

**Manfred Bock's army service in the German Army, before and during
the First World War,
and how a determined German Jew finally became an officer**

**Marion Davies, Manfred Bock's granddaughter, London
February 2025**



Manfred Bock (28 May 1882, Frankfurt/Main - 11 October 1956, London)

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Introduction

The following is a study of a patriotic German Jew who first volunteered for the German Army in 1902. His aspiration was to earn an army commission, and if he had not been Jewish, or if he had been baptized, his period of service would have entitled him to apply to join the reserves as an officer. As a Jew, he was considered ineligible. Despite this discrimination, he volunteered once again in 1914 at the outset of the First World War. He served for the duration of the war on both the Western and Eastern Fronts and survived. Recognising its importance for whatever reason, he fortunately kept his army record, bringing it in his luggage when he managed to leave Germany on 28 March 1939. It has therefore been possible to determine the regiments and units he was part of, as well as their deployment. The following is therefore a study of Manfred's army career. Not being a military specialist, nor having access to the detailed military reports and records, there will be errors and gaps for which I apologise. Nor can I add psychological insight into his emotions and thoughts regarding his army service. What is known is that he felt very strongly about the army's discriminatory policies and let his name be used as part of a challenge to this issue in the Reichstag.

Manfred as an *Einjährig Freiwilliger*

Manfred Bock volunteered for the German Army as an *Einjährig Freiwilliger* in 1902.¹ This one-year service was open to the more affluent and those educated to a higher level. Rather than being conscripted for two or three years, these candidates funded themselves, including their equipment. As potential officer material, on completion their training prepared them for a commission as a *Reserve Leutnant*, Reserve Officer. However, having served between 1902 and 1904 in the artillery in Bockenheim near Frankfurt, Manfred's final rank was *Offizier-aspirant*, officer candidate.

Alice, Manfred's sister, wrote in her memoirs,² that he had aspired to becoming a Reserve Officer, but both were aware that achieving officer rank was only possible, after 1885, for Prussian Jews who had been baptized.³ Manfred was not alone in seeking a commission and feeling disappointed and frustrated due to the discrimination and prejudice he had experienced.

The alleged consensus among officers was that it was 'unthinkable' that Jews could command Germans.⁴ Amos Elon quoted Walter Rathenau when he was discharged with the lowly rank of Lance Corporal, most probably early 1890s: *For every German Jew, there is a painful moment that he remembers his entire life: the moment he is first made fully conscious [in the army?] that he was born a second-class citizen. No ability and no achievement can free him from this.*⁵

Angröss suggested that it was generally agreed in Jewish circles not to press for admission to the elite Prussian officer corps but rather concentrate on entry to the reserve officer corps.⁶ Reserve officers enjoyed disproportionate status to their functional significance, as Germany, at the end of the 19th century/early 20th, was a semi-militarized society. Therefore, a commission in the army reserves was a *sine qua non* for integration into German society, and/or senior careers in government. However, although the army always maintained it was not antisemitic, the hurdles to attaining a commission were many, and at any stage a candidate could fail. As Manfred's final rank was *Offizier-aspirant*, this would indicate that he had completed the training and passed comprehensive exams. After this stage, and it is not known if he was allowed to proceed, he would

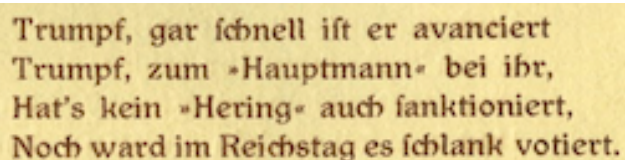
have had to participate in two courses of tactical exercises at which point the regimental commander could (but did not have to) recommend him to the local district commander for election by the corps. This was yet another hurdle and very much one resisted by the corps. If elected, the candidate still required the final approval of the Military Cabinet.⁷ There was no appeal or explanation at any stage if candidates were turned down.

Following the liberal years, by the 1880s as Jews moved to cities and towns and entered commerce, banking and those professions open to them, as well as all other aspects of affluent middle-class life, there was growing antisemitism and resentment in all strata of German society. Angress suggested that persisting in pressing for inclusion in the reserves held symbolic significance for middle-class Jews who wished to have the same opportunities as their German counterparts for whom old barriers were falling away. The Jews remained as the ones still suffering from traditional discrimination in public and military positions. For them it was *...a point of honour and personal dignity. Its achievement would have signified their unequivocal acceptance as equals. Conversely, its denial placed a stigma on their standing within society, (notably one, which puts so much stress on honour and soldierly virtues) ...*⁸ In 1904 the *Verband der Deutschen Juden* was established to counteract the discrimination and antisemitism, and act on behalf of all Jews. Their objectives could not be achieved as there were too many factions, but in 1905 they *resolved to make the redress of Jewish grievances one of its principal functions.*⁹ There was, therefore, *...an extended campaign designed to secure once again the promotion of unbaptised Jews to reserve officer status. Such promotions had been withheld from them since 1885, although they were legally entitled to this right under the constitutions of Prussia and the Empire.*¹⁰

In 1909, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* claimed that twenty-five to thirty thousand Jews, qualified by their education to become officers, had served in the army since 1880, and none had been promoted, though three hundred converts had.

The Social Democrat Reichstag deputies supported the Jewish cause as for them the wider issue at stake was justice and the fact that the army was not being seen to uphold the constitution. The *Verband* provided both the War Minister and the Progressive deputy Kopsch with a list of those denied reserve commissions because of their creed, and on 30 March 1908, this list was presented to the Reichstag.¹¹ As no headway was achieved, the Social Democrat deputies raised an annual question on this matter.¹²

It was known amongst Manfred's contemporaries that his name had been included in the 1908 list, or possibly slightly later, as he was associated with a 'question' raised in the Reichstag concerning his failure, as a Jew, to become an officer. Confirmation is the inclusion in the typical Frankfurt style personalised tongue-in-cheek ditty composed as part of his wedding celebrations:



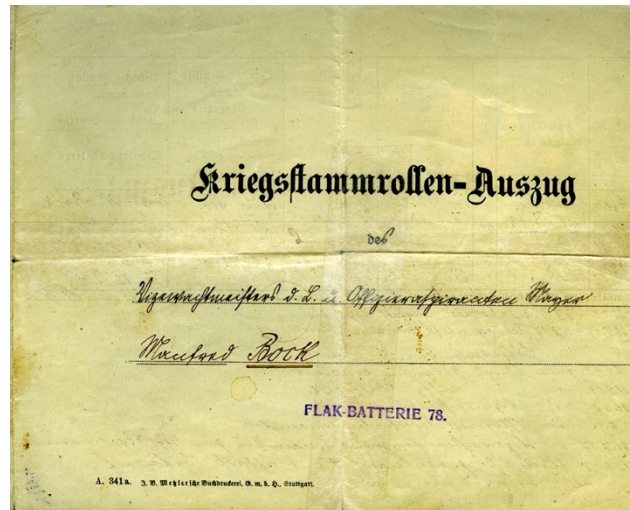
Trumpf, gar schnell ist er avanciert
Trumpf, zum »Hauptmann« bei ihr,
Hat's kein »Hering« auch fanktioniert,
Noch ward im Reichstag es schlank votiert.

Manfred Bock and Bella Fürth's Wedding song, June 1911

Manfred advanced quickly to become a Captain in the army, despite being Jewish, and the issue was due to be (or had been) voted on in the Reichstag.

It took the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, to compel the military to discontinue its discriminatory practices. However, in Manfred's case, it took a further three years to be promoted to *Leutnant*, Lieutenant, in 1917/1918.

Manfred's Army Record



Laufende Nummer	Dienstgrad	Vor- und Familienname	Ort (Verwaltungsbezirk, Bundesstaat) der Geburt	Lebensstellung (Stand, Gewerbe, aktiver Offizier)	Vor- und Familienname der Ehegattin. Zahl der Kinder.	Vor- und Familienname Stand oder Gewerbe und Wohnort der Eltern
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Zusätze zu den Personal-Notizen.

22.I.15 - 6.II.15 Rec'd Hospital Ligonath J. Austin
28.III.17 - 3.IV.17 Rec'd Ligonath IX. Frenchland n. Mon.

Lehrtafel.

1.4.03. zum übrigl. Gebräuch zuwenden

U. 8.03 " " Ufftz. Beför. Inst.

84.504 " *Vignaschmuckst.* "

4.8.74 " *Offizierspalaststrasse* *erwand*

21.7.17 " Шизовая пленка изобретена в. гитлером. Ост. немцам

12.2.18 Ch. A. K.O. J. Leukent v.P. v. Elbart. beproefd.

[illegible]

des Hauptmanns (Off. No.) Roth 2. haben einen einvernehmlichen, freiwilligen
 gütlichen Rücktrittsgeld. Derselbe hat, sich für mit sehr gutem Erfolg teilge-
 nommen.
 Die in Weiterbeförderung sind die seit Beförderung, durch seine Commu-
 nion zum Offizier-Apparat.
 Rücktrittsgeld-Communität
 Fort-Leprie-Regiment.
 Lini.
 (Off.) Loubert.

Frankfurt, n. M., den 1. Juni 1912.
 -gg- Schöler
 Lieutenant i. Communitätsgeld

F. J. R.
 Lieutenant und Batteriechef

Army Record deciphered by Hanno Müller
Translation in red

Page 1:

Kriegsstammrollen-Auszug War roll excerpt

**des Vizewachtmeisters d.(er) L.(andwehr) u.(nd) Offizieraspiranten (Offizieranwaerter) Mayer
Manfred Bock**

**of the deputy sergeant of t(he) L.(andwehr) a (nd) officer aspirant (officer candidate) Mayer
Manfred Bock**

Flak-Batterie 78

Page 2:

Manfred Bock

2: Vizewachtmeister der Ldw. I. (Landwehr I.) **Deputy sergeant**

3: Mayer Manfred Bock

4: isr. (israelitisch) **Jewish**

5: Frankfurt a. M. Preußen 28.V.1882

6: Kaufmann, Frankfurt a. M. **Businessman**

7: Bella geb. Fürth, 2 Kinder

8: Simon M. Bock, Kaufmann. Bertha geb. Löwenthal, Frankfurt a. M.

Zusätze zu den Personal-Notizen: Additions to the personnel notes:

22.I.15 - 6.II.15 Rue d'hospital Lazarett St. Quentin (Military hospital)

28.III.17 - 3.V.17 Res.(serve) Lazarett IX Frankfurt a. Main (Military hospital)

Beförderungen: **Promotions**

1.4.03 zum überpl.(anmäßigen) Gefreiten ernannt **Appointed corporal.**

21.8.03 zum überpl.(anmäßigen) Utffz. (Unteroffizier) befördert **Promoted to non-commissioned officer.**

31.5.04 zum Vizewachtmeister befördert **Promoted to deputy sergeant.**

4.8.14 zum Offizierstellvertreter ernannt **Appointed to deputy officer.**

21.07.17 zum Vizewachtmeister zurück ernannt u. zum Offz. Asp. (Offizieraspirant) ernannt.
Reappointed deputy sergeant and appointed as an officer candidate. [A senior non-commissioned officer, equivalent to a sergeant and in training to be an officer].

12.2.18 lt.(aut) a. K. O. z.(um) Leutnant d.(er) R.(eserve) d.(er) Feldart.(illerie) befördert.
Promoted to lieutenant in the field artillery reserves. Probably therefore commanded a platoon or company.

Page 3:

9. Flak-Batterie 78

10. Dienst-Verhältnisse Service Conditions

a) früher previously

b) nach der Mobilmachung after mobilisation

a) 1.X.02. als Einj.(ählig) Frw. (Freiwilliger) bei 1. Battr. (Batterie) 2. Nass.(aisches?) Feld-art.(illerie) Reg.(iment) 63.

One year old Volunteer 1. Battery 2. Nassau field artillery 63rd Regiment.

- 1.IV.03 zum überzähligen Gefreiten befördert. **Promoted to supernumerary corporal.**
 21.VIII.03 zur Unteroffizier befördert. **Promoted to supernumerary non-commissioned officer.**
 30.IX.03 zur Reserve beurlaubt. **On reserve leave.**
 31.V.04 zum Vizewachtm.(eister) bftd.(befördert). **Promoted to vice-sergeant.**
 4.VIII.13 dauernd felddienstunfähig **Permanently unfit for field service.**

b) [Western Front]

- 4.VIII.14 - 22.1.15 bei 5. M. K. 2 Batl(Bataillon) Fußart.(illerie) Reg.(iment) 3 XXI. A.K. **5th M.K. (several possibilities, but most likely *Maschinenkanone*, automatic machine cannon¹³) 2 Battalion Foot Artillery, Regiment 3, XXI Army Corps**
 4.VIII.14 z.(um) Offiz(ier)stellv.(ertreter) ernannt. **Appointed deputy officer.**
 6.II.15 - 29.3.15 Fußart.(illerie) 3. Ers.(atz) Bsp. Abt.(eilung). **Foot Artillery 3. Reserve Horse drawn division.¹⁴**
 29.III.15 - 6.IV.15 II. Ers.(atz) Abt.(eilung) d.(es) Feldart.(illerie) Reg.(iment) 27. **II. Reserve Division of the Field Artillery Regiment 27.**
 6.IV.15 - 20.IV.15 II. Ers.(atz) Abt.(eilung) d.(es) Feldart.(illerie) Reg.(iment) 63. **II. Reserve Division of the Field Artillery Regiment 63.**
 22.IV.15 - 11.VIII.15 9. Komp.(agnie) Landst.(urm) Inf.(anterie) Reg.(iment) 115. **9. Landsturm Company, Infantry Regiment 115. [The *Landsturm* was a German reserve army that could be mobilised in times of war].**
 14.VIII.15 - 19.X.15 II. Ers.(atz) Abt.(eilung) d.(es) Feldart.(illerie) Reg.(iment) 63. **II. Reserve Division of the Field Artillery Regiment 63.**
 19.X.15 - 31.10.15 zur Verfgg.(Verfügung) d.(es) Insp.(ektor) der Feldart.(illerie) XVIII A. K. **Ordered to the Inspection officer, Field Artillery, XVIII Army Corps**

[Eastern Front]

- 7.XI.15 - 28.III.17 Verpflegungsoffizier der II. Abt.(eilung) Res.(erve) Feldart.(illerie) Reg.(iment) 48. **Catering organiser for the troops of the 2nd Division, Reserve Field Artillery, Regiment 48.**

[Training Course]

- 3.V.17 - 13.VI.17 Flak-Ersatz Abt.(eilung) I. **Flak Reserve Department I.**
 2.VI.17 zur Flak-Battr.(Batterie) 78. **To the Flak Battery 78.**
 21.VII.17 zum Vizewachtm.(eister) zurückbefördert (zurückbefördert) u.(nd) zum Offiziers-Aspiranten ernannt. **Reappointed as deputy sergeant and was appointed as an officer aspirant.**

11 Orden **Medals**

- E.(eisernes) K.(reuz) II (erhalten am) 27.I.17 Iron **Cross II, awarded 27 January 1917**

12 Mitgemachte Gefechte **Combat experience [See below for more details]**

Western Front

- 11.VIII.14 Gefecht bei Lagarde (F-57810 Lagarde Dep. Moselle). **Battle of Lagarde**
 18. - 19.VIII.14 Gefecht bei Lauterfingen-Mittersheim (F-57670 Loudrefing; F-57930 Mittershm). **Battle of Lauterfingen-Mittersheim. (Loudrefing Mittersheim)**
 20. - 22.VII.14 Schlacht in Lothringen. **Battle of Lorraine**

22.VIII.14 - 14. IX. 14 Schlacht vor Nancy-Epinal. **Battle of Nancy-Epinal**
 23.IX.14 - 16.X.14 Schlacht an der Somme. **Battle of the Somme**
 17.X.14 - 22.I.15 Stellungskampf an der Somme. **Trench warfare on the Somme**
 22.IV.15 - 11.VIII.15 Stellungskampf in Lothringen **Trench warfare in Lorraine**

Eastern Front

7.XI.15 - 3. VI.16 Stellungskampf an der Strypa zw.(ischen) d.(er) Wosuszka u.(nd) Sereth. **Trench warfare at the river Strypa between the (river) Wosuszka and Sereth.**
 4.VI.16 - 10.VI.16 Schlacht zw.(ischen) Wosuszka u.(nd) Sereth. **Battle between Wosuszka and Sereth.**
 11.VI.16 - 7.VIII.16: Schlacht an der Strypa am Barys u.(nd) Koropice-Abschnitt. **Battle on the Strypa am Barys and Koropice section.**
 8.VIII.14 (muss 16 heißen) - 14.VIII.16: Rückzugskämpfe zw.(ischen) Strypa u.(nd) Zlota-Lipa. **Fighting retreat between Strypa and Zlota-Lipa.**
 22.VIII.16 - 27.III.17: Stellungskämpfe an der Bystrizca. **Trench warfare at Bystrizca.**

13 Kommandos und besondere Dienstverhältnisse Command and special service conditions

5.V.17 - 2.VI.17 Ausb.(ildungs) Kurs IV d.(es) Flak Ers.(atz) Reg.(iments) Frankfurt a. M. **Training Course IV for the Flak Replacement Regiment in Frankfurt am Main.**
 14.VI.(?) - 1.VII.17 Ausbildungskursus Flakkommando D Blankenberg Be(lgien). **Training course Flak Command D Blankenberg, Belgium.**

14 Führung Conduct

Führung: dienstlich)
 Vorzüglich) **Officially and morally excellent**
 moralisch)
 Strafen: keine **No penalites**

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Der Vizewachtm.(eister) (Off. Stv. (Offizier-Stellvertreter)) Bock hat an einem vierwöchentlichen, theoretischen, praktischen Ausbildungs-Kursus für Zugführer mit sehr gutem Erfolg teilgenommen. Seine Weiterbeförderung wird dieseits befürwortet; dsgl.(desgleichen) seine Ernennung zum Offiziers-Aspiranten.

Ausbildungs-Kommando
 Flak-Ersatz-Regiment
 Einw.(illigung)
 gez.(eichnet) Gombert

Frankfurt a. M., den 2. Juni 1917
 gez.(eichnet) Schöler
 Hauptmann u. Kommandoführer

F.(ür) d.(ie) R.(ichtigkeit)
 A... (Unterschrift)
 Leutnant und Batterieführer

The deputy sergeant (deputy officer) Bock participated in a four-week, theoretical, practical training course for platoon leaders, with very good success. His advancement is supported by this; likewise his appointment to officer aspirant. Frankfurt am Main, 2 June 1917.

Manfred and the First World War

Manfred, in common with many German Jews was very patriotic and volunteered at the commencement of the First World War. In her memoirs, his sister Alice wrote: *When the war broke out, my brother Manfred stood in front of our door on the 1st August at 7 o'clock in the morning and told us that he was going to volunteer for the army, in spite of the fact that his wife was pregnant.* Manfred's son, Walter Ludwig Victor Bock, with his patriotic middle name, was born January 1915.

Alice's husband Leo was called up in 1916, and the two brothers-in-law joked saying that Leo would regain everything back in France that Manfred's company had lost! Both regiments were later sent to Galicia.



**1914, Manfred, Bella and daughter Edith, born October 1912
Leo Goldschmidt and his wife Alice**

Manfred somehow survived the whole war from beginning to end. He was exposed to trench warfare and was posted to the Eastern Front for two cold winters. He was also involved in the Russian Brusilov offensive and subsequent German retreat.

No correspondence has survived between himself and his wife and family from this period (except for the postcards mentioned below). Presumably they were packed in the 'lift' prior to Manfred leaving Germany in 1939. This 'lift' never arrived in England, and all the mainly personal possessions that could not be auctioned, were given to the *Jüdischer Religionsverband e.V. Hamburg*, and did not survive the war.¹⁵

I was never aware of Manfred's experiences in the First World War until I saw his war record, nor that he had received an Iron Cross. I like to imagine him waiting till his ship had left Hamburg for the UK on 28 March 1939, and throwing it in disgust into the sea. Given his lengthy active service, it is hardly surprising that Manfred was one of the many Jews who felt, when the situation started deteriorating for them once the Nazis came into power, that his army service would and should be respected.

Trying to determine where Manfred fought ¹⁶

I have looked at several books about both the Western and the Eastern Fronts during the First World War and searched for information online. The following, therefore, is an attempt to reconstruct Manfred's war, but absent is his subjective experience of those awful years. As he was in the artillery, he was not in the front line, but even so, given the number of battles he was in, it feels like a miracle that he survived.

What sort of artillery was Manfred operating?¹⁷

Before the First World War, the German Foot Artillery and the Field Artillery regiments had been strictly separated. The Field Artillery was a completely mounted unit that handled light field guns and howitzers, primarily supporting the infantry and cavalry. The Foot Artillery were armed with heavy guns and siege howitzers and were not particularly mobile. They had been chiefly deployed during the previous centuries' siege warfare. As the battles during 1914 transformed into trench warfare, it became clear that with modern industrialised warfare, the two artillery units needed to work together. As the decisive role of heavy artillery became evident, the foot artillery became a tactical unit of the heavy artillery.

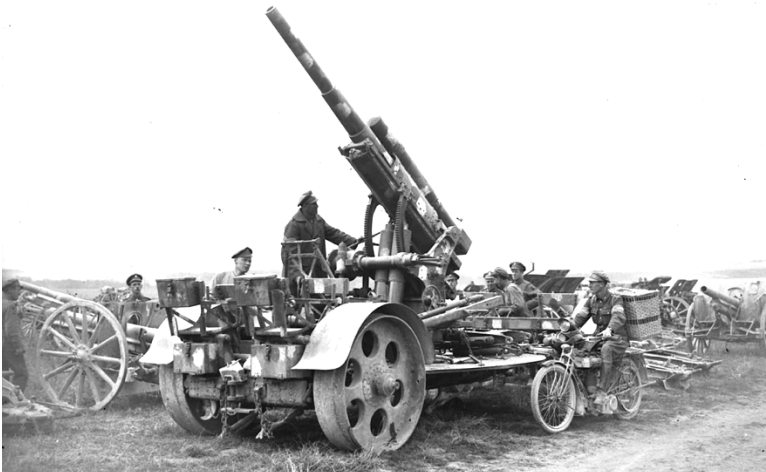
Manfred was assigned to a Field Artillery unit during his voluntary year in the army, 1902 - 1903. On the outbreak of WW1, Manfred was assigned to a Foot Artillery regiment, this unit (II Battalion, Foot Artillery, Regiment 3) was a Heavy Field Howitzer regiment.



German soldiers firing artillery gun, and others moving on horseback ¹⁸

There is no record of the type of artillery Manfred was manning, or if, possibly, from the beginning, he was operating an early form of anti-aircraft weapon. These were primitive and primarily adaptations of existing medium-caliber weapons, mounted to enable fire at higher angles. By 1915, the German military command realised that they were useless for anything beyond deterrence, even against vulnerable balloons and slow-moving aircraft. Higher muzzle velocity guns were developed, allowing the projectiles to reach greater altitudes. The first such German gun, the Flak 16, was introduced in 1917.¹⁹ Flak is the abbreviation of *Flugabwehr-Kanone*, anti-aircraft gun.

In May 1917, Manfred was assigned to an anti-aircraft flak unit. From August 1917 new anti-aircraft detachments, both horse-drawn and motorised, were formed to protect strategically important points and industrial plants in the west of Germany.



8.8 cm Flak 16 cannon ²⁰

Which army was Manfred's regiment assigned to?

In 1902, Manfred, as an *Einjährig Freiwilliger*, one year volunteer, joined the 63rd Regiment (2nd Nassau), Field Artillery, 1st Battery. This regiment was a part of the XVIII Army Corps which in 1914, on mobilisation, joined the Fourth Army.

In 1914, as war broke out, Manfred once again volunteered and was assigned to the XXI AK, (Army Korps). His regiment of Heavy Field Howitzers was part of the XXI Corps and was assigned to the predominantly Bavarian Sixth Army that formed part of the left wing of the forces for the August 1914 Schlieffen Plan offensive on the Western Front.²¹ The Sixth Army were stationed in the Central sector, covering Lorraine, and was commanded by Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria (Kronprinz Rupprecht von Bayern).

It seems that Manfred remained in the Sixth Army, as the battles he was a part of took place further south than those of the Fourth Army. Soon a state of stalemate between the opposing armies was established. The result was the development of trench warfare along the Western Front. Many of the units of the Sixth Army were gradually dispersed to other commands.

In 1915, Manfred is recorded as being part of the XVIII Corps (and therefore part of the Fourth Army), and it would appear his unit had rejoined the Corps it had been a part of on mobilisation in 1914.

Manfred on the Western front

On 1 August 1914, the German invasion force stood on its Western frontier with a force of 1,485,000 men and seven armies. As outlined above, Manfred's unit joined the XXI Army Corps and was therefore part of the Sixth Army that formed part of the left wing of the forces of the Schlieffen plan.²² As such he must have been in the 'Delaying Force' whose task was to defend Alsace-Lorraine with 345,000 men in 8 Corps.²³

11.8.1914 Fought at Battle of Lagarde

The *Battle of Lagarde* began on 7 August 1914 and was the French army's opening attack against Germany. The battle was part of a French attempt to recover the province of Alsace, which France had ceded to the new German Empire following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871. The French crossed the border and occupied Mulhouse on 8 August. They were then forced out by German counterattacks on 10 August.

Manfred's first record shows that he was present at Lagarde on 11 August, the day that the Germans recaptured the town that had, the previous day, fallen to the French. The battle included a significant amount of cavalry, and both sides had substantial losses of both soldiers and horses. Modern heavy artillery dominated a battle that had begun on old-fashioned principles. The French soldiers were still dressed in bright red trousers that were easily seen through the trees, unlike the German Army in their camouflaged green-grey uniforms.

18 – 19 .8.1914 Fought at Lauterfingen-Mittersheim (Lorraine-Mittersheim)

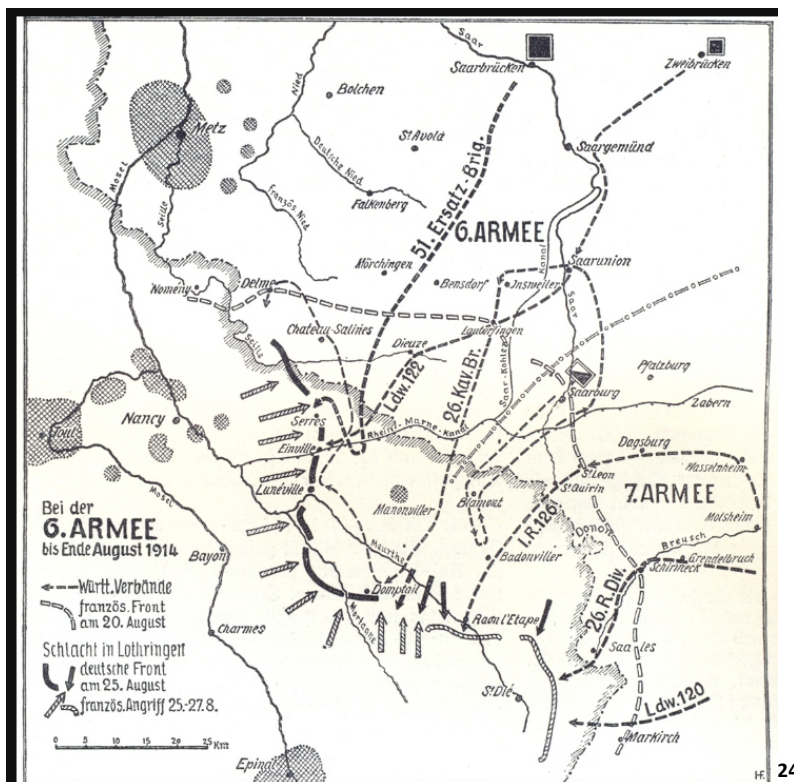
Loudrefing is 20 miles Northwest of Lagarde

20 – 22.8.1914 Battle in Lothringen (Lorraine)

The initial clashes between the French and German armies along the Franco-German and Franco-Belgian frontiers are collectively known as the *Battle of the Frontiers*. This group of engagements, which lasted from 14 August until the beginning of the *First Battle of the Marne* on 6 September, was to be the largest battle of the war, with a total of more than two million troops involved.

As with Alsace, the province of Lorraine/ Lothringen had been under German occupation since 1871, and the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. It was a matter of French national pride to liberate the province, rich in coal and iron deposits. Equally important for the French was the rail and road hub at the fortified city of Metz.

The French thrust into Lorraine started on 14 August and totalled 19 divisions. The German plan was to allow the French to advance and draw them away from the German armies that were successfully advancing through Belgium. However, the German imperial princes, who commanded armies on the Germans' left (southern) wing in Lorraine, were unwilling to forfeit their opportunity for personal glory. On 20 August, Crown Prince Rupert of Bavaria ordered his Sixth Army to counterattack, instead of continuing to fall back before the French advance as planned. Crown Prince William of Germany ordered his 5th Army to do the same. The French suffered thousands of casualties.



22.8 – 14.9.1914 Battle of Nancy-Epinal

As a result, on 4 September, German Army Chief of Staff, Moltke decided to abandon the original Schlieffen Plan in an attempt to seek victory in Lorraine, and diverted the six newly formed Ersatz divisions to Lorraine.

Following the failure of the French to hold the German advance at the Battle of Lorraine, the Germans now planned to attack the Toul–Épinal line of fortifications and envelop the whole French right wing. The city of Nancy was held by the French, who occupied an arc of high ground on a nearby series of hills. It was believed that the German Sixth Army could capture Nancy, whose fall would be a prize worthy of a grand entrance by Kaiser Wilhelm II himself. Anticipating victory, he arrived in his royal train to observe the German attack and attend a victory parade in the captured city.

The battle was fought day and night from 3 to 13 September. On 7 September, the French partly retreated, but this went unnoticed by the Germans, who had retired during the afternoon, and the heights were reoccupied before they could react. German attacks continued until the morning of 8 September, and then became less powerful as Moltke began to withdraw troops and ordered the end of the offensive. On 10 September, following orders, the German army began to withdraw east, and the front stabilized, remaining at the Seille river until 1918.²⁵

Between 13 and 23 September the Sixth Army was moved by rail from Lorraine to St. Quentin and Péronne on the right wing of the German forces.

23.9. 1914 – 16.10. 1914 Battle of the Somme
and
17.10.14 – 22.1.1915 Trench warfare on the Somme.



German troops man a German 5.9-inch howitzer battery on the Western Front, 14 November 1914 ²⁶

There is no information exactly where Manfred was stationed, but he clearly was involved in the first *Battle on the Somme*, followed by further warfare as part of the Somme trench engagements. These battles, the *First Battle of Picardy*, 22 to 26 September, and *First Battle of Albert*, 25 to 29 September, were part of what became known as the *Race to the Sea*.²⁷

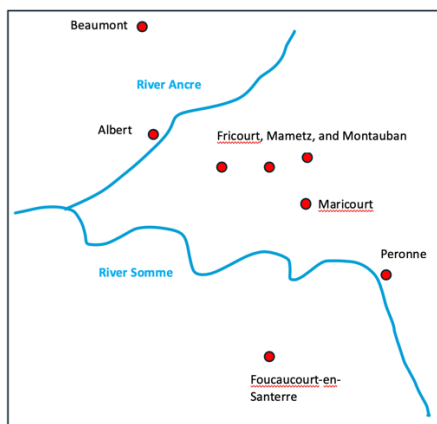
On 21 September, General Falkenhayn, Prussian war minister and commander of the army, met Colonel-General von Bülow and they agreed that the Sixth Army should concentrate their forces near Amiens. Planning to battle their way to the Channel coast, they anticipated seizing the industrial and agricultural regions of northern France. With this in mind, they planned for a *Schlachtentscheidung*, a decisive battle, that would isolate Belgium and outflank the French south of the Somme.

The XXI Corps had moved from Lunéville on 15 September, and the First Bavarian Corps arrived during 24 September. An offensive by the French Second Army forced Falkenhayn to divert both corps as soon as they arrived. They were ordered to extend the front northwards from Chaulnes to Péronne, attack the French bridgehead, and drive the French back over the Somme.

On 24 September, the German Sixth Army were in action south of the River Somme at Foucaucourt-en-Santerre. On 25 September, the Germans attacked, crossed the Somme and captured the ground immediately north of the Somme, east of Albert and the villages of Fricourt, Mametz, Montauban and Maricourt. Neither side could defeat their opponent, and the battle ended in stalemate around 29 September.

In mid-October, the Sixth Army moved further north, covering the ground north of Arras, in what was to become the Lille -Artois battle sector. Several fierce battles with heavy casualties lasted into October and November; the German troops having been ordered to hold their positions. Any advances were halted by late 1914, and with the first snowfalls that winter, most hostilities ceased. Both sides were exhausted and low in men, ammunition, and morale. The time was used improving and strengthening the short trench sections and foxholes into an impressive defensive

line of trenches, that ultimately stretched from the North Sea to the Swiss border, about 475 miles/765 kilometers. The German divisions north of the Somme had selected good positions on high ground, with commanding views over the enemy's lines, and they incorporated many villages and hamlets including Beaumont, Fricourt, Mametz and Montauban.



22.1.15 – 6.2.15 Rue d'hospital, Lazarett, St. Quentin

From this entry it is clear that Manfred must have been wounded in January 1915 when he was fighting on the Somme. He was briefly in a *Feldlazarett*, field hospital, in St Quentin. His next recorded posting was dated 22 April 1915 when he returned to the front in Lorraine. Presumably he had been convalescing during this six-week break, most probably in Frankfurt. His son, Walter, was born 11 January 1915, (and was given the significant middle name Victor), so that would have been a very special time for the family.

22.4.1915 – 11.8.1915 Trench warfare in Lorraine

When Manfred returned to the front, he joined the *Landsturm* company as part of the newly formed 115th Infantry Division.²⁸ *Landsturm* was a term used in Prussia and in other German speaking countries to refer to military reserve units with inferior quality and/or elderly troops. They were generally mobilised in times of war to defend the homeland.

Manfred's record shows he remained in Lorraine until 11 August, once more involved in the ongoing trench warfare. The 115th Division was transferred to the Eastern Front at the end of July. Manfred's unit also moved to the Eastern Front at some point, and his first engagement there was in November. It is unclear if his regiment remained as part of the 115th or not, as the battle locations do not correspond with those of Manfred's records.

Before he was transferred east, Manfred sent some postcards of himself, taken with his horse, to his family, which have fortunately survived. They are dated August 1915, and stamped '115th Infantry Division'. His personal stamp shows he was designated a *Stellungs Unteroffizier*, a NCO position.

5.8.15 KD Feldpoststation - on active service. Alsace, Lothringen (Lorraine). Written to Mrs Goldschmidt (Possibly his sister Alice's mother-in-law). Formally thanking her for her letter and saying he is happy that she is well, and he can say the same about himself!

Meine sehr verehrte Frau Goldschmidt. Nehmen Sie verbindlichsten dank fur Ihre so l(ieben) Zeilen, die mich ganz ausserordentlich gefreut habe ! Ich hore gerne dass es Ihnen gut geht, kann Ihnen auch von mir nur Bestes berichten und grusse Sie nebst Ihren Lieben.

The second postcard was written at the same time. Significantly he writes 'Thank goodness everything is fine with me, but it is now soon time for the end'. Was he saying ...we now need to finish; we have had enough?

Meine Lieben, Besten Dank für Euren so süßen Gruß. Ich freue mich sehr, Gutes von Euch zu hören. Hoffentlich geht es auch (?) Hilde nach Wunsch. Mir geht es G.s.D. (Gott sei Dank) gut, aber es ist jetzt bald Zeit für Schluss. Viele herzliche Grüße Euer Manfred



1915

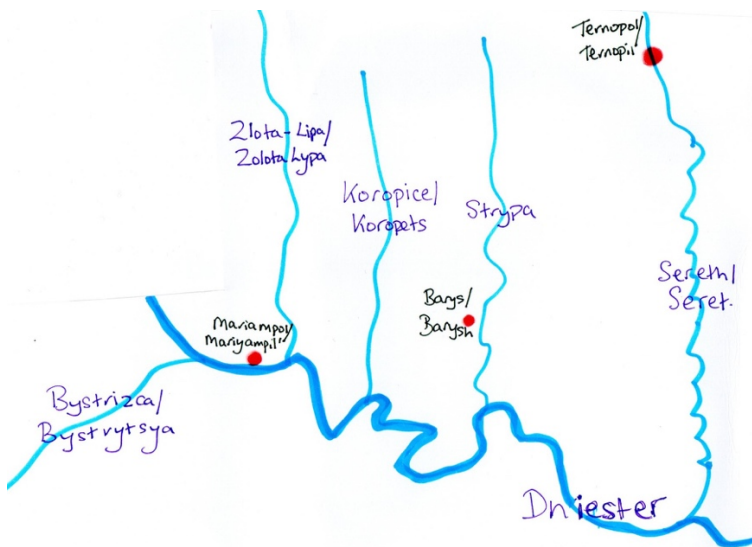


Undated, with snow



1915

Manfred on the Eastern Front



Galicia. Outline of the tributaries of the Dniester, mentioned in Manfred's war record

Sometime between August and November 1915, Manfred's regiment, the Reserve Field Artillery, Regiment 48, a part of the 48th Reserve Division,²⁹ was sent to reinforce the Austro-Hungarian forces on the Eastern Front. They joined the *Südararmee*, or South Army which combined diverse troops: German, Austrian, Hungarian and Turkish, under the Bavarian General von Bothmer.

The brief descriptions of the battles in Manfred's army record are not precise about the location, as most of the battles seem to have been over the natural front lines of some of the innumerable tributaries of the Dniester River. The following is based on his record, and the relatively few references in books that I consulted about the Eastern Front to the *Südararmee*.

The majority of the 48th Reserve Division had already moved east in November 1914. They participated in the pursuit of the Russians from Carpathia and Austrian Galicia in battles known as the *Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive*, that began in May 1915, and were therefore involved in the advance from the Zlota-Lipa river to the Strypa river in East Galicia.

The *Gorlice-Tarnów Offensive* proved to be a major Russian defeat. The Russians suffered a massive loss of men, and it was thought that the Russian army, which had retreated far into Russia, looked as if it was on the verge of collapse and would not be posing any threat in future. *They had been chased from Poland, had suffered repeated massive defeat, and had shown that their system of war was wholly unsuited to the modern, industrial battlefields of 1914 and 1915. Russian generalship had ranged from uninspiring to abysmal, and the Russian transport and economic systems were already showing serious signs of cracking.*³⁰

7.11. 1915 – 3.6.1916 Trench warfare at the (river) Strypa, between the (rivers) Wosuszka and Sereth [Seret], (Galicia)³¹

The Central Powers used the winter to dig several lines of well defended trenches behind three formidable lines of barbed wire. The series of trench warfare battles, between November 1915 and June 1916, included the Russian offensive that commenced on 27 December 1915; the *Battle of the Strypa*. The assault proved to be a total disaster for the Russians and the Russian Chief of Staff, General Alekseyev, called a halt on 26 January 1916. The result was that the combined Austro-Hungarian and German forces retained the Strypa west of Tarnopol during the winter of 1915 and spring of 1916.³² The Wosuszka, mentioned in Manfred's record, is a small river that flows into the Strypa, but has not been possible to locate.

The Austrian High Command under Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf were confident that their defensive doctrine, that placed faith in established positions, defended by concentrated artillery fire, would enable them to hold the front.³³ Conrad commenced, despite the counter arguments of General Falkenhayn, Chief of the Imperial German General Staff, to withdraw troops from the Eastern Front to launch an offensive in the Italian South Tyrol. Falkenhayn felt able to turn his attention once more to Verdun on the Western Front and defeating the French.

What both were unaware of was that the new commander of the Russian forces, General Alexei Brusilov, had proposed a plan of attack that he believed had a chance of success. During the winter of 1915/ 16 and into the spring he managed to modernise the Russian Imperial Army. He transformed the Russian outdated tactics, trained the troops thoroughly, and used aerial reconnaissance to spot the enemy artillery. Secrecy was vital, and the counterattack was planned to take place on four fronts along the 350 mile/450 km front from the Stry River in the north to the Pruth River on the Romanian border.³⁴ By only using an intensive artillery barrage along the long front, the enemy would be confused as to where the main thrust was going to take place and would not have enough time to bring in reserves.

4.6.1916 – 10.6.1916 Battle between (rivers) Wosuszka and Sereth[Seret]

The initial Russian attack breaching the line in multiple places, took place on 4 June 1916 at 4am. And, as anticipated, it took the Austro-Hungarian and German commanders by surprise. The engagements became known as the *Brusilov Offensive* and lasted until 20 September 1916. Manfred was evidently in the sector between the rivers Wosuszka and Sereth, and his division may have had to abandon the trenches they had lived in over the winter.

11.6 – 7.8.1916 Battle on the Strypaam Barys [Barysh] and Koropice, (Koropiec [Polish], Koropets[Ukrainian]) section

On 28 July, there was a further massive Russian attack, in which undoubtedly Manfred was involved. Brusilov's guns opened a barrage along the entire front at 4 am that day, using gas shells in several sectors. By dawn, the Russians had penetrated some of the line and established positions on the Western bank of the Koropiec River. However, they were unable to breach the centre of the *Südarmee* along the Strypa River.³⁵

The Austro-Hungarian losses were enormous and by July 1916 the Austrians conceded strategic planning on the Eastern Front to the Germans.

8.8.1916 – 14.8.1916 Fighting retreat between Strypa and Zlota-Lipa [Zolota Lypa]

The German army were stronger and better disciplined than the Austrian army and the *Südarmee* managed to slow Brusilov's advance but were forced to retreat from the Strypa.³⁶

On 12 August, the Russians crossed the Zlota-Lipa and occupied Mariampol, [Mariyampil'], on the left bank of the Dniester.

22.8.1916 – 27.3.1917 Trench warfare on the (river) Bystrizca [Bystrytsya]

Manfred's division entrenched once more by the Bystrizca (many spellings) river, a right tributary of the Dniester.

By early September Brusilov's troops had advanced an average of 60 miles into enemy territory. In some locations they succeeded in advancing up to 100 miles.³⁷ However, both the Austrians and Russians were exhausted and had suffered enormous losses. Exasperated, the Russian military forced Czar Nicholas to resign in March 1917, a move that led, to the lead up to the Russian Revolution.³⁸

The fighting continued under less autocratic Russian leadership. In this manner, the Germans were prevented from pulling the majority of their forces back to the Western Front and Manfred's unit, remained on the Eastern Front.

Manfred had to endure another winter in the east and On 27 January 1917, Manfred was awarded an **Iron Cross II**, (second class), for 'bravery'. Unfortunately, it is not recorded what merited the award.

The next record reports that Manfred was wounded. He left the trenches by the Bystrizca river on 27 March 1917, and the next day was in a military hospital in Frankfurt, his hometown.

Manfred's role on the Eastern Front

According to his record, Manfred remained on the Eastern Front from 7th November 1915 to 28 March 1917. No leave period is mentioned. He is recorded as being a *Verpflegungsoffiziere* for the 2nd Division Reserve Field Artillery. This translates as an officer in charge of catering, provisions or possibly rations, holding the crucial role of organising the men's food.³⁹ If this translation is correct, perhaps he was able to disappear occasionally into the warm field kitchens during the two bitter winters. A more unfavorable interpretation could be that he was involved in procuring food for the troops by coercing the local farmers and peasantry. This would have been the accepted way fresh food was procured, especially when the troops were long distances away from their home country.

Manfred and the last years of the War, 1917 – 1918

28.III.17 – 3.V.17 Reserve Lazarett IX Frankfurt a. Main (Military hospital)

Manfred must have been wounded more severely than previously, as between 28 March and 3 May he was in a military hospital in his hometown Frankfurt am Main. He never returned to the East.

5.V.17 - 2.VI.17 Training Course IV for the Flak Replacement Regiment in Frankfurt am Main

The 48th Reserves returned to the Western Front in May 1917.

Finally, it was acknowledged that Manfred had earned the right to be considered for promotion to officer.

On 5 May 1917 Manfred returned from his convalescence, joined Flak Replacement Regiment 78, and went on a training course in Frankfurt. On completion, the Battery Commander was able to support his advancement and wrote on 2nd June: *The vice-sergeant officer-deputy Bock participated in a four-week, theoretical, practical training course for Zugführer (A Zugführer leads or commands a subunit of a Zug – a platoon or detachment ⁴⁰) with very good success. His advancement is supported by this, likewise his appointment to officer candidate.*

14.VI.17 - 21.VII.17 Training course, Flak Command D, Blankenberg, Belgium

Manfred was then sent on a further course in Blankenberg, Belgium until the beginning of July. Very slowly he was overcoming the hurdles that had been in his way for so many years.

21.VII.17 Reappointed deputy sergeant and appointed as an officer candidate

It is not clear where Manfred was sent following completion of the course as for some reason his later army service was not recorded. But his *Wehrdienst Soldbuch*, military service soldier's pay book, indicates clearly that by February 1918 he was in Flak-Batterie 78. This unit was located in Rottweil, Württemberg, and he was in charge of an anti-aircraft unit, *Flugabwehrbataillon*.

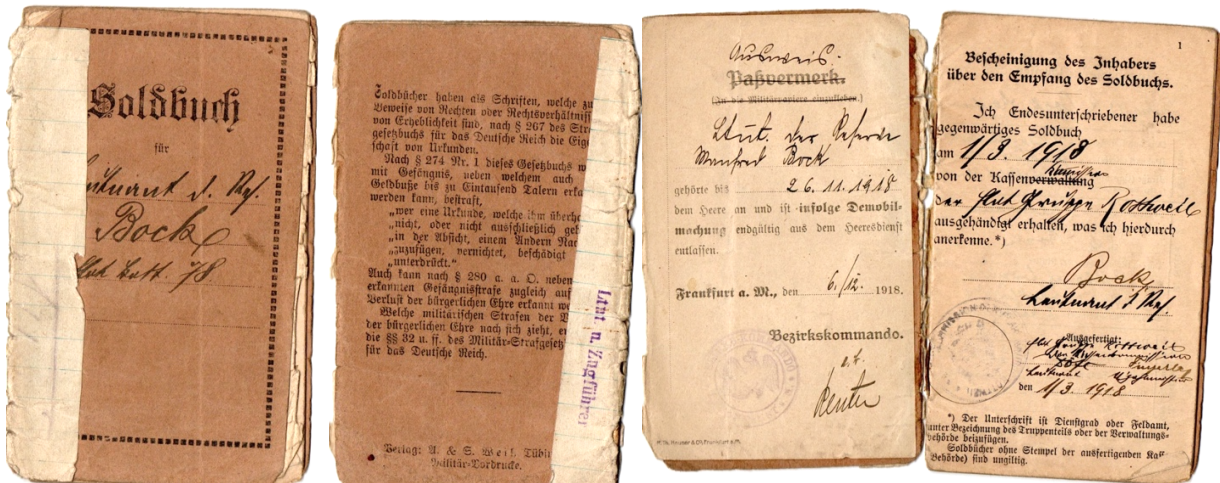
12.II.18 Promoted to lieutenant in the field artillery reserves

Only, and finally, in February 1918, did Manfred finally become a Lieutenant in the Reserves of the Field Artillery. It is therefore most likely he was commanding a platoon or company in Rottweil.

26.11.1918 Demobilized

The *Soldbuch* records Manfred as being demobilized on 26 November 1918. The District Commander signed him off on 6 December 1918 in Frankfurt. Manfred had therefore served during the full duration of the First World War.

Manfred's conduct was recorded as *officially and morally excellent* and he had no penalties.



Rottweil, Württemberg

It seems inconceivable that the family visited Manfred during the war. However, the photos show the family in Rottweil. Manfred looks relatively relaxed, sitting on a branch with his 3-year-old son Walter. Both Edith, his daughter, and Walter can be seen playing with some puppies and rabbits. A gun can be seen in the background of the photo of Manfred standing alone.

Most probably the visit took place after the armistice and before Manfred was demobilized. Manfred's sister Alice definitely visited him at the *Flugabwehrstation* (air defense station), as she wrote that she ...left Rottweil for Frankfurt on 11 November 1918, the 'day of the revolution',⁴¹ and was the only woman on a train full of soldiers.





Family photos of Walter and Edith visiting their father in Rottweil, 1918.

A third child, my mother Lieselotte, was born in September 1919. She was named by her siblings after their father's army horse Lotte. It is unlikely, however, that the horse on the postcard, dated 1915, seen above, survived a move to the Eastern Front and back. So, it is not clear when the children would have seen their father's horse.

Conclusion

It is highly unlikely that further records from the period of Manfred's army service would be held in German archives, as the Prussian Army Archive (*Heeresarchiv*) in Potsdam was destroyed by fire on 25 April 1945, shortly before the end of the Second World War.⁴² It is therefore particularly fortunate to have been able to build a picture of Manfred's war service from the entries in his own, carefully preserved, military record.

Manfred's story was not unusual at the time. The overwhelming hope, especially for middle class Jews, was to become fully accepted in German society. Patriotic Jews like him chose to show their loyalty by volunteering in great numbers rather than wait to be called up at the start of hostilities. To their dismay, in 1916, the German War Ministry, in response to complaints that '...Jews were evading their obligation to serve under every conceivable pretext...' and were not exposing themselves to danger, commissioned a census to elucidate how many Jews were serving on the front.⁴³ The results showed that 80% of all Jewish soldiers served on the front lines, a far higher percentage than the general population.⁴⁴ The census results were never published and the lie contributed to the post war antisemitic slurs against 'unpatriotic' Jews.

With his lengthy and decorated service behind him, Manfred was one of the innumerable Jews who erroneously believed that, as the situation devastatingly deteriorated in the 1930s, his veteran status would confer some protection. Finally, after Kristallnacht, he realised he had to leave Germany but faced an impossible dilemma. Jews were only allowed to emigrate with a mere 10 Reichsmark, having had to pay the hefty 'flight' tax, the *Reichsfluchtsteuer*. Fearing a future without funds, he almost left it too late. Fortunately, he managed to obtain a three month, 'not for employment' visa, and on 28 March sailed from Hamburg for the United Kingdom. The final humiliation: his name and signature in his German passport now including 'Israel', the obligatory designation for German Jews.



Manfred's Reisepass issued 7 March 1939

Acknowledgments

Hanno Müller very kindly offered to decipher, transcribe and contribute his thoughts to the translation of Manfred's army record. Without this, I would not have made much progress in determining Manfred's military movements. A family friend, Ma Henrich, also translated some parts, and pointed out erroneous assumptions from literal translations. To them both; my grateful thanks.

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²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8.8_cm_Flak_16, Photo in Public Domain

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²²

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XXI_Corps_\(German_Empire\)#:~:text=In%20summary%2C%20XXI%20Corps%20mobilised,companies%2C%20and%20an%20aviation%20detachment.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XXI_Corps_(German_Empire)#:~:text=In%20summary%2C%20XXI%20Corps%20mobilised,companies%2C%20and%20an%20aviation%20detachment.)

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- ²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Grand_Couronn%C3%A9
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- ²⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/115th_Infantry_Division_\(German_Empire\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/115th_Infantry_Division_(German_Empire))
- ²⁹ The 48th Reserve Division was relatively mixed but mostly came from the XI and XVIII Army Corps areas. The XVIII Army Corps was basically composed of men from Hessen and had been established in 1899 in Frankfurt am Main.
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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XVIII_Corps_\(German_Empire\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XVIII_Corps_(German_Empire))
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- ³¹ The River Strypa is a left-bank tributary of the Dniester. In 1915-1916, the river was the front line between Russian troops and the Austro-Hungarian army.
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