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The 175ers. Pink & Blank Triangles of Nazi Germany

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## Introduction

The Pink, and Black Triangles. Today, most individuals and historians would not have any connection with these two symbols. Who wore what symbol? The Pink Triangle was worn by homosexual men. The Black Triangles was worn by homosexual women. For many in Nazi Germany during World War II these symbols had a deep, personal, and life changing meaning. The Pink Triangles and the Black Triangles were the symbols used by the Nazis to “label” homosexual (same sex loving) men and women who were imprisoned in the concentration camps<sup>123</sup>. For the purposes of examining this history, the binary of male and female will be used, as this is the historically accurate representation of the genders persecuted and imprisoned in the concentration camps and in general by the Nazis during World War II, and persisted in post-World War II Germany.

No historical document or decision has been discovered by any historian on why the Nazis chose certain colors of triangles to “label” certain populations. In an email correspondence with the Office of the Senior Historian at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, some insight into why triangles were chosen can be addressed through the Haftgrund or reason for their arrest. <sup>4</sup> The Triangle was chosen because of the similarity to the danger signs in Germany.<sup>5</sup> The Nazi party and many Germans did see Homosexuals as a danger to society and the future of Germany.

Today, the Pink Triangle is a symbol that has be adopted by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community as a symbol of unity. Many in the LGBT community do

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Rector, *The Nazi extermination of Homosexuals* (New York: Stein and Day/Publishers, 1981), 108, 127.

<sup>2</sup> R. Amy Elman, “Triangles and Tribulations: The politics of Nazi symbols,” *Journal of Homosexuality* , 30 no. 3, (1996), 2

<sup>3</sup> Elman, 5

<sup>4</sup> Megan Lewis, email to Nick Ota-Wang, November 28, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Megan Lewis, email to Nick Ota-Wang, November 28, 2016

not know the history that surrounds this powerful, yet tragic symbol. This paper will explore the historic significance of the Pink and Black Triangles using the personal stories of survivors. These stories will be explored using oral histories and memoirs captured since the end of World War II.

History for the most part has forgotten about the 175ers, or the Pink and Black Triangle wearers, as they are often overlooked in history of the holocaust that deserve individual attention. This paper will examine the history, importance, and significance of these men and women and their contributions to historical knowledge through their own testimonies and through the research of scholars who have examined the 175ers over the past decades.

### **Historiography**

How has the history of the Pink and Black Triangles been written about, and how by the LGBT community? Unfortunately, the amount of writing on this tragic part of history has had contributions made through a few dedicated authors, which creates limited resources available to study this history. One of the primary sources that has been translated into English is Richard Plant's The Pink Triangle. In this resource, Plant provides the historian and the average reader with an overview and breakdown of the influence that the Pink Triangle has on the modern and past histories for LGBT individuals. The history of the Pink Triangles in particular has more examples than that of the Black Triangles and this is because of several important factors. These factors include: Paragraph 175, persecution of homosexual men by the Nazi regime and German citizens, and the ease of identifying these men because of Paragraph 175.

The law that essentially allowed homosexual men to be persecuted was a section of a larger law, Paragraph 175. Homosexual women technically did not break any formalized law but were still not living a "heterosexual" lifestyle. The Black Triangle was also used to categorize

more than just same sex loving women; it was used by the Nazis to categorize asocials<sup>6</sup>. This is politically significant and makes the finding of lesbian histories a challenge for historians because many identities were all put under one triangle.

The persecution of homosexual men occurred before the Nazi regime under Chancellor Hitler formed in 1933, and intensified under this leadership. Prior to the Nazi regime under Hitler, the success and failures of the homosexual-rights movement in Germany began long before World War I, but did not assume until Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) who repeatedly tried to reform the Paragraph 175 German law.<sup>7</sup> Depending on who was leading Germany, homosexual men (and to some extent) women had a lot of opportunity to love each other without fear. However, the ability to live an open and out lifestyle was not always the way that individuals could face the world.

Paragraph 175 is one part of a larger law that was passed in 1871. In 1935, under the Nazi leadership, Paragraph 175 was changed. Paragraph 175 provided ways for discrimination toward homosexual men to exist and be carried out on a daily basis in Germany.<sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup> The full law and the text that leads up to the law are included below:

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<sup>6</sup> Elman, 5

<sup>7</sup> Plant, 28-30

<sup>8</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Paragraph 175." <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/students/learning-materials-and-resources/homosexuals-victims-of-the-nazi-era/paragraph-175> (accessed 13 October 2016)

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Warren Rinaldi, "Do you remember?: Remembering gay victims of the Holocaust through Jake Heggie's Theater piece, *For a look or a touch*", Dissertation, University of North Texas, 48

*"In 1935, the Nazi regime revised Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code to make illegal a very broad range of behavior between men. This is the text of the revised law."*

#### PARAGRAPH 175

175. A male who commits lewd and lascivious acts with another male or permits himself to be so abused for lewd and lascivious acts, shall be punished by imprisonment. In a case of a participant under 21 years of age at the time of the commission of the act, the court may, in especially slight cases, refrain from punishment.

175a. Confinement in a penitentiary not to exceed ten years and, under extenuating circumstances, imprisonment for not less than three months shall be imposed:

1. Upon a male who, with force or with threat of imminent danger to life and limb, compels another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or compels the other party to submit to abuse for lewd and lascivious acts;
2. Upon a male who, by abuse of a relationship of dependence upon him, in consequence of service, employment, or subordination, induces another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such, acts;
3. Upon a male who being over 21 years of age induces another male under 21 years of age to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;
4. Upon a male who professionally engages in lewd and lascivious acts with other men, or submits to such abuse by other men, or offers himself for lewd and lascivious acts with other men.

175b. Lewd and lascivious acts contrary to nature between human beings and animals shall be punished by imprisonment; loss of civil rights may also be imposed.

English translation by Warren Johansson and William Perry in "Homosexuals in Nazi Germany," Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual, Vol. 7 (1990)."

Paragraph 175 was pretty much ignored by the city of Berlin, which helped to make Berlin a "safe haven" for the lesbian and gay communities during the 1930s and 1940s. <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Paragraph 175*, A Rob Epstein & Jeffrey Friedman film (2000, New Yorker Film, 2000)

With the changes to the Paragraph 175 law by the Nazi Party in 1935, there was a discussion about including lesbians into the updated law. Fortunately for lesbians the leadership considered lesbianism a temporary and curable condition which ultimately saved lesbians from the same discrimination and persecution homosexual men occurred<sup>11</sup>. Women were considered vessels for Germany's future, and because of this any woman who was found to be guilty of lesbianism was deemed as needing to be cured not imprisoned or sent to a camp.<sup>12</sup> Only five (5) known cases of lesbianism were persecuted and sent to the camps. For many lesbians if they survived the war they married homosexual men<sup>13</sup>. Paragraph 175 did not end at the end of World War II. The law itself was on the books and enforceable until the 1968 or 1969 depending on if you were in East or West Germany.

#### Primary sources

The use of oral histories and memoirs in this paper is to help provide the personal, real voices of those that experienced the persecution of homosexuals during the Nazi regime. Because the number of secondary sources on the Pink and Black triangles is limited, and often fact based, having the use of oral histories and memoirs provides a historical viewpoint that may not be verified by historical documentation but they help to provide significant moments of history that would otherwise be lost to time. The historical significance which will be discussed later in greater detail is that as far as can be discovered no survivors of the Pink or Black Triangles are still alive, so their recorded experiences are all that historians have to help record and keep this vital part of history.

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<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

<sup>13</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

## Secondary sources

This paper utilizes multiple types of secondary sources: historical chapter books, dissertations, peer reviewed articles, non-peer reviewed articles, and films. Because primary sources are limited due to many factors, secondary sources served as a strong base for a good amount of the background and the ability to find primary sources for this paper.

Because primary sources for the Pink and Black triangles are challenging to discover and will most likely have limited to no, new additions this paper has the need to rely on the research of historians through their secondary books on the topic. Key to this is Richard Plant's book. In this book Plant lays out a lot of the history, some of which is not found in any other source. Plant also is referenced by other historians and writers regarding the Pink Triangles. Almost every secondary source from dissertations, and movies, to articles either cite or mention Plant's book. His book provides a good base understanding for historians, and p a way to end the silence toward the fate of homosexuals under the Third Reich<sup>14</sup>

Many dissertations in many disciplines have dealt with parts of this overall research paper. The use of these dissertations is to help give another perspective to the secondary and at times primary sources around this topic. None of the dissertations that are used in parts of this paper are by historians, but they do come from other disciplines that used history and presented history as part of their broader research.

Peer-reviewed articles that discuss the Pink or Black Triangles are few in number. The few articles that are available either offer background information or give some explanation for

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle the Nazi war against homosexuals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 19

various viewpoints around memory, and facts. The only peer reviewed article that was found to be helpful for this paper is written by Erik Jensen where he looks at the Pink Triangle, political consciousness, and the memory of Nazi persecution.

Non-peer reviewed articles are also used in this paper. One written by Geoffrey Giles looks at homophobia and sexual politics in Germany. In his article, Giles provides a case for why the persecution of homosexuals should be part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He provides evidence especially on the realities of living under the law of Paragraph 175. He discusses in great detail about the changes in the ease of persecution of homosexuals under the 1935 revised version of Paragraph 175. <sup>15</sup>

*Bent* is a film that looks at the queer community in Berlin prior to the war and the journey that one homosexual man has while surviving in a concentration camp as a Jewish man who wears the yellow star, but is also a homosexual man who through a forced proof of him not being a homosexual by Nazi guards only wears the Star of David. In this film he betrays his lover (another homosexual male), who is beaten on the train to the concentration camp and he befriends a queer man who explains the Pink Triangle and the ranking of some of the different symbols used in the camp. As one prisoner best said it from the film "Pink is as low as you can get" <sup>16</sup> The real view of the daily lived experiences of all concentration camp prisoners but especially those that wore the Pink Triangle is apparent in the film and extremely eye opening, terrifying, sad, and inspiring. The film demonstrated the overall hatred the Nazis had for anyone

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<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey J. Giles, "Why bother about homosexuals? Homophobia and sexual politics in Nazi Germany" (J.B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Annual Lecture, United States Holocaust Museum, Washington. D.C., May 30, 2001). 8

<sup>16</sup> *Bent*, directed by Sean Mathias (1997; MGM Home Entertainment, 2003), DVD.

who was not part of the Arian race, but the deep divide that even different symbols had in the camps is deeply apparent.

Paragraph 175 is a film that explores some of the history around the legal reasons that the Nazis could persecute homosexuals but it also provides some firsthand accounts from survivors. A few survivors that have other memories and provide testimony in this paper will explore include: Gad Beck, and Pierre Seel. Both of these men wrote memoirs that have been translated into English. The film also includes oral histories with Gad Beck, Pierre Seel and a few other men and a woman. These interviews will be included with the oral histories below.

In addition to hearing from individuals who have provided their stories to historians for generations to come, interviews with other survivors who do not have oral histories or memoirs available through other reference sources also provide testimonies. One of the common themes of testimony that all who are interviewed for this film discuss, is the common remembrance of those that did not survive and the appearance of survivor guilt for those that did survive. For many of the homosexual men who were persecuted under Paragraph 175 the only escapes if they survived the war was to leave Germany to other countries. Some went to England, France, the United States, or Israel.

Homosexual men were not as fortunate as their lesbian friends. The Nazis considered homosexuality to be "a contagious disease that threatened and weakened the blood of the German people"<sup>17</sup>. Homosexuals needed to be sent for re-education and/or castration.<sup>18</sup> In the

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<sup>17</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

<sup>18</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

camps, homosexual men were castrated or put to hard labor rather than sent to the gas chambers strictly because they were Christians not Jews.<sup>19</sup>

Paragraph 175 was not only a law for decades following the end of the war but it continued to be the basis for persecution of homosexual men legally. East Germany's version of the law was kept on the books until 1968, West Germany retained the Nazi version of the law until 1969.<sup>20</sup> The men who later in this paper share their story through either memoir or oral history chose to share their story at a later date because Paragraph 175 was no longer going to put them into danger of being arrested for being who they are.

## **Memory**

One important aspect of this paper is to think about the impact that memory can have. Memory can be a tricky but important part of the larger puzzle that a historian would face. One important reminder of the that historians need have when looking into some of the darkest moments of our global history, is that memory can be hard, emotional, and may not have been thought about by an individual for weeks, months, and even years. Through the use of all the variety of sources that are discussed below, at times readers and historians can see the resurfacing of a memory is hard on the individual.

Dori Laub discusses memory and the challenge that the Pink and Black Triangles bring forward to historians. All oral histories require that there be a teller and a listener. According to Laub, “the listener to the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma, faces a unique situation.... [The listener] comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a

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<sup>19</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

<sup>20</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

record that has yet to be made”<sup>21</sup> The memory that is shared by a survivor is not only lived by the survivor but the interviewer, and by anyone listening to the oral history later in life. This same idea can also be applied to memoirs. Memoirs instead provide the opportunity for someone to read the story and become part of the narrative. Historians though live by facts, and when possible verifiable facts. A challenge that many historians pose to any type of evidence that comes from a testimony is to verify it with paper based evidence. Laub helps to challenge this idea when he mentions a historian he is working on an oral history with and this historian demonstrates the “firm conviction that the limits of [a survivors] knowledge in effect called into question the validity of [the] whole testimony,”<sup>22</sup> Many historians, including some featured in Paragraph 175 and taped interviews, hesitate to accept and use an oral history because of the validity. Daub also reminds the historian and the listener that it is important to be careful while being part of a testimony not to obstruct, coerce or overshadow what is being told.<sup>23</sup> The tale being told is one of the individual and should be respected.

Another way to think about memory when looking at the Pink Triangles is to consider collective memory. Collective memory is defined as “a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past,”<sup>24</sup> and this collective memory is considered to be one of the main ways historians can help to explain the limited but still amazing testimonies available from the 175ers. The gay men and lesbians, fear of persecution in East Germany, West Germany and Austria following the war is part of the reason why there are few . This individual, and collective memory of fear, as well as the individual and collective memory of many survivors to not have to remember what happened

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<sup>21</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. (New York: Tayler & Francis Group, 1992), 57

<sup>22</sup> Laub, 61

<sup>23</sup> Laub, 62

<sup>24</sup> Erik N. Jensen, “The Pink Triangle and political consciousness: gays, lesbians, and the memory of Nazi persecution” *Journal of the history of sexuality* 11, no. 1 &2 (2002): 321.

to them is part of the larger reason why the amount of testimony collected is limited and often not recorded in English. <sup>25</sup>

### **Male Homosexuality Testimonies through oral history**

Male homosexuals who shared their oral histories lived very different lives from each other even during the war. Some were openly out about their sexuality. Some came out post war. Some did not share their stories until many years later when they saw the opportunity to share their stories after hearing others. Many of the homosexual men who this paper will highlight as examples of homosexual men who were forced to wear the Pink Triangle in the Nazi concentration camps are no longer with us. Thankfully for the world, their stories have been preserved through individual testimonies collected by many museums and foundations who saw the importance of not letting their stories be lost to history. The oral histories, and tales of individuals this paper will highlight are: Kurt von Ruffin, Paul Gerhardt Vogel, and Teofil (Stefan) Kosinski and an anonymous survivor. These men are only a handful of the many men who were persecuted for who they were. Like their Jewish, and other camp prisoners these men suffered through one of the saddest historical events of the twentieth century.

### **Kurt von Ruffin**

Kurt von Ruffin was an actor and a singer. He originally came to Berlin in 1930 hoping to make it in the film industry. <sup>26</sup> Like many, Kurt had a long list of goals and ambitions that he could not fulfill once the Nazis imprisoned him, which affected his entire life. He was captured he was only imprisoned for nine months,<sup>27</sup> however it is clear that those nine months changed his

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<sup>25</sup> Jensen, 321

<sup>26</sup> *We were marked with a big A*, directed by Joseph Weishaupt and Elke Jeanro (1991; Washington D.C., United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1991), DVD.

<sup>27</sup> Big A

life. Kurt was able to provide historians, and others with the stories of not only his experiences but those of others who were “lucky. He mentions during his interviews about Gustav Grueendegens who was another homosexual and Hubert von Mayernick. Mayernick is important because he mentions a skill that made him lucky and that is the skill to be able to bribe the Nazi’s. <sup>28</sup> Mr. von Ruffin is not sure who “exposed” him to the Nazis but he assumes that he was most likely tortured horribly. He wanted to make it clear that because his accuser and he were both homosexual men that he was never involved with him never! <sup>29</sup>

The film that he was interviewed in has a unique title which brought out the question of why such a title would be used when looking at the Pink Triangles specifically<sup>30</sup>. He did not want to talk about the real meaning but according to the back of the DVD the real meaning of the “A” was “Arschficker” (ass-fucker). Before the Pink Triangle was adapted as the main means of marking homosexuals the big ‘A’ was put on a yellow cloth and was worn by force on the legs of the homosexual men who were unfortunate enough to have such a label placed on them. During his interview Mr. Von Ruffin tells a story of what he told a local person when she encountered him wearing it while on a delivery from the camp. While in the camp he had the privilege of taking clothing to be fixed by a tailor who lived nearby. During one of the visits the tailors wife asked him what the ‘A’ stood for, and he told her “Ausgang” which translates into an individual who had permission to leave the camp for short periods of time.<sup>31</sup> During his interview Mr. von Ruffin mentions a powerful means of survival “you learned to turn off your emotions. It was very important to do it, otherwise you couldn’t survive” <sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Big A

<sup>29</sup> Big A

<sup>30</sup> Big A

<sup>31</sup> Big A

<sup>32</sup> Big A

Mr. Von Ruffin does bring to light a few things that historical documents cannot, and that is what a survivor remembers. While talking with a historian at the Lichtenburg camp, he mentions his experiences, and the experiences that other homosexual men had at the camp. The historian repeatedly says, “we cannot verify that actually happened.” As a historian, it is important for historians to remember that sometimes the only history we have is from testimony, and may not be in official records. In the end, he was one of the lucky ones. When he was released from the camp, he was sent to Berlin, and his lawyer could get his Gestapo file destroyed,<sup>33</sup> which meant he was left alone by the Nazis for the remainder of the war.

### **Paul GerdhardVogel**

Born in 1915 in Leipzig, GerdhardVogel was a young communist, who refused to be a Hitler flagbearer.<sup>34</sup> He was imprisoned in 1933 for five years and returned to a camp in 1940, because he loved another young man and was denounced.<sup>35</sup> GerdhardVogel described in great detail the experiences of the Pink Triangles within the camps. While in the camps he describes how the Pink Triangles were treated by the guards and other prisoners. If two men were assumed or seen together they were called “faggots, pigs and beaten up”<sup>36</sup> He describes the type of work he had to do, which included being in a snow shoveling detail in Norway in the winter and being a road maker in the other seasons. His work was one of great extremes, either bitterly cold or too hot. The other valuable contribution he made is looking at the aftermath that homosexuals experienced, if they survived.

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<sup>33</sup> Big A

<sup>34</sup> Big A

<sup>35</sup> Big A

<sup>36</sup> Big A

After he was liberated by the British he was given a document by the British attesting to his long years of camp imprisonment. A picture of the official document is below and it says, “On February 22, 1940, Gerhard Vogel, born January 29, 1915 at Leipzig, was convicted to 3 months of prison and to lose of civil rights for 3 years. He served his time fourfold,”<sup>37</sup> He also was provided a medical affidavit, which attested to his damaging aftereffects of his imprisonment. The affidavit said, “psychologically, the patient is depressed and very fearful, as a result of the harsh concentration imprisonment for many years, during the entire Nazi period”<sup>38</sup> Neither document helped him get any form of compensation. At the time of the interview he was living in a small room and all attempts to get him reparations failed. He voiced a profound thought at the end of his interview and that is that “memory follows you everywhere!”<sup>39</sup> Memory stays with the individual and if shared can be shared with time.

### **Anonymous man**

One of the perceptions of camps that many do not immediately think about is the fact that there were so many men who did not want to share their stories. These gentlemen did not want to share their stories because of the fear of being discriminated against. The story of this survivor is a tale that you could almost compare to tales told by Jewish survivors. On January 23, 1937 he was hauled out of his bed and sent to a camp<sup>40</sup>. He describes being frightened and having a continuous fear of discrimination. He did not want to provide his name, or any other details about himself.

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<sup>37</sup> Big A

<sup>38</sup> Big A

<sup>39</sup> Big A

<sup>40</sup> Big A

## Male Homosexuality – Oral History

Male homosexuals who shared their oral histories provide us with many individual accounts of time under Nazi Germany. Very few of these men are as brave as the men that shared their stories through memoirs. Because oral histories are not as easily discovered, these men were yes being brave by providing their testimonies but they did not have to do so in such a publicly accessible medium as the memoir providers have. The pure number of stories that are shared by oral history far surpasses those of memoirs. Many factors lead into this, but the primary one is the ability of an individual man to feel safe and welcome to share his story with the world. The men below who shared their stories through memoirs provided an in depth, and at times horrific recall of a horrible part of our history. These men were brave, and pioneers for sharing their stories for the world. Reading their stories makes the memory of what they have gone through all the more challenging but encouraging. The memoirs which cover the experiences of homosexual men include those by: Pierre Seel, Gad Beck, and Josef Kohout “Heinz Heger”

### **Pierre Seel**

Pierre Seel was not the first to write a memoir about his experiences under the Nazis. His memoir Liberation was for others Memoirs of a Gay survivor of the Nazi Holocaust, took nearly forty years to be told. During World War II he was living in France, which was defeated by Germany, and the Treaty of Versailles was “ripped up”. He describes in his memoir the changes in the laws that he was forced to live under. One law included the French language and the regional German dialects being outlawed. <sup>41</sup> Being in France, Mr. Seel was not aware the dangers

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<sup>41</sup> Pierre Seel, *Liberation was for others memoirs: of a Gay survivor of the Nazi Holocaust* (New York: De Capo Press, 1997), 18

that his homosexuality would have for him. In France, they were not made aware of the German Nazi persecution of the homosexuals since 1933.<sup>42</sup> Seel describes his arrest and the interrogation he went through to assist the Germans in identifying other homosexuals to persecute. When he was eventually taken to a camp he was taken to Schirmeck camp (located in the valley of the Bruche River in north-eastern France<sup>43</sup>) in May 1941, where his civilian clothes were taken and he was issued a camp uniform which had a small, enigmatic blue bar on his shirt and cap. This blue bar labeled him as Catholic, asocial, and homosexual. <sup>44</sup> Unlike his German counterparts, he never wore the Pink Triangle, but he did see it in a neighboring camp, Struthof. <sup>45</sup> Seel lived from the age of 17-22 in and out of camps. The Nazi released him and re-imprisoned him in the camps on numerous occasions. He saw men murdered in front of him, he lived in daily fear. Even after the war Seel lived in fear and shame. Even after being “cleared” by the Nazis he could not live as a homosexual. Coming from a family who ran a respected patisserie, and had money, his family image was too important, and he felt it was his duty to ensure the family image stayed strong. <sup>46</sup>He chose to not live his homosexual feelings to help protect his families image and to try and make his life better for himself and for any future spouse. Following in his parents’ footsteps he decided to get married, using a marriage bureau in Paris. In 1950 he married the woman who answered his add, and he would eventually have children<sup>47</sup>. In 1981, at a meeting in a bookshop, Seel originally agreed to share his story if he could remain anonymous. He was still married and did not want to harm his marriage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Seel, 22

<sup>43</sup> Seel, 28

<sup>44</sup> Seel, 29-30

<sup>45</sup> Seel, 30

<sup>46</sup> Seel, 3

<sup>47</sup> Seel, 105-107

<sup>48</sup> Seel, 123

## Gad Beck

Unlike Seel, Gad Beck tells the tales of not only his family of his ever evolving homosexuality. In his memoir *An Underground Life* he brings the reader into his life of hiding and the evolution of his own identity as a homosexual man. Gad Beck not only knew about his own homosexuality from a young age, but unlike the experiences that Pierre Seel had, and spending years hiding relying on friends to help him hide. In 1945, Mr. Beck was finally faced with a camp. His friend Paul Dreyer was arrested by the Gestapo, and the address where Mr. Beck was hiding was shared to the Nazis because Paul was beaten severely during his interrogation.<sup>49</sup> Gad was in prison until April 1945 when he was released.<sup>50</sup> Gad would go on to help his Jewish community in Berlin and Israel. His memoir is an example of having a different perspective to the war. Rather than immediately being taken into custody like so many, he spent years hiding and fearing capture.

## Josef Kohout

The story of Josef Kohout is similar to other survivors but his contribution to history is unique. His prisoner number was 1896.<sup>51</sup> We know his number because the camp uniform he wore survived and a piece of it is now in the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. He was born in 1917 to a wealthy family in Austria. Having survived the camp, his story is similar to that of so many other Pink Triangles. He was able to provide a unique piece of evidence to history, his number and his Pink Triangle. The below picture is a picture of his number of his number

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<sup>49</sup> Gad Beck, *An Underground Life the memoirs of a gay jew in Nazi Berlin* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 147-148.

<sup>50</sup> Beck, 163

<sup>51</sup> Ken Setterington, *Branded by the Pink Triangle* (Canada: Second Story Press, 2013), 65

with the down pointing Pink Triangle. The cloth itself is two inches long and less than an inch wide and is at his permanent home at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C.<sup>52</sup>



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### **Heinz Heger for an anonymous survivor**

Heinz Heger's memoir provides details about being a Pink Triangle. His memoir titled "The Men with the Pink Triangle. The true, life and death story of homosexuals in the Nazi death camps" goes into details about an Austrian man's initial arrest, his arrival and time in the camp, the treatment of homosexuals while in the camps, and how he ultimately was able to return to home. This man wanted to remain anonymous but the tale that he tells and is written by Heger is a great example of a primary source that history could have lost.

Similar to Jewish citizens, this man was summoned to SS headquarters by a summons. This man like other homosexual men knew the danger of being "found out" as a homosexual male. In his memoir he describes in detail about his initial interview with the SS officer. During the interview he describes the SS officer and shows him a picture of him and a friend Fred. In the picture the two boys have their arms over each other's shoulders in a friendly fashion.<sup>54</sup> What caused the photo to have the SS label him a homosexual is what was written on the back of the

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<sup>52</sup> Setterington, 64-65

<sup>53</sup> Setterington, 65

<sup>54</sup> Heinz Heger, *The men with the Pink Triangle the true life-and-death story of homosexuals in the Nazi death camps* (Boston, Massachusetts: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1994), 21

photo “to my friend Fred in eternal love and deepest affection!”, the photo was given to Fred as a Christmas gift in 1938<sup>55</sup> Because the handwriting on the back was his, he was handed a sheet to sign and was taken off to prison. While in prison he was introduced to a term that other testimonies and contemporary authors discuss and that is the term “175er”, which refers to the Paragraph 175 law and being a homosexual male.

In the camp, he is introduced to the idea that he would be wearing the Pink Triangle. Pink Triangles were placed into similar view points of Jews, and Gypsy’s but the difference was Pink Triangles were considered “the lowest of the low...scum”.<sup>56</sup> Pink Triangles were prioritized for medical experiments and many did not survive the camp. <sup>57</sup>

His time in the camp is a time of constantly making sure he does not break any rules. The punishments he describes are awful. One of the things that he mentioned is the medical treatments that homosexual men had to endure. The SS also had the idea that they could “cure homosexuality” by having homosexual men “discover” the joys of being with a woman. Heger makes a telling statement about the reason why this does not work when he said that his “homosexual orientation was reinforced”, especially after he was forced to be with women while under guard watch. <sup>58</sup> Many homosexual men never survived the camps. Even those that claimed to be cured by being intimate with women were lied to by the SS officers about their freedom. Examples of this are heard in the movie Bent and in this memoir. The injustice that these men faced for being who they really are is one of the saddest parts of reading this memoir.

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<sup>55</sup> Heger, 22

<sup>56</sup> Heger, 32

<sup>57</sup> Heger, 34

<sup>58</sup> Heger, 100

The escape and the rescue by the Americans also tells a story about the individual's ability to trust. The first night on the run after escaping from the camp, he and other prisoners come across a farm. He of course is hungry and suggests that they ask the farmer for food. The other prisoners are worried about asking because he could turn them over to the German Military Police. He decides to risk it and is greeted with a good meal from the farmer. The next morning, he is woken by the approaching tank of the Americans. He ends up going back to his sister's house where he is reunited with his family.<sup>59</sup>

### Female Homosexuality – Oral History

Initially the research effort to find any type of female homosexual oral history was challenging. However, there are women who shared their stories, and helped the world to see the story of women who wore the Black Triangle because of their sexual identity. One challenge for historians and for museum archivists has been the Black Triangle and its multiple identity usage. The Black Triangle was used to identify many who the Nazis deemed as asocial, and the only way for historians to know who the lesbians were from these various women is if either a woman self-identified as a lesbian or she is labeled a lesbian through another person's testimony or through actual documentation.<sup>60</sup> Lesbians were persecuted for not following the social norms they should have rather than their sexual identity. Because lesbians had to self-identify, the historical backing for having lesbians persecuted because of their sexual identity is rare and hard to uncover. Some women openly discuss their lesbianism, others mention that lesbianism occurred but never opening admit to being part of the culture. The stories of the identified women and the woman who did not want to be identified for her interview help to show the

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<sup>59</sup> Heger, 115

<sup>60</sup> Isabel Meusen, "Unacknowledged victims: love between women in the narrative of the Holocaust. An analysis of memoirs, novels, film and public memorials, (Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2015), 52

experiences of wearing a Black Triangle for women during the concentration camps and Nazi German leadership. The individual women whose tales will be shared include: Frieda Belinfante, Susan Cernyak-Spatz, an anonymous Lesbian “P”, and Annette Eick.

### **Frieda Belifante**

Frieda Belinfante, born in 1904 in Amsterdam, Netherlands provides a lesbian oral history<sup>61</sup>. She is able to describe some of the ways that lesbians were treated in the camps, and helps to provide some details about the overall experience of lesbians in the concentration camps. Her experience in the camps is best described as survival. Below is a description of her provided by the United States Holocaust Museum:

she describes her family; being raised without a religion because her father was Jewish and her mother was Gentile; the death of her sister in 1915 after an appendectomy and the divorce of her parents soon after; the death of her father in 1923 from natural causes; not being surprised by the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands; getting married in 1931 and divorcing in 1936; becoming the first female conductor of a professional orchestra in Amsterdam; participating in the cultural commission of Amsterdam and receiving instructions from the Nazis about what artists should or should not do; making false identification cards to help save people; discovering her homosexuality but trying to keep it a secret during the war; living disguised as a man for three months; taking on a new female identity and fleeing to Switzerland; participating in several activities of sabotage with other gay and lesbian refugees; returning to Amsterdam after the war and

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<sup>61</sup> Frieda Belfinante, “Collections”, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 2016, [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504443](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504443)

discovering the fates of the members of the resistance group in which she participated;  
 immigrating to the United States in 1947 for a change of scenery in her work;  
 participating in a string of concerts in the US; and her life in America<sup>62</sup>

The name of individual camps is not discussed by her at any point during her interview. Other survivors also do not share details such as camp names, the assumption that can be made is that she did not share the camp names because of fear and discrimination which many survivors faced even years after the camps were closed.

### **Annette Eick**

Born in 1909. Annette provides a glimpse into the world that both men and women had prior to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. She amusingly discusses the clubs and how going to the clubs opened her eyes to the different types of men and women in the community. She described the really feminine men and the very masculine women. <sup>63</sup> Annette was also able to discuss how the lesbian community came together to help protect each other. She was one of the lucky ones. She was able to leave Germany and go to England before the war started. She spoke affectionately about a lesbian who helped saved her she was able to get to England prior to Annette and was able to help get her a ticket to England<sup>64</sup> During the war and after Annette was able to live in the English country side with a lover where she wrote poetry. As of 2016, her living or passing is not known but she was able to give some examples of a female perspective which is rare and refreshing to listen to as a Historian.

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<sup>62</sup> USHMM online archive – Belfinante

<sup>63</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

<sup>64</sup> Paragraph 175 movie

## Female Homosexuality

Compared to the women who shared their experiences through oral history interviews, the women who shared their stories through written memoirs were rare. One book is a collection of stories of lesbians during the third Reich. The below women are all included in the book, and each helps to tell a part of the tale and history that lesbian women faced during the war. The women that will be included are: Hilde Radusch, Anneliese W. or “Johnny” , Gertude Sandmann, and Ruth Margarete Roellig

### **Hilde Radusch**

Hilde was arrested originally as a political prisoner. She describes the conditions in the prisons within a city. She is one of the lucky ones. She never went to a concentration camp, and was released in September 1933.<sup>65</sup> In August 1944 she went underground after being warned by a friend that was going to be arrested again for her relationship with Eddy (a woman she met between 1933 and 1944).<sup>66</sup> She was eventually liberated by the Russians but was starving and was able to live as a “real citizen” again.

### **Anneliese W.**

Anneliese is her real name. But all her friends called her Johnny, a nickname given to her at a labor service job. <sup>67</sup> She never spent time in a concentration camp but heard from her friend’s post war what living in a camp was like. Johnny is another lucky story, but she is able to

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<sup>65</sup> Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of masquerade life stories of lesbians during the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 34.

<sup>66</sup> Schoppmann, 37

<sup>67</sup> Schoppmann, 41

provide stories about her friends going away from years. She assumes it is to a concentration camps but she had no way to be sure.

### **Gertrude Sandmann**

Ms. Sandmann knew from early on that she “felt closer to women than to men”<sup>68</sup>. She was an artist with a lifelong hope that her art would help to create a greater sense of humanity and help to build bridges from person to person.<sup>69</sup> Her hope when World War II began was to leave Germany and get to a safer location. She was able to arrange tickets to England through an English art dealer but by the time the war had begun and the visa she received was essentially useless.<sup>70</sup> She is sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp where she is threatened with deportation because she had not performed slave labor.<sup>71</sup> Her art work is a medium which helps to show the despair and desperation that women, especially lesbians had to face during World War II in Germany and throughout Europe.

### **Ruth Margarete Roellig**

Ms. Roellig was a lesbian who wanted to ensure that the other lesbians in the community had a place to come to should they need a safe place. One testimonial of Roellig’s wanting to help others describes Roellig as an individual who would let anyone show up for lunch<sup>72</sup>. She wanted to make sure that even during the war she could be there for others in the community.

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<sup>68</sup> Schopmann, 80

<sup>69</sup> Schopmann, 86

<sup>70</sup> Schopmann, 82

<sup>71</sup> Schopmann, 83

<sup>72</sup> Schopmann, 137

### Historian use of oral history

Oral history is a history built around people, <sup>73</sup> and the use of oral history throughout this paper is bring forward stories and experiences that can be connected back to one common historic event, the Holocaust in Europe (Germany). Oral history is a history that is hard and sometimes impossible to verify. The use of oral history by historians can open the door to a lead away from paper documentation, rather allowing a historian to craft their own skills of interpretation. <sup>74</sup> This paper has really shaped my historical lens into one of seeing the importance of using any resource possible to gather history and help to preserve it for future generations.

### Historian's use of memoir's

Memoirs, similar to oral histories can be challenging for historians to use. Memoirs like oral histories rely on the memory of a person and their memory might not align with paper documents. Memoirs are an avenue that allows for a historian to have the unique chance to work through their individual ability to interrupt, and report history. Not every historian will tell history in the same way, and memoirs are a great evidence to help demonstrate parts of history that might have been forgotten.

### Contribution

Prior to researching this topic, the thought that homosexuals were persecuted, executed, and treated poorly under the Nazi government was something that never crossed an idea of many historians on who a victim of the holocaust is. By researching this paper and combining the Pink

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<sup>73</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past oral history*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21.

<sup>74</sup> Thompson, 71

and Black Triangle testimonies into one paper, this paper helps to add to the limited but excellent research done by prior historians. Very few historians have looked at this topic, and the majority of the research and writings done on this topic was completed in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s just as the last of the survivors were getting into their 80s and 90s. As of 2011, the last known Pink Triangle survivor passed away. This collection of testimonies using different archives, documentary film, and secondary sources provides the reader with a unique combination of telling the tales of the many men and women who were persecuted for being who they are.

### Significance

What makes this paper so significant? First, the immediate first consideration when an individual hears about the Pink and Black Triangle. A common question is always, “what are the Pink and Black Triangles”, or a common phrase is always “I did not know that those were even populations that were persecuted during the Holocaust”. For history, historians, readers, and anyone who might have the opportunity to read this paper the amount of new knowledge that might be captured from this paper helps to make it a significant contribution to the world historical knowledge.

### Concluding thoughts

Homosexual history is not something that many have the interest in studying, or are hesitant to explore. The stigma even today of examining anything LGBTIQ is a force that makes the idea of exploring anything around homosexuality or gender identity in history something that not all historians would feel the academic freedom to explore. As a historian, the importance of exploring the history that others might not explore is important. The men and women who died during the Holocaust should not have their voices, stories, and memory lost to history. This paper

is for all those that were not able to survive to tell their stories, and for all those that did survive and were brave enough to tell their stories to the world. Pink and Black pride lives strong, and a thank you to all those impacted by the Holocaust is why this paper and this research had to happen. The opportunity to provide other historians a glimpse into an overlooked group of survivors help makes this paper an important addition to the historical knowledge of Holocaust history known.

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