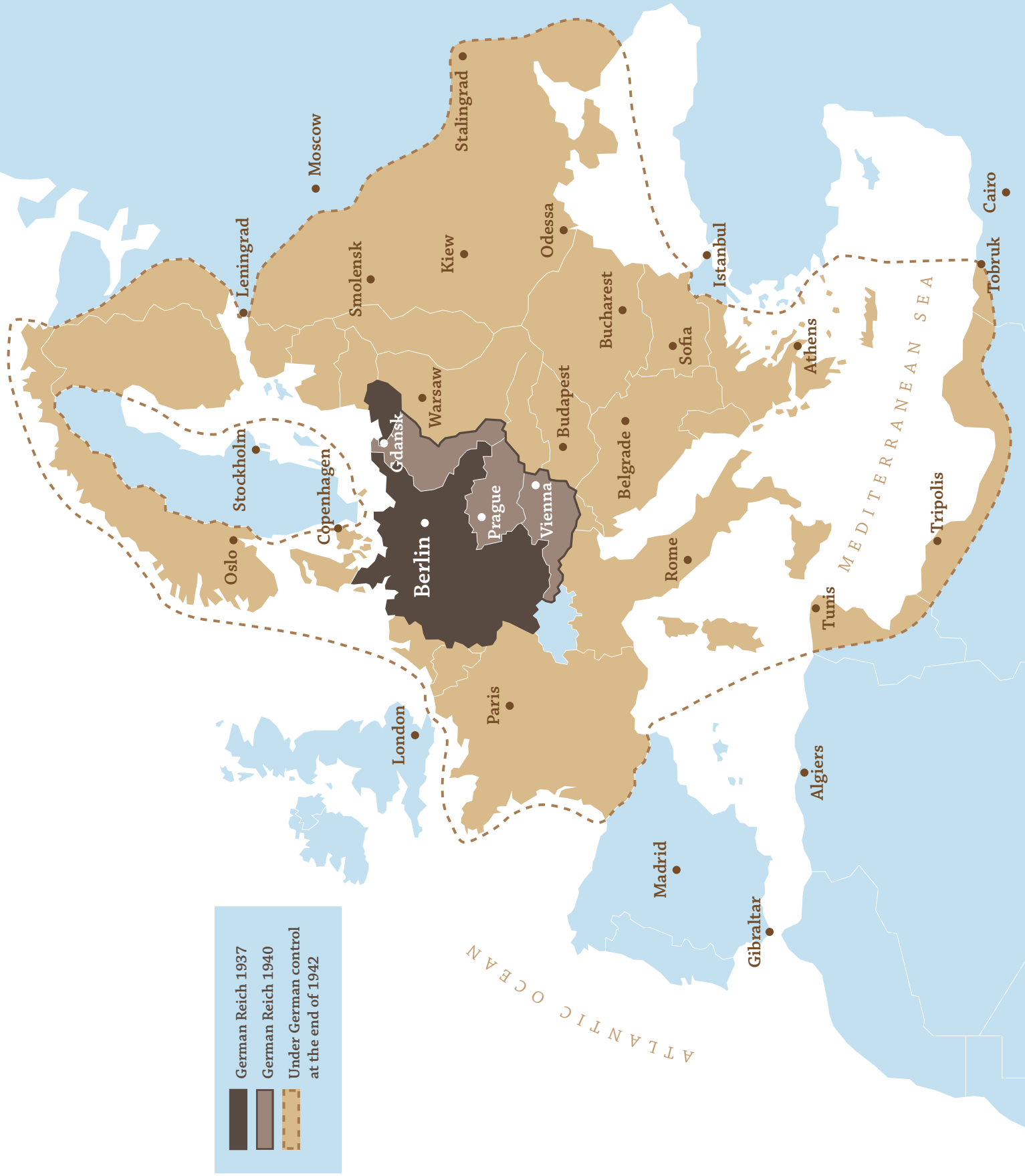


# The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in Luxembourg







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**LUXEMBURGER**

Du bist

**Deutsch**

Deine Muttersprache ist

**Deutsch**

**Du gehörst  
zu uns !**

**Volksdeutsche Bewegung**

**L u x e m b u r g**



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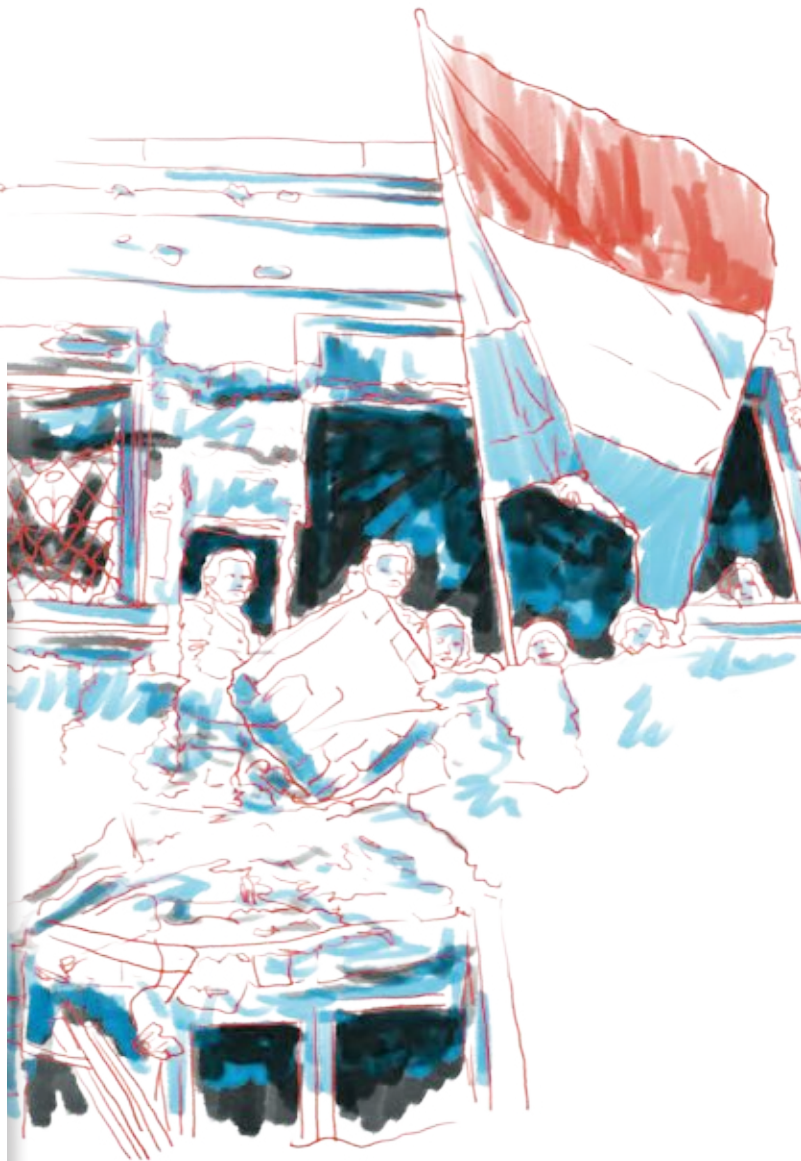
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Dear Readers,

Since its creation in 2016, the Committee for the Remembrance of the Second World War has brought together representatives of resistance fighters, forced conscripts and victims of the Shoah in a common mission. The Committee has been fully involved in the organisation of the commemoration of the Second World War, in particular by seeking contact with young people to raise their awareness of the tragic events of more than 80 years ago.

I was therefore particularly enthusiastic when the Committee, with the support of the *Zentrum für politisch Bildung*, approached the government to produce a joint brochure on the history of the Second World War aimed primarily at young people, but also at adult readers. Many of the witnesses from the era have left us and it is therefore up to us to identify other means of keeping our duty of remembrance alive. This publication – produced with a team of young historians – is a promising start and a sign of solidarity between the three communities represented on the Committee for the Remembrance of the Second World War.

Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister





## Are you 15 or 18 years old? Or even 25?

Eighty years ago, you, like many of your grandparents or great-grandparents, could have been put in situations where you had to make decisions about the life or death of your loved ones. Or you could have lost your freedom and been arrested, tortured, deported, and murdered by the executors of Nazi ideology. Why? Because you were Jewish, because the *Führer* had decided to force you into his army, because you were engaged in active or passive resistance against the Nazi occupiers. Or because the Nazis wanted to eliminate all those who did not fit into their scheme of the ideal man or woman: Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, Roma and Sinti, or other so-called "asocials". In this brochure you will also learn that there was a significant number of Luxembourgers who chose to collaborate with the Nazi oppressor.

Read this brochure, work with your colleagues, your teachers, your family! Get additional information, and go to the places of remembrance. Remember Elie Wiesel's phrase: "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness."

Yes, women and men must be able to live today in mutual respect and in a state of peacefulness where words of hatred will be definitively banned! Take courage in reading what Bob Sheppard, a concentration camp survivor, wrote 50 years ago when he addressed the youth of Luxembourg:

"Know that your fathers do not seek to derive from this duty, which they performed with great heart, neither vain glory, nor triumph, nor honour. Know that suffering has simply opened their eyes, better than many others, a little more to the faults and qualities of men, and if sometimes their gaze seems distant to you, it is because they see again things that they do not want you to see, ever, not you, or yours, or those who will succeed you, or the people around you.

Know that suffering has engendered understanding, that hatred has engendered goodness. They modestly want to be a testimony of what is no longer to be known in a world that can be so beautiful. Think about it, young people of Luxembourg, who will read this book. Think also that the importance of a country and its value is not measured by the square metres of floor space, the density of this or that population, the power of this or that industry, especially not by the glory of this or that man, but by how well all its children stand in adversity."<sup>1</sup>

Guy Dockendorf, President  
Claude Wolf, Vice President  
Josy Lorent, Vice President

<sup>1</sup> R. Sheppard, President of the Comité International de Mauthausen, Identification number 35.174, in: *LETZEBURGER ZU MAUTHAUSEN*, edited by Amicale de Mauthausen (Luxembourg, 1970), p. 6.

# 1. Sliding into War

## What Was the Situation in Luxembourg before the War?

In **1929**, one of the most serious economic crises in history began. It did not spare Luxembourg. Here, as almost everywhere in Europe, many feared that foreigners would take their jobs, in particular the Jews who began fleeing Germany in **1933**. Luxembourgers also worried about the Nazis in Germany, because Nazis considered Luxembourg as a lost part of Germany. Many Luxembourgers called for protection by a strong state. Unlike other countries, however, Luxembourg did not become a dictatorship. Instead, it opted for a grand coalition government of all the major political parties, with the exception of the Communists. In **1939** this government organised the Centenary of Independence, a large celebration that allowed Luxembourgers to express their attachment to their country. Right before the war, Luxembourg had roughly 290,000 inhabitants.



20 - Den historéische Cortège verléist de Kasärenhall

Departure of the historic procession during the festivities of the centenary of independence.





## Who Were the Nazis and What Did They Want?

The Nazi Party (NSDAP) emerged in Germany after the country's ruin and defeat in the First World War. The Nazis considered the Germans a "superior race", but one weakened by democrats, socialists, communists and the Jews. All these were persecuted as soon as their leader, Adolf Hitler, came to power in **1933**. The Nazis then wanted to conquer a "living space" in order to make the Third Reich a superpower and unite all people of "German blood", such as Austrians, Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland, as well as Luxembourgers. On 1 September **1939**, Germany invaded Poland. France and Great Britain then declared war on Germany. Thus began World War II in Europe.



Photos of the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg (*Reichsparteitag*) in 1933.



### *Gertrud Schloss*

was born in Trier in 1899, the daughter of a Jewish industrialist. She joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) at a young age and after obtaining a doctorate in economics, she became a journalist and writer. In her writings, she expressed her pacifist and feminist ideals, speaking freely of her homosexuality and denouncing the Nazis. After they came to power, she was forced into hiding and fled to Luxembourg with her family. The country welcomed hundreds of Jewish refugees in the 1930s: just before the German invasion, there were nearly 2,000. On 16 October 1941, Gertrud and her family were in the first convoy of Jewish deportees from Luxembourg to the ghettos and death camps. She was murdered a few months later in the extermination camp in Kulmhof (Chelmno), in occupied Poland.

**Third Reich** – The term "Reich" refers to the German state up until 1945. The Holy Roman Empire, which began in the Middle Ages, was the First Reich; when Germany unified in 1871 it became the Second Reich. "Third Reich" was the name given to the Nazi regime, the totalitarian state born after Adolf Hitler came to power in January 1933. The Reich dissolved on 8 May 1945 after Germany's unconditional surrender.

## 2. The Invasion



German troops enter Luxembourg, May 1940.

### What Was the Fate of Occupied Luxembourg?

From **10 May 1940** onwards, the Germans attacked France and Great Britain. In the process, they invaded three neutral countries: the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Nearly 90,000 Luxembourgers were evacuated to the north of the country and the south of France. The Grand Duchess and the government left the country and formed a government-in-exile. Their hasty departure left the state without direction, and Luxembourg's Chamber of Deputies then voted to set up an Administrative Commission. After the French defeat, the Commission agreed to collaborate with the Germans if they recognised the Grand Duchy's independence. The Germans refused, insisting that Luxembourg become part of Germany. Meanwhile, the government-in-exile joined the Allies.



The Administrative Commission posing for the weekly magazine A-Z in 1940. From left to right: Louis Simmer, Jean Metzdorff, Albert Wehrer, Mathias Pütz, Joseph Carmes.

**Administrative Commission** – The Administrative Commission was established on 11 May 1940. It was a “de facto government” – that is, a government created outside the usual rules in response to a crisis situation. After his arrival, the *Gauleiter* used it to give orders to the civil administration. In October 1940, the Germans arrested its president, Albert Wehrer, and in late December 1940, they abolished the Commission. The *Gauleiter* no longer needed it, as he then held the power.



## How Did the Germans End Luxembourg's Independence?

Hitler entrusted the mission of making Luxembourg a part of Germany to *Gauleiter* Gustav Simon. “Gauleiter” was the title of Nazi party officials in charge of regions – the term “Gau” designates a region. Simon was the leader of the Nazi party in the *Gau* of Koblenz-Trier, which lies on the border with the Grand Duchy. On **21 July 1940**, he was appointed Head of the Civil Administration (*Chef der Zivilverwaltung*, or *CdZ*) in Luxembourg. He took control of the country's administration, retaining most of the Luxembourgish civil servants, but entrusting important posts to Germans. He then abolished everything that made the Grand Duchy an independent state, such as its flag, its parliament and the Company of Volunteers. The fate of its 461 soldiers speaks volumes about this difficult period. Luxembourg was thus integrated into the new *Gau Moselland*.



Last kiss before the Volunteer Company's forced departure for Germany, December 1940.



Evacuees from the south of the country at Luxembourg station, May 1940.



### Eugène Weiss

had just turned 18 when war struck his town of Differdange. Stuck in the combat zone and left without instructions, the town's population took refuge in the local mines, before the Germans and the Administrative Commission evacuated them to Insenborn in northern Luxembourg. Eugène described the events in his diary, as well as the German soldiers, who looked young and over-confident to him. He also discovered the north of Luxembourg, of which he had known little. He was often surprised by the rural and Catholic lifestyle, so different from the south. Returning to Differdange in June 1940, he and his family found their house ransacked. Two years later, Eugène was forcibly conscripted into the army; he deserted and was arrested. In 1945, he was shot at Sonnenburg (Słońsk) prison.

**Company of Volunteers (*Fräiwëllegekompanie*)** – Before the invasion, Luxembourg was neutral with a small armed force, the Company of Volunteers. After dismantling the Luxembourg state, the German occupiers integrated the Company into its police forces. 264 of its 463 soldiers would eventually go to prison or a concentration camp for disobeying the Germans. 77 died in captivity or during military operations. In June 1942, 14 others joined the Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101. This German unit shot 38,000 Jews in occupied Poland during the Holocaust and sent another 45,000 to extermination camps.



VdB propaganda poster.

# 3. The Totalitarian State

## What Was Everyday Life Like in a Totalitarian State?

*Gauleiter* Simon represented a totalitarian regime, which is to say, a state that left no freedom to its citizens and monitored all aspects of their lives. It demanded that Luxembourgers merge into the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft, that they perform the Hitler salute, partake in the regime's celebrations, and join Nazi organisations as well as the Volksdeutsche Bewegung, etc. Refusal meant risking losing your job, being forcibly moved to Germany, or, for the youth, not being able to study. To oppose or resist meant risking falling into the clutches of the Gestapo. During the occupation, nearly 3,500 men and about 500 women from Luxembourg were locked up in prison or concentration camps for political reasons. 800 of them died there.

**Volksdeutsche Bewegung (VdB)** – The “Movement of Ethnic Germans” was a political party founded on 13 July 1940. It wanted Luxembourg to become part of Nazi Germany, as its motto states: Heim ins Reich (“Back home to the Reich”). *Gauleiter* Simon turned it into a unique party to support his policy: all adults were urged to join. The VdB existed throughout the country, even in the smallest villages, and closely monitored the population's behaviour.

**Gestapo** – The *Geheime Staatspolizei*, or *Gestapo*, was the secret police of the Nazi regime. Luxembourgers, however, called all German police services the *Gestapo*. The headquarters of the German police in Luxembourg was the Villa Pauly. Many prisoners were tortured there.



Hitler Youth parade on the Place d'Armes, August 1942.





In Luxembourg, the totalitarian state was enforced with the help of several Luxembourgers, the best known of whom was Damien Kratzenberg, the head of the *Volks-deutsche Bewegung*.

## Who Were the Luxembourgish Nazis?

People from occupied countries who worked with Nazi Germany were called “collaborators”. In Luxembourg, the most radical were the pro-Germans, who considered themselves Germans. They founded the *VdB* even before the arrival of the *Gauleiter*. 4,000 people later join the Nazi Party. They wore the party’s yellow shirt, which earned them the nickname *Gielemännercher*. These pro-Germans were a significant minority and helped the Nazi regime control the rest of the population. They spread Nazi propaganda and kept an eye on their fellow countrymen. Their information enabled the occupier to identify and persecute non-conformists, opponents and resistance fighters. From **1940** onwards, at least 1,500 people also voluntarily joined the German armies.



## *A Luxembourgish Nazi*

came from a modest background, but his good grades enabled him to enter the *Athénée* Secondary School in 1934. There he met the sons of the elite, some of whom, like him, admired Adolf Hitler. They created an extreme right-wing organisation, the *Luxemburger Volksjugend*. After the invasion, he joined the *VdB* and spread Nazi propaganda. In 1941 he volunteered for the *Waffen-SS*, the most radical branch of the Third Reich’s armed forces. Three years later, he was appointed lieutenant, making him the highest-ranking volunteer from Luxembourg. Captured by the Soviets, he passed himself off as a forced conscript and was released. But after his return, he was recognised and arrested. In 1948, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison and stripped of his Luxembourgish nationality.





Posters in 1940 calling on Luxembourgers to speak only German.

## 4. Racial Politics

### Were Luxembourgers German?

The Nazis assumed that Luxembourgers were Germans who had distanced themselves from other Germans by speaking and thinking in French. The *Gauleiter* therefore forbade the use of the French language, including customary words like “merci” or “au revoir”. He also ordered first names and family names that sound French be changed to German. Thus, for example, “Jean Meunier” became “Johannes Müller”. Not all Luxembourgers were considered “real” Germans. Some of them were not of the German “race”, according to Nazi ideology, such as Luxembourgers of Italian, French or Belgian origin. In order to find out who exactly was to be considered German, the *Gauleiter* organised a census.

**“Aryan” / “Non-Aryan”** – In Nazi ideology “Aryan” referred to individuals belonging to the “white races”, among whom the Germans were supposed to form the “superior race”. “Non-Aryan” referred to individuals of the “inferior races”, especially Jews.

### Personenstandsaufnahme vom 10. Oktober 1941

#### Zählkarte für Ortsanwesende

(für alle Personen, eingetragen unter Abschnitt A der Haushaltsliste)

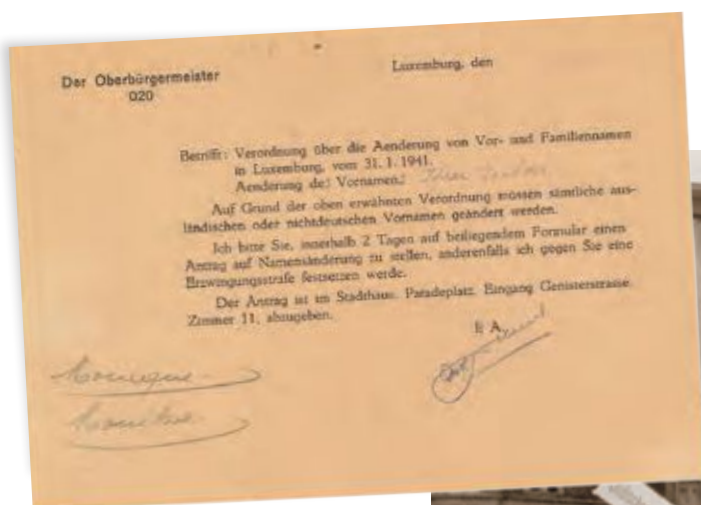
Von Zähler auszufüllen	Kreis:	Gemeinde:	<i>Kramer</i>
	Wohnplatz (Ortschaft):	<i>Caupellen</i>	
	Straße und Hausnummer:	<i>Luxemburger Nr. 6</i>	
	Zählbezirk Nr.:	Haushaltsnummer:	Zählkarte Nr.:
		(d. i. lfd. Nr. in der Kontrollliste)	(d. i. lfd. Nr. in der Haushaltsliste)
1.	Familienname (Zuname): <i>Kramer</i>		bei Frauen Geburtsname:
	Vorname (Rufname): <i>Herrich</i>		
2.	Stellung zum Haushaltsvorstand: <i>Haushaltsvorstand</i>		
(wie Spalte 3 der Haushaltsliste)			
3.	Familienstand: <del>jeder</del> verheiratet, <del>verwitert</del> , <del>geschieden</del>		
(wie Spalte 5 der Haushaltsliste – Nichtzutreffendes streichen)			
	verheiratet mit: <i>Emma Fauboh</i>		geborene:
	geboren am: <i>7. Januar 1909</i>		in: <i>Denkbach</i>
4.	Geburtsjahr: <i>1908</i>		
	Geburtsort: <i>S. Pöschel</i>		
	Geburtsort: <i>Kramer</i>		
falls außerhalb Luxemburgs, Land und Kreis:			
(wie Spalten 7 und 8 der Haushaltsliste)			
5.	Jetzige Staatsangehörigkeit: <i>Schwebisch</i>		(Dieser Raum bleibt frei)
(wie Spalte 10a der Haushaltsliste; Doppelstaater haben beide Staatsangehörigkeiten anzugeben)			
Falls jetzige Staatsangehörigkeit nicht durch Abstammung erworben ist:			
Art des Erwerbs (z. B. Option, Heirat):			
Zeitpunkt des Erwerbs:			
Etwas frühere Staatsangehörigkeit:			
Zeitpunkt des Verlustes:			
6.	Hauptberuf: <i>Schwarz-Schmied</i>		Stellung im Hauptberuf:
	Nebenberufe:		Nebenberuf:
	(wie Spalte 11 der Haushaltsliste)		
	Wo und bei wem beschäftigt: <i>Maxis Differdingen</i>		
	(wie Spalte 13 der Haushaltsliste)		
7.	Muttersprache: <i>Schwebisch</i>		
(In der Regel besitzt jeder Mensch nur eine Muttersprache, in welcher er denkt und deren er sich in seiner Familie und im häuslichen Verkehr am liebsten bedient, weil sie ihm am geläufigsten ist, z. B. deutsch, italienisch, französisch, polnisch. Doch kommen auch besonders bei Personen in gemischtsprachigen Gebieten Fälle von Doppelsprachigkeit vor. Kinder, welche noch nicht sprechen, und Stummstumme sind der Muttersprache der Eltern zuzuzählen. – Dialekte (Mundarten), z. B. luxemburgisch, plattdeutsch, gelten nicht als Muttersprache.)			

## How Was the Census of 10 October 1941 Transformed into a “Referendum”?

A census allows a state to count its inhabitants and collect their personal data: first name, family name, age, address, etc. On the census forms of **10 October 1941**, residents also had to indicate their nationality, mother tongue, and “race”; they further had to specify whether they were Jewish. The resistance called for everyone to answer these questions with “three times Luxembourgish”. In this way, they wanted to divert the census from its original purpose and turn it into a “referendum”, that is a vote on the country’s independence. Many followed the resistance’s direction, despite the danger of being identified. How many of them did so? Enough for the census to be invalidated. The resistance won. Humiliated, the *Gauleiter* had 200 resistance fighters arrested. Two of them were beheaded in February 1942.

## Raymond Petit,

born in 1920, was a pupil at the secondary school in Echternach when the Germans invaded the country. In September 1940, with a handful of comrades, he created a resistance organisation. Little by little, they set up a network across the country’s schools and secondary schools, helping people to leave the country and distributing leaflets. When he was suspected of being part of the resistance, Raymond was expelled from secondary school during the year he was to take his final exams. In October 1941, he took an active part in the campaign against the census. Pursued by the Germans, he had to go into hiding. He was constantly on the lookout for reliable people who could house him for a few weeks. In April 1942, the *Gestapo* finally tracked him down in Berdorf. Rather than get arrested, Raymond chose to shoot himself in the head at the age of 22.



Antisemitic propaganda in the window of a shop in Luxembourg, 1940.





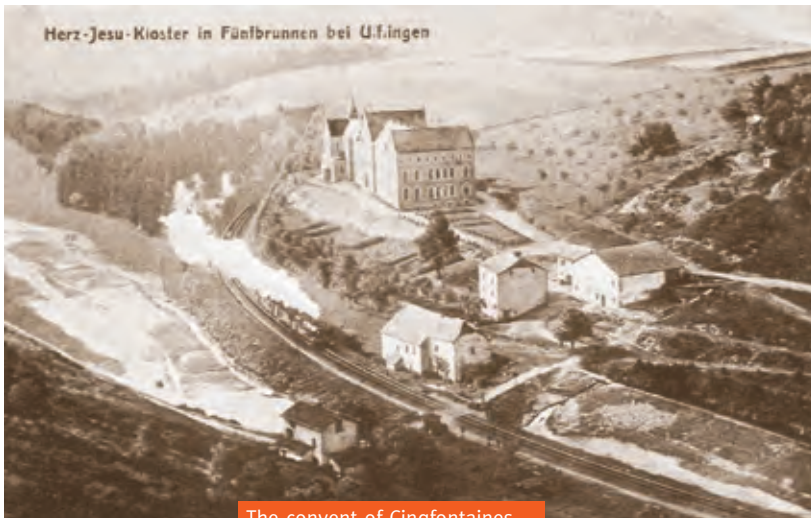
# 5. Persecution of the Jews



Nazi parade in front of the Luxembourg synagogue, 1941.

## What Was the Gauleiter's Anti-Jewish Policy?

The Third Reich regarded the Jews as an “inferior race” and an enemy of the German “superior race”. It passed laws to identify them, separate them from non-Jews, confiscate their property and expel them. These laws were made public in Luxembourg on **5 September 1940**. Anti-Semitic (i.e. anti-Jewish) policy was implemented by the *Gauleiter* and the *Gestapo*, but certain Luxembourg administrations – such as the education system, local authorities, the judiciary and the police – collaborated with this policy. Their role was to identify and list the Jews. They also helped the Germans to confiscate their property and exclude them from schools and certain professions. The *Gauleiter's* aim was to make Luxembourg “judenrein”, that is to eliminate the Jews as quickly as possible.



The convent of Cinqfontaines (Fünfbrunnen).



## What Happened to the Jews During the Occupation?

Nearly 4,000 Jews were living in Luxembourg in **1940**. Of these 980 were Luxembourgers, a thousand were foreigners who arrived before 1933, and the others were refugees, mostly Germans and Austrians who arrived after 1933. On the day of the invasion, more than 2,000 fled to France and Belgium. About 900 others managed to leave the country before mid-October **1941**. At this point, the Germans stopped emigration. Their goal was no longer to drive out the Jews, but to kill them. Some of the remaining Jewish people were gathered in the expropriated convent of Cinqfontaines (Fünfbrunnen), which the Germans had transformed into an internment camp. In the end, nearly 700 Jews were deported from Luxembourg to the ghettos and extermination camps, to which most Luxembourgers remained indifferent. Nearly 600 others, refugees in France or Belgium, suffered the same fate. Almost all of them were murdered in what became known as the Holocaust.

Arrival of Jewish women and children from occupied Eastern Europe in Auschwitz-Birkenau.



**Extermination camps** – Extermination camps were death factories designed to exterminate people, above all in gas chambers. These people were primarily Jews but also Roma, Soviet prisoners of war and other groups persecuted by the Nazi regime. The Germans built their nine extermination camps on the present-day territories of Poland (6), Belarus (2) and Lithuania (1). The best-known of them is Auschwitz-Birkenau.

**Holocaust** – In 1941, the Nazis decided to exterminate the Jewish people. To hide their true intentions, they referred to this crime by the bland name “the Final Solution to the Jewish Question”. It has since gone down in history as the Holocaust, which means “sacrifice” in Greek, or Shoah, which means “catastrophe” in Hebrew. Two-thirds of Europe’s Jews, 6 million women, children and men, were murdered: systematically mistreated or starved, gassed in extermination camps or shot.



### René Oppenheimer

In 1940, René Oppenheimer was 10 years old. His parents' shop was confiscated because they were Jewish. He was no longer allowed to go to school or play with his non-Jewish friends. When the *Gauleiter* prohibited Jews from having pets, his dog was taken away and killed. Because his father was placed at the head of Luxembourg's Jewish community by the Germans, his family remained in Luxembourg until 1943. In June of that year, they were interned at Cinqfontaines, then deported to the Theresienstadt camp in what is now the Czech Republic. There he saw his mother die of exhaustion. In October 1944, he was separated from his father and transported to the Auschwitz extermination camp. He was killed in a gas chamber shortly after his arrival.





# Map of the Main Concentration and Extermination Camps

The Nazis set up concentration camps in all regions under their control. In Eastern Europe, they also built extermination camps. This map shows the extent of this network using a selection of camps. The borders shown are those of today.

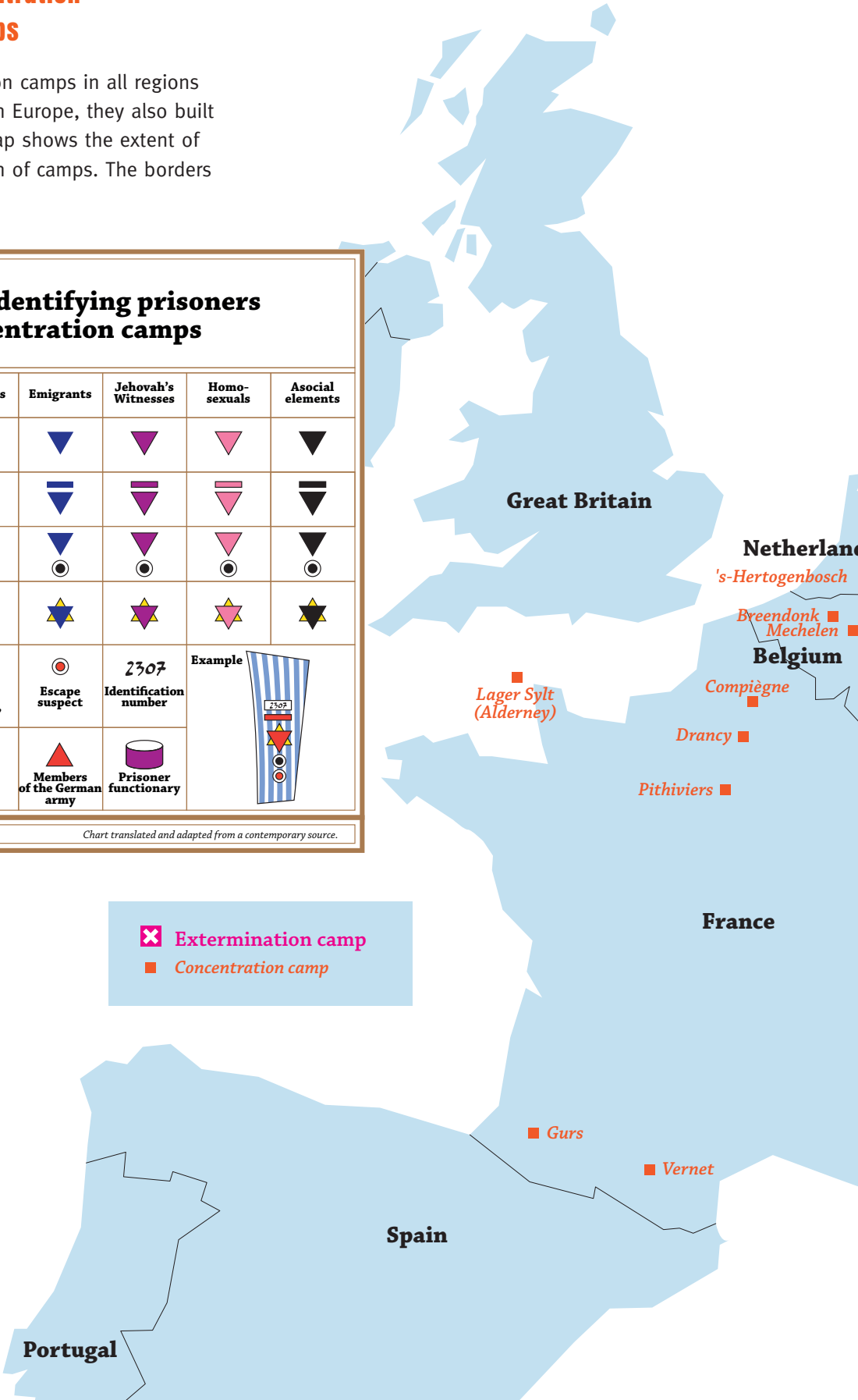
### System for identifying prisoners in concentration camps

	Political	Criminals	Emigrants	Jehovah's Witnesses	Homo-sexuals	Asocial elements
Basic colours						
Repeat offenders						
Punishment battalion						
Jews						
Special marks				2307	<div>Example</div>	
				Prisoner functionary		
	Jewish "race traitor"	Female "race traitor"	Escape suspect	Identification number		
	Polish	Czech	Members of the German army	Prisoner functionary		

Chart translated and adapted from a contemporary source.

Extermination camp

Concentration camp







## 6. The Resistance



The "death staircase" in Mauthausen concentration camp (today Austria). Prisoners were forced to climb the steps carrying heavy blocks of stone. Those who fell down dragged those behind them.

### What Did It Mean to Resist?

The first resistance organisations against the Germans were formed in August-September **1940**, notably amongst the Boy Scouts. Politically very diverse, they shared the objective of liberating Luxembourg and restoring its independence. Entering the resistance meant choosing to fight a totalitarian regime without mercy for its opponents. This choice, driven by civic courage, was dangerous for yourself and your family. Those who chose to join were hunted down, in constant fear of being denounced and sent to a concentration camp, particularly the Hinzert concentration camp. Many paid for their commitment with their lives. Resistance fighters were generally young: in 1940 half of them were younger than 26, while 5% were younger than 16.



Counter-propaganda of the resistance in Luxembourg.

**Concentration camps** – Concentration camps were camps in which the Third Reich locked up the people it considered its enemies, usually without trial. The aim of these camps was to break the will of the prisoners, by starving them, exhausting them through labour, beating them or killing them on a whim. In 1944, there were 1,000 camps throughout occupied Europe. Among the deadliest were those in Dachau, Buchenwald, Natzweiler, Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen or, for women, Ravensbrück. There were Luxembourg deportees in all the main concentration camps. But the one that received the largest proportion of them was Hinzert, 25 km east of Trier: 1,560 Luxembourgers were interned there. 82 died there. Many Luxembourgish deportees were successively interned in three or four concentration camps.





Refugees accompanied by their smugglers. Photo taken at Limerlé on the Belgian-Luxembourgian border in 1944.

## What Did the Resistance Do?

The main initial activities of the resistance were supporting opponents and helping people threatened by the Nazis to get out of the country. It also collected information for the Allies and spread counter-propaganda, as during the census of 10 October 1941. Forced conscription transformed the resistance. It hid and fed nearly 3,600 deserters and draft resisters, or helped them across the border. This was a significant feat in a small, closely guarded country where food was strictly rationed and where any unauthorized crossing of the border was punishable by death. The hiding of conscripts gave it a lot of support among the population. The escaped forced conscripts who joined it provided it with additional know-how, because some of them were armed and had combat experience.



### *Madeleine Weis-Bauler*

In 1940, Madeleine Weis-Bauler was 19 years old. She studied to become a nursery teacher but could not find a job after refusing to join the *VdB*. Instead, she joined a resistance organisation. Exposed, she fled to France where she remained in contact with the local resistance. In 1944, during a mission in Lorraine, she was arrested at the Conflans-Jarny train station and transferred to Luxembourg. The *Gestapo* interrogated her in the Villa Pauly, before locking her up for a month in the Grund prison and deporting her to Germany. She passed through several concentration camps, including Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen. In her memoirs, published in 2002, she described the terrible living conditions in these two camps, particularly in the last months of the war.



# 7. Forced Conscription



Proclamation of execution

## Why Did the Nazis Want to Control Luxembourg's Youth?

Young people were a special target of the Nazis, who considered them more easily influenced and vulnerable to their propaganda. Germany also needed them because it increasingly lacked workers and soldiers. In June 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union; in December 1941 it declared war on the United States of America. The voluntary Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) was introduced in Luxembourg in February 1941. As there were fewer young volunteers than expected, the RAD became compulsory three months later. On 30 August 1942, military service became compulsory. The majority of the population refused to let their children die for Germany, and the next day, the country went on strike. The repression was unprecedented: 125 strikers were arrested; 21 were sentenced to death and executed; 260 secondary school students were sent to Germany to be “re-educated”.

Departure of forced conscripts at Hollerich station, 1942.



Draft resister inside a bunker.

### Reichsarbeitsdienst / Kriegshilfsdienst –

The Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) was a six-month labour service for boys and girls between the ages of 18 and 24. It was introduced in Luxembourg in February 1941 and made compulsory three months later. Some of the girls in the RAD also had to join the Kriegshilfsdienst (KHD), an “auxiliary military service” that also lasted six months. 3,614 Luxembourgish women were thus forcibly enlisted for a year. 58 of them died, in particular during air-raids. During their service in the RAD in Peenemünde, some Luxembourgish recruits spied on the manufacture of V1 and V2 rockets and passed on the information to the Allies.





## What Was the Fate of the Forced Conscripts?

In total, almost 10,200 young Luxembourgers aged between 18 and 24 were forcibly conscripted into the German army. Some 2,848 died or went missing while wearing the uniform of the occupying forces. About 2,000 draft resisters withdrew from the beginning and about 1,500 deserted from the German army. Some of them crossed the border to join the Allied armies or the resistance. About 2,000 were hidden in Luxembourg, some in bunkers. Refusing to fight for the invader was a difficult choice for these young people. Their families risked being resettled (Lux. *ëmgesidelt*) and they risked their own lives. Many deserters and draft resisters were arrested and thrown into prison or concentration camps, often after being denounced. Hostages of the Germans, more than 200 died in captivity, of which 166 were executed. The largest massacre took place in Sonnenburg (Słońsk) prison during the night of 30/31 January 1945, when 91 Luxembourgers were shot, amongst them Eugène Weiss.

Forced conscripts in the RAD during an exercise, 1941.

**Bunker** – Most deserters and draft resisters were hidden in private homes, attics, or barns. But some of them were also hidden in bunkers, large underground hiding places set up by the resistance. The largest was Hondsbësch Gallery in Niedercorn, an abandoned mine where up to 122 deserters and draft resisters lived.

**Forced conscripts / deserters / draft resisters** – Forced conscripts were those young Luxembourgish men and women born between 1920 and 1927 who were forced to do compulsory labour service (RAD) or military service for the Germans. Deserters were those of them who escaped while in the RAD or the German army. Draft resisters were those who refused from the outset to enter the RAD or the German army.

## Jos Steichen

was a student at the Institut Émile Metz in Dommeldange in 1942. He was arrested for taking part in the strike against compulsory military service; he only escaped the death penalty because he was a minor. However, he was forcibly conscripted and sent to the Eastern front. He deserted with a friend in August 1943. They were both sent to the Tambov camp in Russia, which took in non-German prisoners of war from Lorraine, Alsace, and Luxembourg. They managed to get there after a gruelling 200-kilometre barefoot march. The living conditions in camp were equally horrible. The prisoners were ill-treated, undernourished, and in winter the temperature in their huts dropped to -30 °C. 167 of the 1,012 Luxembourgers interned in Tambov died there. Jos survived and was repatriated to Luxembourg in November 1945.





# 8. Disobedience



Luxembourgers subjected to forced labour on the *Reichsautobahn* construction site in the Eifel in 1941.

## How Did Luxembourgish Society Move From Resignation to Opposition?

In the summer of 1940, the majority of Luxembourgers resigned themselves to the German victory. The persecution of the Jews provoked few reactions. Beginning in **1942**, however, forced conscription moved more and more Luxembourgers to disobedience or even opposition – all the more so as, at that time, a victory for the Allies became plausible again. In October 1942, the Americans and British landed in North Africa and gradually pushed back the Germans troops there. In February 1943, the Germans were also beaten by the Soviets in Stalingrad. The number of deserters and draft resisters then increased. The pro-Germans, who helped the occupier to find their hiding places, were hated and isolated. In July **1944**, two deserters shot the head of the *VdB* in Junglinster. In retaliation, the Germans executed 10 forced conscripts held in German prisons.



Many Luxembourg families were resettled from Luxembourg-Hollerich railway station.



## How Did the Gauleiter Seek to Suppress All Opposition?

As soon as he arrived, *Gauleiter* Simon threatened to expel those who refused to submit to the Nazi regime. From March 1941, he arrested nearly 70 people he considered unreliable, as well as 50 Jews, and forced them to work on the construction site of a German motorway. After the strike of September 1942, the *Gauleiter* decided to relocate certain populations. The families that he and the pro-Germans considered undesirable – those of strikers, resistance fighters, politicians, deserters, and draft resisters – were resettled (Lux. *ëmgesidelt*) to Germany and replaced by German families. In all, nearly 1,400 families, comprising 4,200 people, were forcibly resettled in the eastern Reich. Their property was confiscated and they were forced to work for the German war industry.



Bus coming to Wiltz to pick up a family to be resettled.

### Catherine Federspiel-Wagner

On 7 August 1940, when Ketty Federspiel-Wagner was 35 years old, her husband Nicolas was arrested by the *Gestapo*, beaten up, and deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp. The Federspiel family were Jehovah's Witnesses, a religious community persecuted by the Nazis because they were against war. At the end of September 1942, the *Gestapo* came for Ketty and her children. They were given just one hour to pack a single suitcase. The rest of their belongings were confiscated. Considered anti-German ("deutschfeindlich"), the family was forcibly resettled in Silesia, then a German region that today belongs to Poland. Ketty and her children passed through the resettlement camps of Leubus, Flinsberg, and Wartha. When the latter was liberated by the Soviets, they could finally return home. There they met up with Nicholas, who survived deportation.



**Ëmsiidlung** – (German: *Umsiedlung*) refers to the forced resettlement in the eastern Reich of families of opponents, resistance fighters, deserters, or draft resisters. These families came from Luxembourg, as well as from Alsace and Lorraine. The purpose of forced resettlement was to punish the relatives, and it was also intended to make children grow up in regions populated primarily by Germans loyal to the regime. Immersed in this environment, the children were meant to become, unlike their parents, faithful subjects of the Reich. Traditionally, forced resettlement has been called "deportation" in Luxembourg, but nowadays care is taken to distinguish it from the deportation to concentration and extermination camps.



# 9. Liberation

## What was it like in Luxembourg when the Nazi Regime came to an end?

On 6 June 1944, the Allied armies landed in Normandy. Among the troops landing in the following weeks was the Piron Brigade, made up of Belgian and Luxembourg volunteers. Paris was liberated at the end of August. The Allies were then closing in on Luxembourg, and German civil servants left the country on 1 September. 10,000 pro-Germans left with them for fear of reprisals. Liberation seemed close. In Dudelange it was celebrated too soon. During the night of 1 to 2 September, the Germans launched a retaliatory action resulting in six deaths. The Americans entered the Grand Duchy on **9 September 1944**. Four days later, they liberated nearly all of the country. But the war was far from over.

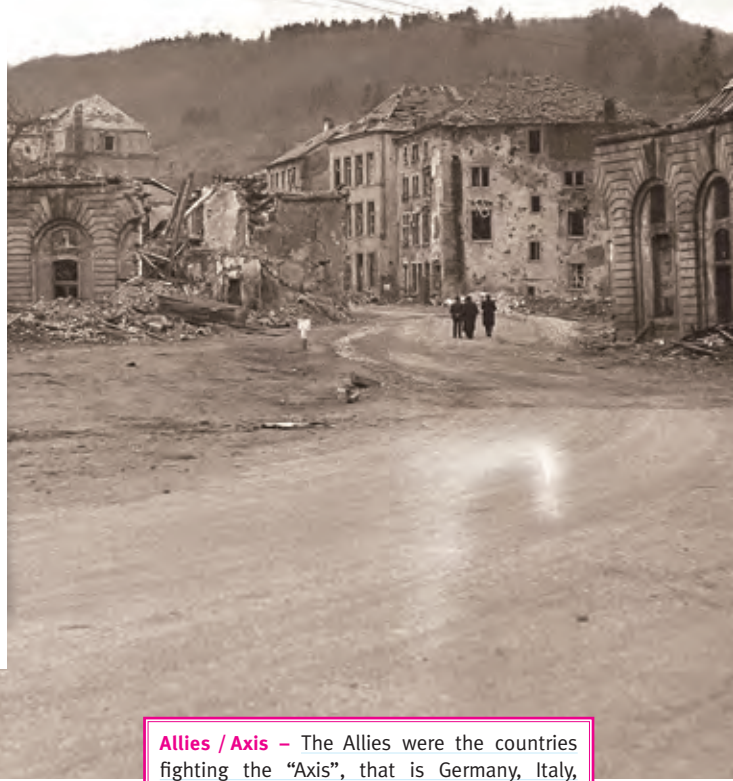
American tanks enter Luxembourg, September 1944.





## How Did the Battle of the Bulge Unfold within Luxembourg?

A shock arrived on **16 December 1944**. The Germans, who had been retreating for months, went on the counter-offensive in the Ardennes. One of their objectives was the port of Antwerp, where the Allies brought in reinforcements, food, and fuel. The northeast of Luxembourg was again occupied and ravaged by fighting. Hundreds of civilians died. Entire towns, such as Echternach, were destroyed. Germans and pro-Germans took their revenge: resistance fighters were arrested, tortured, and murdered. The Americans counterattacked towards the end of December 1944 thus liberating the North of the country a second time in mid-January 1945. The last town to be liberated was Vianden on **12 February 1945**. For them, the Battle of the Bulge was the bloodiest of the entire war. Nearly 20,000 Americans were killed, of whom about 5,000 were killed in Luxembourg. They are buried today in the military cemetery of Hamm.



### *Marcel Ferring*

was 15 years old when the Americans liberated his village of Tandel in September 1944. For the first time in years, he ate chocolate and began to believe that the war was coming to an end and that his father might return. His father was arrested by the Germans for resistance and sent to the Hinzert concentration camp. But on 16 December Tandel was bombed for two days by the Germans. The Germans eventually reoccupied the village, which was bombed by the Americans in return. Marcel and his family had to flee. Like thousands of people from the east and the north, they were thrown onto the roads, in the middle of the fighting, in that particularly cold winter of 1944-45. When they returned in April 1945, they found their house half-destroyed.

**Allies / Axis** – The Allies were the countries fighting the “Axis”, that is Germany, Italy, and Japan. At the beginning of the war, the Allied countries were Poland, France and Great Britain. The United States and the Soviet Union joined the alliance in 1941. The governments-in-exile of some occupied countries, such as Belgium and Luxembourg, were also on the Allies’ side.



Clervaux in ruins, after the Battle of the Bulge.



# 10. A Divided Society

## Was There Political Infighting After the Liberation?

At the liberation, the country was managed by the American army along with Unio'n, the unitary resistance movement. Unio'n dreamt of rebuilding the country. To do so, it first wanted to purge society from Nazism and punish those it considered traitors. By this it meant not only pro-Germans, but also members of the political and economic elite who remained in office during the occupation. By October, Unio'n had arrested and imprisoned more than 3,200 alleged collaborators. This created tensions with the government, which returned from exile at the end of September 1944. In February 1945, Unio'n demanded the resignation of the government. On 10 May 1945, it assembled 10,000 people to demonstrate in the capital. But after this show of force, Unio'n disintegrated. It was too divided and created wariness amongst those who wanted a return to order.

Young men from the *Miliz* posing on the steps of the Dudelange Town Hall.



Demonstrators demanding the punishment of collaborators after the Liberation.



Unio'n – The Unio'n vun de Fräiheitsorganisa-tiounen, or Unio'n for short, was the unitary resistance movement. It was founded on 23 March 1944, and six months later it united most of the resistance organisations, from the political left to the political right. At the liberation, it had 15,000 members and an armed organisation, the *Miliz*, composed largely of forcibly conscripted soldiers who had deserted.



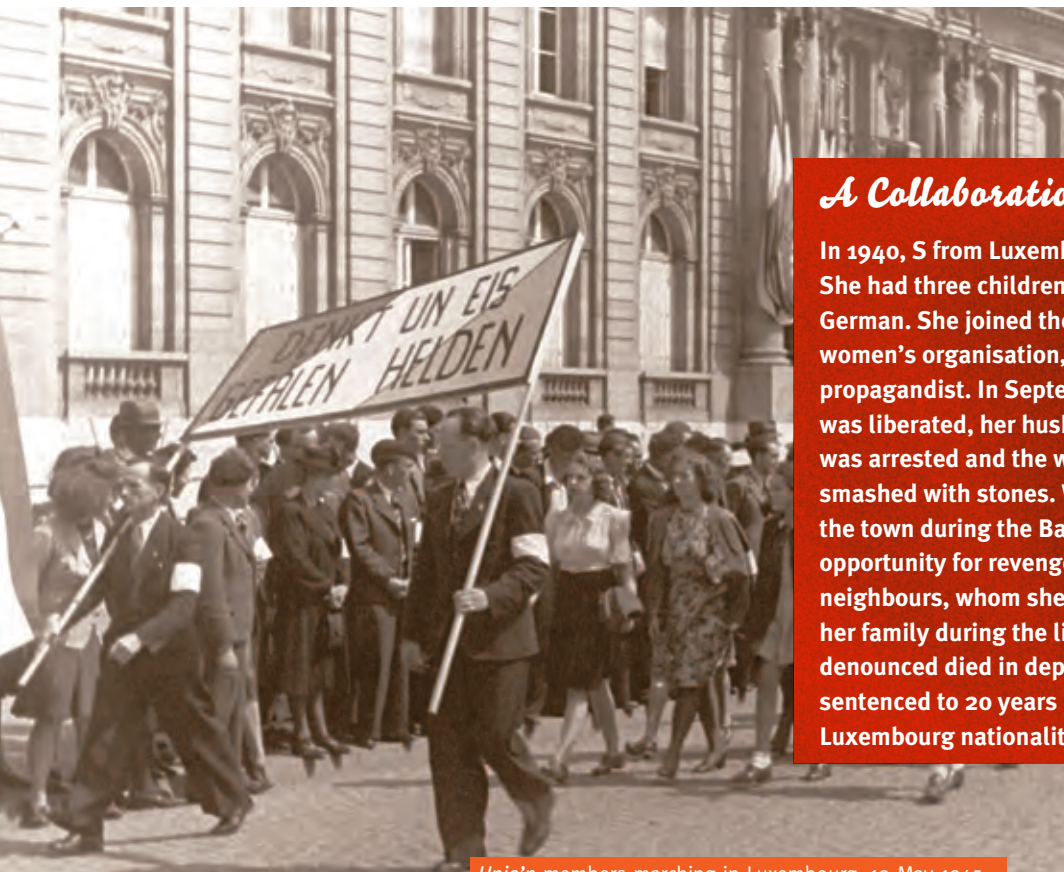
## Were collaborators punished?

The purge demanded by *Unio'n* was finally carried out by the government after its return from exile. It took two forms:

- The administrative purge concerned 18,000 civil servants and representatives of different professions. Its judgements were secret and rather light: only 0.2% involved serious sanctions.
- The political purge was harsher. It affected 10,000 individuals accused of being pro-German. 12 were sentenced to death, and 1,300 were sentenced to more than two years in prison and were stripped of their Luxembourg nationality, which made them stateless, that is, people without nationality. They formed a despised and excluded minority, along with their families. Most of them only regained their rights after the amnesty laws of 1950 and 1955.

Pro-Germans forced to march with swastikas through the streets of Luxembourg after the Liberation.

**Amnesty** – is a legal act which, without erasing the crime, cancels the sentence and requires that that crime no longer be mentioned. It imposes a duty to forget. In Luxembourg, the amnesty law of 1950 restored nationality to Luxembourgers who had been sentenced to more than two years in prison as part of the political purging. The 1955 amnesty law freed most of the pro-Germans who were still in prison.



*Unio'n* members marching in Luxembourg, 10 May 1945.



## A Collaborationist

In 1940, S from Luxembourg's North was 31 years old. She had three children with her husband, who was German. She joined the "NS-Frauenschaft", the Nazi women's organisation, at an early age and became a propagandist. In September 1944, when her village was liberated, her husband, accused of collaboration, was arrested and the windows of their house were smashed with stones. When the Germans retook the town during the Battle of the Bulge, she saw an opportunity for revenge and denounced two of her neighbours, whom she held responsible for the fate of her family during the liberation. One of the men she denounced died in deportation. Tried in 1947, she was sentenced to 20 years in prison and stripped of her Luxembourg nationality.



# 11. A Past That Remains Present



A former deportee, who followed the l'Unio'n's call to demonstrate on 10 May 1945.

## What Happened in Luxembourg at the Closing of the War?

The war ended in Europe on **8 May 1945**. The joy was great but the toll was terrible. In Luxembourg, a third of all built structures (roads, bridges, houses, etc.) were destroyed. Over 8,100 of its inhabitants were dead. Thousands of others were gradually returning. The skeletal appearance of the returning concentration-camp survivors was a shock. Thousands of pro-Germans, who had fled in September 1944, were greeted with insults and spitting. Luxembourgish Jews who had survived the Holocaust were allowed to return home. Jews with foreign passports, on the other hand, were only allowed to return in limited numbers. The fate of Luxembourgish prisoners of war in the USSR fuelled anger against the government, which was accused of not doing enough to repatriate them. The last prisoners returned only in **1948**.

## What Recognition Did Different Groups Receive After the War?

The war was traumatic for many people and left painful memories. Those of the collaborators were completely suppressed. Resistance fighters did receive official recognition: 1,352 obtained the title of “resistance fighter” and a veteran’s pension. Those who perished were declared to have “died for the fatherland”. Not until **1981**, after decades of collective action, were the forcibly conscripted given the status of “victims of Nazism” and compensation equal to that of the resistance fighters. Reparations were reserved for Luxembourgers. But 75% of the Jews were foreigners in 1940 and were thus not entitled to any. In **2015**, the government offered an official apology to the Jewish community for the collaboration of certain state administration representatives.

Return of the ashes of Luxembourgish deportees who died in Germany, 1945.



The *Monument national de la Grève* in Wiltz, inaugurated in 1956, in memory of the strike in 1942.



The “Kaddish” Monument in Luxembourg City, inaugurated in 2018, in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

## How to Unite Painful, And Sometimes Conflicting, Memories?

After the war, resistance fighters, forced conscripts, and later also the victims of the Holocaust set up organisations. Their aim was both to mourn the dead and to fight for the recognition of their rights and their remembrance. Many of these organisations survive and are now led by the post-war generations. The *Comité pour la mémoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale* (Committee for the Remembrance of the Second World War) was established by law on 21 June 2016 on the initiative of the Luxembourg government. Its aim is to reconcile and, where possible, unite these painful and sometimes conflicting memories. It intervenes with the State in the interests of resistance fighters, forced conscripts, the Jewish community, and the victims of the Second World War in general. Its members also have the mission of maintaining the memory of the war. In particular, they participate in organising the official Second World War commemorations.



National Monument of Luxembourgian Solidarity (*Monument national de la solidarité luxembourgeoise*) inaugurated in 1971 in memory of all victims of the Second World War.



# The Place of the Second World War in Luxembourg History

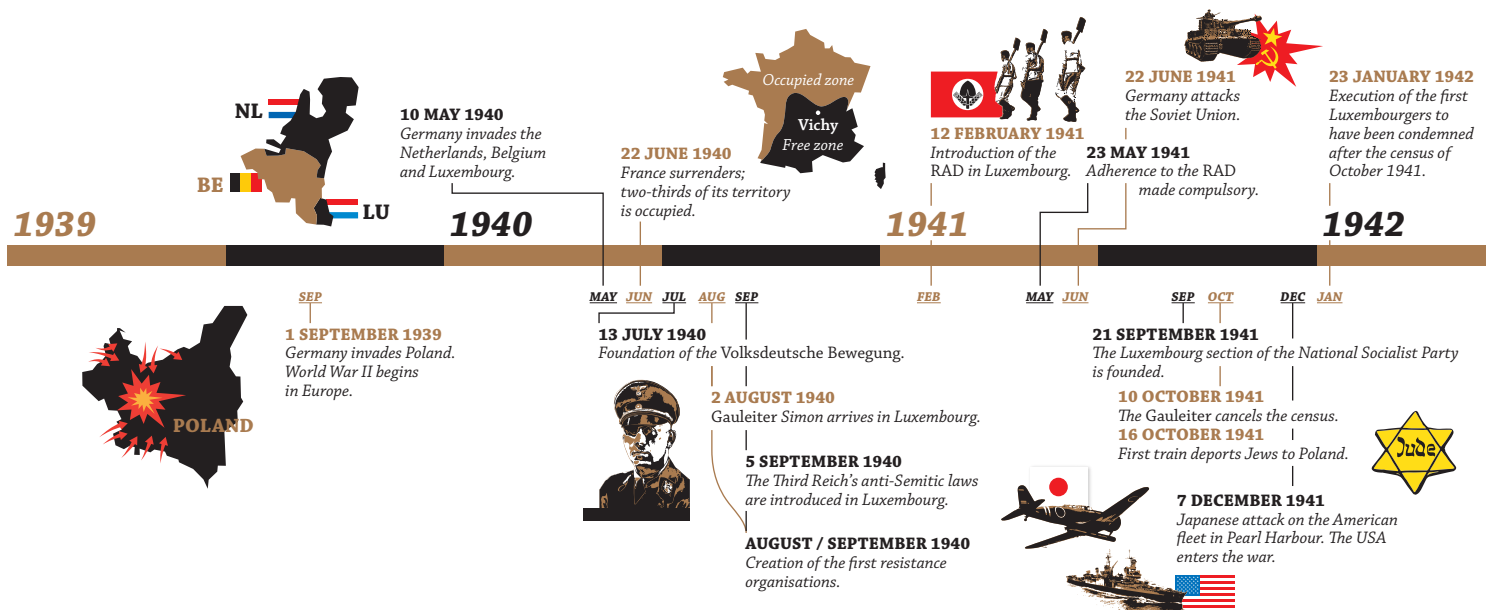
The Second World War deeply affected Luxembourg society. It imposed four tragic experiences on the country's inhabitants:

## The Experience of Foreign Occupation

Before the war, a large majority of Luxembourgers expressed their desire to live in an independent state. After the invasion in 1940, the Germans began to destroy the state and make it part of Germany. The Nazis considered most Luxembourgers as Germans who had become estranged from them. It was in that context that the first resistance organisations were formed.

## The Experience of Totalitarianism

Nazi Germany was a totalitarian regime: a dictatorial and violent state, which left no freedom to its citizens. Its ideal society was purely German and Nazi. It eliminated all those people who had no place in it. It expelled and then killed the Jews. It arrested and then deported resistance fighters to concentration camps, many of whom returned extremely weak or never at all. Families that appeared untrustworthy were forcibly relocated to Germany and replaced at home by Germans.



## The Experience of War

War broke out in Luxembourg while it was still a neutral country. Following the French defeat, most Luxembourgers initially resigned themselves to a German victory. Britain stood firm. And when the Soviet Union (June 1941) and the United States (December 1941) entered the war, it took on a different character. When the Germans forced young Luxembourgers to fight and die in their army, a large proportion of the inhabitants chose disobedience, and many paid for this with their freedom or their lives. When, finally, the end of the war seemed close, the Battle of the Bulge ravaged the north and east of the country.

## The Experience of Division

A significant minority of Luxembourgers supported the Nazi regime. These pro-Germans monitored their fellow citizens and denounced and hunted down resistance fighters and fugitive conscripts. The resistance fighters hated those pro-Germans, and many of them also resented the government-in-exile and the elites, whom they accused of cowardice. Liberation was a time of happiness, but also of anger and pain. The dominant history texts have long insisted on the unity of Luxembourgers in their fight against the Nazi oppressor. But this story has obscured divided memories, memories that continue to hurt many decades later.





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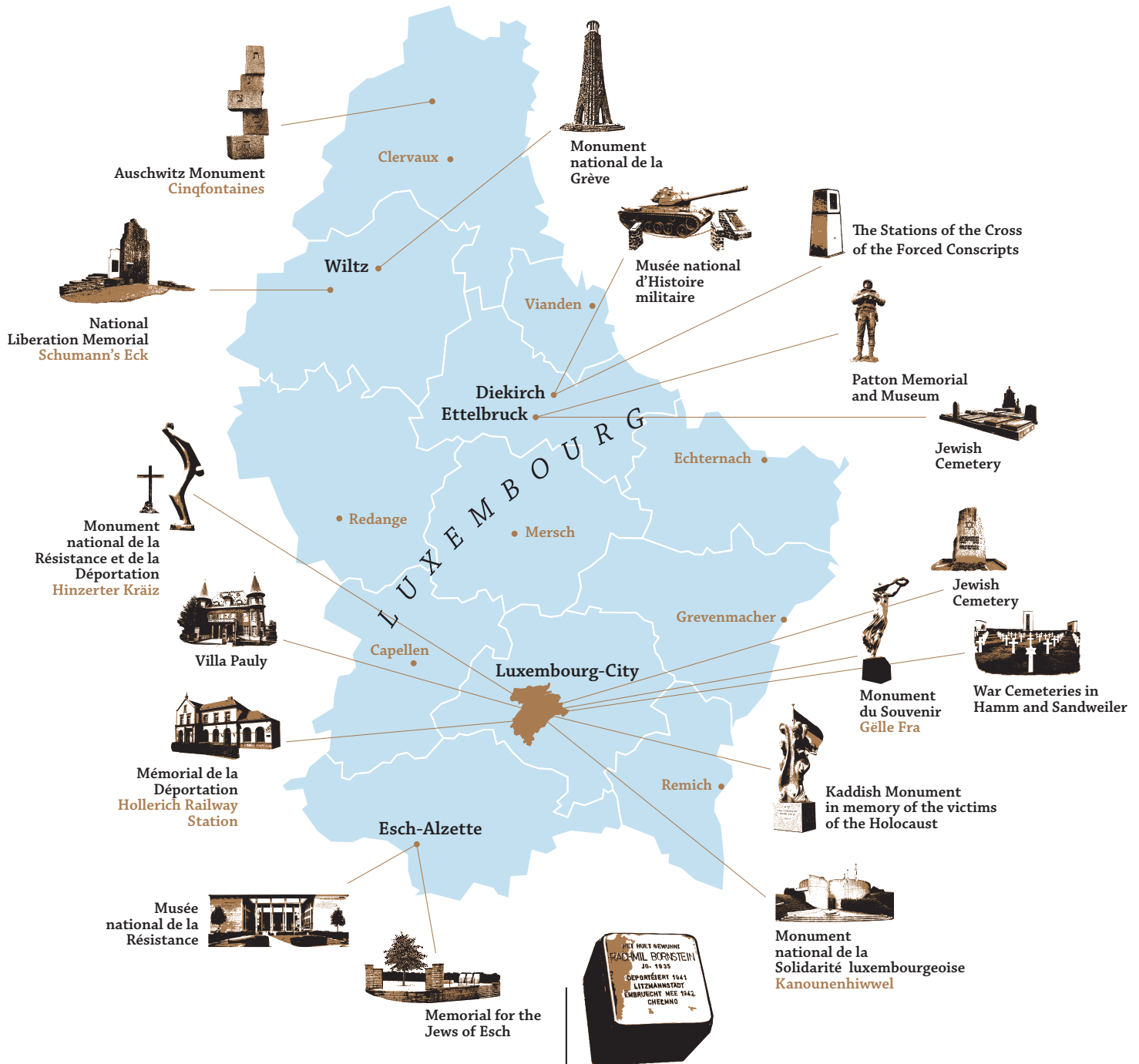
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## Places of remembrance

In Luxembourg, the Second World War is commemorated on more than 500 sites. The main ones are indicated on this map. These sites are diverse: monuments, museums, cemeteries, documentation centres or *Stolpersteine*.







In 1940, Luxembourg was occupied by Nazi Germany. The population experienced terror and war. The majority suffered under the Nazi regime and its illegal and inhuman measures. Resistance fighters were persecuted and many of them taken to concentration camps, the Jewish population was plundered and then deported to extermination camps, thousands of young men and women were forcibly recruited into the Nazi services, particularly in the German army. Others, on the other hand, collaborated actively with the Nazi regime.

The Second World War (1939-1945) was the greatest conflict Luxembourg has ever experienced. It left deep scars that have remained in our memory to this day.

