as practical reasons. For many non-citizens, naturalization was a psychological encouragement that boosted their morale. For enemy aliens of German

¹⁷ This order was extended by Executive Order 9372 on August 27, 1943. See Executive Orders Disposition Tables, National Archives. <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/disposition.html>.

¹⁸ Previous to the Second War Powers Act of 1942, all immigrants were required to be residents of the United States for at least five years before they could obtain citizenship. The Second War Powers Act of 1942 amended the Nationality Act of 1940, and added sections 701, 702, and 705. Sections 701 and 702 of the amendments dealt with the expeditious naturalization of non-citizens in the United States Armed Forces. See: United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Naturalizations Since 1907” 01/20/06 <http://uscis.gov/graphics/aboutus/history/since07.htm>.

¹⁹ A handful of non-citizens were even naturalized overseas. This was the first time in American history that citizenship was granted outside the United States. The most common case however, was to be naturalized before going overseas. By the end of 1944, 101,653 non-citizens in the United States Armed Forces were naturalized., of which, 10,997 were naturalized overseas. See Davie, 199.

origin, naturalization essential; if they were to be captured by the Germans, their lack of American citizenship might mean their death.²⁰

Henry H. Metzger submitted a detailed description of the naturalization process for immigrant soldiers fighting abroad to *Aufbau* on 22 May 1942.

The applicant is requested to have served honorably for a period of at least three months since September 1939. But this requirement may be waived when the applicant is ordered to depart for oversea duty. In case of oversea duty, all proper naturalization procedures should be arranged before departure Trainees of replacement centers will become citizens before being assigned to their regular organization It is up to the commanding officer to decide about approval or disapproval of the application. He will also indicate on a special certificate his recommendations. As soon as the hearing on petitions is favorably decided, the certificate of naturalization will be handed to the applicant.

Drafted as an enemy alien, Tom B., needed to be naturalized before he could be shipped to Europe. “After seventeen weeks we were called into a room, about 8 or 9 of us And we raised our right hand and now you’re an American citizen, now we can ship you overseas. That’s how I became an American citizen.”²¹ In the naturalization process, the applicant was required to renounce any foreign loyalties, declare allegiance to the United States, and defend the United States and its democratic ideology. They swore the following oath:

²⁰ Even though under the Geneva Convention of 1929, non-citizen German-Jewish refugees would have been entitled to treatment consistent with a typical American POW, the guidelines of the rules of war were not always followed. Captured enemy-alien soldiers of German origin, especially German-Jewish origin, would realistically have been executed. Davie, 191.

²¹ Tom B., “The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project,” interview by Steven Remy, 9 July 2004.

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to Germany, of whom (which) I have heretofore been subject (or citizen); that I will support and defend the constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion: So help me God.²²

German-Jewish refugees had been eager to become Americanized. They were quick to acculturate, they were eager to serve for America, and now, as many of them had finally obtained citizenship before being shipped overseas, they had become full-fledged American citizens.

Historian Guy Stern (also a German-Jewish refugee soldier) has suggested that the decision to accept enemy aliens as volunteers probably was not taken until around 17 April 1943.²³ Stern has noted that on this date, William J. (“Wild Bill”) Donovan addressed a memorandum to the assistant chief of staff, G-1²⁴ US Army that argued the need “for certain specially qualified personnel from civilian life.”²⁵ Among the revisions he requested, including age limitations, Donovan specifically appealed for a waiver of the current policy on restricted alien enlistment in particular areas of the military. This was, he argued, due to “specialized qualifications involved” and “urgent need.” About ten days after Donovan’s request, the Adjutant General, on the order of the Secretary of War, agreed, on condition that the enlistee met the physical qualifications and underwent a

²² As seen on the Form for Petition for Citizenship. U.S. Department of Labor: Immigration and Naturalization Service. 1936.

²³ Guy Stern, “The Post-War Years,” 52.

²⁴ G-1 indicates Army or Marine Corps component manpower or personnel staff officer (Army division or higher staff; Marine Corps brigade or higher staff). Military Abbreviations and acronyms of the US Armed Forces” *Globemaster Dictionary*, <http://www.globemaster.de/html/dictionary.html>.

²⁵ Guy Stern, “The Post-War Years,” 52.

background investigation. This concession, along with congressional pressure and other requests by the general staff office, ultimately gave way to a complete waiver of restriction on enemy alien enlistment.²⁶ The change in policy also induced the authorization of non-citizen German-Jewish refugees to serve in combat units. German-Jewish refugees, in short, grew to be fully accepted into the military precisely because of their unique knowledge of the German enemy. Still, German-Jewish refugees continued to be a distinct group within the military. Their special knowledge of the enemy prompted assignments that kept them outside the influence of military integration, and discrimination against them as both Germans and Jews prevented many German-Jewish refugees from becoming typical American soldiers.

Until non-citizen German-Jewish refugees obtained citizenship, they were not eligible to become officers. Thus, many German-Jewish refugees remained privates until they were naturalized right before they went overseas. After visiting seventeen army and navy camps, Rabbi David De Sola Pool commented on the unfair treatment of these refugee soldiers.

There was a time in this country when a Lafayette from France or a Pulaski from Poland were welcomed into the military forces defending this country and given rank in accord with their ability The regulation which debar[s] the non-citizen from being an officer may be intelligible from the point of view of general national policy, which has to adopt a line of caution, setting limitations on America's traditional welcome to the immigrant. Nevertheless, it works hardship in individual case where the immigrant is qualified through his general education

²⁶ Samuel Dickstein, New York congressman and chairman of the Immigration and Naturalization Committee had introduced a bill into congress to ease citizenship for Aliens in the Army, and enable enlistment for aliens in September of 1942. The Bill however failed. "To Ease Citizenship for Aliens in Army" *New York Times*, 30 September 1942, 12.

and experiences to give far more useful and effective services as an officer than he is able as a private.²⁷

These restrictions were particularly detrimental to the military service of German-Jewish refugee physicians, whose talents were wasted while they served as privates. Although there was a wartime shortage of physicians in both the military and civilian defense, the American armed forces did not utilize the skills of German-Jewish refugee physicians. In a letter to *Aufbau* on 19 February 1943, Paul L. Grossner, a German-Jewish refugee physician, expressed his frustration.

I am a medical doctor, and I tried to offer my services to the U.S. Medical Corps, but was not accepted (as all non-citizens among the Medical Doctors are rejected). I still consider it a sacred duty to do my part in this great struggle, and urged the Local Draft Board to induct me, even being a simple Buck Private for the time being . . . One of the reasons why I was so eager to join up is that alien physicians are often accused of trying to evade the draft and grab good practices from leaving American doctors.²⁸

Some non-citizen German-Jewish refugees were drafted before the United States entered the war, and had gained rank before they were considered enemy aliens. Rudy Michaels was drafted in April of 1941 .He was a non-citizen at that time, but considered only an alien.²⁹ When the United States entered the war a few months later, he had

²⁷ David De Sola Pool "Immigrant and U.S. Army" *Aufbau*, 30 January 1942, 1.

²⁸ Paul L. Grossner. "Our Boys' Club: They are Proud to Fight Nazism" *Aufbau*, 19 February 1943, 6.

²⁹ Rudy Michaels was born in 1916 in East Prussia, and grew up in Leipzig, Germany. In 1938, he fled Germany and immigrated to the United States alone. His family was able to escape shortly after to England. In 1941, Michaels was drafted into the American Army. In 1944, he was sent to Camp Ritchie, and trained to be an IPW. Attached to the 5th US

already earned the rank of a corporal; it was then that he also became an enemy alien. He retained rank, yet he was subject to certain restrictions as an enemy alien.

German-Jewish refugees who had obtained citizenship prior to the entry of the United States into World War II were never classified as enemy aliens, and were not subject to any of the military and civilian defense restrictions that non-citizens faced. Thus, German-Jewish refugees who were citizens were able to enlist, to become officers, and to join any branch of the United States military. But given the years of substantial influx of German-Jewish refugees, between 1937 and 1941, and considering that before the war, naturalization took at least five years (and on average six to seven years)³⁰ of residence in the United States, it can be estimated that the vast majority of German-Jewish refugees who were eligible for military service were not yet citizens.³¹ Nevertheless, despite the restrictions on non-citizen enlistment until mid-1943, as we have seen, German-Jewish refugee service in the military was higher than that of the overall American population.

Utilization of German-Jewish Refugees' Unique Skills

No group of Americans knew the German enemy better than German-Jewish refugees. Adolph Hitler had made a strategic error by driving out thousands of Germans

Armored Division, Rudy Michaels was sent to the European theater. Rudy Michaels is featured in the documentary film: *The Ritchie Boys*.

³⁰ Estimate by Davie, 192.

³¹ See chart entitled "Percent of the German-Austrian Immigration Quota filled from 1933-1934" for details on the number of German-Jewish immigrants into the United States.

whom he had deemed “racially unfit.” Now the allied countries would use them as weapons against Germany. German-Jewish refugees knew the language, the culture, the psychology, and the geographic position of many military targets in Germany. In 1943, as the United States began to plan the invasion of Europe, the army command began to recognize the need for German-Jewish refugee soldiers, most particularly in the areas of military intelligence and psychological warfare. Thousands of German-Jewish G.I.s were transferred to various sectors of Army and Navy Intelligence, as well as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).³²

The backbone of military intelligence, which had the most sizable concentration of German-Jewish refugees, was army intelligence. The OSS, although relatively small in personnel, employed a notable number of German-Jewish refugees. Prior to World War II, US Navy Intelligence (ONI) had been open only to native-born Americans, and even during the war, employed only a handful of foreign-born people.³³ Most Army Intelligence personnel received extensive training at Camp Ritchie Maryland, the United States Military Intelligence Training Center (MITC), which trained interrogators of prisoners of war, order of battle specialists, photo interpreters, linguists, and general intelligence personnel. After August 1944 Camp Ritchie also offered counterintelligence training. Then too, German-Jewish servicemen who were not trained in military intelligence nonetheless found themselves in situations in which their fluency in German,

³² Army Intelligence, Navy Intelligence, and the OSS all operated independent from one another. The creation of the joint intelligence committee (JIC) in 1943, helped coordinate an interdepartmental intelligence link. A detailed description on the breakup of American military intelligence during World War II can be found in: John Patrick Finnegan and Romana Danysh, *Military Intelligence* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 1998), 61-84

³³ The small amount of German-Jewish refugees employed by US Navy-Intelligence was negligible, and will therefore, not be discussed. Stern, “In the Service,” 462.

knowledge of Germany, and familiarity with the German people enabled them to be useful to both official and unofficial intelligence operations. As the demand for their services grew, the army command subsequently transferred many of these untrained German-Jewish refugee soldiers in combat units to military intelligence units while in Europe.

The German–Jewish Refugee “Ritchie Boys”

Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains area in Hagerstown, Maryland, Camp Ritchie was originally founded by the Maryland National Guard. In 1942, however, the United States Army took over the facility and reorganized it as training center for intelligence and psychological warfare.³⁴ As the United States planned to invade Europe, thousands of refugee soldiers, most of them enemy aliens, were transferred under classified orders to Camp Ritchie in order to receive training for positions in military intelligence and psychological warfare. The American military most particularly targeted German-Jewish refugees as recruits for intelligence positions, because as native Germans they knew how to read, write, and translate German, and (notwithstanding Nazi notions to the contrary) how to think like the enemy. Looking back at his army service, German-Jewish Camp Ritchie graduate Hans Spear emphasized the importance of the linguistic abilities of German-Jewish G.I.s:

³⁴ Most of the Official Documentation concerning Camp Ritchie was housed in the U.S. National Archive in St. Louis; however, in 1973, a fire destroyed nearly 80 percent of the archives files. The bulk of the academic information concerning Camp Ritchie comes from oral testimonies.

They realized that we were more valuable than the average soldier. Now mind you, my life is no more important than anybody else's life, but you can teach someone in six months how to handle a machine gun, or throw a hand grenade, but you cannot teach them to be fluent in a language in order to interrogate anybody.³⁵

Men who trained at Camp Ritchie were nicknamed "Ritchie Boys." The largest concentration of German-Jewish refugees in any group of the armed forces was to be found at Camp Ritchie. Of the 19,000³⁶ intelligence recruits trained at Camp Ritchie between 1942 and 1945, about 80 percent were not yet American citizens, approximately half were refugees from Hitler (including Germans, Poles, Frenchman, Austrians Czechoslovaks, Italians, and Hungarians and Yugoslavs), and fewer than 5 percent were American-born.³⁷ In total, some 3000 German-Jewish refugees were trained at Camp Ritchie.

Recruits received rigorous and exhaustive training. "Classroom instructions were the most intense instructions I had ever had, either in high school or college. It was the most concentrated course in various types of intelligence work," Guy Stern recalled. German speakers were mainly assigned to a two-month IPW course, which trained them in the skills they would need to interrogate German prisoners of war at the front. Native French speakers were placed in similar courses that focused on the interrogation of civilians and tactical contacts with French resistance. Some recruits, such as Victor

³⁵ Hans Spear was born in 1918, in a small town in Germany, where his family had lived for over 500 years. In 1938, Hans fled Germany, and immigrated to the United States. Hans was inducted into the military in the summer of 1943, and transferred to Camp Ritchie. Hans served in the Counter Intelligence Corps in the European theater. Hans Spear is featured in the documentary film: *The Ritchie Boys*.

³⁶ This estimate of total soldiers that passed through Camp Ritchie is from: Finnegan and Danysh, 67.

³⁷ See Hans Habe, *All my Sins.: An Autobiography* (London: G.G. Harrap, 1957) p.324.

Brombert, who were fluent in both French and German, took two separate two-month courses at Camp Ritchie. According to Brombert:

The core of the training had to do with front-line interrogation of prisoners of war or civilians in the immediate combat zone Special attention was also given to aerial photography intelligence, order of battle (known as OB), and combat zone psychological warfare. [We were required to] memorize the organization of German and Italian army units, the military terms and abbreviations used, the classification and characteristics of their armored vehicles, the capabilities of their weapons, the nature of their ordnance and their supply system, the emblems and insignia of the various military branches, the hierarchical structure of their chain of command . . . [and] we also studied the Morse code.³⁸

The hands-on training at Camp Ritchie often involved interrogating German POWs who had been captured in the early military campaigns of the war. The recruits practiced by interrogating each other as well. The training of the Ritchie Boys also encompassed various field exercises ranging from compass reading to mortal combat. Although most of the Ritchie Boys were trained as IPWs, and general intelligence personnel, starting in 1944, many trained to be American Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) agents. The tasks of CIC agents such as Hans Spear were to detect and investigate espionage, sabotage, disaffection, disloyalty, and general subversion. They were charged with investigating suspect civilians who were taken captive during the Allied advance, and they were responsible for unmasking German infiltration behind United States military lines. German-Jewish refugees were particularly fit for jobs in espionage, as they could easily impersonate German military personnel and German civilians.

After graduating from Camp Ritchie, the recruits were shipped over to Europe. Military intelligence personnel were divided into six-man teams of S-2 and G-2

³⁸ See: Brombert, 259-262.

intelligence units, and were attached to larger army divisions.³⁹ Guy Stern, for example, “was part of a six-man IPW-team (Team 41), and attached with four other teams to the First Army of General Courtney Hodges and his G-2 and Assistant G-2, Colonel Benjamin A. (“Monk”) Dickson and Lieutenant-Colonel Specht.” Guy added, “The vast majority of the officers and enlisted men in our teams were German-Jewish refugees, all of whom felt that the war against Hitler Germany was a personal crusade.”⁴⁰ Two jeeps were assigned to each team of six. Each IPW team was comprised of a captain who was in charge, a first lieutenant and a master sergeant who were the chief interrogators, and two staff sergeants who served as linguists, typists, and drivers.⁴¹ As Victor Brombert has noted, however, “the table of organization was strictly theoretical. In reality, we all shared the tasks.”⁴²

During Operation Overlord, the D-Day invasion of 6 June 1944, the Ritchie Boys invaded Normandy with the divisions they were attached to, and often were a part of the early combat on the beaches. Many other Ritchie Boys arrived soon after the initial invasion. As members of combat units, military intelligence personnel took part in maneuvers for which they had no training. Werner T. Angress was attached to an airborne division that was scheduled to parachute behind German lines on the night of D-

³⁹ S-2 level indicates battalion or brigade intelligence staff officer (Army/Marine Corps battalion or regiment), G-2 level indicates Army or Marine Corps component intelligence staff officer (Army division or higher staff; Marine Corps brigade or higher staff) “Military Abbreviations and acronyms of the US Armed Forces” *Globemaster Dictionary*, <http://www.globemaster.de/html/dictionary.html>.

⁴⁰ Stern, “In the Service,” 465.

⁴¹ Details on the composition of each IPW team are recalled by Brombert, 265.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Day.⁴³ Angress had never jumped out of a plane, and had to obtain special permission from the commanding general in order to remain a part of the division to which his IPW team was attached. He has recalled that at that time, “all I wanted to be was with my buddies, with whom I had made friends and be with them, be like them. On the morning of D-Day, I found myself at the gate of the plane. I was the first person to jump.”⁴⁴

In the European Theater, the IPWs of Camp Ritchie were responsible for obtaining various types of information from POWs. Their duties depended upon the division to which the IPW teams were attached., Guy Stern has explained that at regimental level,

a prisoner-of-war Interrogator (IPW) might be charged with eliciting the exact location of an enemy artillery position; at the army level he was to assess German morale inside the Reich, locate industrial targets for the air force, pinpoint supply and troop replacement routes, report on the effect of air raids and of psychological warfare and, towards the end of the war, unmask perpetrators of the atrocities and war crimes.⁴⁵

The Ritchie Boys were more effective intelligence agents than their German counterparts. Although German intelligence agents were generally fluent in the English language, unlike their American counterparts, they were not natives of the enemy. The Ritchie Boys

⁴³ Werner Angress was born on 27 January 1920 in Berlin. He and his family fled Germany to the Netherlands in 1937. In 1939, Angress immigrated to the United States with a group of friends. Werner Angress was inducted into the U.S. Army in 1941, and assigned to an infantry unit. After two years of service, Werner was sent to Camp Ritchie, where he trained to be an IPW. In the European theater, he was attached to an airborne division. After the war, Werner T. Angress became a renowned historian of German history. Werner T. Angress is featured in the documentary film: *The Ritchie Boys*.

⁴⁴ *The Ritchie Boys*.

⁴⁵ Stern, “In the Service” 464.

used their knowledge as natives and their Camp Ritchie training in order to manipulate the German POWs and thus obtain valuable intelligence.

One of the IPW's most effective tools was the (German) Order of Battle book, which included the identification, strength, command structure, and disposition of the personnel, units, and equipment of the German military. Rudy Michaels has explained that when a German POW wouldn't cooperate, IPWs would simply reel off the information about that particular POW's unit. "We called this at Ritchie a show of knowledge. The idea being that you might as well tell us, because we know almost anything you're going to tell us anyways."⁴⁶ IPWs created ways to instill fear in the POWs, in order to obtain information. Guy Stern and Fred Howard, for example, were part of a POW team that used the German fear of the Russians in order to obtain information. According to Fred Howard, "The German Soldiers were scared to death of the Russians, to be in Russian captivity. And that's when we started to play with the idea intellectually. How can we use that idea to our advantage? [That is], the fear of being sent to Russia." Guy Stern elaborated. "We came up with the idea that I would dress in a Russian uniform which we took off Russian liberated prisoners. I put myself in a tent with a three language caption [over a picture of Stalin], that read 'Dedicated to my friend Commissar Krukov, (singed) Joseph Stalin.'" Another effective scare tactic by German-Jewish refugee IPWs used in particular was to reveal, their personal German-Jewish background to the German POW. When asked by a German POW where he had learned to speak such good English, Martin Selling replied, "I learned to speak such good German while I was in Germany, and I learned how to interrogate prisoners while I was

⁴⁶ *The Ritchie Boys*.

an inmate at Dachau.”⁴⁷ According to Selling, the POW subsequently lost control of his bowels, and answered any question Selling asked.

The tactics used by the Ritchie Boys helped to capture many of the perpetrators of war crimes, including some of those responsible for the Holocaust. Werner Stark, a German-Jewish refugee Ritchie Boy who was trained as a teletype operator and subsequently attached to the 22nd Corps of the Third Army, was among the first to interrogate Joseph Mengele, the infamous doctor at Auschwitz known for conducting vicious medical “experiments” on Auschwitz inmates. Stark recalled that when asked about his inhumane experiments at Auschwitz, Mengele claimed to have conducted them “only upon criminals and volunteers.”⁴⁸ Unaware exactly who Mengele was, the interrogators released him. Fred Howard and Guy Sterns’s IPW team interrogated and identified Gustav Wilhelm Schubbe, whose lethal injections of morphine preparations killed more than 25,000 concentration camp inmates.⁴⁹

The success and strength of the Ritchie Boys flowed from their extensive training, and also their familiarity with their German counterparts. German-Jewish refugees, who made up a large percentage of recruits from Camp Ritchie, had grown up in the same society as the very people they fought, which helped them to obtain valuable enemy intelligence and to impersonate Germans in acts of espionage.

⁴⁷ Martin Selling was born in Lehrberg. He had been jailed in Dachau concentration camp for two months following the November Pogrom. Upon release in January 1939, he secured a visa and arrived in New York in February 1940. Selling was inducted into the Army in 1943, and was trained at Camp Ritchie. Selling served in the 320th Regiment of the 35th Infantry division as an IPW. Martin Selling is featured in the documentary film: *About Face*.

⁴⁸ Stern, “The Post-War Years,” 55.

⁴⁹ Stern, “In the Service of American Intelligence,” 465.

German-Jewish Refugees in the OSS

As noted earlier, William Donovan, founder of the OSS, (the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency), pushed for the change in military policy to enable enemy-aliens to enlist in the armed forces.⁵⁰ Donovan recognized the special qualifications of many enemy aliens most particularly for military intelligence, and wished to tap their abilities for his own agency, the OSS. As the OSS assessment staff explained after the war, foreigners were specifically recruited. “Many foreigners and first-generation Americans were recruited because they were familiar with the language, people, and territory of their respective lands of origin. It was difficult for a staff of Americans to judge men from cultures so diverse and to predict how well they would succeed in dealing with their own countrymen.”⁵¹ German-Jewish refugees and other groups of foreigners were used in all the branches of the OSS. Gero Von Schulze-Gaeverniz, for example, was recruited by the OSS as a principal link to the anti-Nazi opposition in Germany. He was the son of an “Aryan” Weimar legislator who, because of his Jewish wife, immigrated to the United States after Hitler came to power. Schulze-Gaeverniz was

⁵⁰ The OSS was established on 19 June 1942, and it was headed by Donovan. The main tasks of the OSS, were to perform research, secret intelligence and subversive activities. The OSS performed all types of intelligence operations ranging from spy missions to sabotage, from library research to front-line telephone monitoring, and from fighting with underground units in France, to attempting high-level and secret diplomacy. There were about 800 men serving in the OSS during World War II. See Bradley F. Smith, *The Shadow Warriors: O.S. S. and the Origins of the C.I.A.* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁵¹ The OSS Assessment Staff. *Assessment of Men: Selection of Personnel for the Office of Strategic Services* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1948), 11.

well connected in German elite circles, and was thus used efficiently by the OSS in order to infiltrate German resistance groups.⁵²

German-Jewish refugees proved particularly useful in the Research and Analysis (R. & A.) branch of the OSS. Headed by William Langer, R. & A. staff were responsible for analyzing intelligence materials.⁵³ According to historian Bradley F. Smith, “the research and analysis functions really are the heart of the intelligence agencies... only through the organization and study of individual pieces of information does an agency learn anything worth knowing.”⁵⁴ A large number of the OSS’s R. & A. staff were European immigrants, most particularly German-Jewish refugees. In Bradley F. Smith’s view, their skills in research and analysis of German sources were unmatched by native-born Americans.

Refugee and immigrant scholars of European extraction generally received a warm and respectful welcome in Langer’s branch [R. & A.]. German scholars were valued highly not only because of the obvious fact that their homeland was the object of much of R. and A.’s labor but also because the German tradition of scientific scholarship in the social sciences and humanities fitted neatly into the R. and A. system By 1943 there was a large and influential German refugee contingent in R. and A. featuring, among others, Hajo Holborn, Franz Neumann, and Otto Kirchheimer... nearly all had been classified as non-Aryan by the Nazis.⁵⁵

⁵² See: Richard Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History of America’s first Central Intelligence Agency* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 219.

⁵³ The Research and Analysis branch was established before the creation of the OSS, and was headed by William Langer. When the OSS was established in 1942, the Research and Analysis unit became merged into the OSS.

⁵⁴ Bradley F. Smith, 360-361.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 379.

General Donovan highly valued the capabilities of German-Jewish refugees. Historian Ladislav Farago has recalled a conversation with Donovan during a train ride with him in 1942. “We talked about the big mistake France had made when it interned without discrimination the bulk of German refugees instead of utilizing the cream of the crop in the war against the Nazis.” Donovan noted, “I will never make that mistake.”⁵⁶ The success of the OSS during World War II can certainly be credited in part to the contributions of the highly valued German-Jewish refugees.

Special Unofficial Tasks

Among the German-Jewish refugee soldiers who were not affected by the American military’s restrictive policies, were many soldiers who wound up in various combat units ranging from infantry, to artillery, to the airborne.⁵⁷ Although they lacked official training, German-Jewish refugee soldiers who were sent to Europe were instrumental as front-line interrogators and translators. Some were subsequently transferred to non-combat units after their talents were recognized. Because the unofficial exploits of every soldier are individual in nature, there is no “typical” German-Jewish refugee experience in this area. More often than not, officers identified the valuable

⁵⁶ As cited by Stern, “In the Service,” 470. From: Ladislav Fargo, *Burn After Reading: The Espionage History of World War II* (New York: Walker, 1962), 219

⁵⁷ German-Jewish refugees who were not affected were those who were citizens (and thus not “enemy aliens”), those “enemy aliens” who entered the Armed Forces before the United States entered the War (before December 8, 1941), and those “enemy aliens” who entered the Armed Forces after the change in restrictive military policy (after mid-1943)

abilities of the native-born refugees, and charged them with unofficial important assignments.

Henry Kissinger's experience provides such an example. Kissinger had been in G Company of the 335th infantry regiment of the 84th infantry division, which was sent to Europe in September 1944. As an infantry soldier, Kissinger fought through German-occupied Belgium. Before his company reached the German-Belgian border, however, a German-born officer in his unit recognized Kissinger's intellect and ability to speak German, and assigned him to serve as the translator-driver for General Bolling. In March 1945, after the 84th Division had captured Krefeld, the Counter Intelligence Corps of the 84th Division was responsible for restoring order to that shattered city. Among the CIC detachment, however, nobody spoke German. With no security clearance or training, and still a private, Kissinger was selected for the task to become the administrator of Krefeld under the Allied military government.⁵⁸ Kissinger created a civilian government by assigning civilians to municipal jobs. He weeded out obvious Nazis for apprehension. Kissinger was subsequently transferred into the CIC, and became a teacher at a military intelligence school in Germany.⁵⁹

Extraordinary achievement stories like Kissinger's were uncommon, but surprisingly not unique. Eric W. Lange, a German-Jewish refugee soldier in the Fourth Infantry Division, was appointed mayor of a small town near Bernberg in Germany because of his background. An article in the *New York Times*, "97-Pointer Gets Job That

⁵⁸ Krefeld was a relatively large city in Germany with at that time, about 200,000 inhabitants.

⁵⁹ See Walter Isaacson *Kissinger: a Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 39-48.

May Delay Him,” describes the metamorphosis of the infantry soldier into a mayor under the Allied military government.

Although he has accumulated 97 Points toward discharge, S/Sgt. Eric W. Lange feels he may be classified as essential, now that he’s a Mayor Elevated from the grade of corporal for his task, the Sergeant relates he is head also of criminal investigation and civil affairs, and that he “makes it clear to a bunch of Nazis who are in this city that they have to pay a high price for what they have done, as long as I have anything to say about it.” His knowledge of the German language and countryside brought about the soldier’s metamorphosis.⁶⁰

The Allied military government assigned such German-Jewish refugee soldiers to such high-level positions because they were intelligent and conducted themselves well, and also because of their understanding of the German enemy.

Erwin Weinberg was another German-Jewish G.I. who was transferred to military intelligence, although he had received no prior training in intelligence work. He was sent to Army Air Force intelligence because of his native German background, and was assigned to read reports in German and French. Beyond his assigned workload, Weinberg also helped read aerial photography and pinpoint military targets located in areas that he was familiar with in Germany.

The Air Force concentrated on certain industries in Germany because they felt that certain industries were key to the military war effort. So one of these industries was oil refineries, and another one was ball bearing factories. Every piece of machinery, every car, every truck, every tank has to have ball bearings. I

⁶⁰ “97-Pointer Gets Job That May Delay Him” *New York Times*, 6 June 1945, 3.

was able to point out a ball bearing factory in Fulda, where I was born, which was not on the target folders. It was bombed because of my say-so.⁶¹

Not every ordinary combat soldier was transferred to an intelligence position, yet the distinctive skills of a great number of German-Jewish refugee soldiers were often used in unofficial positions at the front lines. Siegmund Spiegel was in one of the first groups to be shipped overseas in November 1942. As an infantry soldier of the First Army, he participated in the invasion of North Africa. After the defeat of the German Africa Corps under Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, Spiegel was charged with interrogating German POWs. Although he had received no prior training in interrogation, he became an unofficial translator and IPW for his unit.⁶² Like Siegmund Spiegel, Tom B. also took on the tasks of translating and interrogating for his division, the 79th Infantry.

I was in the regular 314th regiment, and when we got into Alsace Lorraine, I was pulled out of my regular unit and Colonel Robinson, who was the commanding officer of the 79th, wanted to talk to me and had me translate something from German to English, from English to German, and said I would be his aide from then on As we took prisoners, he wanted to get information before [they] went back and were interviewed by professional people . . . he wanted to find out what troops had come and what they knew. And that was my main job . . . and I was very effective.⁶³

⁶¹ Erwin Weinberg, video interview from the collection of “The Judaica Museum at the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale,” interview by Joshua Franklin, August, 2004.

⁶² *About Face*.

⁶³ Tom B., “The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project,” interview by Steven Remy, 9 July 2004.

Regular Soldiers in the Pacific Theater

Although the vast majority of German-Jewish refugees served in the European theater, some served in the Pacific. A number, like Fritz Weinschenk, served in both theaters of operation.⁶⁴ After VE day, many soldiers who served in Europe were sent to the Pacific, where their background was of no special military use. Most German-Jewish G.I.s wanted to return to Europe. Many had family members whom they had left years earlier, and they wished to search for them. Others simply wanted revenge.

Carl Jaburg was inducted into the Army in April of 1945. After a series of tests and interviews, the CIC recruited him to be trained at Camp Ritchie. First, however, he was required to go through a six-week basic training course. By the time he finished basic training, the war in Europe was over. His German-Jewish background was no longer of use to the military. The Army assigned him to the Tank Corps. "They didn't need my expertise anymore. My unit was assigned to Okinawa. The war was still on with Japan, and they needed me over there."⁶⁵ Unlike those German-Jewish refugee soldiers who returned to Europe during the war, Carl Jaburg was not able to fight the country that had betrayed him, and he was not able to look for his family members who had not emigrated from Germany.

Because of the large number of German-Jewish refugees who were trained for special work in the European theatre, many fewer German-Jewish refugees wound up in the Pacific. Those soldiers who did serve in the Pacific, however, had no special skills or

⁶⁴ *About Face*.

⁶⁵ Carl Jaburg, video interview from the collection of "The Judaica Museum of the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale," interview by Joshua Franklin, July 2004.

competencies, and did not stand out among American soldiers. These German-Jewish G.I.s became more integrated among their units and had less of a distinctive group experience.

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Returning to Europe

Refugees fortunate enough to find a new home in a different country typically do not plan on returning to the country that had oppressed them. Many German-Jewish refugees who served in the United States military received the opportunity of return that few refugees would ever want. German-Jewish victim soldiers had different reasons for and distinctive sentiments about returning to their native country. As we will see, many German-Jewish refugees wished to find family members they had left behind. Some felt nostalgia about being in Europe again. Many even felt fear. The initial emotions and desires of German-Jewish refugee soldiers changed, however, as they came to find the Jewish population throughout Europe nearly annihilated. What they came to find in Europe would cause them to embrace their new homeland, the United States, even more warmly.

Fears of Returning in American Uniform

Although all American soldiers feared being captured by the Germans. German-Jewish refugees in particular were horrified at the prospect. The rules of the Geneva Convention specified a particular manner in which all POWs were to be treated, but the treatment of Jewish, and more specifically German-Jewish POWs, was in many cases similar to how the Nazis dealt with the rest of European Jewry. As Hans Spear recalled, “There is no doubt about it that you were thinking that you might be captured A former citizen of the Jewish faith—Goodbye Charlie!”

A soldier's Jewish identity was printed on the lower right hand corner of his dog tag in the form of a "J" (Jewish) or an "H" (Hebrew). Many Jews, but most particularly German-Jewish refugees, were nervous about being identified by their dog tags. As Victor Brombert explained, "The letter "J" that appeared on the dog tag drew my attention The "J" bothered me . . . because of what it might mean if I should fall into the hands of the Germans."¹ The concern of Brombert and many others became reality for an entire team of German-Jewish IPWs who were captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge, and executed on the spot. Werner Angress changed the "H" on his dog tag to a "P" (Protestant). Angress explained, "I [did not want] to be captured by the Germans, and have my identification tag show that I'm Jewish, a Hebrew. I received a long lecture about pride [from my friends], but I told them, I'm going, not you."² On D-Day plus nine, German soldiers captured Werner Angress and his unit. He had been trained to be an interrogator at Camp Ritchie, but after being captured by the Germans, he became the interrogated. He believes the "P" on his dog tag may have saved his life. Many other Jews who were captured, destroyed or threw away their dog tags so as not to be identified.

German-Jewish refugees also worried about friendly fire. Because many of them spoke English with a German accent, German-Jewish refugee soldiers were sometimes mistaken for German spies who had infiltrated American lines. This concern was most particularly present after the Germans attempted to carry out "Operation Grief," a plan to use English-speaking Germans dressed in American uniforms to create confusion by

¹ Victor Brombert, *Trains of Thought: From Paris to Omaha Beach, Memories of a Wartime Youth* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), p. 254.

² *The Ritchie Boys*, dir. Christian Bauer (2004; Germany, Tangram Productions).

changing American signposts and spreading panic. Fred Howard was one of the interrogators who successfully obtained important information from some of the captured German infiltrators. While he was interrogating them, he realized the immense danger he himself was in. “When I interviewed them, they were in American uniforms. That was the first time I realized that I was in a very serious situation.”³ Both Fred and the German soldiers were in the same uniform, and spoke with the same accent; there was nothing that could distinguish him from them. Although American forces captured the enemy infiltrators, American soldiers became suspicious of anyone who spoke with a foreign accent and, on occasion, accidentally killed foreign-born American soldiers. As one soldier recalled, “[a German-Jewish refugee soldier] got up in the middle of the night to go to the latrine, and was challenged by a sentry. He gave the password, but gave it with a German accent, the sentry shot him, and simply killed him.”⁴

In addition to the fears they felt as soldiers, German-Jewish refugees were also frightened by the very circumstances that had caused them to flee to America. Now, however, German-Jewish refugee soldiers could reverse the circumstances and instill fear in the Germans. As the Allied Forces advanced further into Germany toward Berlin, it became clear that the Allies would win the war. Germany finally surrendered on 8 May 1945.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Reversal of Position

German-Jewish refugees returned to Germany under new circumstances. No longer were they oppressed under the Nazi regime; rather, they were the liberators of its tyranny. Most German-Jewish refugees were no longer counted German citizens when they emigrated, but when they came back as soldiers, they were American citizens, and proud of their new loyalty. As Carl Goldsmith put it, describing his feelings before the invasion of Europe, “I was at that point in time, a very proud American. I was going to show to them [Nazi Germany] what we could do.”⁵ German-Jewish refugee youth had not only swiftly acculturated into American society, but in the process of their Americanization, many had tried to shed their German heritage altogether. Yet, when they returned to Germany in American uniform, German-Jewish refugees couldn’t help but realize that Germany had once been their home. Although Germany was the country that had rejected them, they also remembered that they had once felt deeply German. Fritz Weinschenk recalled, “I had grown up like any German teenager; I was patriotic, and totally assimilated. My father served in World War I.” It was a nostalgic experience for some German-Jewish refugees to step foot on their native soil in an “enemy” uniform. Decades later, Hans Spear remembered that moment vividly.

We crossed the Rhine; it was the Jewish holiday of Passover, [which is the celebration of] when the ancient Hebrews were freed from slavery in Egypt. Here I am, born in Germany, I was kicked out. Had I been there another few months I would have been sent to a concentration camp like my brothers and six million

⁵ *About Face: The Story of Jewish Refugee Soldiers of World War II*, dir. Steven Karras (2006; Chicago Buddy Pictures Inc).

others. And here I am as an American soldier on German soil...[It was] very sentimental and very sad that I had to come back and fight against the country, in which my forefathers were born five hundred years before me.

Although German-Jewish refugee soldiers were proud to arrive as Americans, they were caught up in the nostalgia of returning to their place of birth. Many refugees revisited their hometowns, now mostly in shambles. Some found remnants of their Jewish community, others found just ruins. On rare occasions, they encountered childhood friends in German uniform. As Harry Lorch of the 29th Division was observing German POWs march down the road, “Suddenly, I hear one of the prisoners saying ‘Hans.’” When he looked to see who was calling, the prisoner called out, “‘Its me, don’t you know me anymore Lorch, we used to go to school together . . . in Dieberg I lived on Theorbur street.’” It was then that Lorch remembered that he had been friends with that enemy POW.

Erwin Weinberg went back as a soldier to his hometown of Fulda. When he got there, he found an old family friend.

I went back as a soldier to look over what was still there [I met] a neighbor of ours, a dentist . . . Ernst Schwarz (not Jewish) . . . [who had] helped us in many ways. He installed some gold teeth in my grandmother to get some kind of value out, which was dangerous for him. And he was exceptional When they burned down the synagogue on *Kristallnacht* . . . he saved the Torah and gave it [to me] He also gave me, a piece of the main door of the synagogue.⁶

⁶ Erwin Weinberg, “The German-Jewish Émigré Oral history Project” interview by Steven Remy, August 3, 2004.

When Martin Selling returned to his hometown, Lehrberg, he recognized those Germans who had participated in the persecution of German-Jews. Selling, who had been imprisoned in Dachau before he was able to flee Germany, was eager to have them arrested. “ I saw some people that should not be walking around because they were Nazi party members. I went to the nearest CIC office and told them that there were some immediate arrests walking around. Later they were arrested.”⁷

A few days after Germany capitulated, Guy Stern and a friend of his took a jeep and went to visit Guy’s hometown, Hildesheim. Guy had come to the United States alone, leaving his family behind in Germany. He had not been in contact with them for years, and had no idea of their fate. It was later in life that he discovered that they had perished in the Warsaw Ghetto.

When I arrived in the town, the town had been terribly destroyed. I was so nervous It was a very moving moment. I knew every street. I was very much emotionally connected with the city And the childhood memories, memories of my youth, I began to re-live it all. It made me sad that I was coming back home this way.⁸

In most cases, German-Jewish refugee soldiers were not able to find family members they had left behind. The Germans and their allies had murdered six million Jews throughout Europe. The vast majority of those German-Jews who had been unable to flee Germany were killed. Walter Spiegel was one of the few fortunate enough to find one of his relatives. In a letter (9 November 1945), to his mother and father, he spoke about their cousin Sylvia Freyholdt.

⁷ *About Face.*

⁸ *The Ritchie Boys.*

Sylvia seems nice; with a depth and culture of her Jewish parentage, and of having lived through trying times. It seems that she fled in order to avoid deportation, and that the Nazis made a good deal of trouble to Burgher Freyholdt [Sylvia's husband] trying to find out where his wife was, to which he did not acquiesce. Sylvia is one of the few Jews in Germany, and the only one of the family it seems. Rosa and Nelly [Sylvia's mother and aunt] are both deceased in the deportation.⁹

Ernest Stoch, A German-Jewish refugee soldier enjoyed a successful reunion as well.

When Ernest was inducted into the army on 3 May 1943, he hoped he would be able to find his father, who had been imprisoned in Buchenwald concentration camp in 1938 while he, his mother, and his sister were forced to flee Germany. His father, Leo Stoch, had no idea that his family was even alive. Ernest, a technical sergeant in the Army's Criminal Investigation Division in Europe, found his father living in Holland. *The New York Times* reported this reunion in an article (3 June 1945) entitled "US Soldier Finds Father in Holland" 3 June 1945.

On Mother's Day a jeep with two American soldiers rolled into Utrecht, Holland We stopped, and I saw Papa sitting at a ground-floor window looking out into the street and at our jeep. I told him who I was but he still couldn't grasp it, and only when I was inside did he realize it was his son" [Leo] Stoch said the thoughts of once more being reunited with his loved ones gave him the will to live during his exile.¹⁰

The miraculous nature of finding lost family members in Nazi-Europe came into perspective as the German-Jewish refugees along with the Allied forces liberated

⁹ Walter Spiegel, to Julian and Kathe Spiegel, 9 November 1945, Personal Files of Joshua Franklin, New York.

¹⁰ "U.S. Soldier Finds Father in Holland," *New York Times*, 3 June 1945, 14.

concentration and death camps. Many of the soldiers were returning to the very same concentration camps in which they had been imprisoned before they emigrated. At the time of their incarceration, however, the “Final Solution” was not at that time initiated, and they had not yet witnessed the full horror that they returned to find. Information about the annihilation of European Jewry was available to the general public. An article in the *New York Times* (3 July 1944), for example, entitled “Inquiry Confirms Nazi Death Camps,” described the largest Nazi death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and had estimated that the Nazis murdered a total of 1,715,00 Jews there between 15 April 1942 and 15 April 1944.¹¹ When Allied soldiers came to witness the horrors with their own eyes, however, they found that nothing in writing could compare with what they saw. Among the victims of the death and concentration camps, were the families of refugee soldiers.

Erwin Weinberg returned to Buchenwald in April 1945, where he had been imprisoned after the November Pogrom. “Things at Buchenwald hadn’t gotten any better,” Weinberg recalled decades later. Although Buchenwald was not a death camp, the death toll there was very high. During the month that Erwin was imprisoned, “five hundred people died out of the ten thousand, just from sickness [and] starvation.”¹² The toll had climbed to a total of 56,000 men, most of who were murdered after 1942. The Nazis had built crematoria in 1939 and 1942 in order to dispose of the corpses. Hans Speer saw Buchenwald for the first time in April 1945; he was enraged at what he saw. “I

¹¹ Contemporary scholars have more accurately estimated the total death toll at Auschwitz-Birkenau to have been about 1.1 million. The estimate in the *New York Times*, which was given by Auschwitz escapees, Rudolph Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, still helped accurately depict horror of Auschwitz Birkenau. Daniel T. Brigham “Inquiry Confirms Nazi Death Camps” *New York Times*, 3 July 1944, 3.

¹² Erwin Weinberg, “The German-Jewish Emigré Oral history Project,” interview by Steven Remy, August 3, 2004.

made a recommendation to the War Department. To dig a big hole from Elbe to the Rhine, plow it over, and forget about Germany. I know this sounds horrible, but that's the way I felt."¹³

Manfred Steinfeld, was a member of the 82nd Airborne Division which liberated Woebbelin concentration camp on 2 May 1945.

We came across a concentration camp by the name of Woebbelin. It was only three miles from the town The bodies that we found were buried in the town square. I was certainly emotionally very distraught. There was always the possibility that I would see my mother and my sister among the bodies.¹⁴

The rage and hatred felt by German-Jewish refugee soldiers was often, as in the case of Manfred Steinfeld, counterbalanced by the fear of finding the bodies of their missing loved ones. The aftermath of the war bore a heavy emotional impact on German-Jewish refugees. Their former homes were destroyed. Their families and other German-Jews were murdered. Out of this devastation, however, they came to discover a new appreciation for their adopted home, and new identity in the United States. As Walter Spiegel wrote in a letter to his parents (17 December 1945), "You have to have been through the ruins of Europe to appreciate America, and I realize more than ever the value

¹³ *The Ritchie Boys*.

¹⁴ Manfred Steinfeld was born on 29 April 1924 in Josbach Germany. In July 1938, he immigrated to the United States alone, leaving his family behind. In March 1943, Manfred was inducted into the United States Army. After his basic training, Steinfeld was transferred to Camp Ritchie, where he became a German Order of Battle Specialist. In August 1944, Steinfeld was sent to Europe, and assigned to the G-2 section, HQ Battalion of the 82nd Airborne, as a part of the Order of Battle team. Manfred Steinfeld is featured in the documentary film: *About Face*.

of belonging there, at least I have a lot to look forward to—a wholesome security and a nice way of life.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Walter Spiegel, to Julian and Kathe Spiegel, 17 December 1945, Personal Files of Joshua Franklin, New York.

Conclusion

German-Jewish refugees who served in the American armed forces during World War II were only a small fraction of the 16,000,000 American men in uniform. Yet despite the integration of these men into diverse units that transcended state lines, economic class, and ethnic origins, the experience of German-Jewish refugees as a group was unlike any other American gentile or Jewish soldiers. Their motivations as refugees from the enemy German soil were unique, yet at the same time, they were as proud as other Americans to serve on behalf of the United States. In the armed forces, German-Jewish refugees forged their new American identities by fighting the nation that had terminated their rights as Germans. Even as the military Americanized German-Jewish refugees, it enabled them, at the same time, to revisit their German past and to be part of the occupation forces which would restore order and democracy to the German government, which had caused the new Americans to flee their old homeland in the first place.

In spite of their successful assimilation into an American identity, German-Jewish refugees were different from other American gentile and Jewish soldiers. They were Americans, very new Americans, and their acceptance by their new homeland was not secure. We have seen how as enemy aliens, they suffered discrimination by the American military. Enemy aliens were not allowed to enlist until mid-1943, they were most often restricted from combat units, and they were not promoted to officer rank. At the same time, however, we have also seen how the distinctive skills of German-Jewish refugees were used as powerful military weapons by the American authorities. The American military trained thousands of German-Jewish refugees at Camp Ritchie to become

soldiers of psychological warfare. Because of their origin native to the enemy, German-Jewish refugees had a familiarity with the Germans that few if any native-born Americans possessed. Their language skills and knowledge of the German people as well as of the country were invaluable to American military intelligence. They were effective interrogators of prisoners of war (IPWs), counter-intelligence agents, and translators. Even those German-Jewish refugees whom the American military did not train officially, possessed important abilities which their commanders used for official and unofficial assignments.

These skills and competencies were common to all those of German origin in the American military, yet the Jewish refugees' motivation was distinct. German-Jewish refugees had endured the discrimination of the Nazi government that had revoked their rights as citizens, marginalized them from German society, expropriated their wealth, and imprisoned many in concentration camps. Revenge for the persecution they had endured was not the sole motivating factor; enthusiasm to end the victimization of those German-Jews who had not been able to emigrate also propelled refugee soldiers' zeal to serve. The families of many German-Jewish refugees had remained in Nazi Germany when the young men had fled, which further motivated those who returned as American soldiers to try to find their families. When they returned as soldiers, however, German-Jewish refugees found that the Nazis had murdered almost the entire European Jewish population.

Military service thrust German-Jewish refugees into a complex and changing identity. They were once victims of Nazi persecution. When they came to the United States and joined the American armed forces, they were gradually transformed. Military

service changed the former victims, who became refugees in America, into American victors—and in a special way, successful fighters against those who had grotesquely perverted the political and civil values of their former homeland, a land where Jews had lived for close to a millennium.

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