

HOMESICKNESS AND THE LOCATION OF HOME:  
GERMANS, *HEIMWEH*, AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Germans, *Heimweh*, and the American Civil War

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The subject of immigrant soldiers during the American Civil War has recently received an increase of attention among historians. Military and social historians have examined such themes as nativism, Americanization, and national identity. Although historians have often examined homesickness among soldiers, none have done so from a migrant point of view. As the largest foreign-born group in the Union army, constituting ten percent, the focus of this paper will be on immigrants from Germany.

By looking at letters immigrants wrote to their families, both in the United States and Germany, this paper will examine how both married and single immigrant men interacted with home and war. In many cases, soldiers sought to structure their military environments to resemble the homes, familiar faces, customs, and foods they had left behind. This study seeks to add greater

understanding of both the American Civil War and the migrant experience during the nineteenth century.

(88 pages)

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Homesickness and the Location of Home:  
Germans, *Heimweh*, and the American Civil War

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate homesickness from the perspective of foreign-born migrants, who exhibited multiple notions of home. Letters written to loved ones depicting homesick experiences of the men at the war front illuminate the personal, sentimental, and cultural notions associated with the definition of what a “home” meant. Although focused to a narrow period of American history, this study adds to the larger themes of immigration by acknowledging migrants’ abilities to adapt to their surroundings and make unfamiliar settings resemble the familiar places, faces, customs, and communities of past experiences.

Joseph G. Foster

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Among historians of ethnicity and the American Civil War, the topic of German-born soldiers has seen a surge of interest within the past five years exploring immigrant involvement in the war and the war's effects on the Americanization of immigrant participants. This thesis takes a different turn and explores German soldiers within a second body of recent scholarship: research focused on notions of home and homesickness. A focus on German immigrants during the Civil War *ethnicizes* the topic of homesickness by discussing the perspectives of foreign-born, German-speaking immigrants, adding greater depth and complexity to the topic.

By examining homesick experiences of German immigrants, this thesis will explore how the war affected notions of home and homesickness by comparing correspondences and settlement patterns of nineteenth-century German migrants with those of foreign-born Germans who served as Union soldiers during the American Civil War. As cliché as it might be to claim that “home is where the heart is,” this thesis will examine the relationship between expressions of homesickness and concepts of home, and demonstrate that, separated from their families yet again, migrants missed the aspects, familiarity, and relationships—not only with people but relationships with the land and their own domestic roles—as they struggled to integrate the familiarity of home, first when

they arrived in the United States and again when they left to fight in the war. Home was where they built it.<sup>1</sup>

Studying German soldiers both tests and validates existing research on homesickness and northern culture during the Civil War, yet contributes to the existing literature by examining a group whose background and cultural traits including language, association, and culinary customs reflect a distinction from the dominant Anglo-American culture. The ethnic focus of this thesis does not allude to an entirely distinct, ethnic German experience separate from their native-born American counterparts. Much of the evidence from the soldiers often shares similar sentiments about home and family found in the existing secondary literature concerning native-born American soldiers in the American Civil War, and appears to have little to do with a unique, Germanic identity. The similar responses by both American and German soldiers are not the focal point of the thesis; rather, the thesis points to the fact that the responses are similar despite differences in culture and nativity. This thesis suggests that the war affected the homesick perspectives of German-speaking immigrants, a group separated from home a second time, by challenging them to adapt to new identities as soldiers. By examining the homesick experiences of German migrants who left home a second time, or any number of times, this thesis produces the ability to study the dichotomy between the migrants' conceptions of home based on their European heritage and their adaption to American culture, as migrants struggled to cope with their separation from what they considered familiar yet again.

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<sup>1</sup> Phone conversation with Dr. Susanne Sinke, January 23, 2012.

Scholars have focused their attention on German immigrants during the American Civil War for a number of reasons. First, German immigrants present one group out of an ethnically diverse northern population, reminding historians that those who fought in the American Civil War were not only native-born whites, but a variety of foreign-born people. Foreign-born soldiers accounted for roughly twenty-five percent of the Union army. Second, German immigrants contributed a significant number of soldiers to the war, constituting roughly ten percent of the Union army. Third, as the largest immigrant group in the army, Germans had an assortment of financial, patriotic, and domestic reasons for volunteering, refusing to participate, and to dodge or comply with the draft. Fourth, although Germans were a diverse group of people, many Americans imposed on them a superficial identity based on the commonly shared German language.<sup>2</sup>

A study on *ethnic* homesickness must start with the broader historiography of homesickness and home. Historian Susan Matt's recent monograph on homesickness illustrates the utility in studying the historical and sentimental causes of homesickness in order to add greater depth to the mass migrations of

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen Engle, "Yankee Dutchmen: Germans, the Union, and the Construction of a Wartime Identity," in Susannah J. Ural ed. *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America's Bloodiest Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 11-12, 19, 33. See also Walter Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: the Letters They Wrote Home* translated by Susan Carter Vogel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), xi. Here I use the term "German" as a catch-all to describe immigrants from what we now call "Germany," since there was no such nation-state until 1871. By using the term German, I am following the scholarly examples of Tobias Brinkmann, "The Dialectics of Ethnic Identity: German Jews in Chicago, 1850—1870," in Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner eds. *German-American Immigration in Comparative Perspective* (Madison, WI: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2004), 46-48, and Christian B. Keller, *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 6-7. Brinkman suggests that a shared language connected the various cultural differences among Germans before the unification of the nation-state, while Keller claims that Germanic ethnicity created "a sense of group identification," in the United States.

peoples during the eighteenth-century and through to the twenty-first. Matt defined homesickness in an article she wrote for the *Journal of American History* as “the longing for a particular home,” distinct from nostalgia, which Matt defines as “a yearning for home, but...far away in time rather than space,”<sup>3</sup> The distinguishing characteristics of the term “homesickness” is the close relation of the term to a location or physical object associated with the notion of home, while nostalgia represents the longing for a location or characteristics of home accessible only in a memory or as future desires. In her book, however, Matt eschews any one definition and instead insists that homesickness “meant different things to different peoples at different times,” which allows the historical figures in her narrative to express their thoughts on home within their own personal, malleable idioms.<sup>4</sup> This thesis will borrow from both Matt’s earlier definition of homesickness and the construction of a narrative that reflects the distinct, personal, sentimental notions of home held by the German migrants in this study.

Scholars have tried to define what characteristics or qualities constitute a domestic idea of home during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sally McMurry’s research on farmhouses demonstrates how the architecture of houses changed based on shifts in middle-class consumption of popular culture. Michael Grossberg’s research describes the legal responsibilities husbands and wives had concerning the house, child-rearing, and marriage or divorce. Considered masters of the home, men often retained custody rights over their children and property

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<sup>3</sup> Susan J. Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again: Homesickness and Nostalgia in U.S. History,” *Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (September 2007): 469-471, 494-495.

<sup>4</sup> Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

rights over the home. Wendy Gamber's research explores nineteenth-century notions of home as more than just a structure, depicting home as a private or personal refuge from the world and as a stark contrast from lurid opinions regarding public boardinghouses. Home has been defined as a structure, responsibility, and an intimate, family-values oriented area; and constitutes categories of analysis from which to examine soldiers' comments on homesickness.<sup>5</sup>

In order to fully understand an immigrant's conception of home in space and time, one must first look at the transnational connotations associated with home. Monika Blaschke's work complicates the topic of home by examining how German language women's magazines in the United States inflected "modern American ideals" in terms of fashion and food preparation as well as their responsibilities inside and outside of the home changed how wives saw their domestic roles. Mack Walker and Celia Applegate each wrote on the German notion of *Heimat* (homeland) and its representation as society, hometown, distinctive folklore or folk tunes, and ideology—aspects of home which resonated among German soldiers. Although Mark Wyman's book *Round-Trip to America* describes a wave of immigration many years after the American Civil War, and many years after the torrent of peoples who came in the mid-nineteenth century, his book has been instrumental to this thesis due to his research on return

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<sup>5</sup> Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America: Vernacular Designs and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 57. Also, see Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

migration and the sentimental, personal emotions people associate with a place.<sup>6</sup> The people involved and the circumstances which prompted migration may differ between one time period and another, but Wyman's analysis of transnational migrant identity is useful for any academic discussion immigration because people do not simply leave their experiences and emotional attachments behind them like they do their country.

Historians of the Civil War have also explored the topic of home and homesickness. One of the most influential works on the idea of home and its application to wartime studies is Reid Mitchell's book, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier leaves Home*. Mitchell's book examines the idea of home during the war through the eyes of northern, native-born society of married and single men. The author defines home in terms of family, community, and to a lesser extent, career.<sup>7</sup> Mitchell notes that soldiers not only missed home in such varied contexts, but tried to mimic family and community structures with their new role as soldiers. Men saw their regiments and companies in terms of camaraderie, brotherhood, and occasionally in terms of patriarchy between the officers and enlisted men.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Monika Blaschke, "Communicating the Old and the New: German Immigrant Women and Their Press in Comparative Perspective around 1900," in Dirk Hoerder and Jörg Nagler eds., *People in Transit: German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820—1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 313-327; Mack Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State, and General Estate, 1648—1871* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971); Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880—1930* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 202-209.

<sup>7</sup> Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: the Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 26, 135.

<sup>8</sup> Mitchell, 26, 90.

Other historians of the American Civil War, however, often depict home to the extent that it encouraged participation or desertion. Bell Wiley's work on Civil War soldiers, for instance, includes one such poignant statement: "Home is sweet, and friends are dear, but what would they all be to let the country go to ruin and be a slave."<sup>9</sup> For many soldiers, home, along with freedom in the form of stable government, needed to be defended. Other men, who had left their loved ones to the ravages of war, felt conflicting notions of duty to their family and home or their country. According to James McPherson's research, it was not uncommon for married men, after reading about the hardships back home, to entertain ideas of deserting the army in order to alleviate the needs of their families, as the issue changed from defending home and country to home *or* country.<sup>10</sup>

Although the focal point of this thesis concerns ethnic notions of home, gender roles—the duties and responsibilities men felt they owed to their households and their country—had a profound influence on deciding whether or not to enlist, on soldier identity formation in a camp with few women and surrounded by men, and on the seemingly domestic duties men learned to do for themselves while away from home. Within the past thirty years, recent scholarship on gender, and masculinity in particular, has shown a growing trend that gender roles were not segregated into ridged, binary categories of domestic

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<sup>9</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: the Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 15-16.

<sup>10</sup> James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 138. Also see Susan Matt, "You Can't Go Home Again," 469-497. For another examination of homesickness and its treatment as a medical illness, specifically during the Civil War, see David Anderson, "Dying of Nostalgia: Homesickness in the Union Army during the Civil War," *Civil War History* 56, no. 3 (September 2010): 247-282.

and public spheres, which many had previously noted. Historians Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent maintain that the public and domestic inter-developed and influenced what individuals and society considered proper, masculine behavior from the early modern period through the mid nineteenth-century. Sociologist Michael Kimmel contends that differences in “age, race, class, sexuality and regional background contend with a singular identity of masculinity,” and suggests that personal definitions reflect a plurality of “*masculinities*.” However, Kimmel also recognizes that even with plural definitions of masculinity, men in the United States base their definitions loosely on a “singular ideal of masculinity.” The interactions between the social ideal and the personal reality, public and domestic life provide a complex understanding of gender which demonstrates that men, and in the case of this thesis men at war, did not cut themselves off from sentimentality, but retained their ethnic, domestic, and public understandings of masculinity.<sup>11</sup>

David Anderson’s recent Civil War research focuses on homesickness as a medical illness rather than an improper social behavior. Whereas Matt demonstrated how society changed its perceptions of homesickness from acceptable to unacceptable displays of social behavior, Anderson’s work explores nineteenth-century notions of homesickness as a medical illness by listing the symptoms experienced by soldiers and describing the methods officers,

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 10-15; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 2011), 5-6.

combatants, and medical personnel used to treat the illness such as extending furloughs to soldiers, and by cultivating a stoic mindset.<sup>12</sup>

While Mitchell and other historians have examined key factors associated with the concept of home such as family and politics, they either portray an ethnically homogenous rather than diverse “northern culture” or base their research on prominent “Forty-Eighters” such as Carl Schurz, Franz Siegel, Thomas F. Meagher, and August Willich, who were highly political and intellectual men who fled Europe after the failed revolutions of 1848. Historians such as William Burton, Bell Wiley, and Ella Lonn base their studies of foreign-born soldiers on ethnic regiments, even though the majority of immigrants were not “Forty-Eighters” and did not fight in ethnic regiments, but rather in mixed units.<sup>13</sup> This thesis will seek to move away from the highly political “Forty-Eighters” and incorporate the perspectives from less affluent and influential immigrants who served in mixed regiments in addition to those who served in ethnic regiments. The purpose is to illuminate the experiences of farmers, bricklayers, craftsmen, and mechanics, offering a more bottom-up version of Civil War history.

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, 257, 267-269. See also Frances Clarke, “So Lonesome I Could Die: Nostalgia and Debates Over Emotional Control in the Civil War North,” *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 253-282. Homesickness was considered a form of depression, or *Melancholia*.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, xiii-xiv; McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 26; George Rable, “Hearth, Home, and Family in the Fredericksburg Campaign,” in Joan Cahin ed. *The War was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 86-87; William L. Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers: the Union’s Ethnic Regiments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 1-9; Wiley, 308-309; Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 594-595. For a notable exception which describes the strategic, political differences between Forty-Eighters and other German immigrants see Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 226-28, 234-235, 266-267. Engels, 22-23. Engels shows that roughly 20-25 percent of Germans fought in ethnic regiments—implying that most did not—while citing and agreeing with historian Martin Öfele, who suggests that Forty-Eighters should not be “overemphasized.”

Historians of ethnicity and the Civil War have also neglected the topic of homesickness. Many authors, such as William Burton and Joseph Reinhart focus their studies more on the political or patriotic motives compelling immigrants to fight in the war, demonstrating that foreign born men joined ethnic regiments to show that they were just as patriotic as other Americans. This thesis distinguishes itself from the work done by Burton and Reinhart by discussing more about the soldiers' separation from home than their pursuit for glory.<sup>14</sup>

One particular debate among historians who have written about German soldiers in the Civil War concerns the extent to which the war Americanized foreign-born soldiers. While some historians such as Ella Lonn and William Burton have suggested that the American Civil War was an Americanizing institution that brought together different groups of people under one flag, others contend that the war frustrated the Americanization process and created a stronger ethnic consciousness. For instance, Christian Keller's book *Chancellorsville and the Germans: Nativism, Ethnicity, and Civil War Memory* suggests that German immigrants throughout the northern states discouraged assimilation into Anglo-American society because of national anti-German sentiments and blamed Germans for the devastating Union defeat at Chancellorsville.<sup>15</sup> This thesis will differ from previously written histories by refraining from discussing the complex and fluid conceptions of national identity associated with the term

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<sup>14</sup> Burton, 36. See also Joseph Reinhart, *August Willich's Gallant Dutchmen: Civil War Letters From the 32<sup>nd</sup> Indiana Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 16-17 and Donald Allendorf, *The Long Road to Liberty: The Odyssey of a German Regiment in the Yankee Army, The 15<sup>th</sup> Missouri Volunteer Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), xxii-xxv.

<sup>15</sup> Burton, 233. See also, Wolfgang Helbich, "German-Born Union Soldiers: Motivation, Ethnicity, and 'Americanization'," in Wolfgang Helbich and Walter Kamphoefner eds. *German-American Immigration in Comparative Perspective*, 295-325. Keller, 147, 160.

“Americanization.” Instead, this thesis will make use of prominent immigration theories such as migrants being “uprooted,” proposed by Oscar Handlin, or “transplanted,” as proposed by John Bodnar, to explain that immigrants adapted to their social environment, and use German immigrants in the Civil War as a case study to test the theories when applied to the micro-environment of the military.

Handlin wrote that migrants were “uprooted” from their native lands and removed to a foreign land where they struggled to adapt to unfamiliar living arrangements, work environments, and religious practices than they had known in their native land. In essence, migrants were cut-off and separated. John Bodnar disagreed with Handlin’s analysis. Instead of separation, migrants settled in communities where people shared similar ethnic backgrounds, and where people shared similar traditions and languages. Bodnar’s research demonstrated that people were not “uprooted,” but rather “transplanted,” meaning that life in the United States was a continuation of the lifestyles migrants led in their old homeland.<sup>16</sup>

The most recent scholarship on German immigrants during the Civil War appears in the work by Stephen Engle and Andrea Mehrländer. Engle centers his research in the historiography surrounding German immigrants and German soldiers as he explores the fluid nature associated with collective identity. His research demonstrates that German immigrants identified themselves by social

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<sup>16</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1952), 234-235; John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 57, 71-77.

factors such as a shared language, customs, heritage, and food—particularly beer consumption. Engle concludes his article by claiming that the Civil War promoted a collective German identity, subtly drawing the reader away from blanket statements about Americanization.<sup>17</sup>

Andrea Mehrländer’s research outlines the reasons some German immigrants chose to support Confederate secession based on economic factors. For instance, those who “had families and the ability to protect their antebellum fortunes,” were more likely to support the Confederacy than those who were “less established, single, and male.”<sup>18</sup> Rather than using the terms “assimilation” or “Americanization,” Mehrländer depicts class and economic gain as means to “adaptation,” suggesting that Germans in New Orleans supported the Confederacy because “New Orleans was their home.”<sup>19</sup> Home, then, was a malleable construct, influenced by its social and economic environments.

However, not all historians of Civil War ethnicity study “Forty-Eighters,” Americanization, and patriotic military ventures. Apart from Engle’s and Mehrländer’s articles on Germans, Susannah Ural’s book includes articles about Irish, Jewish, Native-American, and African-American perspectives on the war. Although none of the articles discuss homesickness, they illustrate different aspects of identity, contributing influential ideas concerning transatlantic identity to this thesis. For example, Susannah Ural’s article on Irish Catholic men describes their “dual loyalties to their natural and adopted homelands,” showing that the

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<sup>17</sup> Engle, 15, 18-19, 42.

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Mehrländer, “With More Freedom and Independence Than the Yankees: the Germans of Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans During the American Civil War” in Ural, *Civil War Citizens*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Mehrländer, 80-82.

Irish, like Germans, had a transatlantic identity if not a transatlantic notion of home.<sup>20</sup>

Confederate Jews, according to Robert Rosen, Esq., did not hold a dualistic transatlantic identity. Jews were generally accepted into Southern society largely due to their whiteness and willingness to adopt Southern customs and culture, including slavery, which greatly influenced their collective identity as Southern Confederates.<sup>21</sup> Rosen's work shows that acceptance into a community (interpreting "community to represent Southern society on a macro-scale rather than a micro-scale example of a town or city) is an important element in fostering feelings of patriotism and identity. This thesis will borrow ideas from Rosen's research to suggest that the ethnic community was also an important element of home and homesickness for German immigrants during the Civil War.

American-born and European-born soldiers and civilians felt homesick based on social and economic influences such as family, business ventures, and politics.<sup>22</sup> However, ethnicity and immigration add complexity to the subject of homesickness by studying a group of people who shared a difference in cultural and transcontinental backgrounds from their native-born neighbors. Although the methodology and background scholarship used in this study centers on German immigrants, the concluding analysis may help to illuminate perceptions of homesickness held by other immigrant groups in future studies.

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<sup>20</sup> Susannah Ural, "'Ye Sons of Green Erin Assemble': Northern Irish American Catholics and the Union War Effort, 1861—1865" in Ural, *Civil War Citizens*, 99, 117.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Rosen, Esq., "The Jewish Confederates" in Ural, *Civil War Citizens*, 159-163.

<sup>22</sup> Burton, 9.

When discussing German immigrant experiences during the Civil War, Stephen Engle, Andrea Mehrländer, David Anderson, and many other historians cite the anthology of Civil War letters edited by Walter Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich and translated by Susan Carter Vogel in their primary sources.<sup>23</sup> Thanks to the work by Helbich, Kamphoefner, and Vogel over three hundred letters penned by seventy-eight authors are available for researchers. Although the letters were written to friends and family in Germany to continue contact with the Old World, they describe events in the United States relative to the Civil War and offer personal insights on topics such as slavery, the economy, politics, and their opinions of the war. Out of the seventy-eight authors, six were women, sixty-three were men, and three were written and signed as couples. Sixty-five percent of the authors emigrated from the areas of South-West Germany such as Baden, Hesse, Westphalia, the Palatinate, and Württemberg; seventeen percent from the North-West areas of Oldenburg, the free city of Hamburg, and Hannover; fifteen percent emigrated from the North-East which comprised Prussia, Saxony, Mecklenburg, and Schleswig-Holstein; and two percent came from the South-East areas of Bavaria and Silesia.<sup>24</sup>

Because immigrants frequently moved from one area of the United States to another area, it is much more difficult to accurately portray their place of residence in the United States than their area of departure from Europe.

Attributing residence to the areas of the U.S. where migrants spent the most time

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<sup>23</sup> Engle, 15-18; Mehrländer, 57; Anderson, 279. Susan Matt's research in her book *Homesickness: An American History* uses a different anthology of German immigrant letters compiled by Helbich and Kamphoefner that does not include letters specific to the American Civil War.

<sup>24</sup> Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, xxi.

before the Civil War, thirty-seven percent of the authors resided in the East-coast states, fifty percent in the Midwest, and thirteen percent in the Confederate South. Not all of the immigrants listed their occupations either, but from those who did twenty-three percent were craftsmen or mechanics, forty-six percent were farmers, fifteen percent were merchants, and fifteen percent supplemented their craftsmen occupations with farming.

In addition to the published collections of letters, this thesis will examine unpublished letters from both the Indiana Historical Society and the Ludwig Geyer Letters from my own family collection that had been passed down through the generations. The Indiana Historical Society contains the 112 letters written by Joseph Hotz, who emigrated from Baden in the 1850s, to his wife in Indiana. Unfortunately, due to the ravages of time and war, the responses from the wives of Joseph Hotz and Ludwig Geyer have not survived.

Utilizing these documents, this study will comprise three chapters, roughly fifteen to twenty pages each. The first chapter will explain the political and economic motivations behind emigrating to the United States and the similar reasons German migrants chose to leave home a second time to fight in the war. It argues that “home” was a fluid concept. The second chapter will focus on the domestic and familial aspects of home for which German migrants felt homesick, demonstrating that terms “home” and “homesickness” was not limited to the domicile. The third chapter will explore the various coping methods men used to treat their homesickness such as using letters and photographs to maintain a connection with those at home, obtaining familiar foods, and re-creating similar

social networks and associations that they had at home. It argues that German soldiers searched for ways to make their time away from home more like the homes from which they were away. The thesis will conclude with a short epilogue that draws components from the previous chapters to answer the “so what” question by expressing the relevancy of this study to the larger field of ethnic studies and American history in terms of immigrants being “uprooted” or “transplanted.” The structure of this thesis is laid out in a purposeful manner. Whereas Susan Matt’s monograph on the subject starts with descriptions of homesickness, followed by an explanation for the separation from home, and then discusses how men and women resolved or managed their emotions, this thesis discusses migrants’ separation from home first and their homesickness second. Because this study is about a group of people who left their original homelands and whose involvement in the American Civil War has not been the focus of traditional histories, it is prudent to first explain why Germans migrated to the United States, and why they left their homes a second time to fight in a war not entirely their own.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE BIG PUSH: LEAVING HOME

Although this thesis is set primarily within the context of the American Civil War, it is important to explain the dynamism associated with the word “home” in the nineteenth-century by first discussing attachment to, and separation from, home during the antebellum as well as wartime periods. The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: to demonstrate that notions of home evolved over time as migrants changed locations and renegotiated what it meant to be at home; and to demonstrate that many foreign-born German migrants participated in the Civil War as soldiers because they felt a personal attachment to the United States as they put down their roots and established themselves in a new homeland. Home had a variety of connotations; it could represent a place for pecuniary opportunity, a haven for Victorian values, a family and the responsibilities husbands and fathers to protect and provide for the family, an association of friendships, or the patriotism and love one felt for their state or country based on civic and sentimental reasons. German migrants exhibited multiple versions of home as a domicile, region, family, and home community and national community, which influenced their decisions to enlist or refuse to serve in the military. Such varied conceptions of home based on economic, cultural, political, and social factors

reflects the various ties with which migrants settled themselves in the United States and defined “home.”<sup>25</sup>

Between 1830 and the 1861, the United States saw a surge of immigration from central and western Europe. According to historian Roger Daniels, close to 2.33 million Germans migrated to the United States between 1830 and 1870. The flow of German speaking immigrants that started in the 1830s gained momentum in the 1840s, and became a torrent in the 1850s. The year 1854 alone saw nearly 250,000 people emigrate from Germany.<sup>26</sup> Historian David Blackbourn noted that the flood of immigrants was particularly heavy from the “rural areas of partible inheritance in the southwest: Baden, Württemberg, and the Palatinate.”<sup>27</sup> Partible inheritance meant that as land was handed down through generations, it was divided among the sons, leaving less and less for families to establish wealth. Drawn to the United States with tales of wealth or the opportunity for financial independence, many Germans optimistically left Europe to try their fortunes in the New World. For instance, Albert Krause wrote to his family in Germany about his ambition to have his “own farm after [two] years at the most.” Writing back to his brothers and sisters in Germany, Johann Heubach explained that “the

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<sup>25</sup> Gamber, 1-2; Applegate, 13, 86; Walker, 26-27; Grossberg, 6-18; Wyman, 204-209. Differences in age, property ownership, familial ties and responsibilities create distinct, individual perceptions men had towards the domestic sphere.

<sup>26</sup> David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780—1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 194; Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 146-152. Since the nation-state of Germany as we know it did not exist until 1871, this thesis will use the term “Germany” as used by Blackbourn.

<sup>27</sup> James H. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 79-80; Blackbourn, 192-197.

Germans are only here to make money ... more and more is the motto.”<sup>28</sup>

Desiring other family members to join her in the United States, Regina Kessel told her family: “We think it only fair and right when a young boy or girl living in Germany, working hard for poor food...has the desire to found a new homeland in America...to make a new home, where they can provide a good living for a wife and children.” Pushed by the dour economy in Central Europe, many such migrants were drawn to the United States as a place where they could obtain greater financial security and create a home and family.

But conditions in the United States during the antebellum period were by no means placid. The expansion of American infrastructure and technology such as canal systems and steam-powered boats, along with the opening of new territory through the Louisiana Purchase and the discovery of gold in California, facilitated and enticed the inter-continental mass migration of people.

Commenting on American mobility, Alexis de Tocqueville stated that “an American will build a house in which to pass his old age and sell it before the roof is on; he will plant a garden and rent it just as the trees are coming into bearing;...settle in one place and soon go off elsewhere with his changing desires.” Historian Susan Matt uses Tocqueville’s observation on American mobility to express the dynamism of the antebellum period, and suggest that

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<sup>28</sup> Albert Krause to his family, July 27, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 196; Johann Heuback to his family February 10, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 178; Regina Kessel to her sister, January 1, 1875, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 393-394.

Americans had a transitory connection with home in regards to property ownership or a specific geographic location.<sup>29</sup>

Like native-born Americans, German migrants were not content to remain in one place once they arrived to the United States. In his book *Yankees Now*, Joseph Ferrie demonstrates that many immigrants who arrived in Eastern ports, especially New York, remained along the eastern seaboard for only a few years before moving further into the nation's interior.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes migrants joined the throng of peoples settling on the edges of the mid-western frontier. Other times migrants chose to settle in previously populated areas, where they carved out their own enclaves. The influx of migrants likely facilitated American mobility by buying land and residences from American proprietors and speculators.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Henriette Bruns often wrote about German friends or acquaintances who bought already cleared farms from Americans. Her brother-in-law, Hermann Bruns, "bought an improved farm from an American by the name of Russet," and "Old Schwarze's Fritz purchased eighty acres of land, twelve of which were cleared, and taken over the horses, cows, pigs, geese, and chickens valued at four hundred dollars."<sup>32</sup> Historian Emily Foster wrote that "many a land speculator

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<sup>29</sup> Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History*, 8. For information on changes to the home in terms of architecture, see McMurry, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph P. Ferrie, *Yankees Now: Immigrants in the Antebellum United States, 1840-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10-14.

<sup>31</sup> Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850—1880*, vol. 3 of *The History of Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1965), 543-544; Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian-Americans in St. Louis, 1882—1982* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 15-16; Malcom J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775—1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 242, 324, 327.

<sup>32</sup> Henriette Geisberg Bruns to her brother Heinrich Geisberg, December 3, 1836, in *Hold Dear, As Always: Jette, a German Immigrant Life in Letters*, eds. Adolf E. Schroeder and Carla Schulz-Geisberg, translated by Adolf E. Schroeder (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988), 75-76.

was ruined who ignored the truth that land was only as valuable as the cheapest sod the most adventurous settlers could bust in the next county or state.”<sup>33</sup> Internal migration during the antebellum period was not simply a phenomenon perpetuated by native-born Americans, but one which included foreign-born migrants as well.

During the nineteenth century, ideas associated with the term “home” changed too. Home was not simply an abode, but a refuge from the world moored in Victorian, family-values. Wendy Gamber’s research on public boarding houses demonstrates the social push for private, family oriented homes as a moralist reaction to the perceived promiscuous and untrustworthy characters who resided at boardinghouses. As the bastion of family values, Victorian moralists believed the home needed protection from the pernicious vices of the world such as alcohol and, among abolitionists, slavery. Referring to the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, historian Louise Stevenson wrote that Tom’s “new owner, Simon Legree, has no home, no wife, no friends—merely an abode, a concubine, two thug henchmen, and dreaded dreams... Its secondary plot, the flight of Eliza and her family from American slavery to Canadian freedom, reveals America as it might be—a country with a home for everyone.” Northern moralists and abolitionists regarded slavery as a threat to proper Victorian domestic values, while many white slave-owning, southerners feared the abolition of slavery within the same vein as the destruction of personal property by an angry mob.<sup>34</sup> It is uncertain whether the

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<sup>33</sup> Emily Foster, *The Ohio Frontier: An Anthology of Early Writings* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 140-141.

<sup>34</sup> Gamber, 99-103; Louise L. Stevenson, “Home,” in Paul Finkelman ed. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century* vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons Press, 2001),

German migrants who left Europe knew about that the political flux in the United States or not. They had emigrated to a powder keg—the sort of economic and political turmoil many migrants had left their homes in Europe to avoid.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, despite the turbulent fluctuation in economic and social matters, as well as the mass migration in both Europe and the United States, some migrants continued to thrive. In a letter to his brother, Albert Augustin described the pecuniary advance he had made within the past few years: “In the beginning we had lemonade, [one] box of cigars, some cake and ½ Berl [barrel] of Bavarian Beer. Now I have 3 to 4 hundred dollars worth of goods in my house, liquor and cigars, all paid for and a very nice salon.” In his book *The Westfalians From Germany to Missouri*, Walter Kamphoefner cites the conversation between a priest and a migrant who had emigrated to the United States in the 1830s. The migrant explained to the priest that:

America is indeed a splendid land. Here a person can acquire something. In Germany, I didn't have as much property as I could hold in my hand, and dared not hope, no matter how hard I worked and saved, ever to acquire any property. What you see here belongs to me. I have had to work terribly hard, that is true, but I have something to show for it, too. Here I have eaten more pork in one year than I have ever seen in Germany my whole life. We have plenty of potatoes, too; what more could we want, if we stay healthy?<sup>36</sup>

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30-31; James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 21-23. See also, Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Clifford Edward Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800—1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Louise L. Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860—1880* (New York: Twayne, 1991); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>35</sup> Helbich and Kamphoefner, *Germans in the Civil War*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> J.G. Büttner, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nord-Amerika: Mein Aufenthalt und meine Reisen in denselben, vom Jahre 1834 bis 1841*, cited in Walter Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians From Germany to Missouri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 69.

Through hard work, many migrants felt that they too could create a new life, one with greater possibilities than what they experienced in Europe. Through hard work, migrants could establish themselves on their own land or businesses.

Through hard work, they could create a second home.

As they became more firmly established in their local community, many migrants generally came to see the United States as their new homeland and Europe as the old homeland.<sup>37</sup> “You can go ahead and call America a wilderness,” Johann Bauer wrote to his mother in Germany in 1857, “but I like it more every day.” In 1868, Jürnjacob Swehn told his parents in a letter that he felt “at home here” in Iowa. “Here most everybody is Low German and from Mecklenburg.” Heinrich Möller, who had emigrated in 1865, suffered discomfort due to differences in language during his first few years in the United States. By 1869, Möller wrote to his brother Jakob that he liked “to speak English better than German,” and on many occasions spelled his name in the Anglicized fashion Miller rather than the Germanic *Möller*.<sup>38</sup> Life in the United States was a fusion of two cultures in which migrants incorporated the old with the new.<sup>39</sup>

Barbara Monn and her husband Christian made Michigan their new home after they emigrated to the United States in 1853. In 1865 Barbara wrote to inform her sister about the current events concerning her family and the war. In the letter,

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<sup>37</sup> Robert C. Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835—1915* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 15-19, 210-211, 328; Handlin, 234-235.

<sup>38</sup> Johann Bauer to his mother, September 2, 1857, in Walter Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommers, *News From the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 157; Kamphoefner, *The Westfalians*, 103; Heinrich Möller to his family, January 24, 1869, in *News From the Land of Freedom*, 213.

<sup>39</sup> See also Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion and Class in New York City, 1845—1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) and Kathleen Conzen and others, “The Invention of Ethnicity,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* vol. 12 (1992): 3-41.

Barbara mentioned that “here [in the United States] it is 10 degrees better than the homeland (“*der Heimath [sic]*”) [and] we are no longer foreigners, we are already old Newporters.”<sup>40</sup> The language in Barbara Monn’s letter is virtually devoid of any homesickness for Germany, which she still referred to as the “homeland.” Rather than expressions of longing or a desire to return to Germany, Monn’s language portrays a very optimistic portrait of life in the United States, especially after four years of war. Although Monn maintained a strong identity with Germany, the optimistic description of her life in the United States and her place as an “old Newporter” suggests a shift in her association of her homeland as Germany, and a greater identity and familiarity with her home in Michigan.

Not all migrants considered the United States their home or easily forgot the comfort and familiarity they enjoyed at home in Europe. Occasionally, the simple and rugged living conditions found in rural areas of the United States were a shock for migrants accustomed to the brick or half-timber houses of urban Europe. “When it rains, it is just too sad in these log cabins,” wrote Henriette Bruns. “In cold weather one is a little hesitant to get up in the morning, and I frequently think back to our comfortable living room in Germany.” Henriette Bruns wrote that her brother, Bernhard Geisberg, “suffered very much from homesickness and had become very melancholy.” Bernhard Geisberg recovered for a time, but after he suffered another episode, “he decided to go back to

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<sup>40</sup> Barbara Monn to Jacob Schwarz, March 18, 1865, in *Deutsche im Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg: Briefe von Font und Farm 1861—1865*, eds. Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 328-329.

Europe.”<sup>41</sup> Return migration, what historian Roger Daniels called, “the most profoundly un-American act that one can imagine,” has not received as much attention from historians as emigration to the United States has. Both historians Susan Matt and Mark Wyman point to homesickness as the principal cause of return migration. According to one study, rates of return among German migrants varied greatly with only 4.7 percent returning to Europe in 1859, to a much higher 49.4 percent in 1875. However, Wyman also noted that migrants who had found wives in the United States, “was crucial in discouraging immigrants from returning to Europe.” Andrea Mehrländer found that German migrants in the Richmond, Virginia who were “poorer, single, not yet established males,” were the most likely to leave the south when the Civil War began.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes the envisioned expectations of life in the United States did not match reality, leading some to yearn for the life they had left behind. Others found reasons to stay and make their homes in the United States. The ability to which migrants were capable of transplanting themselves within the United States had a significant impact on their decisions to remain in the United States during the war, to fight, or to return to Europe.

Life in the United States, however, was not completely serene. The political and economic turmoil regarding slavery and states’ rights, which

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<sup>41</sup> Henriette Geisberg Bruns, autobiography, in *Hold Dear, As Always*, 73. “*Heimat*” is a complex word with several connotations. The word literally translates as “homeland,” but can be used to refer to citizenship, place of origin, and heritage. For more information on the term, see Howard Sargent, “Diasporic Citizens: Germans Abroad in the Framing of German Citizenship Law,” in Renate Bridenthal, Krista O’Donnell, and Nancy Reagin eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 3, 18-20; Thomas Lekan, “German Landscape: Local Promotion of the Heimat Abroad,” in *The Heimat Abroad*, 142, 144-146, 150; Applegate, 13, 86.

<sup>42</sup> Daniels, 111; Susan Matt, *Homesickness*, 58, 141-175; Wyman, 90-92; Mehrländer, 60.

simmered in the 1850s, erupted into civil war in 1861. “Now it is no longer the ocean, over 3,000 miles wide with its waves and its tides, that separates us,” wrote Heinrich Stähler, a production manager at a copper refinery in Ducktown, Tennessee, to his family in Germany, “...it is the torrent and flood tide of a fanatically inflamed tangle of peoples...And thus I am sitting here in my office, stranded and kept apart from those who are most dear to my heart.” As much as Stähler desired to return to his homeland and family in Europe, he remained in the South, unwilling to risk capture by the Union blockade for fear that the Union army might conscript him to fight in the war. If Stähler disliked the idea of conscription, why did he not volunteer? Or, if he disliked the Union, why did he not fight for the Confederacy?<sup>43</sup> One reason Stähler chose not to fight for either the Union or the Confederate cause was because he did not consider the United States his home. Stähler still considered Germany his home, and was where he eventually returned after the war to live the remainder of his life.

For other German migrants, however, the United States was their home and they rallied to its defense against secession. Many migrants chose to support the United States rather than return to Germany. Some pledged their support out of affection for the country, a sense of belonging, or one’s duty based on civic ideals of freedom and democracy.<sup>44</sup> Albert Krause described his rationale for remaining in the U.S. rather than returning to Prussia because he had “tasted

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<sup>43</sup> Heinrich Stähler to family, November 10, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 376-377, 386.

<sup>44</sup> Ludwig Kühner to his brother, December 22, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 293; James McPherson, *Is Blood Thicker than Water?: Crises of Nationalism in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 36. James McPherson defined such patriotic motivations as “civic nationalism.”

freedom and it tastes too good to trade it in for a dungeon.” Instead, he decided to enlist in the Union army and go “to the fire filled with courage and enthusiasm.” Krause wrote that, “the United States have taken me in, I have earned a living here, and why shouldn’t I defend them, since they are in danger, with my flesh and blood?!” Friedrich Martens asked his father, “would I still be worthy of living in this land, enjoying this freedom, if I were not also willing to fight for this freedom, and if need be, to die for it?” Martens does not say that the United States was home, but his language depicting the United States as a place that has “taken him in” and where he has “earned a living” describes a home-like connection.

Notions of civic duty and the privilege of participating in the American democratic experiment, which some German migrants felt honor bound to protect, were the reasons some men left their homes to fight. “Oh, gladly would I rush home if I could. But I have raised my hand in oath to the laws of the Northern American States and I will remain true to my oath,” wrote Alphons Richter. “Give my regards to Ludwig Schemmer,” Emil Knoebel wrote back to Germany, “and ask him if he’s recovered now, hiding behind his mother’s apron strings, from the shock he got last fall from the draft?” Knoebel then accused Schemmer of “spreading the most terrible lies about this country, about a country that gave him a free home, a free homeland,” and rebuked Schemmer for cowardly returning to Germany rather than “supporting [the United States] like a free citizen should.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Dietrich Gerstein to Ludwig Gerstein, January, 1867, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 290; Albert Krause to the Krause family, September 11, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 198; Friedrich Martens to his father, June 15, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 317; Alphons Richter to his parents, October 30, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 96; Emil Cornelius Knoebel to his father and brother, March 19, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 148.

For men like Martens, Richter, Krause, and Knoebel duty derived from their obligation to fight as adopted sons of the United States, bestowed with the honor and privilege in defending their personal freedoms. Men were willing to leave their homes a second time in order to defend their adoptive country, their *Heimat*.

Profit, not necessarily love of country, was the principal interest for which many other German migrants joined the military. Historian Mark Wyman discussed economic factors and “the strive for status” as contributing factors behind both emigration and remigration. From the perspective of return migrants the United States represented a place to make the money needed to improve the standard of living back home.<sup>46</sup> Assuming that his post with the Navy would bring him “1,200 dollars with rations and 10 [cents] for every mile I travel for the Government,” Alexander Dupré wrote confidently that “his future is taken care of.” Desperation for money due to debt, not the prospect of a high paying military career, motivated Gustav Keppler to join the army. Jobless, Keppler joined the 14<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry Regiment, enticed by promises of a 175 dollar bounty and wages every two months. It is unlikely that Keppler or Dupré ever considered the United States home, though Keppler never mentioned returning to Germany. Still, joining the military—even if only to repay one’s debts—rather than escape danger by returning to Europe suggests that Keppler and Dupré felt a connection with the United States, if only in a material sense, as a place to make one’s fortune.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Wyman, 205-209.

<sup>47</sup> Alexander Dupré, to the Dupre family, July 14, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 46; Gustav Keppler to the Keppler family, July 28, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 188-189.

Money was a strong incentive for Valentin Bechler to remain in the army, too. “Dear wife, when I’m home I can’t earn any 19 dollars a month,” Bechler wrote. “All my life I’ve had to work hard for every cent...I can stick this out too as long as I get my pay.” Bechler continued in his letter to tell his wife that on pay day “we get paid for four months and you can live a long time on this money.” To Bechler, who did consider the United States his home, the war presented the possibility of quick money that he could use to live a more established, comfortable existence.

Deciding to volunteer, however, was not always an easy path to follow. For many German immigrants, civic nationalism motivated them to fight for their adopted homeland, not simply because the United States had extended citizenship to them, but because of a desire to keep the United States intact for the benefit of future generations. “We weren’t drafted, nor were we tempted by money or the excitement,” explained Ludwig Kühner to one of his brothers in Germany. “It is hard to leave your wife and children behind and march into battle, but there’s nothing else we can do if we want to preserve freedom for ourselves and our children.”<sup>48</sup> By thinking about future generations living in the United States, Kühner’s example demonstrates his “rooted-ness” within the United States, a connection he felt important enough to fight for.

Some men were not easily swayed by idealistic aspirations for profit or by political loyalty. Sometimes, as historians Reid Mitchell and James McPherson have found, a man’s duty to his family competed in priority and, at times,

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<sup>48</sup> Ludwig Kühner to his brother, December 22, 1861 in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 293.

trumped the duty owed the country.<sup>49</sup> Drafted in 1864, Ludwig Geyer described his separation from his family to join the war as “torn from the arms of my wife and four little children.”<sup>50</sup> In a letter to his wife, Geyer wrote that “there are those who wouldn’t mind fighting, but I am a married man with a family and a home to think of, which is no small responsibility.”<sup>51</sup> Geyer, who had left his home in Hesse to escape military conscription, once again left his home, this time unable to avoid military service. Valentin Bechler referred to his wife’s frequent petitions to return home as “the hard letters,” suggesting his own struggle between remaining in the military or returning to provide for those at home. Soon after Heinrich Müller was drafted into the Union army, Müller deserted the military and hid “deep within the countryside,” determined to, “keep my wife and children from misery.” Indeed, Kaspar Herbst attributed Abraham Lincoln’s death to Lincoln’s attendance of “the pleasure-theatre on Holy Good Friday,” rather than staying, “at home with his wife, contemplating Our Redeemer.”<sup>52</sup> Men did not take their responsibilities to home and family taken lightly, which at times conflicted with their civic responsibilities. The above examples from Geyer, Bechler, Müller, and Herbst show that men did not always adhere to the masculine typecast within the public sphere, but instead felt a greater responsibility to remain in their own domestic spheres.

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<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, 29-30, 161-163; James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 134-138.

<sup>50</sup> Ludwig Geyer, autobiography, 1891, in the author’s possession.

<sup>51</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, November 6, 1864.

<sup>52</sup> Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, October 10, 1861, in “A German Immigrant in the Union Army: Selected Letters of Valentin Bechler,” ed. Robert C. Goodell and P.A.M. Taylor, *Journal of American Studies* 4 (1971): 151; Heinrich Müller to Müller family, July 25, 1865, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 249-250; Kaspar Herbst to the Herbst family, July 15, 1865, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 248. For more information on familial responsibilities see Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America*. See also Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair*, 11-15.

Although some men decided that staying at home to provide for their families was their true duty, they felt misgivings for not rushing to the fray. Dr. Hermann Nagel, conflicted over which side of the war to support, wrote of the shame he felt for staying home while many of his fellow Texans rallied to Indianola to repel an army of Union troops: “Seeing this, feelings of shame can overcome any man who is inclined to stay home quietly, just because he doesn’t want to fight for something that is against his principles.” Nagel was unwilling to support the confederate cause due to his strong anti-slavery opinions, but his shame came from his inability to support his beloved Texas. Nagel wrote, “I am also kept back by a certain sense of shame, for leaving a country just at the moment it is overcome by misfortune, after having shared my lot with it so happily and willingly in better times.” But the war eventually caught up with Nagel. Unwilling to support either cause, Nagel and his son Carl fled Texas and the state draft. Eventually they made their way to St. Louis, where Nagel reunited with his wife and younger children after the war.

In Missouri, Hermann Nagel felt like the exception among some of his old neighbors living in St. Louis who “long[ed] for beautiful Texas,” and whom he surmised would all return to Texas “as soon as they have a chance to return to the South.” Instead, Nagel refused to return and wrote that “only my wife’s wish to remain there could induce me to make my home there again.” Nagel’s example shows that home could be more than his family or property and include the

emotional attachment and shared identity he had with an environmental or geographic area.<sup>53</sup>

The difficult decision between the duty owed to the country or to the household similarly nagged Dietrich Gerstein. “What has been and is now my duty, dear Ludwig?” Gerstein wrote to his brother in 1862, “To leave my family, put aside everything and join rank and file...or to do my duty as the father of my family and just watch this battle?” In 1864 Gerstein’s choice to enlist was made for him when his township required seven men, out of a possible twenty, to fill its draft quota. Those who volunteered were promised bounties and a monthly stipend from the State of Michigan for their families, while those who waited to be drafted received neither.<sup>54</sup>

Pressured to serve either by choice or by force, Gerstein reluctantly decided to enlist in order to provide some financial support for his family. “What could we do?” Gerstein wrote rhetorically to his brother referring to the town’s draft burden, “with my bones full of gout, along with this horrible shrew breathing down my neck [Gerstein’s wife]...I decided to go since that would mean I was providing for my family.” In another letter to his brother, Gerstein displayed a more sentimental response to his enlistment: “Yes, Ludwig, I assure you it is very hard to leave behind everything you cherish for a second time and to set out

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<sup>53</sup> Hermann Nagel to his brother, April 28, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 395-396, 402; Herman Nagel to his brother, August 5, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 398-399.

<sup>54</sup> Dietrich Gerstein to Ludwig Gerstein, December 25, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 279.

toward a destiny completely unknown.”<sup>55</sup> Gerstein’s decision to separate himself from his family was largely predicated by the local draft. However, by actively volunteering rather than waiting for the draft to call him into service, Gerstein chose to leave home for his family’s behalf, and because of his own recognition of civic duty and obligation to his adopted country and town. In the end, Gerstein felt that by entering the public sphere of warfare, though distasteful to him, was the most prudent decision he could make for his family.

Providing for one’s family was also an important issue for Karl Adolph Frick. Frick joined the military to “support the cause of freedom with all my might,” by serving the Union in the Franklin County Home Guards. After his first three months of service ended, Frick signed on with the 17<sup>th</sup> Missouri Infantry for another three years, but quickly transferred back to the Home Guards because he did not want to go “several hundred miles away from home...leaving my wife and family to their own devices.”<sup>56</sup> Given the opportunity, Frick chose not to separate himself from his family but remained in active military duty because he thought it a “shame for any man who can bear arms to desert his adopted fatherland.” It was not simply monetary gain or patriotism that motivated either Gerstein or Frick to enlist, but a complex interplay of money, patriotism, paternal responsibility to their family and home, and the draft that influenced their decisions to fight.

Motivations to fight in the war were not static; support for the war shifted as men felt confronted by the government’s changing interests and goals of the

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<sup>55</sup> Dietrich Gerstein to Ludwig Gerstein, January, 1867, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 289; Dietrich Gerstein to Ludwig Gerstein, September 28, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 284.

<sup>56</sup> Karl Alphons Frick to his mother and sisters, May 11, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 350-351.

war and their own. Low morale among soldiers led to increased feelings of homesickness and desires to return home. As Susan Matt's research on homesickness among native-born American soldiers has shown, the Emancipation Proclamation had, at times, an adverse effect on military men who had volunteered to fight secession, not slavery. Matt argued that soldiers who "felt discontented with the purpose of the war," also questioned their involvement: "perhaps they were free from their original obligations and could return home."<sup>57</sup> Due to their status as foreign-born migrants, some immigrants felt removed and untethered to the war effort. "We are an emigrant race," read an editorial in the Boston based newspaper the *Pilot*; "we did not cause this war; vast numbers of our people have perished in it." Although the comments referred to Irish Americans, the editorial could also apply to German Americans.<sup>58</sup> Valentin Bechler, who in 1861 felt that should he "die in the field then I die for the right," wrote to his wife in 1862 that "by God, I don't know for what I should fight." Indeed, Bechler confided in his wife that if he were home, "they [democrats] would have one vote more. I don't want to fire another shot for the negroes and I wish that all the abolitionists were in hell, before this country is ruined."<sup>59</sup> The desire to return home resembled the similar dilemma many faced between

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<sup>57</sup> Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness*, 82. See also James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 123.

<sup>58</sup> Susannah Ural, "'Ye Sons of Green Erin Assemble,'" in Ural, *Civil War Citizens*, 121; For more information on Irish American identity, see Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861—1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 52, 134-135; Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance in American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 36-37, 196, 260-264. See also Keller, 162-166.

<sup>59</sup> Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, October 10, 1861, in "A German Immigrant in the Union Army," 151; Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, November 11, 1862, in "A German Immigrant in the Union Army," 161; Nikolaus Pack to the Pack family, October 12, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 222.

protecting the common home country or remaining with their families to protect the personal home (the household). Home still needed protection; there was a war going on. However, as soldiers suffered the hardships of warfare, and as the Emancipation Proclamation changed the tone of the war, some German immigrants shifted their support from defending the home country to the household.

German migrants reflected on the meaning of the war within a broader, global context. Rallying to the call to defend liberty and the Union against slavery and secession, they felt a need to protect the United States in order to allow the flame of democracy to shine as an example to other countries, particularly the German States. Historian Bruce Levine attributed the influence of German American social clubs (*Vereine*), adaptations based on similar clubs established in Germany, as a significant factor for German American enlistment. Levine states that it took only two days after Lincoln's call for recruits that German American *Turners*, a nationalistic gymnastics association, from Cincinnati created the "all-German Ninth Infantry Regiment," and that its muster rolls "overflowed" with names merely one day after the regiment's creation.

Levine points to the legacy of the European revolutions of 1848, a movement in which men and women sought greater access to the government and social reform, to explain why a significant number of German immigrants felt the desire to fight for the Union.<sup>60</sup> Many German immigrants opposed slavery, and

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<sup>60</sup>James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 113; Author unknown, "Der Geist von Achtundvierzig ist wieder erwacht" (*New Yorker Criminal Zeitung und Bellertristisches Journal*, April 26, 1861, cited by Bruce Levine, *The Spirit of 1848: German Immigrants, Labor Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 91, 256.

linked it with both the rigid class structures in Germany and their own struggles for greater personal freedoms that they and their fellow Germans had pushed for in Europe.<sup>61</sup> “Sooner or later America will have no more slaves,” mused Matthias Leclerc as he wrote about the war, “[as] freedom takes its course with great strides.” August Horstmann answered his family’s rebuke for re-enlisting in the Union army for another three years by explaining that “he who fights for ideals and principles cannot stop halfway!...Believe me, this war will be fought to the end, the rebellion will be defeated, slavery abolished, equal rights established in all America.” Horstmann continued in another letter that “if Europe wants to be honorable, it can take the policies of the United States in the last four years as a shining example.”<sup>62</sup> Many German Americans who fought to end slavery in the United States did so with the intention of helping the United States while setting an example they wished their old, European homeland would follow.

By the beginning of the Civil War, many migrants had adapted within their local communities to life in the United States. It was in their communities that migrants worked, forged friendships, established families and raised their children, became acquainted with the English language, and enjoyed the civil liberties of a democratic republic. They had resettled their lives in another land

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<sup>61</sup> For more information on the spread of European liberalism see, Sheehan, 8-13, 23-25; Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848—1851* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 259-260. For recent publications on the influence the revolutions of 1848 had on the United States, see Mischa Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists after 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); and Timothy M. Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009). Roberts sees the American Civil War as “America’s ultimate response to the 1848 revolutions” (p. 20).

<sup>62</sup> Matthias Leclerc to Cousin Simmon, February 15, 1865, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 227; August Horstmann to his parents, July 16, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 128; August Horstmann to his parents, June 23, 1865, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 129. Horstmann’s statements referred to the influence of European monarchs in Mexico and South America.

where, over time, they developed a complex sense of home and homeland on an individual, personal basis. For some migrants, their personal notions of home determined their decisions to enlist and fight for the Union cause, separating them from their homes a second time. Leaving home to fight in the Civil War, however, was not easy for many men due to their domestic roles as husbands and fathers, which some were unwilling to jeopardize. Still, many men, either through choice or by force, separated themselves from home for many of the same reasons that they had left their homes in Europe for the United States, as they marched into an unknown future.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE HOMESICK

Historian Susan Matt defined homesickness as “the longing for a particular home,” a distinct and separate feeling from nostalgia, which she defined as “a yearning for home, but it is a home faraway in time rather than space.”<sup>63</sup> The fluid nature of the term “home,” although difficult to label, should not cause consternation. Rather, its fluidity offers a rich background from which to explore the multi-faceted aspects of home for which migrants, both soldiers and civilians, felt homesick during the American Civil War. As men encountered situations of loneliness, poor food, exposure to harsh weather, and the absence of the comforts they enjoyed as civilians, their homesickness and nostalgia mirrored their desires. In other words, men missed what they were accustomed to but did not have. The term “home” carried connotations synonymous with the word “familiar”. As such, men experienced homesickness not merely as a separation from their domiciles, but as a separation from what they deemed familiar. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the homesick experiences German migrants felt as they served away from home as well as demonstrate that because the term “home” was a fluid concept, so too was the way men felt homesick.

Discussing the fluidity of the terms “home” and “homesickness,” Matt wrote that homesickness “meant different things to different people at different times. Some who used the word longed for family, some for houses, others for towns and landscapes, for all of these were constituents of the idea of home”

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<sup>63</sup> Matt, “You Can’t Go Home Again,” 469-471.

Borrowing Matt's definition of homesickness, this chapter will examine the particulars of home for which men experienced homesickness. By studying their responses within distinct categories such as family, letters, food, and domestic amenities—attributes of home soldiers commonly missed—rather than looking for a general consensus explains *what* migrants considered “home” in addition to *where*.

As John Bodnar has noted, family was an integral social component migrants utilized to “organize their lives” in the United States. Because family was such a significant aspect of home, separation from them elicited feelings of sadness, symptoms of homesickness. “Not having heard from you, my dearest ones, for such a long time—not even the slightest news—plunged me into a mood that sometimes bordered on melancholy,” wrote Carl Anton Ruff. Valentin Bechler wrote to his wife that “on Sunday I wanted to see my Hildegard,” and that, “I got tears in my eyes and I thought of my children...And I wished I had the two of them for just a half hour.” “Not a minute goes by in a day or night,” Joseph Hotz wrote to his wife, “that I don't think about you lonely human being, and also about my child.” Hotz's conscious desires to return to his family in Indiana occasionally manifested themselves subconsciously while he slept as vivid dreams of him returning home. On such occasions, Hotz's dreams centered on his domestic role as a father and husband such as putting his child to sleep for the night, or of witnessing his wife's joy at the news that the war was over and he could remain at home with her.<sup>64</sup> Dreaming of being home demonstrates Hotz's

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<sup>64</sup> Bodnar, 57, 71-77 ; Carl Anton Ruff to his family, January 12, 1865, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 366; Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, October 25, 1861,

reaction to his separation from his family, but also that being at home meant being with his family and filling his role as a husband and father.

Separation from family could also heighten feelings of desperation as the distance between them and home hindered the ability for men to support their families. Upon learning of the death of his son, Paul, Hermann Nagel keenly felt the frustration and helplessness caused by being separated from his wife and family. Although he wrote that his wife seemed “calm and collected in her letters,” Nagel’s own letter displays a candid glimpse of his struggle to control his emotions. “I writhe with fear,” he wrote, “crying aloud like a child, all for naught.” At one point in the letter Nagel seemed settled, writing that “we must have patience.” However, his composure did not last as he vented his emotions onto the paper, “How in Heaven’s name can I help my poor wife!...I don’t know what to think and am thrown from one idea to the next by the anxiety that tortures me.” As separation from their families created homesickness, the lack of contact and the distance separating the men from their loved ones added anxiety.<sup>65</sup>

Family members at home experienced a type of homesickness, too. As both James McPherson and Reid Mitchell have noted, wives and parents keenly felt the separation from their loved ones at war. Wives beckoned and pleaded for their husbands to return, and parents ached for the well-being of their sons. “It’s enough to break your heart when you think about these times and how painful it is

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in “A German Immigrant in the Union Army,” 152; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, December 14, 1861, M710 Box 1, Joseph Hotz Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, January 3, 1862, Joseph Hotz Letters; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, August 4, 1862, Joseph Hotz Letters.

<sup>65</sup> Hermann Nagel to his brother, May 13, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 397-398.

to be separated,” Alwine Frick wrote to her mother-in-law, “Oh, if I were never to see Adolph again I would totally despair.” Magdalena Böppler wrote to her in-laws that her husband David earned “25 dollars a month,” for his military service, and that “he can make more money in the war than he can at home.” “I myself,” she admitted, “would rather have my husband than the money.” Valentin Bechler tried to explain his inability to return home to his wife and reprimanded her for, “always writing about coming home and I just can’t. Those are the hard letters. And running away won’t do either. I just can’t get away that’s all.” In another letter home, Bechler responded to his wife’s anxiety by reassuring her that “not everybody here is going to get shot dead. I’ll probably come home again.” In his letters home, Bechler used stiff bravado to ease his wife’s concerns, and wrote that her letters of worry were “all for nothing,” and that, “the way you do you’ll make life miserable for the children too.” Whether the “hard letters,” as Bechler called them, included calls to come home, news of a family crisis, or the unease of an apprehensive wife, they could divert a soldier’s focus from the task at hand.<sup>66</sup>

The anxiety and longing expressed by those at home for the safe return of their husbands and sons resembles the expressions of homesick anxiety and the longing for reunification the soldiers included in their letters home. Although it might seem odd to claim that a person at home could also feel homesick, the yearning to be reunited with their husbands, brothers, or sons suggests that rather

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<sup>66</sup> James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 134; Reid Mitchell, 30, 162; Alwine Frick to mother-in-law, April 30, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 354; Magdalena Böppler to her in-laws, December 8, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 325-326; Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, November 11, 1862, in “A German Immigrant in the Union Army,” 161; Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, April 27, 1862, in “A German Immigrant in the Union Army,” 155. For an explanation of how officers and doctors feared homesickness could spread among men, see Anderson, “Dying of Nostalgia,” 247-282.

than simply a house, those at home felt homesick for a complete home, one which contained all the individual characteristics that made a home; a home rendered incomplete due to the absence of a family member.

But even in their absence men sought ways to allay their separation. Letters were a common method through which men could remain connected with those at home. Men eagerly waited for news from home and felt neglected whenever they went long periods of time without receiving a letter. “Seeing your dear handwriting always helps to cheer me up some. One almost imagines he is at home,” Ludwig Geyer wrote to his wife. Magnus Brucker complained to his wife because, “Today I was confidently expecting a letter, but didn’t receive one,” and admonished her not to “try and save paper and do write more often.” “Write to me at least twice a week,” he requested, “you have no idea how a person longs for letters in the field.” After reflecting about his desire to send a photograph of himself home, Friedrich Schmalzried wrote to his brother and sisters that “it’s so hard when they pass out so many letters to the men in the company and I have to go away empty-handed,” and softly reminded them that “there’s no one besides you that I can expect a letter from.” Valentin Bechler masked his appeal for more letters with a touch of humor, chiding his wife that “I think maybe there was a battle up there too and that you are all dead because I don’t get any letters.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 29, 1865; Magnus Brucker to his wife, September 29, 1862 in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 259; Magnus Brucker to his wife, November 30, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *German soldiers in the Civil War*, 261; Friedrich Schmalzried to his family, December 22, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 88; Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, May 22, 1862, in “A German Immigrant in the Union Army,” 156.

Yearning for letters was really a yearning for, personal, tangible impressions of life at home that made men feel closer to their loved ones.

Other pleas for news from home included a range of emotions from sentimental tones to desperation and, at times, lackadaisical. “I was glad to get such a long letter from you,” Ludwig Geyer responded to his wife, “I like to read lots of news from you and of home...and read [the letters] over and over again.” After a month long silence from his wife, Joseph Hotz responded to his wife dramatically, claiming that if she did not write more often he would “see that I am killed in the first battle that we are in,” and that “I am tired of living, it is hard to have a wife and child and not to get an answer to the letters, and yet to be only a few miles from home. Others get letters every day, but not I, it’s too hard on me.” The chance meeting of Gustav Keppler and Jakob Heinzelmann, two men from the same area of Germany, was an opportunity to learn about current events back home. “It made him happier than anything in the world to meet an old acquaintance from his old homeland,” Jakob Heinzelmann wrote to his parents, “and then he immediately asked me what the tavern keeper’s daughters were doing, and if they were still single, because he was really stuck on the youngest one.” Heinzelmann informed his parents that although his fellow countryman, Gustav Keppler, had not written to his family in Germany to let them know how he was getting along, Heinzelmann “wasn’t like that,” and that if he “didn’t write for 2 years then after 4 years I’d be sure to.” Letters from loved ones were one

method by which men who were separated from their families could remain connected to home, if only sentimentally.<sup>68</sup>

However, as historian Janet Altman's research on literary forms has shown, letters could both maintain communicational ties and serve as reminders of the distance separating the men from their homes. According to Matt, letters were inadequate substitutes that could never fully replace physically being home. For instance, it was through letters that Ludwig Geyer was able to remain an active, participating member of his family. In one letter, Geyer wrote that he was "overjoyed to see [his son] little Louis write his own greetings," and encouraged his wife to "let him do that in every letter if he wants to." Geyer feared that the separation from the family would strain his relationships with his children. Geyer responded to a letter from his wife by asking "Dear Mary, do you mean to tell me I'm not going to recognize little Willie because he has grown so? I'm afraid he won't know me and won't want to come to me." Geyer was incredulous that a father would not recognize his own son, but the last line from the paragraph reflects a valid concern: that the son might not recognize his father.<sup>69</sup>

Although letters could help soften the loneliness away from home, they were indeed a poor substitute that could create tensions between those at home and those in the field due to miscommunication. After receiving news that his child had passed away, Joseph Hotz tried to console his wife by telling her that "at

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<sup>68</sup> Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, Feb. 7, 1865; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, November 19, 1862, Joseph Hotz Letters; Jakob Heizelmann to his parents, January 23, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 181. For more on soldiers' homesick calls for letters, see Matt, *Homesickness*, 84; McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 137.

<sup>69</sup> Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1982), 14-15, 186; Susan Matt, *Homesickness*, 267; Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, Mar. 26, 1865; Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, May 13, 1865.

least you were home and had a chance to see her, and I will never see her again in all my life. When I come home, I won't find her there." After being separated from her husband for two years, Maria Hotz sent her husband, Joseph, a letter expressing her frustration over his absence and poor finances, and her despondence that he would return home alive. Joseph Hotz described this letter as nothing but "complaints and accusations." "I don't ever want another letter like that from you," Hotz continued. "If you can't write a better letter, you don't have to write at all. Then it wouldn't break my heart...you would have done better had you kept your 'New Year' for yourself."<sup>70</sup> In the case of the Hotz's, homesickness and the separation from home could turn into frustration, a feeling likely compounded by the remoteness of letters as a method of communication.

Letters did not need to contain dour news of home in order to incite feelings of homesickness. Friedrich Martens noticed that whenever he wrote letters to his parents in Germany, he felt like singing Heinrich Heine's poem "The Homecoming (*Die Heimkehr*)," and that he too could not "determine the sorrow that fills my breast," a stanza from a portion of the poem referred to as "*Die Lorelei*." "Sometimes I think it is homesickness, although," he believed, "I am too old for that." From Martens's perspective, letters to his parents in Germany could trigger feelings of homesickness, an emotion he felt beneath his maturity level, and cause him to reflect on his Germanic identity. Letters were an emotional double-edged sword. Without letters from home, men felt cut-off and isolated, even though the letters and news from home they received sometimes made the

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<sup>70</sup> Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, January 22, 1863; Joseph Hotz Letters; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, January 6, 1865, Joseph Hotz Letters.

men realize how far away from home they were and of what they were missing. In the case of Friedrich Martens, letters served as a reminder of the distance separating him from his European homeland as well as a withdrawal from his familiar Germanic culture<sup>71</sup>

George Rable's research on notions of home held by Union and Confederate soldiers found that holidays were particularly difficult on soldiers as they reflected on their homes and families, and their separation. The added emphasis on togetherness and family during holidays, Rable noted, was especially difficult on men stationed so far away from their family circles. In his December 1, 1864 letter to his parents, Albert Krause ruminated that he had spent four Christmases away from his family, "all alone in a strange country, surrounded by strangers who speak a foreign language." The holidays prompted Krause's impressions of isolation due from his separation from family and the culture of his European homeland, and reminded him of his status as an immigrant in a foreign land.<sup>72</sup>

Other men wrote about how they missed the festivity of the holidays in addition to their families. "I spent Christmas and New Year's in such a way that I don't even know when they were," August Horstmann wrote. "Nothing at all, not the slightest festivity, no joyful shooting in the air, no punch, no beer or wine, and no change in the bill of fare to remind us that these otherwise so richly celebrated days had gone by." Instead of celebrating, Horstman retired early on his "bed of

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<sup>71</sup> Friedrich Martens to his parents, December 3, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 323.

<sup>72</sup> George Rable, 85-89; Albert Krause to family, December 1, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 217.

fir sprigs,” and “observed the moon and the stars for a while, and sent them on their way with greetings to my friends.” Ludwig Geyer noted that although he and his comrades observed Easter, “we surely missed the eggs. We talked about it all day, for we haven’t even seen any eggs since we left home. I have even forgotten how they taste!”<sup>73</sup> While celebrating holidays away from family may not have been unfamiliar for migrants, for many men celebrating holidays away from home was. The differences between how the men celebrated holidays in the field from how they celebrated at home suggests that their nostalgia came from being separated from the familiar sights, sounds, and tastes of home that they were accustomed to as well as spending time with their family and friends.

In addition to familial companionship, soldiers yearned for the domestic comforts of home they enjoyed as civilians, particularly food. “Dear Mary,” wrote Ludwig Geyer, “I know by this time you have butchered the fat pig. If only I had a piece from it right now.” In another letter Geyer described to his wife that the meager military rations hardly satisfied their appetites because “we receive one pound of hard crackers and three-fourths pound of pork—this to last for five days—fresh beef every day.” Also, the men did not always enjoy much variety to their meals and often commented on the poor quality of food they received. “For a change today we had some black coffee and bread; on other days we have bread and black coffee,” jested Geyer. “Coffee is our principal meal, and we make good coffee. We get plenty of [it] and sugar, but no milk. We haven’t seen any milk

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<sup>73</sup> August Horstman to his parents, January 11, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 123; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, April 18, 1865.

since we left home.”<sup>74</sup> Joseph Hotz petitioned his family in Indiana to send him “some good sausage,” as a New Year’s present, “and a good, stinky *Handkäse* [a type of cheese] even if it has worms in [it an] elle long (a unit of measurement from the tip of the elbow to the end of the finger).” Writing home to his parents about the new-found friendship, Jakob Heinzelmann told his parents that “everyday [Gustav Keppler] said he thought about the good times he’d had in Germany, eating and drinking things he liked, and here he couldn’t even get a good drink of water, and even his dog would have refused to eat the food here.” For his part, Keppler’s letters to Germany do not mention reminiscences of the lifestyle in Germany he enjoyed previous to his immigration.<sup>75</sup> Occasionally, however, Keppler described to his parents the tribulations he experienced during his military service such as sleeping on the ground, marching on an empty stomach and in inclement weather, being pestered by insects, and the poor choice of drinking either expensive, limited amounts of alcohol or “water that frogs and toads are swimming around in and that stinks terribly.” In the field, men had to make do with what the ravages of war and the circumstances of life doled out. It was a common reaction for men to look back to times of plenty when they lived in lean conditions. Home became an escapist image of something better than their present circumstances.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 24, 1865; Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, October 16, 1864; Geyer Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, December 10, 1864.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, January 1, 1865, Joseph Hotz Letters; Jakob Heinzelmann to his parents, January 23, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 181; Gustav Keppler to his parents, April 15, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 187.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition to the home-cooked meals about which men so longingly wrote home, German-born soldiers also desired the cultural cuisines of their European homeland. Historian Stephen Engle has noted that one of the cultural traits of German American migrant societies was the Germanic penchant for beer. Indeed, one of Gustav Keppler's complaints about serving in the military was the exorbitant prices for alcohol. Writing to his family in Germany, Keppler stated that one had to pay "2-3 dollars for a bottle of wine," but that even if one had the money, "you can't even get a wine glass full of beer, no matter how hard you try." After reading the news from his wife that their neighbor had invited him for a visit when Hotz returned home from the war, Joseph Hotz told his wife to accept the invitation under the condition that their neighbor "has to have a keg of beer and plenty of whiskey." Ludwig Geyer lamented that "the last glass of beer that I had was in Brownstown," where he was drafted. However, he happily recounted that on one occasion while they were in Columbia he and his comrades found another German delicacy: "a storage of sauerkraut." "This was a feast for us," he told his wife, "and we had our fill of it, but we had to smash the keg bottoms to get at it."<sup>77</sup> The cultural foods about which German-born soldiers wrote home represented their ethnic, Germanic heritage. While the *Heimat* concept of Germany played a major role in their immediate notions of home for many Germans during the war, so too did their cultural heritage—their German-ness.

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<sup>77</sup> Stephen Engle, "Yankee Dutchmen," in Ural, *Civil War Citizens*, 13; Gustav Keppler to his parents, April 15, 1864, in *Germans in the Civil War*, 187; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, December 7, 1864, Joseph Hotz Letters; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, October 16, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, November 30, 1864. For more on soldier discussions about food, see Rable, 85-89, and Matt, *Homesickness*, 89.

Another of the domestic comforts soldiers missed was the shelter and comfortable amenities they enjoyed from living in a house. Sleeping arrangements were one of the major challenges of camp life. The tents Union soldiers slept in had no flooring separating the inhabitants from the ground beneath them (unlike modern tents), making sleeping in poor weather only slightly better than sleeping under the open sky. “Many a night I have slept with my gun in my arm and my belt full of shells buckled around my waist,” remarked Ludwig Geyer. “The rainy weather makes it very bad, for we stick in the mud.” “Dear Mary, we hardly dare think of the good times we had at home and then consider our present lot,” wrote Ludwig Geyer. “Never before did I know the endurance of a man who must lie on the bare earth in all kinds of weather, wet and freezing, as we have to do,” he described. Indeed, the intensely cold weather and inability to make fires except for cooking purposes made Geyer and his comrades in the Indiana Thirty-First Regiment wish that “we were back by our firesides at home.” Geyer added that “If we had a place to sleep in like [the] old stable, we would think it a luxury.” During the cold and wet, winter campaign of 1864 in Nashville, Geyer and his comrades slept upon wooden rails, allowing the water to run underneath them in an effort to stay dry. It was from the poor sleeping conditions during the war that Geyer attributed as the cause of the rheumatism he suffered from later in life. Hospitalized for malaria, Gustav Keppler admitted that he “hadn’t slept in a bed or a house for 2 years until I came to this hospital...it was strange to be lying in a bed, and couldn’t sleep at all.” Instead, Keppler wrote that he “spent the whole night thinking of you [his

family],” thoughts most likely initiated by a change in sleeping arrangements, arrangements which reminded him of home.<sup>78</sup>

For instance, Ludwig Geyer missed the simple pleasure of placing his feet under his own table. Both Keppler and Geyer missed wearing clean clothes. “Tomorrow is Sunday,” Geyer wrote to his wife, “and I am used to having a fresh, clean undershirt, but I do not have any nor any water to wash mine in.” “There is never any talk of undressing. I haven’t had my trousers off since I became a soldier,” Geyer explained to his wife, “No one is allowed to take off their clothes.” Keppler wrote to his parents in the spring of 1864 that in all the time he had been “in the field,” he had gone without “a change of clothes until they almost fall off your body.” Considering the stench and filth that would cover their uniforms after long months of sleeping, fighting, sweating, crawling through mud and marching through dust, it should be no surprise that men returned to memories and fond thoughts of home and the comforts they enjoyed.<sup>79</sup>

Even though men wore a soldier’s uniform, regularly performed military drills, and followed a military regiment, they retained their civilian identity. Ludwig Geyer’s descriptions of the landscapes, buildings, and cities that his regiment passed through reflect his former civilian background as a farmer and brick mason. He pitied the war-ravaged destruction of buildings and farmsteads, and took note of the beauty of areas the war had not touched. While marching

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<sup>78</sup>Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheur Geyer, December 2, 1864; December 10, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheur Geyer, December 30, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheur Geyer, December 10, 1864; Ludwig Geyer Autobiography, 1892; Gustav Keppler to his parents, November 19, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 192.

<sup>79</sup>Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheur Geyer, May 24, 1865; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheur Geyer, October 22, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheur Geyer, December 2, 1864; Gustav Keppler to his parents, April 15, 1864, in *Germans in the Civil War*, 187.

through Tennessee, Geyer observed that “the corn is already a foot high in this part of the country, and the potatoes are ready to hoe.” Seeing the fields in production reminded Geyer of his own fields and the work he could be doing in Indiana: “I would love to help plant the corn,” he wrote to his wife, “if only I could be at home.” Joseph Hotz chided his wife for being “too lazy” when she requested that he “come home and do [her] work,” but agreed that her work load was “hard for [her] now.” “I would rather be home and work with you to make it easier.” Even Dietrich Gerstein, who often had a critical and disapproving comment on any given subject, admitted that “the war is over...and we are all longing to get back to work in our own family circles.” Wishing to return to their previous workloads was another way some men expressed their yearnings to return to the civilian lifestyle they enjoyed at home as an alternative to their present, martial duties.<sup>80</sup>

As men longed to return to the lives they led before the war, they sometimes imagined and discussed what they would do when they returned home. Ludwig Geyer described such an instance to his wife: “Dear Mary, you wouldn’t believe how all of the soldiers are talking about longing to go back home, even those who don’t have much to return to. That is the everyday discussion—what everyone is going to do when they get home.” Concerned over his wife’s ability to procure firewood, Geyer insisted that were he home, he would spend at least one day out of each week to chop firewood for women whose husbands were serving in the war. On another occasion, Geyer imagined the “joy it would be” to

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<sup>80</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, May 13, 1865; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, June 6, 1863, Joseph Hots Letters; Dietrich Gerstein to Ludwig Gerstein, September 28, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 287; see also Reid Mitchell, 135.

return home. “I might come home unexpected, knock on the door and surprise you,” Geyer wrote.<sup>81</sup> Although Geyer reflected on home to elevate his moods and dwell on happier times, his memories could not change his present circumstances, which lead to greater disappointment. “We build castles in the air,” Geyer wrote, “and all at once find them tumbled down—all smashed to nothing, and we then find ourselves again in our despised hut, with the hated uniform on: and then we are vividly aware again of our woeful condition.” In August of 1864, Wilhelm Albrecht wrote to his family explaining that on December 10th he would fulfill his three years of service. Albrecht looked forward to the day he would be released and that his “suffering would soon be over.” “I hope that on that day I will go home,” he continued in his letter, “and then by Christmas I’ll be a human again, which we can’t be as soldiers.” Matt wrote that imagining home was a way for soldiers to have a “stable source of identity” and to “maintain a sense of their ‘true’ selves,” during a time of such great destruction of life and property.<sup>82</sup> Confronted with the stressful, dangerous, and often frightening situations soldiers ubiquitously encountered fighting in a war, men diverted their attention from grim reality and imagined a safe place, a happier time absent from hardships and pain. The image of the civilian lifestyle was at odds with their present environment and duties as soldiers. For some men, the distinction between the two lifestyles made all the difference.

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<sup>81</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, May 3, 1865; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, December 12, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, May 16, 1865.

<sup>82</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 29, 1865; Wilhelm Albrecht to his family, August 22, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 112; Matt, *Homesickness*, 99-101.

The ideals of home that soldiers imagined in the field did not always match up with reality once they returned. Although Dietrich Gerstein had desired to return to his family and his own line of work, he was dissatisfied with the home to which he returned and felt that “all my expectations have been dashed.” “I had hoped,” Gerstein wrote, “my wife would be a bit more reasonable, but she is more of a battle-axe than ever.” Gerstein complained about the weather in “primitive, frozen Michigan,” and deplored the “tedious, boring, monotonous life we have in our woods,” which he referred to as “nothing but hard work and no rest, no pleasure.” Home did indeed seem “more precious from afar,” as one soldier described.<sup>83</sup> Separation caused Gerstein to glance over his memories of home, focusing on the good points while minimizing its faults when compared to his present circumstances in the military. Once he returned home and the military was no longer consciously present as a comparison point, the unpopularity of tasks at home became more apparent.

Matt’s study of homesickness argues that discontent with army life often turned into homesickness, and that homesickness was “often linked to high desertion rates.” Much of Ludwig Geyer’s discontent in the army was, indeed, linked to his homesickness for his family, farm, access to food, and his civilian lifestyle. Geyer may have considered deserting. Geyer told his wife that in camp Carrington, Indiana he and his comrades were always “guarded” by the older recruits. “Every place we go,” Geyer wrote, “they are always there with loaded

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<sup>83</sup>Dietrich Gerstein to Ludwig Gerstein, December 16, 1865, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 287. See also Mitchell, 135-137. August Horstmann to his family, December 22, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 126-127.

rifles.”<sup>84</sup> Geyer remained in the military until he received an official release from the United States government in June of 1865. Joseph Hotz was also dissatisfied with being in the army, separated from his home and family, and in 1863 he petitioned his wife to procure a note from their doctor in Indiana listing her husband in poor health in order to obtain a release from service. Hotz’s desire to return home and his own war weariness prompted him to tell his his wife in the winter of 1863-64 that he would “not reenlist even if they give me all of America.” However, Hotz remained in the military for close to another year and a half until his death on March 28, 1865 less than two weeks before General Lee surrendered his army to General Grant at Appomattox. After listening to Gustav Keppler describe all the wonderful things he missed in Germany (his family, acquaintances, and food), Jakob Heinzelmann chided Keppler and reportedly told him that “if I’d had it as good in Germany as he had, I would have deserted a long time ago.” Neither man deserted. Many of the thirty-eight German-born soldiers studied in this thesis experienced homesickness, vented in their letters about the harsh conditions as a soldier, and a few even entertained thoughts of unofficially returning home, but only one deserted.<sup>85</sup> Desertion could be a strong temptation, but homesickness alone cannot explain why some men chose to leave the military.

Notions of “home” equaled the sum of their parts. Separation from the house, farm, family, and hometown prompted feelings of homesickness and nostalgia along with the separation from the familiar aspects of home such as food

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<sup>84</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, October 16, 1864.

<sup>85</sup> Susan Matt, *Homesickness*, 89-90; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, January 22, 1863, Joseph Hotz Letters; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, January 10, 1864, Joseph Hotz Letters; Jakob Heinzelmann to his parents, January 23, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 181. Heinrich Müller was the only German-born soldier in this study who deserted the military.

and domestic amenities. Although many considered war as a manly affair, their expressions of homesickness for the domestic illustrates that the men examined in this study did not feel entirely comfortable in the military. Their examples suggest that the ridged demarcations of a public, masculine role in the world and a feminine role in the home became less ridged and more porous during periods of war as men rejected public displays of masculinity in favor of their domestic responsibilities. German soldiers experienced homesickness and nostalgia under similar circumstances as their native-born American counterparts, but did so from an ethnic perspective. They missed their Germanic culinary traditions, hearing the German language, and associating with members of their ethnic communities in Germany and the United States. Although not completely cut-off or separated from their families, men were keenly aware of their separation from the familiar scenes and faces at home; their yearning for familiarity and home a similar reaction of migrants historian Oscar Handlin termed “uprooted.”

## CHAPTER 4

### MAKING IT HOME

Considering the emotional depth to which soldiers felt homesickness and nostalgia, along with the demanding conditions many endured during the war, it is curious that more men did not desert and return home. Studies have shown that the vast majority of Union men chose to remain in the military rather than flee.<sup>86</sup> This chapter will examine some of the reasons why German migrants chose to remain in the army rather than return home. The discussion in this chapter will demonstrate that men in the field coped with their homesickness by incorporating aspects of home and their civilian lifestyles into their martial environment. As they sought to merge their civilian and martial experiences, soldiers renegotiated and replaced what they felt was unfamiliar with what was familiar. Over time men considered camp-life as an extension of their home communities.

Even in the midst of hardships and homesickness, men decided to remain in the military. Magnus Brucker feared an unauthorized absence from the army would cost him three months pay, impugn his honor, and incur treatment “as a deserter.” Alphons Richter and August Horstmann considered themselves honor and duty bound towards the United States. “Oh, gladly would I rush home if I could,” Richter wrote, “[b]ut I have raised my hand in oath...and I will remain true to my oath.” For Horstmann, it was the “higher duties” that kept him from visiting his family “to refresh my memories of the happy years of my childhood.”

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<sup>86</sup> McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 137-138, 156, 162, 168-169; Dora L. Costa and Mathew E. Khan, “Cowards and Heroes: Group Loyalty in the American Civil War,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* vol. 118 No. 2 (May 2003): 521, 534.

The point discussing German soldiers' responses of honor and duty is not to show that Germans had a separate notion of honor from their native-born comrades, but to show that they espoused a similar desire to protect a country from where they did not originate, and whose problems were not entirely their own.

Even though he suffered from a leg injury and had difficulty walking, Valentin Bechler insisted on staying in the military. "I can't do my duty," Bechler explained to his wife, "but I can't work at home now either. What should I do[?] Here I get paid." Without the money he earned as a soldier, Bechler felt he would be unable to adequately provide for his family. He feared that the shame from returning home empty-handed would affect the way his family thought of him, that he would "no longer be dear Daddy." Ludwig Geyer felt uneasy about returning home to Indiana without permission, afraid he could lose his life for doing so since the "older soldiers [guard] the new recruits. Every place we go they are always there with loaded rifles." "We simply cannot change the situation," Geyer wrote, "but must accept it."<sup>87</sup> Although Bechler enlisted to support the Union cause and to earn some extra money, it was the hope of added income—and the fear of returning without it—that sustained his tenacity to remain on the battlefield. Ludwig Geyer's stoic response resembles his compulsory, involuntary conscription into the army, which he perceived as unavoidable.

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<sup>87</sup> Magnus Brucker to his wife, October 18, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 260; Alphons Richter to his family, October 30, 1861, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 96; August Horstmann to his family, September 18, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 124; Valentin Bechler to Leokadia Bechler, October 29, 1862, in "A German Immigrant in the Union Army," 160; Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, October 16, 1864.

Unable to return home to work the fields or administer to the family business, men relied on letters to convey their instructions to those at home. Men were still the head of the household even when absent. With the men gone to war, however, the duty of running the business and household fell upon the women and children old enough to do the work. Ludwig Geyer frequently advised his wife on how to pasture and take care of the animals, which fields needed planted and with which specific crop, and how to prune the grape trees without killing them.

Advice, however, was not limited to house work and business. A man's duty to his home and family was more than just bread earner; he was also the protector, defender, and counselor. Through letters men could continue to be an active participant in their family's lives and the social network of their communities, making the distance between them and home seem somewhat shorter. "You said Jana asked who she should marry," Hotz wrote, responding to his wife's previous letter, "there are plenty of good boys, she doesn't have to marry the broom handle." In the meantime, Hotz playfully suggested that Jana should have a man "baked special for her," so that she can "eat him when she is tired of him." While he was away from home, Magnus Brucker advised his wife to "make sure the rifles and pistols are well loaded, there's no place for fearfulness and timidity in these times." "If someone breaks in at night," he added, "shoot him to pieces." The examples from Geyer and Brucker also show

the permeable, blurred distinctions between male and female domestic roles as women assumed many of the responsibilities of their husbands.<sup>88</sup>

The converse was also true. Reid Mitchell's research on masculinity during the Civil War found that "northern society put domesticity at the center of society and women at the center of domesticity." Separated from women, however, "soldiers found themselves doing chores that had been traditionally considered womanly." Indeed, men relied on themselves to cook their meals and to mend and wash their clothes. German soldiers were no exception. In his diary, Alphons Richter documented the daily chores he shared with his tentmate, Carl Becker. "We take turns cooking and washing our pots ourselves," Richter wrote, "one does the cooking and the other goes fishing or hunting." Ludwig Geyer told his wife that coffee was the "principal meal" of him and his comrades "and we make good coffee." Without a mill to grind the roasted coffee beans issued by the army, Geyer wrote that he and the men in his company used their bayonets to "pound the coffee into grounds."<sup>89</sup> As men yearned for the domestic comforts of home, they came to rely on their own abilities to provide for themselves.

In order to relieve men from bouts of homesickness, some officers allowed men to return home for short periods of time on furlough. Dora L. Costa and Mathew Khan attributed the high desertion rates among married men to policies that allowed only married men to obtain furloughs. Such policies created greater

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<sup>88</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, March 29, 1865; Magnus Brucker to his wife, September 10, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 258; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, October 23, 1864; Joseph Hotz, December 7, 1864.

<sup>89</sup> Mitchell, 72-73, 82; Alphons Richter, dairy entry September 6, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 99; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, Dec. 10, 1864.

opportunities for married men to leave the military than their single comrades.<sup>90</sup> For some men, a visit home did not relieve their homesickness like they thought it would. Sometimes, visiting home made returning to the battle field more difficult. Joseph Hotz found returning to the pace of military life more difficult since after he returned from furlough. “I don’t like it here at all anymore,” he wrote, “...It’s a lot harder on me than before...The food doesn’t taste good anymore since I was home.” Although Hotz initially felt that he would not leave his family if he were allowed to return home again, over time he changed his mind. The constant concern he had for his wife and daughter since he saw them led Hotz to rethink visiting home on furlough. A month after his visit he wrote that “if I had to do it again, I would not have.”<sup>91</sup> Friedrich Schmalzried also understood the difficulty with switching between a soldier and civilian mindset. “Much as I long to come home,” he wrote, “I wish it was all over because when I come home, I want to stay there.” Remaining on the battlefield also meant an escape from difficult good-byes. “Upon seeing men greet their wives at a train station, Ludwig Geyer wrote, “Dear Mary, as much as I wanted to see you, I never want to go through parting again. My heart is torn with grief.”<sup>92</sup> Confronted with the difficulty of leaving home multiple times, some men like Geyer, Hotz, and Schmalzried chose to remain separated from their families and homes to better endure, or stifle, reoccurring bouts of homesickness. Paradoxically, men were able to better endure the rigors of homesickness by emotionally and

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<sup>90</sup> Anderson, 273; Costa and Khan, 534.

<sup>91</sup> Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, June 25, 1862, Joseph Hotz Letters; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, July 31, 1862, Joseph Hotz Letters.

<sup>92</sup> Friedrich Schmalzried to his family, April 7, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 94; Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, November 6, 1864.

physically distancing themselves from their families, even though it was this very distance which caused their homesickness.

Personal photographs, as historian Drew Faust described in her book *This Republic of Suffering*, were popular mementos of home and family that soldiers carried with them.<sup>93</sup> Because he was low on funds, Alphons Richter decided to send a picture of himself to his father in Germany as a late birthday present. Joseph Hotz begged his wife to send a photograph of herself and his child, who had been born after Hotz returned to the military from furlough. Hotz wrote to his wife that, “you cannot imagine how I long to see you even if it is just a picture of you.” After he received the photograph, Hotz replied that looked at the photograph often, “how many times I couldn’t begin to tell you.” Ludwig Geyer sent a photograph of himself to his wife so that their children would have a visual connection of their father should he be unable to return home. He cautioned his wife, however, not to send him a picture of her since it could get lost or damaged. Geyer’s wife either neglected his advice or did not receive his letter in time because soon afterward Ludwig Geyer received a photograph from her. Eloquently responding to his wife about the present she sent him, Geyer wrote:

Dear Mary, your picture is a source of much happiness to me. I have lovingly kissed you and carry you next to my heart in a pocket which I sewed inside my coat for that purpose...your picture will always be my choicest treasure, my star in the dark of night, my talisman in danger...and if at times spells of sadness come to me while doing guard duty at the lonely hour of midnight, then you will refresh and raise my spirits so that sadness may not engulf me.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death in the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2008), 11-12.

<sup>94</sup> Alphons Richter, diary entry, September 6, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 98; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, November 22 1863 Joseph Hotz Letters; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, Feb. 15, 1865.

Photographs were indeed powerful reminders of home which ameliorated the sorrowful symptoms of homesickness by providing a visual connection with loved ones, one which made the distance from home seem momentarily shorter.

Unable or unwilling to visit home due to inability to obtain furloughs and the cost of transportation, soldiers used packages to help them alleviate homesickness. Packages were sent both ways. Those at home supplied soldiers with items from home for which they longed, while soldiers too, when able, sent packages to their loved ones. Articles of clothing, such as a hat or a winter coat, were sent home as presents, both lightening one's pack load and serving as mementos of a faraway husband, father, son or brother. Men would try to send money home as often as possible, but doing so was infrequent since soldiers often went months without payment.<sup>95</sup> Soldiers in the field wrote home asking for other items to make their time in the military a little easier. For instance, Joseph Hotz requested for his wife to send him a quilt during the winter of 1861. "I can do without most things," Ludwig Geyer told his wife, "but I do like to have some tobacco occasionally." Henry Kircher, the son of immigrant parents from Germany, found that he missed his books while he was away from home, and asked his mother to send them to him. Wilhelm Albrecht reported to his family that "the best thing" about the winter club house he and his comrades built were the "eight German American newspapers" they subscribed to, particularly the "*Leipziger Gartenlaube* from Germany."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Susan Matt, *Homesickness*, 84-85; Rable, 85-89.

<sup>96</sup> Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, November 20, 1861, Hotz Letters; Henry Kircher to his mother, September 3, 1862, in *A German in the Yankee Fatherland: The Civil War Letters of Henry A.*

Buying homemade food was one way soldiers could obtain culinary foodstuffs similar to what they enjoyed at home. Ludwig Geyer spent fifty cents on “a little bread and cheese.” Once he finished his snack, he “wished for more, as it only teased my appetite.” On another occasion Geyer and his brother-in-law, Peter Meahl, who served in the same company as Geyer, treated themselves each to an apple pie. Although the men intended to buy bread, not pies, they justified their purchase due to the shortage of bread available and because “they were the first pies we had since we left home and they may be the last.”<sup>97</sup> Buying food was an unattractive method of obtaining food due to high prices and the infrequency that men received their military pay. Replying to his wife’s allegation that he never sent home as much money as other soldiers, Joseph Hotz wrote that “they send everything home and in one weeks time they write home and ask for money.”<sup>98</sup> Married soldiers sought to balance their payments from the military according to the amount they could send home and the amount they would need to purchase items in the field.

Instead of buying food, soldiers would raid or trade for it. Near the end of March, 1865, Ludwig Geyer informed his wife that he and his comrades enjoyed enough potatoes only once during his time as a soldier. On November 30, 1864, three hours before the Battle of Franklin, Geyer and his companions discovered a potato field near the area where his regiment was stationed: “Everyone who was free from duty ran there and dug potatoes out with their bayonets...and we had a

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*Kircher*, ed. Earl J. Hess (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1983), 17; Wilhelm Albrecht to his family, August 22, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 110.

<sup>97</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, December 10, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 18, 1865.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, July 15, 1863, Joseph Hotz Letters.

big meal,” he wrote. After the Battle of Nashville, Geyer’s regiment marched south “with scant rations” until they reached Alabama. There Geyer reported that their rations improved “even though we have to resort to plundering.” On New Year’s day they used “cornmeal, molasses, and bacon from a house” to “cook mush and molasses and it tasted as good as the best meal we ever had at home.”<sup>99</sup> Wandering East Tennessee, starved and looking for his corps, Carl Unterhard came across “a small farmhouse that was full of corn and flour.” As his comrades raided the farmhouse, Uterhard recalled that “the woman cried bitterly when we took her corn, but our need was too great...even though I felt sorry about it, I took half a sack.” War blurred men’s traditional roles as the defender of home and liberty, as they stole from and disrupted the homes of others. When raiding was not an option, men traded for what they wanted. For example, one day Ludwig Geyer and two of his comrades traded a woman two pounds of their salt pork for three biscuits, and then divided the biscuits one each. The next day they traded the same woman all their sugar for three more biscuits. Compared with military fare, homemade food was a prize.<sup>100</sup>

Receiving packages of foodstuffs from home was yet another method. Ludwig Geyer lamented to his wife that he would not be able to eat any of her homemade seasonal sausage, only to find a package delivered to him and his comrades near the beginning of February, 1865. “You can’t imagine with what happy anticipation we went at that sausage,” he wrote, “one gets such a longing for it after not having tasted any for such a long time.” Poignantly written on the

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<sup>99</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer,

<sup>100</sup> Carl Uterhard, salutation missing, December 3, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 168; Ludwig Geyer to Maira Ungeheuer Geyer, May 3, 1865.

bottom of Geyer's next letter to his wife were a few sentences written by his brother-in-law, Peter Meahl: "We received the box of sausage, and it surely tastes good. We bought some bread and now we can live for a while as we used to when at home."<sup>101</sup> Unable to return home to enjoy the comfort of a home-cooked meal, a slice of home was sent to them.

Men tried to re-create the comforts of home in other ways than food, too. After sleeping in the snow, and awaking to find more had fallen during the night, Wilhelm Francksen's regiment set to work building log huts, complete with bunk beds, fireplaces, seats, and tables. One hut (perhaps Francksen's) had "a porch in front...with red berries with moss and colorful stones." Francksen also wrote that "on special days the streets were nicely swept and fresh greenery brought back from the woods." Robert Rossi of the 8<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry Volunteers and his comrades also decided to build better winter shelters. The men furnished their "cabin" with usual items such as beds, a table, and places along the walls to store their guns and military armaments. But Rossi's winter shelter also had a certain home-like quality to it. They built shelves to hold their "newspapers, books, soap, [and] cigar boxes," and placed a "small stove" inside their quarters. Indeed, Rossi wrote that "it's so cozy in our little house that we are always glad to come back in even after a short absence."<sup>102</sup> Although it is not clear from Francksen's or Rossi's letters how much their winter quarters reminded the men of their own homes, the furnished interiors and quaint additions of "fresh greenery" and "colorful stones"

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<sup>101</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, February 1, 1865; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, February 4, 1865.

<sup>102</sup> Wilhelm Francksen to his father, March 1, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 139-140; Robert Rossi to Elise, February 17, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 81-82.

are worth noting for their similarity to domestic decoration and their home-like attributes.

The ability to reside in a cabin was not a luxury extended to every soldier in the war. Although Ludwig Geyer wished he could sleep at home “even if we only had a straw tick to sleep on,” he improvised with the materials around him. When available, Geyer gathered “dried grass and weeds” to create what he jokingly referred to as a “feather bed,” the dried grass he called “soldier’s feathers.” Albert Krause’s regiment camped in a deserted sugar plantation near Franklin, Louisiana, where Krause slept in a trough “where the Negroes used to stir the syrup.” “It was the best night of sleep I ever had,” he wrote, “and why not? Since we left Baton Rouge, it was the first night I had spent indoors.”<sup>103</sup> While dried grass and syrup troughs held no comparison with beds at home, it was better than sleeping on the cold, hard ground. Men took advantage of the resources around them to replicate the comforts of a civilian lifestyle, a touch of the familiar.

German soldiers recreated familiar aspects of home and civilian life through the associations they had with the men in their regiments. Historians Walter Kamphoefner and Stephen Engle have shown that Germans often preferred to associate with fellow Germans, even forming ethnic regiments such as the Indiana Thirtieth Regiment under August Willich and the notable Eleventh

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<sup>103</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, November 6, 1864; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 15, 1865; Albert Krause to his family, January 10, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 215.

Corps led by Franz Sigel and Carl Shurtz.<sup>104</sup> However, historian Stephen Engle reported that Germans who served in ethnic regiments accounted for roughly twenty percent of the German military force, meaning that eighty percent of foreign-born Germans served in mixed regiments.<sup>105</sup> But even in mixed units, Germans tended to associate with other German speaking soldiers. During his stay in a hospital due to a battle wound, Wilhelm Francksen met John Tietjen, whom Francksen noted, “only likes real ‘Low Germans’ as he calls people from our area. He can’t stand High Germans and Americans.” Gustav Keppeler reported that he felt alone in his regiment “who are mostly Irishmen.” The two men Keppeler felt he could associate with, one who had migrated from Switzerland, were no longer in the army due to disease and a back injury. Although not a German migrant himself, Heinrich Kircher had been raised in a community of highly educated German migrants known as Latin Farmers, who fled the 1848 rebellion. Kircher was initially stationed in an American regiment, but quickly transferred to an ethnic German regiment where he felt more comfortable with the language and customs with which he had been raised, and where could avoid ethnic tensions among Anglo-American soldiers.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 5, 20-26; Engle, “Yankee Dutchmen,” 18-22.

<sup>105</sup> Wilhelm Francksen to Theodore, December 1, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 145. Stephen Engle, “Yankee Dutchmen” in Ural, *Civil War Citizens*, 22-23.

<sup>106</sup> Wilhelm Francksen to Theodore, December 1, 1863, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 145; Gustave Keppeler to his family, November 19, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 192; Hess, 6-8. Initially enlisted with the 9th Illinois regiment, Kircher later enlisted with the 12th Missouri for three years when his time with the 9th Illinois concluded in the summer of 1861. The term “Latin Farmer” referred to highly educated German immigrants who settled into a life of farming and agriculture in the United States, although they knew more about Latin than they did about farming. See Hess, 1-4, and Helbich and Kamphoefner, *Germans in the Civil War*, 485.

Ludwig Geyer also associated with German-speaking soldiers. They cooked together, shared a tent together, and told each other about home. The distinct feature about Geyer's was that although they were German-speaking migrants, they were all from Jackson County, Indiana, and most of them lived a short distance from Geyer's home in Brownstown. Out of the sixty-six men listed as recruits in the Thirty-First Indiana Regiment, Company I, the roster lists seven men from Brownstown and another eight men from the neighboring town of Seymour. However, Geyer's letters hardly mention the names of men other than those from Brownstown.<sup>107</sup>

Whether serving among fellow German migrants or not, German-speaking soldiers yearned for a sense of *Gemütlichkeit*. The word does not have an English equivalent, but loosely translated the term means “comfort” or “camaraderie”. Wilhelm Francksen described the United States as a place where “there’s no feeling of being at home, no matter how long you live here, because here there’s no *Gemütlichkeit*, without which,” he felt, “Germans can’t even imagine feeling at home.”<sup>108</sup> Francksen likely felt lonesome and isolated from the culture and familiar aspects of his native homeland. But while Francksen experienced social and cultural isolation, other German migrants integrated themselves into the social group as best they could, and made their camp-life resemble their home-life. Wilhelm Albrecht’s “clubhouse” was not only a place

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<sup>107</sup> Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, Apr. 29, 1865; [http://www.civilwarindex.com/army/soldiers/31st\\_in\\_infantry\\_soldiers.pdf](http://www.civilwarindex.com/army/soldiers/31st_in_infantry_soldiers.pdf) (accessed June 25, 2011). Two notable exceptions are Simon Peter, a butcher from Seymour, Indiana who was injured in the battle of Nashville, and John (Fritz) Stunkel, who resided in Tampico, Indiana according to the company roster.

<sup>108</sup> Wilhelm Francksen to his father, August 4, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 137

where the men in his regiment could read a German American newspaper but was also where the men “practiced [their] singing so much that we had many happy hours, and no civilian singing group could have had a better time.” Indeed, the activities that took place at the “clubhouse” resemble the activities associated with German social clubs, or *Vereine*.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, holidays were not always the cheerless events as one would believe after reading August Horstmann’s account. Robert Rossi had a jovial time “spent in pleasant conversation and singing.” “On New Year’s Eve,” he reported, “we went from tent to tent to wish everyone a Happy New Year and we... didn’t get to bed until around 3, all of us dutifully drunk.” Raised as a Lutheran in Germany, Geyer maintained his religious affiliation in the United States, and often comforted himself and his wife in the belief that he would be protected in combat by the Lord. However, should he fall, then his death would be according to the Lord’s unalterable will. After attending church services for the first time in six months, Geyer and the men in his company enjoyed the sermon and the singing so much that they tried to hold church services in a tent back at camp. Unfortunately, however, Geyer reported that not long after its construction, a “storm came along and destroyed it [the tent], so that was the end of our services.”<sup>110</sup> Geyer’s and Albrecht’s examples show that men attempted to make their camp life seem more like their civilian standard of living. In essence, since men could not return home, they instituted aspects of home where they were.

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<sup>109</sup> Wilhelm Albrecht to his family, August 22, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 110. For the original German, see the same dated letter in *Deutsche im Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg*, 172.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Rossi to Elise, February 17, 1862, in *Germans in the Civil War*, 81; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, March 9, 1865.

Another example of camp life resembling one's home is the casual use of the term "home" to refer to their tent or their camp. Ludwig Geyer wrote that after he finished guard duty, he returned "home for dinner, which Peter cooked," and found that he had "received a letter from home." Joseph Hotz also described his camp with domestic imagery when he wrote to his wife about a fight he had with one of his fellow soldiers. "He came home drunk," Hotz reported, "then he started a fight. I threw him out of the bed and he wasn't satisfied, so I threw him out of the house and then he was satisfied." After eating lunch with a friend, Gustav Keppler wrote to his family that he "returned home [*Dann musste ich wieder nach Hause*]" to the hospital where he stayed at the time.<sup>111</sup> That the men used the term "home" to casually refer to two separate locations suggests that men had, to greater or lesser degrees, become familiar with their stations in the field.<sup>112</sup>

Over time, men fashioned their camp communities in the image of their home communities. On January 24, 1865 Ludwig Geyer recalled that after they had eaten dinner, he and his comrades "talked the whole evening about home and any happenings we could recall." "Of course," he continued, "no evening passes without talking when we, Peter [Meahl], Philip [Eichenhour], Fritz Lane, and myself sit around the fire." During one of their fireside conversations, the men from Brownstown, Indiana discussed the local gossip surrounding the Phennigs

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<sup>111</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 29, 1865; Joseph Hotz to Maria Hotz, September 3, 1864, Joseph Hotz Letters; Gustav Keppler to his family, December 14, 1864, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Deutsche im Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg*, 253. The phrase *nach Hause* is the more common expression of "going home;" seldom, if ever, would one say *nach Heim*. Keppler's use of the word *Hause* instead of the word building (*Gebäude*) or even hospital (*Krankenhaus*), is further proof of the translation's accuracy in referring to home.

<sup>112</sup> Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 194. Keppler, however, never returned home to Germany. The paddle steamer *North America*, which carried wounded and invalid soldiers like Keppler, sank near North Carolina on its way to New York due to a storm December 22, 1864.

family. According to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer's biography, a short family history written by her granddaughter, Anise Fosbrink, the town gossip surrounding the Phennigs family concerned the birth of a child out of wedlock. "I don't care a thing about what you wrote of the Phennigs family," Geyer responded, scolding his wife. "We often sat in our tents in Huntsville and spoke about how badly he treated Philipina and how little he helped her."<sup>113</sup> It is no coincidence that the men in Geyer's company, in addition to being German, were from the same area of Indiana as himself. The fact that Geyer surrounded himself with the familiar faces of those from his hometown, who could discuss familiar stories and gossip, and spoke a familiar language demonstrates one way that men would gravitate towards aspects that reminded them of home or made them more comfortable in an unfamiliar environment.

Separation from the men of their camps, either because of death or a military release, demonstrates the attachment with which soldiers relied upon the men of their company. Robert Rossi explained to his family that "you can well imagine how hard it was to leave so many friends and acquaintances with whom I shared 14 months of toil, hunger, and travail as well as many a happy hour." Carl Uterhard remarked that after a hard-fought battle he "had to muster all my strength not to cry when I got back to the regiment," because, "there were so many missing who had been so dear to me." Alphons Richter recorded similar sentiments in his diary: "My heart sinks when I think of all the handsome young men I have commanded, leading them on with high hopes of victory, and then

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<sup>113</sup> Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, January 24, 1865; Ludwig Geyer to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, April 29, 1865; Anise Marie Fosbrink Foster, "I Remember Grandma: A Biography of Anna Maria Ungeheuer Geyer," 1975, in the author's possession.

after the battle was won, seeing them lying dead and stiff all around me, never to wake again.” Reminiscing over the death of his friend Henry (Ahl) Alfiers, Ludwig Geyer predicted the war would claim many more lives before it ended. “Ahl never thought he would die,” Geyer wrote, “even on the last evening before his death...as we lowered him into his grave, I wondered who would be the next one.” In war, death is everywhere, but unpredictable. Many men wondered if they would ever see their loved ones again.

Separation from their loved ones was a situation migrants had gone through before. Unable to visit his family, Johann Bauer told his mother in 1857 to “not be discouraged and sad, dear mother, for I can assure you that we will meet again in that land where there will be no more disappointments, no more death, and no more separation.”<sup>114</sup> Confronted with their own mortality, soldiers “thought of home,” Alphons Richter recorded, “their parents, brothers and sisters or wives.” Richter continued that the soldiers “never complained about their death,” but only requested that their family members be informed that the soldier had “died for my country as a brave man, not one with a cowardly heart.”<sup>115</sup> Richter’s comments are so succinctly laced with patriotic bravado that it is difficult to know for certain if German soldiers truly made such requests,

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<sup>114</sup> Johann Bauer to the Bauer family, September 2, 1857, in Kamphoefner, Helbich, and Sommer, *News From the Land of Freedom*, 157.

<sup>115</sup> Alphons Richter diary entry September 6, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 98-99; Geyer, Ludwig to Maria Ungeheuer Geyer, February 4, 1865. In the first chapter of her book *This Republic of Suffering*, Faust discusses the notions of the “Good Death “ as one based on an honorable death for the cause of justice, but does not extend such discussions of the foreign-born, the drafted, and the politically discontented. Instead, she focuses on examples of men who concerned with their spiritual and eternal welfare and those who “rationalized their death through the rhetoric of service,” 4-10.

especially those who detested the war and resented conscription, or if Richter's sentiments more closely resembled his own patriotic paradigm.

And yet there is evidence to show that some men did share Richter's sentiments. A newspaper clipping from *The Farmer's Cabinet* attributably submitted from "the records of a volunteer nurse" details the death of a German soldier in a hospital operating room. In his blood-loss induced delirium, the soldier mistook one of the nurses as his Marie. Thinking no harm by pretending, the nurse accepted her role as the soldier's wife and listened as the soldier told her of his bravery in battle, running "right through [the] field, up to the rebel guns, till I dropped, and asked her about his parents and what they were doing back home."<sup>116</sup> Friedrich Martens, aware of the death and destruction around him, explained to his father that it was a possibility that he might not survive the war. Martens advised his father, should he receive news of his son's death, to "weep, yes—weep your fill," but then asked his father to pray "to the good Helmsman of the world, and thank him that He gave you a son man enough to fight for a sacred cause and to die." Similarly, August Horstmann wrote to his parents describing his happiness should he be able to see them again. However, should he die in battle, he told his parents that they should "not be too concerned, for many brave sons of the German fatherland have already died on the field of honor." Whereas migrants before the war offered distant loved ones the hope and comfort of a blissful and eternal reunion in heaven to alleviate the sorrow caused by prolonged separation, soldiers justified their involvement in the war and potential demise by emphasizing the bravery and honor in a heroic death.

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<sup>116</sup> Anonymous, "The German Soldier's Death," *The Farmer's Cabinet*, 7 January 1864.

A heroic death was not as comforting to Henriette Geisberg Bruns, who lost two sons during the war, as was having her sons return home. In 1862 her son Caspar, injured and sick from the Battle of Pea Ridge, returned home to his parents in Missouri where he died from a combination of a high fever and “severe diarrhea.” In a state of fear, Caspar called out “Mother, Mother, I am so afraid!” Henriette Bruns responded to her son that “in Heaven it will be better.” “He was a good boy,” she wrote to her brother Heinrich. “We would have liked to have kept him in spite of his cramps and his lost arm.”<sup>117</sup> Bruns’s letter to her brother seems calm and collected. She had been able to see her son Caspar alive and tend to his illness. She had a chance to say good-bye.

When Henriette Bruns’s son Heinrich died a year later in 1863 after the Battle of Iuka, Bruns’s letter to her brother Heinrich expressed her anguish: “Our Heinrich is gone. The handsome, good boy, full of life, the pride of his father, the quiet worry and joy of his mother.” “[The news] hit us so unexpectedly,” she wrote, “like a thunderbolt. It is too hard!...the whole war, and the whole miserable world—one gets so tired of it!” Still, Henriette Bruns found solace from seeing the lifeless body of her son before it was buried. “The first view frightened me tremendously,” but stated that “it was after all beautiful that they sent the body home.”<sup>118</sup> War can be a traumatic experience for anyone, particularly for a mother who lost two of her children. Although the idea of a glorious afterlife in

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<sup>117</sup> Henriette Giesberg Bruns to her brother Heinrich Giesberg, April 3, 1862, in *Hold Dear, as Always*, 187.

<sup>118</sup> Henriette Giesberg Bruns to her brother Hienrich Giesberg, August, 1863, in *Hold Dear, as Always*, 188-189.

heaven brought comfort to some, it was seeing her sons at home that helped Henriette Bruns find emotional closure.

Maintaining connections with home was integral in abating feelings of homesickness. While letters and packages to and from home helped men feel less isolated, soldiers were able to make their experience in the military and their separation from home more bearable by integrating familiar aspects of home such as familiar foods, shelter, domestic comforts and amenities, and social connections. In turn, military camps became extensions of home and the home community; the public sphere had blended with the domestic. Just as the location of home for some migrants had taken on an ambiguous position that included Europe and the United States, the location of home had again evolved to include the military.

CHAPTER 5  
HOME FOR A VISIT

Historian Oscar Handlin's book *The Uprooted* depicted migrants from Europe pushed from their lands by a volatile economy and the advent of industrialization. Forced from their native soil, migrants came to the United States where they struggled to adjust to a different lifestyle. Urban tenement apartments replaced village cottages much like factory employment replaced the outdoor, agrarian labor migrants had known in Europe. "Having become Americans," Handlin wrote, "they [migrants] were no longer villagers... They had seen too much, experienced too much." Handlin suggests that immigrants did not "swallow America in one gulp," rather they "learned how to live in America while still being themselves." Neither industrial labor, nor living conditions turned immigrants into Americans, as much as it changed them into non-Europeans.<sup>119</sup>

Historian John Bodnar critically responded to Handlin's work on immigration by arguing that the immigrant experience to the United States was less like an uprooting and more of transplantation. "They did not proceed simply from an ethnic world to a class world," Bodnar wrote. Migrants were not forced from the lands, but made conscious and informed decisions to emigrate, and settled in areas and communities that shared a similar language and cultural tradition. Life in the United States mirrored the lives migrants had experienced in Europe.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Handlin, 234-238.

<sup>120</sup> Bodnar, 40-41, 82-83, 185, 211.

Although many in this study of German migrants who fought in the American Civil War felt homesick or nostalgic, few entertained the desire of a permanent return to Europe. As dear as friends and family members back home in Europe were, men intimated their desires to visit, not stay. True, Europe was still home, but many considered it the old home. “I believe that if I were to live again for a short time in Germany I would long for America again,” Johann Bauer wrote to his family in Germany. Bauer believed that after the excitement of his return waned and he was “seen again as something old,” Bauer would “set out again for America, which would only cause you sorrow and distress once again.” “America has advantages,” Bauer wrote, “that you don’t have in Germany.” Bauer did not explain what advantages he had by living in the United States, but others did. Carl Hermanns wrote to his parents in the spring of 1862 that he felt satisfied with his accomplishments over the past five years he had lived in the United States. He had a house and a school where he taught as well as “a loving wife and two beautiful children.” In 1871, David Böpplé wanted to take advantage of the 160 acres of land offered by the United States government that Böpplé was eligible to claim due to his military service in the Civil War. “But my wife doesn’t want to move away from here, she says we’ve built a school and a church and a nice farm here,” he wrote, “and she doesn’t ever want to leave.” For his part, Böpplé wrote that he never wanted to “go to Germany again.”<sup>121</sup> Like David Böpplé’s wife, years of living in the United States had taken its toll on the location on of home

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<sup>121</sup> Johann Bauer to the Bauer family, November 30, 1856, in Kamphoefner, Helbich, and Sommer, *News From the Land of Freedom*, 156; Carl Hermanns to his parents, April 12, 1862, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 114; David Böpplé to his mother, January 15, 1871, in Kamphoefner and Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War*, 326-327.

for many migrants. Over time, the term “home,” referring to the lives they had built and social connections they had made, meant the United States; the migrants had become German Americans.<sup>122</sup>

This study of German migrants in the American Civil War has much to gain from historians of ethnicity and migration, and Handlin’s and Bodnar’s work in particular. Although neither historian discussed war as a push factor, the Civil War was a destructive force that prompted many people to leave their homes. Some men like Ludwig Geyer, Hermann Nagel, and men who were drafted into military service experienced an uprooting, while many other men consciously joined the military of their own free will. German soldiers responded to their feelings of homesickness or nostalgia to return home and enjoy the comforts of home within ethnic venues of language, culinary customs, and social interaction. Separated from their civilian lives, German soldiers adapted to their roles as soldiers by mirroring the social and ethnic customs they had known as civilians—a transplantation. It is likely that both Handlin’s model of “uprooted” and Bodnar’s model of “transplantation” accurately describe the migrant experience during the Civil War as two sides of the same coin. Transplantation should be seen as a response to resolve changes or disorder in migrants’ lives caused by the separation from home. In other words, home was where they made it.

On a final note, historian George Rable wrote that the war affected people so profoundly that “an entire generation had to more consciously than ever think

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<sup>122</sup> Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836—1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 148; Handlin, 234-235; Ostergren, 328. For more information on dualistic migrant identities see, George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

about home, the values and meanings of domestic life, and everything that a war threatened to destroy.”<sup>123</sup> Rable’s words, while he intended to represent Anglo-American “Yanks and Rebs,” resonate with the thoughts of home held by German soldiers in a country whose problems were not entirely their own. This study has focused on the homesick perspectives of German migrants, but it could be used to provoke questions concerning the involvement and responses on “home” from other migrant and ethnic groups like the Irish, Native-Americans, or African-Americans, who also participated in the war. Understanding how they conceived of home and experienced homesickness can help future researchers clarify why these groups served in the war, and what they hoped to gain when the war ended.

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<sup>123</sup> Rable, 103.

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