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The Wisconsin 26<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry Regiment in the Civil War: Liberalism or Economics?

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History 489: Research Seminar  
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May 1, 2008

## Abstract

This paper looks at the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment which fought in the United States Civil War, and the reasons for enlistment. The men were all born in Germany, and had immigrated to the United States with their families sometime after the 1848 Revolution failed. This paper gives background to the Revolution; the reasons Germans left their country for the United States; and seeks to answer the question as to why these men fought in the Civil War. This is accomplished by using personal letters from a soldier of the unit, Adam Muenzenberger to his wife describing his view of the war. The argument is German men enlisted due to the large amount of pay involved; and did not enlist for political reasons as is emphasized by most scholars

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## Wisconsin: The American Rhineland

It is difficult to imagine the state of Wisconsin without some mention of a German influence. Wisconsin is the land of cheese, sausage and beer to a typical American. Each of these has descents which are from a unique German background. This state, presently and historically, has been a place for German immigrants to move and settle. The time period leading up the United States Civil War was no different from many other immigrant movements to Wisconsin. Many of the new settlers came from Germany. What is striking are the sheer percentages and numbers of people who left the European mainland for a land so far from their home. Wisconsin is able to boast during the Civil War “fifteen-thousand, seven hundred and nine soldiers which reported for duty in the Union Army.”<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin also reports in the year 1860 “one hundred-twenty three thousand, eight-hundred and seventy-nine German born residents.”<sup>2</sup> This number of people born outside of the United States represents “twelve point seven percent of the entire state’s population.”<sup>3</sup> As of 1860, “four-million, one hundred thousand people were registered, at a time when the total United States population was thirty-one million, four-hundred thousand. About one in twenty four Americans was German born.”<sup>4</sup> These numbers are staggering when taking into account the relatively few immigrants from Germany who resided in Southern states. While some did move to Louisiana and Texas, most Germans avoided the areas of South Carolina and Alabama. It is important when discussing the

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), xx.

topic of nationality to pick up on the fact of most German settled areas were located in Pennsylvania, New York, Wisconsin, and other Northern states which had a large manufacturing and agricultural economic structure. The reason this is important is because all these new people who left Germany settled in Wisconsin right before the onset of violence in the Civil War. Thousands of people moved from one location to another in a relatively short period of time.

### **Willing to Fight**

The next issue that comes up is the sheer amount of people willing to fight, and die, for a country which was not originally theirs. “Wisconsin furnished four regiments and one company of cavalry, twelve batteries of light artillery, one regiment of heavy artillery, one company of sharpshooters, and three brigade bands. In addition the state contributed one-hundred and thirty-three men to the Navy, and one-hundred and sixty-five to the Colored Troops.”<sup>5</sup> These numbers are not showing a state which was fumbling for men to fight. Wisconsin has a distinguished record of combat in the Civil War, and admirably so. One has to remember how Germans were involved in this performance. Of the entire Union Army “twenty-five percent were foreign born, and Germans were one tenth.”<sup>6</sup> These people were not simply joining because of a draft quota, or for personal gain. Germans who lived in Wisconsin had an earnest desire to fight in the United States Civil War.

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Klement, *Wisconsin in the Civil War: The Home Front and the Battle Front, 1861-1865*. (Wisconsin Historical Society. 1997), 79.

<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), i.

## Why Fight in the United States Civil War?

This paper seeks to answer why these men fought by looking at letters the men wrote to their families. In the years of the Civil War, 1860 to 1865, “four million letters were written in the United States and sent by mail to Germany. Five-hundred thousand letters by German Civil War soldiers”<sup>7</sup> were sent to family members. Many of these letters came back to Wisconsin. While they were written in German, many have been translated and they show the personal account of certain men who were in the field. While none of these letters openly explain what brought the men to join the army, it can be inferred based on their demeanor and words. By looking at what other authors have to say on the subject, one can see a common thread. Germans were interested in fighting for the Union Army based “with the notion that they might yet usefully serve a liberal cause.”<sup>8</sup> However logical this argument may seem, an alternative hypothesis has yet to be explored. Most authors agree it was a zest of national pride for a new German homeland; others contend it was a chance to fulfill a proper liberal revolution; this paper argues a more social reason for enlisting. Germans fought in the United States not for the reasons previously stated. The men who fought and died for a country they were not born in, did so with the hope of gaining economic access and social acceptance by their fellow Wisconsin peers. This author seeks to link the German pride of enlistment in the United States as a way of

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<sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), xxi.

<sup>8</sup> Justine Davis Randers-Pehrson, *Germans and the Revolution of 1848-1849*. (New York: P. Lang. 2001), x.

paving an avenue of employment and equality in the eyes of the person who was born in the States.

### **Reason for Immigration**

Why did these Germans, who received no citizenship in their new home fight in a civil war which was not their own? What factors pushed these people away from Germany? The answering of these important questions must take into consideration the politically eruptive events occurring in Germany in the years 1848 to 1849. Germany was flooded by a sense of liberalism and a desire for a national identity. The country that exists today on the other side of the pond has borders which have ebbed and flowed countless times over modern time. Germany was unified in 1871, and this was thirty years after an extremely important event in 1848. “The March Revolution of 1848 brought a springtime of hope for democratization, national unification, and greater international recognition.”<sup>9</sup> These ideals sound appealing and worth staying in Germany in order to reap the benefits. However, historians know a great influx of people from Germany moved into Wisconsin during these two years. A revolution occurred with the intent of bringing the nation together, however this did not occur until 1871. The revolution failed to accomplish its’ goals, and as a result, many Germans left. The best option for many of these people was to start over in the United States. This is the reason for the huge numbers of German people moving into Wisconsin in this time period. This paper seeks to explain the political motivations of the revolution with the intent of following what happened to people after

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<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), 1.

the failed attempt of unified rule. One will be able to understand how German settlers came to Wisconsin due to concerns of political, social and economic persecution.

### **The German Revolution of 1848-49**

Germany, as stated previously, was not a unified nation-state until 1871. Before, it was a loose conglomerate of semi-independent provinces. Each one had its' own nobles, dukes, archdukes, and royal family which were all subject to whichever one of the provincial royal leaders had the most powerful army. Moving between each province was not as simple as jumping across a river such as Minnesota to Wisconsin. It was like entering a new country, complete with different monetary units, tax rates, and public laws. While the language and culture of the people were similar, there seemed to be a political division between a person from Berlin and Munich. Throughout the existence of the German provinces most people, nobles included, felt all Germanic people should be united under one flag, and be subject to one set of laws. Fervor over this notion of a national identity was spurred on by the events of other political uprisings up to 1848 in Europe. Nationalism with a liberalist mindset spread across the peninsular continent like wildfire. Most notably the French Revolutionists, Austrian Independence, Spanish Revolutionists, Italian Independence, Greek Independence, and even Russian leftists felt a surge of patriotism for creating one nation for all people from the same ethnic and historical background. Nationalism was the foremost driving force for people to argue and question political leaders, and liberalist rhetoric was mixed in as well. Nationalists in Germany believed "each nationality, each *volk*, possessed its own peculiar spirit that differentiated it from other peoples. This *volkgeist* was embodied in customs, laws, folktales,



personal behavior patterns, government and economic structures, and above all language.”<sup>10</sup> This belief led each province to pledge allegiance to Germanic people across all the disarrayed regions of the entity Germany. While peasants worked the land of their home village, they felt pangs of recognition with comrades hundreds of miles away whom they had never met before. Nationalism was a “body of doctrine that presented the ethnically defined nation matched by a correspondingly unified national state as the proper unit of politics”<sup>11</sup> and “was by tradition closely linked to liberalism.”<sup>12</sup>

No other country at this time period was as disconnected in a geographical and political manner, yet so homogeneous in a social and cultural sense. Liberalism was able to be the next step from nationalism. It was believed that a pride in one’s country would result in a situation much like that of France. A regime which was autocratic and above the people being brought down and replaced by a “rule of law, embodied in a rational constitution constructed in accordance with the natural laws of social behavior.”<sup>13</sup> People in Germany were increasingly of the mind that “law and government ought to be structured to protect such individual rights as equal access to justice and security or private property.”<sup>14</sup> Monarchs in their own region were the ultimate power in the land. These royal families could come along to a village and move people at their will, arrest for any particular reason and do what they pleased. It is this fear

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<sup>10</sup> Woodruff D Smith, *Politics and the Science of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1991), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Woodruff D Smith, *Politics and the Science of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1991), 94.

<sup>12</sup> Woodruff D Smith, *Politics and the Science of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1991), 94.

<sup>13</sup> Woodruff D Smith, *Politics and the Science of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1991), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Woodruff D Smith, *Politics and the Science of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1991), 18.

which enabled the liberalist movement to move from higher class educated people to the lower classes. An idea of protection from property seizure would have been a dream come true for the small land owners and farmhands who worked on larger farms.

### **Moving Towards Change: The Gottingen Seven**

German people thought liberalists were acting in a manner which was radical at the time. Most of the thinkers who advocated something different were young, well-educated, and were attending universities or professors at a university. Naturally, many of these men were of the middle to upper classes with friends in high, noble places. It would be difficult to enter a profession in the academic world without help from a noble who would become a patron of published works. As these ideas were discussed more frequently in the university setting, local provincial rulers began a campaign of censorship. This tactic would work for a bit, until someone with enough money bought into the liberalist movement and would financially support the publication of materials. The next step was to remove university professors from their posts. Even this had mixed results, as seen in the case of the Gottingen Seven in Hanover. The Gottingen Seven were a group of seven professors from the University of Gottingen who were of a liberalist mind. Georg Gottfried Gervinus, Wilhelm Eduard Albrecht, Wilhelm Weber, Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm, Heinrich Ewald, and Friedrich Christoph Dahlmann were the men who refused to swear an oath of loyalty to a new king. The king was aiming to pass a law which legally made the king exempt from following the constitution so hard-fought by citizens of the city. In 1837, the king passed his decree and demanded an oath of loyalty from all citizens to his new authority. These seven professors of the most prestigious university in the area refused to swear the oath. As a result they were expelled from their tenure, and banished from the city.

The Brothers Grimm were even told to leave the entire country of Germany. Response to the expulsion was immediate and widespread. Mass student protests occurred, university activities were slowed, administrators were contacted, and each professor sent a letter of appeal to the higher powers asking for a redress. These men's actions mirrored the feelings of the general public who were too scared of repercussions to disobey. Even though seven men were dismissed, in actuality many of the citizens of Hanover would have been banished for their thoughts of the newly passed law.<sup>15</sup> It was clear from 1837 that German leaders and nobles had lost control of the masses, and especially of the universities. The seven professors never regained their posts, yet they became martyrs for a liberalist movement for the public. Massive amounts of literature and pamphlets were distributed in order to create anti-monarchy sentiment in the public. In order to combat the rising tide, the government condemned these types of actions. Expulsions became a commonplace activity in order to end the corruption of the youth through liberal lectures in German universities. This event is an important event in the progression of the liberalist movement as there were now faces to link to a name. Due to the fact of these men being dismissed for being too liberal, the public now had leaders and advocates with high social stature. The common person's dilemma of being terminated from a job for political reasons could resonate with these professors of a notorious university. In a way, the professors were able to link the educated upper class with those of common roots.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Each one of the monographs listed in the bibliography give mention and describes the events which took place in Gottingen.

<sup>16</sup> The effects of the dismissal of these professors on the lower classes and the overall effect on the Revolution is best described in length by Bruce Levine's *The Spirit of 1848: German immigrants, labor conflict, and the coming of the Civil War*.

## **A Step Backwards: The Failure of Parliament**

As the liberal ideals began to filter down throughout the classes, more protests began to occur. Eventually enough people were involved in the belief of a unified Germany the monarch at the time, King Frederick William IV, took notice. As masses of people across Germany, but most notably in Berlin, took to the streets holding up signs and generally disturbing the peace the king needed to take action. In an unprecedented move he gave into liberal demands. He offered a chance to create a parliament based on elections, a constitution, and a removal of censorship tactics. The first leaders of the new Parliament met in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt, to start creating a constitution to present to the people. These men were organized and were recognized by all German states on May 18, 1848 and were freely elected to represent all of Germany. On this day eight hundred and thirty one delegates<sup>17</sup> were meeting in the same church to begin drafting legislation which included the issues of monarchy versus republic; federation versus federalism; non-German speaking people included versus excluded; and all the other problems associated with building a nation. As one can imagine, all these discussions took time, and time is what these revolutionists did not have much of. While meetings in the church continued, outside warfare was ongoing with the German nobles and monarchs gaining ground on the revolutionist fighters. Problems also came as the lower classes believed the National Assembly to be a professor's model of government, as most of the delegates had some form of university education. So, as these men worked to create a nation, the less educated people went to work and lost touch with what was happening in Frankfurt. This disconnect was the reason the National Assembly failed. The revolutionary liberals gained notoriety as being from the people

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<sup>17</sup> Professor Gerhard Rempel, *1848: Revolution and Reaction*, available from <http://mars.wnec.edu/~grempe/courses/germany/lectures/081848.html>; Internet; accessed May 1 2009.

for the people. What happened at the National Assembly went too slow for the general public, especially when nobles and monarchs simply refused to accept the legislation passed by this assembly. By November, King Frederick William IV had regained all territory he had lost, and had won back the people, much to the chagrin of the National Assembly. Delegates in St. Peter's Church could do nothing but proclaim and persuade as the King reasserted control over the political realm and began removing decrees issued by the Assembly. From June 6-18, troops sent by local nobles disbanded the National Assembly, and gave control of Germany firmly back in the hands of Frederick William IV.<sup>18</sup> Thus, after all the fervor the "Revolution of 1848-49 miserably failed" yet there still existed the "liberal democratic ideal" in "America, which had guided its leaders and followers significantly."<sup>19</sup>

### **Coming To Wisconsin**

To stay in Germany after the failed revolution, especially if one was a vocal Liberalist, was to risk becoming economically, socially, and politically untouchable. While many people did stay in Germany, there was also a great number which left. "Many of them had already left Germany toward the end of the 1840's. For those that remained – were suspended from their positions as priests, ministers, or teachers."<sup>20</sup> Of course, not each person who fled Germany moved to the United States, as many other nations in Europe were accepting of Liberalists. France was one of the main nations with arms held open. France, along with the United States

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<sup>18</sup> Justine Randers-Pehrson's entire monograph is the discussion of the problems facing the National Assembly. As such, this is a brief timeline for the events as described in most of the entirety of this piece of work.

<sup>19</sup> Hartmut Keil, *German Worker's Culture in the United States, 1850-1920*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1988), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Hartmut Keil, *German Worker's Culture in the United States, 1850-1920*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1988), 241.

held an “uncritical enthusiasm for [the] great democracy that prevailed among radical democrats as well as liberals during the revolution.”<sup>21</sup> The “American Republic continued to attract persons who were politically persecuted in Germany. Since the 1820’s, revolutionaries of various persuasions had chosen America for their temporary or permanent home.”<sup>22</sup> So, as a group of people were being pushed out of their own country’s workplace, social network, and political institutions, a new country was looked to. The nations of the migrating Liberalist’s choosing were ones with a sympathetic ear to the political leanings, but also accepting of almost any person into the workforce. There was an “expectation that in America everything would turn out well”<sup>23</sup> and history is the best teacher in terms of the expectation turning into a reality. This country has been called a melting pot by most, a salad bowl by others, yet the commonality exists. In the United States, it is acceptable to be from almost any country, and have almost any political desire, and as long as one works hard, one can make a living and earn wealth. We speak of this in passing as the American Dream. Of course, exceptions are made as to who is able to enter the border, but the United States’ population is largely due to immigration. “From 1825 to 1861, approximately 10,000 people left Germany each year with a peak of about 220,000 in 1854”<sup>24</sup> with most settlements occurring in the Northeast and the Midwest. These new citizens were “Latin Farmers: this term is used to designate well educated, politically idealistic German immigrants who bought farms in the United States, even though they often knew more about

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<sup>21</sup> Hartmut Keil, *German Worker’s Culture in the United States , 1850-1920*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1988), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Hartmut Keil, *German Worker’s Culture in the United States , 1850-1920*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1988), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Hartmut Keil, *German Worker’s Culture in the United States , 1850-1920*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1988), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Timeline of Emigration, *1800’s: The Forty-Eighters Head West*. German National Tourist Office, 2007, Available from <http://germanoriginality.com/heritage/1800s.php>; Internet; accessed 26 March 2009.

Latin then about farming”<sup>25</sup> and often had severe economic crises throughout their life. Once money these families had with them from Germany ran out; well, one is not able to speak Latin to inspire crops to grow. Daily life became more and more strenuous.

As evidenced by the political crisis on the other side of the Atlantic, Germans were pushed out of their home country. People need somewhere to live, and thus many Germans moved into the United States. This is a country which historically was seen as a haven for optimistic, idealist people who were willing to work hard to better their life. While living in the United States allowed Germans to be freed of political worries, most immigrants found their new country to be just as difficult to survive in social and economic terms. As one can obviously see in the letters written by German immigrants, and by following their life stories, the Civil War gave many the opportunities to gain social acceptance, and gave a new lifestyle outside of farming.

### **The Wisconsin 26<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry Regiment**

The 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin was “organized at Camp Sigel, Milwaukee, WI, and mustered into the service of the United States on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1862.”<sup>26</sup> This unit was led by Franz Sigel, for whom the camp in Milwaukee was named after. Sigel was a man who was born in Germany, and who played a great part in the Revolution of 1848.<sup>27</sup> One reason this unit is

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<sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), Glossary.

<sup>26</sup> Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, Available from [http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/Res\\_regiments.asp](http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/Res_regiments.asp); Internet; accessed April 1, 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Vick, Wells and Randers-Pehrson speak to the influence Sigel had on Germans in his homeland, plus the considerable social weight he had upon immigrating to the United States.

unique is the fact that “Germans preferred to fight in segregated units”<sup>28</sup> and as a result of this desire “Thirty ‘German Regiments’ were raised”<sup>29</sup> to fight. The 26<sup>th</sup> was one of the regiments made up of German-American citizens exclusively.

As mentioned previously, this regiment was one of fifty-two to be called to service by the state of Wisconsin for the Civil War. After being organized, the regiment was sent “on October 6 to Washington, D.C. The regiment moved to Fairfax Courthouse, VA, October 15...it was among the reserve force at Fredericksburg, VA, December 15, 1862...and in the Chancellorsville, VA, campaign April 27-May 6, 1863...was engaged in the Gettysburg campaign July 1-3, 1863...participated in the battle of Wauhatchie near Lookout Mountain October 28-29; Missionary Ridge, November 25<sup>th</sup>...and the relief of Knoxville, November 27 to December 8, 1863.”<sup>30</sup> The regiment has a long history, and was engaged in serious combat. Due to losses from the Chancellorsville and Gettysburg battles, this unit was reorganized. Part of the original 26<sup>th</sup> was “participating in the Atlanta campaign May 1-Sept 8, 1864, Savannah campaign November 15-December 21, 1864, and Campaign in the Carolinas...near Raleigh, NC, April 26, 1865, marched to Washington...was mustered out of service June 13, 1865. It reached Milwaukee on the 17 and was disbanded June 29.”<sup>31</sup>

As one can see, this military unit saw some of the longest and intense portions of the Civil War. While it may not be one of the units known for being in every engagement, what

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<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), i.

<sup>29</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), i.

<sup>30</sup> Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, Available from [http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/Res\\_regiments.asp](http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/Res_regiments.asp); Internet; accessed April 1, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, Available from [http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/Res\\_regiments.asp](http://museum.dva.state.wi.us/Res_regiments.asp); Internet; accessed April 1, 2009.



battles the 26<sup>th</sup> took part in were of a significant nature. Many units earned distinction simply for being a part of the battle of Gettysburg, or Sherman's March to the Sea alone. Certain members of this unit saw both theatres, and multiple campaigns. However, what makes this particular unit worth delving into is not its prestigious record, or reputation on the field. This unit is an interesting piece of the Civil War due to its demographics. Particularly what is interesting to this piece of work are the reasons for why these German men, who had not been born in the United States, signed up for this war. Letters which have survived to the present day help solve the puzzle as to why these men were so eager to join the military, and endure such a brutal conflict.

### **Corporal Adam Muenzenberger's Letters**

Adam Muenzenberger "was born about 1831 in the state of Baden Germany... was brought by his parents to America. There the family settled among a group of German immigrants, in the town of Greenfield"<sup>32</sup> which is a suburb of the present metropolis of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. No mention as to what drove the parents from Germany is given. It is possible Adam's mother or father had been caught up in the revolutionary ferment, and had been pushed to the fringes of society after it's' failure, but any number of reasons exist. "On May 23, 1854 Adam married a neighbor, 20 year old Barbara Anna Wuest, daughter of Nicholas and Anna Wuest."<sup>33</sup> Reasons for the emigration of the Muenzenbergers are unknown, but for Adam's parent-in-laws, the opposite case exists. "The Wuests had been scandalized by the free-

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<sup>32</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

<sup>33</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

thinking talk which had come with the French Revolution...into the Rhine country”<sup>34</sup> and the family left “when the revolution failed, emigration was the only alternative open.”<sup>35</sup> The Wuests, the Muenzenbergers, and the newlywed couple of Adam and Barbara were soon caught up in the Civil War after only a few short years of marriage. Adam enlisted in the United States Army, and was brought into the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment in Company A. This German served from the unit’s beginning until the Gettysburg campaign, where he was captured and imprisoned in Belle Island, Virginia in 1863. Even though the distance was great, Adam and his wife Barbara were in correspondence. His first letter is dated “Gainesville. Nov 16, 1862”<sup>36</sup> and his last reads “Belle Island. Oct 22, 1863.”<sup>37</sup> All the letters which were written in between have been preserved. Unfortunately, the letters which Barbara sent have been lost to the sands of time, save two. Hence, reading the letters is much like looking at a one-sided telephone conversation, with much missing as Adam spends a great deal of time responding to the questions and topics Barbara writes from her side of the paper. Regardless, the information gleaned from this particular man’s life is greatly significant in understanding a German-born, German-speaking, German-thinking, American-citizen soldier and his reason for volunteering for the United States Civil War.

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<sup>34</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

<sup>35</sup> Hartmut Keil, *German Workers’ Culture in the United States, 1850 to 1920*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 224.

<sup>36</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

<sup>37</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

Adam and Barbara were a farming family<sup>38</sup> which would not be the first guess of occupation as Adam explains his delight “to hear that our children are so diligent in study and especially in penmanship, which as you know was always my greatest pleasure.”<sup>39</sup> One would not expect a farmer to take up penmanship in the 1800’s, yet this is just the type of behavior expected from a “Latin Farmer.”<sup>40</sup> It is this obvious education which makes the reasons for enlistment difficult to understand. While Adam does not come right out and say the reasons for why he joined up with the Union Army, his wife Barbara, in an interview many years after the war is able to discern. “Barbara always declared firmly that Adam’s sole reason for enlisting in the Union Army was to claim a \$300 bounty,”<sup>41</sup> and it is this declaration which seems to be overlooked for most of the author’s comments on this specific topic. Many people have looked at the push and pull factors of soldiers in the Civil War, and some have analyzed Wisconsin in great detail. It seems however, the economic reasons for enlistment have been overlooked as a driving force. Before visiting what other authors have said, one must understand the sheer amount of money which was available and practically thrown at enlistees for the Union Army at sign-up. Each man was “promised an Advance bounty from the Federal Government \$25; Government bonus to a person presenting a recruit \$4; bounty from local Central War Committee \$35; One month advance pay from Federal Government \$13; Second bounty from Federal Government \$100; Second bonus from same source \$4; Bonus raised by private citizens \$25; Nine months pay (if the war was over by spring of 1863).” All of this was handed over

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<sup>38</sup> A plat book of the town of Greenfield exists in the letters and manuscripts; the size of the land indicates an agriculture based home life; also the family’s last name lists occupation on the plat

<sup>39</sup> Muenzenberger, Adam. Gainesville. Nov 16, 1863.

<sup>40</sup> Term introduced on page 13 and page 14; see footnote number 25.

<sup>41</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

immediately upon signing on with the local regiments, for a grand total of three-hundred and eighty-seven dollars in cash, in hand. Keeping in mind the year being 1862, where “a dollar was worth \$20 in 2005,”<sup>42</sup> a soldier would receive about six thousand dollars in 2005 value. This may not seem like a great deal of money by 2009 standards, but one living in the Civil War would be working for pennies a day. To have the opportunity to be handed three-hundred dollars, and then receive food and pay per month, soldiers would think long and hard on the decision. Any reason may have existed for soldiers in the United States to join up with the army. However, in Wisconsin, for German immigrants who were facing economic hardships due to discrimination the Union cause seemed a great way to make a living based on the bounties earned.

### **Other Reasons for Enlistment**

One of the most well documented reasons for why these soldiers from Germany fought in the United States Civil War with such fervor is from “serving with the unsuccessful revolutionary armies in Europe.”<sup>43</sup> The liberalist movement may have failed in Germany, but the Civil War was seen as a struggle where soldiers of German descent “might yet usefully serve a liberal cause.”<sup>44</sup> Justine Davis Randers-Pehrson and James Pula are both the leaders in the field of German-American soldiers. Randers-Pehrson takes a comprehensive look at the German

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<sup>42</sup> Sandie Stoker, *Value of a Dollar in the Civil War*, Available from <http://scpiocenterny.blogspot.com/2007/12/value-of-dollar-in-civil-war.html>; Internet; Accessed May 1, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> James Pula, *The Sigel Regiment: A History of the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1865*. (New York: Savas Publishing Company, 1998), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Justine Davis Randers-Pehrson, *Germans and the Revolution of 1848-1849*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2001), x.

revolution and events leading up to, and then places a personal touch on the United States Civil War as her grandfather was on the Union side as a soldier. James Pula then brings the same ideas to a closer look at the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Regiment, and clearly demonstrates the “decidedly Republican political persuasion”<sup>45</sup> of this particular unit. While it is possible many of these soldiers were in the fight to contribute to a liberalist victory, what information is brought out from Adam Muenzenberger is more pragmatic. Adam talks to Barbara about how you cannot “find a single soldier in the entire army who wouldn’t rather go home today than tomorrow.”<sup>46</sup> If the soldiers he was with, and he personally, believed in such a liberalist cause, he would rather have stayed on. Instead “there isn’t a regiment that isn’t looking for peace saying that war is nothing but moneymaking and humbug”<sup>47</sup> is the feelings Adam has towards the effort of the Union and Confederate conflict. Most authors feel the liberalist cause is the main reason for German enlistment, yet there is one conflicting viewpoint which stems from Walter Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Hielbich who acknowledge “different motives for volunteering and fighting”<sup>48</sup> on either side of the army. One important point lies in the last sentence, not every German fought for the Union Army. While the greater majority of soldiers of German descent were living in the North such as Wisconsin, New York or Pennsylvania, there were Rhinelanders down South in Confederate gray. If a liberalist cause was the reason for enlistment, no German soldier would be fighting for a secessionist group. While the “ideology manifest in the 1848

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<sup>45</sup> James Pula, *The Sigel Regiment: A History of the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1865*. (New York: Savas Publishing Company, 1998), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Centerville. Nov 19, 1862.

<sup>47</sup> Stafford Court House. Dec 21, 1862.

<sup>48</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Hielbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), xii.

Revolution extended farther down”<sup>49</sup> into enlistment, Union soldiers “often had purely economic motives.”<sup>50</sup> Even Adam Muezenberger goes as far to say “if only I had not seen this cursed war”<sup>51</sup> which once again is something one would not expect to hear from a zealous liberalist fighter. The economic reason for enlistment is something which has been acknowledged by only a few authors, yet is laying there in plain sight within the source material. Adam mentions “our life is more like the life of one who has been banished to a desert than like the life of a free American citizen”<sup>52</sup> when discussing his feelings about being a soldier in the Union Army. Each one of his letters clearly shows his pangs of homesickness, and he desire to be away from the war. One gets the feeling Adam in his tenure as a soldier is hoping for the best, and just grinding through in order to ensure his paycheck. Almost every letter is concerned with when the paymaster general is coming, and how much he is sending home to Barbara. Money is constantly the concern with Adam. Of course, the other reasons as stated by other authors cannot be discounted. Soldiers from Germany who fought, and failed, in the revolution did come to the United States. Families became citizens, and when the call to arms for the Civil War occurred, Germans answered. The continuation of a liberalist cause may have been the sole motive for some enlistees. However, the problem exists when placing that label on Wisconsin soldiers from the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The ideas and attitudes of the men are captured by Adam Muezenberger in his letters back home. Adam explains even how the “officers would

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<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), xiii.

<sup>50</sup> Wolfgang Johannes Helbich, *Germans in the Civil War: The letters they wrote home*, trans. And ed. Walter D. Kamphoefner. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006), xiii.

<sup>51</sup> Stafford Court House. Mar 23, 1863.

<sup>52</sup> Holy Saturday. 1863.

like to see peace but they are not anxious to lose their pay...they could not make as much as they are making”<sup>53</sup> in peacetime. It is hard to place a revolutionary fervor as the reason for this specific unit from this particular region in Wisconsin.

### **Adam’s Final Letters**

Adam Muezenberger “had the misfortune to be taken prisoner at the battle of Gettysburg”<sup>54</sup> along with two of his friends from the 26<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin. He was marched to Belle Island Prison, which has the reputation as being the worst place to be in the Civil War after Andersonville. He and “Ausmus Holtz are still together like brothers and what the one has the other has,”<sup>55</sup> but even having a friend to use as support, he “died in prison of disease on Dec 3 1863”<sup>56</sup> and was buried in Virginia. Barbara received the last letter Adam sent, and did not know of anything about her husband until “Adam’s fellow prisoners who were exchanged”<sup>57</sup> returned to Greenfield and related the story of her husband’s death. “Social ties among the German Greenfielders were close knit, and Adam was one of the acknowledged younger leaders and spokesman.”<sup>58</sup> Even though this man did not sign up for a larger political purpose, the fact remains that he fought and died for his beliefs. His family needed money, and he was the one

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<sup>53</sup> Stafford Court House. Apr 6 1863.

<sup>54</sup> Richmond. Aug 30 1863.

<sup>55</sup> Belle Island. Oct 22 1863.

<sup>56</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

<sup>57</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Muezenberger trans and ed. Clara M. Lamers and William M. Lamers, *Civil War letters and manuscript, 1862-1863, 1964*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1862), Introduction.

who was determined to see life in Greenfield succeed for his wife and children. The story of Adam Muenzenberger, is epic enough to remind readers of these letters as a Hollywood film. Every single letter opens with Precious Barbara; My Dear Wife, and continues about how he misses the family and home. Adam's story is one of love, honor, and the willingness to sacrifice to take care of those who need help. This German's life, though spectacular and interesting, is not just a drop in the bucket. Adam Muenzenberger is one of hundreds of thousand soldiers who gave their lives in the Civil War, and his life rings true to the stories of many other German-Wisconsin men who fought for their own personal reasons.

## **Conclusion**

Being a German in Wisconsin during the Civil War meant a lot of things. One was expected to work hard in order to be successful in this new country. It also meant working twice as hard as Germans "are no Yankee,"<sup>59</sup> and yearned to become like their American counterparts. We see Americans fighting for the Union based on their religious beliefs, anti-slavery rhetoric, or as some higher calling such as duty for one's country. To be German, most authors agree it was for a liberal movement which had failed in Europe, or for some other political reason. While these points are valid, the literature has a gap, which is the purpose of this work. No author which has published their findings previously can be disproving, and their work in fact is validated by the material presenting within this writing. However, there is a disparity in the amount of weight placed on certain reasons. Authors believe it was all for a liberal cause, and neglect to factor in other potential causes. No soldier in the Civil War ever blatantly came out and said why they fought, yet through letters one can give a best estimate. Adam

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<sup>59</sup> Centerville. Dec 9 1862.



Muenzenberger did not fight for a liberalist cause; he fought because he needed to provide economic stability for his family to survive. The best way to do this was achieved through the enormous amount of wealth bestowed upon a man for enlisting in the United States Union Army. While this economic reason answers the question of why fight for the United States for this one man, it may hold the key to answering the question for many other men in the Civil War, not just German nationalities. It is this possibility which helps balance out other author's arguments. Not every soldier of German descent fought for liberalism, and not every German fought for economic reasons, but the economic motive has been worth less in the academic field until now.

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