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► **To cite this version:**

Gérald Arboit. The Zentralpolizeistelle Luxemburg: An unknown intelligence issue in Luxembourg during World War 1. 2018. <hal-04508276>

**HAL Id: hal-04508276**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04508276v1>**

Submitted on 17 Mar 2024

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# **The *Zentralpolizeistelle* Luxemburg: An unknown intelligence issue in Luxembourg during World War 1**

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# The *Zentralpolizeistelle* Luxemburg: An unknown intelligence issue in Luxembourg during World War 1

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**ABSTRACT:** During World War 1, Luxembourg had not yet developed any system of intelligence, or any protection against espionage, in order to protect its neutrality. Luxembourg employed espionage on the eve of the First World War, but it was the German Army that provided the country with an intelligence corps, under the application of military police forces, the *Geheime Feldpolizei* (1914-1915) and the *Zentralpolizeistelle* (1915-1918). Both worked on counter-intelligence in Luxembourg. Without the post-war commemoration of their work as revealed in the Luxembourg press, their actions would have been forgotten, and in any case, they were limited and never prevented Allied intelligence activities or local demonstrations.

On the eve of World War 1, Luxembourg was among the countries without an intelligence service and had no law prohibiting espionage. In 1912, it comprised only a small Gendarmerie service with national jurisdiction, with a capacity to deal with the threats of the day. This *Brigade criminelle* was modelled on the new French Mobile Brigade — also called the *Brigade du Tigre* because it was founded by the French Interior Minister, Georges Clemenceau. In January 1914, a case of “top secret” stamped documents led the Eyschen Government to begin taking espionage more seriously. After taking advice from Switzerland — their model for institutional matters — and Belgium — their “twin” country —, the government attempted to reach a consensus inside the politically divided Parliament. The choice was simple: either the Grand Duchy returned the documents to their issuing authorities, which in effect amounted to taking up the cause for Germany; or it allowed the unidentified agent to leave with the documents, thereby violating its neutrality to the benefit of the Allies. A proposed law was ready when the German armed forces arrived by train at Luxembourg City station.<sup>1</sup>

## ***From the Geheime Feldpolizei to the Zentralpolizeistelle***

The occupation provided Luxembourg with its first intelligence apparatus and espionage/treason laws, all introduced by German forces. Until 1918, the Grand Duchy was not considered by the Germans as an invaded country but only as part of the army operation zone (*Etappen- und Operationsgebiet*). Counter-intelligence was initially the responsibility of the German Army’s *Geheime Feldpolizei*. As Luxembourg was occupied by the German General Headquarters (GHQ) until September 1914, counter-intelligence was directed by the *FeldpolizeiDirektor* himself, Major and former Strasbourg *PolizeiRat* Maximilian

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<sup>1</sup> Archives nationales, Luxembourg, AE-00436.

Bauer; it appears that a Cologne superintendent, perhaps named “Bayerdörfer”, was specifically in charge of Luxembourg affairs.<sup>2</sup> After the GHQ moved to Charleville-Mézières, Luxembourg’s counter-intelligence was commanded by the 8.Armee’s *Geheime Feldpolizei* until January 1915. In December 1914, a Strasbourg meeting on counter-intelligence between the German Intelligence *Abteilung IIIB* (IIIB) and Interior Ministers from all over the Reich federation (but no Luxembourg delegate) decided to form a new organisation, namely the *Zentralpolizeistellen*, in Brussels and in Luxembourg. The main objective was to free *Geheime Feldpolizei* from counter-intelligence and to organise better coordination with the IIIB. In respect of Luxembourg neutrality, the German military authorities decided to create a military administration (*Militärverwaltung*), offered to the GeneralMajor Richard Karl von Tessmar.<sup>3</sup> Part of this new occupation structure, the Luxembourg *Zentralpolizeistelle* was firstly led by a former Breslau criminal police superintendent, Lieutenant R. Amelung;<sup>4</sup> he came to Luxembourg with the 8.Armee’s *Geheime Feldpolizei*. He was dismissed from his duties by the Luxembourg authorities. Two main reasons can be identified for his dismissal; the first and more important was linked to a corruption case implicating his Luxembourg colleague, the Hollerich police superintendent Henri Ettinger. Another could be Justice Minister Victor Thorn’s claim, directly addressed to the German GHQ’s *Geheime Feldpolizei*, after Amelung decided to investigate a case against the Differdange Mayor: Emile Mark was suspected of having given false identity certificates to French escapees. Thorn’s initiative was certainly facilitated by his friendship with Tessmar. The Amelung Affair went on from August 1915 to December 1916, when the policeman was “promoted” to the new *Zentralpolizeistelle* in Bucharest as military police prefect (*Militär-PolizeiMeister*); there, he decided to write a short summary of his action to promote himself, proof that his action in Luxembourg had been sanctioned.<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant Ernst Rütter, in Luxembourg since May 1916, coming from the Line Infantry in Liege, was Amelung’s deputy, and he took over from him in March 1918.<sup>6</sup> Just before coming to Luxembourg, he was made an IIIB officer, illustrating the manoeuvre of the German intelligence service against policemen from the *Geheime Feldpolizei*. Lieutenant Sachs, Rütter’s deputy, assumed his position for a month. In April 1918 Captain Friedrich Kersandt arrived from Bucharest; the difference in rank between him and his predecessors is hard to explain. Also an IIIB officer, he would be the last chief of the Luxembourg *Zentralpolizeistelle*.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the *Geheime Feldpolizei*, the *Zentralpolizeistelle* was only responsible for counter-intelligence and also some tactical military intelligence. In the Grand Duchy, there was still a *Geheime Feldpolizei* post in Esch-sur-Sûre, not far from the Belgian border. This partition of the country — the south with the capital city of the IIIB and the north with the Army — explains why the *Zentralpolizeistelle*’s workforce never exceeded 21 men;<sup>8</sup> a third of them were civilians, former Bavarian

<sup>2</sup> Service historique de la Défense, Guerre (SHD/G), 7 N<sup>2</sup> 2607, 19/07/1922.

<sup>3</sup> Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Abt. IV Kriegsarchiv, M. Kr. 1629, 08/01/1915; Geheime Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, I. HA, Rep. 77, Tit. 872, Nr. 14, 20/01/1915.

<sup>4</sup> *Offiziere und Beamten sowie die Militär- und Zivilbehörden in der Provinzial- u. Regierungshauptstadt Breslau*, Breslau, Liß, 1913, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg. Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, M1/4, n<sup>o</sup>1208, *Stärkenachweisung für die Zentralpolizeistelle Bukarest* [01/1917]; *Ein Jahr Militär-Polizeimeister der Festung Bukarest*, sl, 1917.

<sup>6</sup> ANLux, AE-00435, Carriers à Thorn, 08/03/1917; Laurent Lombard, *Ludendorff à Liège*, Stavelot, Vox Patriae, 1937, p. 9; Maria Keipert, Peter Grupp, *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes*, 3, L-R, Paderborn, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008, p. 743.

<sup>7</sup> Uwe Kersandt Personal Archives, Hartenstein, Bucharest, 18/03/1918, certified true, Luxembourg, Payr, 29/04/1918; Uwe Kersandt, *The Shadow of a Dream. A Brief Historical Account of the Kersandt Family*, Caledon, New Voices Publishing, 2006, p. 67-82.

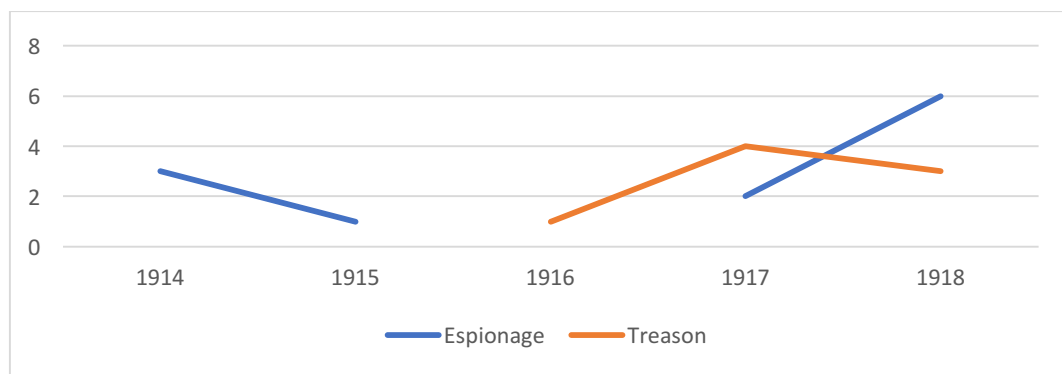
<sup>8</sup> Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich, Abt. IV Kriegsarchiv, M. Kr. 1629, Nicolai to Ludendorf, 29/03/1918.

policemen assigned to the *Landsturm*. As the military service was under the command of the junior officer Lieutenants Schüller in 1916-1918, and then Sachs in spring 1918, the civilian service was directed by a field police officer (*Feldpolizei*beamte), Rahn, followed by Konrad for the same periods.

### **Counter-intelligence in Luxembourg**

The major difference between the *Geheime Feldpolizei* and the *Zentralpolizeistelle* was their respective activities. One element of comparison is the number of citizens held in custody. Up to February 1915, when the Grand Duchy was still under the *Geheime Feldpolizei*'s jurisdiction, 72 Luxembourgers were arrested. 69% of these arrests were made from August to October 1914, as indicated by two types of source. The first are Luxembourg sources, especially from the Hollerich superintendent and his colleague from Differdange, Jean-Pierre Mossinger. The second is the French documentation found in Longwy and Mézières by the advanced elements of *Geheime Feldpolizei* among the “numerous files scattered on the ground by the soldiers who had ransacked the offices” or tidied away in the oak box in the cellar of Mézières prefecture by the GHQ *Geheime Feldpolizei*.<sup>9</sup> Some information was so important that the *Feldpolizei*Direktor Bauer came to Luxembourg in mid-October 1914. He held an enquiry on the most important French agent ever to work in this country, Jules Fournelle. Chief of Office of the Prince Henri railway network, he was working for the French intelligence service since at least summer 1910. In July 1911, in Brussels, he received instructions from the chief of the French intelligence service, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles-Joseph Dupont, for a mission in Germany. Fournelle assigned to this mission a young Luxembourg engineer, Antoine (Tony) Lefort. The following September, his report was sent to Paris and Eyschen received a copy.<sup>10</sup>

### **Luxembourgers tried and detained by the German authorities<sup>11</sup>**



From November 1914 to February 1915, 31% of arrests resulted from a climate of spy mania introduced by the Germans at the beginning of the occupation. Some *Geheime Feldpolizei* civilian agents circulated by train all over the country, acting like “spies, eavesdroppers, and *agents-provocateurs*”.<sup>12</sup> In November 1914, the mechanic Karl Dardar took the train between Esch-sur-Alzette and Luxembourg. He began a conversation in French on the course of the war, highlighting the failures and depredations committed by the Reich army. An inspector from

<sup>9</sup> SHD/G, 7 N<sup>2</sup> 2768, Domercq, 15/02/1919.

<sup>10</sup> ANLux, AE-02112, Lefort, 24/09/1911; Gérald Arboit, « “Rien que pour vos yeux”. Un rapport de renseignement opérationnel luxembourgeois de 1911 », *Hémécht*, 2007, n<sup>o</sup> 3, p. 545-550.

<sup>11</sup> BundesArchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, Auswärtiges Amt, R901/82404, 21/10/1918

<sup>12</sup> Francis Gribble, *In Luxembourg in War Time*, London, Headley Bros. Publishers, 1916, p. 58.

*Geheime Feldpolizei*, who was in the third-class compartment, did not miss any of the words of the Luxembourger. When the train arrived in the station, Dardar was arrested. This situation became difficult to accept for the Luxembourg authorities. After the politicisation of the Emile Mark affair, the Party of the Right made an address to Grand Duchess Marie-Adélaïde, in March 1915, to complain about the arbitrary arrests made by the Germans. Of the 72 citizens arrested, 94% had been released after 5 weeks and some, very rarely, after just 48 hours. Just 6% were sentenced, three for espionage, including Fournelle, sentenced to 15 years and who died in prison in early November 1918,<sup>13</sup> and Dardar, for only three months.<sup>14</sup> The Criminal Brigade also received verbal orders to make the German intelligence work more difficult by competing against it. In June 1917, the Prime Minister, Victor Thorn, former attorney general (1899-1915), formally informed “the gendarmes and police officers” that they were “by no means bound by the injunctions issued by the German military authorities”.<sup>15</sup>

With the creation of the *Zentralpolizeistelle*, Amelung continued to keep up this climate of spy mania. He completed the monitoring of telephone communications by controlling the capital city at the end of August 1915 – on 23 August an observer noted that the “decision [was] recent”. The same controls seem to have already been implemented in Diekirch since the previous winter. All telephone calls had to be made in German; a *Polizist* never hesitated to intervene in the conversation to enforce this new directive or to interrupt it if Luxembourgers didn’t comply with it.<sup>16</sup> Amelung monitored another French intelligence network – the last one remaining in the Grand Duchy for a while –, headed by the Luxembourg lawyer and director of the *Indépendance luxembourgeoise*, Marcel Noppeney. He was arrested in June 1915 for spreading propaganda, but it was a telegraph operator, Heinrich West, a month later, that pushed Amelung to transform the charge into espionage.<sup>17</sup>

This decision profoundly disorganised not only French but also overall Allied intelligence in Luxembourg. That explains the apparent calm in 1916, when no arrests or judgments for espionage or treason occurred. This really resulted from the *Zentralpolizeistelle*’s change of method. Rütter was not a policeman before the war, or a counter-intelligence specialist. Before being integrated into the German Army, he was a legal assistant to the management of the Copper Metallurgy Union Mansfeld, in Eisleben (Saxony-Anhalt). During his service in Luxembourg, he wanted to be appointed as an intelligence officer to a diplomatic post, and at the end of March 1918, he left Luxembourg for Stockholm. This lack of enthusiasm for “low policing” was seen on two occasions. The first was the seeming absence of intelligence collection on strikes, even if they could “threaten the security of the troops and the German Army interests and thus benefit the enemies of the German Reich”.<sup>18</sup> Even if, in his proclamation, Tessmar wrote “As I know”, the information did not come from Rütter but from Mossinger and Fritz Stell, director of the Differdange Deutsch-Luxemburgische Bergwerks- und Hütten-Aktien-Gesellschaft plant. And when Tessmar accused some “foreign agents”, he only pointed out “the enemy foreigners employed at the ironworks in Luxembourg, such as Belgians, French, Italians and Russians”.<sup>19</sup> Even the two Luxembourgers

<sup>13</sup> ANLux, AE-00568.

<sup>14</sup> *Luxemburger Wort*, 24/11/1914.

<sup>15</sup> Thorn to Heckman, 02/06/1915, in Ministère d’État, *Neutralité du Grand-Duché pendant la guerre de 1914-1918. Attitude des pouvoirs publics*, Luxembourg, Buck, 1919, p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Jules Mersch, « Le docteur Michel Welter et son journal », *Ibid.*, *Biographie nationale du Pays de Luxembourg depuis ses origines jusqu’à nos jours*, 14, Luxembourg, Victor Buck, 1966, p. 313; Janet Morgan, *The Secret of Rue St Roch. Hope and Heroism Behind Enemy Lines in the First World* London, Penguin, 2005, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> Gérald Arboit, « Le procès Heinrich Wetz. Une affaire d’espionnage luxembourgeoise méconnue de la Première Guerre mondiale », *Annales de l’Est*, 2014, n° 2, p. 167-188.

<sup>18</sup> Tessmar’s proclamation, 10/05/1917, in Ministère d’État, *op. cit.*, p. 78-79.

<sup>19</sup> Völsing’s proclamation, 31/05/1917, in *Ibid.*, p. 78.

arrested were done so because of a decision of the German Army and not the *Zentralpolizeistelle*!

The second occasion in which Rütter demonstrated his disinterest for counter-intelligence was the search for a French aviator. On August 1917, trying to return to Verdun, Lieutenant Rodolphe Sebenq<sup>20</sup> landed near Beaufort. Helped by a local woman, he had disappeared by the time the Dilling-sur-Sûre *Landsturm* arrived. Only three days after the Frenchman had landed and escaped, Rütter came to Beaufort but found no information to further his investigation. He was only there because “in many cases it has been proven that the enemy [the French Army], especially through planes, place[d] its agents as spies or to make attacks on artificial structures in the territories occupied by” the German Army.<sup>21</sup>

### **Punishment against Luxembourgers by the German courts<sup>22</sup>**

	Death	Life	Duration of the war	15 years	12 years	11 years	10 years	Not judged
1914	1		1					1
1915		1						
1916								
1917				1	2	2	1	
1918	3			1			1	4

Rütter seemed to be more active when he worked in collaboration with the Brussels *Zentralpolizeistelle*. This policy was followed by Sachs and Kersandt. From April 1917 to June 1918, on both sides of the border, the Germans tried to dismantle the British networks established by the Secret Service Bureau, operating from the neutral Netherlands. There were train-watching networks operated firstly by Belgians and then by Luxembourgers. But Rütter only arrested two Luxembourg agents. After him, Sachs and Kersandt detained nine people, working for three different networks. These German successes always resulted from British operator errors. The most important arrest from May to July 1918 was the result of a communication intercepted by the *Zentralpolizeistelle*.

### **Action by the Zentralpolizeistelle**

There was also another reason, rather than just Rütter’s lack of interest, to explain this apparent diminution in the success of the *Zentralpolizeistelle* after June 1915. The civilian monitoring (telephone surveillance, censorship, pass control) instituted during the winter of 1914 began to offer less information. The Luxembourg population also decided to passively resist the Germans. This was implied by Thorn’s 1917 instructions to gendarmes and policemen. In August 1917, Thorn’s successor, Kauffmann, wrote to Tessmar to inform him that the Luxembourg Government intended to intern Lieutenant Sebenq, as in similar cases during the war in Holland and Switzerland. For this purpose it would take the necessary measures to locate him. He believed he could assume that the German military authorities would undertake the obligation not to claim the aviator. In Beaufort, no one, except the wife of a German *Landsturm* member, gave any indication about the pilot and his saviours. In the same case, a member of the Luxembourg Criminal Brigade arrived a day before Rütter, not to investigate

<sup>20</sup> SHD, Air, A600393R.

<sup>21</sup> Tessmar to Kauffman, 26/08/1917, in *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> BundesArchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, Auswärtiges Amt, R901/82404, 21/10/1918

or search to “unravel the truth, but to stifle it”.<sup>23</sup> This Gendarmerie special unit also tried wherever possible to work against the *Geheime Feldpolizei* and the *Zentralpolizeistelle*. In December 1914, it identified and arrested a *Vertrauensmann*, Heinrich Kayser, ready to be tried in France.<sup>24</sup> In July 1915, it arrested, in collaboration with Amelung, the telegraph operator Heinrich Wetz, who worked for Noppene, and jailed him in a Luxembourg prison, to be tried in Luxembourg.<sup>25</sup>

This lack of collaboration from Luxembourgers was a serious impediment to German police action. Many “foreign agents” were smuggled into the neutral Netherlands by the British network in Belgium, like Lieutenant Sebenq, or finished the war comfortably installed in Luxembourg City, like the Belgian First Lieutenant Albert-Ernest Baschwitz, who had arrived by balloon in the Grand Duchy in June 1918.<sup>26</sup> The French and British secret agents coming from France, unlike those coming from the Netherlands and Belgium, could also work without being discovered.<sup>27</sup> This confirmed that the arrests from 1916 to 1918 by the *Zentralpolizeistellen* only resulted from errors by the Secret Service Bureau, operating too far from its Netherlands base and with amateur staff. A British enquiry concluded that “a certain incident where the Boche [Sachs or Kersandt] got hold a telegram” — in fact a pigeon — and a network that “always [seemed] to have been rather a precarious and uncertain one”.<sup>28</sup> If we take into account that the arrests in summer and autumn 1914 also resulted from a combination of circumstances, and those of 1915-1917 from investigations firstly carried out in Belgium, the counter-intelligence activities of the *Geheime Feldpolizei* and the *Zentralpolizeistelle* ultimately turned out to be very few. But most Luxembourgers only remembered that the German policemen were “fantastically foolish and unbelievably stupid”, as personified by Bauer, Amelung and Rütter. They were accused by Marcel Noppene when he complained about the depredations against his property by one of their agents, Gustave Scheller, in June 1915 and June 1918.<sup>29</sup>

### **Quote as:**

Arboit, Gérald. “The *Zentralpolizeistelle* Luxembourg: An unknown intelligence issue in Luxembourg during World War 1” (2018). *Éischte Weltkrich*: <https://ww1.lu/>.

<sup>23</sup> Jos[eph] H[ansen], « Il y a trois ans », *L'Indépendance luxembourgeoise*, 11 et 14 août 1920; Jean de Crécy [Joseph Hansen], « Lettre de Luxembourg. Un souvenir de guerre », *L'Est Républicain*, 18 août 1921.

<sup>24</sup> ANLux, AE-00436, Delleré, 12/12/1914.

<sup>25</sup> Gérald Arboit, « Le procès... *op. cit.* »

<sup>26</sup> Académie royale des sciences d'Outre-Mer, *Biographie belge d'Outre-Mer*, VI, 1968, col. 35-36.

<sup>27</sup> Gérald Arboit, « Espionner le Grand-duché de Luxembourg. Une guerre secrète méconnue pendant la Première Guerre mondiale », *Hémecht*, 2015, n° 1-2, p. 59-78, 133-153.

<sup>28</sup> Dansey to Bruce, 8 and 11/07/1918, in Janet Morgan, *The Secret of Rue St Roch. Hope and Heroism Behind Enemy Lines in the First World* Londres, Penguin, 2005, p. 304; Emmanuel Debruyne, « Une guerre secrète oubliée. Les “résistants” luxembourgeois face à l’occupant, 1914-1918 », Benoît Majerus, Charles Roemer et Gianna Thommes, dir., *Guerre(s) au Luxembourg. Krieg(e) in Luxemburg. 1914-1918*, Luxembourg, Capybarabooks, 2014, p. 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> *L'Indépendance luxembourgeoise*, 07/12/18, 12/06/1919, 05 and 06/07/1919, 27/06/22...