

German Anti-Nazis and the British Empire

*The Special Operations Executive,
Deserters from the German Army and
Partisan Movements in Occupied Europe*

by
Merilyn Moos



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Front and rear cover illustrations: *Details from "Allies inside Germany" by H A Rothholz*

Born in Dresden, Germany, Rothholz emigrated to London with his family in 1933, to escape the Nazi regime. He retained a connection with his country of birth through his involvement with émigré organisations such as the Free German League of Culture (FGLC) in London, for whom he designed a series of fundraising stamps for their exhibition "Allies Inside Germany" in 1942.

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To those of us who came after and carry on the struggle

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German Anti-Nazis and the British Empire

The Special Operations Executive, Deserters from the German Army and Partisan Movements in Occupied Europe

This section looks at active anti-Nazi Germans from within the working class movement who chose an often uneasy alliance with the British military in an attempt to stop Nazism, not all of whom lived in the UK. Rather than being a ‘fifth column’ or the ‘enemy within’ as they were frequently presented, many of these anti-Nazi Germans were more ferociously anti-Nazi than many at the time in the UK. With the wisdom of hindsight, it might appear evident that defeating Nazi Germany was such a priority that allying with the British state was an obvious decision but, in the years immediately before the outbreak of war, many on the left saw the impending war as an imperialist war, indeed an extension of World War 1, as much as a war against Nazi Germany. But very few, apart from a tiny number of pacifists, maintained this position once war began.¹ A handful of the British left adopted an ‘entryist’ position: join up in order to agitate amongst other soldiers, but there is no evidence that any German refugees adopted this position.

Indeed the line of the KPD in exile resembled the line of the British CP, at least after the collapse of the Hitler-Stalin pact, to subsume all activity to the war effort.² In the years leading up to the outbreak of war, the British Communist Party (CPGB), and the German Communist Party (KPD) (although later than many other national communist parties), adopted the line of the ‘popular front’, which emphasised the defence of bourgeois democracy, not a ‘united front’.³ In Britain,

¹ One section of the ILP were sympathetic to the ‘No conscription’ campaign before the outbreak of war. In a remarkable article in the *New Leader* of 9 June 1939, Chris Jones (Chris Braithwaite) argued against conscription on the grounds that in the West Indies, the elementary principles of democracy were denied, that the ‘colonial’ worker had given their lives in the First World war on the basis of unfulfilled promises and that Britain had ditched Abyssinia, (Hogsbjerg, Christian, *Chris Braithwaite, Seamen’s organizer, Socialist and Militant Pan-Africanist*)

² The position of organising the workers’ movement within ones own country had a greater appeal in countries occupied by Nazi Germany where workers’ organised resistance to the Nazi occupation eg in Belgium, anti-Nazi and pro-nationalist sentiments became fused. In Britain, this position had virtually no purchase amongst the home-grown working-class movement, never mind the German refugees.

³ What is distinctive about the united front is that it aims to win working class support for revolutionary politics based on ‘concrete’ demands within a temporary- alliances over those demands with reformist organisations because of their wide support in the working class but the revolutionary organisation maintains its autonomy.

this position was justified by the apparent likelihood of the British Government adopting a policy of appeasement, their failure to support the Spanish Republican Government or to condemn the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. The USSR, on the other hand, was seen as a bulwark against Nazism. The Hitler-Stalin pact came as a shock but was excused as a defensive measure against Nazi Germany. The Comintern's line became that there was nothing to choose between rival imperialisms.

Once the USSR entered the war on the side of the Allies, the discomfort of many in the German and British Communists was calmed. By the summer of 1943, Communist Party membership was again rising (to around 60,000): many of the recruits worked in armament factories where the Communists campaigned for increased production and a second military front.

The 'alliance' between the British left and the British State helps to explain the German refugees' willingness to also ally with the British State as a way of defeating the Nazis, even though the British State would be understood at least by some as representing the 'class enemy'. As will be seen, some of the German refugees who fought with or alongside the British armed forces were far from unambiguously pro-British. The tensions within British policy between being anti-fascist and pro-imperialist, are sharply exposed during the Greek civil war when the German deserters who were fighting with the partisans alongside the British then fought with the partisans against the British.

The first section looks at anti-Nazi Germans who ended up being 'recruited' by the British armed forces, many of who had fought in Spain, and who the French government had then sent to internment camps in Algeria. (People already mentioned in the earlier biographies are not included here.) Although gaining information on this group has been very limited, it looks as if some may have joined up as much out of expediency as principle: they wanted to get out of the camp and, in many cases, to resist the Nazis alongside the USSR.

The second section specifically considers the Germans who worked with SOE (though, again, if people are already in an earlier section, they are not repeated here). The third section considers the establishment of the British 'Miscellaneous' or 'X' troop which recruited from Germans and other anti-Nazi refugees.

The final section considers Germans who were conscripted into the German 999 punishment battalion (see on), who managed to desert and ended up fighting with or alongside the Greek partisan movements, allied for the early years of the war with the British until the Greek civil war put the partisans, including the German deserters, and the British on opposite sides. The wars in Greece reveal all too starkly the tension between fighting the Nazis alongside the British and fighting against the British in their role of imperialists. There is also a brief last section on German deserters who fought in Albania alongside the partisans, many of whom had fled from Greece when the British troops occupied it.

It is impossible to know how many Germans fought with or aligned themselves in some fashion with the British armed forces during World War Two. The figure generally given is around 10,000 Germans who registered for military service in Great Britain.⁴ While I recognise the commitment and bravery of the many Germans who volunteered once they got to the UK, they are not my focus.⁵

The British armed forces and Government policy did not make it easy for German refugees to join the regular forces. As already mentioned, there was a deep suspicion of people who were often seen as a potential ‘fifth column’. Hundreds of young - sometimes very young - German refugees who wished to volunteer, ended up being sent to the British Pioneer Corps which largely never left the UK, though SOE’s recruitment policies were more eclectic (as will be seen in the relevant section), and did draw from the Pioneer Corps.

To use the phrase adopted in ‘Fighters across Frontiers’, what this whole section focuses on are forms of ‘transnational resistance’ across Europe.⁶ Germans were far from the only national group who chose (or ended up) fighting against their own national armies.⁷ The following are some of the stories of such transnational

⁴ Robert Gildea, *Fighters across Frontiers*, Manchester UP 2020, One reason is the lack of research in this specialist area, another how ‘alignment’ is understood. The 10,000 figure has been contested, for example by Paucker, who argues this figure is ‘enhanced’ by including men who fought in Palestine and in the rest of the British Empire’. (Arnold Paucker *German Jews in the Resistance 1933 – 1945 The Facts and the Problems*)

⁵ See Section 1 for the debates in parts of the left as to whether to firstly call for war against Nazi Germany and then whether to support it.

⁶ Gildea, Robert and Ismel Tames, eds, *Fighters across frontiers. Transnational resistance in Europe, 1936-1948*, , MUP, 2020, henceforth referred to as ‘Gildea’.

⁷ There were many causes, non-political as well as political: earlier migration to a new country, for example to find work, thus ending up fighting with the forces of a new country eg those who had gone to work in France, the dissolution by Nazi invasion of the previous boundaries of European states, especially in Eastern Europe, and the millions of forced (and ‘voluntary’) labourers in foreign countries as well as the pull of a political position eg in Spain. (Gildea)

anti-Nazi resistors, who were in some form allies of Britain, at least for a time, some of whom chose to volunteer, others who supported the local guerrillas after they had deserted. All fought against the armed forces of the country of their birth.

Algeria 1939-1945

In April 1939, there were around 10,000 Spanish republicans and 12,000 International Brigadiers who had fled to North Africa. But many had fled to France where the Vichy Government quickly interned them, often in appalling conditions. Some camps were in Algeria, to hold these ‘dangerous foreigners’, communists, dissidents and ‘Jews’ and to use them for forced labour in the Sahara. The Ministry of Industrial Production and Labour was given responsibility for the management of the camps; the day-to-day administration and guards were largely carried out by Senegalese infantry, members of the Foreign Legion and by local recruits, who could apparently be very cruel.⁸

On November 8th 1942, Allied troops arrived in the ‘Torch landings’ and dislodged the Axis armies.⁹ The operations in Algeria were successful in large part because of the well-organised action of young resistance fighters, about two-thirds young Jews, who were collaborating with the Gaullist resistance and occupied strategic objectives in Algiers. *"Those who took to the streets, who fired the shots and, with unimaginable audacity, paralysed the civil and military authorities of Algiers, neutralised a garrison of 15,000 men and facilitated the Anglo-American landing."*¹⁰ This resistance was then hunted down by the German forces and

⁸ Sarah Abrevaya SteinAomar Boum: *Labour and Internment Camps in North Africa*, ushnm

⁹ The Allies landed in North Africa, including Algeria in Operation Torch, on November 8, 1942, aided by the resistance in North Africa, many Jewish. Some 400 ill-armed rebels, loosely allied with the Free French, seized strategic buildings in Algiers such as telephone exchanges, police stations, prefectures, radio stations etc, with the aim of paralysing Vichy resistance and opening the way for the Allies, one of the first major acts of Jewish armed resistance in the War, and perhaps the most successful. Their contribution to Allied victory, and how they were treated, is absent from most histories. (Charlie Pottins, *Lighting the Torch in Algeria*, Jewish Socialist, Winter 2012-3, <https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/features/item/lighting-the-torch-in-algiers>.)

The Vichyist commander, Admiral Francois Darlan, the no.2 in the Vichy regime, co-operated with the Allies, in return for being installed as High Commissioner. (So much for the Allies’ anti-fascist credentials.) Until the US-led invasion, Darlan was loyal to Vichy. One of the insurgents, Bonnier, allied with the Free French, and apparently trained by the British secret service, managed to murder Darlan (but was then himself executed by the Americans). General Giraud, the head of the armed services under Vichy in Algeria, then succeeded Darlan as High Commissioner for N. Africa, with the active collusion of Eisenhower and the Americans. Anti-fascists continued to be arrested and condemned by military courts. Fascist laws were not rescinded. The Vichy officials were only gradually replaced. The official order to close the internment camps for Jewish soldiers (though whether that only applied to the French prisoners is unclear) was only enacted on April 28, 1943. (For more information, see Danny Gluckstein, *Fighting on all fronts*.)

¹⁰ Jacob Olie, *Les camps de vichy en Afrique du Nord (1940-1944)*, Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah 2013

arrested.

But the exact process and timing of the Allies ‘freeing’ the camps is unclear. Alexander (see biography) states that the Vichy camps were not immediately closed following Operation Torch, indeed in some cases this took years.¹¹ Marsalek confirms that even after the defeat of the Vichy troops, the camps were not liberated. General Giraud kept Vichy’s repressive system intact.¹² Gildea et al. argue that General Giraud who took over after Admiral Darlan’s assassination ‘was simply Vichy under American protection’. Oliel states that the camps were only ‘liberated’ in the spring of 1943, so some months after the Anglo-American landings (which concurs with Alexander’s testimony). Although the Americans forces pressurised the French to release Spanish republicans, International Brigaders and communists,¹³ it appears that the concern of the commanders of the US troops was not so much the liberation of the camps but the march West towards Libya.¹⁴

Djelfa

Under the Vichy regime, the Djelfa camp, which had been built and used as a major French military post from 1852, served as a centre for ‘*assignation à résidence*’ and a forced labour camp, catering principally for political prisoners. Although the camps in France were under Vichy authority, the Germans still had the right to track down German - and Italian - anti-fascists, especially those who had fought in Spain.¹⁵ Vichy deported many men who had fought with the International Brigades, as well as French and German Communists, Jews and other ‘undesirables’ to the Algerian camps, including but especially Djelfa. On March 25,

¹¹ Alexander interview

¹² Marsalek, Zdenko and Diego Celaya, *From regular armies to irregular resistance (and back)* in Gildea P85

¹³ Gildea, Robert et al, *Camps as crucibles of transnational resistance* in Gildea, P58

¹⁴ My thanks to Steve Cushion for his analysis here.

The tensions between the OSS and British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Algeria are not our concern. OSS was nominally under the SOE umbrella and they continued to have overall responsibility. It seems it was the OSS who, early on, set up a regional headquarters in Algiers, landed their agents there after Operation Torch and organised intelligence and clandestine missions, drawing on the international fighters in Vichy’s Algerian camps. When 50,000 U.S. troops followed by 15,000 British soldiers landed at half a dozen locations along the North African coast from November, 1942, OSS provided a ‘reception’, sabotaged military targets, provided information, cut off enemy communications lines etc. SOE recruited transnationally. A few were even of Soviet origin who had been captured and then deserted from the Wehrmacht, though few Germans deserted from the German army.

¹⁵ German anti-Nazis who saw Germany as lost still hoped to defeat fascism in Spain. Indeed, the Spanish civil war has been seen as in effect the beginning of the Second World War. Though it falls outside the scope of this work, some Germans who had fought in Spain and survived then became some of the leading fighters in the French resistance (See S. Cushion in *Anti-Nazi Germans*).

1941, the camp was opened to receive and detain approximately 1,200 French “undesirables”.

In August 1942, the Red Cross counted 444 Spaniards, 50 Germans, of whom 16 were Jewish, 118 stateless people (presumably mostly Germans whom the Nazi Government had deprived of citizenship), 15 Austrians, 11 Jewish, 52 Poles, of whom 44 were Jewish, 2 British and about 150 from various nations.¹⁶ (How the Red Cross categorised somebody as Jewish is unknown.)

The conditions in the camp were such that the cemetery was as likely an outcome as release. Surrounded by barbed wire, the men were crowded together in tents, there was much typhoid and dysentery, there was extreme cold during the winter and unbearable heat in the summer, and a lack of shoes put the prisoners at risk of the many scorpion and snake bites. In 1942, the camp commandant, who was a drunk and tyrannical, arbitrarily picked out ten men each day whom he beat. The prisoners worked 10 hours a day, except Sunday. The commander used the prisoners’ existing skills to make the camp virtually self-sufficient, but, despite the prisoners’ long working hours, there was rarely enough food. There was soup in the morning and at night but most times, the soup was just brown water. The prisoners would eat anything to stay alive: rats, scorpions, dogs that wandered into the camp and Alexander suggests, even people. They each had only two cups of water by day (if they were lucky). Men who were punished were buried in the sand up to their heads where they could not move and were bitten by scorpions. The guards would urinate on their heads. They were sent to work on the rail-road, carrying heavy loads of sand and stones, working in all conditions.¹⁷ Conditions were so awful at Djelfa, that General Beynet, on inspection, had at least some of the prisoners transferred.

I have not been able to establish exactly when the Allies took over the Djelfa camp from the control of the Vichy Government, Certainly Alexander suggests it was not till the spring of 1943. so some months after the Anglo-American landings. As late as March 1943, according to Alexander, a Red Cross officer came to Djerba, and later US Quakers brought used clothing, rice, sugar, and condensed milk but most of the food that arrived would have required cooking, which was

¹⁶ Aomar Boum’s article ‘ Djelfa’, updates@academia-mail.com, and also from Bernard Sicot, *Contribution à l’histoire du camp de Djelfa, archives et témoignages*, https://www.persee.fr/doc/emixx_1245-2300_2009_num_3_3_862

¹⁷ Harry Alexander’s interviews

impossible. They were apparently horrified by the condition in the camps. Alexander suggests that although the Americans got there first, it was not till the British troops arrived, that the camp was released. Unlike in some camps in North Africa, there does not appear to have been an active revolt. Alexander said that only 300 were alive in the Djelfa camp at the end.

Some of the prisoners from the camp subsequently joined the French resistance but some preferred the English or American armies.¹⁸ How exactly this process of the German prisoners volunteering for the British army took place is again unclear.

In April 1943, a British officer, Major Brister, was able to get internees in Djelfa released for the Pioneer Corps, among them 65 Jewish internees. But it has not been possible to establish how many of the German internees, many of them strongly KPD and almost all veterans of the Spanish civil war, were recruited by OSS or SOE.^{19, 20} What also remains a mystery is how some of the men who joined the British forces then were given permission and got to the USSR.

¹⁸ Giraud, a French General who assumed command of French troops in North Africa after Operation Torch, only repealed the Vichy anti-Jewish laws on March 14, 1943 but, according to Jacob Olie, Giraud deliberately delayed the release of Jewish internees till towards the end of 1943. but Olie does not clarify whether this was just for French and Algerian Jews or for others as well. (The Jewish population of Algeria was 108,000 in 1941). It was the OSS who, early on, organised intelligence and clandestine missions in Algeria. When 50,000 U.S. troops followed by 15,000 British soldiers landed at half a dozen locations along the North African coast from November, 1942, OSS provided a 'reception', sabotaged military targets, provided information, cut off enemy communications lines etc. The OSS set up a regional headquarters in Algiers and worked with the British Special Operations Executive, though there was apparently much tension. British SOE continued to have overall responsibility. Nevertheless, from what Alexander said, it seems that the camps were only taken over when the British arrived

¹⁹ Some former Spanish republican inmates from Djelfa opted to be trained in a camp at Oujda, set up by the OSS. About 10 men then went back to Spain where they organised an urban guerrilla group in Malaga.

²⁰ Thomas states that the SOE files held in Algeria were deliberately destroyed which makes an understanding of their role in Algeria difficult. (Thomas, Martin, *The Massingham mission: SOE in French North Africa, 1941–1944*, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02684529608432387?journalCode=fint20)

German anti-Nazis in the Djerba camp who volunteered to fight with Britain

The following is in alphabetical order.

Harry Alexander born 1921

Harry Alexander does not appear to have originally been a political activist. He fled Nazi Germany because of its anti-Semitic measures. I am including him because of the interview he gave (see footnote), with all the consequent strengths and limitations, including possible elisions in time, which gives a near-unique insight into the prisoners' view of the Djerba camp, because he was briefly with the French resistance and because he volunteered and worked for the British army.²¹

Born in 1921 in Leipzig, he does not appear to have belonged to any resistance grouping but 'ran messages' for families whose members had been arrested, hidden or fled so that people knew what was happening to their loved ones, an underestimated activity. He was imprisoned soon after *Kristallnacht*, when still only 17. His mother probably bribed the guards for his release on the condition that he would leave the country;



He fled to Italy but became trapped in San Remo because neither Italy nor France would allow him in. With the help of local resistance fighters, he then sneaked into France on an overcrowded fishing boat from which several passengers fell and drowned. He was arrested in Nice, sleeping in a doorway, first imprisoned and then interned in a number of camps, finally in Manosque. The camp authorities told him that if he joined the French Legion, he could go free but he refused, despite the awful conditions in the camp. But, while being transported in a lorry, he jumped down, not knowing where he was, and in the confusion, managed to escape and walked into the woods. Woken the next morning, he was

²¹ Interviews by Joe Richman of Mr. Harry Alexander, 1991, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/iRG-50.030.000Z>, 1995: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog>; 1992: irn504892, irn505558. This section is drawn from these interviews. These interviews are gold-dust though Alexander is sometimes – not surprisingly – a bit disjointed and the listener has to ‘interpret’.

surrounded by a group of men carrying guns. 'I'm a Jew,' he told them. 'I'm on the run.' 'Join us,' they said, we have more guns though not nearly enough. He joined the French resistance group but many were soon tracked down. He hung on with the rest (though he does not say if he ever was involved in any 'activity'). He was eventually caught and sent to a camp in Argelès-sur-Mer and then taken to Djelta.

He spent two years in Djelta where he was forced to work on the Trans-Saharan Railroad project. In the interview, he reported that the Camp Commander told them: 'You all came here to die...You are the scum of the earth...And I am good at what I'm doing'. Interviewed in 1995, more than fifty years after release, he said again and again: "How I survived, I will never know."

He also says that the US Army arrived before the British but that his release from the camp was by the British Army in 1943 (but unfortunately without giving further details). He volunteered for the British 8th army, though he could not speak English. He spent four years with them, after the end of the war being assigned to Düsseldorf to interrogate Nazi prisoners and working for British military intelligence. He 'hunted war criminals for over eighteen months... and went out to get them' i.e arrest them. He moved to New York City in 1947; training to become a watchmaker and raising a family, though his life was very hard at first.

Gustav Dorf (1908-1972)

In 1926, Gustav Dorf had joined the Young Communist League of Germany (*Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands*, KJVDand, in 1929, the KPD. He then worked as a functionary of the KJVD in Wupperthal. From 1931, he was the editor of the *Bergische Volksstimme*. Later, active in the German underground, he was arrested in August 1933, but escaped from Remscheid prison on September 2, 1933 and fled to Holland, then France and then joined the International Brigades, where he was the political commissar of the Edgar Andre battalion.

After he escaped to France in February 1939, he was interned in Le Vernet in September 1939 and finally in the Djelfa camp in Algeria from 1941 to 1943. Here, the accounts become hazy. The *Bundesstiftung-Aufarbeitung*, a usually relatively reliable source, record him as being a member of the British army during 1943/44 and that, in 1944/45, the Soviets ordered him to become a partisan of the OSS. Though this sounds unlikely, other sources agree that at some point, he was

recruited by OSS.²² But yet other sources state that Milton Wolff,²³ presumably representing SOE (see footnote), recruited Dorf in 1943 to fight on the side of the Allied forces in Italy. Dorf fought in Italy both with the Allies and as a partisan.²⁴

In July 1945, he returned to East Germany.²⁵ Until June 1946 he headed the police department of the Brandenburg provincial administration, from 1946 to 1950 he worked as a lecturer and chair of the Karl Marx party college and he continued, unusually, to hold cultural posts. Then things got tricky. The cadre files of the International Brigades, by the former communist Andre Marty,²⁶ appeared to discredit him, in addition to his former – probable - links with OSS. In 1953, the allegations were dropped.²⁷

Erhard König (1900-1966)

From 1919 to 1929, König worked with short breaks as a stone worker and became a union activist. In 1916, he was already a member of Socialist Workers Youth and in 1918, of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD, of which he became a functionary. Then, in 1923, he joined the KPD and became a councillor as well as heading the protection and defence organisation of the KPD in the area around Mittweida. He was a local leader of the *Rotfrontkämpferbund* (League of Red

²² https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

²³ Wolff was the son of a family of Jewish working class immigrants. At a young age, he joined the US YCL and then the USCP. He arrived in Spain in 1937 and became the commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He then joined the British secret service: SOE and recruited former IB fighters for commando operations behind the German lines and then in Italy. After his return to the US, he appeared before the Un-American Committee, later published manifestos against the Vietnam War and criticised the Nixon government for their stand against the Sandinistas.

²⁴ In a "Report on the Gang Situation" from the diaries of the General Command of the LXXV Army Corps, dated April 1944, it states there were about 10 to 15 German deserters in the Communist partisan group "Romagna" in the area of Monte Falterona out of 400 to 500 partisans. But figures on the participation of German deserters in the partisan fights are rare. Gerhard Paul mentions ten deserters with the 4th Garibaldi Division and 7 deserters with the 36th Partisan Brigade but that overall, in northern Italy, the presence of Germans in the main partisan units and in the fiercest fighting was significant (Paul, Gerhard: 'Die verschwanden einfach nachts«. Überläufer zu den Alliierten und den europäischen Befreiungsbewegungen' in: Norbert Haase & Gerhard Paul (Hg.): *Die anderen Soldaten. Wehrkraftzersetzung, Gehorsamsverweigerung und Fahnenflucht im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Fischer, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, S. 139-156 1995; also see Roberto Battaglia: *Deutsche Partisanen in der italienischen Widerstandsbewegung*, in: Internationale Hefte der Widerstandsbewegung 2, (1960), and the main source for this footnote: Brieger, Matthias, *Wehrmachtsdeserteure in der Resistenza* https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/175Brieger.pdf)

²⁵ https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

²⁶ Marty was a despicable person. From France, he acted as a key agent for the Comintern in Spain and as such, had enormous influence in the International Brigades. Marty believed that the "fascist-Trotskyists" had infiltrated the International Brigade and saw their liquidation as his duty. In April 1938, the Spanish government expelled him.

²⁷ www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/gustav-artur-dorf

Front-Fighters RFB) and a delegate on the KPD district leadership. After a strike in 1929 at the Steinart company where he worked, König was sacked.

In 1933, the KPD decided he should go to Czechoslovakia, continuing to work on behalf of the KPD. There, he was arrested several times for his political activities and then expelled. In March 1936 he went to Moscow and in October 1936, he left to fight in Spain, becoming chief of staff in the Edgar Andre battalion. König became a member of the Spanish Communist Party (CPE) in 1938. In February 1938, he was seriously wounded in the Battle of Jarama.

In 1939, he went to France, was interned, including at Gurs, where he was the underground 'chief'. Convicted of illegal party work, he was taken to the fortress of Collioure. At the end of 1939 he was transferred to Le Vernet camp and in 1941 to Djelfa.

After the Allies landed in 1943, König was initially 'forcibly recruited' into the 363rd work company of the British army but in December 1943, he and 31 other German International Brigade veterans were released from the British army at the instigation of the Soviet government and went to the Soviet Union. There he became a member of the National Committee for Free Germany²⁸.

In 1945 he returned to East Germany and initially worked for the KPD regional leadership in Dresden. In 1946, he became a member of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, the East German Communist Party) and then of the Peoples Police, where he made a very successful career.²⁹

Hans Schaul (1905-1988)

Barred from working as a lawyer in 1933 because of his Jewish heritage, Schaul fled to France, then joined the International Brigades and became a lieutenant in the 13th Division. He became an employee in the office of the International Brigade Inspectorate. In 1937, Schaul became a member of the CPE, also working as an editor on several political newspapers. He returned to France in 1938 and worked for the "Support Committee" for German fighters in the Spanish Civil War. The next year, in 1939, he joined the KPD.

²⁸ Moos, *Anti-Nazi Germans* for more on the National Committee for Free Germany

²⁹ This is all drawn from Wikipedia.

In September 1939, Schaul was interned, ending up by 1943 in the camp at Djelfa, Algeria. In 1943, he became a member of a British labour camp in Algeria. (Unfortunately, I have not been able to establish further details about this.)

In 1944, he was able to travel to the USSR, arriving in November. Here he was employed as an instructor for French and Japanese POWs. He was then employed by Moscow's Administrative Head Office for Prisoners of War, working as an instructor at various 'anti-fascist' schools. In 1948 the party ordered him back to Germany.³⁰

In East Germany, he joined the SED and from 1956-72, became one of its leaders. He was also first the editor of and then on the editorial board of the SED journal: 'Einheit'.

Walter Steffens (1903-1968)

Walter Steffens, born in Hamburg, a baker, then a stoker, probably on ships, became unemployed in January 1930. In the same month he joined the KPD. In 1932 he became head of the "Red Navy" section of the illegal Red Front in Hamburg. In May 1933, the Gestapo arrested and imprisoned him but he was released in September 1933 for lack of evidence. Faced with re-arrest, he first lived underground but then fled to Prague in February 1934 where he also lived illegally.

From April 1938, Steffens fought with and became a Sergeant in the XI International Brigade. In February 1939, he fled to France. From February 1939 to April 1943, he was interned in a number of camps, finally in El Djelfa. After the arrival of the British troops, Steffens volunteered for and quickly, though briefly, became a corporal in the British North African army.

In 1943, he received approval for his application to go to the USSR. From November 1943, he was on his way to the Soviet Union with another 31 International Brigade veterans. Here he became a member of the National Committee for a Free Germany (*Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*, NKFD) and

³⁰ <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de>

On his return to Germany, Hans Schul married Dora Davidsohn. Exiled in Paris, and 'sans papier', she had been sent to a variety of internment camps but escaped in July 1942. She made contact with the Communist Party in Lyon, and joined the Résistance. Disguised as a French woman under the name of Renée Fabre, Dora Benjamin worked at German official offices to gather important information for the Résistance. She also used her contacts to German soldiers to distribute anti-Nazi leaflets and flyers. She returned to Germany in 1946. (<https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies>)

took part with the Red Army in the fighting in Belrus and the Caucasus..

On April 2, 1946, Walter Steffens returned to the Soviet zone of Germany. He first worked on behalf of the Central Committee of the KPD, then joined the SED and made a career out of different positions of authority in the police.³¹

Anton Switalla (1896-1970)

The son of a working-class family, König became a shepherd, then a port worker in Hamburg. Drafted for military service in 1915, he became a smelter, then construction worker. In 1919, he was a local leader in the Hamburg rising, a part of the defeated Spartacus uprising, when he was arrested. In 1920, he joined the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, USPD), then the KPD and became chairperson of the KPD local group in Schiffbek. He was works council chairperson in Hamburg after the 1923 uprising.³² Arrested, he was sent to prison for five years. Released early, from 1927, he became secretary of a number of KPD districts around Hamburg as well as being active in the RGO³³ and was their delegate to the KPD Conference. In 1929, Switalla was sentenced to nine months in prison for 'resisting state power'.

In 1931 Switalla briefly attended a military political school in Moscow. From 1932 to 1933 he was secretary of the KPD leadership in Altona and was elected to the Prussian state parliament.

From 1933, he became the Secretary of the, by now illegal, KPD first in Bremen, and then the principle clandestine KPD organiser in Saarland, to where he had fled and which for a short time became one of the organising centres of the KPD leadership.³⁴ In March / April 1935, he seems to have become part of the KPD external leadership in Paris. In 1935, Switalla left for the Soviet Union, took Soviet

³¹ <http://www.parow-info.de/Parow%201950/WalterSteffens.html>,

https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

³² In an uprising which remains controversial to this day, the KPD, or at least a section of it, led the uprising in Hamburg which started on 23 October 1923, lacked solid working class support and lasted about three days. Rebels stormed 24 police stations and took arms. Some 100 people died and hundreds were arrested during the uprising.

³³ *Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts Opposition* (Revolutionary Union Opposition) was the Communist union in Germany during the Weimar Republic. It went underground after the Nazi Party seized control of the government and continued operating until it was crushed by the Nazis in 1935.

³⁴ The source: Gabriele Baumgarten and Dieter Hebi in *Biographisches Handbuch der SB"/DDR, 1945-1990* (1996) suggest Switalla adopted a united front position at this point. If he did so, he was in advance of the KPD's official line but maybe the politics in Saarland had a relative autonomy.

citizenship and became a union instructor for foreign workers in a locomotive works.

Then he left for Spain and between June 1937 and February 1939, joined the International Brigade, becoming political commissar at an officers' school. But, for reasons unknown, he was demoted to soldier in 1938. In 1938, he joined the Spanish Communist Party.

After fleeing to France in 1939, Switalla was arrested and interned in a number of camps, ending up in Djelfa. He was released in 1943, was a short-term member of the British army and then returned to the Soviet Union where he became a seminar leader at the antifascist schools for POWs. (According to the Bundestag records, his return to the USSR initially failed because of Walter Ulbricht's objections.) On May 6, 1945 Switalla returned to East Germany as a member of the 'Sobottka group', to lay the groundwork and prepare for the Soviet take-over.³⁵ He became a member of the SED and rose up in the police.

Gunther Tenner 1907-1989

A member of the Berlin Factory Workers Association from 1921, in 1927, he joined the KJVD and in January 1928, the KPD in Berlin. He then became an employee of the local KJVD.

It is worth emphasising that he was arrested and imprisoned, not in 1933, but under the Weimar Republic in 1930, for 'continuation of an illegal organisation' though he was acquitted for lack of evidence. From 1930, he worked in different capacities for the KJVD.

From 1933 – 35, he worked underground for the KPD. In 1935, he went to Moscow but was briefly arrested there though remaining till March 1937 when he left for Spain.

He joined the Ernst Thälmann Brigade, where he became the Political Commissar, and in 1938, joined the Spanish Communist Party. Interned in France from February 1939, he was finally sent to Djelfa where he headed the KPD group.³⁶

³⁵ <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de>; Handbook of German Communists, https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

³⁶ Palmier, In passing, suggests that he got to the USSR at this point but he was probably thinking of his later exile.

From April - November 1943, he was a soldier in the British Army in North Africa, where he also headed the KPD group, though I have not found further information on this. He then left for the USSR, returning in 1945 to East Germany, where he would become a central figure in the maintenance of Party discipline.³⁷

Karl Wegmann (1906-1981)

The son of a railroad worker, he became a painter, joined the Social Democratic youth organisation and in 1926, the SPD. He fled to France in 1933, became a member of the KPD and, in 1936 joined the Thälmann Brigade. He then fled back to France in 1939 and was interned, first in Argeles and then in the fortress of Marseilles until 1941 when he was taken to the Djelfa camp. From January 1943, he was in a work company of the British army deployed to build a desert road in the Sahara. Whether the British just took over control of the camp and its prisoners or whether Wegman in some fashion volunteered is unclear.

After being granted Soviet citizenship in December 1943, he was transported to the USSR. He received special training in Moscow and was then used as a partisan in Belarus. From the summer of 1944 until the end of the war in 1945, he was involved in Operation Beresina for almost ten months with other German exiled comrades. (Several armies in the German Wehrmacht were entrapped and prevented from crossing the Beresina River in June 1944).

Wegmann returned to East Germany in 1945 and like so many of these men, rose in the police.³⁸

Hans-Hugo Winkelmann (1907-1995)

Winkelmann first held an apprenticeship as a locksmith, then joined the KJVD in 1921 (aged 14) and then the KPD and RFB in 1923. He then became a cashier but, in 1926, he was dismissed after a strike; he then worked on the roads and then became a locksmith but in 1932, he was again unemployed. In 1933, he fled to the Netherlands but was imprisoned and then deported to Belgium. He returned illegally to the Netherlands and was head of the illegal KPD group in Rotterdam-West.

In August 1936 he went to Spain and became a member of the Thälmann

³⁷ <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de>,
https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

³⁸ https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf and Wikipedia.

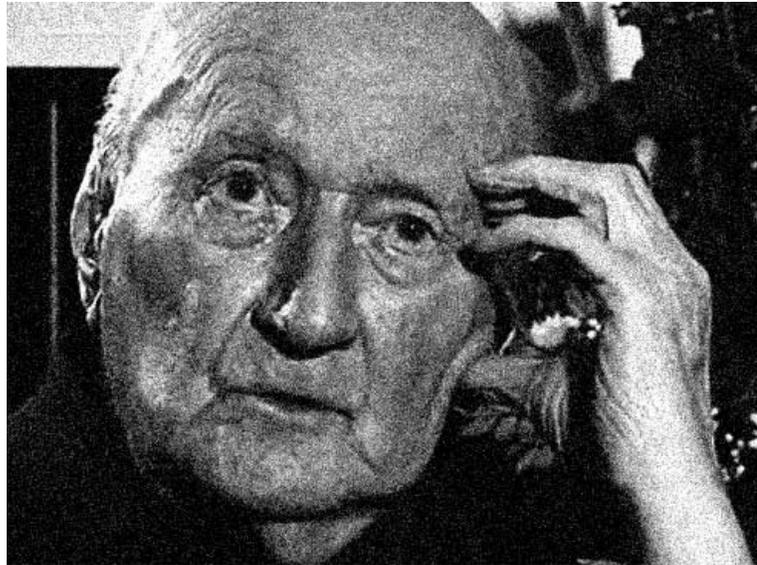
Brigade, where he was the liaison to the military intelligence service: *Servicio de Investigación Militar*, and, from August 1938, its head. He was wounded several times. After escaping to France, he was interned in St. Cyprien, Gurs and Le Vernet camps in France from February 1939, and in the Djelfa camp in Algeria from 1941 to 1943.

From April to November 1943, he was a soldier in the British army in Algeria. In 1944, he left for the USSR. In 1944/45, he became a member of a special unit of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the police and intelligence service of the USSR) charged with tracking down enemy espionage groups in Belorussia.

In April 1946 he returned to East Germany. By 1957, he was chief of the riot police.³⁹

Erwin Schulz, 1912- 2012

I am including Schulz because his gives a rare interview about being a political prisoner and then about his time in the 99s, though he never was in Algeria, but in Tunisia. The interview is undated but he is evidently an old man and while he was generally amazingly clear, this was not always the case.



Born in Berlin in 1912, he joined a union as a young employee and was then sacked. Later, when he finally found another job, he joined the trade union of office workers. In the interview, he talked about joining a labour sporting 'fichte' which he implies was attached to the SPD (and which he contrasted to the nationalistic sports and youth groups). He already belonged to the *Socialistische Arbeiter Jugend* (Socialist Workers Youth, SAJ, SPD youth section). He and his

³⁹ <https://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de>

group was already up against the SA who attacked them viciously on different occasions: there was already 'war' on the streets from the late 1920s.

From 1933, the group divided into cells of five, then of only three, to avoid arrest. Schulz and his family turned their home into a 'music centre' i.e. into a meeting place for the illegal cell, writing and organising the distribution of leaflets. Soon arrested, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for preparation of high treason, because he had distributed antifascist flyers and activities with the "Fichte". He was sent to a number of increasingly awful prisons and camps. He was finally released in 1940.

As a former political prisoner, he was judged unworthy of military service but in 1941/42, the Army was short of manpower. During training, he witnessed the shooting of a Bible student because of his refusal to bear arms.

Schulz repeatedly described the formation of the 999 cell as a kamikaze unit who would be sent to their deaths against the enemy and who would be shot from behind, if they were not shot from the front. The principal was the extermination of the politicals.'

Although he did not elaborate, Schulz mentioned how careful one had to be of other political prisoners and how one could not always know what they believed: maybe this was a reference to SPD/KPD animosity but maybe also to the possibility of former comrades who had become sympathetic to Nazism or at least were willing to collude with the Nazi officers.

After a brief stop in Italy, there were taken to Tunisia. From the beginning, he could not shake the feeling that his superiors were sending him to certain death, especially as they placed him in highly vulnerable positions on the 'front', facing the Americans. While knowing that he could well be shot by American forces, he discussed with others seizing the camp and handing it to the Americans. That came to nothing and he then decided to desert. But on the 30th April, the Americans took over the camp. In the radio programme, he says "And there we are ... on April 30th - we then left there. That was '43. We didn't go back, we just moved forward. That was mountainous terrain there, and I said: "Yes, yes, tomorrow is the first of May, we are not going into captivity yet. We want to celebrate May 1st as free people between the fronts." And, well, the next day we are on, and then we were captured

by Moroccans”. (no further explanation provided).

He was handed over to the French who handed him over to the English: He ended up on a camp in America, before being finally released.

In March 1946, he was released from captivity, returned to Germany and joined the KPD and then rose within the SED.⁴⁰ He ended his interview by urging an awareness of the growing threat from the neo-Nazis.

Working with the SOE (the Special Operations Executive)

What was the SOE?

In 1938, three separate organisations were formed as part of the UK's preparations for the expected war in Europe, which, in 1940, Churchill authorized to amalgamate to form the SOE.⁴¹ Most unusually, SOE's role was to work from ‘beneath’: to promote sabotage and subversion in enemy occupied territory and to establish a nucleus of trained men and women to work with local resistance groups, largely within Europe but also elsewhere.⁴²

Thus SOE balanced on the cusp of two parallel wars: the war between German and Anglo-American imperialisms and the ‘popular’ war: people fighting against Nazism but also against their own right-wing rulers eg in Greece and Italy. This ambiguity facilitated left-wing Germans, who one might imagine might not have wanted to support the operations of the bourgeois state, nevertheless finding justification for working for them. While this position raises far wider issues, no section of the British left, apart from the pacifists, consistently opposed the Government’s war against Nazi Germany, though from a wide variety of perspectives (see Part 1 for elaboration): it was understood that an enemy even greater than one's own imperialists were the Nazi imperialists.

⁴⁰ https://www.resistance-archive.org/en/testimonies/erwin-schulz/#/clips/7ZRPzW_LwEY?_k=y5si73Blees, Christian, ‘Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein - Der "Wehrunwürdige" in der Strafddivision 999 <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de>

⁴¹ These were: Section D (the Sabotage Branch of MI 6); MI R (a research branch of the War Office) and Electra House (a semi-secret propaganda section of the Foreign Office).

⁴² SOE was initially divided into three branches reflecting its origins: SO 1 (propaganda); SO 2 (active operations - this branch was subsequently split into groups dealing with geographical areas of operation) and SO 3 (planning). SOE ended up under the Ministry of Economic Warfare. SOE's relations with MI6, the War Office, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Information was at times highly acrimonious and ,in August 1941, after a dispute with the Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office, the bulk of SO 1 was transferred to the newly created Political Warfare Executive, under the control of the Foreign Office. It was disbanded after the end of the Second World War, in 1946. (<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C153>).

It is also intriguing how far the leadership of SOE, mainly establishment figures, were willing, or even enthusiastic, to draw on the left-wing of the exile community. I do not go into the debates within the SOE but, as already noted in Part 1, SOE was not keen on recruiting from the Communist/KPD network but appears to have found the ISK grouping (*Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund*: see *Anti-Nazi Exiles* for more details but briefly a left breakaway from the SPD) more congenial. It would seem that they discerned the political differences within the left exile fishbowl! Recruiting Germans to go underground in Germany had clear advantages: the refugees could pass as German citizens. But SOE's involvement with the resistance in Germany was minimal, even with the more bourgeois German resistance groups, till the last stretch of the war.

SOE did however make use of ISK comrades and Bertholet's ISK network (see biography) between about 1941-45. SOE records praise ISK for proving useful conduits to Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany.⁴³

SOE set up Operation Downend with the aim of dispatching SOE agents to work with the remnants of ISK in the Ruhr and Frankfurt area. Similarly, there were links with Hans Jahn and the ITF.⁴⁴ Jahn stated that the ITF continued to successfully encourage its members to commit sabotage and SOE mounted a number of sabotage operations directed at the German railways: Frilford(1944) was supposedly successful sabotage of railway track from Hintshingen to Oberlauchringen, Colan(1945) between StuttgartandHeilbron, and Fleckney in the Breslau area, Carstairse in Halle; Chalgrove in Hamburg and Bremen, Colburn: Gelnhausen - Schluechtern and Aschaffenberg to Gemuenden, Cregina: Eisenach/Bebra,⁴⁵ Cresswell: Fangfoss and Fiddington,⁴⁶ Curland (1945) Nordhausen/Blankenheim.⁴⁷ Not all these operations were successful and, although Jahn and the ITF, exiled in London, had re-formed links with German railway workers, I have not found evidence as to who exactly did what. The footnote below refers to a few of SOE's other attempted acts of sabotage in Germany, one by a

⁴³ Op cit, quoting from the official history of SOE Mackenzie, the secret history of soe, 691/2

⁴⁴ Marilyn Moos, *Hans Jahn, biography of an anti-Nazi trade unionist*, Community Languages

⁴⁵ Jeremy Black, <https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/mikro/lit3301.pdf>,

www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/special_operations_executive_series_1_parts_1_to_5/Contents-of-Reels-Part-3, National Archives.

⁴⁶ HS 6/682, Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946 Adam Matthew Publications, <https://www.bsb-muenchen.de/mikro/lit3301.pdf>

⁴⁷ HS 6/683. *ibid*

German deserter but of doubtful political provenance.⁴⁸

One of the figures about whom more is known is Jupp Kappius, a leading figure in ISK who was sent to the Ruhr to encourage subversion and sabotage among railway, factory and mine workers.⁴⁹ Although it was with the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) rather than directly with SOE,⁵⁰ two other ISK members, both women: Hilde Meisel (Hilde Monte) and Anna Beyer, who had fled Germany, also agreed, in the summer 1944, to be trained as couriers and undertook secret operations in Germany, Austria, France and Portugal.⁵¹ On April 17, 1945, while trying to cross the border illegally from Germany into Liechtenstein, Meisel was shot and bled to death while still on the border.⁵²

After D Day, SOE briefly decided to put out feelers to the remnants of KPD and SPD to create a network of anti-Nazi working-class ‘resistance’ but quickly decided (or were instructed) to back away. In an illuminating, and predictable, memo, dated 10 September 1944, it states that *‘it appears more than likely that the main long term role of the German section of S.O.E. will be ...to use our resources to counter any underground movement arising in Germany. ...I have already sent out instructions to my representatives in the field authorising them to use any*

⁴⁸ Operations Braddock I and II were the proposal to scatter four million incendiaries devices over Germany after D-Day to be picked up by anti-Nazis and forced labourers for use in sabotage attacks.

Operation *Calvados* (1943):– SOE attempt to start a sabotage organisation in Hamburg and Bremen. Kurt Koenig, supposedly a German army deserter, volunteered for SOE and was dropped on three occasions, disappearing on the third. The first was when SOE’ provided him with sabotage material and in February 1943 parachuted him back into Germany to establish a resistance network in Bremen and to prepare for the dropping of incendiary devices and propaganda for possible use by POWs in an uprising.

(<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C11135826>)

Downend (1944) Agent sent to create a sabotage organisation in the Ruhr and Frankfurt, based on a nucleus of contacts with the ISK.

A plan for a revolt in Dachau while Germany collapsed which appears to have been planned to make use of a German anti-Nazi is detailed below. ‘PW’ whose full name is never given had been in a concentration camp, presumably Dachau, in 1943. The memo lists the prisoners: Russians 10,000, Poles 5,000 German political prisoners 3,000 Czechs 1,000 Members of the International Brigade in Spain brought from France 800 Priests, practically all of whom were Catholics, 800 German ‘Berufsverbrecher’ (criminals), asocial elements 500 Jugoslavs 300, French 200 Belgians 100. Total 21,700 ‘PW would like to be dropped by parachute... If PW wore SS or some other uniform he would not be at all conspicuous’. Paper 25, SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE, 1940-1946 HS 6/629, Adam Matthew Publications

⁴⁹ Moos, *Anti-Nazi Exiles*

⁵⁰ In fact, the OSS was less politically choosy about using German left-wing exiles in Britain than the SOE. The so-called Tool mission recruited Paul Lindner, a previous organiser for the German Metal workers union, and Anton Ruh, a lithographer and flew them into Germany. See Part 1 for more details.

⁵¹ Yet again, there is a link to Berthelot After being dropped into France, in September 1944, and after many hair-raising adventures, Meisel and Beyer were picked up by Berthelot who got them illegally into Switzerland. Later, they again got to Switzerland and stayed at Berthelot’s home (used principally by refugees).

⁵² Other German exiles and groupings in the UK also worked with or fell under the SOE who are discussed in Part 1 and not here eg see reference to the LEX group, Fritz Bieligk and Karl Friedrich Groehl.

suitable channels to obtain the fullest information about any underground movement being established in Germany and about possible methods of combating it. Special attention is to be paid to the various Youth Movements..... This is a very definite change in our role. (unsigned).⁵³

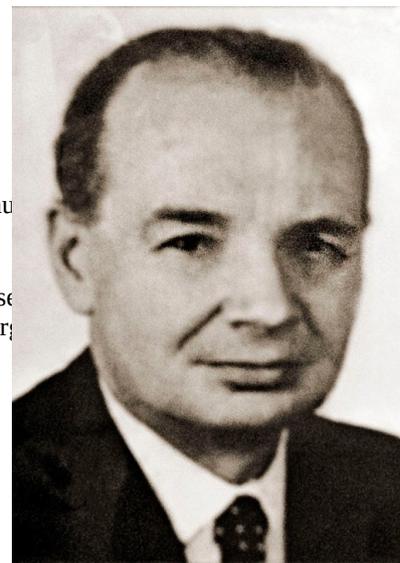
The following people who worked in some fashion with the British secret state during the war can be found in *Anti-Nazi Exiles*, but are not repeated here.⁵⁴ They are in order of arrival in the UK.

- Josef Lampersbrger
- Fritz Bieligk
- Wilhelm Koenen
- Hermann Knufken
- Jupp Kappius
- Paul Lindner, Anton Ruh
- Hilde Meisel
- Karl Groehl
- Hans Jahn but also *Hans Jahn: Biography of an Anti-Nazi Trade Unionist*.⁵⁵

René Bertholet (1907-1969)

Rene Bertholet, a key figure in SOE's resistance activities, only just squeezes into these biographies.⁵⁶ Born in Switzerland (and thus with Swiss citizenship), he moved to Berlin in his late teens, then, following imprisonment, fled back to Switzerland in 1936 and became a key collaborator with SOE, helping to organise grass-roots resistance, especially in France and Germany. His work with SOE reveals how important ISK were to SOE's resistance work, an aspect of the Allies' war which is rarely mentioned but which also sheds light on how ISK, which was to the left of the SPD and the 'conventional' left, were willing to work with the State apparatus to overthrow Nazism.

René Bertholet later wrote about his youth: "I was brought up in a very simple socialist family and



⁵³ HS 6/622, SOE, 1940-1946 Adam Matthew Publications, <https://www.bsb-mu>

⁵⁴ http://anti-nazi-resistance.net/?page_id=275

⁵⁵ http://anti-nazi-resistance.net/?page_id=298

⁵⁶ Unless it says otherwise, much of the following biography is drawn from these periodica.ch/cntmng?pid=cmo-001%3A1995%3A11%3A%3A179, <http://doi.org> d'histoire du mouvement ouvrier (1995-1996)

experienced with intensity the difficult struggles of the working class from the age of ten. We were full of hope since the October Revolution and were later greatly disappointed by the stabilisation of the capitalist world after the First World War."

By 1929, Bertholet had become a member of ISK. He was a correspondent for *Der Funke*, ISK's daily newspaper from its beginning in 1931, when he moved to Berlin, where he then would sell it on the streets.⁵⁷ It was banned on 17 February 1933 but continued illegally, partly possibly because of Bertholet's links with and base in Switzerland. Another important network, even then, was that of railway workers and seafarers, led by Eddo Fimmen, General Secretary of the ITF (the International Transport Workers Federation) whom Bertholet had met in Amsterdam and who had participated in its Congress in August 1932. Bertholet was also a correspondent for the CGT's daily 'Le People', edited by Leon Jouhaux, also involved with ISK.⁵⁸

Bertholet was arrested on 9 November 1933 and remanded in custody in the Moabit prison in Berlin and sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment, served in the Luckau and Brandenburg prisons, released early, at least in part because of the intervention of Swiss officials, In 1936, he fled to Switzerland, subsequently writing about how a cadre group needs to be formed from the anti-Nazi prisoners.

After the outbreak of the Spanish War, he became a correspondent for 'le People', drove an ambulance for the republican side and became a key collaborator in getting arms to the Spanish government.⁵⁹

Although it is hard to keep track of where Bertholet was based, from 1936, he became the head of ISK in France. Bertholet's concern was to build a large underground information network in France. It is not clear how he financed himself and his activities but at least one later letter exists in which he appealed to American friends and comrades to provide vital financial support. He contacted and financed resistance activities in France, printing illegal publications in

⁵⁷ Eichler (see biography) was the editor. *Der Funke* argued for a united front against Nazism and, unsuccessfully, published the "Urgent Call for Unity" between the SPD and KPD ahead of the July 1932 *Reichstag* election. The newspaper was finally banned in February 1933

⁵⁸ Cushion & Moos, *Striking against the Nazis*

⁵⁹ In 1936, he married Hannah Fortmüller, an ISK activist, to prevent her deportation from Switzerland where she was a refugee and collaborated with her on ISK publications in Britain. After the war, she became a publisher in Germany.

Switzerland and illegally crossing the border and bringing them in. his articles/pamphlets, written as Pierre Robert, had a wide circulation, including by *Socialist Vanguard*, the ISK British spin-off.⁶⁰

Although details are hazy, he became active in organising and financing underground couriers to work with SOE, though based in Switzerland.⁶¹ Details of his activities are inevitably hazy and incomplete. Bertholet had helped ensure that a report by Yvon Morandat, a leading figure in the French resistance, reached SOE, recommending the use of the trade union movement in the resistance and sabotage.

Bertholet's main task became to make contact with the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT, General Confederation of Labour, principal French trade union confederation).⁶² SOE was under the political direction of Hugh Dalton, the Labour Minister for Economic Warfare, who wanted French labour organisations to form the basis of the resistance. This was not popular in the British Cabinet. Bertholet was instructed to contact Leon Jouhaux, the secretary general of the CGT, who was however soon arrested. Bertholet helped lay the groundwork for links between French trade-union based resistance groups and the SOE in the unoccupied zone.

Anthony Brooks, or Alphonse, was parachuted into France in July 1942, by SOE to carry out this mission. He was already a friend of Bertholet's, who became his mentor. Brooks' main mission was to approach and help organise railway workers, led by Eddo Fimmen. In an astonishing interview, Brooks details how he helped form sabotage crews amongst railway workers and worked with local railway workers to sabotage German trains by destroying the vital rail link between Montalban and Toulouse and around Lyon and derailing trains from Marseille to Lyon, stopping the trains carrying German tanks, amongst others, thus slowing the Germans down after D Day and limiting its supplies. Although they made a point of not 'knowing' each other, Bertholet was similarly involved.

Bertholet also had links with the ITF in Germany. By late 1941, he was

⁶⁰ Pfister, Tom and Kathy et al, *Eva and Otto: Resistance, Refugees and love in the Time of Hitler*. Although again this is only hinted at, it seems American contacts on occasions secreted large sums on their person when arriving in Europe.

⁶¹ He also worked with the OSS, in November 1942, meeting Alan Dulles, the OSS representative in Switzerland, who considered the information he provided 'absolutely vital'! It seems that some of the comrades saw working with OSS, as opposed to the SOE, as a step too far.

⁶² Seaman, Mark, *Undercover agent, How one of SOE's youngest agents helped defeat the Nazis*, p69. Seaman was a historian with the Cabinet Office.

requested to form links with German transport workers, in particular through the ITF, to promote the ITF's appeal to German left-wingers to carry out sabotage and to smuggle in the necessary materials. Again, based on Hans Jahn's suggestion, Gaby Cordier, a French ISK member who had already travelled thousands of miles as a courier as phone and wireless links could not be trusted⁶³, was recruited by René Bertholet, at that time living in France, to work with the SOE.⁶⁴ He also had contacts with Daniel Mayer, a member of the French Section of the Workers' International (*Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière*, SFIO) and the *Libération-sud* resistance movement,⁶⁵ Jean Texcier⁶⁶ and Hans Eisler.

Bertholet also took part in and worked for free for the OSEO (*Œuvre suisse d'entraide ouvrière* or *Schweizerisches Arbeiterhilfswerk*, Swiss Workers Relief Agency), created in 1936 by the Swiss Trade Union Association and the Swiss Socialist Party, both essentially social democratic organisations, to support Swiss families and children, which also provided him with a cover. But very quickly, under the 'innocent' title of 'Swiss parcels', he became a key figure in distributing food parcels especially for child victims of the Spanish Civil War and, illicitly, to French concentration camps, targeting refugees and illegal immigrants. It seems he also helped to smuggle up to 2000 refugees into Switzerland. By the last years of the war, he had become a crucial figure in the transmission of information about what was happening on the ground and about other key resistance figures, whether they were alive or dead and whom they were still working for,

In 1950, he left Switzerland for Brazil, though it appears he was 'sent' there by ISK, where he founded two agrarian colonies and wrote prolifically.

Stephen Dale born 1917

The following is almost entirely based on 5 hours of a fascinating interview, by and held at the Imperial War Museum (IWM), which illustrate how non-aligned German anti-Nazis ended up working for SOE (though even fifty years later, he

⁶³ Seaman, Mark, *Undercover Agent*.

⁶⁴ It was founded in 1936 by the Swiss Trade Union Confederation and the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland and became active in refugee aid.

⁶⁵ Daniel Mayer (1909-1996), a close friend of Leon Blum's, worked for the SFIO's daily newspaper, *Le Populaire*. In January 1941, he founded the Comité d'Action Socialiste. He then worked hard to build a unified resistance movement under de Gaulle.

⁶⁶ Jean Texcier, (1888-1957) In 1902, he participated in the founding of the Socialist Party of France, which, following a merger with other left-wing parties, became part of the SFIO. A journalist, he wrote the first clandestine brochure, calling for the refusal of any compromise with the occupier. Texcier was one of the founders of the Liberation-North movement, writing *We the Workers* and many other clandestine articles

provided few details of how this happened).⁶⁷ Unspoken but suggested, in itself interesting, is that he was close to the organised resistance in Germany and once in the UK, again aligned with the left but did not want to speak of it.

Born Heinz Spanglet in Berlin in 1917, from a historically Jewish background, though he was a 'convinced atheist', he was involved in a youth movement, though, as in much of the interview, he unfortunately keeps his political affiliations to himself. He became seriously involved in anti-Nazi political work after Hitler came to power. This originated in the youth movement, though he does not suggest which one. Then he founded his own little group



which printed leaflets using very primitive means and stuck them up on lampposts. In January 1934, he was first arrested, aged 16. He was kept in solitary confinement for six months, in a prison for political offenders and also in Sachsenhausen. His friend later told him that he had betrayed four of them to the Gestapo after arrest. (Another of the group, Heinz Alexander, then joined the SA: a not uncommon transition.)

He then became a sailor based in Hamburg. In another suggestion of his political allegiances, which reveals the level of communist party organisation on board ships from Hamburg, he was confronted by the organiser of the KPD cell on board who accused him, falsely, of daubing Communist anti-Nazi graffiti on board. When the boat docked at Bremerhaven, the Gestapo came on board, arrested and interrogated him in Hamburg and, after a short while, released him.

In 1938, he hoped to escape Germany on a British ship out of Hamburg where he had got a place as a sailor but on the night of the 9/10 November after *Krystalnacht*, he was picked up by the Gestapo, although he does not state why. He then spent six weeks at Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He described how the importance of Walter von Swizow (but I could have the wrong spelling) helped

⁶⁷ Iwm.org.uk, 14582

to maintain morale (and by suggestion only, was a political prisoner).

He was released to go to England because his permit to work there as an agricultural labourer came through, though he could not remember how he got it. Here, Woburn House arranged for him to take a course to become an officer in the merchant seamen at John Cass, But war broke out and that put pay to that. He wanted to join the navy but was only allowed into the Pioneer Corps, about which he made many disparaging comments. From there, he volunteered to join SOE. But after Churchill's 'collar the lot' speech, he was interned and sent on the Dunera to Australia, much to his annoyance. Finally released (in part thanks to Eleanor Rathbone), he was permitted to join the Pioneer Corps, and spotted by SOE, who trained him, including in Scotland, and told him to change his name so he appeared English. First sent to a holding camp in Algiers, (via Gibraltar), he was parachuted into northern Italy (along with two ex *Wehrmacht* soldiers: unfortunately I have not been able to find out more about them).

The purpose was to work with the partisans and provide them with explosives and ammunition. But his parachute jump from a plane piloted by a Pole failed and he was arrested by the SS near Brindisi. (He comments that there were many Cossacks amongst the German troops.) Interrogated, he explained his ability to speak German because he had a German mother (his cover story) but though he comments that if they had realised he was Jewish, he would have been done for, does not explain how this information was concealed (and the interviewer was too discrete to ask). He was a prisoner for six months. His view of the SOE was that it was so underfunded, that its success was inevitably limited.

When the British army arrived in February 1945, he then had difficulty persuading them that he was not a German plant, but was repatriated in April 1945. Between 1946-47, he became a part of the denazification project in Germany, helping interrogate German prisoners with the Allied Control Commission, and interviewing railway personal. Finally, he worked for the 'Civilian agency' of NATO, which he described as useless and inefficient.

He drops a few clues as to his politics in Britain. He was good friends with Tony Turner, whom he described as the organiser of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and who was certainly on its left. Interviewed in 1994, he lamented Britain's class snobbery and the 'growth of prejudice' and concluded: 'I am not at all sure that

some sort of Nazism could not happen here too’.

The X-Troop

Churchill was responsible for the British army setting up the ‘10th Inter-Allied Commandos’ (or ‘X troop’) specifically to absorb a wide range of foreign volunteers, mostly from German occupied countries but which also drew in a few Germans. One sub-section, set up in 1942, No. 3 Troop (or ‘Miscellaneous Troop’), consisted mainly of Germans, Austrians or Eastern Europeans who were historically Jewish, German political refugees and Germans with a multinational identity e.g. Sudeten Germans, under the command of Captain Bryan Hilton-Jones (See separate biography), They all came as volunteers from the Pioneer Corps and apparently became the most highly trained group of about 100 men in the British army. The men had to take English “Nommes de Guerre” and new identities.

The entire troop spoke German, giving them an advantage in interrogation of German prisoners and ‘penetration into enemy lines’.⁶⁸ Their training included camouflage, compass marching, street fighting, housebreaking, lock-picking, silent reconnaissance and capturing and interrogating prisoners. The central role of X-Troop was to provide native German speakers to accompany raids, to act as interpreters, translators, interrogate prisoners, and encourage the enemy to surrender. They were often attached to other Special Forces because of their special skills.

Many of X troop had been interned in Britain and protested that they were anti-Nazis and not German fifth columnists, before being ‘allowed’ into the Pioneer Corps. Apparently, historic Jews found less prejudice in the X troop than elsewhere. (Listening to a number of interviews of Germans who were in the Pioneer Corps, there are definite hints of them experiencing anti-Semitism.)

Of the hundred or so refugees who joined the British forces in the No 10 Inter-Allied Commandos, a number had fought in Spain, escaped into France and then were interned in Algeria by the French Government before joining the British army.⁶⁹ Most files on this remain closed.

⁶⁸ Gildea Robert and Ismee Tames, eds, *Fighters across frontiers. Transnational resistance in Europe, 1936-1948*, MUP, 2020, henceforth referred to as ‘Gildea’.

Pioneer Corps, calling himself John Robert Taylor but was badly injured. He received British citizenship in 1946 (Marsalek, Zdenko and Diego Celaya, *From regular armies to irregular resistance (and back)* in Gildea,84

⁶⁹ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/no-3-jewish-troop-of-the-no-10-commando>

After the war, most members of X-Troop became UK citizens and part of Intelligence units, tracking down war criminals, acting as interpreters and interrogators, and infiltrating Nazi resistance groups but this small group has received little attention..

I am going to stretch the identity of "German" to include Sudeten Germans, whose first language was German and who regularly saw themselves as German, even on the left.⁷⁰ The Czech Sudeten German volunteers exemplify the strengths and ambiguities of the concept of transnationalism during World War Two.

Maurice Latimer (originally Moritz Levy)



Corporal Maurice Latimer, 10IA Commando 3 Troop attached to No.41 RM Cdo. rounds up German prisoners at Walcheren. (Commando Veterans Archive 2006 – 2016.⁷¹

Although it has not been possible to find out much about Latimer's original background, we do know that he was a Sudeten German, fought with the International Brigades and was a socialist. Information on his role in the X Troop is more easily available.

In the failed and deadly early raid on Dieppe, Latimer stated that his orders had

⁷⁰ About 3m Sudeten Germans lived in a part of Czechoslovakia which had once been Bohemia, whose first language continued to be German. It was an area with multiple identities: there was a strong pro-German nationalistic movement, which became strongly pro-Nazi, but also a strong anti-Nazi movement. Most were expelled by the Czech Government at the end of the war.

⁷¹ <http://gallery.commandoveterans.org/cdoGallery/v/units/10IA/x+troop/Walcheren+Cpl+Latimer>
Photographer unknown.

been 'to proceed immediately to German General HQ in Dieppe to 'pick up' (which necessitated swimming) all documents, etc of value, including, if possible, a new German "respirator", almost certainly a code word referring to the Enigma machine, but, as. Latimer later wrote, the area was under intense German fire, and Latimer was the only one, from the initial group of five Czech Commandos, to return without being wounded, killed or captured. One of the Assault Units was formed for the Dieppe raid by Commander Ian Fleming RN [of later 'James Bond' fame].

Latimer was later part of the D Day landings (when he was wounded). Then, with X-Troop, he was part of the landings near Walcheren, Holland and the subsequent attack on Walcheren in 1944 where he was involved in rounding up German officers at the local concentration camp, after persuading an artillery observation unit located in the Westkapelle Tower to surrender. Gray, a fellow Sudeten German in X troop, later wrote about him: "He thought that the common man was much better than those in charge... so he went... behind the [German] sergeant's [back] and got the Germans in the tower to surrender without any conditions at all." By persuading significant numbers of German troops to surrender, Latimer is supposed, and almost certainly did, save lives on both sides. He then was involved in interrogating German soldiers. The tactic of using German speakers paid off.

He settled in the UK after the war.⁷²

Kurt Elton Jones (1919-1945)

Kurt and his family exemplify the nature of the transnational opposition to the Nazis and willingness to fight, and die, for the cause. Kurt was born in Pomerania, at that time in Germany, to Willy and Maria Therese Glaser, and refused to join the Hitler Youth. Forced to leave school, he was sent to England to complete his education.⁷³

Kurt volunteered, was allowed into the Pioneer Corps and then recruited into No 3 Commandos/ Miscellaneous Unit where he became Keith James Griffith. Having

⁷² Monk, Jeremy, *Forgotten Heroes? The Czechs of X-Troop, N°10 Commando*, JULY 30, 2017
<https://www.praguepost.com/culture/forgotten-heroes-czech-x-troop-commando>

⁷³ Willy practiced medicine in Pomerania. Although 'historically Jewish', he did not consider himself Jewish. An outspokenly anti-Nazi, the Glasers fled Germany for Spain in December 1935. Willy worked for the Republican Army medical unit and then the International Brigades (where he appears to have been thrown out). They made strenuous efforts to be allowed into the UK, ending up in a number of French camps but finally got into the UK in 1939.

reached the rank of Lance Corporal, he was granted an emergency commission commanding 3 Troop on 2 June 1944, four days before the Normandy Landings. The whole story of 3 Troop is still cloaked in mystery but he was detailed to, and successfully carried out crucial operations on the North coast of France.⁷⁴

By 1945, Kurt commanded 3 Troop. He was part of the force assigned to cross the River Aller in Saxony and was shot and killed by a sniper on 11 April 1945, less than a month before Germany surrendered, aged 26.⁷⁵

Jan Theilinger (John Taylor)

Another Sudeten German, Jan Theilinger, had fought in Spain with the International Brigades, been interned, then released from Gurs, and evacuated to the UK in 1940. Here, he joined the mutiny in which more than 500 hundred soldiers refused to obey the orders of the ‘bourgeois’ officers, and was then interned.⁷⁶ Still keen to enlist, he was permitted to join the Pioneer Corps, joined the 10th Inter-Allied commandos and volunteered to become a commander. (He was seriously injured during training and never saw ‘service’) He settled in Birmingham, in the UK and became a citizen in 1946.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ National Archives, Special Services Group. WO 373/95/793 Recommendation for award. Hilton-Jones’s conduct is showered with - justifiable - praise.

⁷⁵ <https://eehe.org.uk>

⁷⁶ This seems to be anachronistic, but so are the original sources. Any further information would be gratefully received.

⁷⁷ Marsalek, Zdenko and Diego Gaspar Celaya in Gildea, 83, 84 (Unfortunately, I have not managed to trace further information.)

For and against the Allies in Greece (and Albania)

The following section is not about anti-Nazi Germans who directly joined the British armed forces but about Germans conscripted into the 999 section of the Wehrmacht (see below) who deserted and fought with or alongside the Greek partisans who were often allied in some fashion with the British.⁷⁸ Greece is of significance because of the strength of its partisan anti-fascist units.⁷⁹ What this section also highlights is that the German deserters/partisans' alliance with the British broke down as many of the partisans opposed and fought *against* the British troops in the Greek civil war, revealing the limitations for many of the 999 deserters and German revolutionaries in working alongside the 'Allies'.

The *Wehrmacht* sent its especially 'dangerous' recruits, in particular the 'politicals' to the 999 battalions, especially after 1943. The politicals covered the entire spectrum of German resisters to fascism. Jehovah's Witnesses were also recruited, defined as being politically subversive.⁸⁰ In Greece, there were at some point 17,000 999s, in 7 infantry battalions, known locally as the 'Battalions of the Unwanted'. They were used in activities where they were likely to be killed: to protect railway lines, airfields and other strategically important locations against anticipated Allied attacks as well as the advance troops in fighting.

Wolfgang Abendroth (see biography), who was in a 999 division first in Yugoslavia, then Greece, states that two-thirds of the 999s were political prisoners, with a third being criminals (many of whom were Nazis) who were recruited to keep the politicals under control and who hoped thereby to make it into the

⁷⁸ Greece had been governed by a military/fascist regime under General Metaxas (from 1936) and King George II (from 1935) which had brutally repressed the workers' movement, banned the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and attempted to destroy the left. The Greek military repulsed an Italian take-over but the Wehrmacht then arrived in April 1941. The first units of the Wehrmacht arrived in Greece in May 1943. The following is not a detailed analysis of the wars in Greece: neither the successful but fraught driving out of the German troops or the unsuccessful subsequent attempt to drive out the British. A good source is Mazower: *Inside Hitler's Greece*.

⁷⁹ Greece was far from the only place the German 999 deserters allied with the locals against the Germans. The following is a story told in Burkhardt as reported by Kurt Schwaen. '*In the spring of 1943 our company left the ship in the port of Groix and marched in single trains to the scattered villages....When we move into our village, an old, white-haired fisherman is standing by his garden fence and looks at us suspiciously. German soldiers again?... I quickly get into conversation [in French]... When I walk into a small bar a few days later and greet a Frenchman at the table: Bon jour, monsieur, "he replies warmly: Non monsieur. Camerade.Pierre Péron ...is the leader of a [local] French resistance group.*' Schwaen's job was blasting tunnels. The resistance group needed explosives, by suggestion to blow up rail lines. '*Explosives are hidden in the carts, [and] brought out...*' (p102)

⁸⁰ By far the largest religious group who were arrested were the Jehovah Witnesses. They proved especially difficult to manage as they were unwilling to do anything remotely connected with the war.

Wehrmacht, get some promotion and a few holidays.⁸¹ The necessity for having criminals keeping an eye on the politicals was established after so many of the 999s melted away during the African campaign, when there was no other external coercive force.⁸² In mid-September 1944, the Nazis dissolved battalion 999 as its soldiers were too unreliable.

Hans Peter Klausch, a German 999 deserter in Greece, in a later interview, emphasised how much the men in the 999s hated the Nazis and, generally, wanted an ‘English’ victory. It did not help that the 999s were systematically deployed against the Greek partisans: ‘*They had to go into the mountains to look for partisans, to track them down. They also had to carry out raids in towns where hostages were arrested. This caused some difficulties for the political 999s, as you can imagine.*’⁸³ Anybody who did not obey risked being sent to the German forced labour units: Organisation Todt, in France. Indeed, in October 1943, this is what happened to 1500-2000 German 999s in Greece.⁸⁴

Though the exact figures are unknowable, about 400-500 of the 999 soldiers deserted (out of approximately 17,000) and joined the guerrilla army of ELAS (Greek People's Liberation Army (*Ellinikós Laikós Apeleftherotikós Stratós*)) was the military arm of the communist led National Liberation Front (EAM)).⁸⁵ For example, the 54th ELAS Regiment, based in the Volos area, included about one hundred and twenty-three German partisans. This was the largest number of German volunteers - mainly from the units of the probationary battalions 999 - in the ranks of the ELAS that existed at that time in a Greek regiment. Reinhardt (see biography) also emphasises that the majority – he estimated 80 percent - who fought with the partisans or under AKFD (Anti-Fascist Committee for a Free Germany, *Antifaschistische Komitee Freies Deutschland*, an organization of former Wehrmacht soldiers.) had been anti-Nazi activists, and around half had

⁸¹ Abendroth, Wolfgang, 1965, *A short history of the European working class*; 1976, *Ein Leben on der Arbeiterbewegung*.

⁸² Abendroth, Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung,

⁸³ Brees, Christian, ‘Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein - Der "Wehrunwürdige" in der Strafdivision 999 <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de>This wonderful transcript of a radio programme is based on interviews with survivors and has to be read as such.

⁸⁴ ‘‘Comrade Herbert Köckritz, Schumann, Friedland and Zietz from Dresden, all good comrades were shipped to France in locked wagons and incorporated into the Organisation Todt. Other anti-fascists were brought back to Germany, discharged from the Wehrmacht and transferred to a penitentiary or concentration camp.’Burkhardt 181/2

⁸⁵ The Greek People's Liberation Army (*Ellinikós Laikós Apeleftherotikós Stratós*, ELAS)), (sometimes called the National People's Liberation Army) was the military arm of the [left-wing National Liberation Front](#) (EAM). It was strongly influenced by the KKE.

already been through the Nazi camps and prisons.⁸⁶

During the first half of 1944, Willi Binz from Szczecin [then in Germany] was able to form a German partisan group on the island of Zákynthos', supplying the partisans with weapons, ammunition, equipment and food, which later joined ELAS. *'They [also] set themselves the task of freeing Greek political prisoners'* In December 1944, having liberated the island, there was a joint parade with the ELAS unit, They are still remembered there.⁸⁷

Since the Germans fighting with the ELAS partisans would be shot immediately upon capture by the *Wehrmacht*, the ELAS leadership kept the Germans out of direct combat with the *Wehrmacht*. But almost 200 of these German deserters were arrested and most of them were executed.⁸⁸ Another problem faced by the 999 deserters was that the units were distributed throughout Greece, with many mountain ranges in between and contact was dangerously difficult.

An alternative and equally dangerous strategy to joining the partisans was to stay in the 999 unit and try to support the partisans from 'inside'. This had the advantage, as at least argued by some in the KPD, of being able to try to subvert the other soldiers from the inside. Wilhelm Schulze reported that his resistance group, led by comrades Muche and Gerlach, maintained contacts with Greeks and Yugoslav partisans on the islands of Kōs and Kalymnos and that they repeatedly handed over weapons and ammunition from *Wehrmacht* stocks.⁸⁹ Erich Thiele remembered how, in the 3rd Company of the XI Battalion on the island of Kalymnos, there was an illegal group of *"five anti-fascists who knew each other from the Heuberg. There were some Greeks on the island who knew German. We made our first contact with them...Through a Greek professor we got good information and further connections to other Greeks. ... There was a lot of looted weapons and ammunition on the island, and we agreed with the Greeks that we would give them some of it. We gave them: 40 Italian rifles with 2 boxes of*

⁸⁶ Burkhardt, Hans, , *Die mit dem blauen Schein. Über den antifaschistischen Widerstand in den 999er Formationen der faschistischen deutschen Wehrmacht (1942 bis 1945)*. Militarverag der DDR, Berlin,1982, 278.

Burkhardt does not provide an exact source. This will in future be referred to as Burkhardt. Not to be confused with Blees,, 'Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein, which has a very similar title and covers very similar ground. It is based on veteran's recollections, including by the authors, all of whom were KPD,

⁸⁷ Burkhardt, Hans, *Erleben, Nettball, Die mit dem blauen Schein* Ibid., 207

⁸⁸ Schneider, Valentin. *Greece under the Nazis: The German soldiers perspective*, with interviews by Marinos Tzotzis, <http://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/index.php/topics/culture-society/6405..>

⁸⁹ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein* Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein* , 244

*ammunition; 4 English machine guns with about 2,000 rounds; 120 artillery shells, 7.5 cm calibre; 2 boxes of English and 4 boxes of Italian hand grenades; and two rolls of fuses. The weapons with the ammunition were provided by us during the night watch and taken by the Greeks to illegal bunkers of ELAS’.*⁹⁰

Heinz Steyer, briefly a member of the KPD and a functionary of ‘Red Sports’, arrested again and again for his underground activities in Germany, and repeatedly sent to prison and camps, was drafted into Battalion 1V of the 999 in February 1943. Taken to Greece, he became a clerk and radio operator for the 999 military command in Lechenain the Peloponnese.⁹¹ This was a crucial position. Together with his friend, Werner Illmer, KPD, (see biography) who was the leader of the rebels of the IV 999 battalion in the Peloponnese, they made contacts with Greek partisans and used his job to warn the partisans about planned "pacification actions", provided them with medicines, ammunition and weapons and procured them German ID cards. Werner Illmer had joined the partisans in July 1944 and was subsequently shot by a German firing squad after capture.⁹² Steyer was arrested on July 3, 1944 July 9 and shot on the July 12 in Ai Giannis.

Another example of the importance of having access to means of communication is provided by Kurt Nettball who later wrote "*On a July day in 1943... I was on night duty as a telephone operator when a coded order was transmitted at about 11 p.m. ...it said that the following morning at 3 a.m. a 'pacification operation' was to be carried out against the village of Iraki, 5 km to the southwest.*" He called the adjutant who for reasons left to the imagination got the message passed to the partisans. '*Together with the partisan group, the men were able to retreat to the mountains in time.*'"⁹³ Paul Scharrenberg was a switchboard operator in the company command post and had direct contact with the regiment's radio operator (and if we believe him, sometimes made contact with Radio Moscow and London, which is how they learnt about the formation of the National Committee in Moscow). This crucial role enabled contact with the partisans. The occasional illegal radio was also at times constructed, made up of string and sealing wax.

Burkhardt reported how those who wanted to support the partisan struggle also

⁹⁰ Ibid 244,245

⁹¹ Andreas Peschel, Saxon State Archives, <http://www.isgv.de/saebi/>.

⁹² https://de.zxc.wiki/wiki/Hans_Hauschulz,

https://de.zxc.wiki/wiki/Antifaschistisches_Komitee_Freies_Deutschland, Mazover, Mark, *Inside Hitler's Germany*

⁹³ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 184,185

tried to occupy key functions.⁹⁴ *Karl Wloch, for example, was deployed as a medic in the 11th Company's area and in this function was able to visit bases and maintain connections with the comrades. In the 11th Company, to which Comrades Scharrenberg and Agatz belonged, almost 80% had earlier political convictions'* Checking on the functioning of trains also fell to them.⁹⁵

Klausch reported how, when the German officers created 3 groups of around 400 specifically political subversives in the 999s to fight on the front-line in Greece, it also facilitated them organising themselves, including to defect. Any sniff of subversion was enough to get one killed.⁹⁶

The danger in organising within the 999 units. did not just come from the commanders. KPD member Erwin Rothe's report on Zanthos explains that they *'supplied [ELAS partisans] with ammunition in abundance. Above all, we had to be careful because of the criminals, many of whom volunteered for spying.'*

The precariousness of trying to organise from within the 999s is brought out by Burkhardt. He refers to when the officers, suspecting what was going on, threatened to kill every 10th man in the unit. He reported on how he had fled the troupe after the arrests of some of the comrades. On the night of July 3rd to 4th, 1944 (so before the decisions outlined in next paragraph), they somehow falsified the watch schedule, and with the help of a lot of alcohol made the guards drunk. *'Three comrades, Fritz Klapper, Richard Wagner and myself, managed to take them with us on the morning of July 4th at 4:30 a.m. with our weapons, ammunition, hand grenades and the submachine gun of the sergeant on duty to*

⁹⁴ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 165-182. Burkhardt is worth a few biographical details given the unique character of his book and how much I use it as a source. Born in Berlin, an early member of the KPD and very involved in film, he worked underground from 1933-35, publishing an illegal bulletin. In 1935, he was arrested and spent four years in different camps. After resuming his illegal work in Berlin, he fled to Switzerland in 1942 across Lake Constance. He was then again interned, followed by having dealings with OSS to get KPD comrades repatriated. He became deeply involved with film after the war, initially joined the SED who threw him out (or did he jump) and went to W. Berlin in 1949 and became a freelance writer.

(www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographie)

⁹⁵ Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein - "Wehrunwürdige" in der Strafddivision 999 Ein Feature von Christian Bleses. The writer/editor of this manuscript has drawn heavily from those who survived whom he names: Hans Burkhardt, Günter Erxleben, Fritz Müller, Kurt Nettball, Emil Paffrath, Gerhard Reinhardt, Kurt Schwaen and Werner Seiffert.

⁹⁶ In another fascinating 'anecdote', Burkhardt describes how a group of the 999s were arrested by their officers. They feared the worst but it appears the officers were also afraid of them. In the end, one of the German 999 rebels took on full responsibility, saving everybody else's life. Such events inevitably fuelled a suspicion that one of their own had betrayed them, in this case a man called Hertel, who had, apparently, become unstable after his time in the International Brigades. Bleses, 'Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein and French internment. (He was rewarded by being returned to Germany.) (179)

*leave the base. After a two-hour brisk march, we came to the nearest town, where we immediately identified ourselves on the basis of the ID 22 given to us by the partisans and told the population what we were up to... At the exit of the village we were greeted by a Greek anti-fascist who directed us to the nearest partisan camp.*⁹⁷

There were however profound political divisions amongst the deserters and, as we shall see, the line did not remain constant. The KPD/Moscow had plans to set up its own separate group led by Falk Harnack, the political leader (see biography) and Gerhardt Reinhardt, the organisational leader (see biography) with a Central Committee including Paul Fritz (Essen), Erich Klose (Berlin), Willi Schrade (Berlin)⁹⁸ and Hans Schüller (Cologne),⁹⁹ mostly defectors from the XXI 999s. The plan was to form units made up of *Wehrmacht* defectors already fighting with or alongside ELAS. A less diplomatic way of presenting this is that AKFD wanted to pull their members and supporters out from fighting with ELAS.¹⁰⁰

At the end of July 1944, after discussions with a Soviet military mission, there was a meeting in the ELAS headquarters between Falk Harnack and Gerhardt Reinhardt, and a number of leading people from ELAS. However, because so many of the German deserters were already involved in partisan warfare, including against the nationalist EDES, the establishment of the Anti-Fascist Free Germany Committee (AKFD) was postponed till August 1944.¹⁰¹ The EAM paper *Eleftheri Ellada*, published, in German, an 'Appeal to all German soldiers' to actively fight against 'Hitler's Wehrmacht'. The AKFD included the goals of pulling together all German anti-fascists in Greece and fighting for the liberation of the German people. The AKFD's Central Committee was supposed to work closely with the ELAS High Command and the Communist Party of Greece.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 182

⁹⁸ See later footnote about Velos

⁹⁹ The illegal leadership of the KPD appears to have had a contact man in the IV Battalion: Hans Jendretzky. The "leaflet for comrades conscripted into the Wehrmacht published by the Berlin party organization was, it appears a guiding influence. (Burkhardt, pps 159/160).

¹⁰⁰ Burkhardt provides intriguing though generalised detail about how tourists would bring messages from the KPD underground in Berlin to the 999 'underground'. Their instructions were to destroy weapons, ammunition and other war material, to sabotage military orders and where possible, to defer to the Soviet troops, to the partisans in Greece and Yugoslavia Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*. p.160

¹⁰¹ The National Committee for a Free Germany, first established in the USSR in July 1943, and aimed at recruiting German POWs and German soldiers, gave birth to similar committees across occupied Europe. (Gottfried Hamacher, Andre Lohmar, Herbert Mayer and Günter Wehner, *Gegen Hitler: Deutsche in der Resistance, in den Streitkräften der Antihitlerkoalition und der Bewegung "Freies Deutschland"* Dietz, Berlin, March 2005),

¹⁰² Ibid, 277

The AKFD group divided up Greece into groups of about thirty which were to be attached to, but not part of, the ELAS regiments. Reinhardt for example worked with 30 ex-999s around Thessalonica. Though the details are unclear, as before, the central KPD/Anti-Fascist Committee line was that they did not want their supporters joining ELAS but coordinating with them through separate anti-fascist units.

Although this may appear abstruse, this posited significant differences in strategy between the Communists towards ELAS from those who joined or wanted to join the partisans directly, not work with them through a separate Communist dominated German anti-fascist group. Many, probably around fifty, of the 999 broadly KPD deserters who had joined ELAS stayed with ELAS. (The AKFD had a very short life: it was wound up in December 1944 4 months after inception, after the Nazis were defeated but that is another story.)

The ambiguity in the relationship between ELAS and the AKFD is addressed by Burkhardt, who if anything veers towards seeing the role of the Communist party as paramount, so his analysis here is significant: ‘*The bulk of the German anti-fascists stayed with the ELAS units to which they had defected and worked in separate German groups, but [sic] under the guidance and according to the possibilities of the local ELAS units.*’ He continues by explaining that the looseness of the link between ELAS and AKFD was a consequence of ‘the complicated relationship between ELAS and the British military’.¹⁰³ He does not elaborate but he could well be referring to a relationship between ELAS and the British which he saw as too close.

The ‘line’ on how far Communist deserters should align themselves with the communist cell or join ELAS appears at best to lack clarity. A later letter stated: “*Since more and more [German] regular troops arrived in Volos as a result of the retreat... some of our comrades became impatient about staying longer with the [German] troops. They did not want to get into the same situation as in the Soviet Union at the beginning of 1944. The illegal leadership therefore gave the instruction to defect to the ELAS army,*’ ELAS apparently gave a deadline: those who were not with them by then, would be considered as German enemies. On 18 September 1944 at 10p.m, all 15 comrades from the West I and West II bases went

¹⁰³ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 299

over to ELAS, carrying their guns and ammunition,¹⁰⁴

One response to the delay in the formation of the AKFD, described above, was that, on 20 July 1944, a number of German deserters: Paul Gässner, Ludwig Haase, Reinhold Hüttner, Werner Ulmer, Fritz Klapper, Erich Schultz and Richard Wagner, amongst others, led by Hans Steyer (see bibliography), founded the "Association of German Anti-Fascists in the Peloponnese" in the village of Tropia, the headquarters of the 6000 strong 3rd Division of ELAS.¹⁰⁵ Around 60-80 directly joined ELAS.¹⁰⁶ While these are tiny proportions, the German deserters brought with them vital knowledge of weapons as well as being used as propagandists for 'loyal' German troops, using loudspeakers and asking them to end the war and distributing leaflets in the local areas.¹⁰⁷

The first leaflet put out to the German soldiers by the NKVD in Volos in late 1944 read: *'Comrades! We call you, who are still undecided, come to ELAS immediately ... The war is coming to an end ... Seize this last and only possibility, take your weapons and come to us. In this way you serve our fatherland and your family more than if you were to die in a hopeless fight for the Nazi bosses. The ELAS's only demands of us are that we stop this war... Do you want to be responsible for the atrocities of the SS?'*

The comrades' final task, stated Burkhardt, was to persuade their 999 units to surrender!¹⁰⁸

The role of the British and of SOE in Greece

Although, as in so much of the historiography of this period in Greece, many details are still disputed, the resistance, not the British, had been primarily responsible for pushing out the Germans from much of Greece by the end of 1944. Then, in the last year or so of the war, the partisans clashed militarily with British forces. As will be seen in the biographies, the anti-Nazi Germans who fought with or alongside the partisans, generally, ended up unsympathetic to the British and the

¹⁰⁴ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 295--299

¹⁰⁵ Werner Ulmer, KPD, who had already been sentenced to four and a half years in a German prison in 1935 for his participation in the anti-fascist resistance struggle, was executed on 28 July 1944. 'Before the sentence was carried out, the accused was ... given the opportunity to make a statement. {He said] *'I have worked for my idea and I am dying for it. Long live communism!'*" Burchardt, 180

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, 199 Burchardt states that the available materials do not provide further information about this.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, 185

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 233

British to them, despite having previously fought ‘on the same side’.

Greece was invaded by German troops in April 1941. To understand the position of the resistance, including the Germans who fought with/alongside them, towards the British, it is useful to have some understanding of what the British were doing in Greece. As opposed to the small numbers of people attached to SOE who arrived in Greece in 1942 and in general worked with the partisans, British troops began to arrive on 4 October 1944, by which time large parts of the country had already been liberated by the partisan movement. The landing of British troops in Greece was an attempt by British rulers to support the political right-wing in Greece, at that point not doing well, and to prevent the establishment of some sort of left-wing government. Greece’s location was also of strategic military importance for British imperialism in terms of its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, And, once the war had ended, they wished to maintain Greece within the Anglo-American, not Soviet sphere of influence and to become the cornerstone of British influence in the Balkans.

But there were deep splits within the British war elite as to whether to support the Government-in-exile and the return of the King, then exiled in the UK,¹⁰⁹ or to fund and support the guerrilla troupes.¹¹⁰ The ‘dilemma’ was ultimately resolved by SOE being informed not to support most of the partisan troupes (see introduction) and Britain throwing their military weight against the guerrillas once the Germans had been pushed out.

SOE had a presence in Greece of around 200 though many of the SOE recruits were not British born; a disproportionate number were Poles, such as Adam Kula, a Polish army officer, dropped by SOE into Greece, although there seems to have been significant conflict over the British plans for the Polish ‘transnational’ fighters and ELAS.¹¹¹

But, as opposed to the British government’s general if critical support for the

¹⁰⁹ The main Greek governments-in-exile, loyal to the king of Greece, functioned: from Cairo, under the aegis of Great Britain. King George 11 had returned to Greece, following a republican interlude of 13 years and quickly given his consent to the dictatorship of Metaxas in 1936. Metaxas soon set about establishing a quasi-fascist dictatorship, heavily reliant on its Gestapo-style secret police, strict censorship of the press and the crushing all opposition and sources of dissent.

¹¹⁰ A revealing letter, from April 1943, from the King of Greece complains about SOE’s activities, a complaint sent to Churchill (N.A. FA, 954/24A)

¹¹¹ Bailey, *SOE and transnational resistance* in Gildea, 150

pro-monarchist forces, SOE's goal was to promote the local resistance. In 1942, the British War Office decided that destruction of a number of viaducts could halt the flow of supplies to Rommel in North Africa. The guerrilla bands were approached and were willing to carry out such attacks, although ELAS and EDES (the National Republican Greek League)¹¹² were suspicious of SOE from early on, supposing, correctly, that the real British aim was the restoration of the Greek monarchy.¹¹³ The British mission, which only consisted of about a dozen British saboteurs, coordinated a combined force of 200 guerrillas from EDES and ELAS. In November 1942, ELAS, EDES and SOE carried out one of the largest acts of sabotage in the Second World War when they attacked the Italian garrison and destroyed the Gorgopotamos bridge in Operation Harling. SOE parachuted in a sabotage team of 13, who hidden by Greek families, and who then worked with 86 ELAS and 52 EDES men. Two teams of eight guerrillas were to cut the railway lines connecting Athens and Thessalonica, the approaches to the bridge itself, and the telephone lines, while the main force of 100 guerrillas was to neutralize the garrison (most of whom were Italian troops).¹¹⁴ The sabotage mission was a major success for SOE.

It also strengthened ELAS's influence and control over the mountainous regions of central Greece. As late as July 1943, under 'Operation Animals', ELAS, EDES and SOE organised a successful and joint campaign of sabotage. The 'joint' mission was a success but marked the last collective organisation between both EDES and ELAS with the British.¹¹⁵ The state of conflict between the different guerrilla groups at times became lethal.

SOE's effectiveness was also thwarted due to feuds with a number of different bits of the British government, in particular the Foreign Office and Churchill.¹¹⁶ At the end of 1942, the head of the SOE Balkan Section wrote of Foreign Office staff that they were SOE's 'main enemies in the Middle East'.¹¹⁷ Churchill's support for the SOE contrasts with his prevention of SOE success in Greece. The tensions

¹¹² EDES, the National Republican Greek League, was the largest non-communist and highly fragmented resistance group who acknowledged the king in part to garner British support and military supplies.

¹¹³ Woodward, *The Enemies Within*

¹¹⁴ Nioutsikos, Ioannis, *The Special Operations Executive in Greece: Operation Harling* https://www.academia.edu/35331886/The_Special_Operations_Executive_in_Greece_Operation_Harling

¹¹⁵ British Military Mission (BMM) to Greece, 1942-44 A Monograph by Major S. Stephen Shrader U.S. Army.

¹¹⁶ Stephen Woodward, *The Enemies Within: SOE Frustrations Co-ordinating Resistance in Greece 1942-1943* <https://www.academia.edu/1400049>. Well sourced and instructive article on the role of the Foreign Office.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

came to a head over British policy of supporting the re-establishment of the Greek Monarchy, which Churchill guaranteed. There is the inevitable dispute as to how far the SOE tried to stop ELAS but what is clear is that even before civil war sent ELAS and SOE onto evidently opposing sides, there was cause for considerable tension.¹¹⁸

Although ELAS had become the dominant force in most of the rural areas and the cities, except Athens, as we shall see, the leadership of EAM and the KKE (Communist Party of Greece, *Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas*) were willing to cooperate with British proposals.¹¹⁹ The KKE leadership of EAM denied the class character of the struggle and insisted on it being a united national struggle and ‘to win national liberation at the side of our great Allies’ (backed by the Soviet/Stalinist leadership), despite there having been a wave of militant strikes during 1942 and 1943.¹²⁰

What happened next shows the way the political wind was blowing. The main resistance groups, ELAS and EDES, signed an agreement in July 1943 to cooperate with and subject themselves to the Allied Middle East High Command. This provided one further step towards the British gaining military and political control. Yet ELAS were seen by British Command as under Communist influence and far too factional and violent. EDES were the preferred resistance group whose 12,000 guerrillas were totally dependent on British financial and other assistance (although seen by some as also willing to act along with German forces).¹²¹

In May 1944, ELAS had agreed to the arrival of British troops and to place its guerrilla forces ultimately under the British commanding officer, Lt Gen Ronald

¹¹⁸ Bailey, Roderick, *SOE and transnational resistance* in Gildea. Nevertheless, there are examples of cooperation,

¹¹⁹ Gluckstein, Donny, 2012, *A People’s History of the Second World War*, 46-52

¹²⁰ On 15 March 1942, there were strikes in several cities, including Athens, followed by a strike of 40,000 civil servants, apparently led by Trotskyist militants.

On 25 June 1943 there was a general strike in Athens against the execution of hostages by the occupation forces which saved 50 tramway workers who were sentenced to death for participation in the tram drivers’ strike two weeks earlier. <https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/06/29/pandelis-pouliopoulos-how-greek-trotskyists>.

One ELAS leader, a member of the KKE Central Committee, Aris Velouchiotis, denounced the agreement between ELAS and the British as a betrayal. Expelled by the KKE, he was assassinated.

The logic of the KKE position was to oppose, including by murder, its opponents to the left: Trotskyists, but also Archeiomarxists, associated with the Trotskyist opposition, anarchists and the Opposition faction of the KKE. “We killed more than 800 Trotskyists”, boasted KKE Politbureau member Barzotas. Broué wrote that “throughout the country OPLA agents abducted, tortured and murdered such militants as Stavros Veroukhis, the Secretary of the Association of the War Wounded, and Thanassis Ikononou, former Secretary of the Communist Youth at Ghazi. Workers, dockers, metal workers and teachers all suffered alike.” (ibid. The article does not provide details of its sources)

¹²¹ Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece*, 141-145.

Scobie.¹²² Stalin had instructed the Greek Communist Party to avoid confrontation.¹²³ In October 1944, when the Nazis were pushed out of Greece, ELAS, which did not yet control Athens (unlike most other cities), agreed to keep its 50,000 armed partisans outside Athens and agreed to sign the British order for demobilisation after the Varkiza Agreement.¹²⁴ At this point, some of the deserters who had been fighting with ELAS then went to join other liberation forces such as in Yugoslavia and Albania.

From a war against fascism to a war against imperialism

How come these anti-Nazi Germans who, as we shall see, had generally fought with ELAS and therefore alongside British forces, then were willing to risk their lives in a popular anti-imperialist, class war alongside ELAS when they came into conflict with the British forces during the civil war?¹²⁵ What clearly emerges is that the anti-Nazi deserters had not fought with the partisans because they were on the side of the Allies but because they supported the fight against fascism.

What happens next is that Britain's imperialistic role in Greece comes out into the open, replacing its previously professed hostility to fascism. As already mentioned, on December 1944, despite an agreement to the contrary, the British commander of 111 Corps Ronald Scobie, ordered the unilateral disarmament of EAM-ELAS. This in effect prevented Athens coming under their control. In response, on 3 December 1944, a massive demonstration in Athens, many of them women, took place. The police opened fire, killing over twenty and wounding hundreds. Manolis Glezos, an activist who survived to later become a Syriza MP,

¹²² [Ed Vulliamy and Helena Smith](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/athens-1944-britains-dirty-secret), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/athens-1944-britains-dirty-secret>

¹²³ This might explain the simultaneous skirmishes between ELAS with the British, but also with Trotskyists, anarchists and other political dissidents in Athens on the grounds of 'national unity'!

¹²⁴ Aris Velouchiotis, a loyal party member and active leader of ELAS, in November 1944, tried unsuccessfully to drum up support for the ELAS divisions to move closer to Athens. In fact, he first signed the demobilisation of the ELAS army but then refused to comply with it. He tried to mobilise a new insurgency, a new ELAS. He was denounced by the KKE leadership of treachery. He was ambushed with his unit in the mountains, maybe betrayed by KKE and probably committed suicide on 16 June 1945 when he and his small group got surrounded by units of the National Guard. (<http://isj.org.uk/two-in-one>).

Varkiza Peace Agreement), finally signed February 12, 1945 was between the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of the KKE on behalf of EAM-ELAS.

¹²⁵ According to Harnack, one of the German 999 'deserters', Kurt Adam, a 999 deserter, defected to the British but the details are obscure. Adam had been sent by the Central Committee to ELAS (3rd Division) in the Peloponnese. But a letter from Dr. Falk Harnack states: "Kurt Adam did not carry out his mission to establish contact with German partisans at the ELAS in the Peloponnese. He defected to the British, so that this urgently needed connection could not be established. He has grossly abused our trust." 286

noted that they would rather use those troops to fight our population than German Nazis. Badly armed, badly fed, and for the most part very young, the partisans of the EAM in Athens and Piraeus held out for 33 days under this deluge of fire, faced with both the British troops and the security battalions". Crowds were corralled into the streets: masked informers then pointed out ELAS supporters to the Gestapo and Security Battalions. Many executions took place, including public hangings.¹²⁶

Churchill, keen to break the insurrection and fearing the growing influence of the Communists and of the USSR, informed the British troops in December 1944: *'You are responsible for maintaining order in Athens and for neutralizing or destroying all EAM-ELAS bands approaching the city. You may make any regulations you like for the strict control of the streets or for the rounding up of any number of truculent persons... Do not... hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress... We have to hold and dominate Athens. It would be a great thing for you to succeed in this without bloodshed if possible, but also with bloodshed if necessary.'*¹²⁷

Though one needs to read Burkhardt carefully, his view of the role of the British is significant. He argues that the 'civilian agents' of the British (by which I take him to mean SOE) tried to sabotage the plans of German anti-fascists in particular and the partisans generally. Though I have not found other such evidence, he states that they 'operated secretly with the German occupiers and Greek quisling troops', leading to the deaths of some comrades.

Mazover also argues that the British agents' mission was to damage ELAS by all means available. They tried to poach its partisans by bribing them with gold sovereigns and financed small competitor organisations, including those who were accomplices of the Germans. They even took part in the Nazi troops' operations.¹²⁸ British forces did everything they could to prevent ELAS consolidating its power, regularly using indiscriminate force against them. This culminated in ELAS's defeat. The partisans had lost. Though there is disagreement about how to assess how long it continued, this culminated in a bloody civil war, with the British forces backing Greek fascists against the left-wing guerillas. The

¹²⁶ Athens 1944; [Vulliamy, Ed](#); Smith, Helena, "[Athens 1944: Britain's dirty secret](#)". *The Guardian*. (November 30, 2014) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/athens-1944-britains-dirty-secret>

British side won. 50,000 Greeks died.¹²⁹

Hans-Peter Klausch was interviewed many years after he returned to Germany after fighting with the Greek partisans. He said: *‘Everywhere the opponents of Hitler’s Germany got to know the other Germany with the 999; the Germany of resistance. And I think that often left a positive impression on the people and the armies. In Greece, for example, the graves of the 999ers who were shot were always decorated with flowers and wreaths. And when the Germans withdrew in November ’44, ...there were always 999s in German uniforms taking part in the [victory] demonstrations..... Even today, people in Greece, still talk positively about what the 999ers did there in the resistance.’*¹³⁰

Although those included in the biographies are far from a full list, it is noticeable that most of them were either from the KPD or in Abendroth’s case, the SAP. It is possible that these are the men who have been written about but it is also worth emphasising that the Germans ‘recruited’ into the 999s were principally from a revolutionary and activist anti-Nazi background. In addition, it is worth considering who fled and who remained in Germany after the Nazi take-over. Only those who remained in Germany could have been sent to the 999s. And the policy of the KPD was to keep its members in Germany except the leadership and a few who they decided should get out. Compare this to the policy of most of the other revolutionary or quasi-revolutionary groups, which instructed their members to get out. Of course, this is also likely to also correlate with the class background of the memberships of the organisations.

The following includes an alphabetical list of some of the Germans who deserted from the 999 section of the Germany army in Greece, one in Albania.¹³¹

Wolfgang Abendroth

Abendroth, a member of the SAP (Socialist Workers' Party of Germany,

¹²⁷ Fontaine, Joelle, *How Churchill Broke the Greek Resistance*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/05/greece-world-war-two-winston-churchill-communism>

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Mazover, Mark, *Inside Hitler’s Germany*, passim. Mazover is a well recognized source.

¹³⁰ Blees, *Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein*

¹³¹ I have included photos where I could find them but it is noticeable that most of them are of the people when they are at least middle aged, not at the time they who took up arms against their own country when, they would not have want their photos taken!

Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands)¹³² and ex-KPD, survived as a deserter from the 999s in Greece and later wrote about forms of resistance as a left-wing German historian.¹³³ Burkhardt includes the following quote: "When I met my old comrade and friend Werner Illmer again on 3 February 1943 at the assembly point in Berlin, we were in agreement with the entire political group: If we come to the front for 'action' somewhere, there can only be one task for us: To do everything we can to come into contact with the population of the occupied areas and to fight together with them against Hitler's fascism".¹³⁴

Abendroth was stationed in Lemnos and worked in the central office of the Nazi commander, from where he managed to develop close contacts with members of the partisans and at some point, slipped away and joined ELAS.¹³⁵



Addressing a student forum at the University of Marburg, 1972.

Abendroth states that it was clear to the comrades that their job was to do anything possible to destroy

the Third Reich. This was not possible in Yugoslavia where he was based very briefly but there were more possibilities in Greece, especially after they were moved to the island of Lemnos, where they were for about a year. He provides a rare description of the process by which contact was made but also how precarious their clandestine work was: *'But then our battalion arrived on the island of Lémnos, in its largest town, Kástron. There lived many Greek intellectuals who spoke good French, and also some students from the Greek universities that were closed at that time. We 'intelligentsia' among the political people, an economist and I, were always sent first. Although we naturally only spoke to the Greeks in*

¹³² SAPD was a centrist Marxist political party in Germany. It was formed as a left-wing party with around 20,000 members which split off from the SPD in the autumn of 1931.

¹³³ This is largely drawn from Marilyn Moos and Steve Cushion's, *'Anti-Nazi Germans'*.

¹³⁴ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 29

¹³⁵ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung* 186,7

*cautious hints at first ...Then we were approached by Greeks who had been sailors and fishermen before the German occupation and who could speak a few words of English.’ At the same time, his battalion commanders who were from the regular Wehrmacht, needed people who knew Greek so he also became a ‘scribe’ for the authorities. ‘We could not expose ourselves ...and thereby drag our illegal organisation in the battalion ...into the vortex’.*¹³⁶

Abendroth tried to get in contact with the different groups of partisans. He first, unsuccessfully, went to the taverna which somehow alerted the Greek resistance. They worked out that he and another SAP comrade were 999ers and sent some local students to talk to them. Although Abendroth did not speak Greek, he spoke French and English and so was able to converse with the students.

It appears that Abendroth was then put into the central office of the Nazi Commander of the island because of his facility with languages and therefore started to learn about what was going on. He does not provide an explanation of his position there apart from suggesting that the Commander was more of a bureaucrat than a Nazi.¹³⁷

Asked what were the consequences of his work with the partisans, Abendroth's answer is oblique but he gives an example of when he had an accident, the partisans sent *their* doctor and surgeon to look after him in Lazerett hospital which was under Nazi control. Abendroth gives a second example of how members of the partisans protected a 999er by turning off his radio, when they passed by his window, because it was tuned to the British Jerusalem station, enough to get him arrested and maybe even shot. Abendroth paints a picture of close contact between a handful of the comrades and the Greek resistance. There was a local well regarded, well rooted, illegal, Communist Party branch, the largest party in Lemnos, which included some local intellectuals, led by a dentist.

Abendroth's position in the office of the Commandant made him privy to privileged knowledge: he was aware of an anti-Communist opposition, whose intention was to take back state power. And he found out early that the German troops were going to be withdrawing, using a scorched earth policy as they did so, and bringing down the electricity system as they left. Somehow, an Austrian

¹³⁶ Burchhardt, 231. Burchhardt's study is invaluable but, as I understand the book, does not clarify that Abendroth's political allegiance was by this point with the SAP, not the KPD.

¹³⁷ Abendroth, *Ein Leben in der Arbeiterbewegung*, pp.186-7

comrade engineer managed to stop this.

After they were forced into the mountains, the 999s embarked for Lesbos. In Lesbos, Abendroth succeeded in slipping away and joining ELAS, who at that point were still working with the British. But by the end of 1944, the distrust between the British and ELAS was growing, with the British indicating that it was they who wanted to be in control. Unfortunately, valuable though his book is, there is much detail missing from Abendroth's account: because he was being interviewed forty years after the event, he may no longer have remembered clearly or may well have thought a younger generation would not be interested in such 'detail'.

Though the exact date is unclear, when the British arrived on the island, they demanded of the Greek resistance that Abendroth be given to them as a POW. Although they did not want to, the Greeks handed him over because they wanted to avoid falling out with the British.

Erwin Barts/Bartz (born 1909)

A toolmaker, he joined the KJVD, then the KPD and was arrested and sentenced in 1936. In October 1942, he was sent to the 999s. Many years later, he wrote about how, having been convicted of high treason and with a criminal record, and therefore considered unfit for military service, which apparently they had failed to inform him about, there was no problem in later making use of him as a driver in the 999s in 'their pursuit of robbery'.

*'In 1940, a card fluttered into my house, sender: Military District Command! I should come to the muster! That must be a mistake! Convicts: "subhumans" in the proud armed forces? ...Hundreds of men, born in 1910 and 1911, the "future heroes" are drafted with me to the 999 probation battalion, which is made up of criminal and political convicts.... Again we are prisoners. We had to swap the striped uniform of the convict for that of the forced soldier ...This path of aresistance fighter from the Brandenburg prison via the Heuberg to Belgium, Italy, the Soviet Union and finally to Greece is breathtaking.'*¹³⁸

What exactly Bartz did in Greece is unclear. One source has him joining ELAS in October 1944. But Burkhardt et al seem to suggest he worked with ELAS but

¹³⁸ Soldier on parole, CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE, 2017
<https://biffidu.wordpress.com/2017/02/20/soldat-auf-bewaehrung/>

remained in the 999 unit. As discussed in this section's introduction, which it is, is telling.

Burkhardt writes that only Erwin Bartz, who was in the KPD, along with Karl Binder, Alfred Mobius and Willi Schrade, succeeded in coordinating their clandestine activities, having the advantage of pre-existing political links. Bartz and his comrades' first goal was to establish links with EAM and ELAS as they wished to work with the local partisans. Messages and military information were delivered to the partisans, not the Commanders, as were medicines and materials.¹³⁹

Bartz, along with Alfred Moebius, were arrested during the Volos onslaught in 1944 and taken to the Volos military prison. Erwin Bartz, Alfred Möbius, Willi Schrade, Hans Grossmann and Arthur Witte began to work out an insurrection plan in Volos, to seize the radio station. The comrade Karl Mandl was able to gain the trust of the platoon leader, Sergeant Major Demmer, who, helpfully, liked his drink, and of the non-commissioned officer, Vollbracht. Mandl had established contact with fighters from the 54th ELAS Regiment. But it all came to naught. Apparently, this action garnered support from men in the 999s who had not previously sided with the insurgent; A couple of officers, though not defecting, were supportive. There was a catastrophic breakdown in communication; it seems, between the Communist cell and ELAS. In an intriguing sentence, one explanation is offered: "One member of the illegal leadership, comrade Hans Grossmann from Berlin ... had already defected to ELAS". The aborted action led to multiple arrests and prison, including of many in the illegal leadership such as Alfred Möbius and Erwin Bartz

The German comrades then made extraordinary efforts to break into and free their comrades from the Volos prison (but the lorry carrying the ammunition would not start) and to get medical help for many who had been shot and were still alive.¹⁴⁰

Bartz had become a member of the Anti-Fascist Committee 'Free Germany' and did political work amongst German POWs. He later wrote that 'the task of the anti-fascist in the war is not to defect individually and haphazardly, but to carry out purposeful educational work among all soldiers'¹⁴¹.

¹³⁹ Burchhardt, p292

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 295

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 60

In 1945, he returned to Germany.¹⁴²

Provisorischer

MITGLIEDS - AUSWEIS
ΔΕΛΤΙΟ - ΤΑΥΤΟΤΗΤΑΣ
=====

Antifaschistisches Komitee deutscher Soldaten
- F R E I E S - D E U T S C H L A N D -
A.K.F.D. in Griechenland

Αντιφασιστική Επιτροπή Γερμανών Στρατιωτικών
- Ε Λ Ε Υ Θ Ε Ρ Ί - Γ Ε Ρ Μ Α Ν Ι Α -
Α.Κ.Φ.Δ. στην Ελλάδα

Name u. Vorname *Bartz Erwin*
Όνοματεπώνυμο -----

Dienstgrad *Soldat*
Βαθμός στο -----
στράτο

Mitgliednummer *95*
in Volos -----
Αριθ. Μητρώου
Βόλου

Tag der Aufnahme *10. 11. 1944.*
Ημερομ. έγγραφης -----

Für das A.K.F.D.

Για την Α.Κ.Φ.Δ.

Josef Woll

-- A.K.F.D. --
Hunderttschaft
V o l o s

Beglaubigt

θεωρήθηκε
für den ELAS
Για τον ΕΛΑΣ

5

Unterschrift des Inhabers

Υπογραφή του Γατόχου

Erwin Bartz

¹⁴² https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/

Kurt Bennewitz

In 1916, Bennewitz started an apprenticeship as a lathe operator at Dr. Bernhardt and became a member of the German Metalworkers' Association. During his apprenticeship he joined the sports association "Vorwärts" and was active there until 1928 as a handball player, gymnast and athlete. During an illegal May Day celebration on May 1, 1933, he decided to join the KPD.

From 1933, Bennewitz played a key role in the development and organisation of the illegal anti-Nazi Red Sports group in Eilenburg and organised the communist resistance there, Bennewitz and over a hundred others were arrested by the Gestapo on June 11, 1934. In the subsequent trial, he and 23 other red athletes and communists were accused of preparing high treason. As the main defendant, Bennewitz was sent to the Esterwegen camp.

In 1939, Bennewitz was released from prison, and was subsequently sent to the 999s in October 1942 on Limnos, a Greek island. Bennewitz was a courier in the 5th Fortress Infantry Battalion and was therefore well informed. When the Wehrmacht withdrew in autumn 1944, Bennewitz carried out public anti-war propaganda and called on the other soldiers to mutiny. His unit withdrew and reached Macedonia in January 1945. It is not clear what happened but he may have tried to flee with other comrades and hoped to find the partisans. On the border with Austria, however, they fell into the hands of an SS unit at the Loibl Pass and he was shot and killed.¹⁴³

Kurt Otto Burghardt (1910-1990).

Kurt Burghardt was a founding member of the Heidenau Association of Worker Photographers of Germany, a group closely associated with the KPD. He was elected secretary in 1932. Able to afford a Leica camera, he concentrated on taking photos of different aspects of working class culture and of the workers' movement. After the *Reichstag* fire, he hid about 130 negatives and prints under



Worker sportsperson in target practice

¹⁴³ The main source for this is [https://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Kurt%20Bennewitz%20\(1902-1945\)](https://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Kurt%20Bennewitz%20(1902-1945)).

the floorboards where he lived in Dohna, where they were found in November 2010.¹⁴⁴

From spring 1936 to mid-1938, he was active in the local resistance group led by Rudolf Gebauer, in which he undertook dangerous courier rides on his motorbike.¹⁴⁵ This early resistance group specialized in getting the politically wanted out of Germany to Czechoslovakia and anti-Nazi literature in.)¹⁴⁶ After Gebauer's death in the Dresden police prison on December 10, 1938, other members of the group were uncovered. Burghardt was taken into protective custody on 24 January 1939, sentenced on 14 December 1939 to 15 month's imprisonment for high treason, and was drafted on 7 June 1943 to the 999s and sent to the Aegean islands at the end of September. After the surrender, Burghardt ended up in Egypt in English captivity.¹⁴⁷



Festival of worker athletes in Heidenau, 1930-3

Alfred Eickworth (1907-1943)

Eickworth, a locksmith, weaver then hairdresser was first a member of the SAP, but then the KPD and became the local KPD chairperson, actively organising the resistance in the Crimmitschau area in Saxony. His group, the *Alfred Eickworth Group*, was finally crushed in April 1934 when around 165 people were arrested. He was sentenced to two years in prison.

Eickworth was drafted into the 999s in Greece at the beginning of February 1943.

He deserted on the island of Karpathos in the autumn of 1943 (presumably after the Germans had pushed back the Italian and then the Allied forces) in order to join the partisans. It is rumoured that he escaped from the 999s by killing a three-man SS guard. But, seriously wounded, he died of the injuries.

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.arthistoricum.net/themen/bildquellen/arbeiterfotografie>, with thanks.

¹⁴⁵ Moos & Cushion, *Anti-Nazi Germans*

¹⁴⁶ Being a photographer could be dangerous under the Nazis. Kurt Beck, a member of the "Union of German Working-Class Photographers", and from 1923, active in the KJVD, photographed small impoverished farmers in the Erzgebirge region of Germany. Accused of having made "preparations for high treason," Beck was condemned in 1934 to two years and three months of custody.

¹⁴⁷ [https://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Kurt_Burghardt_\(1910-1990\)](https://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Kurt_Burghardt_(1910-1990))

Eickworth's tomb on Karpathos still exists and is tended by the local people.¹⁴⁸

Lieutenant Gerhard Fauth

As a student, Fauth joined a group close to the SAP. After describing the Nazis as a bunch of criminals, he was arrested in summer 1933 but the proceedings against him were dropped. He then fled to Czechoslovakia but returned to his parents in Germany. He then somehow became a lieutenant in the 999s, a surprising position for someone with his political past. In 1944, Fauth saved a group of Greek partisans about to be shot by the SS, by getting them assigned to work on urgent telephone repairs. In 1945, he was given the order to blow up several dams, but did not carry out his orders. He was arrested (though by whom is not clear) and sent to Yugoslavia, miraculously survived, turned down an offer to work for the Soviet zone in Germany, moved to Munich and became a member of the SPD. He founded and wrote for *Echo der Woche* and wrote a book about the First International Youth Rally in Munich in June, 1947, which he had helped organise along with Harry Wilde.¹⁴⁹

Ludwig Gehm(1905-2002)

In 1911, at the age of six, Ludwig Gehm moved to Frankfurt with his parents, as his father had been expelled as a strike leader from Bavaria. He joined the SPD in 1921 but by around 1927 had joined the ISK (Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund International Socialist Combat League).¹⁵⁰ In Frankfurt, the ISK disguised itself as a vegetarian restaurant. From 1933, the group had built a sufficiently solid underground organisation to be able to disrupt Nazi rallies, commit sabotage, and get political refugees out of the country without too many arrests.

He was arrested for the first time in 1936 and finally sentenced in 1938 to two years but in 1939, he was transferred to Buchenwald and in 1943, drafted into the 999s and sent to Greece in 1944. Here he deserted and fought with the Greek Resistance (ELAS).

¹⁴⁸ <https://peoplepill.com/people/alfred-eickworth>, www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/das-verschwundene-denkmal. During the GDR era, in his home town of Gablenz, Alfred Eickworth was commemorated with a monument but after the fall of the Wall, the monument was demolished.

¹⁴⁹ Drawn from Wikipedia, Harry Wilde: Theodor Plevier and personal knowledge

¹⁵⁰ Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund ("International Socialist Militant League") or ISK was a socialist split-off from the SPD during the Weimar Republic and was active in the German Resistance against Nazism.

He became a member of the Free Germany committee and tried to persuade *Wehrmacht* soldiers to give up fighting, using flyers and other methods.. He was then captured by the British military and taken to a North African POW camp.

After his release from captivity after about two years, he returned to Frankfurt in 1947. Like most other ISK members, he rejoined the SPD, began working for them and became a city councillor.¹⁵¹

Falk Harnack 1913-1991

Harnack was an influential figure in the Munich/Berlin resistance, partly through his brother Arvid, executed in 1942 as a member of Red Orchestra in Berlin and his cousins, the Bonhoeffers who also knew the Kreisau Circle group and the Scholls of the White Rose.

Harnack was called up for military service in 1941 and was arrested on March 6, 1943 and put before the People's Court in Munich on April 19, 1943. Harnack was the only defendant to be acquitted, due to "unique circumstances" but in fact probably because the Gestapo wanted to use him to track remaining members of the White Rose and also the 'Red Orchestra'.¹⁵²

On 19 April 1943, he was transferred to the 999 Light Africa Division (999 leichte Afrika-Division), sent to Tunisia and then to Greece. In December 1943, he was to be arrested on order of the Gestapo for his connections to the White Rose but his superior, Lieutenant Gerhard Fauth tipped him off and helped him escape by truck to Athens. From early 1944, Harnack and Reinhardt, in line with party instructions, started working directly at ELAS headquarters in Kastrina, Katambaki. (For a further discussion of the role of the Free German committee, see the introduction to this section) But Harnack ("Ikarus") also provided leadership for one of the guerrilla units, moving through the middle mountains to the Greek west coast in the direction of Albania.

Harnack survived the war in Greece and then returned to Germany. Harnack then worked at the Bavarian state theatre in Munich and then the Deutsches Theatre in Berlin.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/ludwig-gehm, www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/ludwig-gehm/?no_cache=1

¹⁵² https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

¹⁵³ https://spartacus-educational.com/Falk_Harnack.htm. Falk Harnack was highly critical of the West German government and their involvement with the CIA and especially by the employment of Reinhard Gehlen, a senior

Werner Illmer

Illmer from a working class Berlin family, joined the KVPD and became an anti-Nazi activist. He was sentenced to four and a half years in prison in 1935. He was then drafted into the 999s and sent to Greece. In January 1944, he deserted and joined the Greek partisans in the Peloponnese. In July 1944 he was wounded and captured by a *Wehrmacht* patrol and then shot.

The board, illustrated, which had been attached to the Werner Illmer youth hostel from 1978 to 1990, no longer exists.



Kurt Lohberger(1914-2008)

The son of a miner, Lohberger completed an apprenticeship as a bricklayer from 1928 to 1930. In 1930 he joined the KJVD and later the KPD. Briefly imprisoned in 1933, he emigrated to Czechoslovakia, where he organized illegal border crossings for refugees and, with a false identity, made several trips to Germany as a courier for the KPD.

From 1937 to 1939, Lohberger fought in the Edgar-Andre and the Thälmann battalions, including at Aragon and Ebro in Spain. In February 1939, he fled to France, where he was interned in a number of camps and in 1941, was deported back to Germany and handed over to the Gestapo. In Waldheim prison till 1943, he was then sent to the 999s, in the XXI battalion, in Greece.

But in September 1944, he succeeded in defecting to ELAS. In the following years he took part as a partisan with ELAS in the fighting in Greece as well as being the co-founder of the 'Committee of Free Germany' of German soldiers (AKFD). At the same time, he was the commander and political leader of the 34th and 42nd ELAS regiments with apparently about 21 Germans around Agrinion in Western Greece.

figure in the Nazi administration, who then hired his old 'mates'. The Americans copied (or inherited) the system of surveillance that the Gestapo had used and also directed it at anti-Nazis. Some Nazis worked for the CIA and defamed the resistance after the war.

Reading current sources, it still seems there is a need to justify his behaviour as non-treasonous!

Lohberger, from the XXI 999 Battalion, became the commander of, The AKFD Hundred Agrmion, consisting of twenty-one fighters, which, though Burkhardt avoids explaining the precise relationship, was drawn from the 34th and 42nd ELAS regiments. His experience in the International Brigades was useful. He also became responsible for organising the political re-education of German POWs.¹⁵⁴

The ambiguity (sometimes catastrophic) of allegiances is suggested by events in Volos. In Volos, where vicious fighting took place between the partisans and the 999s, Italians and the SS, Lohberger provided the leadership of an AKFD group, which included non-Communists. Though the details are not clear, it appears that there were problems in liaising with ELAS.

After the occupation of Greece by British troops, Lohberger was one of a number of German ELAS fighters went over to the National Liberation Army of Albania,

After the liberation of Tirana, Kurt Lohberger worked for a long time as a lecturer at the local military school in Tirana, somehow living briefly in the USSR before returning to East Germany .

There is no one date for when Lohberger returned to Germany, varying from 1945 to 1948. He then became a police officer and rose up Party ranks.¹⁵⁵

Alfred Moebius 1907-1945,

Alfred Moebius 1907-1945, a carpenter, was a member of the SAJ, then the KPD, and was imprisoned in 1933, and, once released, became active in 'border work'. In 1935, he fled to Czechoslovakia and from there went to Spain in 1937 where he joined the Thaelmann brigade.



Escaping to France, he was then sent to the Vernet camp in the Pyrenees (along with about 12000 other refugees from the war) and in 1941, was deported back to Germany. He was then sentenced to four a half years in prison and then dispatched to the 999s.

He was first sent to the Eastern Front and made some attempts to desert, though details are unclear. Arrested, he was sentenced to death but escaped. Here the story becomes obscure. Another version which seems more probable, given its source,

¹⁵⁴ Buckhardt, 282-299

¹⁵⁵ <https://de.linkfang.org/wiki/Lohberger>

was that he was then sent to Greece with the 999s¹⁵⁶

There, the 999 battalions were divided into four distinct companies. This made coordination amongst those sympathetic to the partisans difficult and only the leading members of the 1st and 2nd companies, all KPDers, including Alfred Möbius, who played a key role, Erwin Bartz, Karl Binder, and Willi Schrade, succeeded in coordinating their activities through EAM and ELAS, warning them of imminent military attacks and providing the partisans with some supplies.

Then, moved to Volos, Mobius and others started to develop an insurrection plan, including seizing the radio station. But, despite careful planning, Mobius and others were arrested and taken to the military prison. (See Erwin Bartz biography for further details)

A few days later, there was heavy bombing of the harbour. Alfred Möbius and a couple of others had reported to the doctor before the attack, had been separated from their guard in the chaos, found their way to a sympathetic Greek family and from there, to ELAS.

As described earlier, many of the partisans and the Germans deserters needed to flee Greece and some constructed small units aiming to enter Yugoslavia.¹⁵⁷ What happens next depends on the source According to the Bundesarchiv, Mobius was re-arrested in Yugoslavia on the border along with 12 other comrades. Mobius was shot on the 10th March 1945 by fascist troops.¹⁵⁸ But according to AK- and this seems the more likely, he was shot by Yugoslav partisans in Skopje, Yugoslavia under false accusations, also on March 10, 1945.¹⁵⁹

Karl Mueller 1903-1972.

A member of the KPD and RGO he became active in the underground and was arrested in 1936. He was sent to prison but, in 1943, he was sent to the 999s. He defected to ELAS and then from 1945-47, seems to have gone to the USSR. He returned to Germany in 1948.

¹⁵⁶ Burckhard 290-296

¹⁵⁷ t. The SOE , which from 1943, supported the partisans in Yugoslavia,, who numbered up to 300,000, had a presence in Yugoslavia but it was fairly minimal and i do not look at its role there..

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.argus.bstu.bundesarchiv.de/dy55/index.htm?kid=eb7ca11a-027a-4ed3-9b04-195130e467c2>

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.akubiz.de/index.php/angebote/veroeffentlichungen/broschuere-warum-erinnert-ih-euch-nicht>. Akubiz stands for Alternative Culture which is an organisation committed to fighting all forms of racism.

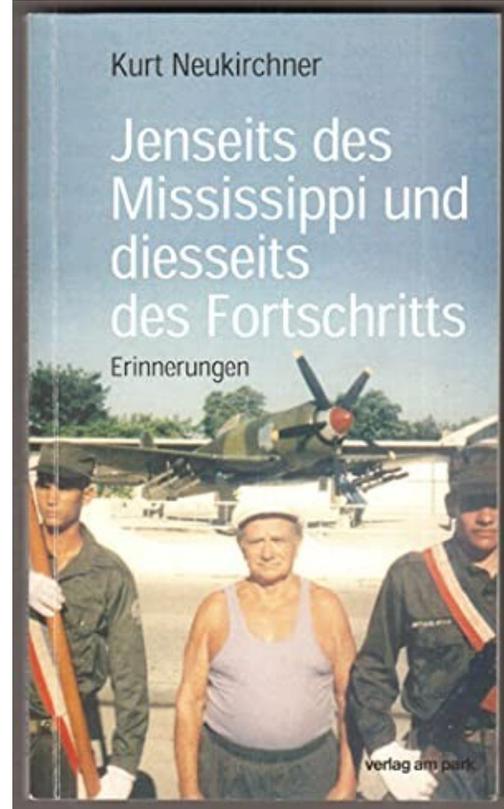
Kurt Neukirchner(1914-2011)

Born into a working-class family in Saxony, Neukirchner was initially active in Friends of Nature youth group and in left-wing sports organisations. In 1930 he joined the KJVD and the RGO¹⁶⁰ and was soon to become a loyal communist party member, which he remained.

After 1933, he did illegal anti-fascist resistance work. His group was arrested in early February 1934 on charges of continuing to support the RGO financially but he was subsequently released. But for one year, he had to report to the police three times a day. In the armaments companies in which he worked from then on, he built up informal resistance circles of both SPD and KPD supporters.

In October 1942, he was arrested and sent to the 999s, then sent to France and later to North Africa. In an interview many years later, he said that he expected the trains carrying them to different places to actually take them to a concentration camp. In fact, as he explained, the first to go were two biblical scholars (Jehovah Witnesses) who were shot because they had refused to accept a uniform or a weapon. He and the other ‘politicals’ were perpetually afraid they would be next. He never knew what to do as failure to follow commands and to try to desert would likely end with his being shot.

He later wrote about what difficulty he, and others, had in ‘transitioning’ to the British Army in Tunis, who apparently were not keen on taking him and his comrades, though in the end he briefly succeeded. Neukirchner reported that *"During the second attempt, I was picked up by the 'chain dogs' of the mountain troops. A few days later I make my third attempt and met comrade Erich Andert from Oranienburg, who has the same intention. He tells me that he had already reached the English line, but that after his pistol was taken from him, he was*



¹⁶⁰ *Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts Opposition* (Revolutionary Union Opposition) was the Communist union in Germany during the Weimar Republic. It went underground after the Nazi Party seized control of the government and continued operating until it was crushed by the Nazis in 1935.

*chased back by the English. After two days we managed to cross over to a unit of the 8th British Army. We stayed with this unit for ten days, but were then handed over to a prisoner-of-war camp. Among the thousands of prisoners, we finally found seven comrades with whom we were sent to a camp near Constantine.*¹⁶¹

What is utterly unclear from this description is how he ended up with the Germans again but it would appear that the British handed him over, though he did say so.

Neukirchner was then sent into the 999s, to the 1st Company in Greece. He, hoped to defect. Neukircher reported: "*Our platoon leader, Sergeant Schröder, had taken up quarters with the Belgian doctor Dr. van de Perk. One day I was ordered to stay in his quarters after duty.... A very painful ulcer on my left shoulder was not treated by our medic. I asked Dr. Van de Perk to help me. ...I told them about our Germany, about the Germany of the anti-fascists and about Ernst Thälmann.*"¹⁶² Although Sergeant Schröder reported to the Gestapo, Neukircher and the doctor developed a firm relationship, which provided a base for further contacts.

Assigned as a messenger, he spent much of his time in the rear, sending and receiving orders He somehow informed the partisans when the next attack would be. He managed to desert in 1943 and was taken prisoner by the US.

Neukirchner was then sent to a camp in the Mississippi (see photo of the jacket of his book), and later became a lumberjack on the Canadian border. In 1946 he was released and he returned to Germany via France. He joined the KPD and then the SED and then worked as an SED functionary, remaining a loyal Communist Party member.

But there is a final note to this story: Neukircher was not a simple 'Party' loyalist, as has at times been depicted. Abe Books was selling his autobiography: *Beyond the Mississippi and this side of progress*, published in 2004. He had written in it a dedication: "*To The Trotskyist and trade unionist Jakob Moneta*" and signed it: 'K. Neukirchner.

Jakob Moneta had fled Germany in 1933 and gone to Palestine. There he organised union strikes for the eight-hour day and worked with Arabs. In 1939, he

¹⁶¹ Burckhard 84

¹⁶² Ibid, 68

was interned by the British for 27 months. Later, Moneta belonged, together with Tony Cliff,¹⁶³ to the Trotskyist "League of Revolutionary Communists",¹⁶⁴ In its manifesto "Against the Current" of 1948, it advocated a binational Jewish-Arab community within a "United Socialist Arab East". Moneta returned to Cologne in 1948, where he joined the German section of the Trotskyist 4th International. A journalist, he worked for a time in Paris, where he secretly assisted the Algerian independence movement, the FLN, financially and by other means (and was later honoured on the 50th anniversary of the start of the War of Independence).¹⁶⁵ He died in Frankfurt.

My guess, and that is all it can be, is that Moneta and Neukircher knew each other from both being involved in sporting organisations in their youth. Whatever the link, Neukircher must have known him well enough to give or send him a copy of his book.

Gerhard Reinhardt (1916-1989)

Gerhard Reinhardt, a KPD member, ended up fighting with and leading units of ELAS from 1943. As far as I can gather, he had no illusions in the role of the British in Greece, unlike some in the leadership of the KKE, indeed, denouncing English capitalism for being soft on Hitler.

Reinhardt, a locksmith joined the KPD in 1930. Arrested in 1936, he was sentenced to prison and then to Heruberg camp where he fell under the influence of Hans Hauschulz, an activist and committed Communist (who also ended up in the 999s but in Africa).

Reinhardt was sent to the 999s in Greece in 1942. Horrified by the deprivation and misery he witnessed around him, he deserted in Athens in 1943. He was also

¹⁶³ Tony Cliff became the leader of International Socialism, which became the Socialist Workers Party. Early in the Cold war, he vitally distinguished the group's politics from both the Fourth Internationalists and the Cold warriors, with the slogan 'Neither Washington nor Moscow'.

¹⁶⁴ The others in this tiny group were Jakob Taut, Rudolf Segall and Jabra Nicola.

Nicola was a Palestinian Trotskyist leader, born in Haifa, who translated some of the Marxist classics into Arabic. Imprisoned by the British from 1940–1942, he was recruited by Tony Cliff. He later rejoined the CP and then Matzpen. Placed under house arrest after the Six Day War in 1967, he left for London in 1970, where he lived until his death in 1974. One of his most important publications was *Arab Revolution and National Problems in the Arab East* written with Moshe Machover and published a year before his death..

¹⁶⁵ His address to this event ended with the following: *Our hope that Algeria would become a democracy not only for the rich but also a socialist one for the poor has unfortunately not been fulfilled. At least Algeria has won its freedom from France. At 90 years of age, however, I still hope to see a socialist democracy come true in Algeria.*
<http://www.die-welt-ist-keine-ware.de/vsp/soz/0502201.htm>

eager to follow the example of his brother Bruno who had been killed in Spain in 1937 as a tank commander in the International Brigades.¹⁶⁶

Reinhardt later commented: *'I still vividly remember those Germans in the two AKFD detachments 'Volos' and 'Larisa', [51 in Volos, 38 in Larisa] their readiness and the tireless work they did under extraordinarily difficult conditions.'*¹⁶⁷

Reinhardt was a valuable asset for the underground, presenting himself on the streets of Athens in a *Wehrmacht* uniform and providing propaganda material in German. He participated in night actions against the fascists as a member of the Organisation for the Protection of the Peoples Struggle, an EAM urban guerrilla hit squad. (Apparently, some of the recruits, including Schrade and Klose: see earlier, had been 999 commanders.)¹⁶⁸

He met Flak Harnack, another KPD member (see biography), when he was sent to the X111 ELAS division in Karpenisi. The two of them marched thousands of kilometres across the mountains of Greece towards Thessalonica to develop a movement that could win over members of the *Wehrmacht*, and seems to have succeeded in drawing small groups of German soldiers into ELAS units. They later co-founded the Greek 'Free Germany anti-fascist committee' which also succeeded in recruiting small groups of German fighters, many who already had anti-Nazi sympathies.¹⁶⁹

Reinhardt later wrote: *'In trenches along the guerrilla lines... we became agitators, appealing through loudspeakers to the patriotism (sic) of the men in the German fascist positions...we lost dear comrades, like Otto Stueck...gunned down on 29 August 1944... In the midst of battle, he had stood up and walked towards the advancing German soldiers, unarmed, urging them to spare their lives for a future Germany without Hitler'.*¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Zaugg, Franziska and Yaacov Falkov with others, *Transnational guerrillas in the 'shatter zones' of the Balkans and Eastern front*, in Gildea, *Fighters across frontiers* P162

¹⁶⁷ Burchardt, 281

¹⁶⁸ The Organization for the Protection of the People's Struggle (Οργάνωση Περιφρούρησης Λαϊκού Αγώνα) was a special paramilitary force of the Greek CP, involved apparently in not just killing the right. In December 1944, they massacred several hundred Trotskyists, anarchists and other internationalist communists.

(<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/06/29/pandelis-pouliopoulos-how-greek-trotskyism-was-born>)

¹⁶⁹ Zaugg, Franziska and Yaacov Falkov with others, *Transnational guerrillas in the 'shatter zones' of the Balkans and Eastern front*, in Gildea, *Fighters across frontiers*. P161-163

¹⁷⁰ Zaugg, Franziska and Yaacov Falkov with others, *Transnational guerrillas in the 'shatter zones' of the Balkans and Eastern front*, in Gildea, *Fighters across frontiers*. P162 This quote is taken from BarchB SGY 5/1287 erinnerungen des genossen Gerhard Reinhard, 1.7.1964, 41-2, with my thanks.

Reinhardt became a representative for and a captain within ELAS, for example organising and working with 30 ex-999s around Thessalonica. Though details are again obscure, Reinhardt, along with up to fifty others, marched on to Thessalonica before going to Yugoslavia, where he became an officer in the Second Austrian Freedom Battalion in the Third Yugoslavian Army, formed in early 1945, which recruited from 999 deserters and German POWs.. He reached Vienna in August 1945.¹⁷¹

In 1946, he became a member of the SED and in 1963, secretary of the Committee of Antifascist resistance fighters in East Germany and used this base to organise against the Greek Colonels' coup in 1967 and was a key activist internationally. On 10th August 1974, after the military dictatorship had collapsed, he organised a celebration in a Greek-German gathering of former resistance veterans in Saxony.¹⁷²

Emil Paffrath 1904-1985

A carpenter, he joined the KJVD and the KPD. In 1929, he became Secretary of the local RFB branch and in 1931, took over RFB's agitprop work,

He was first imprisoned as early as September 1932 for four months, a sign of how repressive the pre-Nazi regime already was (and a 'justification' for the KPD's failure to spot the character of the Nazi regime). At the end of January 1933, so after Hitler had become Chancellor, he became the instructor of the RFB leadership in East Prussia. He was re-arrested on April 28, 1933 in Königsberg and sentenced to three years in prison but was still in Sachsenhausen or Buchenwald camps before being released at the end of 1939 and allowed to return to Cologne.

From 1940 to 1942, he worked as a wheelwright in Cologne, but was then drafted into the 999s in January 1943 and sent first to Greece and then the Crimea. Though there are no details, he deserted to the Red Army in April 1944 and became head of the anti-fascist club in Camp 188: Tambow, USSR, from May to

¹⁷¹ Before becoming too starry eyed about Yugoslav partisan internationalism, 13 German members were assassinated in unclear circumstances which have however been attributed to seeing even German anti-Nazis as oppressors.

¹⁷² Gildea and Manojlovic with others, *Afterlives and Memories* in Gildea, *Fighters across Frontiers*,, p 223/4,230, 231.. Reinhardt also edited *Strafdivision 999: Erlebnisse und Berichte aus dem antifaschistischen Widerstandskampf*. Deutscher Militärverlag, Berlin (1965). Some of Reinhardt's documents remain unpublished, awaiting an enthusiastic PhD student!

September 1945.¹⁷³

In January 1946, he returned to Germany, an employee in the Central Committee of the KPD, then an advisor at the SED. On January 31, 1950, he received a "severe reprimand" and a two-year ban because of "behaviour that was harmful to the party and the union" and initially became a transport worker in the VEB but was later 'reprieved'.¹⁷⁴

Kurt Prowrock, born 1909

A member of the KPD, he was repeatedly imprisoned for illegal activities from 1933, and was sentenced to four years in prison in 1939 for "preparation for high treason". In 1943, he was sent to the 999s to Samos, Greece, where he made contact with the Greek partisans. In Samos, he belonged to the "Anti-Fascist Committee of Free Germany".¹⁷⁵ He was sentenced to death in absentia by the German army, but they did not capture him.¹⁷⁶

It seems Prowrock was then 'captured' by the British in 1946, and became a POW, though the details are not clear. He was released back to Germany in 1947.

Heinz Steyer (1909-1944)

Steyer, a staunch communist, was actively involved in the resistance against the Nazis in Dresden before 1933. He was a printer and played football in the workers' sports club of the German Gymnastics Federation, which was associated with the SPD. Aged 18, he joined the KVPD and then the KPD. He was therefore excluded from the Federation. He then joined and worked for the Red Sports unit "Rot-Weiss"

After the Nazis came to power, he worked in the Dresden-Kaditz resistance group and distributed the illegal newspapers "Depesche" and "Der Rote Stern". On August 2nd, 1933, he was arrested and sentenced to two years and six months

¹⁷³ I could not find out more about Palfrath's role. However, 1500 prisoners from Tambov were sent to Algeria to support the Free French in July, 1944, some of whom took part in the battles for Alsace. 30,000 men from Alsace-Lorraine had been conscripted into the German army, a majority of whom, once stationed in the USSR, saw it as their duty to desert. Conditions however at Tambov were appalling. In Mulhouse, Alsace, a memorial was built for the 17,000 Alsatian and Moselle dead at Tambov and other camps in the USSR. (Rigoulet, Pierre, *La Tragédie des Malgré-nous - Tambov, le camp des Français*)

¹⁷⁴ www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/emil-paffrath

¹⁷⁵ https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Veranstaltungen/2003/DRAFD.pdf

¹⁷⁶ Samos was occupied by the German army from September 1943 until 4 October 1944, with dreadful British losses, and apparently liberated by the 'Greek Saved Band', an anti-ELAS/EAM group.

imprisonment for high treason. After his release, he continued to resist and was repeatedly arrested.

In February 1943, he was drafted into the Penal Battalion IV of the 999s. On June 22nd, 1943, his unit was transferred to the Peloponnese in Greece, he became a clerk and radio operator for the military command in Lechenain the Peloponnese.¹⁷⁷ Together with his friend, Werner Illmer, he made contacts with Greek partisans and used his job to warn the partisans about planned "pacification actions", provided them with medicines, ammunition and weapons and procured them German ID cards.. When this became known, he was arrested in July 1944, sentenced to death for high treason and shot in the village of Ai Giannis.¹⁷⁸

What happened next to the German 999 deserters?

What happened to the 999s who ended up in British hands is a story unto itself. In January 1945, the British demanded that all Germans in Greece, whether prisoners or partisans, had to be extradited as 'normal' POWs. ELAS decided the German partisans should get out of Greece. They split into groups: about 50 set out for Yugoslavia, 40 to Bulgaria¹⁷⁹, a third group marched towards Albania, some stayed behind.¹⁸⁰ Of those who did, many were transported to POW camps in North Africa.¹⁸¹

Those who surrendered to the British were regularly not allowed to return to Germany because of the British fear that they would propagate socialist or Communist ideas upon their return. One forgotten bit of what the British did in World War 2 was to ship Germans who had risked their lives to fight on the side of the Allies to Alabama. Twenty-four camps housed about 16,000 German

¹⁷⁷ Andreas Peschel, Saxon State Archives, <http://www.isgv.de/saebi/>.

¹⁷⁸ https://de.zxc.wiki/wiki/Hans_Hauschulz, https://de.zxc.wiki/wiki/Antifaschistisches_Komitee_Freies_Deutschland, Mazover, Mark, *Inside Hitler's Germany* https://de.zxc.wiki/wiki/Heinz_Steyer, Institute for Saxon History and Folklore https://saebi.isgv.de/biografie/Heinz_Steyer

¹⁷⁹ Burkhardt was in this group. They were commanded by the 16th ELAS regiment who handed them over to the border guards of the Bulgarian Patriotic Front. They were then taken to Sofia where they were guests of the militia. The then existing international control commission, demanded from the Bulgarian provisional government that they were extradited to British captivity. Then the Soviet city commandant in Sofia, Colonel Dulow, advised them to go to a Bulgarian and later a Soviet POW camp because 'no German communist will be extradited to the English' Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, p.321

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 303-320

¹⁸¹ Ibid. ,276-291

POWs.¹⁸²In an interview, Kurt Neukirchner recounted how he and some other 999ers who had deserted to the Allies ended up being shipped across the Atlantic to a POW camp in Alabama. There they were forced to mix with the Nazi prisoners whose aim was to harm them. Eventually the British officer allowed the 999ers to move into a separate space. Erwin Schulz (see biography) also told about how there were thirty to forty political resistance fighters who had to confront the Nazis who occupied all the collective spaces in the camp, such as in the writing/rest room and kitchen. When the Nazi POWs gave the Hitler salute, anyone who didn't salute was likely to be punished. Some anti-Nazi POWs were murdered. *'The fascists ... wanted to destroy us.'* They even set fire to a barracks at night where the anti-Nazis slept. The commander, approached by the 999 deserters, always said: "For me you are all Germans".¹⁸³

Other ex-999 German deserters who had supported the Allied war effort in Greece ended up in other British POW camps after the war: Kurt Neukircher and Ludwig Gehm were both sent to a British camp in Tunisia, North Africa. Kurt Burghardt ended up in English captivity in Egypt. Abendroth was captured by the British in September 1944, and was sent to POW camps in Egypt, where he carried out political education of the Nazis who were also in the camp.

The Americans were no better. Walter Kresse, in the 999s, fell into American hands in Tunis and remained interned first in n Africa, then Alabama until 1946. Kresse, KPD, who worked for the Workers' Gymnastics and Sports Association and was active in AgitProp, was arrested in 1933 and sentenced to three years in prison, then sent to the 999s in 1943.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² There were about 425000 POWS, mostly Germans, in the different camps. Which were located all over the US, but were mostly in the South,

¹⁸³ Die Soldaten mit dem blauen Schein - "Wehrunwürdige" in Der Strafdivision 999 Ein Feature von Christian Blees

¹⁸⁴ www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/de/recherche/kataloge-datenbanken/biographische-datenbanken/walter-kresse

Albania

About 500 Germans who had been in the 999s fought with the partisans in Albania. This is an almost unheard of story, certainly in the UK, but also in Germany. It has also apparently not had much publicity in Albania.¹⁸⁵ Some of the ‘deserters’ had fled from Greece, mostly in mid/late 1944; some arrived in Albania with the 999s from June 1943 and then deserted, including a few who had not originally been political. Extraordinarily, the 8th battery of the 3rd unit of the Artillery regiment of the 999s deserted en bloc. The commanders of this unit, Sepp Moritz (an Austrian) also deserted, as did Hermann Heurish, commander of the 8th battery, Walter Brehdo and Paul Ludwig, Commander and Deputy Commander of the 9th of the 999s; 5 other commanders followed.¹⁸⁶ In addition, there were deserters from the *Wehrmacht* proper, including of Karahks and Tajik origin, who had had been captured by the Germans and forcibly ‘enrolled’.¹⁸⁷ At least a couple of the commanders, while remaining within the 999s, also actively collaborated with the partisans, providing them with food and ammunition.¹⁸⁸ How far this level of desertion was a result of it being clear to anybody looking that Germany was losing the war is unknown.

The partisans, mostly under communist leadership, of Enver Hoxha, numbered tens of thousands and had a remarkable level of success against the German invaders.¹⁸⁹ It seems, unlike in Greece, almost all the deserters joined the partisans, rather than keeping in separate Communist dominated units, and were involved in several bloody battles with German forces.

Albania was invaded by Italian forces in April 1939 and the invaders set up Albania as a protectorate or puppet state. The German Army occupied Albania n

¹⁸⁵ Most countries liberated from fascism wanted to define their liberation as their own doing eg France. Albania is no exception. Instead of Germany proclaiming these ‘deserters’ as anti-Nazi heroes, they were first defined as traitors and subsequently still seen as too far on the left for comfort.

¹⁸⁶ dokumentet-e-panjohura-500-nazistet-apo-sic-njiheshin-ndryshe-njerzit-me-shenjen-blu-qe-luftuan-ne-shqiperi-perkrah-partizaneve-te-enver-hoxhes I do not understand the Albanian language so I have not in general even attempted to translate Albanian sources and have little sense of the reliability of this source.

¹⁸⁷ Gildea, *Fighters across frontiers*, p145/6 . In fact, the Italian soldiers who supported the Albanian partisans significantly outnumbered the Germans, estimated at about 20,000. The Antonio Gramsci battalion attached to the partisan 1st brigade was especially significant.

¹⁸⁸ Dokumentet e panjohura/ 500 , ibid.

¹⁸⁹ This section does not look at Italians who worked with the partisans or with the opposition to the earlier Italian invaders. Britain failed to initially oppose the Italian ‘acquisition’ of Albania; only once Italy had declared for the Axis, did they approach Albania in terms only of defeating Italy.

1943, straight after the Italian government changed sides and joined the Allies in September. Albania at that point included most of Kosovo, Western Macedonia and a strip of Eastern Montenegro, sources of conflict with the Yugoslav partisans. The first, relatively successful German offensive against the partisans, who were concentrated in Southern and Central Albania, started in early November 1943. The German government was especially interested in Albania's chromium.

The British government only recognized Albania's right to independence at the end of 1942. But the Allies, in particular the British, needed the assistance of its resistance movement. So the British organised arms drops for the partisans and joined in the attacks on the Italian occupying forces, Albania became the only Balkan state which was not liberated by a foreign army.¹⁹⁰

The first SOE mission (code name "Concensus") only arrived at the end of April 1943. Unlike in Greece, the Communist party, led by Hoxha, only established at the end of 1941, was deeply suspicious of the British and of the SOE. The British might be fighting the same enemy but their goals were at variance with the Albanian's resistance's goals. Hoxha stated that they could be used as a source of supplies but for nothing more..

A question remains as to how far the SOE aimed and succeeded in collaborating with the Albanian partisans. While the partisans viewed them with deep suspicion, at least some of the SOE officers sought them out. Maybe, this was because the officers were less conventional politically, or because Albania was of less strategic significance or because of the British government's ignorance about Albania. It did not help that Albanians spoke such a 'strange' and unknown language!

At the end of 1943, a new set of SOE men were dropped into Albania, headed by Brigadier Edmund F. Davies (known as "Trotsky" Davies). He had to deal with a situation careering towards civil war between the Communist partisans and the right-wing, the Zogists.. SOE tried, unsuccessfully, to bring the factions together. But, after some prevarication, Davies recommended to the British Government that they support the communist partisans. Davies was wounded and captured by the Germans, though he survived. The British position remained deeply ambivalent, much to the annoyance of the SOE officers on the ground, who saw the right-wing as in effect siding with the Germans. Between May 1943 and the end of 1944, SOE sent over 100 officers, almost all

¹⁹⁰ The military commander of the partisans, Mehmet Shehu, had fought and gained military experience in Spain

British, who, successfully, sought to channel weapons, funds and equipment to the guerrillas, mostly parachuted in, to the Communist partisans. (This put them into conflict with the Foreign Office, who, under the guise of not taking sides, was in effect, backing the anti-Communist forces. This did not endear the British to what was about to become the Albanian government.)¹⁹¹

There is still a debate as to whether it was the partisans or British troops which liberated Saranda in 1944 and Delvina,¹⁹² though I go with Aron Tare, an Albanian historian, that it was primarily the partisans.¹⁹³ Whichever way it was, the death toll of the SOE, the Albanians partisans and the ‘deserters’ was very high. In October 1944, SOE withdrew.

There does not appear to have been any direct contact between SOE and the German deserters, except insofar as the Germans were part of the partisan units. Burkhardt draws on the German ‘deserters’ recollections of their experiences working with the partisan units eg producing leaflets to distribute to the German troops, Oskar Fuselbach, unusually a member of the SPD before 1933, is reported to have saved the prefecture in Vlora from being blown up by German soldiers, who, during their retreat, operated a scorched earth policy, by cutting the ignition cable.¹⁹⁴ A few of the biographies of German deserters below who supported the Albanian partisans are drawn directly from Burkhardt, though he gives Albania far less emphasis than Greece. These are people whose histories are hard to find and the details here are often very brief.

Paul Ludwig 1910-1992

A carpenter, by 1931 he was unemployed after participating in a strike. In 1932, he joined the KPD, was responsible for a street cell and organising illegal activities.

The KPD decided he needed to flee to Czechoslovakia where he acted as an illegal courier. In May 1934, he was arrested by the Czech police but managed to

¹⁹¹ Petrov, Bisser, Great Britain and resistance in Albania, 1943-1944, www.academia.edu/1638366/Great_Britain_and_resistance_in_Albania_1943_1944, Bailey, Roderick, *Wildest Province: SOE in the Land of the Eagle*, ‘SOE in Albania’, given as part of the Special Operations Executive Conference held at Imperial War Museum, London, GB, 29/10/1998, www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80017675)

¹⁹² Until the Second World War, a small Jewish community existed in Delvinë of Jews who had arrived there during the Ottoman Empire, having fled Spain.

¹⁹³ www.academia.edu/10767258/Saranda_the_small_stage_of_e_grand_war

¹⁹⁴ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein* Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 204-219

escape and continued to work underground. In April 1937, he was re-arrested and expelled. Although he managed to return to Prague, the KPD decided it was time he got out. He then walked his way from France into Spain.

He joined the 11th Brigade of the International Brigades, but, after their demobilisation in September 1938, he, along with others, continued to fight but was arrested and sent to France where he was placed in a number of camps. In April 1941, he was extradited to Germany and taken to Breslau by the Gestapo, where he was sentenced to three years in prison for high treason.

In 1943, he was sent to the 999s. He defected to the Albanian partisans in autumn 1944. He became a regular member of the 4th Battalion of the 12th Partisan Brigade,¹⁹⁵

One source, whose veracity I cannot check, has Ludwig working with SOE but without further detail.¹⁹⁶ As we know from German comrades who worked for the SOE in the UK, this is certainly possible and would be significant, but it is also possible that he was fighting with the partisans alongside the SOE.

Ludwig joined the victory parade in Tirana in November 28, 1944 with his 4th Battalion. He then got to Moscow and became head of the Antifa school for German POWs in the Golubwka camp (though I could not trace this). He then became a part of the 96th Rifle Division of the Red Army and took part in battles near Szombathely, Hungary.¹⁹⁷ He finally returned home in May 1945.¹⁹⁸



Presented in 1958

¹⁹⁵ A different source has this as the 15th Partisan brigade, based in Greece. (Kretsi, Georgia (2002). "The Secret Past of the Greek-Albanian Borderlands. Cham Muslim Albanians: Perspectives on a Conflict over Historical Accountability and Current Rights")

¹⁹⁶ [Gottfried Hamacher](#) et al. (Ed.): *Against Hitler. Germans in the Resistance, in the armed forces of the anti-Hitler coalition and the "Free Germany" movement.* / Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Volume 53;

¹⁹⁷ Szombathely was a town in Hungary on a railway junction and with a local airfield. It appears that the US and USSR raced to 'free' it from the Germans. On 28 March 1945, the 6th SS Panzer s and the 6th Army were pushed back by an assault from the east by the Russian armies which took control on 29 March 1945.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, Wikipedia.

In Berlin, Franz Dahlem (see biography) instructed him in setting up a police apparatus in Bernau; he became a member of the SED and rose quickly in the ranks of the police.

Artur Musil

The following brief description is drawn from Burchkardt (311-323). This Artur Musil should not be confused with the Nazi 'Artur Musil'.

Musil had been dragooned into the 999s and sent to Albania. One day, under the pretext of having forgotten something, Musil managed to detach himself from his unit; he and his donkey then hid in a gorge, where many local people were also hiding. He was concerned not to run into either the British or the Germans. He found his way to the partisan headquarters in Delvina where he was questioned. One problem was that he spoke no Albanian. The interrogation appears to have in part been conducted in Latin! He explained about being a member of the KPD for fifteen years and then forced into the 999s. They accepted him. But, somehow, he was caught and interrogated and what happened next can only be guessed at.

Ernest Oschmann (1907-1979)

Ernest Oschmann, a saddler and upholsterer, joined the KPD and became an active anti-Nazi from early on and in charge of the KPD sub-district of Kopenick. He also worked on the production and distribution of the KPD newspaper *Die Rote Fahne*.

On 19 December 1934, he was arrested by the Gestapo, sentenced to prison for high treason, which he served in Brandenburg. In 1944, he was conscripted into the 999s and sent to Albania. There he joined the partisans and was badly injured. He returned to Germany in 1945. He later worked for the SED in East Germany.¹⁹⁹

Josef Pfofe

First sent in the 999s to Belorussia, he became an ELAS fighter in Greece, participating in the fighting in the Grammos Mountains on the Greek-Albanian border, and then fled into Albania and joined the National Liberation Army of Albania in April 1945. After the fighting in Albania ended, he became head of the POW camp in Tirana, which included about 230 German, Czech and Polish soldiers, among them at least ten former 999ers, as they were POWs, presumably

¹⁹⁹ Burkhardt, *Die mit dem blauen Schein*, 311

who had not deserted.²⁰⁰

Max Zaspel (1914-1961)

Zaspel, who had been an active member of the KPD and former functionary of the socialist school movement and the KJVD in Leipzig, As far as I can see, he did his military service in the *Wehrmacht* proper, not in the 999s, First sent to Greece, he seems to have still been with the *Wehrmacht* when they transferred to Albania in September 1944. He thus represents one of the few Germans who deserted in Albania from the *Wehrmacht* proper.

In Albania, he was already under suspicion and was interrogated by the German officers. It seems he had been using his position in the Post Office to communicate with ‘undesirables’. He spoke Italian which helped in contacting the partisans. He then deserted and joined the 19th partisan brigade, from October 1944 to January 1945. He knew some of the comrades who had already deserted to the 8th Battery, such as Willi Schmidt from their illegal work together in Leipzig, which helped the partisan unit in accepting him. He was used in clearing mines, building bridges, roads and telephone connections.

What happened next is unclear but he and some others got to the Hungarian border where they appear to have joined up with the 96th Rifle Division of the Red Army on February 21, 1945, with whom they then fought. They arrived in Vienna on May 11th, 1945

He then went to the Soviet occupation zone, became a member of the KPD/SED and a member of the German People's Police where he made himself a successful career, despite some significant hiccups, and became chief of the border police.

What happened next

I want to end by mentioning what happened to some German anti-Nazi POWs in British camps outside the UK, in particular the 999s, after the war ended. I do this to highlight how unsympathetic the British government were to anti-Nazis from the 999s captured by the British after the war. The British were minded to regard Greece, in particular, as a semi-colony and anybody on the left, who had supported the partisans as a potential enemy, certainly if German. Scobie, the British commander there, even sought to delay the German withdrawal in order to prevent

²⁰⁰ Ibid, ,204-219

ELAS, the main resistance group (see relevant section) from establishing control of the country.²⁰¹

In a cryptic exchange in the House of Commons on the 28th February, 1945, so while the British were still waging war on ELAS, Sir W. Edge, a Liberal National, closely associated with the Conservatives, asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether in returning E.L.A.S.[German] POWs to E.L.A.S. ‘we are including any Germans who have always been fighting against us [British forces] or whether we are regarding these men as outside the limits of exchange.’ (The implication here is that all Germans were essentially the ‘enemy’.) Mr. George Hall, another Viscount and also a Labour MP, answered on behalf of the Government that Germans were not returned to ELAS, but provided no explanation of what did happen to them.

The following are extracts from a debate in the House of Commons on October 8th 1946, one year or so after this exchange about what was happening to Germans who had been in the 999s or/and were POWs, held by the British, during the war. First Jennie Lee (Labour):

‘Now I come to what is to me a much sorer matter. ...how many of the German prisoners of war still retained in North Africa belonged to the German 999 Division and should be returned [to Germany]...[When requested from the Ministry of War] separate statistics relating to the 999 battalion were not available... Hitler put them into jails and concentration camps, but that was not because they were good Nazis. ..There is something queer happening in that Department.

I am concerned that the whole of the prisoners in the Middle East should be brought into repatriation schemes, but I am particularly stressing the position of the anti-Fascist prisoners of war... ‘

Mr Edelman (Labour) supported her: *’This evening I wish to confine myself merely to the question of those members of the 999 Battalion who are still detained in captivity. I venture to do so because I raised this matter in this House some months ago. Then I was told that it was impossible to find out who these prisoners were and to separate them from the mass of prisoners, because of the*

²⁰¹ Gluckstain, Donny *A People's History of the Second World War: Resistance Versus Empire*

administrative difficulties of sorting them out...(Reading out a letter) from Irvin Schultz, Camp 2228 [in Holland] "Why are not the anti-Nazis in British camps freed? I am here with 40 former political prisoners who spent 115 years as political prisoners in all under the Third Reich. They have already spent eight or nine years behind barbed wires. Is not it a moral duty to free these men who have gone through the hell of the Gestapo?" Then Edelman goes on to say:"The uncertainty as to when they will be released after spending a further three years as prisoners of war is crushing. Is Nazism, beaten on the field of battle, to achieve its goal after all of destroying so many fighters for freedom?"He adds:"Humanity demands their immediate release."...

Mr. Derek Walker-Smith (Tory) then reported that, talking to other German POWs, the German POWs in North Africa felt deserted. He went on to state that *'With regard to the particular case of the 999 Division ...the fact that the Nazi Government saw fit to mix in this unit political offenders, as they then were, with ordinary criminals, no doubt makes more difficult the administrative task'but 'places a still greater responsibility upon the War Office ...[to] get matters sorted out as soon as may be.'*

Mr. Paget (Labour) while generally disagreeing with Jennie Lee's position, did argue: *'One exception might, perhaps, be made in regard to the 999 Division. It might be said that these men were never really soldiers at all, that they ought never to have been.'*

The Financial Secretary to the War Office (Mr. John Freeman, Labour) then gave a non-answer on behalf of the government: *'We cannot— and the House and the country would not wish us to—treat the German prisoners of war with such consideration, or with such softness, as to deprive the people of this country of what they need, or hamper the reconstruction of this country.'*²⁰²

Many of those who joined the local resistances and survived and who 'returned' to East Germany, became one sort or another of apparatchik, many in the police or/and government. Those who had fled 'West', for example to the UK, were less approved of : they were often seen as having been tarnished by capitalist values, especially if they had not taken up arms against the Nazis and those who had

²⁰² [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1946-10-08/debates/b2b64d2a-3561-40f8-b3d9-6e3036e87004/Anti-NaziPrisonersOfWar\(Repatriation\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1946-10-08/debates/b2b64d2a-3561-40f8-b3d9-6e3036e87004/Anti-NaziPrisonersOfWar(Repatriation))

fought in the Spanish Civil War were feared for having too much independence of thought, even if the International Brigades were officially honoured

One unfortunate effect was, for decades, to discourage the writing of memoirs etc in East Germany, contributing to a relative absence of first hand material. Abendroth is rare in writing about his experiences in the 999s and Greece and that was from West Germany and he still does not give much personal detail.

West Germany was dominated by Cold War ideology, where Communists, anarchists and ‘such like’, even if they had worked with the ‘Allies’, were seen like the plague, wishing to destroy West Germany and the West’s inner fabric. Moreover, lest we forget, types of fascist regimes persisted in Spain and Portugal up to the 1970s, without Western Europe’s serious objections. None of this encouraged the participants to recount their stories, who were moreover growing old.

In Britain, where few of the resistors ultimately stayed, even those who did were not honoured for their anti-fascist experiences and bravery. Though a few studies on those who worked with the UK have now appeared, there is still a remarkable lack of recognition of how German anti-Nazis contributed to the Allied war effort. Virtually nobody, even on the left, has heard of how deserters from the 999s worked with the partisans in the countries Germany occupied, frequently at terrible personal cost. That many of them were some sort of communist has largely put them outside the fortress of historical respectability.²⁰³

Conclusion

I want to end by asking why the stories of these Germans who opposed Nazi Germany is still significant. I want to start by emphasising the similarities between many European countries today and late Weimar Germany: an increasing likelihood of unemployment, an appalling rise in ‘legitimatised’ racist rhetoric, a growing disenchantment with the political process and, in Britian, a Tory government, strengthened by the recent pandemic, which is more and more trying

²⁰³ On the other hand, the British ruling class had no qualms about benefiting from the Nazis’# ‘science’ research . The Americans got von Braun and several hundred completed V2s, the Russians got a mixed bag of more junior scientists, and the V2 assembly line at the subterranean Mittelwerk factory. Britain benefited from the pioneering German work on the hydrogen peroxide. programme.(<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v21/n21/francis-spufford/operation-backfire>)

to limit the usual Parliamentary or judicial constraints,. The present day rise of the ultra-right across Europe has also made more likely proto-fascist movements and governments. Although history never exactly repeats itself, to quote Brecht, (and with apologies for the sexist language), ‘the bitch is on heat again’.

These stories remind us that not all Germans were Nazis or colluded silently with the Nazis. Yet, what also emerges is that though some aspects of the resistance to the Nazis is well known, these men and women have received very little recognition, in part because national myths do not generally recognise transnational fighters, but in part because so many came from working-class and activist left –wing backgrounds. Many of those included here risked their lives again and again because of their commitment to overthrow the Nazi Government, and to build a better, and, often, socialist, world. As outlined in Part 1, such people generally do not have myths of glory built around them,²⁰⁴

The UK does not come well out of this story. Yes, British forces were vital in defeating Nazism and all honour to the tens of thousands who gave their lives. But the British Government were involved in two parallel wars, of which the second was to stop the Soviets and to preserve or build their own spheres of influence and control. The Greek civil war bears dreadful testimony to this: and led to many of the anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist German deserters supporting the partisans against the British.

When the Second World War is often presented in the UK as fought for and won by plucky Brits, and as the forces of nationalism and racism increasingly comes to dominate the political discourse, let us remember these brave anti-Nazis and their participation in an international struggle against fascism and dictatorship who often were willing to take up arms and risk their lives against their country of birth - and let us stand up to be counted along with them.

²⁰⁴ Though I only touch briefly on this throughout, there is a paucity of source material about many of the people included here, not helped by some of the more ‘sensitive’ material still being well under wraps.