

Chapter 4

GERMAN JEWISH REFUGEES IN THE U.S. MILITARY



After the attack on Pearl Harbor, German Jewish refugees frequently expressed their eagerness to fight in the war for the United States but were often left frustrated when they tried. Though they were occasionally able to join the army in support roles, only after restrictions on enemy aliens in the U.S. Armed Forces were relaxed in 1943 were they able to enter all military branches and eligible to participate in combat. From then on, they joined in significant numbers. The National Jewish Welfare Service conducted surveys during the war that suggest the percentage of the Jewish refugee population fighting matched that of the general population, if not slightly higher.¹ War participation was a crucial topic within the German Jewish refugee community. *Aufbau* inevitably played a major role in this, promulgating the notion that it was natural and imperative for the refugees to fight because they owed it to both the United States and themselves, their German Jewish past, and Jewish friends and relatives who had remained in Europe. Meanwhile, German Jewish clubs across the country regularly and proudly published the latest numbers of members who had joined the Armed Forces and reserved special honors for soldiers' families.

Since the refugees had left their homes, Germany had been a rather distant political entity. It acted as a memory, an imaginary space and contested topic in their lives. For refugee soldiers, Germany now became a very immediate presence because they encountered German soldiers—on and off the battlefield, during and after battles—and later also German civilians.² The relationship between German Jews and non-Jewish Germans was dramatically altered in that the power dynamic was now frequently completely reversed.³

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Donning an American Uniform: Motivations and Attitudes

When John Stern, a refugee from Marburg, recounted being drafted into the U.S. Army in November 1943, he recalled that he “was quite pleased,” explaining, “it offered me a chance to do something for the country that adopted me. Naturally, what I had experienced in Germany made a serious impact on me and gave me the extra incentive to be a good soldier.”⁴ The two sides of his sentiments about joining the Army—reflecting his relationship with the United States and Germany—are representative of many refugees’ feelings, both at the time and in their recollections. While different individuals certainly had various personal motivations, in public, most refugees strongly emphasized their special relationship with the United States as a principle reason for their participation in the armed forces.

Military service held a special place for German Jews historically because it was closely tied to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about emancipation. Young German Jews had volunteered to fight against Napoleonic France and also in the German wars of unification.⁵ During World War I, Jews volunteered in disproportionately high numbers. Perceiving their service as an act of patriotism and loyalty to the state, Jewish men proudly pointed out their military service and saw it as legitimating their special tie to Germany.⁶ In the United States, in the context of World War II, refugees regarded joining the Army as the best way to express their gratitude to the nation for accepting them and as ultimate proof of their loyalty to it. There was an understanding that refugees’ military service would clear the past debt, but also that it constituted an investment in the future, further establishing them as good (future) citizens of their new country. In fact, several *Aufbau* articles overtly stated that army service allowed refugees to further their Americanization, which, as we saw in previous chapters, they viewed as both essential for their success and acceptance in the United States and as their duty. In this spirit, one young refugee wrote *Aufbau* that “joining the Army [was] surely the best and quickest way to become Americanized.”⁷ For refugees who had lived in strong refugee communities, like in New York City’s Washington Heights, the army was indeed one of the first places they closely encountered Americans and maintained steady contact with them.⁸

Refugees also wished to join the army because of the enemy in this particular war. Having escaped the Nazis, refugees knew firsthand how ambitious and ruthless they were. Explaining “what he was fighting for,” one young refugee wrote in 1943,

We don’t want to be afraid to open the door of our house when the bell rings because the Gestapo might be waiting outside. . . . This war is entirely different: it is not a war of conquering territories only, but our enemies want to rule the whole world physi-

cally as well as mentally. We are fighting to prevent the enemy from seizing our minds and our souls. We want to live our own lives.⁹

The refugees' German Jewish background affected their attitude toward participating in the war not only in relation to their new home but also with a view toward Europe. Besides wanting to defend their new country, most refugees were predominantly motivated by a strong desire to actively fight the German regime responsible for their and their families' suffering, and to stop the intensifying terror against Jews in Europe. For example, Siegmund Spiegel, originally from Thuringia, expressed his motivation as follows: "I became obsessed with joining the American army once war broke out in Europe in September [1939] because it was important for me to fight against Nazi Germany, the country of my birth."¹⁰ Many refugees had felt helpless in the face of the worsening atrocities in Europe, and joining the army offered an escape from this, as Kurt Klein's words exemplify: "Being in the army came as a tremendous relief to me because I appreciated that America had given me the opportunity to serve as a soldier and possibly defeat evil. It was the first time that I felt good that I could help."¹¹ To make a difference, some refugees found it particularly important to fight in the European theater and not in the Pacific one. Edmund Schloss, a refugee from Hesse, remembered his "biggest fear was being sent to the Pacific." Schloss said, "I kept reminding the first sergeant of my training company that I had the special training in interrogation and could be more effective in the European Theater."¹²

The prospect of fighting Germans who had inflicted so much hardship on them appealed to many refugees. Bernard Fridberg, for example, explained, "I had first-hand experiences with the Germans, so I was anxious to get even with them a little bit."¹³ Other refugees explained this appeal in stronger terms, like William Katzenstein, who wrote in his memoir, "I wanted my revenge, so I volunteered for the draft board."¹⁴ While many refugees named revenge as a motivating factor for joining the U.S. Army in interviews and memoirs many years after the war, the stories they told about the war and their interactions with Germans rarely entailed personal acts of vengeance. Rather, these thoughts of revenge seemed to have fueled their urge to fight and defeat Germany as Allied soldiers and not through indiscriminate acts of retaliation.

Whereas for most refugees their experiences in Germany were motivating factors to go to war, some refugees were rather unenthusiastic precisely because of their recent experiences. Although they largely felt they had a reason to fight, after years of discrimination, persecution, flight, loss, and great efforts to forge new lives, they were hesitant to leave their often still unstable existence. Going to war would again interrupt their new "normal" lives. John Brunswick (formerly Braunschweig), a refugee from northwest Germany, for instance, received his draft notice with "very mixed feelings." On the one hand, he felt that he "should have volunteered to fight Hitler and his Stormtroopers who had caused such

unbelievable suffering to so many people and had ruined their lives.” But “on the other hand,” said Brunswick, “I hated to leave my wife. At the age of thirty-two, having already been in the United States for six years, I was making a little money and I was able to support my parents.”¹⁵

Some younger refugees, too, who did not yet have their own families when the United States entered the war, were very reluctant to leave their civilian lives. Walter Reed, who also believed that America could make a real difference in stopping the Nazi terror, wanted to avoid the draft until he had finished high school: “I was now eighteen years old and that was more important to me at that time than going to war.”¹⁶ His draft was indeed deferred once or twice during 1942 so that he could finish high school.¹⁷ Reed had come to the United States alone, leaving his entire immediate family behind in Germany. For Reed, establishing security in America was foremost in his mind—a pragmatic concern arising from his solitary status.

Also, while revenge and loyalty to the United States predominated in the discourse about refugees’ motivation to join the army, Tom Tugend, a refugee from Berlin, reminds us that pragmatic reasons were often as instrumental as ideological ones. His decision involved a “whole bunch of mixed emotions.” He did not deny that it was important for him to be part of this particular war, but said, “First of all, I wanted to get away from home as quickly as I could,” adding that perhaps “in other times I would have run away and joined the circus.”¹⁸ This shows that while German Jewish refugees’ reasons for joining the army could be distinct from the mass of American soldiers and participation in this war was a very personal endeavor for them, at least some refugees were not that different from other young Americans.

The Refugee Soldiers’ Position within the U.S. Army

As new soldiers, refugees particularly cherished the camaraderie they experienced with other soldiers and the opportunity to be part of the greater project. Still, particularly in the beginning of their time in the army, some refugees “sensed [their] ‘otherness’” as newcomers to the United States, as Jews, and also because of their immediate connection to the enemy country.¹⁹

Depending on how long refugees had been in the United States and on their place of residence, they had become more or less used to America and American ways. However, most were first exposed to numerous Americans from diverse ethnic, regional, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the army. While this was initially “daunting” for some, the refugees generally appreciated the diversity and felt that belonging to this group was part of becoming real Americans.²⁰ One refugee reported in *Aufbau* that “it [was] a pleasure to watch the boys of all nationalities, that is Puerto Ricans, Philipinos [*sic*], Chinese, Italians, Germans, Norwegians,

Danish and what not work together and try to profit from each other's experience and knowledge."²¹ This characterization of the military experience—men from multiethnic backgrounds working together as a team—fits a major theme the Office of War Information propagated among the American public, which became an important image of the war experience as represented in American popular culture.²² It is not clear whether the soldier quoted above had tuned into this central message or arrived at this position on his own. Nevertheless, the multicultural composition of the Armed Forces certainly made it much easier for refugees to “fit in,” not least because many native-born Americans were also surrounded by people from outside of their own, often homogenous, communities, for the first time.²³

At the same time, the diversity in the army also led to clashes between soldiers. Some refugees felt that it was not their non-American background but their Jewish identity that sometimes set them apart.²⁴ Tom Tugend recounted how some of the American soldiers in his unit, “mostly Southern boys, farm boys,” had strong stereotypes of Jews. When, during a conversation about religion, Tugend mentioned that he was Jewish, the reactions were “No you're not, no it's impossible, there are no horns growing out of your forehead and you haven't tried to gyp me and tried to get money from me, so you can't be a Jew.”²⁵ This episode could have happened to an American-born Jew as well and shows how, to some extent, the army was also an “Americanization” experience for Americans coming from parts of the country where they had rarely or never encountered people of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds.²⁶ For Tugend, this reaction, and various other experiences of anti-Semitism he was subjected to after arriving in the United States, led him to conclude that he “was better off identified as a German than as a Jew,” even in an army fighting Germans. Anti-Semitism was not unusual in the army; still, these episodes did not define refugees' experience there. They often blamed anti-Jewish sentiments on individual ignorance, and it was most important to them that there was no structural discrimination against Jews by the state and the military. Also, segregation of African Americans in the U.S. Army “taught Jews forcibly that despite whatever animosity they might meet, they were still white.”²⁷

Occasionally, German Jewish refugees encountered skepticism among other soldiers because of their specific background. Siegmund Spiegel, for example, remembered a master sergeant who “distrusted me, not only because I was Jewish, but also because I was German and spoke with an accent.”²⁸ Also, in early 1942, one refugee soldier advised others in *Aufbau* to abstain from emphasizing their special background in the army and from “representing themselves as well fitted fighters against fascism.”²⁹ He wrote, “When you enter camp you should not show your emotions, you don't have to tell anybody how much you hate the Nazis and how much you have suffered in concentration camps. Soon you will find out that emotions don't get you anywhere.”³⁰ This kind of advice, which

suggested that most American soldiers did not have the same urge and reason to fight in this war as most Jewish refugees did, may have been intended to circumvent sentiments among some Americans who blamed “the Jews” for the war.

From the beginning of the war, and in connection with the enemy alien classification, the refugee community had stressed in publications that refugees’ special knowledge of the enemy and the enemy country could be tremendously useful to the American war effort. Yet only in 1943 did the U.S. government and military officially recognize this potential, when they began to regularly recruit German émigrés, and particularly Jewish refugees.³¹ Also, after the restrictions associated with the enemy alien classification were lifted (see chapter 2), many refugees were assigned to special units to engage in intelligence work—primarily in the army, but a very small number went to the navy and also to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The OSS’s Research and Analysis Branch recruited prominent German émigrés such as Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, and Otto Kirchheimer, and also employed lesser known or ordinary refugees, some of whom worked at OSS into the early postwar years.³²

Still, most refugees recruited for intelligence work served in the army. After basic training, many German Jewish refugees and other foreigners with special knowledge deemed useful to the American war effort began special training at the United States Military Intelligence Training Center established at Camp Ritchie in Maryland. Starting in 1944, some also trained at Camp Sharp in Pennsylvania.³³ Not all refugees were recruited to these special training camps. Some regular army camps also had battalions in which refugee GIs were trained in interrogation techniques, while other refugees who later carried out intelligence work never received any special training at all.³⁴ Camp Ritchie was the largest specifically designated training facility, however, with nineteen thousand soldiers going through it, including three thousand German Jewish refugees.³⁵ Hans Habe, a refugee from Austria-Hungary, wrote in his autobiography about Camp Ritchie that “about 80 per cent. of the Intelligence recruits were not yet American citizens; about half of them were refugees from Hitler, and less than 5 per cent. had been born in America.”³⁶

Soldiers at Camp Ritchie learned how to transform their civilian knowledge of the enemy and enemy country into militarily useful information and tactics, opening a different lens through which they could approach their former home. The German-speaking refugees were trained in all kinds of intelligence activities with a main focus on interrogation tactics for German prisoners of war (POWs) and German civilians. They also became experts in analyzing aerial photographs and on the size and structure of the German Wehrmacht and German military equipment. Beginning in 1944, training also began for them to engage in counterintelligence and spy work.³⁷ Some refugees received instruction in psychological warfare and subsequently worked for the Office of War Information composing leaflets to be dropped behind enemy lines and loudspeaker messages

addressed to German soldiers and civilians.³⁸ Many refugees were very fond of their experience at Camp Ritchie and felt good and proud, not only because they could finally do something in the fight against the Nazis but also because they had earned recognition in their new country. Kurt Klein, recalling a successful exercise at the camp prior to completing his training, stated, for example, “I had assumed a certain authority through my training and often thought it was the fulfillment of a dream to find myself in that position. Certainly it was a position in the army that I never expected to have, so I was very happy I could be in that place in that capacity.”³⁹ At the end of their time in Maryland, the Ritchie Boys, as they came to be called, were shipped to Europe, usually landing first in the United Kingdom. There, they gave lectures to other American GIs about Germany, the German army, and the German people the soldiers would be facing.⁴⁰ Consequently, their special knowledge as German Jews gave them distinct recognition and unique status within the Army.

Even so, the refugees did not see themselves as separate from the larger military. In fact, these specially trained refugees fought right alongside other soldiers in battle. While the intelligence units composed of Ritchie Boys (usually six men) played a special role within the American military and were thus distinct from other American soldiers, their units were attached to larger army divisions.⁴¹ Many Ritchie Boys, and particularly graduates of Camp Sharp, took part in the invasion of Normandy on and after D-Day in June 1944, and many were involved in operations behind enemy lines.⁴² Even while performing special intelligence tasks, these refugees understood their job to be part of the larger united effort of all American soldiers because, as Walter Reed pointed out, they and other Americans were “all in the same boat” in battle.⁴³ Reed emphasized how important it was to him to be part of the great American force; he recalled: “Having been in Europe and ‘knowing’ the Nazis soon faded into the background and was replaced by the danger we all equally felt and were determined to fight against.”⁴⁴ Many other refugees felt the same way. Interviews with former refugee soldiers reveal how immersed they became in the American military culture. Fritz Weinschenk remembered that he was not “immune to the general tenor of American propaganda of that period” and that he started calling the Germans “Krauts,” for example.⁴⁵ While it resulted from widely different experiences, there was a shared animosity toward the Germans by both German Jewish refugees and the American soldiers, contributing to a strong bond among the men.⁴⁶

Most German Jewish refugees became American citizens before being shipped overseas, which reinforced their feeling of being part of a greater project.⁴⁷ As previous chapters illustrated, becoming American citizens was a principle goal for most refugees after their arrival. Refugee soldiers in the army reached this goal sooner than they would have as civilians. The ceremony itself was often quite important to them, since swearing the oath to the United States, and having it

acknowledged, finally validated and made official all their previous assertions of loyalty. Yet becoming naturalized citizens was also a practical matter because it would protect refugees if they became POWs of the German Army. While this situation would not have been unusually dangerous to immigrant soldiers with other backgrounds, many refugees worried that if they were captured and found to be of German origin, German authorities would charge them with treason and execute them.⁴⁸

For this reason, and also to better fit in with mainstream American citizens, many refugees changed their names when they were naturalized. Sometimes military superiors or naturalization officials suggested the name change. Wolfgang Bloch remembered that when he was to be sworn in as an American citizen, an official came by and shouted: “Wolfgang?” When Bloch answered in the affirmative, the man replied, “Do you want to get shot as a spy? Change your name, you can do it here, I’m a judge, doesn’t cost you a dime.” Then, Bloch remembered, “The only ‘W’ I could think of was Walter, so that’s how I became Walter.”⁴⁹ Another refugee, Walter Reed, who was born as Werner Rindsberg, also wanted to change his name because he felt that it stereotyped him as a foreigner and a Jew. This was not easy for him, however, because his name also connected him with his parents, who had remained in Germany and about whose whereabouts and wellbeing he knew nothing at that point. He said, “I vividly recall that I had qualms about changing the name my parents had given me, so I intentionally kept the initials ‘W.R.’ and also selected my original first name of ‘Werner’ to be my new middle name.”⁵⁰

From the time the refugees first entered the American military to their deployment in Europe, they became connected to the United States in new and intense ways. They returned to Europe as American citizens, and some even with new names, but they still had a close connection with their past.

Experiences in Battle and Encounters with German Soldiers

Returning to Europe with the American military was an empowering experience for the refugees. They came as part of a strong military force they felt themselves to be an integral part of and were eager to prove themselves as good GIs. At the same time, unlike their fellow GIs, they had a special relationship with Germany. Individual refugees held different perspectives on their role in this war, and especially about their position vis-à-vis the Germans.⁵¹ Edmund Schloss, for example, recounted, “While I felt a great deal of gratification that I was there with the American troops, I never felt that, ‘Here I am, back to fight you guys for what you did to me.’ [B]ecause I became one of the GIs I never gave revenge a second thought.”⁵² Thus, fighting the Germans was foremost as a necessity to protect fellow soldiers. For Walter Reed this was the predominant motivation to fight:

“It was never about ‘getting back at Hitler,’ or worrying about killing my former countrymen. . . . It was mostly ‘these Krauts are going to kill my buddies,’ ‘let’s get them *first*’ or ‘they killed our buddies, let’s go get even.’”⁵³

Nevertheless, in battle, other refugee soldiers were powerfully driven by their personal experiences with Germans before the war. Bernard Fridberg, for example, who flew bombing missions over German cities, explained:

I felt a great deal of hate toward the Germans at that time when I was twenty-one; what I did know was that my family had lived in Hanover for centuries, and then all of the sudden I wasn’t a German anymore. I wasn’t allowed to swim in public pools or go into parks or enjoy things that non-Jewish children did. Essentially, they took our country away from us. So, I felt good about what I was doing in the air force.⁵⁴

Fridberg’s comment reflected on the relationship between his personal background and his actions as an American soldier, revealing not only that he felt his actions were justified but also that they gave him some satisfaction. In addition, his words illustrate how significant the loss of his and his family’s homeland had been even for a young refugee.⁵⁵

This attachment most German Jews had felt to Germany could surface in certain situations, as the story of another refugee soldier, published in *Aufbau*, illustrates:

This refugee soldier, gunner on a Flying Fortress, had the thrilling experience of shelling his own hometown. Sad and unsettling emotions ravaged in him when he looked from the window of his airplane down on the streets he had known so well. One moment, he said, he was gripped by homesickness, but then he remembered his mother, his father, and his two sisters who had been slain by the Nazis, and his brother, who was a prisoner of the Gestapo. And he did his duty.⁵⁶

As *Aufbau* presented it, the pain the Nazis had inflicted on this young man spurred him to engage in combat. *Aufbau*, always simultaneously serving as a source of information, a guide to proper behavior, and a representation of the refugee community toward the outside, clearly propagated the idea that refugees had a duty to fight in this war. Such statements addressed a principle concern the U.S. military had when enlisting aliens from Axis countries: that these men might be hesitant to fight their former countrymen. Even if they were, the public consensus was that they should overcome this hesitation. Many refugees contemplated the meaning of encountering their former home from the perspective of the enemy and, like the two men who flew bombing missions, being so directly involved in its physical destruction.

Similarly, refugee soldiers also reflected upon engaging Germans in battle. Even years later, they frequently remembered their first encounter and notable situations in the field involving enemy soldiers. William Katzenstein, for

example, stated in an interview that he often thought about a particular hand-to-hand knife fight he had with a German soldier he finally killed, and he described it in detail.⁵⁷ Eric Hamberg's description of his first deadly confrontation with Germans on a battlefield in Anzio, Italy, shows the conflicting emotions this engendered in him. After killing five German soldiers and having a fellow soldier compliment him for it, he felt "queasy," but then he recounted that he considered it his job to participate in the war, and that he wanted to get "back at the Germans" for what they had done to him, his family, and German Jewry more generally. He did not know whether his parents were still alive, and he remembered "the pleasure most Germans got out of synagogues and businesses, dragging Jews through the streets." He said, "Fighting the Germans went very deep for me; I wasn't going to give in an inch."⁵⁸

Refugee soldiers could be aware of their special identity on the battlefield in other situations as well. Language and accent, inevitably, were particularly strong identifiers. During the German counteroffensive at the Battle of the Bulge, the German military had dressed some of its units in the uniforms of American soldiers. This was a dangerous situation for German Jewish refugees, Kurt Herrmann recalled, who, like him, often still had German accents and, thus, could be easily mistaken for the English-speaking German *Wehrmacht* soldiers in American uniforms.⁵⁹ Concern over German soldiers infiltrating their ranks lingered among American troops and refugee soldiers worried about a possible mix-up. This fear, as it turned out, was not unfounded. In one case, a German Jewish refugee was killed at night on his way to the latrine after having responded to the password call with a German accent.⁶⁰ However, refugee soldier Walter Eichelbaum used this potential for confusion to the advantage of the U.S. Army. When he discovered a unit of Germans in disguise, Eichelbaum pretended to be part of another one of these units and, pretending he thought they were Americans, asked them to surrender. Surrender they did, thinking they had nothing to fear from one of their own, only to subsequently "receive . . . the shock of their lives when their captors turned out to be Americans."⁶¹ Here, Eichelbaum strategically used his "Germanness" to be an effective American soldier, demonstrating that refugees could be particularly adept at fighting the Germans in this war, just as many refugees had long argued they would be.⁶²

Off the Battlefield: Full Reversal of Power

For the refugees, facing German soldiers on the battlefield was different than facing them after they had surrendered or had been captured and when they did not pose an imminent threat to their lives or that of their fellow comrades. While some refugees articulated that fighting Germany was somewhat tied to notions of revenge, and that such emotions provided an incentive in battle, the testimonies

of refugee soldiers rarely reveal acts of personal vengeance against German soldiers off the battlefield. The relationships between German Jewish refugee GIs and German soldiers in such settings were shaped primarily by their respective status: the refugees were members of the victorious army and the Germans were on the losing side. One German Jewish refugee recalled the impression this complete reversal of power between the two groups had on him and a German officer he had captured:

Without undue delay I told him, 'Hände hoch' [hands up], pointed my rifle at the son of a bitch, and he turned ashen white. Then I told him, 'Ich bin ein deutscher Jude' (I'm a German Jew), and this man was in an absolute state of terror. He could not believe that one little yid should get him out of five million GIs. A rifle pointed at an arrogant officer becomes a powerful persuader. It was a good feeling.⁶³

Although such displays of the power reversal may have constituted a sort of psychological revenge tactic for some German Jewish refugee soldiers, personal acts of revenge—that is, physical violence—against soldiers who had surrendered or been captured are largely absent from the refugees' stories.⁶⁴ On the contrary, many refugees highlighted the care they took to not behave in vindictive ways and to be especially sensitive in situations where Germans were killed when it did not constitute self-defense.⁶⁵ Even refugee soldiers like Eric Hamberg, who articulated that he "wanted to get back at the Germans," remembered his distress when American GIs killed two German soldiers who had surrendered.⁶⁶ Otto Stern recalled another instance when a German soldier was walking toward him with his hands up to surrender. Before Stern could question him, another soldier shot him. "I just hated that, and in fact, it is still on my mind. The last word the German said was, 'Mutter' (mother)."⁶⁷

Karl Goldschmith also remembered a similar incident, when a few young American soldiers killed fifteen POWs they had been ordered to guard. Goldsmith was deeply disturbed by this. He said, "In the pocket of one of the dead men, I found a letter to his wife about how happy he was that this mess was over and soon he would be home. My God, what horror that was. That was not war, it was murder."⁶⁸

Some German Jewish refugees seemed to have been less inclined to kill German soldiers who did not pose a direct threat to them than their fellow American GIs. Their testimonies suggest that this derived from a certain sympathy for the German soldiers as well as the ideal they held of how one ought to act as a soldier. Because of their familiarity with Germans outside the context of war, refugees were able, perhaps more than other American soldiers, who had never met Germans without a *Wehrmacht* uniform, to more easily relate to the German soldiers as individual human beings rather than as ubiquitous and anonymous enemies. Being able to understand the enemy's language also

affected them, so that utterances like the word “mother” spoken in German by a dying soldier evoked some sympathy. Also, without forgetting the negative experiences they had suffered in Germany, many refugees recalled that not all Germans had been Nazis and that not all soldiers were ideologically driven and fervent fighters for Hitler’s Reich.⁶⁹ In addition, the refugees, being in the position of power the American military had granted them, were able to talk to the German soldiers once they had surrendered and been taken prisoners and, thus, to find out more about the soldiers’ involvement in the regime. This ability to distinguish between different Germans was an important incentive for the refugees to refrain from random acts of vengeance. Also, because of their past, the refugees were particularly sensitive to these kinds of killings. They had seen Nazis violently attack people merely for belonging to a certain group and did not want to act similarly.

In fact, having experienced a dictatorial system that had stripped people of basic human rights, many refugees were particularly eager to act with human decency and in accordance with the principles of the Geneva Convention to which they had sworn an oath.⁷⁰ Fritz Weinschenk described this feeling in a situation he faced. An American soldier friend, sympathetic to his German Jewish background, assumed that he would want revenge and to see any Germans dead. When a group of about thirty German soldiers surrendered with their hands up, his friend suggested that Weinschenk could now have his way with them, which he opposed. After yet another soldier then threatened to kill them, Weinschenk shouted at the Germans to run away and told the GI not to shoot them. He recalled, “I prevented a war crime. I didn’t want to see that happen.”⁷¹ In their war stories, many refugees highlighted their decent and humane acts as soldiers. Many felt it was crucial for them to respect human dignity because it set them apart from the Nazis, a group they most directly identified with inhumanity, and bound them closer to the United States, a nation they believed embodied these principles.

All these aspects came to the fore in the refugees’ treatment of German POWs, with whom they had frequent and direct contact since they were in charge of overseeing POW camps and were mainly responsible for interrogating them. Even though the power reversal was paramount and most direct in this relationship, the interactions between refugee soldiers and German POWs were not characterized by acts of indiscriminate revenge.⁷² Rather, most refugee soldiers experienced strong feelings of satisfaction, a sense that justice was being served, and gratitude in their position of power over the German POWs. Kurt Klein put it this way: “I enjoyed seeing Germans as prisoners because now the shoe was on the other foot. To see them bedraggled and kind of desperate to get out of the war felt very good. When I lived in Germany, they had the decision of life or death over us, and we could only stand with our hands tied. Now to see them in that state felt very good.”⁷³

The relationships that developed from this power reversal depended on various factors, not least on the personalities and personal histories of both the refugees and the POWs. The prisoners came from different backgrounds, as Kurt Shuler remembered:

There were two kinds of German prisoners of war, in Italy, most of them were drafted Bavarian farmers who just wanted to get back to their farm, they were, you know, not necessarily convinced Nazis but they, you know, they were drafted. And then there were the German paratroopers, which were an entirely different class of people, you didn't even want to get close to them, they wanted to kill you.⁷⁴

The individual stance prisoners had toward Hitler and the Nazi ideology frequently revealed itself during interrogations. The goal of the interrogations was to extract any information that could aid the Allied war effort, such as details about strategies and tactics, as well as the state of military might and morale in the Wehrmacht. In addition, interrogators also sought to gain insight into the morale of the civilian population in the Reich. Toward the end of the war, when knowledge about the Nazis' atrocities against European Jews and other "enemies" was being confirmed, interrogators also increasingly aimed to acquire information that could help identify war criminals and lead to their capture.⁷⁵ The treatment of the POWs during the interrogations differed, depending on their rank in the Wehrmacht, whether they belonged to the SS or other special units, and on how cooperative they were. Fred Fields recalled that when dealing with SS and higher-ranking officers, for example, they "had to be rough with them, psychologically (and sometimes physically) and threatened them with everything under the sun."⁷⁶ While one of the most effective threats was the prospect of transferring a POW to the Soviet Army, some refugees were conscious that their German Jewish identity, coupled with their position of power as American soldiers, could potentially terrify the POWs.⁷⁷ Thus, some refugees scared German soldiers by revealing that their interrogator, the "American captor," was a German Jewish refugee. Martin Selling reported in an interview that he played on his German Jewish identity when he told the POW he was interrogating why he spoke such good German: "I learned to speak such good German while I was in Germany, and I learned how to interrogate prisoners while I was an inmate at Dachau."⁷⁸ With satisfaction Selling reported that, upon hearing this, the POW not only lost control of his bowels but suddenly had answers to all of his questions.⁷⁹ Few refugees recounted intimidation and threats that turned physical. Fred Fields recalled one such incident during an interrogation when he "let [his] anger fly . . . [and] knocked a Sturmhauptführer's teeth out."⁸⁰

In other situations, and with other POWs, the relationship could be different. When Kurt Shuler interrogated the Wehrmacht soldiers whom he described as Bavarian farmers not persuaded by Nazi ideology (see above), they were surprised

that Shuler also spoke with a Bavarian accent and wondered what he was doing “on the other side.” When he revealed he was a Jew from Nuremberg, their response, he said, was, “lucky you, you got away from here.”⁸¹ Sometimes, refugees even recounted having friendly relations with German POWs. Fritz Weinschenk, for example, who was in charge of supervising POWs working for the American military, remembered the German POWs’ good work ethic with admiration. He also recalled having cordial interactions and interesting conversations with one particular German staff sergeant.⁸²

Besides these stories about both friendly and hateful interactions, some refugee soldiers said in interviews that they were baffled by the submissiveness and ignorance of the larger situation they observed in many German POWs. Kurt Shuler remembered that Germans just “couldn’t believe that they lost the war, they were standing in their uniform with all their medals on, by their tanks and everything, and they looked at us as, their attitude was, how did this ragtag group of Americans manage to beat us, they couldn’t, they really couldn’t understand it.”⁸³ This incomprehension and submissiveness was even true for some who had formerly held powerful positions in the Reich, such as Julius Streicher, a virulent anti-Semite and publisher of the Nazi propaganda newspaper *Der Stürmer*. John Brunswick had interrogated Streicher, who, he reported, “sounded so ridiculous and pathetic that I could not even hate him.”⁸⁴ According to *Aufbau* reporter Wilfred Hülse, who was a captain in the U.S. Army and had a lot of contact with POWs through his position as a physician in a POW camp, this was a common character trait among German soldiers.⁸⁵ In his experience, they displayed absolutely no sense of courage, lacked political judgment, were neither “capable nor willing to personally take on responsibility” for the future of Germany, and were only motivated to please authority—regardless of its nature.⁸⁶ In 1945, Hülse wrote that the average soldier, although not a fanatic Nazi, did not object to the principles he had lived by over the past twelve years nor was he conscious of any crimes he had committed. Hülse expressed surprise at “how little these people have learned.” Hülse’s words do not communicate feelings of hatred for the German POWs or calls for punishment or revenge. Rather, they reflect this refugee soldier’s clear sense of moral superiority over them and a good dose of contempt.⁸⁷

The German Jewish Refugees as Occupiers: Encountering German Civilians

The refugees’ first contact with Germans frequently happened outside of the territory of the 1933 borders of the German Reich. Yet the experience of returning to German territory for the first time generated another range of feelings and reactions. In interviews recorded many years after the war’s end, many refugees

imbued this experience with great symbolic meaning. Otto Stern, for example, recalled, “I had a feeling of elation the first time I stepped on German soil when we crossed the Rhine to Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. I was not a victim but a captor and the feeling was unbelievable.”⁸⁸ The destruction Allied bombs had wrought on German cities caused a variety of reactions from the refugees. Edmund Schloss spoke of his response at the time: “It was a revelation to see what we had done to Germany; I was elated when I saw the German cities destroyed, because I thought that was justice and that they got what they deserved.”⁸⁹ Other refugees, especially those who found their former hometowns destroyed, said they had had more mixed feelings, often ruminating on the destruction and the brutality Hitler and his regime had brought upon so many different people. Still, the refugees put the destruction into the broader context of the war and German atrocities—something most Germans did not do.⁹⁰ This realization—that many Germans could not see beyond their own suffering and did not accept responsibility—especially shaped refugees’ relationship with German civilians. While refugee soldiers experienced satisfaction over their power as victorious American soldiers and employees of the military government in a position to identify and oust certain Nazis, they also saw that they could not force Germans to acknowledge their wrongdoing. This frustrated refugee soldiers tremendously, who overwhelmingly translated this frustration into contempt for Germans rather than indiscriminate acts of revenge on German civilians.

Shortly before the end of the war and in its immediate aftermath, the U.S. military often assigned German Jewish refugees to positions entailing a lot of interaction with German civilians. Such positions could involve taking over administrative or organizational tasks in a German town or community, for which the refugees were well equipped due to their knowledge of the language and familiarity with general structures in German society. Ludwig Mühlfelder, for example, a refugee soldier originally from Thuringia, was tasked with arranging accommodations for American troops.⁹¹ In this position, he ordered Germans to leave their homes to make them available for American soldiers staying there temporarily before moving east. In his memoir, Mühlfelder emphasized the importance he placed in not behaving toward Germans in ways comparable to Nazi actions. Thus, he always told German civilians not to leave valuables behind so they would not get stolen. Mühlfelder’s fellow soldiers criticized him for treating the German people too humanely, he wrote, but he insisted that American soldiers ought to act honorably and decently. Like other refugee soldiers, Mühlfelder also described how his own experience with the Nazis made him want to act morally superior to them. Nevertheless, Mühlfelder did have a strong interest in finding out which Germans had been Nazis.⁹²

Identifying Nazis in local governments was one of refugee soldiers’ major tasks in Germany. Henry Kissinger was assigned to a small county near Frankfurt, where he was to ensure security and “arrest all Nazis above a certain level.” He

recalled, “I had the right to arrest anybody I wanted for security reasons, which was a strange reversal of roles. Of course, no German ever claimed to have been a Nazi.”⁹³

This was a problem most refugee soldiers encountered. Tom Tugend, for instance, recalled going from village to village as part of a counterintelligence unit searching for Nazis. Everywhere he went, people denied having been Nazis. Instead, everyone accused their neighbors. “Finally,” Tugend said,

I went into a small town in Bavaria and everybody said: “Well, there is one Nazi, he is an 80-year-old blind poet and he is a vergrämter [antagonized] Nazi.” So, I went to the guy, and he was blind, and said: “your neighbors maintain you . . .,” and he said: “yes I’m Nationalsozialist and I am proud of it and I believe in Hitler,” and so on. So I went back to my headquarters and said, “I think I deserve to get a medal, because I’ve discovered the only Nazi in all of Germany.”⁹⁴

Although Tugend told this story with some bemusement many years later, it was an exceedingly frustrating experience when it happened. Klaus Mann captured this sentiment in an article for the army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* in 1945. He described how perplexed and irritated the Allies were by the Germans’ “complacency, self-pity and ignorance.” He wrote, “They don’t seem to regret anything, except their own unpleasant plight. They don’t see why they, of all people, should have to suffer so much. ‘What have we done to deserve this?’ they will ask you— all wide-eyed naiveté and bland innocence.”⁹⁵

Despite such denials, refugee soldiers were able to circumvent them sometimes by using their own knowledge and experience. Some returned to their former hometowns “to look for the Nazis [they] remembered.”⁹⁶ Karl Goldsmith said in an interview, “As the war finished, I immediately put in a request to be involved with the Denazification of my hometown. I wanted to do that so badly. They kicked the shit out of me so much as a kid.”⁹⁷ Goldsmith’s request was granted, so he went to his hometown of Eschwege and was indeed able to arrest the main Nazi perpetrators there. This enabled Goldsmith to retaliate against specific Germans with whom he had experienced negative encounters, but he did so through official channels within the framework of the Allied occupation denazification program. During his time as military governor of the city, it appears that his relationship with the local population was fairly tense. While Goldsmith described himself as a pragmatist in this position, he also said that he lived very well while there. His neighbor called him the town’s “uncrowned king,” which suggests that Goldsmith may have used the authority invested in him extensively.⁹⁸ Moreover, Goldsmith’s mother told her son years later after returning from a trip to Eschwege, “Karl, you can never go back to Eschwege; they’ll kill you.” Goldsmith himself said of his behavior in Eschwege, “I doubt if my father would have approved, but I did not compromise or bring dishonor

to my adopted country or family.” It is clear that the locals’ denial of their responsibility for the situation they found themselves in was highly frustrating to Goldsmith. He recounted many people who had known him before the war asking him for special favors for their families. His answers to such requests, he claimed, were always, “I’m sorry, I cannot do anything about it.” He recalled that he was “flabbergasted that these people had the temerity to face me and say these things to me, when they knew what they themselves had done to me and my family. Forget about all the other people who burnt up in concentration camps.”⁹⁹

Sometimes, refugee soldiers held such authority positions over former fellow townspeople by coincidence. Kurt Shuler, born in Nuremberg, returned to the city as an American soldier to look for his relatives. He was lucky to find his cousin alive: she had survived the war in a “privileged marriage” to a non-Jewish German man. Shuler remembered that when he arrived in Nuremberg on the day of the armistice, he was “essentially the only American representative” in the city. Although he had not intended to take on any authority, he recalled that because he had local knowledge and trustworthy connections, until the Allied Military Government arrived, “for several weeks I really ran the city. So, waiting for the real people to come and because of my cousin who knew everybody, who knew who was who, I was able to get rid of the main Nazis.”¹⁰⁰ Consequently, Shuler, who emphasized that he was not motivated by revenge, ended up in a position of power over the German population, using his local connections to help in the denazification process.

Like Kurt Shuler, many refugee soldiers asked for permission to return to their former hometowns to find relatives.¹⁰¹ Walter Reed hoped to find out something about his family’s whereabouts in his hometown of Mainstockheim. There, however, “local residents knew only that the Jews had been ‘sent to a labor camp in the East’ several years before.”¹⁰² While a few refugee soldiers were reunited with family members who had survived in hiding, most did not find any relatives alive.¹⁰³ Even refugees with no family members left in Germany frequently returned to their former hometowns, driven by a certain nostalgia and desire to see the place where they had grown up. Most refugees recalled this experience of going back as very emotional, depending on their particular histories with the place. For example, Guy Stern said, “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.”¹⁰⁴

Confronted with the physical sites of his past life, Guy Stern found that the pain of having lost his home could not be erased by returning there as a victor. For another refugee soldier, returning home evoked negative feelings of a different kind: “I was to drive back to Weinheim, a place I left in disgust and

which I never expected to see again in all my life. Fate wanted it differently . . . I looked around and although everything looked familiar, it looked strange, cold and repulsive to me. The spirit, the sentiment, the atmosphere of former years removed.”¹⁰⁵ The confrontation with familiar places evoked memories and emotions associated with a range of positive and negative experiences. Which of these took precedence depended on a variety of factors, including refugees’ personal histories and postwar interactions with the people in their former hometowns.

How these interactions turned out depended on individuals’ past histories and the specific context of the postwar situation in which they met. Thus, while there could be agreement and friendly exchange over one issue, there might be a dispute over another.¹⁰⁶ Studies on early postwar Jewish and non-Jewish German encounters have emphasized that Germans avoided being drawn into conversations about Jewish persecution and annihilation and demonstrated ignorance and innocence, focusing on their own suffering.¹⁰⁷ This was particularly true when Jews returned to live in Germany, but the refugee soldiers faced such German reactions as well. Most interactions between refugee soldiers and locals seem to have been dominated by locals’ awareness that the refugees held a position of power—even if they were not officially in charge of the town. This realization could express itself in different ways. John Stern found it interesting that “quite a few people welcomed” him.¹⁰⁸ However, he also recounted that this welcoming could be quite ingratiating, likely because many Germans, while not openly acknowledging guilt, had a sense of the injustice committed and feared retribution. A prevalent fear Stern encountered was that he had returned to take away people’s property. Hinting at this sentiment, one woman told him, “You never looked like a Jew. You were always so nice,” also illustrating an astonishing lack of comprehension among many Germans at the time. Another refugee soldier stationed in Berlin in summer 1945 was repelled by the “bootlicking ways” German people employed in attempts to establish friendly contacts with Allied soldiers.¹⁰⁹ In a letter home, he wrote, “Girls are everywhere. They practically offer themselves to us.” He found this disconcerting, not only because he was surprised by their good looks, “impeccable” dress and makeup (he wrote, “Are we in liberated Paris or in conquered Berlin?”), but also because this all happened in the immediate context of the Holocaust: “and we try to look stern and to remember Buchenwald and Dachau.”¹¹⁰

Other refugee soldiers observed some Germans suddenly coming up with Jewish ancestors or telling returning refugees stories about helping different Jews in their hometown during the Third Reich.¹¹¹ In recalling his interactions with Germans, Kurt Shuler remarked, “What bothered me more than anything else was that everybody was lying. You know, when Hitler had these plebiscites, 99.4 percent voted ‘*ja*.’ After the war, 99.4 percent voted ‘*nein*.’ They were all lying through their teeth.”¹¹²

Yet, among these prevalent denials in the early postwar encounters between refugee soldiers and non-Jewish Germans, some refugees were able to make Germans engage with their own anti-Jewish actions. In this, they were empowered by their position as American soldiers, their familiarity with the people, and the knowledge that they did not have to live there. When Otto Stern returned to his former hometown, he found that the Jewish cemetery had partly been turned into a cornfield. Angered by the destruction, he confronted the mayor, whom he had known before the war, and demanded that he rectify this issue. The mayor insisted it was difficult to find people to do this, essentially trying to evade the situation, to which Stern replied, “If it’s not done by the time I come back, you’ll do it personally while I point a rifle at you.” Stern continued in his recollection: “Needless to say, by the time I did eventually return, the cemetery was in good shape.”¹¹³ Such incidents might have given refugees momentary personal satisfaction, but most found that they did not belong there, not least because such rectifying actions needed to be forced on Germans. Learning about the full extent of the atrocities against European Jews reinforced this feeling.

Holocaust

Throughout the Allied invasion, German Jewish refugee soldiers were very sensitive to the situation of Jews who had remained in Europe. Recounting their war experiences, refugee soldiers often specifically mentioned encounters with Jews in territories that had been under German occupation, most of whom had survived the war in hiding. The soldiers frequently tried to provide them with food or other useful items.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, during their time in the army, the refugees, along with the general American and world public, were not yet aware of the full extent of the crimes against European Jews. News of deportations and ghettos had appeared in American papers since late 1939–40, when Nazis had started to deport Jews from cities in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. Massacres of Jews were also reported, and *Aufbau* in particular paid close attention to these events. Depending on when they joined the military, some refugees may have had an idea about atrocities and may have more or less believed the accounts of them. However, while in Europe, some refugee soldiers caught glimpses of the bigger picture during interrogations of German POWs. Harry Lorch recalled getting some soldiers to admit to him that “there were things happening to Jews in Russia that were unimaginable.”¹¹⁵ Toward the end, and in the immediate aftermath of the war, refugee soldiers also found out about the atrocities from survivors. During a Shabbat service in Augsburg, for example, Jerry Bechhofer met a mother and daughter who told him they had escaped the gas chambers. Bechhofer recalled this incident as “the first eye-opener” for him.¹¹⁶ Refugees also served in units that liberated concentration camps or entered them shortly

thereafter. While the encounter with the horrors were shocking and unfathomable for all, refugees had to fear to find family members or other people they knew among the dead.¹¹⁷

The realization just how extreme and extensive the atrocities against the European Jews were made some refugee soldiers question Germany's future. In late April 1945, Werner Angress, who had witnessed the liberation of some concentration camps, wrote in a letter to his friend Bo,

I am quite objective in my judgment; I am more than ever convinced that the German nation stinks, that they are a rotten bunch. Granted that not all of them are criminals, but their majority is below all standards . . . Bo, if they erase Germany's boundaries off the map, nobody would be sorry here. This state, this nation has forfeited their right to exist.¹¹⁸

Similarly, another refugee soldier remembered his response upon seeing Buchenwald concentration camp in April 1945: "I 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."¹¹⁹ While not all refugee soldiers felt this strongly about Germany, most saw no future for themselves in their former home country when they recognized the reality of the atrocities against Europe's Jews and Germans' behavior in the face of it. As most refugees held sentiments of contempt for Germany, they appreciated the United States even more and felt confirmed in their sense of belonging there.¹²⁰ Their proclamations of loyalty and the gratitude they had felt and demonstrated since arriving in the United States took on another dimension of meaning when they learned about the fate of Europe's Jews.

Still, they were also grateful to the United States for allowing them to participate in the fight to end Nazism. The testimonies of these refugee soldiers convey their overwhelming pride about having been in the American military and having contributed to ending the Nazi terror.¹²¹ To differing degrees, refugee soldiers also felt personal satisfaction at having retaliated against Germans (taken at large) for what they had done. William Katzenstein wrote in his memoir, "I was more than overjoyed, if not totally ecstatic, that I had been a conquering soldier. I felt that I got my revenge for my second cousin, Rosel Faist, many cousins more removed, and murdered friends."¹²² Katzenstein's war memories, like those of most other refugee soldiers, did not include stories about him carrying out acts of personal vengeance against Germans. It becomes clear that, for him, revenge meant returning and defeating the Germans as an American soldier. Whether they called it "justice served" or, in one case, "my way of *Wiedergutmachung* (repayment)," many other refugees shared this satisfaction.¹²³

For many refugees, any nostalgia they may have still held for the old country faded after they experienced the destruction that the Nazis and war had brought

upon it. The older generation may have mourned Germany's loss more intensely and had greater difficulties adjusting to a new life in the United States, but most of them did not see the destruction themselves. Walter Spiegel wrote as much in a letter to his parents: "You have to have been through the ruins of Europe to appreciate America, and I realize more than ever the value of belonging there, at least I have a lot to look forward to—a wholesome security and a nice way of life."¹²⁴ In contrast to Germany, the United States offered them a future. Many refugees took advantage of the GI Bill, which allowed them to begin or finish their studies if they were young enough. This gave them an opportunity for an education many would not otherwise have been able to afford.¹²⁵ Karl Goldsmith was among these GIs and was very grateful for it. Reminiscing about the end of the war and his return to America, he also reflected on his relationship to Germany: "I really think I tried very hard to do what I consider as fulfilling the debt. I think I paid back a little bit to the good old country, and what I was given was a new life and future. My reward for going to war was a free country."¹²⁶ For these refugee soldiers, having fought in the U.S. Army solidified their position in the United States.

While most refugees returned to the United States after completing their service, a few stayed in Germany to work for the American military government and put their experience in Germany to work for the United States.¹²⁷ Fritz Weinschenk, for example, stayed because he had "an intense (though not necessarily favorable) interest in the Germans and what was happening to them."¹²⁸ Refugees were mainly assigned to work on legal and denazification matters—their participation in the Nuremberg trials is their most well-known involvement. Yet others were also employed in the fields of civil administration, finance, economy, manpower, and plans and operations.¹²⁹ In addition, some refugees were entrusted with rebuilding German cultural institutions, such as the German press and German libraries.¹³⁰ In general, very few émigrés appeared to have been employed in high-ranking positions, likely because American authorities may have been concerned that they would either be too friendly or too hostile with the Germans.¹³¹

The relationships between refugees working for the American occupation government and Germans during the immediate aftermath of war were complex. Weinschenk recalled, "At first . . . we of the occupation looked down on them [the Germans] for what they had done."¹³² Nevertheless, some refugees also believed that certain Germans could be entrusted with rebuilding Germany and that they should have some freedom to do so.¹³³ Even so, many Germans continued to act ignorant of their own role in the war and its aftermath, and resented the occupiers and, as Hans Habe pointed out in his autobiography, seemed to have particularly disliked taking instructions from former countrymen in American uniforms.¹³⁴ In general, the refugees' time spent in Germany working for the military government and sometimes in closer cooperation with German

civilians did not propel them to want to stay and live in Germany again.¹³⁵ Also, the positions they held did not guarantee a future in Germany. In 1947, the vast majority of refugees were dismissed from service in the American occupation government, apparently because they were viewed as “insufficiently ‘impartial and objective’” in their actions toward German civilians.¹³⁶ Even though there are no reports of acts of Jewish vengeance, notions that such acts could happen persisted in American and German circles during the early aftermath of the war.

Not many years after they had fled Germany, some German Jewish refugees returned to the continent as American soldiers. As immigrants to the United States, they were subject to the draft and sometimes came in direct contact with Germany and Germans. Many refugees embraced the opportunity to fight against the Nazis and also saw it as a fitting way to show their loyalty to the new country. Coming back to Europe and Germany as American soldiers and victors gave most of them great satisfaction, which was particularly meaningful in direct interactions with Germans. Abstract notions of revenge that had spurred many refugees to fight did not translate into individual acts of vengeance, however. Encountering Germans and Germany, they faced the complex realities of their past, which for many included a good life before the Nazis, and persecution once the Nazis had come to power. In their interactions with Germans, they were guided by both these past experiences and their present status as American soldiers. They especially wished to distinguish themselves from the Nazis and act like decent, honorable soldiers, which they perceived as a core value of the democratic world they were fighting for. Many refugees believed this attitude accounts for the absence of vengeful acts against Germans. Furthermore, they often felt contempt rather than anger for the Germans they encountered. In this way, the soldiers’ military superiority was matched by feelings of moral superiority. The refugees’ interactions with Germans thus affected the way they wanted to see themselves. The experience of being a U.S. soldier solidified refugees’ status in America, not only because of the bond they experienced with other Americans, but also because their interactions with Germans and the destruction they witnessed did not offer very much for them to long for or identify with. This did not mean that they were uninterested in Germany’s fate after the war. On the contrary, because of what they saw and experienced firsthand, they remained interested, also for the sake of their own and other Jewish communities.

Notes

1. Based on case studies of different cities published in 1943, 34 percent of refugees aged eighteen to forty-four served, which equals the percentage of Americans in general. Belt, *Fighting for America*, 4. Another study by the National Jewish Welfare board, also based on a case study of about 3,500 refugees, shows that 10 percent were in the service, compared to 8.9 percent of all Americans. National Jewish Welfare Board, *American Jews in World War II*, 23–24.
 Various scholarship on German Jewish refugees serving in the U.S. Army during World War II puts their number between 9,500 (based on a calculation in Franklin, “Victim Soldiers”) and 30,000 (Remy, “Deutsch-Jüdische Flüchtlinge,” 201), which the majority claims. My own estimate, based on numbers of soldiers from the Los Angeles Jewish Club and the New World Club in New York, is closer to 15,000. Of about two thousand (mostly older) members of the Jewish Club in Los Angeles, 163 were soldiers in 1944.
2. For existing literature on the topic, see Franklin, “Victim Soldiers”; Remy, “Deutsch-Jüdische Flüchtlinge”; Stern, “In the Service of American Intelligence”; Stern, “The Jewish Exiles in the Service of US Intelligence”; Krauss, “Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?”; and Jochem, “Fallbeispiel III.”
3. In this, I concur with many scholars who have written on refugee soldiers and whose works are listed above. Female refugees who served in the U.S. Armed Forces are not included here; research on these women remains to be done.
4. “John Stern,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 125.
5. See Penslar, *Jews and the Military*.
6. Gerson, “In Between States,” 187–88. The Jewish enthusiasm for serving in World War I was damaged by the 1916 census of Jews in the army, the so-called Jew count, the army’s reaction to accusations that Jews were avoiding military service. The stab-in-the-back legend lived off allegations that treacherous Jews in the army were responsible for Germany’s defeat. Still, Jewish men who had served in World War I and their families kept certain rights and privileges after the Nazis were in power, in contrast to those who had not served.
7. Fred Forscher, “A Soldier on Americanization,” *Aufbau* 8 (30 January 1942): 8. Forscher was a refugee from Austria. However, his outlook was similar to that of refugees from Germany.
8. See, e.g., interviews with Henry Kissinger, Walter Reed, and Jerry Bechhofer in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*.
9. This is an excerpt from the winning essay of an essay contest of the National Jewish Welfare Board. “Jews in Uniform,” *Aufbau* 9 (27 August 1943).
10. “Siegmond Spiegel,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 19.
11. “Kurt Klein,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 274.
12. Edmund Schloss, from the small German town of Jesberg, came to the United States as a boy in 1938. Fear of being sent to the Pacific theater could also have been grounded in the brutal warfare in the Pacific rather than a determined desire to face the German enemy. The context of the interview suggests the latter, however. “Edmund Schloss,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 170.
13. “Bernard Fridberg,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 62; Fridberg was born in Hanover in 1922 and left Germany when he was thirteen.
14. “William Katzenstein,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 98.
15. “John Brunswick,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 248.
16. “Walter Reed,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 186.
17. *Ibid.*, 187. See also Mühlfelder, *Weil ich übriggeblieben bin*.
18. Interview Tom Tugend.
19. “Walter Reed,” in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 188.
20. *Ibid.*

21. From the regular section "Our Boy's Club," *Aufbau* 9 (22 January 1943).
22. Alpers, "This Is the Army," 143.
23. Even if other Americans came from diverse backgrounds, many shared cultural preferences distinct from those of the refugees. This was particularly true for sports. While baseball and football were important to most Americans, many refugees had not taken a great liking to them. They often preferred soccer or were not interested in sports at all. Thus, one refugee recalled heated arguments erupting between him and his fellow American soldiers over such ostensibly minor things as what to listen to on the radio because he preferred Brahms and his fellow soldiers football sportscasts and Sammy Kay. Fred Forscher, "A Soldier on Americanization," *Aufbau* 8 (30 January 1942): 8.
24. For a study of American Jews who fought as soldiers in World War II, see Moore, *GI Jews*.
25. Interview Tom Tugend.
26. *Ibid.* On anti-Semitism in the U.S. Army, see, e.g., Bendersky, *The "Jewish Threat."*
27. Moore, *GI Jews*, 71; see also 119, 151. In the interviews I used, segregation in the army was not discussed, nor, interestingly, was it mentioned in relation to discussions on anti-Semitism. Deborah Dash Moore pointed out that many Jewish GIs "ignored the fact that both the Army and civil society in the South were segregated, but some northern Jews did remark on Jim Crow."
28. This was in 1942. "Siegmond Spiegel," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 20.
29. Walter Schoenstedt, "Our Army, Too: Immigrant Etiquette for Military Life," *Aufbau* 8 (2 January 1942): 3.
30. *Ibid.*
31. It is not entirely clear why this happened so late, as Stern points out in "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of U.S. Intelligence," 51.
32. See Katz, "The Frankfurt School Goes to War," also for the interesting fact that the U.S. government employed Marxist thinkers. See also Müller, *Krieger und Gelehrte*.
33. Most of the official documents on Camp Ritchie were destroyed in a fire at the National Archive in St. Louis in 1973. Therefore, scholars have so far drawn mostly on individual testimonies to reconstruct the history of the camp. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 53n34.
34. See, e.g., "Edmund Schloss," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 171.
35. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 54.
36. See Habe, *All My Sins*, 324, 3.
37. Jochem, "Fallbeispiel III," 437. For a more detailed account on the experiences of the Ritchie Boys, see Franklin's thesis, "Victim Soldiers," or Stern's account, "In the Service of American Intelligence."
38. Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 471.
39. "Kurt Klein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 276.
40. Interview Kurt Herrmann.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 56. See also Habe, *All My Sins*, 341. In Europe, refugee soldiers were asked to translate documents or interrogate German POWs or civilians. Sometimes, when the demand arose, even refugees without special training performed these tasks.
43. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 186.
44. *Ibid.*
45. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 68. Karl Goldsmith also frequently said "Krauts" when referring to Germans.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Some refugees became citizens after they had been shipped overseas. See, e.g., "Eric Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 54.
48. Davie also points out that this was a justified concern. Davie, *Refugees in America*, 191, and "Victim Soldiers," 47n20.

49. Interview Walter Bloch.
50. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 189.
51. They had different abilities and opportunities to express these positions both then and also retrospectively in interviews.
52. "Edmund Schloss," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 173.
53. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 188.
54. "Bernard Fridberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 63.
55. *Ibid.*, 12.
56. The refugee was a twenty-three-year-old man who had been in the United States five years before returning to Europe as a soldier. "Gestern Refugees—Heute Soldaten: Ruhmestaten von Immigranten in der amerikanischen Armee," *Aufbau* 10 (22 December 1944).
57. "William Katzenstein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 99–100.
58. "Erich Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 55.
59. Interview Kurt Herrmann.
60. See Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 71.
61. Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 466–67.
62. In their testimonies about the war, many refugees recalled situations in which they used their special knowledge and skills for the American military. *Aufbau* also reported on refugee soldiers' "heroic deeds." See, e.g., "Gestern Refugees—Heute Soldaten: Ruhmestaten von Immigranten in der amerikanischen Armee," *Aufbau* 10 (22 December 1944).
63. "Harold Baum," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 163–64.
64. Naturally, more refugee soldiers may have engaged in such acts but did not talk about them in their interviews because they wanted to appear decent and humane, adhering also to the grand narrative of the "good American soldier" in "the good war."
65. "Eric Boehm," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 226.
66. "Eric Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 56.
67. "Otto Stern," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 265.
68. "Karl Goldsmith," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 114. The accuracy of these stories of American GIs committing war crimes cannot be determined. Even if they are not true, the fact that soldiers told them in this way highlights how important they felt it was to create a narrative of having been good and humane soldiers.
69. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 66.
70. Remy, "Deutsch-Jüdische Flüchtlinge," 201. Reports that the Germans did not treat their POWs according to the rules of the Geneva Convention circulated in the U.S. Army. See "Die Nichteinhaltung der Genfer-Konvention durch die Deutschen ist heute eine notorische Tatsache," *Aufbau* 11 (18 May 1945).
71. *Ibid.*, 72.
72. There were various dimensions to this power reversal, as Fred Field's words show: "It felt damn good to interrogate Nazis, especially when we had a pistol (usually one of their Lugers) in a holster on us"; "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 233. Thus, refugee soldiers interrogated German POWs and had weapons—sometimes even those the POWs themselves had formerly possessed.
73. "Kurt Klein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 279, as well as other interviews collected in this volume.
74. Interview Kurt Shuler. Shuler, who did not change his name until after the war, served in the army as Kurt Schulherr.
75. See Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 464.
76. "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 233.
77. Stern, "In the Service of American Intelligence," 465.
78. *The Ritchie Boys*, cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 58–59.

79. Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 59.
80. "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 233.
81. Interview Kurt Shuler.
82. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 72.
83. Interview Kurt Shuler.
84. "John Brunswick," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 259. See also letter from Werner T. Angress to Curt Bondy, April 22, 1945, in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin et al., eds, *Heimat und Exil*, 207.
85. Interview Kurt Shuler.
86. Wilfred C. Hulse, "Erfahrungen mit deutschen Kriegsgefangenen," *Aufbau* 11 (13 April 1945).
87. Ibid. This article appeared on the third page in *Aufbau* and thus presumably reached a considerable audience.
88. "Otto Stern," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 128.
89. "Edmund Schloss," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 175.
90. See, e.g., "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 191–92.
91. Mühlfelder, *Weil ich übriggeblieben bin*, 69.
92. Ibid.
93. "Henry Kissinger," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 120.
94. Interview Tom Tugend.
95. Quoted in Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 72. On Germans' exclusive focus on their own suffering in the early postwar, see, e.g., Moeller, *War Stories*; Heineman, "The Hour of the Woman."
96. See "Fred Fields," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 234.
97. "Karl Goldsmith," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 114.
98. Ibid., 115.
99. Ibid.
100. Interview Kurt Shuler.
101. Ibid.
102. "Walter Reed," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 192.
103. Two stories in *Aufbau* about soldiers reuniting with family members are "Die Mutter wiedergefunden," *Aufbau* 11 (19 January 1945); and "Die Eltern in Köln wiedergefunden," *Aufbau* 11 (16 March 1945).
104. *The Ritchie Boys*, dir. Christian Bauer (Tangram Productions, 2004). Cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 74.
105. "Wiedersehen mit der Vaterstadt," report quoting Ernst Braun, *Aufbau* 11 (11 May 1945).
106. For an analysis of relationships between Jews and non-Jews in Germany after the war, see, e.g., Demant, "Living in an Abnormal Normality." See also Koch, "Returning Home?"
107. Lissner, *Den Fluchtweg zurückgehen*; Moskowitz, "The Germans and the Jews," quoted in Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*, 7. Lühe et al., *Auch in Deutschland waren wir nicht wirklich zu Hause*.
108. "John Stern," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 129. See also the report of refugee soldier Walter Hellendall. "Als amerikanischer Soldat in der deutschen Vaterstadt . . . Erlebnis in München-Gladbach," *Aufbau* 11 (6 April 1945).
109. M/Sgt. Charles Gregor, "Fahrt durch Berlin," (based on letter from 14 July 1945), *Aufbau* 11 (17 August 1945).
110. Ibid.
111. See letter from Werner T. Angress to Curt Bondy in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin et al., eds, *Heimat und Exil*, 207; and *ibid*.
112. Interview Kurt Shuler.

113. Ibid. The state of the Jewish cemeteries in their hometowns or towns where they had family were a major concern for almost all the refugees.
114. See multiple interviews in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, which contain references to meeting Jews in different places in Europe. Some refugees recalled celebrating holidays and shabbat with Jewish residents.
115. "Harry Lorch," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 290.
116. "Jerry Bechhofer," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 42.
117. See Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 77.
118. Letter from Werner T. Angress to Curt Bondy in Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin et al., eds, *Heimat und Exil*, 207.
119. Hans Spear in *The Ritchie Boys*, cited in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 77.
120. See also Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?"; and Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," who come to the same conclusion.
121. In the case of interviews recorded in the 1990s, the refugees' narratives of pride fit those of their non-Jewish comrades-in-arms. See Terkel, *The Good War*; and importantly, Bodnar, *The Good War in American Memory*.
122. "William Katzenstein," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 100.
123. See, e.g., "Eric Hamberg," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 59–60.
124. Letter from Walter Spiegel to Julian and Kathe Spiegel, December 17, 1945, Personal Files of Joshua Franklin, New York, quoted in Franklin, "Victim Soldiers," 77–78.
125. Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 165. This is not to say that returning from war and adjusting to civilian life was easy. Hans M. Salzmann, "Vom Soldaten zum Zivilisten," *Aufbau* 11 (6 July 1945); and Salzmann, "Die Sorge um den Arbeitsplatz," *Aufbau* 11 (13 July 1945) both discuss the difficulties this entailed for many returning soldiers.
126. "Karl Goldsmith," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 116.
127. "Fachleute bei der Okkupation: Die Verwendung von deutschsprachigen US Bürgern," *Aufbau* 11 (22 June 1945).
128. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 74.
129. This example is based on research on the military government in Bavaria. Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 75. For participation in the Nuremberg trials, see, e.g., Stiefel and Mecklenburg, *Deutsche Juristen im amerikanischen Exil*.
130. See Stern, "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of U.S. Intelligence," for specific examples of Jewish refugees working in U.S. intelligence after the war.
131. Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 74; see also Habe, *All My Sins*, 365.
132. "Fritz Weinschenk," in Karras, *The Enemy I Knew*, 74.
133. See Hans Habe, e.g., who was angry about the "Morgenthau spirit" he felt existed in Washington. Habe also criticized the double standard of the American victors in dealing with the Germans, who, e.g., "condemn[ed] soldiers and re-employ[ed] Gestapo agents." Habe, *All My Sins*, 354, 366.
134. Hans Habe, *Im Jahre Null*, 138, quoted in Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 73.
135. See Krauss, "Eroberer oder Rückkehrer?," 80–81.
136. Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 91n21. See also Stern, "The Jewish Exiles in the Service of U.S. Intelligence," 61, for more information on General Lucius Clay's instructions on not to renew contracts nor hire "anyone who has been naturalized since 1933," which essentially targeted German Jewish refugees.