

The history of the Great War in today's Rhineland-Palatinate

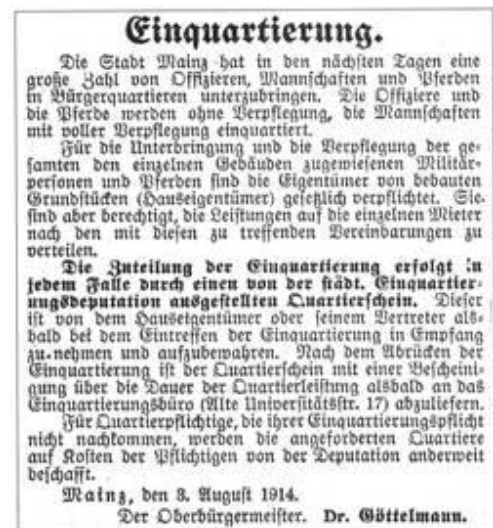
An overview



Transport of forces over the Rhine Bridge in Koblenz (Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-197-076-25A)

Today's Rhineland-Palatinate was not a direct theater of war, but as a region close to the border, it did not remain unaffected by the events of the years 1914 until 1918. The dualism of enthusiasm for war and its rejection was especially obvious here in these parts because on the one hand the Germans conceived the war as defensive and therefore fought with resolution against Russia and France, but on the other hand it also sowed fear.

Definitely the war made itself felt with the very presence of the armed forces. A lot of cities were utilized for marching ups and places of residence for following squads. For example 40.000 soldiers stayed temporarily in Koblenz and 25.000 in Germersheim. For this reason, the fortifications here and also in Landau and Mainz were massively extended. In view of the new weapon technologies they could not fulfill their purpose of defense anymore completely, but as accommodations and strategic positions they still played an important role during the First World War. However, in the first months of war the space in military buildings was often insufficient so that in many places public buildings and later also private dwellings gave shelter. At the beginning of war, Emperor William II. sojourned in the official residence of the Rhine Province's president in Koblenz, because it was the place of the military headquarter in August 1914. From January 1917 till March 1918 the Supreme Army Command took up quarters in Kreuznach.



Decree on the Accommodation Obligation in Mainz (Stadtarchiv Mainz)

Not only armed forces, but also raw materials and military equipment crossed the cities on the Rhine on their way to the front. A great amount was provided by companies from the region, which could hardly keep up with the production. Food shortage and the collapse of the regional commerce were the consequences. A very important company for war was situated in Ludwigshafen: the BASF (Baden Aniline and Soda Factory) produced explosive material and toxic gas so that the German army could continue the battle of material in the West and could even use new, more terrible forms of warfare. The shortage of male workforce led to the increasing employment of women in the armament industry. In addition in the course of time, altogether 2.5 million prisoners of war were compelled to forced labor with about 1,000 of them working at the BASF. Up to 2,000 French stayed at the prisoner-of-war camp Ebenberg near Landau, ca 6,000 Russian soldiers at the camp Germersheim. In a lot of cities and villages



*Russian and French prisoners of war in Speyer
(Stadtarchiv Speyer)*

wounded were brought back to their homes all across the region of today's Rhineland-Palatinate so that here the terror of the huge damages resulting from the material battles became obvious very early. That is why there were centers for emergency treatment and military hospitals in a lot of cities and municipalities.

As the supply of food and other commodities became more and more scarce, combat fatigue spread which entailed the formation of workers' and soldiers' councils in November 1918. With the armistice of Compiegne on November 11th, the First World War officially ended for the German people and the period of occupation began. From the end of 1918 until 1930, large parts of the Rhineland and the Palatinate belonged at first to the American and later to the French occupation zone. The regulations determined in the Treaty of Versailles, especially the War Guilt clause, were perceived by a large part of the population as a great humiliation imposed by

France. Against this background, the National Socialist revisionist policy found wide and momentous approval, notably in the regions occupied by France.

Despite the fact that in the years 1914 until 1918 no open acts of war took place in this region – apart from the bombardment of single cities – the war influenced peoples' lives at the "Heimatfront" (home front) in a great measure by the circumstances outlined. The *Institut für Geschichtliche Landeskunde an der Universität Mainz e.V.* (institute for historical regional studies at the university of Mainz) would like to present the enormous range of political, economic, social and emotional consequences of the First World War to you on the website www.erster-weltkrieg-rlp.de. Unfortunately the content is currently only available in German.

the forced laborers were employed in farms, for example in Kreuznach, Mainz-Finthen or Neuwied.

Soldiers' letters sent via the army postal service gave information about the occurrences at the front regularly – e. g. of the 6th Rhineland infantry regiment No. 68 from Koblenz and Ehrenbreitstein, the Bavarian infantry regiment 17 from Gernersheim, or the Palatinate division, which were involved in the Battle of the Somme. War victims and



*The workers' and soldiers' council at the top of a demonstration in Kaiserslautern
(Stadtarchiv Kaiserslautern)*