

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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American provost guards in Coblenz look across the Rhine at Ehrenbreitstein castle and the moveable pontoon bridge, 6 January 1919.

“REPRESENTATIVE OF A VICTORIOUS PEOPLE”

THE DOUGHBOY WATCH ON THE RHINE

BY ALEXANDER F. BARNES

The heavily laden soldiers assembled at the Trier train station early on the morning of 8 December 1918, and when the train pulled out at 0900 it was headed east toward Coblenz on the Rhine. Normally, any infantryman prefers riding to walking, and this must have been especially true for these men, who had just endured a dozen days of strenuous road marching from Commercy, France. But these were not normal times, and for the doughboys of the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, this ride was different; it marked the beginning of perhaps the most unusual mission they would ever perform. Under the terms of the 11 November 1918 Armistice, the retreating German Army was required to make a phased withdrawal to and somewhat beyond the Rhine within thirty-one days. The cities slated for Allied occupation on that river appeared susceptible, prior to the victors' arrival, to the armed, angry stragglers and deserters from the German Army and Navy, as well as a variety of Bolsheviks, Spartacists, and other highly politicized labor organizers who were provoking violence else-

where in Germany. Indeed, the lack of clear political authority caused by the abdication of the kaiser and the collapse of the German Army at the end of World War I would lead to outbreaks of revolutionary violence in urban areas across Germany.¹

Fearing that their city might be the next site of revolutionary fervor, the German authorities in Coblenz, working through an advance liaison officer from the U.S. Third Army, requested that the Americans dispatch troops in advance of the main force to maintain order in the city as well as to guard the Rhine River crossings until the rest of the American occupying forces could arrive. The honor of being that advance force went to the foot-weary doughboys of the 39th, and, as the train moved down the track, they did not know whether they would meet a hostile, neutral, or friendly reception.²

While no one knew exactly what to expect on this day, the U.S. Army had some practical experience with living in and governing occupied or hostile territory. U.S. troops currently in Iraq and Afghanistan are conducting peacekeeping or stabilization operations, and many

think this is a new experience for the U.S. military, but that is far from the case. The two decades before the United States entered World War I saw an almost uninterrupted series of large and small conflicts, which often concluded with Army or Marine officers and noncommissioned officers performing civil affairs duties or exercising governmental responsibility. The deployment of U.S. forces to Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippine Islands, Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic in those decades had provided numerous such occasions, but rarely on this scale and certainly never in a European country. And so, the Third Army was marching boldly but blindly toward its destiny on the Rhine as the American Army of Occupation. Just before the Armistice, the intelligence section of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) began to gather information on the organization and processes of the German government in order to prepare the Third Army for its civil and military missions, but the information it obtained was incomplete and largely outdated. Occupying Germany would



Sergeant Fidler, right, and three privates prepare to receive their rations, Coblenz, 1919.

prove to be another on-the-job training event. The story of the American occupation of Germany from 1918 to 1923 provides an often fascinating look into a past with many parallels to today's ongoing missions.

Honored or not, the 39th Infantry Regiment was certainly a good choice for the mission. As an element of the 4th Division, as today's 4th Infantry Division was then designated, the 39th was a battle-tested outfit that had seen heavy combat north of Château Thierry in July and August 1918 and near Montfaucon, northwest of

Verdun, in September and October 1918. On board the train was Sgt. Bert Fidler, a 19-year-old doughboy from Oswego County, New York, who had survived his share of dangers—snipers, high-explosive artillery fire, machine gun nests, and gas attacks—on the battlefield.³

Fidler's memories of his last months in France were still vivid when, some while later, he wrote to his family from occupied Coblenz. "It still gives me chills when I think of it. It was a case of running into machine gun nests just before we entered the Ar-

gonne woods. . . . I dropped as soon as they opened fire and believe me I didn't fall a second too soon either for a machine gun must have been aimed straight at me. As I fell forward, a stream of bullets cut through the back rim of my helmet riddling my pack. The mess kit in my pack was shot full of holes, my corn willy and hard tack was shot to pieces so I didn't have anything to eat for nearly 3 days." Equally upsetting, his canteen was destroyed by the same burst, causing him to go thirsty until he could replace it.⁴

... the most important question of all was, How would they be received?

Although not dangerous, the march to the Rhine after the Armistice was itself no small event, as it was longer than any undertaken in France by a U.S. Army unit. The move of the 39th Infantry to Germany involved travel over damaged roads and a week of almost continuous rain. Overall, the 4th Division saw more than 2,000 men evacuated to field hospitals while en route. But for the men of the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, the discomforts of the march were behind them now and, as the train pulled into the main Coblenz *Bahnhof* (train station) at 1430, the most important question of all was, How would they be received?⁵

Standing and waiting patiently at railside were two officers, the American liaison officer to Coblenz and a German officer. With few words and no ceremony, the men of the 39th disembarked from the train and were quickly broken into two-man teams to begin their foot patrol of the city. Sergeant Fidler and his patrol-mate were among the first Americans to enter the city; they preceded the

American colors with “orders to knock the hats off any body that didn’t salute the flag.”⁶

For the next three days, the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, would be the only U.S. combat unit in the city of Coblenz.⁷ And what a city it was. Situated where the Moselle River joins the Rhine, Coblenz derived its name from the Latin word *confluentes*, signifying a place where rivers come together. Surrounded by nineteenth-century fortresses and packed with well-known landmarks, Coblenz had been a strategically important garrison town since the days of the Roman Empire. Particularly notable among its landmarks were a 40-foot-high bronze equestrian statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I (1797–1888) that stood facing north, atop an even taller monumental base, right at the river confluence; the large “ships bridge” across the Rhine made of pontoons that could be disconnected to allow river traffic to pass; and the massive Ehrenbreitstein castle that looked down on Coblenz from across the Rhine. On 8 December 1918, the men

of the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, began walking around these monuments, guarding the city’s streets, and establishing residence in the city.

Filling the roads between France, Luxembourg, and Coblenz were some 250,000 more doughboys and all of their equipment. Under the terms of the Armistice, more than 2,500 square miles of western Germany with a million inhabitants were assigned to the United States for occupation duty. The Third Army was to set up its positions in a sector running from the Luxembourg border to an area on the east side of the Rhine River that was soon known simply as the Coblenz bridgehead. After the AEF commander, General John J. Pershing, received notification of the requirement, he had selected his occupying force from among the thirty intact infantry divisions in the AEF. Realizing the potential for danger and the inherent complexity of the operation, he chose some of his best units, including the four senior Regular Army divisions, the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th Divisions. From his National Guard divisions,



Company A, 39th Infantry, marches through Schweich, Germany, en route to Coblenz, 6 December 1918.

he selected the 42d Division (the nationwide “Rainbow Division”), and the 32d Division from Michigan and Wisconsin, whose members became known as the “*Gemütlichkeit* boys” because so many of them spoke German. From his National Army divisions, he added the 89th Division, formed of men from Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado, and the 90th Division, whose men were drawn primarily from Texas and Oklahoma. These eight divisions made up the Third Army, commanded by Maj. Gen. Joseph T. Dickman.⁸ The distinctive patch designed for the Third Army was a capital letter “A” inside the letter “O,” symbolizing the army of occupation.

The selected divisions received notification of their new mission and organizational relationships almost immediately after the end of the fighting on 11 November, so they had only a few days to prepare for the move. Following on the heels of the retreating German Army, Third Army units began their advance toward Germany on 17 November 1918 and soon crossed the borders of Belgium and Luxembourg. To the north, elements of the British Army marched toward Cologne and the Belgian Army advanced toward Aachen, while to the south French forces headed toward a sector around Mainz. Under the provisions of the Armistice, the victorious armies moved in stages, conscious at all times of the potential for renewed warfare. The Armistice did not permit crossing the German border until 1 December, and this allowed the units to take organized pauses to rest their animals and refurbish some of their equipment.⁹

Once the German border had been crossed, however, the march took on a different tone altogether. Victory flags and pretty girls waving from the windows of the liberated towns of France and Luxembourg gave way to shuttered windows and deserted streets. Even the terrain became more difficult, and the frozen roads and heavy loads took their toll on the troops. After the American army crossed the border, some of the units



National Archives

General Dickman, 1919

dropped out of the march and set up in their assigned sectors. During this approach to the Rhine, the 39th Infantry received its mission to move into the vanguard of the Third Army and occupy Coblenz. Finally, on 11 December 1918, all of the Allied forces reached the Rhine and, after a short reorganization, crossed in large numbers on 13 December to establish positions on its eastern shore.¹⁰

When the main force arrived, the headquarters of the Third Army was established in Coblenz in a large German government building complex located on the waterfront on the west bank of the Rhine. Crossing to the east side of the river, III Corps, composed of the 1st, 2d, and 32d Divisions, took up positions within

a large semicircle, 18.6 miles in radius, to guard the bridgehead. The Marine brigade of the 2d Infantry Division, acting as the extreme left flank of the Army, crossed the Rhine via the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge at Remagen, a site that would assume even greater significance in the next world war. Remaining on the west bank of the Rhine was IV Corps with the 3d, 4th, and 42d Divisions. The VII Corps, made up of the 89th and 90th Divisions, occupied the Moselle valley from Trier west to the Luxembourg border. In support roles further to the rear, the 33d Division, an Illinois National Guard outfit, and elements of the 5th Division, a Regular Army organization, were stationed in Luxembourg to protect and maintain the Third Army’s logistics pipeline from France.¹¹

Although most of the soldiers assigned to the Third Army would probably have preferred to be heading home, some were so fed up with France and the French that they were happy to try something new. As Robert Koehn, a doughboy from Elyria, Ohio, wrote his mother “no wonder these french don’t get nothing done, they Stand around pretty well all day.” Right after the Armistice was announced, he complained, “these french have raised the price on every thing.”¹² A Third Army civil affairs officer noted, “The average soldier looked forward with curiosity to seeing Germany.”¹³

After arriving in the Coblenz sector, among the first duties of the Third Army was to disarm the new security forces that had been formed in the area. While for the most part the front-line German Army units maintained their discipline during the withdrawal from France, the unorganized, angry stragglers of various units presented a very real threat to lives and property in Coblenz. To maintain order in the city, a local police inspector had recruited and armed citizens of Coblenz with prior military experience to act as a peacekeeping force. Starting with a hundred men, this force had quickly grown to three hundred men led by two infantry captains, and it was

charged with guarding local government arsenals, depots, and ammunition dumps. After the Americans met with the local authorities, they moved quickly to disarm this force. A few days before Christmas, an additional battalion from the 4th Division was dispatched to augment the 2d Battalion, 39th Infantry, in providing security in Coblenz.¹⁴

As could be expected, the arrival of the U.S. Third Army was a cause for uncertainty in the local population because the attitude of the Americans toward the Germans was unknown. General Pershing attempted to alleviate the local citizens' fears by proclaiming, "The American Army has not come to make war on the civilian population. All persons, who with honest submission act peaceably and obey the rules laid down by the military authorities, will be protected in their persons, their homes, their religion and their property. All others will be brought within the rule with firmness, promptness and vigor."¹⁵

On 7 December 1918, just before the arrival of the first American forces, Coblenz's Burgomaster (mayor) and Police Director Closterman announced to the German population, "We are informed by the American Commission that the civil life will not be disturbed. Under the condition, however, that not the slightest disturbance to public order and security occurs." Nonetheless, two days later the AEF issued regulations for the American occupation zone banning public gatherings, severely restricting long-distance telephone communications and outdoor photography, censoring the press, and even requiring detailed reports from the owners of carrier pigeons. The

Third Army established control soon thereafter, and General Dickman and his staff began to regulate a broad range of social and economic aspects of life in the occupied territory.¹⁶

Although preliminary planning had been quite limited, the AEF had wisely decided that officers in charge of civil affairs would assist the commanders of combat units in their designated zones of occupation. This would free the unit commanders to focus their attention on the disposition of their units and to make preparations for restarting combat operations should that be necessary. It also gave the German population the impression that the civil affairs officers had the weight of the combat units behind them in enforcing the American occupation. Operating in the towns and local regions of the American zone, the officers in charge of civil affairs had responsibilities that far outstripped any training they might have received. Their administrative duties came to include supervision of the German police and local jails, liaison with the local government officials, the conduct of provost marshal courts, control of the movement of all civilians in their area, and responding to any complaints by local civilians against the military. Other duties included the surveillance of local food and fuel supplies, supervision of public utilities, and oversight of the local political scene.¹⁷

Early in the occupation many of the officers in charge of civil affairs found themselves overwhelmed by the scope of their duties and, when confronted by law-breaking Germans, often simply imposed the

most severe punishments allowed. Adding to their struggle was the confusion caused by the fact that the head of civil affairs operations was initially assigned to the AEF advance general headquarters in Trier, eighty miles away from the headquarters of the commanding general of the Third Army Coblenz. The distance from the flagpole and poor communication capability often led to a lack of guidance, conflicting guidance, or an uneven application of the guidance that was offered. Only in June 1919, after four U.S. divisions had left Germany to redeploy to the United States, did the U.S. Army shift ultimate civil affairs authority in Germany to the Third Army headquarters in Coblenz. The remaining officers in charge of civil affairs in each of the local districts were henceforth able to get clearer instructions in the form of Third Army ordinances. Perhaps more important, by now most of these officers and their German counterparts had begun to develop a partnering attitude and had started to work together to resolve issues before they became problems.¹⁸

This partnership was critically important because occupied German communities whose war industries had been unable to promptly reconvert to civilian production could neither sustain their people nor pay war reparations to the victorious Allies. It was incumbent on both the occupiers and the occupied to restore the economies of these communities as soon as possible. In the near term, however, the occupying forces' many rules and proclamations imposed serious impediments to reviving local trade and industry. These regulations severely

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U.S. military police in Coblenz inspect the contents of a resident's cart before permitting him to leave the city, 30 December 1918.

restricted all personal movement and allowed U.S. military authorities to keep a close eye on the ownership and use of automobiles. All newspapers and magazines published in the American zone had to be delivered to the local U.S. military commander upon issue for censorship review; any appearance of anti-American sentiment would cause the suppression of the publication. Printing of material other than periodicals also required the approval of American authorities. Allied censorship and control of telegraph and telephone messages and the variations among the occupying powers' regulations on movement and travel also proved troublesome for the local inhabitants.¹⁹

To keep local industrial plants from closing and to reduce unemployment in the American zone, U.S. occupation authorities quickly permitted the transport of raw materials and industrial equipment into that zone. Beginning in January 1919 they also permitted the local industries to sell their products in the rest of Germany. These provisions helped revive the economy of the zone.²⁰

In German cities like Coblenz and Trier, the responsibilities of civil

administration were traditionally divided among a burgomaster and several assistant burgomasters. With the advent of the American occupation, these civic leaders functioned as the liaison staff and worked closely with the U.S. officers in charge of civil affairs. The variety of responsibilities held by Coblenz Assistant Burgomaster Rogg was typical of the range of administrative duties of these officials. His assignments included

oversight of the Department of Construction, the Department of Street Cleaning, the Municipal Wagon Park, canalization, apartment inspections, the naming of streets, railway construction, streetcar and electricity issues, bath houses, and the management of the huge municipal *Festhalle* and the municipal wine cellar.²¹

Of particular importance to Rogg was his role as administrator of the *Festhalle*. This building served as the cultural center of the town and had even doubled, during some of the economic crises caused by the war, as a homeless shelter and food kitchen. During the occupation, the *Festhalle* was requisitioned by the Army and turned over to the YMCA to serve as a massive recreation center for the troops of the Third Army. Later intelligence summaries would indicate that requisitioning the *Festhalle* was one of the U.S. Army's more aggravating acts, as it deprived Coblenz's citizens of their social center and dance hall.²²

Although Coblenz had been a military garrison town for many years, there was a severe shortage of billeting space throughout the entire occupied zone for the 250,000 doughboys initially assigned to the Third Army. Quartermaster officers thus had to house many of the officers and soldiers in local hotels and homes. Invariably this led to some antagonism between



Soldiers enjoy a dramatic production in the *Festhalle*, 1921.

the Americans and their German landlords. Billeting officers for the 4th and the 89th Divisions reported that some of the wealthier landowners in their areas attempted to hide the number of potential billeting rooms they owned in order to avoid having them occupied. Conversely, the 42d Division reported that it had been easier to obtain billets in the occupied zone than it had been in France.²³ For daily payments of 2 marks per officer and 40 pfennigs per enlisted man, the landlords were expected to provide a bed with clean linen, clean living space, light, and heat. Many landlords saw this as inadequate compensation—with the economic fluctuations and inflation, the mark's value rate went from 7.8 to the U.S. dollar in 1918 to 109 to the dollar in February 1920—and they complained that “American troops use and waste more light daily than the Germans [do] weekly.” Hotel owners were also upset that the compensation they received did not fairly reimburse them for the loss in revenue from commercial customers or for the excessive wear and tear their furniture received from the American soldiers.²⁴

Other businesses in the occupation zone, however, benefited from the American presence. The local stonemason, lumber, and sawmill businesses saw a nice upturn in trade as they were called upon to supply the Third Army's need for construction materials. Similarly, the tailors, laundries, photographers, barbers, and shoemakers found their businesses booming as the doughboys took advantage of their services. In both Coblenz and the smaller towns, the troops also visited and spent freely in jewelry shops, souvenir stands, stationery stores, and other small retail establishments to satisfy their quest for souvenirs and items to send to the folks back home. And while some Germans were upset at the relative wealth of the American doughboy compared to the average German, an American officer noted “the important fact that the well-paid troops spent their money for the necessities of life or the satisfaction of their personal inclinations on the same generous scale as that on which they received it.”²⁵



Coblenz residents line up outside Third Army headquarters to obtain permits to travel outside the city, 2 January 1919.

The local beer and wine merchants also quickly discovered the doughboy trade to be good for business. Fortunately, many breweries were located in the Coblenz area. Especially well known were some of the larger ones, the Königsbacher Brauerei, the Schultheis Brauerei, and the Klosterbrauerei. The large local wineries and world-renowned mineral water businesses in the Ahrweiler area in the U.S. occupation zone also benefited from the thirsty doughboys.²⁶

In an attempt to control this thirst, the AEF in December 1918 ordered that U.S. soldiers would be allowed to purchase beer and wine only between 1100 and 1400 and between 1700 and 1900, and that no stronger liquors were to be sold in the occupation zone at any time. To make this rule more easily enforceable, all patrons were required to leave cafés and restaurants by 2100. Beginning in February 1919, however, these establishments were allowed to remain open and to sell beer and wine to all until 2200, and in 1920 closing hours were further relaxed. Any German businessman breaking these regulations was subject to a fine or imprisonment. Children were also forbidden to loiter in areas where the Americans were billeted, and parents were warned that if they could not control the “unnecessary inquisitive-

ness of their children” around the American soldiers, legal proceedings might be taken against them.²⁷

Along with the regulation of drinking hours, the Coblenz “red light” district was placed strictly off limits to the Americans because it was deemed too small to handle the large influx of American soldiers Coblenz received on a daily basis.²⁸ Soon after, as travel restrictions between zones were lifted, an American officer noted that “professional prostitutes flocked to Coblenz. Under their influence—or sometimes, perhaps, unable to discriminate—soldiers occasionally requested permission to marry women of this class.”²⁹ In 1920 and 1921, U.S. military provost courts convicted defendants of 6,746 charges of violation of military government regulations. More than 65 percent of these convictions (4,416) were for prostitution or the associated offense of “vagrancy.” The next largest category was “unlawful possession of United States government property” with a comparatively few 437 offenders.³⁰

The red light district notwithstanding, the increased desire by the doughboys for haircuts, photographic portraits, dress uniforms, fancy perfumes, and stationery quickly drove up the prices for these services and products. This increase in cost did not negatively affect the local



The first-prize-winning U.S. artillery team in the Coblenz horse show, 11 August 1920.

population as most of these items were seen as luxuries by the German people who, after four years of war rationing, were concerned mainly with staying warm through the winter and trying to get enough to eat.

Although legal businesses began to thrive and the friendly nature of the American doughboys and the local Germans made for a fairly easy transition from conquered populace to congenial host, some Germans could not avoid breaking the American ordinances. In February 1919, a U.S. military commission tried two German citizens, wholesale liquor merchants

ishment was later reduced by General Dickman to six months at hard labor and a 100,000-mark fine.³¹

Even as the occupation became more settled and some restrictions were lifted, the variety of crimes inside the American zone continued to run the gamut from attempting to start a “Spartacist movement” to insulting the United States flag, the United States Army, and a female YMCA worker. More common, however, were convictions for the purchase or possession of U.S. property. U.S. officers soon began to notice that the local inhabitants’ attitudes were

intend to occupy the zone in a fair but firm manner, some of the aggressive attitudes were relaxed.³²

By April 1919, just a few months after all of the units were set in place, the 42d Division received orders to move back to France and sail to the United States. This started the rapid demobilization of the divisions that had been assigned to the occupation force, with the last division leaving Germany in August 1919.³³

One factor that helped smooth the rough edges between the U.S. Army and the German population was the success that U.S. Army remount units in Coblenz, Sinzig, Wengerohr, Trier, and elsewhere in the American occupation zone were having in nursing the 50,000 horses and mules of the Third Army back to health. Each wartime U.S. infantry division was authorized almost 4,000 horses and 2,700 mules under its table of organization. With the return to the United States of the divisions in France and subsequently the divisions in the occupying force, along with the motorizing of previously horse-drawn artillery pieces, the Army no longer needed many of these animals and they could be offered for sale to the local population. From March to May 1919, the Third Army auctioned more than 5,500 animals for farm work and another 192 for butchering.³⁴ The results were immediately positive. Germany had been stripped

“... and from an attitude of cringing servility they became loud, a bit aggressive and assertive.”

Mathias Scheid and Jacob Ring, for attempting to smuggle some seven hundred cases of cognac into Coblenz by boat from Oppenheim am-Rhein, a small town south of Mainz. After their arrest, they pleaded “not guilty” to charges of smuggling and procuring fraudulent documentation. The commission found both men guilty and sentenced each to a year at hard labor and a fine of 250,000 marks. This pun-

changing from apprehension to more assurance in dealing with American soldiers. One observed that “when they saw that we were not inclined to treat them harshly, they changed very rapidly, in a few days, and from an attitude of cringing servility they became loud, a bit aggressive and assertive.” At first this created other problems, but when the Germans realized that the Third Army really did

of draft animals to support its army in France, so local farmers were very eager to obtain healthy horses and mules. In one case, fervor ran so high that the doughboys in the area’s remount squadrons had to be called out of their barracks with weapons and field gear in order to maintain order among the unruly buyers during the auction.³⁵

Around the same time the Army began to auction a large number of

vehicles, carts, and wagons captured from the German Army. Equally important were the salvage sales of thousands of pairs of repaired shoes, scrap metal, excess automobile parts, tires, miscellaneous kitchen tools, and other equipment. All of these provided much-needed products and materiel, serving to boost the local economy and help restore its normal peacetime functioning.

In addition to keeping U.S. troops occupied with guard mounts, city patrols, or border crossing duties, American commanders carried out vigorous combat training programs and conducted large field maneuvers culminating in “live-fire” exercises that used some of the substantial quantities of excess ammunition available in the zone. These exercises employed artillery and aircraft in both offensive and defensive roles, and time was set aside for in-depth performance critiques. The American forces also ultimately set up a number of schools to prepare the doughboys for their return to civilian life by teaching skills such as auto repair,



Shoulder-sleeve insignia used by the Third Army and American Forces in Germany

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welding, electronics, and agricultural science. The last of these topics was taught successfully at a small farm operated by the quartermaster of the American Forces in Germany near Mülheim (today Mülheim-Kärlich), a town six miles northwest of Coblenz. The farm provided fresh meat, vegetables, eggs, milk, and flowers to the soldiers and produced enough extra to sell locally.³⁶

As the weather improved with the advent of spring each year, the doughboy’s life in the zone became even more pleasant. Sergeant Fidler wrote his family back in New York, “This is a very beautiful morning and I haven’t got anything better to do than write letters . . . since we have been here in Coblenz I have got mail nearly every day.” The doughboys were encouraged to take sightseeing trips to France and England, and some even traveled as far as Italy.³⁷

On 2 July 1919, the Third Army headquarters demobilized and was replaced by a new command designated American Forces in Germany. General Pershing selected Maj. Gen. Henry T. Allen to lead this new organization. Allen was particularly well suited for this position as he had been a U.S. military attaché first in Russia and then in Germany in the 1890s. He served several months in 1901 as military governor of the island of Leyte in the Philippines, and then organized and for four years led the native-manned Philippine Constabulary, the U.S. civil government’s law enforcement



National Archives

General Allen inspects Company B, 8th Infantry, winner of the American Forces in Germany’s best company contest, accompanied by the unit’s commander, Capt. Howard J. Gorman, who stands behind Allen, 1921.



U.S. Army officers and their family members bid farewell to others at the Coblenz railroad station, 19 June 1922.

organization in the Philippines. During World War I, Allen organized and led the 90th Division through the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne campaigns, and in the months after the Armistice he held a succession of corps commands in France and Germany.³⁸

During the course of 1919, a large majority of the U.S. soldiers and combat units that had served on occupation duty redeployed to the United States, leaving fewer than 20,000 U.S. Army officers and enlisted men in Germany as the year ended.

into a cohesive organization able to focus on its unique military and civilian missions. Its qualities impressed many military leaders. General Pershing was reported to have declared “that the American Forces in Germany have been the best unit in the United States Army.”³⁹

Because the United States had not ratified the Treaty of Versailles and thus was still technically at war with Germany, the question arose, once that treaty took effect on 10 January 1920, whether any of the ordinances

the 5th, 8th, and 50th Infantry Regiments. Even as the number of soldiers in the Coblenz area declined, however, their impact remained substantial, particularly after September 1919, when U.S. troops were permitted to fraternize with the German population. Between 1 December 1919 and 1 January 1922, the U.S. Army became responsible for providing passage back to America, along with rotating soldiers whose tour was completed, for 782 dependent wives and their 267 children. Nearly 90 percent of these women were German and 6 percent were French.⁴¹ In April 1920, General Allen attempted to limit his command’s approval of overseas marriages to requests submitted by soldiers above the rank of staff sergeant, believing this was necessary to prevent his organization from becoming a “partially Germanized command.” The U.S. War Department, however, disapproved this policy. Instead, it simply permitted Allen to limit the command’s approval to the marriages of those doughboys whose character was “very good or excellent” and to deny approval when the woman’s character was “questionable.” Only spouses whose marriages had been approved by the command could, with their children, obtain dependent billets on ships returning soldiers to the United States. In spite of this relaxation of the marriage guidelines, roughly an equal number of

“... our highest ambition has been to act with such justice towards all as would insure a lasting peace in Europe.”

Among Allen’s early guidance to the American Forces in Germany was the notification that all assigned soldiers would now wear the “AO” patch that the command had assumed when it replaced the Third Army in lieu of their individual division or unit patch. Though unpopular at first with soldiers justifiably proud of their own unit’s insignia, this order helped General Allen to mold his command

approved by the other victorious nations on the Interallied Rhineland High Commission would be binding in the American zone. General Allen defused this potentially difficult situation by publishing, with a few exceptions, the commissions’ ordinances as official orders from his headquarters.⁴⁰

By the end of 1919, the American Forces in Germany had been reduced to two small brigades built around

marriage-approval applications were approved and disapproved. Doughboys were alleged to be fathers of 36 percent of the illegitimate children born in the occupied zone in 1920 and of 42 percent of those born in 1921.⁴²

The American Forces in Germany cooperated actively in the occupied zone with a program initiated in 1920 to provide food aid to undernourished German children. The

American Friends Service Committee conducted the program in coordination with the official American Relief Administration, headed by Herbert Hoover. The children the program aided had suffered from poor diet during the war, and many were extremely malnourished. This became fully apparent when German physicians conducted physical examinations of more than 100,000 children aged twelve and under in the American zone and found over 15 percent of them to be in very poor condition. The relief program provided one healthy meal a day to the most undernourished. The children's condition was monitored and, as their health improved, they were removed from the program and other children were added. In 1920 alone, more than 23,000 children in the American zone received meals. This number dropped to 5,400 in 1921 as the general health of the population continued to improve. General Allen was so convinced of the importance of this work that in 1923, after his retirement, he assumed the leadership of a committee of prominent Americans that would raise more than \$4.3 million to continue feeding children across Germany, where significant needs persisted.⁴³

During 1922, the German government's failure to meet the reparation requirements of the Versailles Treaty, along with other concerns, led France to contemplate military enforcement action. Congress and the administration of President Warren G. Harding had supported the continued service of U.S. troops in the Rhine occupation so long as this commitment appeared to be restraining French aggressiveness toward Germany and contributing to peaceful reconstruction in Europe. By the end of 1922, this effect seemed to have run its course. Moreover, Americans had clearly wearied of the effort. On 7 January 1923, the Senate voted 57 to 6 to call for the return of U.S. occupation troops. When, three days later, France announced that it would occupy the Ruhr to seize its mines, hoping thereby to obtain full reparations, the United States decided

to withdraw the last of its occupation forces.⁴⁴

When the American flag was lowered at Ehrenbreitstein on 24 January 1923, control of the Coblenz bridgehead passed to the French Army, and the last American soldiers left the occupation zone. In his final public remarks as commanding general of the American Forces in Germany, General Allen said, "With deep affection in our hearts for our Allies



Army of Occupation of Germany Medal
authorized by Congress in 1941, front

and sympathy for our former foes, our highest ambition has been to act with such justice towards all as would insure a lasting peace in Europe."⁴⁵ The American flag would not fly again in that part of Germany until twenty-two years later, when American GIs in March 1945 once again crossed the Rhine in a second, more successful attempt to obtain a lasting peace.

What are we to think of that first occupation of part of Germany by the American Army? While its scale and length were overshadowed by the post-World War II occupation of Germany and the stationing of U.S. forces there during the subsequent Cold War, the American occupiers of 1918–1923 experienced many of the same ups and downs, problems and successes, of the later, larger versions. The administration of an occupied territory, though challenging, was certainly not outside the capabilities of the U.S. Army in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and the American soldier proved to be an amiable yet effective occupier. A 1919 report from the military commander of occupied Coblenz points out key attributes of successful occupation that still ring true today. "It will always be necessary to protect and regulate the following: public utilities, war materials and supplies, food stores—clothing stores, bridges and ferries, control the civil population, control circulation of civilians."⁴⁶

An American officer wrote in a 1921 report on the occupation, "The well-behaved and self-respecting American soldier found himself a respected member of the community, and he was not slow to take advantage of a welcome that except in time of war his own countrymen have never extended him. At the same time he never forgot that he was the representative of a victorious people, he continued to preserve a tactful attitude of superiority, and in every way he showed himself worthy of the country from which he came." Though his report was also brutally honest in describing many of the crimes committed and mistakes made by doughboys and Germans alike during the period, the officer concluded, "The departure of a train filled with soldiers bound for the United States furnished evidence of the friendly relations mentioned above. The sight of the throngs of Germans gathered about the train, of the sorrowful and in some cases tear-streaked countenances, and the shouted farewells made it difficult to realize that those leaving were soldiers of an army of occupation or that the crowds were composed of

inhabitants of an occupied area. One could but reflect that the departing soldiers would probably meet with no such cordiality upon their arrival in their own country.”⁴⁷ He was right. The return of the last of the doughboys drew no acclaim in the United States. Indeed, the medal created to honor the doughboys’ service in the occupation of Germany would not be authorized by Congress until November 1941, as the United States was on the verge of entering another world war.⁴⁸

NOTES

1. Robert B. Cole and Barnard Eberlin, eds., *The History of the 39th U.S. Infantry during the World War* (New York: Press of Joseph D. McGuire, 1919), pp. 117–22; Christian A. Bach and Henry Noble Hall, *The Fourth Division, Its Services and Achievements in the World War* (Garden City, N.Y.: 4th Division, 1920), p. 222; *United States Army in the World War, 1917–1919*, 17 vols. (1948, reprint ed., Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1991), 10:53; Gordon A. Craig, *Germany, 1866–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 398–407.

2. Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division in the World War*, pp. 221–22.

3. Cole and Eberlin, *History of the 39th Infantry*, pp. 25–86, 94–97.

4. Ltr, Sgt Bert A. Fidler to Robert U. G. Fidler, 8 Jun 1919, printed in *Oswego* (N.Y.) *Palladium*, undated clipping in files of Matthew R. Fidler, Verona, New York.

5. Cole and Eberlin, *History of the 39th Infantry*, pp. 117, 119, 124; Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division in the World War*, pp. 222, 227.

6. Interv, Matthew R. Fidler with Bert A. Fidler, 4 Feb 1986, files of Matthew R. Fidler.

7. Cole and Eberlin, *History of the 39th Infantry*, pp. 121–22; Edwin L. James, “Pershing Sends Three Divisions across the Rhine,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1918.

8. American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* (Washington, D.C., 1938), pp. 488–93.

9. American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields*, p. 488; *United States Army in the World War*, 10:57; *Final Report of Gen. John J. Pershing, Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), p. 56.

10. American Battle Monuments Com-

mission, *American Armies and Battlefields*, p. 488.

11. Ibid., pp. 488–89; *Order of Battle of the United States Land Forces in the World War*, 3 vols. (1931–1949, reprint ed., Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1988), 1:265, 289, 333, 335; 2:87–89, 201–03.

12. Ltrs, Pvt Robert Koehn to Mrs. Charles Koehn, 24 Sep 1918, first quote; Robert Koehn to Mrs. Charles Koehn, 25 Nov 1918, second quote. Private Koehn was a prolific writer and documented his experiences well, but he did not believe in the use of punctuation and many of his letters appear to be single sentences. All spelling and punctuation quoted here are his. Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division in the World War*, p. 233, reports the view that the French were overcharging as a way of “making the Americans pay for the war.”

13. Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany [Col. Irwin L. Hunt], *American Military Government of Occupied Germany, 1918–1920* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 18, quote. Maj. Truman Smith, who would serve as U.S. military attaché in Germany from 1935 to 1939, assisted Colonel Hunt in the preparation of this report, which was submitted in four volumes in 1920 and issued then in a limited edition. The 1943 edition prints the text of the first volume of the 1920 edition with altered pagination. These notes cite the pagination of the 1943 edition. Substantial excerpts from this report were subsequently reprinted in *United States Army in the World War*, 11:145–243. See also W. Karin Hall, “Truman Smith: United States Military Attaché, an Examination of His Career,” M.A. Thesis, San José State University, 1992, p. 19, and Earl F. Ziemke, “Erwin [sic] L. Hunt, Henry D. Morgenthau, Jr., and German-American Relations after Two Wars,” in *Germany and America: Essays on Problems of International Relations and Immigration*, ed. Hans L. Trefousse (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1980), pp. 229, 233.

14. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz, Germany* [Lt Col James M. Lockett], from December 8, 1918, to May 22, 1919 (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: General Service Schools Press, 1921), pp. 68–69; Cole and Eberlin, *History of the 39th Infantry*, p. 122; Bach and Hall, *Fourth Division in the World War*, p. 235.

15. Ltr, General John J. Pershing to all inhabitants, no date [evidently mid-December

1918], printed in *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, p. 79.

16. Proclamation by Closterman, 7 Dec 1918, printed in *ibid.*, p. 75, quote; Rules and Regulations, 9 Dec 1918, printed in *ibid.*, pp. 81–83.

17. Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany, *American Military Government of Occupied Germany*, p. 86.

18. Ibid., pp. 65, 70, 77–82; *Order of Battle*, 2:189, 191, 287, 407, 415, 417.

19. Keith L. Nelson, *Victors Divided: America and the Allies in Germany, 1918–1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 44; Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany, *American Military Government of Occupied Germany*, pp. 104–07, 115; *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 109–10; Harry Alexander Smith, *Military Government* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: General Service Schools Press, 1920), pp. 44–45.

20. Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany, *American Military Government of Occupied Germany*, pp. 185–89; Smith, *Military Government*, pp. 27, 35–36; Nelson, *Victors Divided*, pp. 44–45.

21. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 34–35.

22. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany [Maj. Philip H. Bagby], *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21*, 2 vols. [Coblenz, 1922?], 2:279–82; Intelligence Section, General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces, *Candid Comment on the American Soldier of 1917–1918 and Related Topics: By the Germans, Soldiers, Priests, Women, Village Notables, Politicians and Statesmen* (Chaumont, France: General Staff, General Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces, 1919), pp. 35–36.

23. Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany, *American Military Government of Occupied Germany*, p. 39.

24. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 28, 65–66, quote, p. 65.

25. Ibid., pp. 64–65; Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany [Lt. Col. Henry Hossfeld], *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1922–23* [Coblenz, 1923?], p. 244, quote.

26. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, p. 64.

27. Ibid., pp. 76, 80–82, 88–91, 94, quote,

p. 80; Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany, *American Military Government of Occupied Germany*, pp. 110–12.

28. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 69–70.

29. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21*, 2:44

30. *Ibid.*, 2:19–21; *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 69–70.

31. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, p. 99; “Jail Coblenz Smugglers,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1919.

32. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 87, 95–97, 112–14, 124–25, 132–34; first quote, p. 113, second quote, p. 133.

33. *Order of Battle*, 2:17, 19, 287; *Final Report of Gen. John J. Pershing*, p. 59.

34. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, pp. 101–02, 104, 106, 108–09, 111, 118, 120, 129; *United States Army in the World War*, 1:341; *Report of Remount Service, A.E.F.*, Operations of the Quartermaster Corps, U.S. Army, during the World War (Philadelphia: Quartermaster Corps School, Schuylkill Arsenal, 1929), pp. 82–85.

35. Alexander F. Barnes, “Great Coblenz Horse Sale,” *Army Logician*, July–August 1993, pp. 41–43.

36. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21*, 2:315–19,

328–33, 346.

37. Ltr, Bert Fidler to Robert Fidler, 8 Jun 1919.

38. Heath Twitchell, *Allen: The Biography of an Army Officer, 1859–1930* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1974); Nelson, *Victors Divided*, p. 146; Henry T. Allen, *My Rhineland Journal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), p. 1.

39. Pershing’s views were reported by Maj. Gen. James Harbord, who is quoted in Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1922–23*, p. 329. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21*, 2:239, 245, provides information on the patch adopted by American Forces in Germany and strength figures for that organization.

40. Officer in Charge of Civil Affairs, Third Army and American Forces in Germany, *American Military Government of Occupied Germany*, pp. 363–64; Nelson, *Victors Divided*, pp. 135–36, 160–61.

41. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21*, 2:41–49, 241–42.

42. *Ibid.*, 2:45–50, 74; first and third quotes, p. 46, second quote, p. 47.

43. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Repre-*

sentation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21, 2:97–99; Frank M. Surface and Raymond L. Bland, *American Food in the World War and Reconstruction Period: Operations of the Organizations under the Direction of Herbert Hoover, 1914 to 1924* (Stanford University, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1931), pp. 117–20, 198–99.

44. Nelson, *Victors Divided*, pp. 243–48; Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1922–23*, pp. 122–53.

45. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1922–23*, pp. 151–52, quote, p. 151. General Allen’s speech contained his hope for continued peace in Europe, but German politics were already starting to polarize and the relationship between the Germans and the French troops that replaced the Americans was never cordial or pleasant. Only ten months after this speech, Adolf Hitler made his first attempt to seize power.

46. *Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz*, p. 135.

47. Assistant Chief of Staff, G–2, American Forces in Germany, *American Representation in Occupied Germany, 1920–21*, 2:41–42.

48. Evans E. Kerrigan, *American War Medals and Decorations* (rev. ed., New York: Viking, 1971), p. 90; War Department Bull 34, 10 Dec 1941, p. 3.

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DR. JEFF CLARKE

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include advanced experimental materiel. And as the Army’s senior curator recently commented, objects are the most visible and emotionally charged source of historical instruction and can forcefully communicate information at many levels. A group of helmets with division insignia from Normandy, for example, underlines the importance of unit cohesion, while a comparison of the armor used by the U.S. Army and its foes during World War II dramatically illustrates the impact that different armor doctrines had on equipment development and the advantages possessed by the more expensive but generally better armed and armored German machines. (We put our money into speed and mass production.) Thus, although curators have a somewhat different function than historians in this arena of support, they too can supply concrete aid for current missions and should strive to do so at every opportunity. If all of our historical professionals can do that, I know

that we will have a smarter and a better Army and that the Army Historical Program will have made a lasting contribution to the national defense.

I recently returned from a great visit to the Grafenwöhr training area, where Elvis Presley was serving in 1960 when I first donned an Army uniform. Certainly I have watched great changes in the U.S. Army since then. Now, after forty years of service to that Army, I will be retiring as this issue of *Army History* goes to press. But as one who has specialized in military history, I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had such a great career working and sharing wonderful experiences with so many terrific people. I sincerely wish all of you well. I ask only that you build on the fine work done by your predecessors and ensure that our historical programs remain the best in the world as you continue to provide tangible support to our soldiers and leaders.