

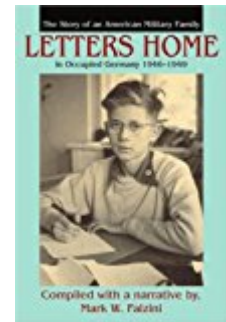
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mark W. Falzini, ed. *Letters Home: The Story of an American Military Family in Occupied Germany, 1946-1949*. Lincoln: iUniverse, 2004. xiii + 244 pp. \$20.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-595-31245-0.

John Palmer Hawkins. *Army of Hope, Army of Alienation: Culture and Contradiction in the American Army Communities of Cold War Germany*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001. xix + 332 pp. + 12 pp. of plates. \$125.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-96738-3.

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Life “Inside the Fence”

Both of these books deal with the lives of American soldiers and their families serving peacetime duty in West Germany after 1945. First, they provide insights into the interaction between members of the American military communities with the German population at large. Second, Hawkins’s book especially updates the study of the peacetime U.S. Army, revealing the competing obligations of a total institution and the lives of servicemen and their families through the 1980s. The portrait that emerges is of Americans hard-pressed to satisfy the demands of both their families and the U.S. Army, while they remained isolated from an alien and somewhat hostile local population.

Mark Falzini’s *Letters Home* is an edited volume of letters from his grandfather, Major Samuel S. Kale, his grandmother Julia Kale and his uncle, Herbert W. Kale II (“Bub”) to the United States. Samuel Kale and his family were stationed in Würzburg from 1946-49. Julia Kale worked with Displaced Persons (DPs) in the area, soliciting toys to help children enjoy Christmas, while Bub attended the American high school. Falzini provides a short introduction, after which follow sections of letters interspersed with family photos. The photographs themselves are striking, because they reveal American teenagers wearing the same fashions as they would have worn in the United States. They also provide images of

Americans doing things that they would not do in the United States, such as hunting wild boar.

The letters are the main focus of the volume. Those who are looking for descriptions of meaningful interactions between Americans and Germans during the early postwar years will certainly come away disappointed. The family, living in a sequestered 24-room house, had limited interaction with Germans. The servants tended to be DPs from the Baltic States. They knew no German. Although Julia Kale repeatedly requests vegetable seeds to plant to supplement their diet, they still have an overpowering advantage over the population in whose midst they lived. For instance, they were able to trade cigarettes for a set of Rosenthal china (p. 120). They were also able to buy fresh fruit in the PX during February 1948 (p. 132). Furthermore, they seem to have real contempt for the German population. Fifteen-year-old Bub’s letters are especially hostile, referring to “Krauts” (p. 99), who “pity themselves” and who seem “indifferent” with a “wall between you and them” (p. 96). Julia Kale’s letters also highlighted the isolation of her children from Germans; she bemoans the lack of German playmates for her youngest children (pp. 70, 76). Still, this must have been the experience of a life time for “Bub.” The high school he attended was all-American, with American teachers and an American curriculum. But imagine a civics class

field trip to observe the Nuremberg trials (pp.61-64)! The vacations the family took also speak of opportunities unavailable outside of such an assignment: Paris, the Riviera, Austria, Holland.

By the 1980s, however, U.S. military personnel and their families would live in Germany under far different circumstances. Hawkins's book, *Army of Hope, Army of Alienation*, is an anthropological study of American soldiers and their dependents in Germany during the 1980s and 1990s. Based upon over 100 interviews (listed in an appendix), this book will have the same value to future historians as John Gimbel's 1957 questionnaire-driven study of Marburg under American occupation.^[1] Hawkins uncovers a mass of contradictory obligations and identifications that served to make the lives of married GIs in Germany stress-filled and overburdened. This stress had the outcome of sapping morale and diminishing combat readiness, the ultimate mission of the army in Germany.

Hawkins's book, the second edition, retains the text of the original edition with a new recommended reading section at the end. He divides the volume into twelve thematically arranged chapters. Hawkins first explores the reasons for joining the Army: patriotism and an avenue of upward social mobility for many Americans with a low level of education. He then discusses the competing institutions of family, the army and community (chapter 2). Nothing, however, prepared the military family for the shock of arriving in Germany. In contrast to the experiences of the Kale family, U.S. Army bases accommodated military personnel and their families based on rank. As a result, enlisted men and their families often had to fend for themselves "on the economy." Bewildered GIs and their spouses in the late 1980s confronted a disadvantageous exchange rate, language difficulties and German ways that often seemed strange to them. Compounding these problems were long commutes and the need to perform optimally within the force structure of an Army that faced the possibility of being overwhelmed by the Soviets at any moment (chapter 3). Using countless anecdotes gleaned from his interviews, Hawkins chronicles the spiral into isolation for many military families. For instance, performance reviews were the only avenue to promotion. But the Army demanded that soldiers sometimes remain for days away from their families. If a child acted up too much, and the single spouse was unable to control that child, the Army could send that child back to the United States while the soldier remained in Germany. Furthermore, the evaluation of that soldier's performance was downgraded because he "couldn't control

his family" (chapter 8). If spousal abuse occurred, and the Military Police were called, it would come to the attention of the soldier's superior officers with the resultant downgrade on the performance review. However, if the couple sought counseling, the commanding officer would be notified, and this action also would be noted in a negative light. If a soldier could not handle the stress of dealing with his spouse, how could he handle command in combat? Soldiers and their families likened life on the base to "living in a fishbowl," where deviant behavior would be noted and reported with the consequent loss in the race for promotion (chapter 10). Hawkins cites Michel Foucault in noting that family members internalized the discipline of the institution and modified their behavior both in public and at home to conform to what they believed could best help avoid trouble with the U.S. Army (pp. 211-212). However, this meshing of domains tended to undermine the stability of both.

Dealing with the German population was hardly an alternative. It was difficult for Americans to adapt to the norms of German life. A soldier could be heavily fined for mowing his lawn on a Sunday or playing the piano in the evening or owning a car that dripped oil. And of course, any problems that one had with Germans could make their way back to the CO. Those who did make friends with Germans were able to lighten the sense of isolation. Those who did not (Hawkins conveys the sense that this group included the vast majority of American servicemen and their families) tended to spend any time outside the apartments at the base, with all of the risks of a misstep that a trip to the base entailed (chapter 9). The tensions from family situations and adjusting to life in a new, and quite alien, society exacerbated those stresses that accompanied the attempt to perform optimally for the army. As a result, constant scrutiny, evaluation and an almost impossible family situation militated against the battle readiness of American forces.

Hawkins's book updates and expands many of the themes put forth in Edward M. Coffman's book, *The Old Army* (1986). Coffman wrote a social history of the U.S. Army officers, soldiers and their wives and children during peacetime in the nineteenth century. He considered how the officers and soldiers built and maintained the army as an institution and how women and children lived under circumstances of extreme hardship and isolation. With the global expansion of the army's role as a peacekeeper during the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, Hawkins's interviews reveal the corrosive interaction of irreconcilable obligations of family and the institution of the army. His focus is not so much the de-

velopment of institutional professionalism, as Coffman detailed in his work. Rather, Hawkins focuses on how to maintain professionalism. He ends his book with some common sense recommendations for ending this tug of war. One solution would be to create an alternative reporting system for family psychological problems rather than sending everything through the commanding officer (pp. 269-272).

These two books add a needed caution to the exuberance of the "Americanization" literature, particularly those who see the critical cultural interstice as being the

relationships of Americans in the armed services and the German civilian population. Both Hawkins and Fanzini suggest that Germans and Americans lived in close proximity to one another over a long period of time, but that they inhabited very different cultural and institutional spheres.

Note

[1]. John Gimbel, *A German Community under American Occupation: Marburg, 1945-1952* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

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