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These two excellent books by two young Graz historians deal with the interactions of Austrians and Americans during World War II and are part of the fabric of the larger trajectory of Austrian-American relations in the 20th Century.¹ With their focus on “war and society,” these books may be taken as a strong signal that “the new military history” has arrived in Austria too, where little serious military history is being done in academia.² Florian Traussnig’s study, a by-product of his Graz dissertation on the role of Austrian émigrés in American wartime propaganda, deals with Austrian refugees from all political camps that fled to the United States after the “Anschluss.” They supported their new homeland by joining the American armed forces or intelligence services to make personal contributions to the defeat of Adolf Hitler and his murderous National Socialist regime, which had persecuted them in their native Austria. Georg Hoffmann’s published University of Graz dissertation deals with the “lynching” of Allied airmen shot down over Austria and Hungary during World War II. Hoffmann highlights the cold-blooded murder of American aircrews by the “community” of local people: Nazi bigwigs and soldiers, egging on civilian bystanders. Both books carefully analyze larger stories through the lens of individual biographies, both Austrians fighting for the U.S. against the Nazis and


Austrians who, propelled by Nazi propaganda, murdered American flyers on the ground.

As many as 6,000 to 7,000 Austrians in exile in the United States (p. 16) joined the U.S. military and/or the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the U.S. civilian intelligence service during World War II (and predecessor to the postwar CIA). These Austrians became Americans—“leaning on” the U.S. (“Anlehnungsmacht”)—to participate in the defeat of Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich. Many of them were Jews from Vienna who used their military service as a “fast track” to U.S. citizenship during the war. The Anglo-American powers were less interested in an Austrian resistance that would make a contribution to the defeat of Nazism (according to the 1943 “Moscow Declaration”). They needed loyal people who spoke the German language and were prepared to gather intelligence from the German Army, or were prepared to fight in the trenches to defeat the Nazis. Traussnig aims at elaborating on the role this large group of Austrian exiles played in the Austrian “resistance” against the Nazis. Traussnig is able to show, through a careful biographical approach, that these “Austrians” were quickly forgetting about their homeland and had many different motives in fighting the Nazis. His analysis of some 700 individual biographies of Austrians in the United States gives these anonymous exiles “a face and a name” (p. 25) by adding these hitherto anonymous characters to the historical narrative of the Austrian resistance during World War II.

Traussnig starts his book with the story of the aborted “Austrian Battalion.” Otto von Habsburg, with his excellent contacts to President Roosevelt, managed to persuade the President and the War Department to start an Austrian unit in the U.S. Army, destined both to support the Allied war effort and to serve as a symbol of an Austrian contribution to the reconstruction of Austria after the war. The idea of an “Austrian Battalion,” calling for an Austrian contribution to the reestablishment of an independent Austria, was born before the November 1943 Moscow Declaration was issued. The Battalion failed as a result of the deep ideological divisions among Austrian exiles in the United States. Exiles on the Left and their allies in the American press considered it a reactionary and restorative Habsburg project (“a bunch of fascists and royalists,” p. 43) and agitated against it. The War Department established the Austrian Battalion in November 1942, and President Roosevelt disbanded it in May 1943 due to a lack of recruits. Among some 600 soldiers trained in Camp Atterbury, Indiana, only 29 volunteers signed up. The rest were Austrian exile draftees and Austro-Americans, many of them from the non-German parts of the former Habsburg Monarchy who opposed a Habsburg restoration
in Central Europe (pp. 47-49). The War Department transferred Joseph Podlipnig, an exiled Socialist from Carinthia, to the Austrian Battalion. He did not think much of the morale and fighting quality of the Battalion (p. 60). Anton Greissle grew up in a Communist milieu in Vienna. “The Emperor’s Battalion” raised some feelings of nostalgia in him about the Habsburg Monarchy, but like so many of the involuntary transfers to the Battalion, he was not interested in serving in “Otto’s imperial guards” (pp. 66-67). Like most involuntary transfers, he concluded: “I don’t want to fight for Otto – I want to fight for America” (p. 91). Traussnig concludes that the Austrian Battalion was “a disaster;” however, one had to give Otto and his conservative supporters credit for their “Austrian patriotism and spirit of resistance” (p. 92).

Traussnig dedicates a chapter to the “Ritchie Boys.” The U.S. Army recruited thousands of Central European exiles to be trained at the “Military Intelligence Training Center” in Camp Ritchie, Maryland (p. 94). The “Ritchie Boys” were usually anti-authoritarian exile intellectuals not much given to military discipline – they saw Camp Ritchie as a “utopian counterpoint to a traditional military camp” (p. 106). Take the Jew Karl Frucht, born in Brno/Brünn, who went to law school in Vienna. He worked as a writer in Vienna and in his Paris exile after the “Anschluss” before he managed to get to safety in New York. Frucht, like many of his fellow Austrian exiles, was trained to interrogate German Prisoners of War in Europe. The tactical and operational information they gathered in France after the Normandy invasion was helpful to the U.S. Army as they advanced into Germany. Their intelligence warnings gathered from German POWs about the imminent last Nazi offensive in the Ardennes (“Battle of the Bulge”) was not heeded (pp. 107-126). The secrecy of Camp Ritchie transformed the “enemy alien” soldiers from Central Europe into an elite corps of vital intelligence gatherers in the U.S. Army (pp. 150-151).

Many Austrians in exile were drafted into the 10th Mountain division, an elite unit in the U.S. Army that saw some heavy fighting in Northern Italy toward the end of the war. After observing the “winter war” between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1939/40, the U.S Army began training a division of soldiers in Colorado who knew how to ski and negotiate mountains. Austrians, who had been ski instructors and mountain guides in the U.S. before the war, ended up in the 10th Mountain Division. Friedl Pfeiffer, who had been a ski instructor in the 1930s in St. Anton, as well as in New South Wales in Australia and Sun Valley, Idaho, had been a member of the Austrian National Ski Racing Team. Pfeiffer ended up in the 10th and was wounded badly in Italy in April 1945 (pp. 196-198).
Traussnig falls victim to the contemporary mythology proffered in many newspaper accounts that these mountain troops were archetypical American “frontier” pioneers who managed to negotiate the harsh environment of the “Wild West” (p. 167).

The approximately 300 Austrians in exile who served in the American intelligence unit “Office of Strategic Services” (OSS) may be the most distinguished group. Many worked in the propaganda division of the OSS “Morale Operations Branch” and utilized their many talents in propagandizing the Third Reich in general and enemy soldiers on the frontline in particular. Take the young Viennese Socialist Rudolf Anzböck, who was involved in sabotage action against Austrofascism and had to flee Austria to save his life. One step ahead of the Nazis, Josef Buttinger, the leader of the Vienna “Revolutionary Socialists,” managed to get him to New York from his Swedish exile. After a brief interlude in the 10th Mountain Division, the OSS Labor Section recruited the Social Democrat. The OSS trained him and a number of Austrian compatriots for a “penetration” mission into Nazi Germany to gather intelligence on German and foreign slave labor, and, if possible, unleash a revolt against the Nazis. But Anzböck never was dropped into Nazi Germany. Instead, he was used as a research analyst in London on assessing everyday life in Germany (pp. 222-261). The OSS decorated Anzböck for his service; he stayed involved in intelligence work after the war and, like most Austrian exiles, never returned to Austria. Traussnig makes a good case that many Austrian leftists like Anzböck continued their resistance against Austrofascism/Nazism from the prewar era into the wartime. Their personal contribution to the defeat of Hitlerism also contributed significantly to the “liberation of their former Heimat” (p. 263). For this, they deserve credit from Austria and Austrian historians.

Traussnig has dug deeply into American archives to provide us with a number of compelling paradigmatic portraits of Austrians who fought in the U.S. Army and served in the OSS. Traussnig is particularly insistent on rescuing these resistance fighters in Allied armies from the ignominy of having been “deserters” due to their support of the victorious side. Austrians who had supported the Nazi regime and latched on to the myth of Austria as “the first victim of Nazism” gave no credit to such “bandits” who had left the country. In a sort of Austrian continuity of anti-Semitism, tens of thousands of Jews, who had been expelled after the “Anschluss,” have been silenced in the historical narrative. The official narrative of the Austrian resistance constructed after World War II as part of the Austrian “victims myth” ignored them and so has a recent quasi-official symposium on the
Austrian resistance and a major new survey of the Austrian resistance. These “deserters” have been given their due in the Austrian public recently and have received a monument in a prominent square in Vienna. They are now considered a crucial element in the Austrian resistance to Nazism and are also included in Austrian memory of World War II (pp. 13-14). Given the “negligible size” of the resistance inside the “Alpen- und Donauaue” (p. 323) during the war, the role of this “transnational” Austrian resistance in exile is all the more remarkable.

Hoffmann is the first scholar who presents a firm “body count” of captured and killed airmen in Austria and Hungary during World War II. On the basis of impressively exhaustive research in American, Austrian and German archives he has established a database of every airplane shot down over Austria and Hungary and their crews. 556 airplanes were shot down in the “Alpine- and Danube Area” of today’s Austria (and 281 over Hungary). Crewmembers numbering 2,511 lost their lives, and 169 are “missing-in-action” to this day. Aircrews numbering 4,046 came down alive on their parachutes, of which 149 were killed, while the rest ended up in German POW “Stalags” (p. 136). The Anglo-American Air Forces lost a staggering 27,000 airplanes and 152,000 airmen during World War II. Allied airmen numbering 61,000 were captured alive, most surviving the war in Nazi POW-camps (p. 128). Given that the air war came to the “Alpine- and Danube Area” and Hungary late during the final two years of the war, civilian defenses were not attended to in preparation for Allied attacks. American bombers launched the first large attack against Wiener Neustadt on August 13, 1943 (p. 49). Before this attack, the “Alpine- and Danube Area” had the reputation of being the Third Reich’s “air-raid shelter” (p. 50). From that moment onwards, Austria’s and Hungary’s large cities Vienna, Linz, Graz, and Salzburg, as well as Budapest, Pécs, and Győr, increasingly suffered Allied attacks in 1944. The culmination of the air war against Austria came in the winter/spring of 1945. During the “oil offensive,” the Anglo-American air forces lost 30 planes over Austria and 11 over Hungary on June 26, 1944, with 122 airmen losing their lives (p. 135). On April 12/13, 1944, the U.S. Air Force lost 22 airplanes in wave

of attacks against Vienna, Wiener Neustadt, and Budapest (p. 134). These were staggering losses.

The focus of Hoffmann’s study is the situational circumstances and the social psychology – or, the “referential frame” as he calls it – of the lynching of Allied airmen. In the summer of 1943, Nazi Germany’s propaganda chief Josef Goebbels changed his tune by suggesting that the Allies waged the air war as a “criminal war” against German “women and children” (p. 149). Focusing the new “enemy image” on the “terror flyers” and “air bandits” (pp. 150-151), Goebbels called upon the population to exact vengeance against downed airmen on their own. When Kenneth D. Williams was shot down over Bremen on November 26, 1943, he carried the imprint “Murder Inc.” on the back of his flight suit. This was a welcome propaganda message for Goebbels, giving him the opportunity to spread the news of Mafia “gangsters” being recruited in Chicago to murder women and children in Nazi Germany (p. 152). The air war had become existential for the survival of Germany. The Nazi leadership unleashed violence (“Freigabe von Gewalt,” p. 167) against Allied fliers, calling upon the German people—including Austrians and Hungarians, once Hungary was occupied by the Nazis—to take matters into their own hands and exact vengeance against these murderous bombing crews. Hoffmann carefully reconstructs the “narrative” of Goebbels’ propaganda campaign against Allied flyers as a means to analyze how local communities, egged on and directed by local Nazi bigwigs, gathered to retaliate against Allied flyers as they floated to the ground on their parachutes after their planes had been shot down by German fighters or anti-aircraft guns (“flak”). Curious groups of people assembled to watch the flyers come down, or were gathered by local Nazi bigwigs. They usually were “bystanders,” reluctant to mete out vengeance themselves. They passively watched as uniformed men killed airmen in cold blood (pp. 323-326). As in recent historical scholarship on lynchings in the American South after the Civil War, these local spectacles of communities of violence became quasi-public rituals.5

Ironically, on June 6, 1944, the very day the Normandy invasion was launched, the Nazi leadership gathered on the Obersalzberg for a meeting, deciding to allow “lynching justice” (Lynchjustiz) to be unleashed by the German people and for Goebbels to further arouse the “people’s anger” (Volkszorn) against the “air gangsters” (pp. 170-171). Hoffman then carefully dissects the various scenarios of group actions—various group formations incited by the local Nazi leadership to hunt downed allied airmen—resulting in the capture and murder of downed Allied flyers.

The “meat” of Hoffmann’s vast empirical work comes together in 26 meticulous case studies of allied airmen captured and killed and the detailed personal biographies of a half dozen murderers of allied airmen. As late as April 4, 1945, probably drunken Nazi officers brutally murdered Walter P. Manning, one of the African-American “Tuskegee airmen,” on the airfield of Linz–Hörsching. Second Lieutenant Manning’s P-51 was shot down on April 1. Manning’s body was found with a plaque hanging around his neck reading “We are taking care of things ourselves! The werewolf” (Wir helfen uns selbst! Der Werwolf) (pp. 293–297). The case of Franz and Markus Lienhart is particularly telling. On March 4, 1945, Franz, a local farmer in Straßgang, a village close to Graz, chased down the flyer Sergeant Steven Cudrak. With the words, “You dog, dumping bombs on women and children” (Du Hund du, du schmeisst Bomben auf Frauen und Kinder) (pp. 343–346) he beat him up; later on, his son Markus shot him. Markus had earlier killed with a pistol the two downed flyers, Corporal Harold D. Brocious and Sergeant Levi L. Morrow, with a large group of local women and children watching the violence (pp. 238–242). Military courts prosecuted the two Lienharts after the war and both were found guilty. Franz, the father, went to jail for ten years, and Markus, the son and murderer, was executed in 1946 (p. 346).

Most of them actually got off scot-free and were not prosecuted after the war. Manning’s murderers slipped into obscurity after the war and were not brought to justice. The individual perpetrators who killed Allied airmen portrayed by Hoffmann joined the Nazi movement early; they were ideologically deeply committed to National Socialism and volunteered for military service. After being wounded multiple times on the Eastern Front, they were posted close to home inside the Reich, where they slipped into the business of killing American airmen (pp. 364–365). Most of the “lynchings” happened in villages where the airmen bailed out from planes that had been severely damaged in attacks over cities. Manning’s “lynching” in April 1945 also is further evidence that a deep commitment to Hitler and the Nazi ideology persisted into the most remote corners of the “Alpine- and Danube Area” until the final days of the war.

Concluding his book, Hoffmann reflects on Austrian memory of these war crimes. Austrians considered themselves as “victims” of the Allied air war during World War II. In their minds, this explained the “lynching

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6 For a model extended case study of the “lynching” of seven American airmen on the island of Borkum in Northern Germany, based on the extensive postwar trial records, see James J. Weingartner, Americans, Germans, and War Crimes Justice: Law, Memory, and “The Good War” (New York: Praeger, 2011).

justice” of allied airmen. These Austrian perpetrators continued to consider themselves “victims” and the Allied airmen “perpetrators” long after the war (p. 371). These murders became taboos in the local communities where they were committed and were silenced after the war. In other words, Austrian society never atoned for these war crimes. Postwar Austria has lived with such inversions of World War II perpetrators and victims for a long time. While the victims of the Nazi takeover of Austria, who fought for the Allied cause in exile, were considered “traitors,” the perpetrators of “lynchings” of allied airmen considered themselves “victims” of Allied bombing attacks during and after the war. These two subtle books provide long overdue corrections to these narratives so dear to Austrians.