

G-SIG FORUM #66

...from the German Special Interest Group. G-SIG is an effort of the St. Louis Genealogical Society (www.stlgs.org/) and the German American Heritage Society, St. Louis, Mo. (gahs-stlouis@earthlink.net).

This forum is for genealogical, educational, and historical information with fresh insights and ideas on German traditions and ancestry. Gerald Perschbacher is *FORUM* compiler and coordinator.

You may submit a notice or request for information in condensed form for the *EXCHANGE!* section (limit 50 words). *EXCHANGE!* notices run only once, but you may resubmit, within reason. We reserve the privilege to shorten and edit. Send your *EXCHANGE!* submission to persch3@hotmail.com.



No Mercy for Mercenaries

By Gerald Perschbacher

It's true. There was little mercy for mercenary troops before 1830. That's because of strange practices that guided the realms of various rulers.

As you study genealogy, you may encounter references to several of your ancestors who seemed to have been in a mercenary army. Don't be surprised. From the perspective of territorial rulers, the need to have mercenary armies arose from several reasons.

One was protection. It was far better to fight a defensive war in the territory of your neighbor than in your own territory. Dukes and counts may have chosen to sell their troops into service for that reason alone, making the offer financially attractive merely to meet the cost of arming and paying the troops just for short-term military deployment.

Another reason was wealth. Most (if not all) mercenary troops came at a price. The ruler who sent them expected a fair return on the effort. Greed drove others to demand a high profit. Some of that payment may have been divided among the troops themselves. The majority of income most likely went into the ruler's coffers or paid down the debt accumulated by the army's ruling family.

A third reason was power and authority. Weak territories often were forced to bow to more powerful neighbors. Having a strong standing army was a deterrent to invasion. But that standing army cost money and needed to stay active for good morale and to keep their abilities sharp. In territories that had few sources of income, channeling an abundance of its young men into mercenary service became a financial necessity.

There are other reasons to raise a mercenary army, but we'll focus on these three for the purpose of brevity.

The raising of mercenary troops was not restricted to a single territory. That's because of shifting alliances. When ruler "A" came to power, he or she may have had pleasant inclinations toward neighboring ruler "B." As soon as ruler "A" died or was deposed, the successor may have made an about-face and was ready to reinforce the border of ruler "B" in an exercise of saber-rattling. Extra troops were needed. So at certain times in German history, there may have been several mercenary units (even large armies) fielded by a series of territories.

The Thirty Years' War was heavily influenced by mercenary units. Some were reasonably friendly to the population they had freed or protected from encroachment. But that work came at a price. Documents reveal that some liberating mercenary armies chose not to leave a freed territory until they had been properly paid. In effect, they held the territory or a handful of villages for ransom. Mercenary troops simply stayed put until the money was forthcoming. While they waited, they ate off the land, drank local wine and beer, put meat on their plates by killing whatever cattle they wanted, lived in homes of villagers and farmers, and took all they desired just to press the point of cruelty in order to negotiate their full payment. It behooved the ruler or the towns themselves to scrape up the money to pay off the mercenaries, sending them on their way for some other "cause."

From the perspective of the soldier, being a mercenary might have been the only way out of a hopeless life cycle. For many, the life of mercenary troopers was their sole source of income. Poor families offered a dim future for young men who were locked into that low-end stratum. Leached land, crop failures, and joblessness added to despair. Often the military offered an escape and the promise of a good future.

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Who Was Revolting?

In 1884, Edward J. Lowell wrote the book, *THE HESSIANS and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War* (Harper &

Brothers, New York). It is sobering to discover how mercilessly certain troops were treated.

According to the book, the first mercenary units to head to America to fight against the revolution were from Brunswick. The force consisted of 2,282 soldiers and departed from the mouth of the Elbe on February 22, 1776. A second division of about 2,000 Brunswickers left at the end of May. The first Hessians departed Cassel in early March and shipped out “at Bremerlehe, near the mouth of the Weser. The second division was embarked in June.” The entire Hessian force according to Lowell came to nearly 13,000 men. “They were for the most part excellent troops and well equipped, for the [Hessian] Landgrave’s little army was one of the best in Germany.”

Interestingly, the Hessians were known as fighters in the earlier days of Roman history. They carried the name “Chatten” or “Chatti tribe” and were quite infamous as spoilers of Rome’s efforts to colonize the Chatti territory east of the area around the juncture of the Rhine River and the Main (pronounced “Mine”). So, since at least the year 50 A.D., the Hessians were fond of raising armies to defend their freedom, their rights, their culture, and their land. Doubly interesting is that in 1776 the Hessians were deployed in mercenary service to take those same benefits away from fledgling Americans!

Back to 1776. “The march from Brunswick or Cassel to the port of embarkation was a comparatively simple matter. The troops passed from the territory of their own prince into the Hanoverian dominions of the King of England, and these reached to the sea. The Prince of Waldeck sent his regiment through Cassel without trouble. The Prince of Hesse-Hanau, the Margrave of Anspach-Bayreuth, and the Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst had a longer road and more difficult before them,” said Lowell.

Due to animosity between a father and son, the Prince of Hesse-Hanau did not want his mercenary troops to march through the territory of his father since he feared desertion. His troops were packed onto boats and shipped down the Rhine. Those troops traveled through territories that cast wary eyes on their purpose and destination. The citizens of the free city of Cologne were cautious. The three spiritual electorates through which they passed also were skeptical. Lowell noted, “Any one of the little states might make trouble if its permission for the passage of troops were not obtained, and after running the gantlet of them all, there was danger of still more serious hindrance when the flotilla came to Rhenish Prussia. Difficulties had already arisen between the local authorities and the English recruiting officers, and although the first regiment from Hanau, in the spring of 1776, was allowed to pass unmolested, trouble was brewing” (page 47).

A group of men left Hanau on March 7, 1777. The next day “the boats were stopped at Mainz, and eight men were taken from them. The archbishop claimed these either as his own subjects or as deserters from his

service....On March 25...in Holland, seven men sprang overboard, and three of them escaped, with the help of sympathizing peasants.”

Two regiments from Anspach and Bayreuth (1,285 men) departed their lands on March 7, 1777. A hundred miles from Hanau, their trip became dreadful. Lowell said, “Unused to their crowded quarters, shivering with cold, sickened by the smell of the boats, in which, in their simplicity, they thought they were to sail to America,” they grew discontent. “Their grumbling grew at last into a mutiny, a poor, helpless mutiny, without a plan, without a leader” (page 48). At daybreak some soldiers skipped onto land, “refusing to yield to the threats and promises of officers.”

Although some soldiers obeyed orders and were told to shoot at deserters, the rioters returned fire. “Several men were wounded. The burghers of Ochsenfurth shut their gates and drew up their drawbridges to keep themselves out of harm’s way.” The revolting troops had eaten their fill and imbibed whatever they could. When they were sober, some returned to the ranks. Others deserted. The Margrave of Anspach was so shaken by the ordeal that he mounted his steed and raced to the point of encounter. “He announced that any man might then and there leave the service, forfeiting his home, all his property, and the princely favor. No one stirred. The soldiers were re-embarked and taken down the Main [River]” (page 49).

The soldiers sent to quell a rebellion had become the rebels! Discontent and disappointment were to plague these mercenaries throughout their service. And when the British lost the war, some of those German troops saw little reason to return home and face reassignment. So they made the newly freed America their adopted homeland.



What about DNA...?

Individuals in G-SIG Clusters are discovering special insights about DNA, the traceable familial ink of humans. One group of Cluster participants finds it absolutely fascinating, thanks to the book *Trace Your Roots with DNA* by Megan Smolenyak and Ann Turner. It was brought up among Cluster participants that today’s military men and women provide a DNA sample when they enter the service. One Cluster participant was surprised to know how reliable DNA tests can be. A child’s shoe from the Titanic was tested for DNA. The tests linked that shoe to the child’s family! A mystery was solved. DNA testing has become one of the most intriguing tools in genealogical research.

Several G-SIG participants have said that <http://www.familytreedna.com/> (part of the National Geographic DNA testing all over the world) is the best source to explore a person’s DNA links. Dr. Bennett Greenspan is a guiding force

behind this effort. He is an entrepreneur and life-long genealogy enthusiast. He founded Family Tree DNA in 1999. To find out more about the subject, search online or contact experts.



Eisenhower Discovery!

The Monuments Men Foundation has uncovered an audio recording of General Eisenhower speaking about the importance of art and its protection during war. Eisenhower delivered the speech at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City on April 2, 1946. At that event, General Eisenhower was presented with an Honorary Life Fellowship from the museum with a citation that read: "To Dwight D. Eisenhower, soldier, diplomat and statesman, through whose irreplaceable art treasures were saved for future generations."

It was an unfortunate twist of war that Nazi leaders absconded with all sorts of rare art treasures during the Second World War. Seemingly countless art pieces were tucked away, sold, or otherwise lost in the process of war, liberation, and reconstruction. The Monuments Men Foundation has the goal of recovering as many lost pieces as possible.

Stealing art was nothing new to European society in the 20th century. In fact, some of the art pieces which the Nazi regime was accused of stealing had been taken out of Germany by the French and other countries over centuries of war and intrigue. Still, that is no justification for art thefts, especially from the private sector.

The Foundation adds, "We have created a version of the audio recording in which we have laid in images and archival footage of the events and people he is discussing, along with photographs from the event. The viewing time is less than fifteen minutes. The video clip can be found on our new and improved website: www.monumentsmenfoundation.org ."



Never Too Strict on Spelling

The bane of researchers is to find multiple spellings of ancestors. But it may not be errors that researchers see. Those could be variant spellings over the decades and centuries, adapted phonetically by long-gone record keepers.

It wasn't until the 1500s that spelling gained greater consistency with the popularity of the moveable-type printing press (thank you, Mr. Gutenberg). Prior entries in books were spelled as they sounded. This provides a fascinating window on the advancement of German pronunciation and regional dialects.

Thanks to Gene Mueller, Rhineland North and South Clusters have found out that “when looking for a surname, as well as a given name, there is a serious need to be flexible in spelling. The spelling in a church or town book using Latin or old dialect German and in various script styles is a challenge. Conrad may be spelled Konrad, Cunrad, Cvnrad and others,” the Clusters reported.

The surname Mueller also has many variations. “So be flexible.... When you have what looks like a good hit, compare the dates. The given name used in the U.S.A. may be known in Germany as a *rufname* or ‘call name’ or ‘known as’ name. This is the name an individual was known as in the family and friends. The *rufname* may not be in the record books. First and middle names may become reversed. Double letters may be changed to single letters in the U.S.A. It may take several pieces of evidence to finally conclude you have found your ancestor.”



***Exchange!* G-SIG Comments, ideas, and requests**

+ **Higginson Books** (<http://www.higginsonbooks.com/>) can provide a quality reprint of the Lowell book referenced in the first two articles in this issue.

+ **German** genealogists and historians may find it fascinating to search for American descendants. Carol Schlueter in Belleville, Ill., is a G-SIG participant who offers the following website as an “in” for details about the soldiers of the Vietnam War: <http://www.virtualwall.org/iStates.htm> •

+ **Finding the ancestral home town** in Germany challenging, report the Rhineland North and South Clusters. Why? Some place names occur several times within various German areas. When you think about it, isn't too far removed from American cities. How many “Springfields” are there...? (Get the point?) Changes in spelling and phonetic transcribing adds to potential confusion among researchers.

+ **Fred Held** is featured on two links. Find out what he has to say at < <http://fhheld.tripod.com/Presentations/Presentations.html> > and also see <https://www.familysearch.org/learn/researchcourses>. Click on the sections dealing with Germany.



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