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Introduction – War Experiences of Conscripted Non-German Men and Women

During the Second World War, under Nazi occupation, more than half a million men and women without Reich German citizenship were subjected to German labour and military service. The annexed and/or occupied territories were subjected to Reich German laws and obligations due to their German or ethnic German heritage, as claimed by the Nazis. Despite the common perception of the Wehrmacht and the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* as being comprised solely of Germans, it is essential to acknowledge the significant presence of up to half a million foreigners in the ranks of the Reich German labour organisations and armed forces. This volume aims to highlight these overlooked aspects, providing a comprehensive analysis of the diverse experiences and contributions of conscripted individuals.

One of the affected regions was the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which fell under Nazi occupation in May 1940, and was subsequently de facto annexed. To investigate this period and its consequences, the research project “WARLUX – Soldiers and their Communities in WWII: The Impact and Legacy of War Experiences in Luxembourg” was launched at the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH) at the University of Luxembourg, running from 2020 to 2024. Funded by the Luxembourg National Research Fund (Fond National de la Recherche, FNR), the project aimed to study the individuals subjected to labour and military service, as well as their families and communities, from an actor-centred perspective. The goal was to move away from a national, top-down narrative and focus on individual perceptions and experiences of war, examining the social impact of conscription on a large number of families and individuals in Luxembourg.

Moreover, the project sought to broaden its perspective to a European level by launching a Call for Papers to investigate European war experiences and the ramifications of war on non-German nationals who served in the Nazi German armed forces and labour organisations. The conference aimed to illuminate the individual profiles and identities of these men and women from an actor-centred perspective. It also sought to examine the impact on local communities and families, recognising that forced conscription has broader consequences beyond the individual, affecting family and community dynamics.

In October 2022, Denis Scuto, the Principal Investigator (PI), Nina Janz, the Co-PI, and doctoral researcher Sarah Maya Vercruysse, hosted an international conference on forced conscription and wartime experiences at the University of Luxembourg,

focusing on the individual perceptions of those most impacted. The conference elicited a positive response, with contributions from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, France, Belgium, and Italy. This anthology is a culmination of the discussions and insights shared during this international conference.¹

During the Second World War, the Luxembourg civil occupation administration, under Gauleiter Gustav Simon, introduced a swift conscription of both male and female Luxembourgers into various National Socialist services. Labour service became compulsory for both genders on May 23, 1941,² and young men were drafted into military service on August 30, 1942.³ A similar situation occurred in the French regions of Lorraine and Alsace. The conscription and integration of these subjects into the Reich were a consequence of the Nazi notions of “race” and ethnicity. Those identified as “deutsche Volkszugehörige” or “Deutschstämmige” (of German descent) were obliged to fulfil certain civic and military service duties and subjected to Reich German citizenship. According to the German Military Conscription Act of 1935, only Reich Germans could be drafted into the Wehrmacht.⁴ Consequently, before conscription could proceed, legal issues concerning the nationality of these officially foreign citizens needed to be resolved.

In addition to the 10,200 male Luxembourgers, approximately 130,000 French citizens, including Alsace-Lorraine residents, were subjected to mandatory enlistment. Moreover, up to 90,000 men from Upper Carniola and Lower Styria,⁵ 8,500 men from Eastern Belgium,⁶ and between 375,000 and 500,000 Silesian⁷ men were conscripted. These men primarily ended up in the Wehrmacht (and the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*).

1 See the conference report, <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinkering/impact-war-experiences-europe-conscription-non-german-men-and-women-wehrmacht-and>.

2 Verordnungsblatt Chef der Zivilverwaltung Luxemburg (hereinafter VBl. CdZ), “Verordnung über die Reichsarbeitsdienstpflicht in Luxemburg”, 23 May 1941, 232.

3 VBl. CdZ, “Verordnung über die Wehrpflicht in Luxemburg”, 31 August 1942, 253.

4 The Reichsgesetzblatt (hereinafter RGBl.) I 1935, 375, “Law on the Structure of the Armed Forces” (Gesetz über den Aufbau der Wehrmacht) of 16 March 1935 reintroduced mandatory military service; the duration this service was initially set at one year, before being extended to two years in August 1936.

5 Gregor Kranjc, “Fight or Flight: Desertion, Defection, and Draft- Dodging in Occupied Slovenia, 1941–1945,” *Journal of Military History*, no. 81 (January 2017): 141. The numbers are not clear; other researchers estimate between 38,000 and 80,000; see Kokalj Kočeva, Monika, “Langer Kampf um Anerkennung. Zwangsmobilisierte Slowenen und ihre Rechtsstellung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Zwangssrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021), 191.

6 Peter M. Quadflieg, “Zwangssoldaten” und “Ons Jungen”. *Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2008), 6.

7 Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polen in der Wehrmacht* (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017), 25.

Although the Wehrmacht served as the primary conscripting power, the Waffen-SS also played a significant role. Many men found themselves in the Wehrmacht through various means, including forced conscription and deceptive recruitment tactics.

Forced conscription, which compelled individuals from occupied and annexed territories – non-citizens of the occupying power – into various services, notably military and labour roles under Nazi rule during World War II, forms the central focus of this volume. Developed within the framework of the WARLUX project, its objective is to examine the individual wartime experiences of those impacted by conscription within their respective regional, territorial, and national contexts of residency, naturalisation, and military service. The authors have drawn upon a diverse array of sources, including letters, diaries, literary works, poetry, and photo albums. Furthermore, oral history interviews have been crucial in capturing firsthand accounts, supplemented by extensive research in institutional archives such as those of the Wehrmacht, trial records, and documents from Allied and Soviet POW camps.

The exploration of personal perspectives within affected communities is paramount in this discussion. Forced conscription, known by various terms across the nations and regions impacted, emerges as a critical national concern. In Luxembourg, the portrayal of conscripted individuals as “Ons Jongen” (Our Boys), highlighted their victimhood, eliciting empathy within the Luxembourgish context. Similarly, the *Malgré-Nous* (“Against our will”) in France are often viewed through a nationalistic lens. This phenomenon of forced conscription was uniquely contextualised in each country. To transcend these narratives and mitigate post-war biases, this study proposes an experiential framework, employing an actor-centred perspective to authentically explore the personal and nuanced perceptions of these men.

The approach to focus on “experience” aligns with Reinhart Koselleck’s notion of “Erfahrungsraum,” which emphasises how historical events shape human perception.⁸ The individuals living under forced conscription not only encounter events but also engage in subjective experiences, uniquely interpreting their surroundings and emotions. Klaus Latzel, in his immense study on the war experiences of German soldiers in the Second World War (based on letters from the front) underscores that war experiences are shaped not only on an individual level but also by societal influences, including self-images and external perceptions, an idea that is captured within the letters studied here.⁹

8 “Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont. Zwei historische Kategorien”, in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, by Reinhart Koselleck, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 349–75.

9 Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); Klaus Latzel, “Wehrmachtsoldaten zwischen „Normali-

The focus on ego documents and personal testimonies is pivotal for comprehending the diverse experiences of individuals during times of conflict. The chapters in this volume examine the methodologies and the utilisation of ego documents (such as letters, diaries, and memoirs), as well as personal testimonies such as oral history interviews, to analyse the recruitment practices of the Wehrmacht. Understanding wartime experiences necessitates a multifaceted exploration that extends beyond the conventional narratives associated with forced conscription and occupation. However, the study of wartime experiences, here based on the ego-documents, also has its limits. The authors of these accounts may present information that the recipient wants to hear, or how they themselves wish to be portrayed. Memoirs, which are also considered personal primary sources, contain statements and perspectives written with a temporal distance from the war. Consequently, they may reflect distorted accounts and the author's attempts to "correct" their own experiences.¹⁰ Nevertheless, approaching this topic via primary sources, such as letters, diaries and memoirs and interviews, provides a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and how they were affected by the events of the National Socialist war of extermination in which they participated. Although such personal accounts, also known as ego-documents, can be helpful for research, they nonetheless also feature constructed narratives.

Alongside Latzel, scholarly discourse on war experiences, particularly from a grassroots perspective, has been enriched by works such as "Andere Helme – andere Menschen?" edited by Wolfram Wette and Detlef Vogel.¹¹ This study offers an international comparison of front-line experiences among diverse soldiers of various nationalities and armies during World War II, primarily drawing on correspondence and letters. German-speaking historical research (Wolfram Wette in

tät" und NS-Ideologie, oder: Was sucht die Forschung in der Feldpost?," in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, ed. Müller, Rolf-Dieter and Volkmann, Hans-Erich (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 579, <https://doi.org/10.1524/9783486852028>.

¹⁰ On the critical reflection of front letters, see Ortwin Buchbender, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939–1945* (München: Beck, 1982); Veit Didczuneiet, Jens Ebert, and Thomas Jander, *Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Essen, 2011); Katrin Kilian, "Die anderen zu Wort kommen lassen. Feldpostbriefe als Historische Quelle aus den Jahren 1939 bis 1945. Eine Projektskizze," *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift* 60, no. 1 (2017): 153–66, <https://doi.org/10.1524/mgzs.2001.60.1.153>; Klaus Latzel, "Vom Kriegserlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 56 (1997): 1–30.

¹¹ Vogel, Detlef and Wette, Wolfram, eds., *Andere Helme - Andere Menschen? Heimerfahrung und Frontalltag im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Ein internationaler Vergleich, Schriften der Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte* (Tübingen: Klartext, 1995).

particular) has directed attention in military history towards the “little man” – the average soldier – contributing to a perspective of military history “from below.”¹² Many authors studying the Wehrmacht and the German military similarly emphasise this bottom-up perspective, focusing on the individual and their personal experiences, primarily through wartime correspondence, as demonstrated by Latzel and numerous other scholars.¹³

Works on the forced conscription of non-German soldiers within Hitler’s army remain limited, with most research primarily focused on national contexts.¹⁴ One of the earliest studies to adopt a transnational approach is Georges Gilbert Nonnenmacher’s “La Grand Honte” (“The Great Shame”). This work exam-

12 Wolfram. Wette, *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes: Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich: Piper, 1995).

13 Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten - Nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis, Kriegserfahrung 1939–1945*; Latzel, “Vom Kriegserlebnis zur Kriegserfahrung. Theoretische und methodische Überlegungen zur erfahrungsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung von Feldpostbriefen”; Buchbender, *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges: Deutsche Feldpostbriefe, 1939–1945*; Didczuneiet, Ebert, and Jander, *Schreiben im Krieg - Schreiben vom Krieg. Feldpost im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*.

14 To name but a few, on Poland (Silesia), see Kaczmarek, *Polen in der Wehrmacht*; Jerzy Kochanowski, “Polen in die Wehrmacht? Zu einem wenig erforschten Aspekt der Nationalsozialistischen Besatzungspolitik,” *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte in deutscher Sprache* 1, no. 6 (2022): 59–82. On the Czech conscripts Zdenko Marsalek, “Wieder auf „unserer“ Seite: Ehemalige Angehörige der Wehrmacht als Soldaten der tschechoslowakischen Exilarmee,” in *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Jiri Neminar and Marsalek, Zdenko (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučinska, 2021), 69–98; Frantisek Emmert, *Tschechen in der deutschen Wehrmacht: Totgeschwiegene Schicksale* (Kehl am Rhein: Morstadt, 2021). On Slovenia, see Bernard Nežmah et al., *Nemška mobilizacija Slovencev v drugi svetovni vojni* (Celje: Zveza društev mobiliziranih Slovencev v nemško vojsko 1941–1945, 2001); Kokalj Kočeva, Monika, “Forcible Mobilisation of Upper Carniolans into German Army and Germanisation Process,” in *Slovenia in 20th Century: The Legacy of Totalitarian Regimes*, ed. Mateja Čoh Kladnik, Zbirka Totalitarizmi - Vprašanja in Izzivi; 6 (Ljubljana: Study Centre for National Reconciliation, 2016), 133–51. On Eupen-Malmedy, Belgium, one example is the work mentioning the forced conscription by Heinrich Toussaint, *Verlorene Jahre Schicksale einer Kriegsgeneration im Grenzland* (Eupen: Grenz-Echo, 1988). For more information, see the contribution by Philippe Beck (p. 127–164). On the conscripted men from Alsace and Lorraine, Bopp, Marie-Joseph, “L’enrôlement de force des Alsaciens dans la Wehrmacht et la SS,” *Revue d’Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* 20 (1955): 33–42; Eugène Riedweg, *Les “Malgré Nous”: Histoire de l’incorporation de Force des Alsaciens-Mosellans dans l’armée Allemande* (Strasbourg: Edition du Rhin, 1995). On Luxembourg, Marc Buck, “Les jeunes luxembourgeois ‘enrôlés de force’ dans la Wehrmacht (1940–1945)” (Bruxelles: École royale militaire, 1969); Dostert, Paul, *Luxemburg zwischen Selbstbehauptung und nationaler Selbstaufgabe: Die deutsche Besatzungspolitik und die Volksdeutsche Bewegung 1940–1945* (Luxemburg: Saint-Paul, 1985), 167–88.

ines conscription from a legal standpoint, considering the responsibilities of the Nazi occupation regimes in Alsace and Lorraine, Luxembourg, and the situation in Eupen-Malmedy.¹⁵ Nonnenmacher's 1969 study provides sources and documents, offering insights from a transnational perspective on the regions and countries impacted within Western Europe.

The studies that follow predominantly did not transcend national borders, maintaining a national perspective on the topic.¹⁶ One groundbreaking contribution in this regard is Peter M. Quadflieg's dissertation on forced recruitment in Eupen-Malmedy and Luxembourg, which was the first to adopt a comparative perspective. Quadflieg's work explores the recruitment processes for former Belgian nationals in Eupen-Malmedy, providing a leading comparative approach between Luxembourg and Eupen-Malmedy.¹⁷ Norbert Haase also examined commonalities and differences between the various national and regional groups, particularly regarding desertion and the severe consequences faced by the men when brought before a military court.¹⁸ However, his study leaves room for deeper exploration, especially into the personal experiences of the individuals affected, with much of the human aspect remaining unexplored.

Two more recent influential transnational approaches must be acknowledged: an edited volume by Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg, and another by Zdenko Marsakel and Jiri Neminar. These works present an important transnational approach to this topic across different countries and frameworks, highlighting the variety of experiences and emerging narratives in diverse regional and individual

15 Georges-Gilbert Nonnenmacher, *La grande honte de l'incorporation de forces des Alsaciens-Lorrains, Eupénois-Malmédiens et Luxembourgeois dans l'armée allemande au cours de la deuxième guerre mondiale* (Colmar: ADEIF, 1969).

16 Sovilj, Milan, "Übersicht der bisherigen Forschung," ed. Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínska, 2021), 25.

17 Quadflieg, "Zwangssoldaten" and "Ons Jongen". *Eupen-Malmedy und Luxemburg als Rekrutierungsgebiet der deutschen Wehrmacht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*.

18 Norbert Haase, "Von 'Ons Jongen' und 'Malgré-nous' und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg," in *Die anderen Soldaten: Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1997), 157–73. Also see the forthcoming chapter by Sarah Maya Vercruysse, and Nina Janz, "The 'long arm' of the military justice of the Wehrmacht – A case study on Luxembourgish desertions", planned to be published in Maddox, Kelly, Tino Schölz and Urs Matthias Zachmann, *Military Justice in Modern History: The Adjudication of War and Violence in a Globalizing World* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2025). Frédéric Stroh published a study about the conscripted men from Alsace and Lorraine and their imprisonment in the Wehrmacht prison in Torgau, see Frédéric Stroh, *Les Malgré-Nous de Torgau: Des insoumis alsaciens et mosellans face à la justice militaire nazie* (Strasbourg: F. Stroh, 2006).

backgrounds.¹⁹ As pioneering as these edited volumes were, our approach seeks a broader perspective. We delve into aspects such as combat experiences within Allied armies, instances of desertion – particularly their impact on families – and experiences of captivity. This effort aims to push the narrative beyond conventional boundaries. A notable gap in existing literature and research is the lack of women's experiences and their involvement in organisations like the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (Reich Labor Service)²⁰ and *Kriegshilfsdienst* (KHD), the War Auxiliary Service.

The Nazi Concept of 'German' and the Path to Forced Conscription

The concept of *German Volkstum* (here meaning German community, heritage)²¹ served as the basis for the partial occupation and integration of the impacted territo-

¹⁹ Frédéric Stroh and Peter M Quadflieg, *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945. Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten 1939–1945*. (Strasbourg: PU, 2017); Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar, eds., *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive* (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínka, 2021).

Numerous studies have also been published on post-war narratives, veterans' associations, memorials, and the struggle for compensation and pensions; to mention but a few, Albert Gehlen, "L'indemnisation des enrôlés de force dans l'armée allemande" (Diplome Thesis (Licencie en Histoire), Liege, 2005); Elizabeth Vlossak, "Traitors, Heroes, Martyrs, Victims? Veterans of Nazi Forced Conscription from Alsace and Moselle," in *Rewriting German History: New Perspectives on Modern Germany*, ed. Ruger, Jan and Wachsmann, Nikolaus (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 100–118; Grandhomme, Jean-Noëlle, "La Mémoire de l'incorporation de force en France," in *L'incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945. Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich annektierten Gebieten 1939–1945*, ed. Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg (Strasbourg: PU, 2017), 113–32; Eva Klos, "Umkämpfte Erinnerungen. Die Zwangsrekrutierung im Zweiten Weltkrieg in Erinnerungskulturen Luxemburgs, Ostbelgiens Und des Elsass (1944–2015)" (Dissertation, University of Luxembourg, 2017); Gustijn, Damijan, "Schwierige Heimkehr: Die Konfrontation der slowenischen Zwangssoldaten mit ihrer Heimat," in *Zwangsrekrutierte in die Wehrmacht: Mobilisation - Widerspruch - Widerstand - Gedächtnis in der schlesischen, tschechischen und slowenischen Perspektive*, ed. Zdenko Marsalek and Jiri Neminar (Praha/Hlučín: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR/Muzeum Hlučínka, 2021), 171–87.

²⁰ The conscription of women has not been extensively studied. One example of a collection of personal accounts for the French case is Nina Barbier, *Malgré-elles. Les Alsaciennes et Mosellanes incorporées de force dans la machine de guerre nazie* (Strasbourg: Editions du Rhin, 2000). For Luxembourg, Georges Even, *Frauen erleben den Krieg* (Luxembourg: Editions Saint-Paul, 2007).

²¹ This can also be translated as "folklore" or "traditions".

ries into the Reich, alongside subsequent measures such as labour and military service tied to citizenship acquisition. The processes of Germanisation and conscription varied across different territories and contexts. In occupied and annexed territories, individuals were coerced into service under the guise of naturalisation or planned assimilation into the *German Volkstum*. This included populations that were considered ethnically German or formerly German, who were granted Reich citizenship, enabling their conscription into the military. The Nazis viewed these individuals as rightful citizens, reinforcing their loyalty through racial and ethnic affinity rather than mere formal citizenship, as highlighted by Mark Mazower's analysis prioritizing racial allegiance over political citizenship by the Nazis, asserting that ethnic Germans owed undivided loyalty to the Third Reich and its leader.²²

The Nazi regime's concept of "German" and its pathway to conscription were pivotal elements in its strategy of expansion and exploitation. Nazi Germany strategically conscripted individuals for both labour and military service to meet its economic, industrial, and military needs, using these measures to simultaneously indoctrinate and "Germanise" new citizens and subjects within Hitler's Empire, as historian Mazower describes the Nazi Reich and its annexed territories.²³

In the case of Luxembourg, the *Anordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit* (Citizenship Ordinance) specified that the "deutschstämmige" – Luxembourgers who volunteered or were conscripted into the Wehrmacht or Waffen-SS – would be automatically granted German citizenship.²⁴ Thus, conscription into the Wehrmacht conferred citizenship, rather than citizenship being a prerequisite for conscription.²⁵

²² Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe*. (London: Penguin, 2008), 45.

²³ Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe*.

²⁴ VBl. CdZ, "Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg", 23 August 1942, 254.

²⁵ Here are some laws and regulations concerning the introduction of German citizenship in the annexed and occupied territories: "Verordnung über den Erwerb der Staatsangehörigkeit in den befreiten Gebieten der Untersteiermark, Kärntens und Krains" 14 October 1941, RGBL, 1941, Part I, 648–649; "Verordnung über die Staatsangehörigkeit im Elsaß, in Lothringen und in Luxemburg" August 23, 1942, RGBL, 1942, Part I, 533–534; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete" 8 October 1939, RGBL, 1939, Part I, Nr. 204, 2042–2043; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über das Inkrafttreten des Erlasses über Gliederung und Verwaltung der Ostgebiete" 20 October 1939, RGBL, 1939, Part I, Nr. 207, 2057; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über die Wiedervereinigung der Gebiete von Eupen, Malmédy und Moresnet mit dem Deutschen Reich, 18 May 1940, RGBL, 1940, Part I, 777; "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers zur Durchführung der Wiedervereinigung der Gebiete von Eupen, Malmédy und Moresnet mit dem Deutschen Reich," 23 May 1940, RGBL, 1940, Part I, 803–804.

Conscription of the “New Citizens”: The Imposed Obligation

The modern concept of conscription, whereby all young men (and later, in some cases, women) within a state’s jurisdiction are obliged to undertake military duty, originated in France in 1798 with the “loi Jourdan” during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1801). However, the idea that every male citizen should defend his country dates back to the classical world, where the connection between military service and citizenship was well-established among Greek city-states and the Roman Empire. Revolutionary France gave this notion a new and radical impetus, expanding the concept of “citoyen” beyond its Greco-Roman counterparts. Unlike the militaristic traditions of Athens, Sparta, or Rome, French contemporaries drew inspiration from the absolutist Ancien Régime and its professional army, conscripting all young men into a citizens’ army. However, conscription required citizenship to be called up for the so-called citizens’ army.²⁶

Military service is characterised by a dual nature of citizenship and subjection, exercising civic rights while simultaneously denying them, political autonomy coupled with social discipline, and civic participation alongside hierarchical submission.²⁷ This duality means that an individual’s belonging to the State and the nation extends beyond mere attachment: it reaches an existential level, encompassing the citizen’s potential sacrifice. Conscription exposes individuals to the military machine and, in the worst case, to death “for the homeland.”²⁸

In modern states, the formulation is often reversed: the State is conceived as the expression of the general will of the civic nation. This idea is supported by Hippler, who argues that the nation, as an “imagined community” and expression of the collective will of citizens, serves as a necessary link for the mutual integration of the civic individual and the State.²⁹

Conscription is intrinsically linked to citizenship. In Nazi Germany, this link was manipulated to enforce control. For instance, in Luxembourg, the *Staatsbürgerschaftsverordnung* stipulated that conscription into the Wehrmacht or Waffen-

26 Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 9.

27 Thomas Hippler, *Soldats et Citoyens: Naissance du Service Militaire en France et en Prusse*, 1re éd, *Pratiques théoriques* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2006), 11.

28 Ibid., 18.

29 Ibid., 13.

SS automatically conferred German citizenship on the day of enlistment. The conscription of non-German citizens was a clear violation of international law. Article 23 of the “Regulations Annexed to the Fourth Hague Convention” of 1907 stipulated that it was “forbidden to compel the nationals of the hostile party to take part in the operations of war directed against their own country”.³⁰ This illegal manoeuvre, which prioritised conscription before granting citizenship, reflected the Nazi regime’s coercive tactics.

The designation ‘citizen army’ or ‘citizen soldier’ reflects the understanding that military service is closely related to one’s role as a citizen. Conscription acts as a marker of national belonging, simultaneously delineating those who are excluded. For example, the conscription of Lorrainers and Alsatians underscored their status as German citizens, thereby illustrating Nazi Germany’s racial politics by excluding others. From its inception, conscription has been both a civic duty and a privilege reserved for citizens, excluding non-citizens or those who had lost their civic rights. This system establishes a direct correlation between conscription and active citizenship, where one concept implies the other. Frevert argues that conscription represented a dual construct capable of both inclusion and exclusion. It provided men from diverse social backgrounds and beliefs with a limited opportunity to engage in the political and social spheres while simultaneously excluding others.³¹ For the Nazis, it was an “ideal” means of integrating individuals into the *Volksgemeinschaft*, partly due to a shortage of men, but also to lay the foundation for an extended national community.

The coerced integration of non-German citizens into Nazi services began with categorising individuals as “German enough” or “German-like,” allowing them to receive citizenship or naturalisation. In the case of Silesians, this categorisation involved classification with a *Deutsche Volksliste* in occupied Western Poland.³² The initial conscription of Luxembourgers, followed by granting them citizenship, not only contradicted German law but also violated international law.

In Hitler’s Germany, the forcible conscription of non-Germans, such as Luxembourgers, exemplified the totalitarian state’s use of conscription as a tool for

30 “Convention (IV) respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land. The Hague, October 18, 1907”, International Humanitarian Law Databases, accessed 21 June 2024. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-iv-1907/regulations-art-23#:~:text=A%20belligerent%20is%20likewise%20forbidden,the%20commencement%20of%20the%20war.>

31 Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, 4.

32 On the policies of Germanisation, see Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Alexa Stiller, *Völkische Politik: Praktiken der Exklusion und Inklusion in polnischen, französischen und slowenischen Annexionsgebieten 1939–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2022).

the control and regimentation of occupied or annexed territories. Totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany often viewed conscription as essential in transforming societies into warfare or siege states.³³ By coercing individuals into military service, even in its basic form, these regimes compelled populations to align with and support their ideological and military goals, perpetuating a sense of constant³⁴ external threat that necessitated perpetual vigilance.

The conscription of “new” citizens under Nazi rule was a pivotal mechanism for exerting control and expanding military influence. American sociologist Morris Janowitz argued in 1976 that conscription not only served as a nationalist tool but also facilitated political control over military professionals, highlighting its significance in the Nazi regime’s strategy to compensate for manpower shortages and extend its fascist reach.³⁵ At the onset of Hitler’s regime, militarisation progressed from voluntary to compulsory, notably through organisations like the Hitlerjugend. By 1936, 60 percent of German children were members, which was mandated by 1939. This widespread indoctrination instilled military principles, discipline, and allegiance among youths, thereby reinforcing the regime’s ideological foundation.³⁶

Following Germany’s defeat in World War I, Hitler pursued aggressive rearmament despite the Versailles Treaty’s restrictions, reintroducing conscription in March 1935. This marked a significant step toward militarising Germany under Nazi ideology. Ute Frevert observed that while the Nazi Party aimed to shape political ideology, the military played a crucial role in training soldiers who embod-

33 Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemmas of Military Service, Citizens and Soldiers* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 33, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501733772>.

34 While compulsory military service in occupied territories has been deemed illegal since the 19th century, it was not explicitly categorised as a “war crime” or “crime against humanity” by the Allies in 1945. However, the Allies did label the imposition of compulsory military service in Alsace and Moselle as a “war crime” in their joint indictment. The French delegation went further, considering it a “crime against humanity” due to its impact on nationality. Additionally, the Commission of Fifteen, established in 1919 after World War I, identified the “forced conscription of soldiers from inhabitants of occupied territories” as among the 32 violations of laws and customs of war committed by the Central Powers and their allies, highlighting cases such as the involuntary conscription of Greeks and Serbs into the Bulgarian army, see Frédéric Stroh, “Introduction. Une Histoire Commune, Mais Plurielle,” in *L’incorporation de force dans les territoires annexés par le IIIe Reich 1939–1945 – Die Zwangsrekrutierung in den vom Dritten Reich angetakelten Gebieten*, by Frédéric Stroh and Peter M. Quadflieg (Strasbourg: PU, 2017), 8–9.

35 Morris Janowitz, “Military Institutions and Citizenship in Western Societies,” *Armed Forces & Society* 2, no. 2 (January 1976): 191, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X7600200202>.

36 Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, 248.

ied national identity and upheld state ideals as “political soldiership,”³⁷ distinct from the conscription of populations in occupied territories.

The extension of conscription to non-German citizens during Nazi occupation and annexation was unprecedented. Conscription symbolised both “imposed” citizenship – forcefully integrating individuals into the *Deutsche Volksgemeinschaft* – and served as a tool of control and ideological enforcement under the totalitarian rule of the Nazi occupation regime.³⁸ By coercing individuals into military service, Nazi Germany aligned populations with its militaristic and ideological ambitions, perpetuating a constant state of readiness for war.

Labour Service – Conscription for Men and Women

Besides military conscription, women were also significantly affected by various obligations imposed on populations in occupied and annexed territories. These included compulsory labour services such as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) (also for the male population) and the *Kriegshilfsdienst* (KHD).³⁹ The *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, originally known as the *Freiwillige Arbeitsdienst* (FAD) during the Weimar Republic, aimed to combat unemployment and instil Nazi ideology among young Germans. Initially used to organise young adults into camps for non-profitable and economically unproductive work,⁴⁰ it was formalised as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* in 1935.⁴¹ The *Reichsarbeitsdienst* sought to promote a new work ethic, enhance physi-

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁸ Haase, “Von ‘Ons Jongen’ und ‘Malgré-nous’ und anderen. Das Schicksal der ausländischen Zwangsrekrutierten im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” 174.

³⁹ The central focus of this volume is the forced recruitment and conscription of non-Germans for labour and military service. This should not be conflated with the labour obligations imposed on French (“Service du Travail Obligatoire, STO”), Belgian, and Dutch men (“Arbeidseinsatz”), Organisation Todt, or the forced deportation and enslavement of Polish and Soviet citizens as “Ostarbeiter.” See Katarzyna Woniak, *Alltags- und Emotionsgeschichte polnischer “Zivilarbeiter” in Berlin 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Brill | Schöningh, 2020); Charles Dick, *Builders of the Third Reich: The Organisation Todt and Nazi Forced Labour* (London New York NY Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). The discussion specifically addresses the compulsory conscription and obligations imposed on women and men from occupied or annexed territories under German law within the Nazi “new territories,” including Alsace, Lorraine, Belgian Eupen-Malmedy, Luxembourg, and Polish regions such as Silesia, Slovenian Upper Carniola, and Lower Styria.

⁴⁰ Kiran Klaus Patel, “*Soldaten der Arbeit*: Arbeitsdienste in Deutschland und den USA 1933–1945 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

cal fitness for military service, contribute to the construction of a new national culture, and ultimately fulfil the Nazi concept of a unified national community.⁴² Although women could serve, compulsory labour service for women was only introduced after the outbreak of World War II in 1939, alongside the *Kriegshilfsdienst*. Women in the *Kriegshilfsdienst* were involved in various crucial war-related efforts, such as working in armaments factories, hospitals, offices, and other industries vital to the war economy.⁴³

This notion of service formed a conceptual link to the military, with labour service equated to conscription. Both were considered services for the “national community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) and selfless acts that stemmed from inner conviction, without financial remuneration.⁴⁴ Labour service conscripts, dubbed “soldiers of labour,” lived in camps subject to rigorous discipline and a strict hierarchy.⁴⁵

For men, the service lasted six months from 1935, typically before military service. From 1939, it lasted six months for women, followed by an additional six months in the *Kriegshilfsdienst*, although during the war this was often extended, eventually without a fixed end date. The labour service system also extended to the “new territories” of the Reich. This system marked the transition from mere membership in the Reich (*Reichsangehöriger*) to full citizenship (*Reichsbürger*) and membership in the racially based “national community” (*Volksgenosse*).⁴⁶

As this book’s contribution focuses solely on male conscription into the military, there is an urgent need for more research on female conscription into labour service.

The Impact of Forced Conscription on Individuals and their Communities

Military and labour conscription under Nazi rule posed profound challenges for ordinary citizens, particularly those forcibly integrated into the German war effort. For non-Germans, conscription meant the interruption of careers and daily

⁴² Ibid., 15.

⁴³ Frank Bajohr, “Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst Im ‘Dritten Reich’. Ein Konflikt Zwischen Ideologie Und Ökonomie Author,” 1980, 351. Studies mainly cover the female Labour service in Germany, see Dagmar Gabriele Morgan, “Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst in Deutschland” (Dissertation, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, 1979); Michael Jonas, *Weiblicher Arbeitsdienst in Deutschland 1932–1945: Organisationsgeschichte und Dienststellenverzeichnis* (Saarbrücken: VDM Heinz Nickel, 2015).

⁴⁴ Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks. Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society*, 249.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 249.

lives for extended periods, often leading to dissatisfaction and reduced productivity. The selective application of conscription could foster feelings of injustice among those drafted, straining relations between civilians and the military. Moreover, conscription exacerbated grievances stemming from economic hardships, inadequate living conditions, and the harsh disciplinary regime of military life.⁴⁷ Yet conscription transcended mere logistical necessity; it functioned as a potent mechanism for ideological conformity and national integration. Military (and labour) service was elevated to the status of a civic obligation, emphasising loyalty, sacrifice, and obedience as essential components of national identity,⁴⁸ as also envisioned by the Nazis. Even non-German nationals integrated into the Wehrmacht encountered rigorous discipline and hierarchical structure, aimed at consolidating a unified front under Nazi racial ideology.⁴⁹

Despite its coercive nature, conscription paradoxically aimed to instil a sense of belonging and loyalty among those conscripted. By mandating equal obligations under the law, conscription purported to unify diverse populations into a singular national identity, albeit under Nazi hegemony. This integration was fraught with complexities, as conscription imposed by a foreign power was often viewed as intrusive and oppressive, challenging individual and community allegiances.

The impact of conscription on non-Germans raises critical questions, which this publication aims to answer:

How did conscription affect the daily lives and social dynamics of non-Germans integrated into the Wehrmacht? What were the familial and communal repercussions? To what extent did conscripted non-Germans align with Nazi ideals versus maintaining loyalty to their own national or ethnic identities? How did conscription contribute to or undermine the formation of national identity among non-German conscripts during the Nazi era? What forms of resistance or evasion were employed by non-German conscripts against Nazi conscription policies? How effective were these acts of defiance in challenging Nazi control? How did German courts adjudicate cases of forced conscription among non-Germans and their supporters? What ethical dilemmas and legal precedents emerged from these proceedings? In what ways did conscripted non-Germans contribute to the Allied war effort against Nazi Germany? How did their involvement shape resistance movements within occupied territories?

Taking these questions into account, the contributions delve into the methods and sources, with a specific focus on the personal and individual experiences of

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*, 68.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁹ Kutzner, Rutkiewicz, *Polacy z Wehrmachtu*, 119.

those affected and their communities. This approach centres on the use of ego documents, personal records, and institutional documents from occupying authorities and the Wehrmacht, supplemented by postwar personal accounts such as interviews. By adopting this comprehensive approach, the contributions aim to illuminate the nuanced motivations, challenges, and moral dilemmas encountered by non-German conscripts under Nazi conscription policies. Additionally, they seek to explore the broader societal and historical impacts of these experiences.

The Structure of the Book

Citizenship, Conscription and Volunteering

In “National Socialist Ethnicity and Citizenship Policy under growing military pressure in occupied Luxembourg (1940–1944)”, Denis Scuto begins by addressing the increasingly complex issue of citizenship and military service under Nazi occupation. As Nazi Germany expanded its conquests, particularly in the West, the intricacies of these questions intensified. In regions such as Alsace-Lorraine and Luxembourg, which were not formally annexed, protracted debates and disagreements ensued among Gauleiters, Reich ministries, and NSDAP leaders. After extensive discussions, the naturalisation of selected groups was ultimately decided upon, balancing foreign policy considerations with the strategic use of citizenship for recruitment and the “(re-)Germanization” of these populations. Scuto’s analysis delves into these nuanced issues of citizenship and naturalisation, particularly in the context of Luxembourg during its occupation by Nazi Germany. He explores how military recruitment was intricately linked to the broader questions of citizenship and naturalisation, highlighting the layered complexities of these processes in occupied Luxembourg.

Klemen Kojcancic’s chapter “Fighting for the enemy: Recruitment of Slovenians for the Waffen-SS during the Second World War” explores the German legal stance towards occupied Slovenian territories and the subsequent treatment of the Slovenian population. He examines Nazi Germany’s plans for the complete integration of these lands into the Third Reich following the April War of 1941. Germany occupied the northern half of Slovenia, initiating the recruitment of the local population – initially only German nationals, but later including Slovenians as well. This process eventually led to the involuntary formal mobilisation of Slovenes into various German (para)military formations, such as the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS, and other local units. Kojcancic focuses particularly on the initial voluntary recruitment process for the Waffen-SS, utilising contemporary newspapers, ar-

chival documents, and personal testimonies to discuss the experiences of Slovenes in the SS. He notes that while some joined voluntarily, others were mobilised against their will, highlighting the complex and often coercive nature of these recruitment efforts.

Personal Perceptions – War Experiences and Ego Documents

After discussing conscription, and the granting of citizenship, Nina Janz, in “War Experiences of Non-German Soldiers in the Wehrmacht: Insights from War Letters – The Case of Luxembourg”, explores the individual perceptions of war through the lens of letters sent by recruits to their families. These letters provide insights into various aspects of military service, including training, front-line experiences, and personal perceptions, while balancing the limited, curated perspectives of the letter writers. The research aims to investigate soldiers’ experiences and reactions to military service, with a focus on their Luxembourgish origin. The chapter centres on the war correspondence of two brothers, whose exchange of letters while actively serving in the military offers a unique window into their perceptions of military service. Within her chapter, Janz examines issues of integration into military service, group cohesion, and the maintenance of Luxembourgish identity and language.

Shifting the perspective to Slovenia, in “Forcibly mobilised Slovene soldiers in Wehrmacht: Diary analysis of their war experiences” Monika Kokalj Kočevar examines the conscription of Slovenes into the Wehrmacht from 1942 to 1945, with an estimated 60,000 to 70,000 mobilised. Kočevar’s chapter focuses on war diaries, some of the rarest surviving items, written by soldiers on various fronts across Europe. These diaries offer a detailed view of everyday life in the units, encompassing relationships with family, interactions among soldiers, attitudes towards other national groups, experiences of battles, encounters with death, hopes for the war’s end, and considerations of desertion or joining resistance units. Moreover, some diaries track soldiers’ experiences in POW camps and their eventual return home. The analysis explores the emotional content, personal reflections, and meticulous records found within these diaries, elucidating the significance of diary-writing for the soldiers themselves.

Philippe Beck’s chapter “Adaptive stances of East Belgians in the Wehrmacht and *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (1940–1945). Insights through ego documents” examines the conscription of men from Belgium, with a specific focus on St. Vith/Eupen Malmedy. He analyses the remnants of personal perspectives and ego-documents from individuals in this region through a photo album. Beck discusses this document, sourced from his own family archives and supplemented by other materials, to shed light on individual experiences within the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* and the

Wehrmacht. Through his analysis, Beck provides motivational explanations and methodological insights into the adaptive stances adopted by individuals from this border region during pivotal historical and biographical moments.

In “Paper and ink in the Soviet camp 188 in Tambov: Capturing the camp life of Luxembourgish conscripts” Inna Ganschow explores the intimate accounts left behind by Luxembourgish Wehrmacht soldiers – secretly penned diaries, heartfelt letters, and verses of fallen comrades committed to memory – that eventually made their way back to their homeland. This body of literature, rooted in the prison and POW traditions, provides a documentary glimpse into the experiences of Luxembourgish conscripts in Soviet POW camps from 1943 to 1953, blurring the line between historical record and traditional fiction. Ganschow examines a wide array of texts, ranging from clandestine notes smuggled out by released prisoners to meticulously kept diaries, impassioned speeches, makeshift dictionaries, poignant poetry, succinct narratives, and poignant sketches – some created within the confines of captivity, others upon their return from camps in Tambov and elsewhere in the Soviet Union. By cataloguing these invaluable relics from 1943 to 1946 and analysing their diverse genres, her chapter illustrates how the authors’ biographies and narrative techniques captured the essence of life in the camps.

Desertion and Draft Evasion: Impact on Families and Communities

Sarah Maya Vercruysse, in “Desertion leads to resettlement – The consequences of desertion and draft evasion on the families of Luxembourgish soldiers (1942–1945)”, expands the broader impacts of forced conscription, beyond the recruits themselves. The actions of these conscripts within the German forces significantly affected their families who remained at home. Starting in mid-1943, the number of Luxembourgish deserters surged. In response, the civil administration intensified its focus on their relatives and local communities in order to pressure deserters and deter others from fleeing. Her chapter explores the consequences of desertion and draft evasion on family members in Luxembourg, examining the extent to which the National Socialist principle of *Sippenhaft* (family liability) and punitive measures such as relocation played a role, as well as how they were enforced. Vercruysse analyses the administrative and legal frameworks of these policies within the context of Nazi Germany’s broader strategies in the occupied territories. It not only brings to light the life trajectories of those impacted, but also reveals interconnections between individuals, shedding light on overarching policies, procedures, and objectives.

In his chapter “Beihilfe zur Fahnenflucht in der Rechtsprechung der deutschen Sondergerichte in den besetzten Gebieten Polens (1939–1945)”, Konrad Graczyk examines the repercussions of desertion in Upper Silesia, with a specific focus on cases of aiding desertion from the German Wehrmacht before special courts. His study centres on the proceedings before the Kattowitz Special Court and other special courts across occupied Polish territories, including the incorporated eastern territories and the General Government. Graczyk’s analysis delves into the Nazi perception of desertion and aiding desertion as criminal acts, exploring the legal frameworks that guided their prosecution. Graczyk’s findings are drawn from court judgments, covering adjudicated cases, the individuals involved as perpetrators, the factual and legal grounds for convictions, the nature and extent of the sentences imposed, and the subsequent fate of deserters. By examining these dimensions, he provides a comprehensive exploration of the judicial treatment of desertion during the Nazi occupation, shedding light on the operational dynamics of special courts and their impact within the occupied territories, particularly focusing on the recruitment practices in Silesia.

Tobias Kossytorz’s contribution “Alsatian draft evaders in Switzerland (1942–1945)” details the widespread draft evasion among non-German recruits, particularly focusing on Alsatians who sought refuge in neutral Switzerland. Hundreds of young Alsatian men crossed the border near Bonfol to evade enlistment into the German Armed Forces, expecting a welcoming reception which, contrary to their hopes, was far from warm. Within his chapter, Kossytor examines the fate of approximately 1,200 Alsatians who resisted forced incorporation into the German military by fleeing to Switzerland between 1942 and 1945. He delves into their everyday experiences in Switzerland, arguing that they can be understood through the lens of “privileged precarity.” This term captures their situation, which was characterised by a restrictive legal framework that curtailed individual freedoms, demanding labour conditions, and tensions with the local population.

Prisoner of War Captivity and Re-Enlistment

For many forced conscripts, the war did not end upon their return home or their reintegration into civilian life; it persisted through Soviet or Allied captivity, or even renewed conscription.

In “Malgré-Nous: Men from Alsace and Moselle held as POWs by the Western Allies during WWII”, Philippe Geny examines the forcibly recruited non-German soldiers who found themselves in Allied captivity. A significant number of conscripts from Alsace and Lorraine, known as “Malgré-Nous,” were captured as Wehrmacht soldiers by British and American troops. They transitioned from the

battlefield to detention in Western Allied camps, sparking inquiries into their treatment amidst the complexities involving Free France and the Provisional Government of the French Republic. Geny's chapter delves into the experiences of the "Malgré-Nous" in Allied POW camps, detailing their treatment, procedural differences from German prisoners, and the conditions of their detention. He explores the dynamics within these camps, shedding light on how these soldiers were perceived by Allied forces and their fellow German captives, as well as the underlying reasons for their presence and treatment.

Some individuals opted to desert and join the Allied forces. In "Conflicting loyalties among soldiers fighting both in the German army and the Allied Forces", Machteld Venken explores the complex allegiances of the Polish-origin soldiers who fought alongside the Polish Allied Forces. Through interviews, Venken illustrates how these veterans crafted autobiographical narratives to navigate their intricate identities, which despite their individual nuances, shared common themes. Post-war, these soldiers underwent socialisation in Poland and are now revered as Europe's liberators. Venken's analysis reveals that while these soldiers internalised ideological values from both sides – often including prevalent anti-Semitic sentiments – joining the Allies exposed them to the individualistic, humanistic ethos inherent in democratic military environments. However, their conduct in combat remained largely consistent, regardless of which side they fought for. Within her chapter, Venken demonstrates that their actions were shaped not only by personal choice and societal pressures; at times, they adhered to norms under duress while also making spontaneous and unconventional decisions beyond their usual frameworks.

In the last chapter, "From 'forced conscription' to compulsory military service: Luxembourg's 'forced conscripts' and the question of post-war military services", Felix Steicher and Nina Janz explore Luxembourg's dual conscription history. Following the forced enlistment of young Luxembourgish men into the German Army during the occupation, the Government of the Grand Duchy reintroduced national military service in November 1944. Their analysis delves into whether Luxembourg harbours a particular aversion to military service, influenced by lingering memories of forced enlistment under Nazi rule. They pose the question of how post-war conscription was affected by these memories. The focus of their study is on Luxembourgers born in 1925/26, who were initially conscripted into the Wehrmacht in 1944 and subsequently became the first conscripts of Luxembourg's post-war army from July 1945 onwards. Steicher and Janz examine how the experience of forced enlistment during the German occupation (1942–1944) shaped public discourse and impacted the individual experiences of these men during their subsequent military service in Luxembourg uniforms from 1945 to 1946.

Jörg Echternkamp summarises the results and provides his concluding thoughts in the afterword. In short, he states that the narratives in this book should not be understood as compulsory structures but rather as opportunities to express individual and collective experiences, sometimes even serving as a means to resist predominant, hegemonic narratives. Ultimately, he highlights a shift in focus: we are no longer primarily concerned with history as narrative but with the history of narratives.

As these contributions encompass various aspects and sources relating to the experiences of forcibly conscripted men – ranging from personal reflections in ego documents to the influence of families and communities, and the repercussions of volunteering for Allied forces, captivity, and subsequent uniform changes – there remains a lack of comprehensive studies on women and their roles in organisations like the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. Nonetheless, these insights add new layers to our understanding of occupation and the war in Europe, particularly regarding the experiences of those who were forcibly conscripted.

Belval/Esch-sur-Alzette 2024

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