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## Reflections on the Experiences of German Émigré Soldiers in the U.S. Army during World War II

Until the 1990s, scholars paid scant attention to the experiences of German-Americans during World War II. General surveys on the subject simply stated that a vast majority of German-Americans opposed Hitler. The past two decades, however, have witnessed the publication of works that present a far more intricate picture of the German-American experience during the war. Works published in the 1990s showed that non-naturalized Germans living in the U.S. during the war were labeled as "enemy aliens" and that thousands of enemy aliens and German-born American citizens were interned in camps all over the country. But here it is important to point out that the exact number of internees and the extent of their sympathy for the Nazi regime are both open to debate. On the one hand, works by Don H. Tolzmann, Timothy Holian and Stephen Fox estimate the number of German internees to be between ten and eleven thousand. They, along with published memoirs by internees, suggest that a great number of the internees were opposed to Nazism and were victimized by the U.S. government's exaggerated fear of the Nazi menace. Max Friedman's recent work, on the other hand, argues that many internees were openly sympathetic to the Nazi movement. Marian L. Smith, historian for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, has also shown that the actual number of internees was much lower than ten thousand.<sup>1</sup>

In the past few years, researchers have turned their attention to German newcomers who fought in the American army during the World War II. These men have become the subject of two documentary films, "About Face" by Steven Karras, and Christian Bauer's "The Ritchie Boys" and two books: Bauer's book *Die Ritchie Boys: Deutsche Emigranten im amerikanischen Geheimdienst* and my recently published biography of K. Frank Korf, "I Must be a Part of this War": *A German-American's Fight against Hitler and Nazism*.<sup>2</sup>

The following essay will make a case for the significance of research on German émigré veterans. It shall provide brief sketches of the careers of K. Frank Korf and three veterans not featured in the works mentioned above: Joachim Elbe, Hans Schmitt, and Tom Frazier (born Ulrich Heinicke). The sketches will focus on the reasons why they left Germany, their experiences as immigrants and their response to the internment of German-Americans. It also features their military careers, especially their reactions to being back in Germany, and highlights their special contribution to the war effort in general and opposition to Hitler in particular.

Joachim von Elbe was born in Westphalia in 1902. His father was a member of the Prussian civil service. Following in his father's footsteps, Elbe studied law and passed the bar exam in 1928, and became member of the district government in Potsdam. After the Nazis began forcing Jews out of the civil service in 1933, Elbe received a questionnaire

asking him about his descent. He dutifully reported that his maternal grandmother was Jewish. He hoped that the fact that his grandmother had converted to Christianity would help, but it did not. The only concession made for him was that he was allowed to resign before he could be formally fired from the civil service. This experience convinced Elbe that he had no desire to remain in Germany. As he put it, "A compromise with Nazi ideology was out of the question."<sup>3</sup>

Thanks to an affidavit of support from a brother who lived in the United States, Elbe emigrated in 1934. Four years later, he was graduated from Yale Law School, and became an instructor. He became a citizen in 1941, shortly before the United States entered World War II. The naturalization process, as he noted, made final his "separation from Germany, from Hitler's Third Reich." He added, "I had undergone a spiritual transformation during the past several years without realizing it." Yet he had no interest in jettisoning his background and posing as American-born, as some of his fellow refugees had done.

In 1942, Elbe was drafted in to the U.S. army. At age forty, he could have waived his right to serve on the basis of advanced age. But he had no reservations about serving. As far as he was concerned, Hitler's declaration of war on the U.S. meant that he wished to destroy the foundations of Elbe's new life in America. "To fight Hitler," Elbe concluded, "was a matter of self-defense . . . it was either him or me."<sup>4</sup> Shortly after he was inducted into the army, Elbe filled out a questionnaire indicating that he spoke German and French fluently. He was then dispatched to the army's Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie in Maryland. The men who came to Camp Ritchie were trained to become battle specialists, photo interpreters, and interrogators of prisoners of war. Joachim Elbe was one of nineteen thousand men who trained there during the course of the war.<sup>5</sup>

In early 1944, Elbe was shipped overseas and assigned to evaluate German military documents within the G-2 division (military intelligence) of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces or SHAEF. In this capacity, he was a non-combatant. A few weeks after the end of the war in Europe, Elbe's document section was moved from Belgium to Germany. Elbe commented: "After twelve years I was on German soil again. Yet what an appalling sight! The city [of Aachen] was almost totally demolished; in its place stood nothing but mounds of rubble."<sup>6</sup> Elbe was also appalled at the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews. While he believed that most Germans were ignorant about them, he believed that top officials must have known. When he learned that Dönitz, Hitler's successor, claimed that he knew nothing about the Holocaust, Elbe observed:

The ignorance of millions of Germans must be distinguished from the alleged ignorance of high Functionaries of the Third Reich. Despite deceptions and concealments, they were in a position to find out if they had wanted to. Or was the reason for their indifference a sentiment I once heard expressed—it may have been in 1933 or 1934 by an army officer: "Germany will not perish by what may happen to the Jews."<sup>7</sup>

He was complimentary of the work of the German resistance. He wrote: "The men of the resistance knew. They paid with their lives for the consequences they drew from their knowledge."<sup>8</sup> According to historian Peter Hoffman, the price for resistance was quite

high: "Tens of thousands of Germans were killed for one or another form of resistance. Between 1933 and 1945, Special Courts killed 12,000 Germans, courts martial killed 25,000 German soldiers, and 'regular' justice killed 40,000 Germans."<sup>9</sup>

Elbe was stationed in Marburg, where his sister—whom he had not seen in twelve years—happened to live. He encountered no hostility from the Germans whom he passed on his way. When he reached his sister's home, she did not recognize her brother at first: "The change wrought by my appearance, and the feelings of delivery and relief were almost beyond my sister's capacity to comprehend," he recalled. He was able to convince his superiors that her home should not be seized or intruded upon.

By the time that the war ended, Elbe was eligible for immediate discharge since he was 42 years old. Elbe was proud of his accomplishments:

I had worn the uniform of my new country for almost three years. I had crossed into Germany as a member of the victorious army. What a feeling to be a victor! It did not express itself in arrogance or superiority toward the vanquished; its main ingredient was freedom of movement. And there were no longer SA and SS uniforms on the street, a sight which had formerly sickened me.<sup>10</sup>

When he was inducted in the army in 1942, Elbe had hoped to contribute to the destruction of Nazi Germany while at the same time helping to promote German-American understanding, and he felt that he had been successful on both counts.

Elbe's experiences as an emigrant and as a soldier were positive. Because he was naturalized before the United States entered the war, he was never subject to being classified as an enemy alien. His memoir also makes no mention about the detainment and internment of Germans after Germany declared war on the U.S. nor does he hint at any measure of prejudice being exacted against him at any point during his tenure in the U.S. army. After the war, Elbe was anxious to help restore Germany's legal system. He secured a job with the American Military Government for Germany and eventually became the legal advisor at the American Embassy in Bonn, West Germany.

Kurt Friedrich Franz Korf's career as an immigrant was not quite so smooth. He was born into a prosperous Berlin family 1909, and his family background was distinguished: his father's family traced its roots to a crusading knight in the thirteenth century, and his mother was descended from a prosperous Jewish family of bankers. Korf's maternal grandfather, Curt Mossner, converted to Protestantism and raised his children in the Protestant faith.<sup>11</sup>

Korf witnessed the rise of Nazism with dismay. On the day that Hitler was made chancellor, Korf observed the new chancellor exiting from his car into the Berliner Hof hotel, and caught a glimpse of him at close range. Korf reeled from the experience. He told his mother, "This is a madman. He is obsessed." Shortly thereafter, the Nazi movement touched Korf's personal life. In March of 1933, less than two months after Hitler came to power, he learned that the Ministry of Justice would soon deny admission to the bar to candidates who had any Jewish blood. Korf made haste to apply before the April deadline. Shortly thereafter, he received his application, accompanied by the "dreaded" questionnaire, which asked him to disclose religious affiliation of immediate family members.

Korf initially felt he had nothing to worry about, since his paternal grandparents were Catholics and his maternal grandparents Protestants. But he stumbled by the

phrase: "I hereby declared under oath that there are known to me no facts from which I could conclude that any of the above is not of Aryan ancestry." Since Korf's maternal grandfather was born a Jew, he could not declare in the affirmative. Korf was advised to have himself "Aryanized" by submitting an affidavit stating that his Jewish grandfather was abroad for at least ten months so that it would have been impossible for him to have fathered Margarete Korf, née Mossner. In effect, Korf was asked to sign a statement making his mother illegitimate. Korf was outraged. As he put it, "I would not let [the Nazis] drag my grandfather's memory into the mud or my mother's honor. I was proud of my descent."<sup>12</sup>

Unlike Elbe, who left Germany because of the 1933 laws against Jews in the civil service, Korf tried to work around the new restrictions. After his application for admission to the State Board of Examination was denied, making it impossible for Korf to practice the law in court, Korf earned a doctorate in Jurisprudence so that he could become a legal consul. In the meantime the rising tide of anti-Semitism upset him more with each passing day. The Nazi program against the Jews was institutionalized by the Reichstag's passage of the Nuremberg Laws in September of 1935. The laws not only effectively severed all so-called "full-blooded" Jews from official life in Germany, but also stigmatized millions of other Germans who had one or more Jewish grandparents. With the passage of the laws, Korf and others like him who had one Jewish grandparent were now called "mixed bloods of the second degree" (*Mischlinge zweiten Grades*). As such, they could serve in the armed forces, but could not be commissioned and were not allowed access to most of the Party organizations.<sup>13</sup>

Korf was horrified by the laws and their impact. He noted, "You suddenly discover in 1935 that you are not a German at the same level with anybody else. [This] is so incredible, coming from a family which goes back almost a thousand years!"<sup>14</sup> Korf came to realize that his status as a "mixed blood of the second degree" would eventually force him to face two unacceptable alternatives. First, it did not exempt him from the draft. If the Nazis waged a war of aggression, as he suspected they would, Korf would be forced to fight alongside them. As it turned out, thousands of "mixed bloods" or *Mischlinge* ended up serving in Hitler's army during World War II.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Korf's *Mischling* status made him vulnerable to persecution as a non-Aryan.<sup>16</sup> Since neither of these alternatives were acceptable, Korf considered going underground to resist Nazism, but sensed that given the strength of the Nazi terror network, he felt that resistance would be extremely difficult at best, and at worst put his family, especially his more "full-blooded" Jewish relatives, at greater risk. Weighing his options, he decided to leave Germany in early 1937.

Unlike Elbe, whose immigration was sponsored by a brother already living in the United States, Korf arrived on a tourist visa with little money and no connections. He first found employment as an elevator boy in New York and later as a reporter for the *New Yorker Staatszeitung und Herald*, a German-American publication. Though he felt safer in America, Korf was very concerned about the growth of Nazism in the United States. When he discovered that Fritz Kuhn, the leader of the pro-Nazi German-American Bund was living in the apartment above him under the alias "Franz Karsten," he dutifully relayed this information to the FBI.<sup>17</sup>

But at the same time, his adopted country was beginning to view citizens of Germany such as Korf with suspicion. In August of 1940, Congress passed an act requiring non-citizens to be registered and fingerprinted. In the event of war, the

government would use the list to identify those who came from countries that were enemies of the United States and classify them as "enemy aliens." Approximately five million registered foreigners in the United States came under this classification, and were put into a separate category from naturalized citizens. They were not allowed to vote or hold public offices, they were ineligible to be licensed to practice medicine and law, and could not travel more than five miles away from their homes during the day, and could not venture beyond a mile of their residences after dark. They were also subject to FBI probes to determine whether they represented a threat to the United States; the latter were sent to internment camps generally located in the south and southwestern sections of the country.<sup>18</sup>

When the United States entered the war against Japan and its allies, Korf, who was not yet naturalized, became an enemy alien. In March of 1942, the FBI searched his apartment while he was out. Korf was incensed at the intrusion, especially after he had gone to the trouble of being an FBI informant. Korf went to the FBI to inquire why his apartment had been searched. Although he was cleared, he knew of others who were sent to internment camps during the war.<sup>19</sup>

Korf was eager to serve in the U.S. army when his adopted country entered the war. In 1942, he wrote his mother:

Now the arms of madness [of Nazism] are stretching across the Atlantic, and they are gripping us with the fingers of those men and boys who were once close to me. They are the ones who are arming the torpedoes that are blasting the ships that supply our food . . . maybe they have reservations about what they are doing, but they are doing it anyway. I, however, am committed to fighting against them. . . . I do know one thing: I must be a part of this war. It is being fought for me and for you. It concerns us both. I hope the army will accept me . . . or I will feel like a coward for the rest of my life.<sup>20</sup>

But Korf's enthusiasm did not assure him an automatic place in the armed forces; several things had to be ironed out first. The Selective Service Act stipulated that enemy aliens like Korf could not be inducted unless they were deemed acceptable to the armed forces.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Korf had to petition to join, and in October of 1942, he received a "Notice of Alien's Acceptability" form, clearing him to serve. In November of 1942, he finally received his notice to report for induction into the U.S. Army.<sup>22</sup>

Within a matter of months after he was inducted into the Army, Korf rose from the rank of private to the rank of technical sergeant and was admitted to transportation officer candidate school (OCS) in Lake Plauche, Louisiana. But his smooth progress through the ranks ended at OCS. He was chastised for lacking a "proper command voice" and for not knowing anything about playing baseball. In late 1943, Korf was informed that he had washed out of OCS for failing to "exhibit leadership qualities" but he suspected that his German accent was to blame. His military career was saved shortly thereafter when he was invited to enroll in Military Intelligence Training School at Camp Ritchie, Maryland. By the time Korf got to Camp Ritchie, Allied forces were closing in on Germany, and men with Korf's linguistic abilities were in demand at the front. Korf found his niche at the Military Intelligence Training school. He breezed through the training program and graduated as a commissioned second lieutenant.

Korf was shipped overseas in November of 1944. For a time, he worked as a desk

officer in Paris, but soon put in for a transfer to the front, where he wanted to serve. His request was granted, but only after his colonel demanded that he change his name to something that sounded "more American." If captured under his birth name, the colonel warned, he might be shot as a traitor. Korf objected at first—but finally agreed to abbreviate his first name to K, omit his second name Friedrich, and Americanize his third name, Franz, to Frank. Henceforth he would be known as K. Frank Korf.<sup>23</sup>

Many years later, Korf wondered whether the exchange with the colonel had been in reality a test of his loyalty to the United States and its army. Regardless of the reason for the name change, Korf felt bound by the compromise he had reached with the colonel and kept the name K. Frank Korf for the rest of his life, and introduced himself as "Frank" instead of "Kurt."

Shortly after Korf Americanized his name, he finally received the chance to do what he had wanted to do for some time: go to the front. He was assigned to Headquarters of the European Theater of Operations of the United States of America (HQ ETOUSA) as an interpreter for military intelligence. In the early spring of 1945, Korf was given permission to go behind enemy lines to visit his mother, who he had not seen in several years. After a heart-rending reunion, he experienced another emotional shock. In early May of 1945, Korf was ordered to assist victims of the concentration camp at Flossenbürg.<sup>24</sup> Though the SS had abandoned the camp a few weeks earlier, hundreds of camp inmates remained who required immediate attention. As the only German-speaking officer in his unit, he had his hands full coordinating the treatment of survivors and the capture of remaining SS personnel. His accounts of conditions there are detailed and horrifying. As he toured the crematorium, he observed:

I saw piles to my right and left as I entered. I looked closer in the dim light. They were corpses. They looked very much like railroad ties, dark and close together, hands on their sides, skeletal legs straight. At that moment I felt that I should lose my mind. But a miracle happened. It was like a veil was suddenly put before my eyes. I saw clearly, but did not feel . . . I seemed to be in a haze for the next few days. The terrible things I saw did not seem to penetrate until much later, but the views were needle-sharp.<sup>25</sup>

When Korf was able to process his feelings later on, his distress was even more pronounced because he was born a German, but yet Germany was the scene of what he referred to as "the dirtiest, filthiest, shameless acts the world has ever seen!"<sup>26</sup> From his experiences at Flossenbürg and his subsequent interrogation of prisoners who participated in the executions of Jews, he came to the conclusion that not only German leaders but also many Germans were guilty of crimes against humanity during the war.

At war's end, Korf remained in Germany to interrogate prisoners of war and ferret out Nazi war criminals. In the midst of helping an injured GI to safety in early 1946, Korf slipped on the ice and shattered his leg bone, and was shipped home. During his lengthy convalescence, he finished his law studies at Fordham University in New York. Thereafter, he hoped to land a good position working on Wall Street, but had no luck securing the kind of job he wanted. He suspected that his German heritage, which had

been such an asset to his military career, now served as an obstacle to success in his postwar career. As he put it,

I looked to the future as a lawyer, [but] I had a few strikes against me. Five years of absence in New York is a lifetime. Nobody knew me now. My connections were gone. Strangely enough, the fact that I had fought against the Nazis and clearly showed my scars did not dispel the fact that I was German-born, and therefore a "Nazi." The doors were politely slammed in my face.<sup>27</sup>

He ultimately found employment at the Department of Justice, which sent him back to Germany in 1948 as part of an Overseas Mission assigned to determine which Germans were eligible to reclaim their property in the United States. He remained there until 1951 and continued with the Justice Department in Washington until his retirement in the early 1970s. He donated his papers to Florida Atlantic University in 1999, and passed away in September 2000.

Like Korf and Elbe, Hans Schmitt also became a *Mischling* after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws. He was born near Frankfurt in 1921. His father was an expert on social legislation and his mother was a lawyer and teacher. Schmitt and his family moved to Berlin in 1933. The rise of the Nazis put the Schmitt family in peril; though Schmitt's father was a gentile, he was also a socialist, and his maternal grandparents were both Jews. In 1934, his parents decided to send their son to a Quaker boarding school in Holland dedicated to children whose parents were suffering political persecution. Schmitt's mother and brother joined him a year later; the elder Schmitt remained in Germany. Thanks to sponsorship by distant relatives in the United States, Hans emigrated in the fall of 1938 and enrolled at Washington and Lee College in Virginia, and later moved to Chicago. In 1940, the elder Schmitt died in Germany from a heart attack. Meanwhile, his wife and younger son languished in Holland. After the war began, Schmitt was classified as an enemy alien because he was not yet a citizen. He had to be cleared by the FBI before he could take job in a war factory. But he was unaware of the internment of German-Americans at that time.

Like Korf, Schmitt was eager to serve when the U.S. entered the war, but his was upset to discover that his status as enemy alien made him ineligible for the draft. He expressed his frustration as follows:

December 7, 1941 . . . found me, as well as millions of American citizens, before the radio . . . we were at war. The time of passive suffering was over. Now I could do something. The next day, I hastened to the recruiting office . . . soon my turn came, but not to enlist. The non-commissioned officer who spoke to me was civil but firm I was an enemy alien and could not volunteer. I must wait until my draft number was called. Crestfallen, I went back to my typewriter . . . for the time being, I would have to continue to help decorate the elegant homes of Chicago's North Shore and leave the epic struggle against evil to those of more fortunate birth.<sup>28</sup>

Schmitt finally received his draft notice in April 1943, and was naturalized shortly thereafter. Like Korf, he had no desire to spend the war behind a desk. He applied and

was accepted at Engineer OCS at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. After he was accepted, however, he realized he had made a mistake, and like Korf, felt out of place at OCS. He recalled:

My foreign background and limited experience in traditional American ways soon proved a severe handicap. I was "different," and that could prove fatal to one aspiring to attain a commission in the United States Army. I was, for example, the only member of my platoon who had never owned or driven a car . . . It was also soon discovered that I was deficient in another area, namely that all-American sport, softball. Our tactical officer . . . simply refused to believe that there was alive on this earth a human being who never pursued this commonplace pastime.<sup>29</sup>

Schmitt barely made it through OCS. After graduation in 1944, he was sent to the 1298th Engineer Combat Battalion, where he became a battalion adjutant. One day he was asked to list all officers of the command who could speak German. Schmitt was the only one. Shortly thereafter, he was ordered to report to the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie.

When he arrived at there, he observed, "My new station seemed more like a resort than a military post. The wooded hills north of Hagerstown inclined one to sit back and enjoy the scenery rather than ponder matters of life and death. But the large and competent teaching staff kept one's mind on the grim business at hand."<sup>30</sup> After two months, Schmitt was put in charge of the Interrogation of Prisoners of War Team 221. His team consisted of one warrant officer and four noncommissioned officers.

In the spring of 1945, the team was shipped overseas. After brief sojourns in England and France, he was sent to the command post of the 106th Infantry Division at Bad Ems. His chief duties were to interrogate POWs for intelligence information, and ferret out possible war criminals and black marketers. By the time that Schmitt's job was underway, the war was all but over, and he never saw action. But he did get the opportunity to observe the enemy in defeat. He recalled: "We found few admitted supporters of National Socialism . . . Everyone, whatever his role in the regime, claimed to have been the victim of irresistible coercion." Schmitt was also dismayed by what he saw as general ignorance about the Holocaust. One family acquaintance that Schmitt visited admitted that his pest control firm had unwittingly supplied poisonous gas to Auschwitz. The acquaintance told Schmitt: "It is true by the way . . . what most people tell you. We, too, did our work without knowing what went on behind the scene. Why, I actually visited Auschwitz without ever realizing what was happening there."<sup>31</sup> Soon thereafter, Schmitt recalled that his pity for defeated Germans was soon replaced by contempt. He wrote his wife: "These Germans are mighty poor losers. They lack dignity in defeat."<sup>32</sup> He had expected the Germans to hate their conquerors; but instead, they denied their past and asked their conquerors to pity them.

Schmitt, however, did not allow his feelings to translate into actions against his former countrymen. At the prisoner of war enclosure where he worked processing German POWs, he and his men were criticized for taking too long to process former German POWs. They were teased and called "Kraut lovers." He recalled, "These toughened infantrymen needed our help to reduce the large prison population, but they resented our painstaking pace and what they considered to be unduly lenient methods of investigation."<sup>33</sup> Some infantrymen took their out their resentment on the prisoners



by making them march on the run and kicking those who failed to keep pace. Schmitt complained to his battalion commander about the physical abuse, and it was stopped.

Schmitt was finally granted leave to visit his mother and brother Richard in July of 1945. His mother had spent the war working as a teacher of foreign languages at a boarding school. In 1943, she was arrested and sent to Westerbork, a transit camp for Auschwitz, but was released to raise her half Aryan minor son. The rationale was that a mother from "an inferior race" was better for a half Aryan boy than none at all. In the waning months of the war, Richard had hidden out at a farm to avoid being drafted into the German army. Hans brought them both to the United States after his tour of duty.

Schmitt later received his Ph.D. in history and became a member of the faculty of the University of Virginia.<sup>34</sup> Given what Schmitt had suffered under Nazism, he was only too eager to become an American. As he put it, "After I ceased to be a German, I became an American, and what is equally important, a historian. This transition involved passage through material uncertainties and certainly demanded hard work, but never anguished soul-searching. I survived and changed without having to sell my soul, and with that I am satisfied."<sup>35</sup>

Tom Frazier was more hesitant about serving in the army than the other three men. He was born Ulrich Heinicke in Danzig in 1921. His parents moved to Berlin in the 1920s, and divorced in the early 1930s. Ulrich's mother married a Jew, Al Levy, head surgeon at a leading Berlin hospital. Shortly after Hitler came to power, Levy lost his job and went into private practice. When Ulrich's youth group was taken over by the Hitler Youth, Levy surprisingly advised his stepson to remain, believing that Ulrich could simply enjoy social activities and ignore the organization's anti-Semitic focus. At first, Ulrich enjoyed the athletic activities and camping trips, but he later became disillusioned with its program to turn members into anti-Semites.

By the mid 1930s, Levy began to fear not only for himself but for his wife and stepson; as Ulrich put it, "Although only Al was Jewish, we were considered a Jewish family."<sup>36</sup> They secured an affidavit of support from Levy's sister, who lived in the United States. Shortly before he left, Ulrich was informed by local Gestapo that his exit papers were not in order, and that he had to report for an interview. He recalled, "I was interviewed by one of the officers who asked me whether I would remain loyal to the Fatherland. What could I say but yes?"<sup>37</sup> Days before his departure in May of 1937, Ulrich was confirmed in the Lutheran Church by Pastor Martin Niemöller, the prominent anti-Nazi theologian. Shortly thereafter, Niemöller was arrested, and remained in concentration camps until 1945.

After arriving in the United States, Ulrich and his family eventually settled in Portland, Oregon. Ulrich found the adjustment to American life difficult; he noted "In spite of my intense desire to be an American, I did not catch on easily to the American ways of social interaction. It was easy to accept the role of 'poor little refugee' that was assigned to me, although the attention it brought was not very satisfying."<sup>38</sup> The adjustment was difficult for Levy when he came to the uncomfortable realization that anti-Semitism was not something that was confined to Germany. Although he passed the state medical boards and received a license to practice surgery, he was denied permission to operate in Portland hospitals. Heinicke wrote, "Our suspicion, which as later confirmed, was that he was refused because he was Jewish."<sup>39</sup> Heinicke eventually was accepted to Reed College, where he majored in history. College life was not easy, for he had to balance course work with full time employment in order to pay tuition.

When the U.S. entered World War II, Levy and his family, who were not yet citizens, had to register as enemy aliens, abide by curfew, and stay within a radius of five miles from their homes. Heinicke appears to have known nothing about the internment of Germans. He observed that the rules for enemy aliens "were the only restrictions placed on the Germans even though some of them retained strong attachments to the fatherland. The Japanese, on the other hand . . . who were loyal American citizens, were forcibly moved to distant 'relocation' camps . . . I was upset that the United States would do something so unfair."<sup>40</sup> He also was upset that though his pro-Nazi German immigrant employer was interviewed by the FBI, "there was no suggestion that he should move to a relocation camp."<sup>41</sup>

The U.S. entry into World War II against Germany confronted Heinecke with a dilemma. As he put it: "If I fought in a war against Germany, I would be fighting against my friends . . . who was my enemy now? I was strongly anti-Nazi but not anti-German." After he was cleared as an enemy alien to register for the draft, he initially considered registering as a conscientious objector. But upon reflection, he reconsidered his position:

Now I wondered if I was more concerned about my personal welfare than about saving democracy or stopping the evil that I knew was coming out of Germany . . . I finally decided to register I-A as a "good American" even though I was an enemy alien. I had more reason than most to know the danger imposed on the world by Hitler, and to recognize the values we had in America and how important it was to save them. Once I made the decision to go, I was prepared to do whatever necessary . . . to carry out the mission of the United States in World War II.<sup>42</sup>

After he entered the army in February 1943, Heinicke's first assignment was light; he served as a chaplain's assistant at Camp Philips in Kansas. During the first few months of service, he became eligible to take the U.S. citizenship test. He passed, and was naturalized. He observed, "I was very proud to officially be part of my new country." Shortly thereafter, he received top secret orders from the War Department to report to Camp Ritchie for intelligence training. He learned all about German weaponry and was trained to interview prisoners of war. He had the option of volunteering to work behind German lines to rescue allied prisoners. He decided such work would be "important and useful" and volunteered. But then it dawned on him that his German name would be a liability in such an assignment: "I suddenly realized that with my German name . . . if I were caught, I would be considered a traitor, and I would be tortured or killed at once rather than taken prisoner as an ordinary American soldier would. I rushed to the adjutant general's office, and the captain . . . told me to change my name at once." He was given a half-hour to do this. Heinicke grabbed a phone book, and recalled the name of two founders of the Unitarian church, and decided on the name Thomas Lamb Frazier.<sup>43</sup> His adjutant general "rushed the name change to the local superior court to make it official."

Frazier shipped overseas in the spring of 1944, and arrived in France shortly after the Normandy invasion. His unit rescued many British and American troops from behind enemy lines. After the liberation of Paris, he was dispatched to northern Italy to rescue Italian partisans from the Germans. The mission lasted six months, and he

received a medal for organizing the rescue of a British soldier who had been given up for dead. In March of 1945 he and his men were assigned to move with the forward infantry into larger German cities and evaluate documents found there. In the course of his work, Frazier, like Korf, came into contact with horrors inflicted by the German army and the SS killing machine. In France, he took pictures of dead French partisans who had been tortured by German troops. In Germany, he toured Dachau shortly after its liberation, and was both horrified and confused by what he saw. He recalled:

My anger toward the Germans reached a climax . . . were my people responsible for these indescribable cruelties? I began to ask myself other questions as well . . . I had been born a German. Could I have done this? I was not Jewish. I would have had to serve the Fatherland . . . Deep down, was I angry with myself? But why? Where did this cruelty in the Germans come from? Thanks to my Jewish stepfather and my mother I had managed to flee the Nazis, and now I was fighting them and taking big risks in the process. I wondered what my German school comrades had done. At one time, we had been very much the same; had the same ideas and goals . . . Could I have been a guard in a concentration camp, or would I have been six feet underground on the Russian front . . . The only truth I knew was that I was an angry and upset soldier . . . My mind simply could not comprehend what I had seen. Life seemed so unfair, and I felt so helpless in the face of all this horror.<sup>44</sup>

Frazier was discharged from the army in late 1945. He later received a master's degree in social work, and after his retirement he conducted workshops on group dynamics and counseling in Europe, particularly in Germany.

These sketches make several points clear. First, the men left Germany because they found themselves in an uncomfortable position. On the one hand, they were discriminated against because they had Jewish relatives. Elbe and Korf had one Jewish grandparent, Schmitt a Jewish mother, and Frazier had a Jewish stepfather. But the very same laws that discriminated against them—the Nuremberg Laws—also permitted them to serve in the German army. They therefore left because they did not want to fight for a regime that discriminated against them.

Though life in America was certainly better than life in Germany, adjustment to American life was at times problematic; Korf and Frazier were uncomfortable with their status as enemy aliens and were resentful about being investigated by the FBI after the war began. It is interesting that of the four men, Korf was the only one who knew about the internment of Germans in camps. Korf's job as reporter for a German-language publication may have given him better access to such information. In addition, of the four men highlighted in this essay, Korf was the only one who lived in New York, an area where an inordinately large number of arrests occurred.<sup>45</sup> The fact that the other three men had such limited knowledge about the camps suggests that the numbers of internees as cited by historians Tolzmann, Holian and Fox have been perhaps exaggerated; though certainly many more veterans have to be interviewed before a definitive conclusion can be reached on the subject.

Their German background made their adjustment to army life difficult at times. Korf and Schmitt discovered that they were not "American" enough to be fully accepted at OCS. The men found their true niches in military intelligence and counterintelligence,

agencies that made the best use of their backgrounds and language skills. Though they were understandably shaken by the horror of the concentration camps, the men had different interpretations of whom they believed was responsible for it. Elbe and Schmitt leveled blame on Germany's leadership, and believed that German people were ignorant about what was going on. Korf and Frazier, on the other hand, seemed to feel that "ordinary" Germans were also involved in the tragedy; this may well be conditioned by the fact that both saw the horrors of the concentration camps of Flossenbürg and Dachau first-hand.

All four made important contributions to the war effort. As recent immigrants from Germany, the four servicemen were more intimately connected with the German way of life than their American counterparts. This in turn enabled them to do their various jobs—interpreting German documents, interrogating prisoners of war, and ferreting out war criminals and administering the occupation—more efficiently and rapidly than their American counterparts. Their treatment of their former countrymen appears to have been even-handed and quite fair; this also made the Germans perhaps better disposed towards their American conquerors.

Their stint in the army enabled them to contribute to the defeat of Nazism, and it also allowed them to complete the transition from being victims of Nazism to being victors over Nazism. But although they wanted to be regarded as Americans during and after the war, they remained connected to German affairs for the rest of their lives. Elbe became a member of the military government in Germany, Korf worked for the Berlin and Munich Overseas Missions for the Department of Justice, Schmitt became a distinguished professor of German history, and Frazier conducted counseling workshops in Germany during his retirement.

These four men were part of a sizeable cohort: 33,396 men who served in the U.S. army during World War II were born in Germany. Of this group, 14,452 were non-citizens, and probably had some memories of Hitler before leaving Germany.<sup>46</sup> Their stories have a special place in the history of Nazism and World War II. Most studies on World War II deal with its military aspects and with experiences of American soldiers.<sup>47</sup> But the German emigrants did not fit into the latter category because their commitment to fighting the war was different from that of native born American soldiers. As Korf put it, "I felt very strongly that I should go into combat, because these boys that came from Pennsylvania and South Dakota, they didn't even know what a Nazi was. They had no idea what they were fighting for, and they were going to get killed for it, too. I felt I had a much higher obligation."<sup>48</sup> This sentiment was shared by the other three as well. Most studies on Nazism deal with its major perpetrators and its victims, and those who opposed the regime. The emigrants' experiences, however, do not fit into these categories either. Victims of Nazism are typically billed as those who lived under Hitler's regime in Germany—or in areas under control of the German army—for the duration of the Second World War. The emigrants were victimized for a shorter period of time, but the fact that they opposed Nazism not only by leaving Nazi Germany but also by joining the U.S. armed forces shows that they fought Nazism in their own special way.

More research—including oral histories need to be done on men who escaped Nazism and then confronted its demise as members of the United States army. Their memories on the subject of the internment of German-Americans and recent émigrés would help to flesh out the debate on this problem. But obtaining information from them is becoming increasingly difficult; only a few have written their memoirs, and their

cohort of World War II veterans is dying out at the rate of about fifteen hundred per day—it is therefore important that historians and researchers retrieve their memories before it is too late.<sup>49</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Don H. Tolzmann, ed., *German-Americans in the World Wars*, 5 vols. (Munich: KG Saur, 1995); Timothy J. Holian, *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), and Stephen Fox, *America's Invisible Gulag: A Biography of German-American Internment and Exclusion in World War II* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Arthur D. Jacobs, *The Prison Called Hohenansperg: An American Boy Betrayed By His Government During World War II* (New York: Universal Publishers, 1998); Max Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). In 2001, U.S. Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin cast his lot with the former group and introduced a bill, entitled Wartime Treatment of European Americans, which states that approximately eleven thousand German-Americans were “unfairly arrested, detained, interred, or relocated by the U.S. government.” When the bill came up for review in the Senate Judiciary Committee in March 2002, its sponsors argued the injustices suffered by the German-Americans and other ethnic groups during World War II warrant further investigation. Two commissions were subsequently created to review the U.S. government’s treatment of these groups; a vote on the Senate floor is currently pending.

<sup>2</sup> Christian Bauer and Rebekka Göpfert, *Die Ritchie Boys: Deutsche Emigranten beim US-Geheimdienst* (Munich: Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 2005). A description of the Bauer film is at <http://www.theritchieboys.com>. The book and the film are based on interviews with ten veterans: Werner Angress, Victor Brombert, Phillip Glaessner, Fred Howard, Si Lewen, Morris Parloff, Rudolf Michaels, Richard Schifter, Hans Spear and Guy Stern. Karras’s film is explained on the website <http://www.aboutfacefilm.com>. He interviewed Martin Selling, John Slade, Karl Goldsmith, Werner Rindsberg, Fritz Weinschenk, Sigmund Spiegel, Theodore Bachenheimer and Erich Boehm. Korf’s story is the subject of the biography “*I Must be a Part of this War*”: *A German-American’s Fight Against Hitler and Nazism* by Patricia Kollander with John O’Sullivan, contributor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Joachim Elbe, *Witness to History: A Refugee from the Third Reich* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>5</sup> John Patrick Finnegan, *Military Intelligence* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1998), p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Peter Hoffmann, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945*, 3rd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Elbe, *Witness to History*, pp. 292-93.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with K. Frank Korf, 24 February 2000. K. Frank and Rita Korf Collection, Florida Atlantic University Library (hereafter Korf Collection).

<sup>12</sup> English composition by Korf dated 17 April 1940 entitled, “Admission Denied,” Korf Collection.

<sup>13</sup> In his book, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Holocaust expert Raul Hilberg notes that as of 1939, there were 64,000 *Mischlinge* of the first degree and 43,000 *Mischlinge* of the second degree living in Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. The original census figures are published in *Statistik des Deutschen Reiches*, Heft 3: *Die Bevölkerung des Deutschen Reiches nach der Religionszugehörigkeit* (Berlin: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1942) and Heft 4: *Die Juden und jüdischen Mischlinge im Deutschen Reich* (Berlin: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1944).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with K. Frank Korf, 24 February 2000. Korf Collection.

<sup>15</sup> Until fairly recently, historians assumed that all *Mischlinge* were exempt from military service by virtue of their “tainted” blood. But research by historian Bryan Mark Rigg shows that up to 150,000 *Mischlinge* served in the German army during World War II. Though scholars have disputed Rigg’s numbers, Rigg is probably correct in his conclusion that “The *Mischlinge* experience clearly demonstrates the complexity of life in the Third Reich. Nazi policy toward them was a maze of confusion and contradictions, which reflected the regime’s uncertainty about how to deal with Germans of partial Jewish descent.” See Bryan Mark Rigg, *Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jew Descent in the German Military* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust*, p. 268.

<sup>17</sup> In December 1939, Kuhn was found guilty of embezzling Bund funds, and sentenced to a two to five year jail term in Sing-Sing. Released in 1943, he was subsequently stripped of his American citizenship

and held for extradition on Ellis Island. He returned to his native Germany in 1946, and died five years later. LaVern J. Rippley, *The German-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> Krammer, *Undue Process*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> The National Archives contains records of FBI interviews with camp detainees regarding their associations with pro-German organizations in the United States. Records of the Office of Alien Property. Records of German Organizations: Deutsche-Amerikanische Berufsgemeinschaft. Records of FBI Investigations and Exhibits in Court Cases, 1936-43. Expert Testimony, Exhibits. RG 131 Box 3.

<sup>20</sup> K. Frank Korf to Margarete Korf, 24 November 1942. Korf Collection.

<sup>21</sup> *Selective Service and Victory: The 4th Report of the Director of Selective Service* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1948), pp. 206-7.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Rita Korf, 6 January 2001.

<sup>23</sup> K. Frank Korf, Unpublished memoir, p. 74, Korf Collection. German-born soldiers in the American army were not always shot, but suffered ill-treatment. Jay Bitzer, who emigrated from Germany as a small child, became a ball turret gunner in the air force and was shot down in France in 1943. He spent the rest of the war in prison camps in Germany. Though he never divulged any information beyond his name, rank and serial number, the Germans somehow found out he was born in Germany, and singled him out for beatings and sessions in solitary confinement. He recalled that at Luft Stalag IV there was "one guard who singled me out. He hit me on the side of the head and sent me sprawling. After a few more punches he let me know that he was not happy about my fighting against the 'Fatherland.'" Interview with Jay Bitzer, December 2003.

<sup>24</sup> For a long time, Korf believed that he was one of the first to liberate the camp, but when he attended Liberators Conference sponsored by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council in 1981, he learned that this was not necessarily the case. Members of the 358th and 359th Infantry Regiments of the 90th Infantry Division told Korf that they had entered the camp on 23 April—five days prior to Korf's arrival. Korf himself admitted in a letter to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council that, "considering the flux which is normal to combat and the fact that Flossenbürg was not actually defended, it is hard to say who the liberator was, the 97th or the 90th division." The website of the memorial of the camp states that it was liberated by the 90th division on 23 April. See <http://www.gedenkstaette-flossenbuerg.de/> and Kollander and O'Sullivan, *I Must be a Part of this War*, p. 111.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104. Korf Collection.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with K. Frank Korf, 9 March 2000, Korf Collection.

<sup>27</sup> K. Frank Korf, Unpublished memoir, p. 176, Korf Collection.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Schmitt, *Lucky Victim: An Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 185-86.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196-97.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206-7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>34</sup> Schmitt is the author of several books, including *Charles Péguy; the Decline of an Idealist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), *Quakers and Nazis: Inner Light in Outer Darkness* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 1997), *The Path to European Union: From the Marshall Plan to the Common Market* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University State Press, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt, *Lucky Victim*, p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Tom Frazier, *Behind the Lines* (Oakland, CA: Oakland, CA, 2001), p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338-39.

<sup>45</sup> See Don H. Tolzmann, ed., *German-Americans in the World Wars, vol. 4: The World War II Experience. The Internment of German-Americans* (Munich: KG Saur, 1995).

<sup>46</sup> A 1948 report by Watson B. Miller, Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization entitled "Foreign Born in the US Army During World War II, with Special Reference to the Alien" contains a table entitled "United States Citizenship Status of Foreign Born Who Enlisted or Were Inducted, United States Army: July 1, 1940, to June 30, 1945." The table reports that 33,396 men who served were born in Germany. Of this group, 18,944 were citizens, and 14,452 were non-citizens. Watson B. Miller, "Foreign Born in the US Army During World War II, with Special Reference to the Alien" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Military History Institute Library).

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997) and Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>48</sup> Interview with K. Frank Korf 8 June 2000. Korf Collection.

<sup>49</sup> Apart from the memoirs of Elbe, Schmitt and Frazier, other memoirs include: Kurt Gabel's *The Making of a Paratrooper, Airborne Training and Combat in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1990); Werner von Rosenstiel, *Hitler's Soldier in the U.S. Army: An Unlikely Memoir of World War II* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006) and Alfred Meyer's unpublished manuscript "My Life as a Fish" excerpts of which can be found on the website [www.theritchieboys.com](http://www.theritchieboys.com).