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# American Aid for German War Prisoners: Humanitarian Relief as Reconciliation between Heritage and Patriotism

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American Aid for German War Prisoners:  
Humanitarian Relief as Reconciliation between Heritage and Patriotism

By

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of the requirements for  
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## ABSTRACT

FUGGER, ERICA    American Aid for German War Prisoners:  
Humanitarian Relief as Reconciliation between Heritage and Patriotism

ADVISOR: Andrew Morris

When Europe was thrown into conflict in 1939, German Americans feared treatment reminiscent of the discriminatory practices of World War I. Recent immigrants were in an especially difficult position, as they sought to remain loyal to their adopted country, while also desiring to assist those affected by the war abroad. In answer to this dilemma, Emil Auer, a native of Munich and naturalized resident of Buffalo, New York, formed a war relief organization in 1940. Initially focusing its efforts on the British Commonwealth camps established in Canada, the American Aid for German War Prisoners grew to assist Axis soldiers and internees imprisoned worldwide.

Closely scrutinized by the government before and after American entrance into the war, the group emphasized its humanitarian intentions to preempt disapproval. Nevertheless, the President's War Relief Control Board pursued a campaign of consolidation among philanthropic organizations, and revoked Auer's permit in 1943. However, the American Aid for German War Prisoners reflected a growing tolerance for German Americans, as the effort came to signify the reemergence and greater acceptance of a cohesive ethnic community.

This thesis traces the progress of the relief organization through its rise, expansion, investigation, and dissolution. Research draws upon government documents,

association newsletters, and personal correspondences housed in the New York State Library in Albany, New York City Public Library, and National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Most notably, this work reflects upon the evolution of the German American community through a humanitarian effort that concurrently supported both German heritage and American patriotism.

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And, last but certainly not least: This thesis would not have been possible without the continuous help of Professor Andrew Morris of the History Department. His constant patience, enthusiasm, knowledge, guidance, and support throughout of the year have been invaluable. The experience as a whole has certainly been one of the highlights of my academic career and plays a significant role in my understanding of historical research.

## INTRODUCTION

“When you are behind barbed wire, cut off from the world, it are these signs of compassion and caring that make your fate bearable.”<sup>1</sup>

— Gustav Pohlig, World War II Prisoner of War, German Army

In September 1940, Emil Auer petitioned the U.S. Department of State for permission to establish a war relief organization. While humanitarian work itself was not rare during the Second World War, the focus of Auer’s effort was particularly unusual. Strikingly, the “American Aid for German War Prisoners” sought to bring relief to captured Axis servicemen. Existent neutrality agreements allowed American philanthropy to subsist with little regulation, as the United States continued to refrain from involvement in the European conflict. Nevertheless, the focus of Auer’s group appeared to challenge the very core of American sensibilities.

As tension escalated overseas, the British relocated their prisoners of war (POWs) to the country’s distant dominions. Canadian detention camps came to house captured German servicemen and brought the prospects of warfare nearer to the American home front. Without the legal ability to prohibit the organization’s founding, the federal government granted the American Aid for German War Prisoners consent to engage in donation collection on the soldiers’ behalf. Growing in scope over the next three years, the relief effort expanded to include German, Italian, and occasionally, U.S. prisoners of

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1. Thomas R. Nealeigh, “The ‘American Aid for German War Prisoners’ CARD,” *German Postal Specialist* (November 1981), 477.

war internationally. It extended further aid to civilian internees upon America's entrance into World War II.

The greatest support for the relief effort was derived from German Americans nationwide. Yet, the American Aid was established amid a time of great uncertainty for the ethnic community. German Americans were only slowly recovering from the World War I era "anti-German hysteria" that had fueled discrimination and induced their rapid assimilation. As a result, recent immigrants during the interwar years often sought unification focused on their heritage and culture. The more radical groups of the time were largely rejected as the majority of German Americans sought to portray neutral rather than political alliances. Therefore, humanitarian initiatives like the American Aid organization became the common ground upon which German Americans could congregate. Since global philanthropy was accepted during times of war, the relief effort could exist without the threat of persecution.

As a first-generation German American, Emil Auer remained adamantly loyal to the United States, but also maintained ties to his homeland. He further sought to express support for his heritage and hoped to unify a divided ethnic community. Auer's religious roots as a Quaker also likely encouraged his humane pursuit of war relief. Others involved in the organization occasionally even possessed familial ties to the POWs themselves. Each of these factors culminated in the founding of the American Aid for German War Prisoners. While essentially existing on a small scale, this group brought the prisoners and internees necessities and desired comforts. Providing small items and care packages, the organization existed without the purpose of aiding the Nazi government, but rather with the intention of providing aid to those most affected by the perils of war.

It was therefore a curious combination of factors that led to the demise of Emil Auer's association. After American involvement commenced overseas, war relief jurisdiction was transferred from the State Department to the President's War Relief Control Board (WRCB). The Board was given the task of decreasing the number of relief efforts present in the United States. Intending to minimize competition and duplication, the WRCB pursued a campaign of consolidation that saw local initiatives replaced by those recognized internationally. Consequently, the Board became particularly weary of Auer's continuous pursuits of expansion. Inquiries into his past alliances fueled investigations of the effort's true purpose. Discoveries of Auer's youthful ties to Nazism in Germany provided the final grounds of disbanding the organization. Despite innocent intentions, the American Aid ceased to exist in 1943.

Overall, this thesis examines the conditions allowing for the formation and decline of the American Aid for German War Prisoners. It suggests a narrative to the largely untold story of German American war relief through archival research and secondary analysis. Essentially, it will seek to present this humanitarian involvement as an outlet for reconciliation between ethnic heritage and American patriotism.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Literature Review

American philanthropy during the Second War World has been chronicled through the analysis of international relief organizations. But seldom has research been completed on local humanitarian initiatives like the American Aid for German War Prisoners. As there exists little writing immediately on the subject, it is especially important to examine the societal circumstances that influenced the tenure of this organization. Insight into the group's formation and demise will consider the treatment, perception, and collective identity of the German American community. An evaluation of ethnic associations like the American Aid for German War Prisoners is need to lend a broader perspective to Auer's initiative. Furthermore, it is essential to examine the conditions present in both the Allied POW camps and American internment operations to gain an understanding of the individuals Auer aided. An appraisal of these subjects allows for a wider analysis of the war relief's place within the context of the Second World War and amid the greater German American experience.

#### *The American Aid for German War Prisoners*

While Emil Auer's efforts have not previously appeared in scholarly publications, lesser known periodicals reveal evidence of his group's impact. The Germany Philatelic Society, an association of postal stamp collectors based in the United States, printed two

articles on the relief organization in their monthly magazine. As Auer was a stamp dealer by trade, mention of his wartime efforts was relevant to the *German Postal Specialist*.

The 1981 edition of the *Specialist* included what appears to be the most comprehensive writing on the American Aid for German War Prisoners. Although the article was not published with scholarly intent, Thomas Nealeigh incorporated his personal correspondences with Auer and former German POWs as primary source evidence. Nealeigh wrote that the relief group sent 200,000 parcels to prisoner of war camps worldwide, and that the donations primarily consisted of small articles like cigarettes and toothbrushes. He noted that the organization's fundraising efforts included the sale of "War Cards" containing German stamps, but clarified that the initiative was not formed with "sinister" intent.<sup>1</sup> This article must be understood as a nonacademic source, but should be recognized for its merit in conveying Auer's direct perspective.

The *German Postal Specialist* published a second piece on the American Aid for German War Prisoners in 2008. Myron Fox derived the majority of his research from Nealeigh's descriptions of the relief effort, but also drew upon his own communications with Auer after the war's conclusion. It initially appears that the absence of primary source material minimizes the effectiveness of his argument. Fox asserted, "The relief done by Auer and his organization was not without notice in Germany. The German treatment of American POWs was given some preferential status as a result."<sup>2</sup> Although the group's immediate impact on the German prisoners of war is confirmed through the soldiers' writings, the expansive claims made in Fox's article are less readily verified. It

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1. Nealeigh, "CARD," 477.

2. Myron Fox, "American Aid for German War Prisoners," *German Postal Specialist* 59, no. 8 (August 2008), 328.

is not likely that the German government would have been regularly informed of such a small-scale operation, and still less probable that these efforts would have had an immense impact on American POW treatment.

Yet, Auer's collaboration with the International Red Cross may have ensured that Germany was in fact advised of his efforts. It is possible that Fox based his claims on the assumption that both the German Red Cross and national government would have subsequently been privy to information regarding the war relief group. A further review of Fox's personal correspondences reveals that Auer himself issued the original statement, although without direct evidence supporting his assertions.<sup>3</sup> While this article lends insight into the greater influence of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, the source is still not one of an academic nature. As a result, caution will be used when citing its contents.

One further piece was published in Germany by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Zensupost e.V in the *AGZ Rundbrief*.<sup>4</sup> The author, Gustav Pohlig, was a former German POW detained in Australia who benefited from the work of Auer's group.<sup>5</sup> He stated that the American Aid organization brought relief to 100,000 prisoners worldwide and that its fundraising techniques also extended to the sale of traditional German flowers. Pohlig quoted Auer as having emphasized the integrity with which his group functioned, "*Niemals haben wir nach Nationalität, Religion oder Rasse gefragt – wir halfen allen. Das war unsere Stärke* [Never did we ask about nationality, religion or race – we helped

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3. Emil Auer, letter to Myron Fox, September 30, 1965.

4. The Arbeitsgemeinschaft Zensupost e.V. is a recognized German association specializing in the investigation of postal censorship.

5. Nealeigh, "CARD," 477-478.

everyone. That was our strength].”<sup>6</sup> The author likened this charitable cause and idealism to Auer’s ties with the Quaker religion. Although this piece was also not published with academic intent, Pohlig’s writings can be used to further contextualize Auer’s work.

Despite the scarcity of scholarly writing on the subject, each article presents a further means of analysis and background on the American Aid for German War Prisoners. While these writings will be used with discretion, they serve the useful purpose of lending insight into Auer’s direct perspective on his war relief initiative.

### *Before the Second War: Identity and Persecution*

At the advent of World War I, the German American community was well established among the greater populace.<sup>7</sup> Embracing the cultural pluralism of American society, German immigrants commonly pursued U.S. citizenship while maintaining an emphasis on their cultural identity. The group sought to pursue involvement in policy and government, while dually intending to preserve a sense of ethnic distinction and heritage. With immigration reaching its peak near the dawn of the twentieth century, German Americans had come to play a vital role in American society.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the “anti-German hysteria” that emerged during the First World War was largely unprecedented. Don Tolzmann argued that public prejudice grew to deprive German Americans of their proud cultural element. Criticisms of German language practice struck the very core of the immigrants’ heritage and challenged the community’s

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6. Gustav A. Pohlig, “Die Amerikanische Hilfsaktion für Kriegsgefangene [American Relief Work for Prisoners of War],” *AGZ Rundbrief* 43/84 (1984): 135-138.

7. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German-American Experience* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 235-236.

8. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 272, 243, 224; Russell Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8.

cohesiveness. Ethnic slurs developed into more aggressive harassment and expanded to include coerced readings of the Pledge of Allegiance to reinforce American loyalty.<sup>9</sup>

The scope of these practices also extended to direct governmental legislation. Frederick Luebke described the mandated persecution of German Americans through policy and law. Encouraged by the developing wartime fervor, the U.S. government admonished both German influence and culture. Federal regulations transformed American patriotism into “rampant prejudice,” spawning campaigns to rid street names and monuments of German distinction.<sup>10</sup> Most drastically, residents who had acquired German citizenship were regularly interned as “enemy aliens.” Such actions served as a means of intimidation, and complemented efforts to target and dismantle German American associations.<sup>11</sup> Each of these efforts further fractured the bonds of the ethnic community.

From the perspectives of those historians, it is understood that a combination of both public panic and federal mandate detrimentally affected German Americans during the First World War. The immigrants became synonymous with the conflict overseas rather than being known their conduct within the boundaries of the United States. As a result, by the end of the war, the group no longer sought such prominent positions in American society. Instead, self-censorship was encouraged through adaption and naturalization in an effort to hide most indications of German heritage.<sup>12</sup>

This departure from ethnic identification continued into the interwar period as the lingering effects of the discrimination persisted. Russell Kazal gave example of

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9. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 287, 284, 299.

10. Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 268.

11. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 283, 286.

12. Luebke, *Bonds*, 282.

Philadelphia's German American community as a paradoxical reflection of "how the nation's largest ethnic group ha[d] gone missing from the national scene."<sup>13</sup> He further suggested that a strict sense of ethnic distinction was replaced by identification with "whiteness," religion, and socioeconomic class.<sup>14</sup> This means of assimilation greatly stressed unification under American culture rather than a connection between those of German descent.

Yet, Kazal also emphasized the variance of the ethnic experience in the post-war U.S. There tended to be "a greater expression of public Germanness" in cities like Chicago where more support could be derived from a larger German population.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Leslie Tischauser's accounts of German Americans in the Midwest portrayed similar trends. With membership in German societies regaining ground in this area during the interwar period, Tischauser proposed that calls for unity superseded fears of persecution. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm of the organizations' leaders often failed to gain ground elsewhere as they faced a largely "apathetic and unresponsive public...[un]interested in ethnic issues."<sup>16</sup>

Most notably, these findings present an understanding of the divided state of the German American community immediately preceding World War II. Kazal and Tischauser both described the influence of geographic location on the strength of ethnic organizations. However, it is clear that the national cohesiveness of this group had been irreversibly fragmented by assimilation and prejudice. The reappearance of a "subdued"

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13. Russel A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

14. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 270.

15. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 272.

16. Leslie V. Tischauser, *The Burden of Ethnicity: The German Question in Chicago, 1914-1941* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 96, 109.

German identity in the interwar years foreshadowed the timidity of ethnic associations during World War II.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the condition of the German America during this period created the environment under which Emil Auer's relief initiative could emerge as a humanitarian unifier.

*Ethnic Organizations: Cultural Despite Radicalism*

Understanding the state of German American organizations leading up to U.S. entrance into the war creates a clearer context for Auer's efforts. Despite waning interest in German societies, the interwar period saw the tentative reemergence of culturally focused organizations. Gatherings within the German American community centered on the more traditional aspects of German heritage.<sup>18</sup> Yet, memories of poor treatment during World War I conjured fears of renewed persecution. Emphasis on cultural observance rather than political exploits counteracted fading interest in ethnic identification and improved the public perception of German Americans.<sup>19</sup>

Tolzmann asserted that the community suffered linguistic and cultural losses due to the pressures of assimilation. These developments especially affected German American cohesion shortly preceding the Second World War. He further argued that the German-American Citizens League and the Steuben Society of America faced a loss of approval due to their political pursuits soon after World War I. Prolonged criticism of these groups shifted their focus to one emphasizing the more neutral facets of German heritage. The American populace perceived the German Americans as a lesser threat, and

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17. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 193.

18. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 193; Tolzmann, *Experience*, 302.

19. Timothy J. Holian, *German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 14.

subsequently decreased their acts of discrimination.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the ethnic community saw greater unification through an emphasis on culture.

Although Kazal argued that German Americans in the Midwest were more inclined to extol their “Germanness,” Timothy Holian maintained that the group also emphasized a mindset of isolationism. While the ethnic community sought a means of unification, the majority looked not to Germany, but rather within their own ranks, for guidance and validation.<sup>21</sup> Yet, the emergence of radical organizations during the 1930s questioned this very occurrence. The most outspoken and visible of these groups, the Amerikadeutscher Bund (German American Federation), sought to reassert German authority in the United States. But the organization only gained support on a small scale, as the larger ethnic community had adopted American ideals and did hold Nazi beliefs. Nonetheless, the American public was especially distressed by the emergence of the Bund because the group’s leader, Fritz Kuhn, exaggerated his claims of influence and power.<sup>22</sup>

Susan Canedy contended that the very persecution endured by German Americans during the First World War fueled the formation of extremist groups like the Bund. She asserted that rapid assimilation drove a minority of the ethnic population to support the radical movement.<sup>23</sup> Bund members were seen as disillusioned Germans living in United States whose “desperate cling[ing] to their ethnicity” would confirm their exile from both American society and larger portion of the German American community.<sup>24</sup> The

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20. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 304-307; Holian, *Perspective*, 14.

21. Holian, *Perspective*, 14-16.

22. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 319-320.

23. Susan Canedy, *America’s Nazis: A Democratic Dilemma* (Menlo Park, CA: Markgraf Publications Group, 1990), 1-2.

24. Canedy, *Nazis*, 1.

prominence of the German American Bund in the public sphere may have provided deterrence of ethnic unity, but also encouraged further emphasis on cultural pursuits for the organizations already in existence.

In 1938, the Bund was put on trial and publicly examined by House Committee on Un-American Activities for their ties to the Nazi Party abroad. Tolzmann declared that the congressional hearings irrevocably tarnished the reputation of German Americans and helped perpetuate a revival of ethnic suspicion.<sup>25</sup> Although the Bund was created to reassert German identity amid American prejudice, the group's actions evidently had a detrimental effect on the ethnic community as a whole. Public perception and efforts to limit Bund activity further lessened the prevalence and approval of extremist organizations. To offset negative publicity, German Americans staged protests with the intention of emphasizing the split within the ethnic community. Anti-Nazi associations were formed by German Americans to draw distinction between those who were loyal to the American public and those who maintaining political ties with Germany. Nevertheless, while the majority of ethnic community declared its support of the United States, a lesser scale of anti-Germanism emerged alongside Adolf Hitler's rise to power.<sup>26</sup>

Essentially, German American organizations existing at the outbreak of the Second World War were subjected to public scrutiny in light of Bund activity. While the majority of these associations pursued a cultural means of unification, radicalism threatened to tear apart the ethnic community. As tension rose overseas, groups like the American Aid for German War Prisoners were caught between the pressures of patriotism and the divisive nature of their ethnic identification.

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25. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 320.

26. Holian, *Perspective*, 34; Tolzmann, *Experience*, 322.

*The Outbreak of War: Perception and Internment*

When war erupted in Europe in 1939, public opinion shifted towards an even greater mistrust of the German Americans. As tensions continued to rise over the following year, the government sought to compile a record of all legal resident aliens in the United States. The process registered five million individuals nationwide by 1941. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also created an inventory of “potentially dangerous” German Americans, especially noting the memberships of pro-Nazi associations. The resulting lists were used to identify German Americans who had retained foreign citizenship shortly following American entrance into the war. Japanese Americans also were also targeted in similar efforts. A second round of registration and investigation in 1942 ensured that “German legal resident aliens with anything less of a spotless record and reputation [could] be hold under suspicion as a potential security threat.”<sup>27</sup> The outcome resulted in the arrest and internment of those labeled as “dangerous enemy aliens and Americans of questionable loyalty.”<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly, there was a distinct divide in perception towards the Germans and Japanese, as tensions rose in both the European and the Pacific. While both ethnic groups were interned as the United States entered the war, a separation of views conjured racial epithets and created varying means of treatment. As the American public was informed of Adolf Hitler’s atrocities, a criticism of violence was not commonly directed towards the German people. Instead, Americans associated National Socialism with the war crimes. On the other hand, the Japanese were dehumanized and seen as the key perpetrators of escalating tensions. The attack on Pearl Harbor also likely helped cement this growing

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27. Holian, *Perspective*, 89, 91-92, 94, 97.

28. Holian, *Perspective*, 130.

belief. Propaganda portrayed the “good German” among the Nazis, while the Japanese were collectively shown as a malevolent race. These stereotypes came to affect perceptions of German and Japanese Americans during the course of internment and throughout the war.<sup>29</sup> But the lack of racial distinction when considering the German likely allowed for an acceptance of possibility of good, humanitarian action within the German American community. Nonetheless, fears of the Nazi threat against the United States fueled the search for subversiveness among the country’s immigrants.

Therefore, it was two months prior to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor that the government began to prepare for German American internment. The process itself commenced four days before American entrance into the European warfront by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s own decree.<sup>30</sup> While internment camps were located throughout the country, jurisdiction over their management spanned the Justice Department, Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the U.S. military.

While Japanese American internment was exasperated by widespread evacuation and relocation, the German Americans faced a somewhat different fate through selective detention. Internees of these ethnicities were occasionally housed in different areas of the same facilities, although they usually occupied separate camps. Living conditions varied between overcrowded processing centers and more personal dwellings within the camps. Although families were sometimes interned together, a large portion of the facilities

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29. John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 34, 322; Holian, *Perspective*, 14.

30. Don Heinrich Tolzmann, ed., *German Americans in the World Wars: The World War Two Experience, The Internment of German-Americans*, vol. 4, sect 1, ed. Arthur D. Jacobs and Joseph E. Fallon (München: K.G. Saur, 1995), 1498; The start date of German American internment was December 7, 1941. The Enemy Alien Act and Section 21, Title 50 of the U.S. Code were cited as the preexisting authorization for alien internment upon the U.S. declaration of war against Japan (December 8, 1941); Holian, *Perspective*, 97, 135.

housed solely German males under suspicion. A number of women decided to join their imprisoned husbands “voluntarily’ . . . due to economic and family hardship.”<sup>31</sup> Others remained safely at home with their children, unsure of their husbands’ fates.

Stephen Fox argued that the psychological toll of internment created low morale among German Americans. This development was in line with the Justice Department’s intention to “intimidate the German community without alienating the general population.”<sup>32</sup> But as some internees grew to resent the restrictions of camp, their “threat” became considerably higher. The German government offered incentives to those who would give up their American residency, guaranteeing their welfare through repatriation proceedings. As a result, U.S. government feared that naturalized, first generation German Americans might also join in support of the Nazis. In hopes of preempting shifts in loyalty, the Young Men and Women’s Christian Associations delivered war relief provisions to the camps. The organizations provided entertainment and school supplies to lift the burden from the interned families. These items helped to counteract, relatively successfully, the aid given to the camps by the Nazi Party itself.<sup>33</sup>

In total, the federal government interned 10,905 German American residents and citizens. Coupled with others of European descent, German Americans comprised fifty-six percent of those interned in the U.S. over the course of the war. In addition to Japanese Americans, those of Italian heritage also composed the ranks of the detention

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31. Holian, *Perspective*, 137, 139-140.

32. Stephen Fox, *Fear Itself: Inside the FBI Roundup of German Americans During World War II* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2005), xxiv; Stephen Fox, *America's Invisible Gulag: A Biography of German American Internment & Exclusion in World War II: Memory and History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 169-170, 176-177.

33. Fox, *Gulag*, 176-177.

camps.<sup>34</sup> Overall, the internment process created a sense of isolation and exclusion, as the ethnic identity again became a means of discrimination. The treatment of German Americans provides insight into the conditions under which the American Aid for German War Prisoners functioned. Although Emil Auer was himself a naturalized citizen, his status as a first generation immigrant still aroused suspicion from the government. As Auer sent aid to the internment centers, it is also important to recognize the role the camps played in the organization's fundraising and distribution.

### *German Prisoners of War in North America*

The Allies did not confine their prisoners of war solely to incarceration in Europe, but instead distributed the servicemen across the United States and to British Commonwealth camps internationally. While the American Aid for German War Prisoners contributed a small portion of their proceeds to U.S. internment camps, the larger scope of Auer's initiative instead focused on these POWs. In total, approximately 378,000 Germans were housed in the U.S.<sup>35</sup> American treatment of these soldiers presents a larger perspective of public sentiment towards those of German descent.

While the U.S. upheld international standards for POW treatment, residents believed that the government handled the servicemen too leniently. Newspapers ran headlines declaring a national "coddling" of the prisoners.<sup>36</sup> But public outlook was not

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34. Tolzmann, *Internment*, 1498, 1516-1519; Holian, *Perspective*, 129.

35. Robert D. Billinger, *Nazi POWs in the Tar Heel State* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), xiii; David Carter, *POW, Behind Canadian Barbed Wire: Alien, Refugee and Prisoner of War Camps in Canada, 1914-1946* (Elkwater, AB: Eagle Butte Press, 1998), 191.

36. Richard P. Walker, *The Lone Star State and the Swastika: Prisoners of War in Texas* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 2001), 164-165; International standards for the treatment of prisoners of war were set forth by the Geneva Convention (1929); Dietrich Schindler and Jiří Toman, "Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War," *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions,*

always so unified under this negative opinion. A more humanizing side was taken in response to prisoner escapes, as a portion of the population understood the soldiers' desires to return home to Germany. Furthermore, as POWs often engaged in work outside of the camps, Americans became acquainted with the Germans on an individual basis. It was found that in such a situation, "Positive stereotypes replaced negative ones among those in close contact with the POWs."<sup>37</sup> Generally, there tended to be an array of perspectives, with the most adamant being against the Germans, and more restrained appreciating an intrinsic sense of commonality.

In reviewing the treatment within the camps themselves, governmental action also varied. Meredith Adams depicted the more severe handling of German prisoners as an attempt to gaining information on subversive activities. Efforts ranged from spying and interrogation to the degradation of living conditions.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, Matthias Reiss documented the positive bonds formed between American soldiers and imprisoned corporals. The guardsmen became aware of the masculinity they shared with the POWs, which resulted in a more decent treatment of the prisoners.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, American opinion and conduct towards the Germans appears to be in accordance to the level of personal interaction between the two groups. If the Americans had a high level of contact

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*and Other Documents* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1988): 339-366; Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (Chelsea, MI: Scarborough House, 1996), 305.

37. John Hammond Moore, *The Faustball Tunnel: German POWs in America and their Great Escape* (New York: Random House, 1978), 221; Robert D. Billinger, *Hitler's Soldiers in the Sunshine State: German POWs in Florida* (Gainesville, FL : University Press of Florida, 2000), 118.

38. Meredith Lentz Adams, *Murder and Martial Justice: Spying and Retribution in World War II America* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2011), xix.

39. Matthias Reiss, "Bronzed Bodies Behind Barbed Wire: Masculinity and the Treatment of German Prisoners of War in the United States during World War II," *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (2005), 475.

with the German prisoners in a fairly equalized setting, a mutual sense of understanding was able to arise in spite of national alliances.

Finally, David Carter's portrayal of German prisoners of war in Canada complements the descriptions of those housed in the United States. Carter classified the camps as Commonwealth prisons, and noted that there was an evident questioning of jurisdiction between Canadian and British authorities. Nonetheless, it did not appear as if Canadian treatment of German soldiers was greatly influenced by the conflict occurring overseas in England. Although logistically differentiated from the American facilities, Carter noted no further deviation from U.S. conduct. Most notably, Great Britain sent roughly 40,000 German prisoners of war to Canada from 1940 through 1942. During that time, the European Student Relief Fund and War Prisoner's Aid of the YMCA complemented Auer's relief work by bringing aid to the imprisoned servicemen.<sup>40</sup>

Essentially, an understanding of the prisoner of war experience lends perspective to the relief efforts of the American Aid for German War Prisoners. While a lingering degree of mistrust affected those of German descent, the treatment of the POWs portrays another perspective. Although resentment towards the German prisoners of war often existed throughout North America, personal connections with the soldiers tended to change the Allied outlook. It especially important to note that the quantity of study on the Canadian camps is far less than that compiled on the U.S. facilities.

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40. David Carter, *Canadian*, 11, 43, 61; Sheldon Kirshner, "Doc Tells of German PoWs in Canada," *Canadian Jewish News*, March 22, 2007.

*Secondary Source Overview*

Overall, the formation of the American Aid for German War Prisoners speaks to a larger history of the German American experience. While scholarly work on this war relief effort has not previously been published, various periodicals present insight into Emil Auer's experience and perspectives. These pieces are not a substitute for academic research, but provide at least a means of comparison to subsequent primary source evidence. In the absence of further secondary analysis on this war relief effort, scholarly writings contextualizing the group's formation have been examined.

During World War I and the interwar period, the German Americans experienced a shift in both ethnic identification and group cohesiveness. In hopes of avoiding persecution, the community encouraged expressions of German culture and American loyalty. The emergence more radical organizations, like the German American Bund, threatened the sense of ethnic unity and created negative publicity among the American populace. But the potential presence of "good Germans" likely allowed for the acceptance of more neutral causes.

The selective internment of German Americans may have created a heightened emphasis on bringing aid to both German Americans and the prisoners of war. Although neither group experienced unbearable conditions in the detention camps, the American populace still regarded both groups with a degree of suspicion. The emergence of humanitarian aid organizations also likely provided a sense of purpose and unity for the German American community. Emil Auer's war relief effort combined a sense of American charity, but also avoided displays of ethnic aggression.

In assessing the integrity of the information gathered, it is certain that there is not currently an extensive amount of secondary source material examining these various facets. Based often upon individual projects, oral histories interviews, and newspaper commentaries, it is difficult to wholly endorse the scholarly nature of each of these sources. It is with these understandings that this thesis will seek to present a narrative and analysis of the American Aid for German War Prisoners. Supported by this initial secondary source overview, the subsequent writing will investigate the fundraising efforts and federal mandates regulating this war relief effort. Research will draw upon collections of the organization's newsletters, Auer's personal correspondences, and government documents chronicling the group's tenure. A return to secondary source understandings will then combine with the archival findings to suggest the larger legacy of Emil Auer's relief effort.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Establishment and Motivation

By the mid-1930s, the United States had begun a slow recovery from the Great Depression. Mirroring this arduous process, German Americans had gradually regained their image as “good Americans” over the course of the interwar period. The ethnic community increasingly embraced the conventions of their adopted country over the customs of the homeland. But overseas, Adolf Hitler was amassing his stronghold in Germany. After his rise to power in 1933, the U.S. saw an influx in immigration by those seeking to escape political persecution. With this new wave of Europeans creating a source of comparison, it was soon understood that the German American community had become divided between the “hyphenated” elements of their ethnic identity.<sup>1</sup> The evolving definitions of Americanness, Germanness, and German Americanness were each in question.

It became increasingly evident that the assimilated immigrants already established in the U.S. were notably different from their predecessors. While previous groups had held strong attachment to their German roots, second-generation German Americans identified more with American culture over German tradition. Youth generally displayed

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1. Holian, *Perspective*, 14; Tolzmann, *Experience*, 317; “Hyphenated Americanism” refers to the stigmas conjured when emphasizing the ethnic roots of American citizens. It especially applied to the action of discrimination or a questioning of “Americanness” based on an individual’s ancestry. While Americans of German heritage were once were represented as “German-Americans,” the shift to emphasize loyalty to the U.S. and deconstruct ties to Germany in the 1920s and 1930s encouraged the elimination of hyphenation. The contemporary references of this ethnic group most often appear without the hyphen; Kazal, *Old Stock*, 232-233.

a “lack of interest in German associational life,”<sup>2</sup> an occurrence that further deprived German American organizations of extensive support. First-generation immigrants, on the other hand, were both influenced by reminders of their heritage and a sense of loyalty to their adopted country.

Similar trends were also present among Japanese Americans at this time. To counteract criticism from the American public and a disconnect with the *Nisei* (second-generation), the *Issei* (first-generation) adopted a policy of biculturalism. By compromising their strict adherence to Japanese culture and acknowledging the American influence on their lives, the first generation sought to perpetuate a sense of collective identity.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, recently immigrated Germans faced a struggle to assert American patriotism, appeal to the younger generations, and maintain cultural ties to their heritage.<sup>4</sup> Nearing the outbreak of war, a renewal ethnic persecution was imminent. In both immigrant groups, the greatest emphasis was therefore placed upon unification under politically neutral expressions of culture.

As German Americans of the older generations still desired an outlet for expression and congregation, the organizations that emerged immediately before the war reflected an emphasis on ethnic celebration. German intellectuals in the U.S. argued for a “middle course...of cultural mediation,” in which German tradition was preserved alongside American allegiance. Founded immediately after the First World War, the Steuben Society of America emerged as a leader on the East Coast during the interwar

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2. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 199.

3. Lon Kurashige, “The Problem of Biculturalism: Japanese American Identity and Festival before World War II,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 4 (March 2000): 1634-1635.

4. Tischauser, *Burdens*, 219.

period. Shifting its focus from politics to cohesion heading into the 1930s, the organization brought German Americans together as a unified ethnic community.<sup>5</sup>

With notions of cultural unity, the Spring Garden Association was formed in Buffalo, New York, in April 1938 under the leadership of local stamp collector Emil Auer. The group held annual German-themed festivals and also collaborated with neighboring groups like the *Schuhplattler-Gebirgstrachtenverein, Edelweiss Buffalo*.<sup>6</sup> In this manner, the Spring Garden supported camaraderie within the organization itself, but also sought to forge ties with similar ethnic associations. To perpetuate a unified front, German Americans began to understand the importance of cooperation rather than competition among their ranks. The ethnic community hoped to pursue politically neutral activity to placate emerging criticism from the American public and government.

Consequently, it is reasonable that the German American population turned to humanitarian relief at the advent of World War II. Despite reservations, the first generation was apparently torn between a sense of loyalty to the United States and concern for their relatives remaining overseas. To make amends between their desires to uphold American patriotism, maintain ethnic bonds, and display compassion for those engaged in warfare, members of the German American community organized what they perceived to be impartial acts of philanthropy.

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5. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 302, 307.

6. Emil Auer served as the first President of the Spring Garden Association from 1938 through 1947; Spring Garden Association, "History: "50 Years Ago," Spring Garden Association, <http://www.springgarden.com/history.htm> (accessed November 5, 2011); *Schuhplattler* refers to a type of folk dance, complemented by the traditional German dress of the *Gebirgstrachten*. *Edelweiss* is a type of flower found in Germany, likely being a symbolic unifier of the community. The group was declared a formal association through the distinction of *Verein*; Schuhplattler Gebirgstrachten Verein Edelweiss. "History." Schuhplattler Gebirgstrachten Verein Edelweiss Buffalo, Inc. <http://www.edelweissbuffalo.com/history.html> (accessed January 15, 2012).

Interestingly, Tolzmann argued that humanitarian relief by the ethnic community dated back to American involvement in World War I and spanned the interwar period, “Especially high on the agenda was humanitarian relief for the Old Country, an important work because of the English blockade of German ports. Organizations, churches, and individuals engaged in a massive labor of love, collecting millions of dollars before 1917 for the starving children of Germany.”<sup>7</sup> These relief initiatives were not often viewed with criticism from the U.S. government and public, as they were understood to be a form of charity for the innocent victims of war. Often working with the German Red Cross and American delegations overseas, the ethnic community momentarily evaded anti-Germanism through compassionate action.<sup>8</sup>

During the Second World War, humanitarian aid again emerged with a similar purpose, but also became a method of reunifying a divided German America. As was previously stated, Stephen Fox cited the influence of the Young Men and Women’s Christian Associations within the internment facilities after American entrance into the war.<sup>9</sup> Coupled with the Red Cross, the YMCA covered much of this stateside relief, while the Red Cross provided comprehensive aid internationally. These same organizations were equally influential in the relief brought to the prisoner of war camps in the United States. On the Canadian side, Carter cited the European Student Relief Fund and the War Prisoner’s Aid of the YMCA as especially effective in sending aid to the POWs. Jonathan Vance wrote of the importance of the Canadian POWs Association in its

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7. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 273.

8. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 297.

9. Fox, *Gulag*, 169-170.

efforts to establish communal and supportive care for the POWs.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, German Americans sought to forge unity on a more local scale and wished to coordinate similar initiatives. On these grounds, the American Aid for German War Prisoners was established in Buffalo under the same leadership as the Spring Garden Association.

Born in Munich in 1904, Emil Auer immigrated to the United States at the age of twenty, and was formally naturalized as an American citizen in 1931.<sup>11</sup> As a resident of Buffalo, Auer served as the first president of the Spring Garden Association in 1938, and the founder of the American Aid organization in 1940. A Quaker by practice, Auer's experience with war relief dated back to the end of the First World War when he received supplies from American Quakers in Germany.<sup>12</sup> Yet, beyond philanthropy, this first-generation German American was also involved in more extreme elements of the reemerging ethnic community. In the early years of its founding, Auer became a leader of the German American Bund.

The Bund was established in March 1936 at a Buffalo convention of the Bund der Freunde des Neuen Deutschland (Friends of New Germany). Gaining national attention for his voluble displays of Nazi support, the National Chairman of the German-American Bund, Fritz Kuhn, appeared before the House of Representatives in 1939. The Special

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10. Carter, *Canadian*, 11; The Canadian POW Relatives Association coordinated efforts to process prisoner of war records, managed parcel exchanges with relatives, and brought "all possible comfort" to the POWs imprisoned in Canada; Jonathan F. Vance, "Canadian Relief Agencies and Prisoners of War, 1939-1945," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31/2 (Summer 1996): 133-135.

11. "Emil Auer," *Tacoma News Tribune*, February 8, 1996, obit. sec.; U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York, "Emil Auer," U.S. Naturalization Records and Petitions, National Archives, College Park, MD.

12. "Die Amerikanische Hilfsaktion für Kriegsgefangene," *AGZ Rundbrief* 43/84 (1984): 135; "Emil Auer," *Tacoma News Tribune*, February 8, 1996; Emil Auer to Homer Fox, June 10, 1945, File Revoked, American Aid for German War Prisoners Reports, Box 018, President's War Relief Control Board Collection: 1939-1946, Record Group 220, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter cited as American Aid, NARA); "Revoked" is the designation given to one of the files containing American Aid reports at the National Archives.

Committee on Un-American Activities questioned Kuhn on the “subversive” nature of the Bund, and its affiliations with National Socialism abroad. Although the Committee could bring no formal charges against Kuhn on these accounts, the leader was indicted for the embezzlement of Bund funds.<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of the hearings, the Kuhn was questioned on the involvement of other German Americans in his radical group. As the association was founded in Buffalo, Emil Auer was indicated as a local leader of the Bund. Although Kuhn denied Auer’s connection to the organization, investigations and hearings towards end of the World War II proved the Committee’s claims to be true. In 1923, Auer participated in the Munich “Beer Hall Putsch” as a member of the Nazi Party. In explanation of his actions, Auer said, “I have always avoided the occasion of trouble or violence, but I was only 17 years old at the time of the putsch.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps not anticipating Hitler’s ultimate intentions, Auer was drawn the Party at an early age.

Auer acknowledged his position as a former Buffalo Bund leader, but placed great emphasis on his role as a dissenter. He spoke of Kuhn’s attempts to establish uniformed Ordungs-Dienst (Order Service), an even more vocal and aggressive division of the Bund. Auer claimed that he said, “As long as I am unit leader in Buffalo...there will be no uniformed groups there.”<sup>15</sup> He stated that the formation of the Spring Garden Association was an effort to break ties with the rapidly radicalizing German American Bund. He disbanded Buffalo’s branch of the Bund, and prohibited Spring Garden

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13. Holian, *German-Americans*, 26; Canedy, *Nazis*, 182, 184, 199; Tolzmann, *Experience*, 320.

14. U.S. House of Representatives, “Investigation of House Resolution 282.” Special Committee on Un-American Activities: 1938-1944; Auer Admits Part in the Nazi Putsch,” *Niagara Falls Gazette*, January 15, 1944, p. 3.

15. “Buffalo’s Ex-Bund Chief Testifies He Fought Kuhn Orders,” *Salamanca Republican-Press*, January 13, 1944, p. 8; “Memorandum,” President’s Board, June 26, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 1.

members from having involvement in the former group.<sup>16</sup> Although Emil Auer participated in German political associations leading up to World War II, his change in focus reflected the shifts of the larger German American community. Auer's establishment of the Spring Garden Association indicated the growing importance of German American culture and neutrality.

In this sense, the formation of the American Aid for German War Prisoners is put into greater perspective. When his allegiance to the United States was called into question during the course of later war trials, Auer adamantly asserted his intention to remain removed from foreign aggression. He registered with the United States draft board during the conflict as a "contentious objector...[who] always avoided the occasion of trouble or violence."<sup>17</sup> His decision indicated the sense of confliction first-generation German Americans experienced as tensions rose overseas. Auer pursued humanitarian action to aid those immediately affected by a war he did not endorse. Yet, as a recent immigrant, his residual connection to Germany encouraged lingering support for the citizens of his homeland. Auer hoped to uphold his religious values as a Quaker through charitable giving. He shifted cultural pursuits to politically neutral war relief, and sought to sever his ties with Nazism for ideological and patriotic motivations. For these apparent reasons, Emil Auer attempted to unite the ethnic community through philanthropy, and simultaneously sought to lessen criticisms of German American loyalty.

As a result, the American Aid for German War Prisoners was formed in 1940.

Since the United States was not yet involved in the war by this time, the process of

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16. "Emil Auer asserts Buffalo Members Held Bund Racket," *Salamanca Republican-Press*, January 14, 1944, p. 1; Police Executives Meet At Blassdell," *Erie County Independent*, May 25, 1939, p. 1.

17. "Auer is Quizzed on Conscientious Objector Status," *Salamanca Republican-Press*, January 15, 1944, p. 8.

applying for permission to raise funds was not incredibly arduous. Jurisdiction over relief agencies was given to the Department of State, Division of Controls in 1939. The Department sought to compile an inventory of the philanthropic organizations and prohibited collaboration with the governments of the warring powers.<sup>18</sup> The 1939 Neutrality Act defined and regulated this war relief by stating,

Nothing in this section [8] shall be construed to prohibit the solicitation or collection of funds and contributions to be used for medical aid and assistance, or for food and clothing to relieve human suffering, when such solicitation or collection of funds and contributions is made on behalf of and for use by any person or organization which is not acting for or on behalf of any such government, but all such solicitations and collections of funds and contributions shall be in accordance with and subject to such rules and regulations as may be prescribed.<sup>19</sup>

This mandate determined the rules regulating early war relief. The agreements ensured that no aid could be prohibited to either side of the war, but that cooperation overseas remained neutral. Meeting those requirements, the federal government officially registered Auer's relief effort on September 27, 1940.<sup>20</sup>

The American Aid for German War Prisoners sought to bring the ethnic community closer together under one cause. Therefore, solicitation was originally focused solely on German Americans. The group's application to the Department State read, "[There shall be a] collecti[on] of money, clothes usf. [sic] through letters or personal contact with various German-American Soci[e]ties and individuals within the USA. Through voluntarely [sic] appeals in various German language newspapers in this

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18. U.S. Department of State, Application for Registration, October 2, 1940, File 1, American Aid, NARA.

19. Sec. 8. (a) of the 1939 Neutrality Act bans the collection of funds on behalf of the foreign governments of recognized warring countries; U.S. Department of State, "Neutrality Act of November 4, 1939," *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 500-501.

20. The American Aid for German War Prisoners was registered under Permit Number 374; U.S. Department of State, Application, October 2, 1940, American Aid, NARA.

country. Through collecting boxes in German clubs and establishments. (IF PERMISSABLE).”<sup>21</sup> By these means, Auer intended to garner support through German American organizations already in operation. As he appealed to ethnic communities nationwide, publicity in the media allowed his group to gain donations and recognition. The German American press had been on the decline since the interwar period and took measurably less political stances leading into the war.<sup>22</sup> But as language still remained the one sure unifier of the first-generation, and Auer’s organization was of humanitarian intention, this approach to fundraising appeared especially effective.

At the onset of collection efforts, Auer’s focus remained on the prisoner of war camps across the national border. Eager to organize the relief initiative, he petitioned the Canadian government for permission to distribute care packages. But the authorities instead instructed Auer to operate through the Prisoners of War Aid of the YMCA, located in New York City, in lieu of sending donations directly.<sup>23</sup> Undeterred, he coordinated with this larger organization, while also seeking to forge his own path of independent war relief elsewhere. Almost immediately following registration, the group pursued permission to send aid to Commonwealth camps in Jamaica. Accordingly, Auer was granted the ability to provide relief to German and Italian POWs and civilian internees housed in these British detention facilities.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the early years of war, the American Aid organization continued global expansion. In April 1941, the State Department extended the group’s jurisdiction

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21. “Usf.” is the abbreviation of the German phrase, “und so fort.” The English translation is the equivalent to “and so forth;” U.S. Department of State, Application, October 2, 1940, American Aid, NARA.

22. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 309-310.

23. Emil Auer to Mr. Price, U.S. Department of State, February 25, 1941, File 1, American Aid, NARA.

24. Emil Auer to U.S. Department of State, October 14, 1940, File 1, American Aid, NARA.

to include Surname, as well as the Dutch Possessions in the West and East Indies. By September of the same year, the relief effort had grown to encompass the German and Italian prisoners in British camps, spanning Bermuda to St. Lucia, and extending to the Dominican Republic. Two months later, Auer sought to raise funds for Axis POWs housed in India. Finally, shortly following American entrance into the war, the American Aid for German War Prisoners had grown to support prisoner of war and internment camps from Canada to Australia, the Caribbean to South America, England to India, and finally, the United States.<sup>25</sup> Despite such far-reaching relief, local initiatives tended to be the greatest strength of the aid organization. The primary focus of the group effort was on the ten POW camps in Canada, as the prisons were in close proximity to Auer's Western New York headquarters. It is likely for this primary reason that the organization's attention rested so greatly on the Canadian prisoners of war.

While Emil Auer's efforts can be attributed to his personal background and community involvement, others involved in the initiative were likely motivated by slightly different causes. As many first generation immigrants remained in contact with any family members that still resided overseas, German Americans had immediate connections to German POWs. As a result, some supporters of the American Aid organization sought to directly assist their imprisoned relatives. Emil Auer's group allowed them a neutral outlet to maintain those ancestral connections.

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25. Emil Auer to Leonard Price, Department of State, April 5, 1941 and Emil Auer to U.S. Department of State, September 24, 1941, File 1, American Aid, NARA. Emil Auer to U.S. Department of State, November 5, 1941 and Emil Auer to U.S. Department of State, January 3, 1942 and Emil Auer to American Red Cross, December 9, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA; Report of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, January 1942, Vol. 9, Prisoners of War Bulletin, microfilm, New York City Public Library Periodicals and Microfilms, New York, NY (hereafter cited as American Aid, POW Bulletin).

Such was true with a young member of the Germany American community in East Greenbush, New York. Born in Panknin, Germany on September 13, 1921, Erika Plath's connection to the New York Capital District dated back to her early childhood. Upon relocating to the United States in the late 1920s, Plath attended grammar school locally and ultimately graduated from Van Rensselaer High School in Rensselaer, New York. After completing her education in 1940, Plath immediately joined the commercial workforce.<sup>26</sup>

Erika Plath's involvement in the ethnic community was evident in her adolescent years. Her presence at local Amerikadeutscher Volksbund (German American League) festivals, such as the Völkischer Tag (German Day) in Schenectady, New York,<sup>27</sup> demonstrated an evidently strong connection with German tradition preceding the war. Although she was largely raised in New York State, it is apparent that Plath was still tightly rooted in the customs of her native country. For this reason, she fell in line somewhere between the first and second generations: coming of age immersed amid American culture, yet embracing a sense of ethnic heritage unlike many others in her position.

Upon the eruption of war in Europe, Plath was especially affected by news coverage detailing the imprisonment of German soldiers on Lake Ontario. Articles appearing her local newspaper spoke of the hurried assemblage of the prisoner of war camps over the border, "England's decision to use Canada as a prison base for war

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26. Erika Plath, "Graduation Memories," [ca. 1933], File 12, Erika Plath Papers: 1931-1945, Box 1, New York State Library Manuscripts and Special Collections, Albany, NY (hereafter cited as Erika Plath Papers); Erika Plath to Hans Toepfer, [ca. 1933-1939], File 2, Erika Plath Papers; U.S. Census Bureau. "Elizabeth Kray [*sic*]." 1930 Federal Population Census, U.S. Naturalization Records and Petitions, National Archives, College Park, MD; Graduation Program, Van Rensselaer High School, June 21, 1940, File 12, Erika Plath Papers.

27. Amerikadeutscher Volksbung, "Völkischer Tag," July 19, 1936, File 14, Erika Plath Papers.

captives was reached suddenly and there was no time for more elaborate preparation. Some of the prisoners are in temporary camps where they are necessarily more strictly regimented and every moment is under inspection of armed guards because there are no physical barriers.”<sup>28</sup> Articles of this nature portrayed the relatively poor conditions the prisoners faced due to the rapid construction of the camps and likely concerned those with the strongest ties to Germany. Tuning in to additional news coverage, Plath was further informed that a German POW bearing her mother’s maiden name was imprisoned in Canada. Concerned for his health and hoping to forge a connection, she sought to contact the serviceman.

Therefore, in February 1941, Plath corresponded with Emil Auer in an appeal to his camp connections in Canada,

I read an article recently in the *Albany Times Union* which acquainted me with your committee and I am interested for I am of German origin and have also heard that a person and cousin might be [*sic*] in one of the prison camps. I do not know exactly where he is and would like to know if you could help me in locating him and thus finding out if we are related. The prisoner’s name is Ernest Krey, and according to the shortwave broadcast, he was a flight commander. He may have been interned in the camp at Espanola, Ontario. If I could get in touch with him I would like to know on what section of Germany he had lived and if he know of a family by the name of Franz Plath whose wife’s maiden name was Elsa Krey, daughter of Mrs. Berta Krey of Panknin, Germany. If you can help me, I will greatly appreciate the service. I would also like to know if I could be of service in helping your organization in the work it is doing.<sup>29</sup>

Plath’s familial ties to the prisoners likely increased her motivation to become involved in the war relief initiative. Upon arriving in the United States, the Plath and Krey families, related through Erika Plath’s mother, occupied the same household in East

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28. W.W. Chaplin, “War Prisoners Held Near State Border,” *Albany Times Union*, October 4, 1940, file 15, Erika Plath Papers; Guy Richards, “Empire’s Jail Holds Babel of Foes,” *Sunday News*, November 17, 1940, file 15, Erika Plath Papers.

29. Erika Plath to Emil Auer, [ca. January-February 1941], file 15, Erika Plath Papers.

Greenbush.<sup>30</sup> But since her immigration came at such an early age, Plath did not seem to know a vast amount about her relatives remaining in Germany. Nevertheless, she was concerned enough to inquire into the background and wellbeing of someone who could potentially be her cousin. Such an occurrence indicates her continued connection to Germany despite being raised in the United States.

Yet, it does not appear that Plath was able to directly contact the serviceman in Canada. Although the Geneva Convention (1929) allowed relief organizations the opportunity to send parcels to the POWs, the imprisoned soldiers were only allowed to write letters home to their family members.<sup>31</sup> The inquiry would likely have gone through the Canadian POW Relatives Association, but there appeared to be no evidence of correspondence with the group. Since records did not verify that Erika Plath was directly related to Ernest Krey, the Director of Internment in Ottawa, Ontario, did not approve of their correspondence. He further stated that if the American Aid for German War Prisoners were to “attempt contacts or abuses of the privileges granted...the society [would be] placed on the Black List.”<sup>32</sup> As Auer wished to remain on amiable terms with the authorities, he did not pursue the inquiry for Plath any further. Despite the setback in direct communication, Erika Plath eagerly extended her help to the war relief effort in early 1941, “According to your letter you spoke of opening if possible a branch of your organization in this section of the state. I would be willing to cooperate with you in any

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30. 1930 Census, “Elizabeth Kray [sic], NARA.

31. Section IV, Article 35 states the international allowance of prisoner of war correspondence with the outside world. Section IV, Article 36 states the permission of care packages for the POWs; Schindler and Toman, “Convention,” 349; “Copies and Excerpts,” American Aid for German War Prisoners, February 1943, POW Bulletin.

32. Vance, “Canadian Relief,” 127; H. Stethem to Emil Auer, December 25, 1940, File 15, Erika Plath Papers.

way possible.”<sup>33</sup> With prospects of aiding long-lost relatives and those of similar heritage, Plath began her own local division of the American Aid organization.

In one sense, Auer and Plath shared an ethnic heritage that motivated their mutual involvement in humanitarian relief. Both understood the importance of aiding those affected by war, and each was actively involved in the German American community. But while Emil Auer was raised overseas amid another time and culture, the majority of Plath’s adolescence was spent the United States. Therefore, while Erika Plath’s direct ties to Germany were to a lesser degree than Auer’s, the potential for familial connections with the POWs spurred her interest in philanthropy. In this way, the American Aid for German War Prisoners became a unifier of the ethnic community and overcame generational differences.

Interestingly, Erika Plath’s participation in humanitarian relief was not confined solely to Auer’s initiative. Plath sought involvement in organizations similar to the American Aid, as was indicated through her collection of pamphlets distributed by the Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk (Kyffhäuser War Relief).<sup>34</sup> Seeking to send relief German military hospitals, the Philadelphia-based Kyffhäuser intended to better the living conditions of those involved in the war, albeit with a slightly different focus than Auer.<sup>35</sup> Their range of relief also varied greatly from that of the American Aid organization. The group intended to raise funds for injured soldiers and citizens in the warzones of Germany and German-occupied Poland.<sup>36</sup>

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33. Erika Plath to Emil Auer, [ca. January-February 1941], File 15, Erika Plath Papers.

34. The distinction “Kyffhäuser” refers to a mountainous region in Germany; “Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk,” July 1941, File 10, Erika Plath Papers.

35. “Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk,” July 1941, File 10, Erika Plath Papers.

36. U.S. Department of State, “Application for Registration,” October 4, 1939, File 1, Kyffhäuser League of German War Veterans in U.S.A. Reports, Box 105, President’s War Relief Control Board

The Krieghilfswerk itself was essentially a subset of the larger “Kyffhäuserbund, League of German War Veterans in U.S.A.” Described by historian Heinrich Winkler as a “veritable mass movement” at the end of the nineteenth century, *Kriegervereine* (warriors associations) like the Kyffhäuserbund der Deutschen Landkriegerverbände (Kyffhäuser Union of German Warrior Associations) had united the “‘ordinary folk,’ who cherished the memories of their years of military service.”<sup>37</sup> Following the conclusion of World War I, German veterans who immigrated to the United States formed their own division overseas.<sup>38</sup> Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, these former soldiers sought to contribute humanitarian relief to those injured over the course of battle, as they knew firsthand the consequence of warfare.

In November 1939, the group’s National Commander, Karl Schumacher, described his organization’s motivations through their war relief application, “Knowing what a War means, we could like to help those who have to suffer from the present War.”<sup>39</sup> He further stated, “A war creates sufferings on both sides. Permit me to draw your attention to the fact that we in the true spirit of men who know war by experience and in the true spirit of comradeship...wanted to help suffers on both sides.”<sup>40</sup> The veterans may have possessed a connection to the soldiers fighting in the German Army due to the very nature of their earlier service, but their efforts remained neutral like

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Collection, Records of Temporary Committee, Commissions and Boards, RG 220, National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter cited as Kyffhäuser, NARA); Karl Schumacher to American Red Cross, File 1, April 23, 1940, Kyffhäuser, Box 105, NARA, 1.

37. Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 249.

38. Official authorization of the Kyffhäuser Krieghilfswerk was issued under Permit Number 202; Karl Schumacher to U.S. Department of State, November 19, 1939, File 1, Kyffhäuser, Box 105, NARA.

39. Schumacher to Department of State, November 19, 1939, Kyffhäuser, NARA.

40. Schumacher to Red Cross, April 23, 1940, Kyffhäuser, NARA, 1.

Auer's cause. Rather than bringing aid solely to the Axis Powers, they sought to send relief to all nationalities of wounded soldiers under German care.

As a point of clarification, Schumacher emphasized that his association was "in no way connected with the German Government or Army according to information received by the Germany Embassy in Washington."<sup>41</sup> However, the organization sought to work with the NS Reichskriegerbund (National Socialist Reich Warriors Association), the transitory name of the original German Kyffhäuser. As the "NS" distinction in the name signified the group's affiliation with the Nazis, it is relatively surprising that the Krieghilfswerk did not encounter further scrutiny at its start.

Despite such dubious alliances, Schumacher's initiative remained markedly loyal to the United States, and wished solely to provide aid as an alleviation of wartime suffering. A first generation veteran spoke openly about a similar sentiment,

I came to this country in September 1923 and took out my American citizen papers in April 1929 and believe to be considered a good citizen in our community...I have fought in world war, was wounded and became a prisoner of the French. My sympathies stretch out to all common peoples in Europe at the present time. Naturally, I should like to give also to the poor people and wounded soldiers in Germany who are the tools of their government.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of the mainstream fear of the rise of American Nazism, the German American veterans representing the Kyffhäuser did not seem to align with Hitler's wartime agenda. Instead, members of the group were sympathetic to those most highly affected by the violence in Europe. The veterans' status as first generation immigrants nearly ensured

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41. U.S. Department of State, Application, October 4, 1939, Kyffhäuser, NARA, 2.

42. O.W. Kreutzer to Department of State, United States Government, November 6, 1940, File 2, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA.

that strong ties remained to Germany, but they were not in a position, nor seemingly wished to take sides in the conflict.

While the Kyffhäuser appealed to a narrower base of German Americans in comparison to the American Aid, the general approach of both groups was comparable. The veterans' methods of raising funds were especially similar to Auer's. To secure donations, the Kriegshilfswerk intended to "solicit or to collect contributions at our Post meetings or at charity affairs for this purpose or at meetings at other German American Societies or to ask in pamphlets or in American newspapers in the German language for contributions."<sup>43</sup> This appeal to established German American organizations is especially important, as it again highlights the desire to create a cohesive ethnic community. Much like Auer's intent to use German language outlets, Schumacher utilized print medium as a means of generating support. But it is also essential to note that the Kyffhäuser's initiatives seemed to overlay the fundraising target of similar organizations like the American Aid for German War Prisoners. Instead of working in unison on humanitarian relief, the two groups unknowingly competed for the same market of donors.

Along these lines, the State Department issued a letter to Kriegshilfswerk, questioning the initiative's effectiveness in comparison to the work of larger relief organizations. In reply, Schumacher stated that the veterans' perspectives as former soldiers were more conducive to providing relief than Red Cross. The group reasoned that strictly humanitarian associations understood less of war's destructive nature than those who had experienced it firsthand. The National Commander also offered open criticism of the Neutrality Act of 1939 and its tendency to favor of the Allied side of

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43. U.S. Department of State, Application, October 4, 1939, Kyffhäuser, NARA, 1.

conflict. He emphasized, "From the beginning, we wanted to be neutral in spirit and not only help the German wounded but also the wounded soldiers of the other nations...[as the repeal of the arms embargo] benefits only one side of the warring nations there should be no objection to our desire to help those suffering on the other side."<sup>44</sup> Schumacher argued unwaveringly with the State Department, vying for the continued authorization of their relief initiatives overseas. He also took a strong stand against U.S. policy, an unusual occurrence for German Americans leading up to World War II.<sup>45</sup> With permission granted to continue their efforts, Kyffhäuser prepared plans for the expansion of its war relief.

In the same month marking the formation of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, the Krieghilfswerk also applied to send relief to German POWs and civilian internees detained in Canada. Having received a letter from the German Seaman's Mission in September 1940 requesting support, the organization decided that the appeal complied with the Kyffhäuser's wartime philanthropy. A petition to the State Department in January 1941 asked for a formal amendment to acknowledge their permission to aid German Canadian internees. A similar request was made help the internees in Jamaica, but the government in the second case denied Schumacher's appeal.<sup>46</sup> The more local influence and direct appeal of Canada likely motivated the group to help the new cause, similar to the initial intentions of Auer's group. Pressures to downplay the

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44. U.S. Department of State to the Kyffhäuser, October 27, 1939 and Karl Schumacher to U.S. Department of State, November 8, 1939, File 1, Kyffhäuser, Box 105.

45. Tolzmann, *Experience*, 309-310.

46. Karl Schumacher to U.S. Department of State, September 6, 1940 and Cordell Hull to The Kyffhäuser, December 23, 1940, File 1, Kyffhäuser, Box 105, NARA; Karl Schumacher to U.S. Department of State, United States Government, January 18, 1941, File 2, Kyffhäuser, box 105, NARA.

Krieghilfswerk's involvement with German agencies abroad may also have played a factor.

Therefore, by the fall of 1940, these two humanitarian organizations were in full operation in Canada. Sanctioned by the State Department, the relief efforts allowed for an outlet of philanthropy and community organization. The formation of each initiative arose out of the evolving nature of the German American identity. Compared to the organizations that had been desecrated by anti-German hysteria during World War I, the groups emerging during the Second World War were more readily assimilated. As they wished to avoid renewed persecution, the majority of German Americans emanated political neutrality and American patriotism. First generation immigrants comprised the largest percentage of participants in ethnic societies, as they retained ties to their homeland. While these individuals intended to remain loyal to the American public, they also wished to provide aid for those of similar heritage, familial connection, and the victims of warfare.

Both the American Aid for German War Prisoners and the Kyffhäuserbund took similar measures in their approaches of appealing to the German American community. Auer's emphasis on humanitarian compassion and religious duty allowed his group to avoid political scrutiny. Schumacher stressed his organization's neutrality, as the veterans themselves knew the perils of combat and merely wished to send aid. In each case, first-generation immigrants drove the relief efforts and appealed to the larger German American community for support and alliance. Yet, there was imminent potential for competition and duplication as both groups pursued the same cause.

Consequently, as the war progressed, these relief efforts were not consistently compared to the more radical groups of the time. In lieu of strict ethnic persecution, bureaucratic campaigns of consolidation would take a partial role in their eventual demise. While suspicion of allegiance lingered as the war waged on, the anti-German hysteria of earlier years was not truly revived. German Americans largely avoided the intense suspicion that had plagued their existence during the First World War. As a result, humanitarian efforts were able to unify the ethnic community.

## CHAPTER 3.

## Suspicion and Consolidation

In the early months of 1941, the fundraising efforts of the American Aid for German War Prisoners and Kyffhäuser Krieghilfswerk were meeting success nationwide. Emil Auer's network of chapters included German American communities on the East Coast through the Midwest. Humanitarian efforts had grown to involve those of the younger generations, among them being Erika Plath. The Kyffhäuser Krieghilfswerk was also pursuing similar grounds, but had the advantage of appealing directly to German veterans across the country. Centering attention on the Canadian prisoner of war and internment camps, the Kyffhäuser shifted its efforts from the more distant wartime hospitals overseas to a North American focus.

The American Aid for German War Prisoners pursued a combination of fundraising campaigns. Auer sent Erika Plath printed collection booklets to document the monetary collections she acquired. Beyond direct donations of this sort, the group sold 50¢ cards bearing German stamps. Auer also sought contributions of books, entertainment, sporting equipment, and household goods for the camps.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, interned seamen in Nebraska made Christmas cards to offset a deficiency in resources, *“Es war schwierig, genügend Geldmittel aufzubringen. Wir verkauften Weihnachtskarten, die ein in Fort Lincoln internierter Seemann herstellte, sowie künstliche Edelweiß*

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1. Emil Auer to Erika Plath, March 13, 1941, file 9, Erika Plath Papers; Nealeigh, “CARD,” *German Postal Specialist*; American Aid for German War Prisoners, Report #7, February 1942, POW Bulletin.

– *Blumen* [It was difficult to raise sufficient funds. We sold Christmas cards, which were made by the interned sailors at Fort Lincoln, as well as artistic Edelweiss – flowers].”<sup>2</sup>

Although the POWs could not be used to manufacture items specifically for war purposes, the imprisoned soldiers were allowed creative outlets that helped subsidize the cost of the camps.

Both the American Aid and Kyffhäuserbund hosted local fundraising dinners with preexisting German American associations. These events helped to perpetuate notions of cohesion, as the ethnic community came together in pursuit of a unified cause.

Furthermore, the two organizations learned of each other’s similar pursuits in 1941 and collaborated in a campaign to sell holiday packages. This instance appeared to be the first interaction between the two groups, as the potential for cooperation became apparent.

The donations most often went to purchase “sundries” for the prisoners of war. These items included cigarettes, small care packages, and oftentimes clothing.<sup>3</sup>

While the American Aid organization did not seem to encounter much resistance in the first months of its operation, the Kyffhäuser likely experienced slightly different circumstances. The formal name of the organization changed in November 1940 from the “Kyffhäuserbund” to “The Kyffhäuser, League of German War Veterans in U.S.A.”<sup>4</sup>

While the distinction, “*Bund*,” simply indicates a German federation, association, or union, the term increasingly took on a negative connotation in the U.S. in light of the

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2. Pohlig, “Hilfsaktion,” *AGZ Rundbrief*; Auer to Plath, March 13, 1941, Erika Plath Papers; Article 37 of the Geneva Convention (1929) states that prisoners of war cannot be used for the benefit of “operations of the war;” Schindler and Toman, “Convention,” 347.

3. Nealeigh, “CARD,” *Postal Specialist*; American Aid, Report #7, February 1942, Erika Plath Papers; “Hitler’s Victories are Celebrated Here; 11,000 Aid Fund for Kin of Reich War Dead,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1940.

4. Karl Schumacher to U.S. Department of State, November 13, 1940, file 1, Kyffhäuser, box 105, NARA, 2.

German American Bund hearings. The Kyffhäuser's ties to the Reichskriegerbund in Germany also feasibly perpetuated greater scrutiny of the organization.

Jurisdiction over these relief efforts may have been granted to the State Department in 1939, but the evolution of the war encouraged a change in authority. As investigations uncovered that "no less than seven hundred organizations in the United States were at work collecting funds and attempting to launch a relief program overseas,"<sup>5</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought alternative measures to manage the aid organizations. As a result, the President's Committee on War Relief Agencies was introduced on May 13, 1941. Although the State Department remained involved as a consultant, the President's Committee took formal control of foreign-aimed relief. Headed by Joseph Davies, Fredrick Keppel, and Charles Taft, the group was experienced in both philanthropy and foreign affairs, and saw the importance of condensing the number of organizations providing aid.<sup>6</sup>

There also was an increasing emphasis on international organizations over local war relief. In 1940, Department of External Affairs had recognized the Canadian Red Cross Society as "Canada's official voluntary aid society."<sup>7</sup> Canadian officials increasingly accentuated the importance of streamlining fundraising efforts. The President's Committee studied the actions of the Canadian National Advisory Board and made similar conclusions supporting consolidation. It was with this last prospect in mind

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5. Wayne McMillen, "The War Relief Agencies," *Social Service Review* 17, no. 3 (Sept. 1943): 304; President's Committee on War Relief Agencies, "Interim Report," *U.S. President's War Relief Control Board: Miscellaneous Publications and Reports*, October 4, 1941, University of California Library Documents Division, Richmond, CA, 13.

6. McMillen, "War Relief," 304.

7. Vance, "Canadian Relief," 126.

that each relief group was required to resubmit an application.<sup>8</sup> The Committee sought to especially assess the efficiency and necessity of each group, but also likely the potential for subversiveness. As a consequence of these inquiries, the Kriegshilfswerk attempted to reinvent its image in the months leading up to America's entrance into the war.

As criticisms of the Kyffhäuser dated back to mid-1940, the group was required to overcome an extensive negative image for this new Committee. Newspaper articles portrayed the group's fundraising efforts as celebrations of German victories abroad. The *New York Times* quoted two members of the League who said, "This affair [a gathering of the German-American Conference of Greater New York] is to demonstrate our love and devotion to the country of our birth. . . We do not have to hang our heads in shame. If the French or English were winning there would be fireworks in Times Square."<sup>9</sup> The writer of the article seemed to draw attention to the most outspoken German Americans in attendance in order to question the loyalty of the ethnic community. Also emphasized in the article was the veterans' status as first-generation immigrants from Germany. The event itself was a unifying experience for the German American community, as it assembled more than three hundred organizations in the area. But the publicity negatively affected the Kyffhäuser's reputation rather than bringing the community closer together.

In response to the article, one concerned citizen further criticized the Kyffhäuser's efforts. In a letter to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, Ella Wylie wrote,

Such demonstrations are truly UNAMERICAN and should be looked into. This is the sort of thing that paved the way for Hitler's notions in the smaller countries of Europe, and should be wiped out here. If these

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8. Merle Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1963), 432;

9. "Hitler's Victories are Celebrated Here; 11,000 Aid Fund for Kin of Reich War Dead," *New York Times*, May 20, 1940, p. 11, File 1, Kyffhäuser, Box 105, NARA.

people are such admirers of Hitler and his scrupulous methods, let them go over to Germany and help him win the war there. These people could not truly believe in our Constitution or they would not uphold Hitler's aims and ambitions.<sup>10</sup>

Wylie emphasized the importance of neutrality and her perception of the organization's unpatriotic nature. Although such allegations were certainly not to the same extent as anti-German hysteria of World War II, this reaction demonstrated the rising tensions among the American populace. The State Department may not have taken Wylie's complaints seriously in their more comprehensive registration of war relief agencies. But the President's Committee was more likely to review these records and inquire into the group's potential for seditious activity.

In hopes of overcoming their unfavorable image, the Kriegshilfswerk revitalized its efforts to exude neutrality, morality, and forge positive relations with the public. In the organization's resubmitted application, National Adjutant Walter Hachsler stated that the group intended to, above all, "uphold camaraderie" among the war veterans. The organization likely sought to portray a sense of unity and loyalty to which the larger populace could relate. Such an idea was complemented by their intention "to follow the century old tradition of German immigrants, to become good American citizens."<sup>11</sup> With assertions of patriotism and descriptions of historic legacy, the Kyffhäuser hoped to confirm their alliance with the American people. The report further established the need to "foster German Language and culture... and to uphold the good German reputation in this country." Not only were Kyffhäuser members growing nervous of the accumulating tension within the United States, they believed it to be necessary to engage in public

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10. Ella Wylie to Cordell Hull, May 20, 1940, file 1, Kyffhäuser, Box 105, NARA.

11. Walter Hachsler to the President's Committee on War Relief Agencies, Explanation Sheet, May 10, 1941, File 2, Kyffhäuser, Box 105, NARA, 2.

relation campaigns and reassert their political neutrality. At the same time, these actions also demonstrated a continuing emphasis on the culture and unity of the ethnic community.

In another newspaper, the *Kyffhäuser* was rather positively portrayed as an “anti-Nazi” organization. Yet, in that same article, the veterans were wrongfully accused of interacting with the German Red Cross and became under investigation by the American Red Cross in Michigan. Conflicting opinions made it perceivably difficult discern the true intentions of the organization. When the State Department inquired into their activity, Karl Schumacher was quick to reassure the government that the Red Cross’s allegations were incorrect and that the group did not have ties to other German agencies abroad.<sup>12</sup> Again, while the government took note of these accusations, the State Department did not act immediately on their suspicions, but instead left matters up to the President’s Committee on War Relief Agencies.

Oddly, as collection efforts ran strong into mid-1941, there seemed to be less inquiry directly into the group’s intentions. But while public criticism may have diminished, governmental action took its own toll on the organization. In June 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8785 in an effort to halt the transference of funds to foreign powers. EO 8785 established a licensing program with the Treasury Department for organizations seeking to transfer funds to belligerent countries. As Germany was included in this list, the *Kyffhäuser*’s interactions with the Berlin-based

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12. “Red Cross Unit asks Inquiry on Anti-Nazis: Michigan Chapter Questions Fund Collections Laid to Group,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1940, [n.pag], File 1, *Kyffhäuser*, Box 104, NARA; Karl Schumacher to U.S. Department of State, April 30, 1940, File 1, *Kyffhäuser*, Box 105, NARA.

Reichskriegerbund finally came under scrutiny.<sup>13</sup> Based upon the stipulations of the Executive Order and an investigation by the President's Committee, the Kyffhäuser's funds were rather suddenly suspended by the federal government in July 1941 without much further information given to the group.<sup>14</sup>

Hearing of their troubles, Emil Auer immediately requested that any additional money raised by the Kyffhäuser be transferred to the American Aid for German War Prisoners, as both organizations had been pursuing similar causes. His September newsletter to American Aid donors detailed a meeting between the two groups in New York the month prior,

*Am 30. August war Ihr Landesvorsitzender Gast des 'Kyffhaeuser Hilfswerkes' [sic] und in einer sehr wertvollen Aussprache mit den Herren in New York kotten eine Basis fuer eine gute Zusammenarbeit gefunden werden....Leider sind seit Juni die Gelder des 'Kyffhaeuser' von der Regierung gesperrt worden, doch hoffen wir, dass dieser Tage das Geld wieder frei geben wird. [On August 30, our regional chairman was a guest of the 'Kyffhaeuser Hilfswerkes' [sic] and had a very valuable conversation with the gentlemen in New York, during which a good base for cooperation was found....Unfortunately, the 'Kyffhaeuser's' money was shut down by the government, but we hope that it will be given back to them again soon].<sup>15</sup>*

When writing to the war relief's supporters, Auer emphasizes the likelihood for future coordination between the two groups. Such an occurrence supports his efforts to align and unify with other organizations within the German American community. Although Auer expressed hope that the government will unfreeze the Krieghilfswerk's accounts, he also attempted to absorb the group's funds.

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13. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 8785: Freezing the Assets of Certain European Countries," June 14, 1941.

14. Adolf A. Berle, Jr. to J. Edgar Hoover, December 15, 1941, File 3, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA; Emil Auer, Report #3, American Aid for German War Prisoners, September 1941, POW Bulletin.

15. Auer, Report #3, September 1941, POW Bulletin.

In a letter to the State Department, Auer simply stated that if the American Aid could take on the additional funding, there would be less stress on the organization from American Red Cross and YMCA.<sup>16</sup> In response, the Division of Controls passed the inquiry to the Treasury Department's Division of Foreign Fund Controls whose jurisdiction fell under EO 8785.<sup>17</sup> It would appear that from a lack of reports specifying increased revenues and from the absence of any correspondence between the Treasury to State Department, Auer was not granted access to the funds he desired.

By October 1941, the President's Committee and the State Department moved to unblock the Kyffhäuser's assets. An amendment was made to the Kriegshilfswerk's registration limiting the organization's aid solely to German prisoners of war and civilian internees in the United States, British Commonwealth, Russia, and any other country remaining free of German and Italian control.<sup>18</sup> Despite such promising news, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was conducting its own examination of the organization. Although it was understood that the Kyffhäuser had followed protocol and ceased activity upon the issuance of Roosevelt's Executive Order, the State Department discussed the possibility of prosecuting the war relief agency for illegal collaboration with the Reichskriegerbund.<sup>19</sup> With suspicion as to whether the organization was in close association with the Nazi Party abroad, the Justice Department's Special Defense Unit listed the Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk as a "dangerous" organization and intended to keep

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16. Emil Auer to U.S. Department of State, September 4, 1941, File 1, American Aid, NARA.

17. Eldred Kuppinger to American Aid for German War Prisoners, September 13, 1941, File 1, American Aid, NARA.

18. The Kyffhäuser was assigned Permit Number 2682 after their assets were unblocked in October 1941; Walter Häusler to U.S. Department of State, October 29, 1941, file 2, Kyffhäuser, box 105, NARA.

19. Adolf Berle, Jr. to John Edgar Hoover, December 15, 1941, File 3, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA.

a close watch over their activity.<sup>20</sup> The organization was accused of “aid[ing] German War Prisoners in Canada to escape to the U.S. and then to Mexico en route to Germany.”<sup>21</sup> The combination of these investigations ensured that the group was under great scrutiny as tensions culminated in December.

Consequently, American entrance into the war was the final catalyst of the Kyffhäuser’s closure. When Germany became an official enemy of the United States in December 1941, the veterans understood the further inspection they would soon be under. Therefore, the Kyffhäuser, League of German War Veterans in U.S.A. was formally dissolved itself on February 1, 1942. Although all activities of the *Krieghilfswerk* were terminated at that time, FBI investigations into the organization’s members and activities continued through August of that year. Federal hearings of German American Bund leaders “for conspiracy to violate the Espionage Act” also required examination of the Kyffhäuser’s ties to the *Reichskriegerbund*, although it is not clear whether those on trial were directly involved in the veterans association.<sup>22</sup>

In total, the *Krieghilfswerk* raised \$140,000 in solicitations from German American organizations throughout the country.<sup>23</sup> By the time the two groups had met together in August 1941, the American Aid group had raised nearly \$13,000 in donations. Such figures put into perspective the lesser degree to which Auer’s organization raised funds. While the American aid was more of a local initiative formed out of his own

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20. Kashima Tetsuden, *Judgment Without Trial: Japanese American Imprisonment during World War II* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004), 32.

21. U.S. Department of Justice, Cross-Reference File Note, File 3, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA;

22. *Schumacher v. Bronell*, 210 F.2d 14, 11099 (3rd Cir. 1953-1954); Gordon Butterworth to Eldred Kuppinger, U.S. Department of State, February 6, 1942, File A1S1, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA; “A1S1” is the designation given to one of the files containing American Aid reports at the National Archives; J. Edgar Hoover to Homer Fox, August 17, 1942, File 3, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA.

23. U.S. Department of State, Report on the Kyffhäuser League of German War Veterans in the U.S.A., [ca. 1942], File 3, Kyffhäuser, Box 104, NARA.

vision, the Kyffhäuser had a preestablished veterans network to which to appeal. During its operation between late November 1939 and early February 1942, Kyffhäuser averaged approximately \$5600 in donations each month. In contrast, the American Aid for German War Prisoners raised approximately \$1300 in its first ten months of solicitation.

The discrepancy between these two fundraising entities serves to confirm the very line of reasoning employed by the President's Committee on War Relief Agencies, "It is a well-established fact that competition in fund-raising enhances the problem of obtaining money even for the most appealing causes."<sup>24</sup> The existence of two organizations raising funds for the same purpose did not yield positive results for either group in their fourteen months of concurrent fundraising. Instead, their appeal to the German American community forced the donors to choose one of the organizations rather than unifying under a mutual cause. Although the Kyffhäuser called for its own dissolution, a combination of both suspicion and consolidation would have likely yielded the same results shortly. With the Kyffhäuser officially out of commission, Auer's relief effort gained the ability to capture the full attention of the ethnic community.

When the Krieghilfswerk was under investigation in late 1941, Emil Auer had worried of a similar fate for his own organization. In newsletters shortly preceding American entrance into the Second World War, Auer constantly reaffirmed to his supporters the importance and validity of the relief effort. In September 1941, he wrote, "We wish to emphasize the fact that we still have full permission from the authorities to carry on with out work and we must beg you to do everything in your power to raise

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24. McMillen, "War Relief Agencies," 307.

additional funds.”<sup>25</sup> Hoping to avoid the prospect of diminishing donations, and calling upon those who may have previously contributed to the Kyffhäuser’s funds, Auer sought to reassure the German American community of his sanction to proceed with war relief.

Furthermore, Auer repeatedly invoked a strong sense of pious duty to help those imprisoned by the war.<sup>26</sup> The American Aid for German War Prisoners donated nearly five hundred catholic [*sic*] prayer books to the International Red Cross in Montreal, which were in turn distributed to both prisoners of war and internees in Canada.<sup>27</sup> In his address to supporters and donors, Auer directly appealed to the Christian sympathies of the public,

The relief to all war prisoners is entirely neutral and consequently not an expression of political support, but merely a gesture of christian [*sic*] and human charity. . . Sons – who are loved at home, fathers – who cannot forget their families, husbands – without news from home, all are awaiting some sign that they are not forgotten. This is only possible through your generosity.<sup>28</sup>

Incorporating a religious tone to the organization likely allowed for a means of humanizing both the German Americans and the Axis soldiers alike. But most notably, it shifted focus away from political scrutiny of the cause to perceptions of more charitable intent. With potential for backlash from the government, Auer put stress on the philanthropic aspects of his efforts, as he likely thought it would understood to be of decent cause. His strong ties to the Quaker religion also likely played a motivating role in his pursuit of compassionate action.

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25. Report #7 of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, September 1941, POW Bulletin.

26. Emil Auer to Friends of American Aid, January 1942, American Aid, File A4, NARA; "A4" is the designation given to one of the files containing American Aid reports at the National Archives.

27. Emil Auer to Friends, January 1942, American Aid, File A4, NARA.

28. Emil Auer to Friends, January 1942, American Aid, File A4, NARA.

In December 1941, U.S. involvement in the war also changed the actions and outlook of the American Aid organization. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Auer immediately contacted the American Red Cross, seeking not only to provide further aid, but also to show American allegiance. Interestingly, Auer asked the National Chairman of the American Red Cross to send word to their German affiliates indicating, “All during the time that we have been working for the German War Prisoners we found the American government very cooperative. We are sure that this generosity on the part of the American government will be received with great satisfaction by the German Red Cross. In return will guarantee the same cooperation on the part of the German government.”<sup>29</sup> Although he likely wrote the Red Cross intending to demonstrate loyalty and cooperation, Auer’s reassurances might instead have drawn further scrutiny to the war relief group. His words seemed to indicate an agreement between the German Red Cross and the American Aid organization, which was not the case at the time, but would have likely aroused alarm.

His continuous reassertions of patriotism also likely contributed some degree of confusion towards the American Aid for German War Prisoners. Referring to American soldiers as “our boys...prisoners in the hands of our enemies,”<sup>30</sup> his words might have been misunderstood to indicate the POWs he was aiding. Such an occurrence would have emphasized the group’s German ethnicity, while instead Auer saw himself and his supporters as “good Americans.”<sup>31</sup> In response, the President’s Committee questioned the

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29. Emil Auer to the American Red Cross, December 9, 1941, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

30. Emil Auer to the National Chairman of the American Red Cross, January 20, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

31. Report #15 and 16 of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, October and November 1942, POW Bulletin.

organization's intentions and ties to Germany, with Auer scrambling to explain the meaning of his words.<sup>32</sup>

Further reflecting the escalating tensions brought on by American's participation in war, Auer requested an official name change of the organization in January 1942. In reply to the prospect of omitting the "German" distinction in the organization's title, one State Department official wrote, "This conveys the erroneous impression that the money collected will go to aid American war prisoners when in fact most of the money will most likely still go to aid German war prisoners."<sup>33</sup> In support of alleviating such controversy, a proposal seeking the dissolution of the war relief group by was issued by the Department. Joseph Green counteracted these claims by citing the Geneva Convention (1929) as a justification for the continued presence of the humanitarian organization. Although Green did not necessarily support Auer's cause, he understood the legal necessity of upholding international standards and domestic law, and admitted that the "necessary legal means do not now exist to bring to an end the American Aid for German War Prisoners."<sup>34</sup>

Another official wrote that not only did he think that the relief efforts should be left up to larger, legitimized organizations, but also that the current conditions of warfare did not leave him in support of Auer's efforts,

We're in the midst of a war and I am not going to get too excited about efforts on the part of persons in this country to give aid and comfort to prisoners of ~~our~~ enemies.... In my opinion, it would be better if this organization would dissolve. Their desire to change their name is an indication of a similar thought in their own mind -- at least an indication

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32. Emil Auer to Joseph Davies, December 17, 1941, File A4, American Aid, NARA.

33 B. Halla to B. Long, U.S. Department of State, February 2, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

34. Joseph Green to AL and B. Long, "Memorandum," February 6, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA, 1; Green to AL and B. Long, "Memorandum, February 6, 1942, NARA, 2.

that they cannot continue along the lines intended in their original organization.<sup>35</sup>

Accordingly, American involvement in the war motivated the President's Committee on War Relief Agencies and State Department to pursue a more rapid criticism and consolidation in comparison to that prior to the war.

Nonetheless, much like the Kyffhäuser's shift in focus as the war progressed, the American Aid wished to extend relief to both Italian and American POWs imprisoned in all Axis-controlled countries worldwide.<sup>36</sup> Although Joseph Green formally confirmed the name change of the organization, he specified that any war relief efforts aiding American soldiers were not included under the jurisdiction of the State Department and President's Committee.<sup>37</sup> At this point in time, it became even more evident that Auer's desire of philanthropic expansion was not received well by the government.

In July 1942, the President's War Relief Control Board (WRCB) assumed jurisdiction over the war relief efforts.<sup>38</sup> This shift occurred under Executive Order 9205, as President Roosevelt established the Board as a replacement for the Committee.<sup>39</sup> Heading the WRCB were Joseph E. Davies, Charles P. Taft, and Charles Warren, both Davies and Warren have served on the President's Committee on War Relief Agencies. The Board's jurisdiction expanded to regulate and restrict relief organizations in the United States and abroad, extending to include those groups that aided refugees, civilians,

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35 B. Long to SD and Mr. Green, Department of State, February 6, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA, 1-2.

36. Emil Auer to Department of State, January 23, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA; Report #8 of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, March 1942, POW Bulletin.

37. Joseph Green to L. M. Mitchell, American Red Cross, February 14, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA, 1-2.

38. Homer Fox to A. Strunk, October 6, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

39. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9205: Establishment of the President's War Relief Control Board," July 25, 1941.

and members of the armed forces.<sup>40</sup> The only organizations outside of the Board's control were the Red Cross and religious groups that provided war relief."<sup>41</sup>

Measures were also put in place to further consolidate the sheer number of philanthropic groups, as President's Committee had effectively just begun the process. The Committee had taken an aggressive agenda and downsized the number of aid groups from seven hundred to three hundred by July 1942. One year later, the War Relief Control Board further merged the number to one hundred and sixty-six organizations. In 1945, there would be only ninety foreign war relief organizations still in effect.<sup>42</sup> With these new intentions at their origins in 1942, each humanitarian effort was expected to resubmit, once again, an application defining the purpose and prior involvement of the organization. With reassurances readily provided by Auer, it was understood that the American Aid for War Prisoners did not intend to proceed with subversive activities. Nonetheless, the Control Board's commentary on the American Aid application provided an understanding of the WRCB's initial perspective and its future intentions for consolidation,

[We wish to] Limit the registration of this organization to its original purpose, i.e. aid and assistance to prisoners and internees of enemy nationality. There is some question whether the public might not be misled into believing that this organization, which is essentially one for the relief of enemy nationals, is a general prisoners of war aid organization comparable perhaps to the Prisoners Aid of the YMCA or the Red Cross if it is permitted to solicit aid for American prisoners as well. There is nothing to indicate in the record that the agency is other than a bona fide one but there is some question whether mixed objectives in which in a case as this are desirable.<sup>43</sup>

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40. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9205," July 25, 1941.

41. Roosevelt, "Executive Order 9205," July 25, 1941.

42. McMillen, "War Relief," 304, 306; Joseph Davies, Charles Taft and Charles Warren, *Voluntary War Relief During World War II: A Report to the President* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, March 1946), 23, 9.

43. "Application No. 5," President's War Relief Control Board, August 22, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

These assertions were directly in line with the commentary issued by the State Department and President's Committee on War Relief Agencies in their exit report.<sup>44</sup> While government did not directly question the validity or intent of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, the WRCB was still weary of the effort's expansion. And as the Board's immediate task was to rapidly decrease the competition among the war relief groups, the future was questionable for this relief organization.

In August, Auer sought once again to amend his organization's registration to formally provide aid to U.S. civilian internees.<sup>45</sup> But the WRCB was not fully supportive of his new endeavors. Although the Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk no longer pursued the same cause, the Control Board came to favor larger organizations of international influence over small scale, local initiatives. With change at the forefront, August 1942 marked the beginning of the decline of the American Aid for German War Prisoners.

It is apparent that the American ascent into war marked the beginning of a higher scrutiny of the Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk, the American Aid for German War Prisoners, and similar foreign relief efforts. Evolving policy under the U.S. Department of State, President's Committee on War Relief Agencies, and President's War Relief Control Board sought above all to consolidate war relief. Although the Kyffhäuser came under suspicion by the government and public, the dissolution supported continued neutrality among the German American community.

Scrutiny of the American Aid was in part due to its involvement in Axis relief, but instead also stemmed from desire to streamline war relief. This occurrence is an indicator

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44. Secretary of State to Chairman of the President's War Relief Control Board, September 15, 1942, File revoked, American Aid, NARA.

45. "Application," August 22, 1942, NARA.

of great significance, as it demonstrates a sentiment quite different than the blatant anti-German hysteria of First World War. While previously, the government may have suppressed an organization that supported the German enemy of war, the WRCB did not as greatly emphasize the group's ethnic ties.

Humanitarian aid became a compromise between German culture and American loyalty, as relief efforts unified the ethnic community. Both international decree and national law protected the existence of these relief organizations. With this in mind, Emil Auer pushed the limit of the WRCB in the later half of 1942. Although his attempts at expansion were ill fated, he nonetheless hoped to forge stronger bonds across German America and bring aid to those who were immediately affected by the perils of war.

## CHAPTER 4.

## Dissolution and Aftermath

By October 1942, Emil Auer's petition to provide aid to American internment camps had been supported by the President's War Relief Control Board, but then subsequently denied.<sup>1</sup> The Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, spoke of the government's role in regulating and managing the welfare of civilian internees through the Justice Department's efforts.<sup>2</sup> He did not see it appropriate for a war relief organization to provide supplementary supplies. In reply, Auer emphasized that the group did not wish to collect monetary donations for the internees, but rather they hoped to simply donate the clothing supplies and machinery they had purchased.<sup>3</sup> He also clarified that the American Aid for War Prisoners had not been required to report their domestic philanthropy to the State Department, but that they hoped to provide this "supplemental help" to the internees despite the new governmental jurisdiction of the Control Board.

The matter of internment relief was left unresolved for some time before again being addressed in January 1943. A month prior, Emil Auer visited Washington, D.C. and met both the International and American Red Cross, as well as the WRCB. Auer

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1. "Application," August 22, 1942 and Joseph Davies to Emil Auer, October 20, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

2. Secretary of State to Chairman of the President's War Relief Control Board, September 15, 1942, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

3. Emil Auer to President's War Relief Control Board, October 26, 1942, File 2, American Aid, NARA.

described the experience as an “exchanging of views,”<sup>4</sup> and spoke with Board member Homer Fox to discuss future prospects for the war relief. The meeting evidently went well, for Fox followed up with another member of the WRCB, Eldred Kuppinger, and defended Auer’s intention. He stated that the American Aid for War Prisoners solely intended to “transmit. . .voluntary contributions [and] assist. . .in the operation of a hobby shop established by the camp [Fort Lincoln, Nebraska], especially in the sale of articles made in that shop.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the Board approved the American Aid to send relief to German American internees with the stipulation that monetary donations could not be elicited, instead allowing only contributed supplies. Auer’s ability to aid relief to the interned members of the ethnic community further supported the cause of German American unification.

As war escalated overseas in February 1943, the government issued General Order 20 “prohibit[ing] any payment, transfer or distribution of property in the process of administration by a person under judicial supervision or involved in any court or administrative action or proceeding, to or for the benefit of any person in any place under the control of an enemy country.”<sup>6</sup> These new measures supported Bulletin #56 from the Board of Economic Warfare, which had disallowed individuals to send personal packages to Axis prisoners in late 1942.<sup>7</sup> These changes in jurisdiction seemed to defy the basic measures of the Geneva Convention, outlined in Article 37, “Prisoners of war shall be

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4. Report #17 of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, December 1942, POW Bulletin; Homer Fox was the Executive Secretary of the U.S. Department of State and a member of the President’s War Relief Control Board.

5. Homer Fox to Eldred Kuppinger, January 11, 1943, File 2, American Aid, NARA; Eldred Kuppinger was the U.S. Department of State’s Assistant Chief of the Special War Problems Division.

6. “General Orders 5, 6, & 20,” Office of Alien Property Custodian, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 1.

7. Combined Reports #15 and #16 of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, October and November 1942, POW Bulletin.

authorized to receive individually postal parcels containing foodstuffs and other articles intended for consumption or clothing. The parcels shall be delivered to the addresses and a receipt given.”<sup>8</sup> But as international aid organizations like the Red Cross and the War Prisoners’ Aid of the YMCA still contributed supplies to the POW camps, it was only individual philanthropy that were restricted, not full war relief itself.

Consequently, with relief measures being further limited as the conflict progressed, the American Aid for War Prisoners shifted its focus to support these two international agencies. Through the stipulations of the President’s War Relief Control Board, the WRCB was not allowed control over the Red Cross nor any religious organizations. With a greater likelihood of the contributions being delivered without reproach from the Board, Auer focused his efforts on the Canadian Red Cross and donated hundred of Catholic prayer books emphasize once more his interest in religious contributions. The American Aid organization furthered their collaboration with the War Prisoners’ Aid of the YMCA to ensure proper distribution of supplies in Canada. By November 1942, the organization’s distributions were confined solely to these intermediary groups and only engaged in separate relief through internment contributions.<sup>9</sup> Not only was action of this kind a way to avoid mounting political criticism, but also a means of evade the growing scrutiny of the War Relief Control Board.

But humanitarian intentions could not protect the aid group from the ongoing troubles in Europe. While the WRCB did not immediately seek the closure of Auer’s organization, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York issued a “blocking order” on May

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8. Dietrich and Toman, “Convention,” 349.

9. Emil Auer to Federal Reserve Bank, June 1, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 1.

27, 1943 that froze Auer's personal assets alongside those in the American Aid accounts.<sup>10</sup> Auer claimed the order stated, "There is reasonable cause to believe that you are a national of a foreign country designated in executive order #8389, as amended, and within the meaning of section 5 (b) of the Trading with the Enemy, as amended."<sup>11</sup>

Despite being a naturalized German American, the Federal Reserve categorized Auer as a foreign national and would not allow him carry on the war relief in spite of attempts to correct the mistake. Auer complained to the WRCB that he was guaranteed rights as an American citizen, and that his liberties were violated through the blocking order.<sup>12</sup>

In response to hearing of such news from Auer, the chairman of the Canadian Red Cross cited the importance of preserving the right of relief organizations. E.L. Maag wrote, "The structure of the work carried on by the Red Cross Societies all over the world may be jeopardized, if any one nation would make an attempt to use these international agreements for their own benefits only, instead of applying the benefits on a mutual basis. Please do not fail to let me know, if this order is not revoked promptly."<sup>13</sup> The New York office of the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA expressed similar sentiment, "Needless to say, I trust your appeal for release of your funds will succeed. War is war and as it proceeds things tighten up more and more, and so many folk who in reality are quite innocent and only eager to be of help come under suspicion or at least under current regulation."<sup>14</sup> These correspondences lent support and appreciation for Auer's efforts,

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10. Auer to Federal Reserve Bank, June 1, 1943 and Walter Wolff to Emil Auer, June 4, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

11. Homer Fox to Maurice Pate, June 19, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

12. Emil Auer to the President's War Relief Control Board, June 21, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

13. E. L. Maag to Emil Auer, June 10, 1943, File revoked, American Aid, NARA.

14. Conrad Hoffman, Jr. to Emil Auer, June 14, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

which the War Relief Control Board took into consideration.<sup>15</sup> Surprisingly, the State Department mustered concern over the negative publicity that could result from the blocking order. The Department wrote to the American Red Cross to ensure that the limits on Auer's efforts would not be perceived poorly overseas. They were worried that the government's action to limit aid to German POWs could affect the treatment of imprisoned American soldiers.<sup>16</sup> With reassurances in hand, the President's War Relief Control reached a decision. As it perceivably created more problems than positive impact, the tenure of the American Aid for War Prisoners was soon to come to a close. The final decision to revoke Auer's permit was reached by the end of June 1943.

The WRCB was discontented with the Treasury Department, as they did not appreciate the decision to freeze Auer's assets without any consultation. As a result, the two offices sat down to discuss their varying perspectives and the information they had collected. Through the Board's writings, it is evident that Emil Auer was under FBI surveillance, separate even from investigations by the Federal Reserve Bank. The Treasury Department divulged that they had information confirming Auer's membership in the Nazi Party and his participation in the Munich Putsch in 1923. They discovered that he had been associated with German American Bund's National Chairman, Fritz Kuhn, before a disharmonious parting of ways caused Auer to form the Spring Garden Association in Buffalo.<sup>17</sup> All of this same information would again surface in the denaturalization trials Auer sat in on as a witness towards the end of the war.

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15. "Memorandum to the Board," President's War Relief Control Board, June 28, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 1.

16. Fox to Pate, June 19, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

17. "Memorandum," Control Board, June 28, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 1.

The Board also cited incorrect information regarding the American Aid's loose affiliation with Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk and misleadingly identified members of the American Aid as resident aliens. In light of these controversial assertions, the Board came to an immediate conclusion to disband the American Aid for War Prisoners, "On the face of this record, plus a continuing series of irregularities. . .there would seem to be no justification whatever for continuing the registration of the organization."<sup>18</sup>

Although Auer's distant ties to Nazism swayed the WRCB in its final decision, the Board was not forthcoming about the information they had gathered. Stating that, "publicity would serve no purpose," they did not wish to officially declare the reasons for the disbandment. Instead, the Board explained to Auer that their decision was based on pursuits of consolidation, "In view of the fact that properly constituted organizations are already carrying on the activities to which you have been devoting your attention, it is not believed proper in the public interest to encourage parallel or competitive operations."<sup>19</sup> Long-time efforts to terminate this relief agency had finally been achieved.

By June 1943, Emil Auer's humanitarian services had formally come to a close. Through its three-year life span, the American Aid for German War Prisoners had raised nearly \$50,000 and shipped 200,000 parcels worldwide.<sup>20</sup> But while the group officially disbanded in mid-1943, Emil Auer did not immediately cease his pursuit of philanthropic action. He continued to receive packages from prisoners' relatives, as German Americans hoped to continue communication with their imprisoned family members. Auer sought to become an intermediary operation with the intention of forwarding the parcels without

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18. "Memorandum," Control Board, June 28, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 2.

19. Minutes, Meeting of the President's War Relief Control Board, July 20, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

20. "American Aid for German War Prisoners," Finance Report, President's War Relief Control Board, Folder Revoked, American Aid, NARA; Fox, "American Aid," 324.

pursuing monetary collection.<sup>21</sup> He even offered to pay delivery costs and further attempted an appeal to the humanity of the War Relief Control Board (WRCB) in allowing him to continue this small service, “As you know there are many near relatives over here, many brothers and sisters. . . .Everyone concerned would be very happy [for the shipping allowance].”<sup>22</sup> Yet, the WRCB was steadfast in its decision, denying Auer’s request and believing that any further work by aid organization would be simply against “public interest. . . [and] encourage competition or duplication.”<sup>23</sup> Not only were Auer’s desires in contradiction to the Board’s intentions, they challenged the stipulations of General Order 20, as POWs no longer were allowed to receive personal care packages.

While Auer did not succeed in continuing his efforts, the lifespan of war relief organization speaks to his successes. At the time of American entrance into the war, there were very few remaining organizations that provided war relief to the Axis countries. Emil Auer had stated in February 1942, “Besides the YMCA we are, at present, practically the only organization that is carrying on this work of bringing relief to German and Italian War Prisoners in all parts of the world.”<sup>24</sup> Enforcing this claim, when the WRCB published its mid-year report in June 1943, the list of German-focused organizations indicated only one group in existence.<sup>25</sup> As the American Aid for German War Prisoners was disbanded at the end of that month, it is likely that the report indicated its status as the only remaining independent group sending relief to the Germans. Only

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21. Emil Auer to President’s War Relief Control Board, July 26, 1943, Folder Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

22. Emil Auer to Ernest Maag, August 9, 1943, Folder Revoked, American Aid, NARA.

23. Melvin Hildreth to Emil Auer, August 12, 1943, folder revoked, American Aid, NARA; “General Order 20,” Alien Property, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA, 1.

24. Report #7 of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, February 1942, American Aid, POW Bulletin.

25. McMillen, “War Relief,” 306.

larger organizations like the American Red Cross and Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA were allowed further involvement afterwards. Therefore, it becomes somewhat astounding that this war relief initiative could survive for as long as it did, as most organizations of its kind were terminated long before 1943.

While Auer faced relative uncertainties after the closure of the American Aid for German War Prisoners, he was almost immediately thrown into an even more challenging situation. As the President's War Relief Control Board had been advised that Emil Auer had long been under surveillance, presumably by the FBI, the Board's report mentioned the "possible denaturalization of Mr. Auer, who is understood to be a naturalized citizen of German origin."<sup>26</sup> Although he was fortunate enough to personally avoid denaturalization, Auer was called upon in January 1944 to testify as a key defense witness in the federal hearings of former German-American Bund members. The claims against the eleven individuals on trial were: "Taking the citizenship oath with mental reservations and of retaining alliance to Germany. . . [and] establish[ing] the subversive nature of the Bund."<sup>27</sup> While they could not be criminally prosecuted, each individual was charged with disloyalty to the United State with a possible sentence of imprisonment and deportation.

During the trial, Auer's alliance with the Nazi Party in his youth and his parting of ways with Fritz Kuhn were again touched upon. The hearings made headlines across the state as the persecution attempted to question Auer's credibility. Photographs surfaced of him posing with the radical Ordungs-Dienst (Order Service), a group he allegedly

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26. "Memorandum to the Board: American Aid for War Prisoners," President's War Relief Control Board, June 26, 1943 and Memorandum," President's Board, June 26, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA; Report #7, American Aid, POW Bulletin, NYC Public Library.

27. "Trial of Buffalo Bundists Underway," *The Leader-Republican*, January 16, 1944, p.3.

opposed. It was also determined that he never rose at a Bund meeting to publically declare intentions of dissent. But Auer's controversial involvement in the hearings did not immediately determine the fate of the former Bund members. His testimony was only one part of a lengthy trial, as questioning of "subversiveness" and disloyalty spanned the remainder of the war. Auer at least survived the investigation and the hearings without assaults on his own denaturalization. At its conclusion in February 1945, seven of the eleven former Buffalo Bundsmen were acquitted, while four had their citizenships revoked.<sup>28</sup>

Following the conclusion of the trials and the end of the war, Auer's pursuits included work with the Quaker Relief in Central Europe. His connection with this religious group conceivably influenced the course of his humanitarian efforts and complemented the pursuits of the ethnic community. But such efforts are also evident of the greater U.S. involvement post-war reconstruction.<sup>29</sup> Memories of the American Quakers' kind treatment in Germany after World War I also likely encouraged his involvement with the Society of Friends in the post-war years as he provided aid to foster parents in Germany.<sup>30</sup> His endeavors led him to reconnect with ethnic heritage overseas, while continuing to forge those strong bonds within the German American community.

In the 1950s, Auer made the decision to move to Washington State with his wife, German-native Angela Selma Auer. Spurred by a fascination with "a picture he saw of Mt. Rainer during his childhood, he satisfied his desire to live near this mountain," Auer

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28. "Auer Admits He Took Part In Munich Beer Hall Putsch," *Evening News*, January 15, 1944, p.1; "11 Ex-Bundists Go On Trial," *Binghamton Press*, November 23, 1943, 24; "Four Ex-Bundsmen Lose Citizenship As Court Cites Link With Nazis," *Morning Herald*, February 21, 1945, p.1.

29. "Emil Auer," *Tacoma News Tribune*, February 8, 1996, obit. sec; Tolzmann, *Experience*, 344-345.

30. Emil Auer to Homer Fox, June 10, 1943, File Revoked, American Aid, NARA; "Society of Friends to Hear Three Speakers," *Niagara Falls Gazette*, Niagara Falls, NY, May 10, 1947, p.4.

relocated his family to Tacoma in 1953. He went on to pursue his passion for stamp collecting and selling, often advertising his expertise in *Popular Science* and philatelic publications. Auer passed away in 1996, with his wife following three years later. His ties remained close to Germany as the majority of his living relatives remained overseas.<sup>31</sup>

Erika Plath, the young German American who had hoped to connect with her relatives in Canada's POW camps, pursued a career in business following her involvement with the war relief initiative. Working with her sister, Klara Drake Plath, Erika Plath became the co-owner of a family restaurant in nearby Rensselaer, New York.<sup>32</sup> She was so highly respected that she earned the distinction of Rensselaer Business and Professional Club Woman of the Year in 1986. Well known for her volunteer work in raising funds for the Rensselaer Girls Club, Plath was even made an honorary resident of the City of Rensselaer after having long lived in East Greenbush. Much like her involvement in the American Aid for German War Prisoners at such an early age, Plath's charitable nature and passion for activism evidently remained present for years after the war.<sup>33</sup>

Only with the larger scope of personal impact can the American Aid be put into greater perspective. Although the President's War Relief Control Board may have ended the expansive plans Auer sought for his organization, his relief strategies crossed generational differences and appealed to the larger ethnic community. Auer found ways of adapting to changes in policy by aligning himself with larger German American and

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31. Emil Auer," *Tacoma News Tribune*, February 8, 1996, obit. sec.; "Angela Selma Auer," *Tacoma News Tribune*, November 30, 1999, obit. sect.; Extra," *Popular Science* 162, no. 1 (January 1953), 79; "Different," *Stamps: A Weekly Magazine of Philately* 31-32, (1940), 357.

32. "Klara Drake," *Daily Gazette*, August 7, 2000, [n. pag].

33. "Rensselaer 'Woman of the Year' Named," *Albany Times Union*, Albany, NY, March 5, 1986, [n. pag].

philanthropic associations. His persistency allowed the initiative to exist far after others of its kind had been disbanded. Even as perceptions of Auer's ties to the Nazi Party motivated the group's dissolution, bureaucratic consolidation efforts also evidently played a role. While the government questioned the loyalty of the German American community, the American Aid for War Prisoners sought an outlet to express its conflicted position in society. The effects of this humanitarian action appeared to last long after the war, as both Auer and Plath pursued similar initiatives throughout the span of their lifetimes.

## CONCLUSION

Emil Auer's wartime work raises a series of intriguing questions, the first being: Why was this organization allowed to exist, particularly in light of the anti-German sentiment experienced during World War I? Most apparent, the Second World War was born out of a different era and mindset than that of the First. The evolution of the German American identity impacted perceptions of Auer's group and encouraged its relative acceptance. While the German American Bund stood as an example of radicalism, the majority of the ethnic community pursued more cultural outlets of expression. In this way, immigrants like Auer took on the role of the "good German-good American" who advocated international philanthropy.

While he had immigrated to the United States as a young adult, Auer's adolescent years had created close ties to Germany. Erika Plath, too, was a first generation German American, but also was engrained in American culture at an early age. Auer had been exposed to American war relief in Germany after the First World War, and was further encouraged by his religious convictions. Plath was motivated to humanitarian action through her familial connections to the German prisoners of war. In these ways, their comparable, yet diverse, motivations allowed for a basis of unification. War relief similarly captured the interest and attention of other German Americans. Charitable efforts combined the desire to help those of like heritage and came to form a sense of community cohesiveness. Yet, these actions also attempted to uphold the American

tradition of humanitarian work, as many wished to emphasize their loyalty to the United States.

Furthermore, the Geneva Convention set into motion an international standard for the treatment of prisoners of war. The U.S. government acted to neutrally manage the relief efforts providing them aid. This shift in policy and organization presented the ability for nearly all types of relief groups to emerge at the start of the war. Likely with this in mind, the President's War Relief Control Board intended to pursue later consolidation without particular discrimination against the German Americans. Since both the War Prisoners' Aid of the YMCA and the Red Cross provide relief to the POWs, the American Aid could be understood simply as a duplicate cause, not an assault on ethnicity. Such an occurrence would therefore seem to create the grounds for dissolution.

But why had a similar decision not taken place earlier in the war? Potentially, the proper measures were not in place until American entrance into the conflict. Only then did the WRCB gain broader jurisdiction than that of previous agencies. Although many members of the State Department voiced their discontent of allowing aid to the Germans, it is certainly plausible that there simply was not the legal means to disband the group earlier. And perhaps, the government was actually convinced of Auer's humanitarian intent through their numerous correspondences.

Interestingly, Emil Auer's downfall was due in part to his lofty goals of philanthropic expansion. First beginning with German prisoners of war in Canada, the relief group extended to aid Italian prisoners. Soon including British Commonwealth camps worldwide, the organization hoped to send relief to U.S. troops abroad. Although planned as a display of American loyalty, Auer's action effectively caused the

organization to come under higher scrutiny. Yet, his intention to provide aid to German American internees caused the greatest concern. While Auer had long engaged in unreported efforts of bringing aid to the internees, his pursuit of licensing undermined American Aid stability. The President's Committee on War Relief Agencies warned foreign relief agencies "to refrain from making appeals for domestic relief and... not attempt to combine domestic work with foreign activity."<sup>1</sup> But Auer sought to expand his humanitarian scope to help Germans in the United States. The government felt that the organization was attempting to undermine its authority.

While these actions provoked the attention of the WRCB, the Federal Reserve also took notice. Freezing Auer's assets in 1943, the Reserve met with the Board and revealed all they had learned about the organization, from connections with the Kyffhäuser Kriegshilfswerk to Auer's ties to Nazism. While these findings may have caused the final revocation of Auer's relief permit, they were not confined solely to suspicion of the American Aid for German War Prisoners. Even earlier in the war, the President's Committee took a practical approach to understanding war relief involvement, "The military and geo-political changes of the last two years [since the start of the war] or more are reflected emotionally among the racial groups of interest in this country and the volume of relief funds peaks and falls with the fortunes of war."<sup>2</sup> Seeing the American Aid as purely influenced by the passions of international politics, it was difficult to see past these barriers to the actual humanitarian cause. Although not intending to discriminate against German Americans themselves, the government agencies controlling war relief brought an end to local philanthropy.

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1. President's Committee. "Interim Report." [n. pag].

2. President's Committee. "Interim Report," 6.

Nonetheless, throughout the early years of war, Auer's organization made an impact both overseas and stateside. As one German prisoner of war in Suriname wrote to Auer, "*Gott sei Dank besteht hier im Lager ein gesunder Optimismus and wir hoffen, dass die Welt nach der Vernichtung... endlich zur Vernunft und Einsicht kommen wird*" ["Thank God there is a healthy outlook of optimism here in the camp that the world will finally come to reason and insight after the destruction"].<sup>3</sup> The American Aid made possible this hope, spreading relief from the expansive prisoner of war camps to the regional internment facilities. Emil Auer forged cohesive connections within the ethnic community and conveyed the more humanistic nature of German American culture in light of the atrocities carried out in war. The group raised funds for a charitable cause, in spite of governmental bureaucracy and lingering prejudice.

The American Aid for German War Prisoners existed despite all reasons for it not to flourish. The organization allowed German Americans the opportunity to recapture the sense of ethnic identity that had long been prohibited of them in the United States. Most remarkably, humanitarian action provided many German Americans the opportunity to find a compromise between their German heritage and sense of loyalty to the United States.

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3. Karl Berghoff to Emil Auer, October 26, 1941, POW Bulletin.

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