

Armed With Prayer in an Alcatraz Dungeon: The Wartime Experiences of Four Hutterite C.O.'s in Their Own Words

DUANE STOLTZFUS*

Abstract: In the spring of 1918, four young Hutterite men from the Rockport Colony in South Dakota were conscripted into the U.S. army and forced to report to a military training camp at Camp Lewis. Because they refused to wear a military uniform or comply with other orders, the men were court martialed and sentenced to twenty years of hard labor at the infamous federal military prison at Alcatraz. After enduring abusive prison conditions at Alcatraz for several months, the men were transferred to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas where, in December of 1918, Joseph and Michael Hofer died of their mistreatment. Although the basic outline of this account is relatively well-known, the recent discovery of several significant caches of letters—exchanged between the men and their families—sheds new light on this painful story.

On May 25, 1918, four young farmers left their home at the Rockport Colony in South Dakota, bound for Camp Lewis in Washington. They were the most reluctant of draftees, these three Hutterite brothers—David, Joseph, and Michael Hofer—and their fellow colonist, Jacob Wipf. In keeping with Hutterite convictions born in the sixteenth century and tested time and again since then, they believed that followers of Jesus must renounce all violence, including service in the armed forces, at any cost. While traveling by military train to Camp Lewis, the four received an ominous introduction to life in the army. A band of rowdy young soldiers took them away one by one and cut off their beards and trimmed their hair close to the scalp. On their arrival at Camp Lewis, the Hutterite men refused to drill or wear a uniform or perform work of any kind. They were immediately confined to the guardhouse. The men bode their time, hands manacled but eyes free to peer through small windows and in that way track the rhythms of camp life. They were court-martialed on June 10 and subsequently sentenced to twenty years of hard labor at Alcatraz, the federal military prison in the San Francisco Bay. Since they would not put on uniforms at Alcatraz, they had only underwear for clothing in the dank and pitch-black basement, where

*Duane Stoltzfus is a professor of communication at Goshen (Ind.) College. He is currently completing a book manuscript about conscientious objectors during World War I, focusing on the story of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf.

they languished on a diet of water and bread. Since they would not work, guards strung them up by chains so high that their feet barely touched the floor.

In November, when the military authorities ordered a transfer, guards accompanied the men, all four in chains, to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Once they detrained, the Hutterites were herded like cattle to the prison, guards prodding them along with bayonets. The men, who had been overheated on the railroad car, caught a chill during the forced march and later, when they were kept waiting outside of the prison. Within days, Joseph and Michael Hofer were transferred to the military hospital. Summoned by telegram, the wives of the men traveled by train; through an apparent miscommunication with railway officials, they went first to Fort Riley. By the time the women arrived at Fort Leavenworth, on the night of November 28, the men were barely able to speak. Joseph died the following morning. What he would not wear in life he was forced to wear in death; the authorities dressed his body in military khaki for transport back home to the colony. Michael died on December 2. David was released a few days later, free to return to the home colony in Alexandria, South Dakota, and Jacob Wipf followed the next spring, on April 13, 1919.

The core of this narrative is well known to attentive readers of Anabaptist-Mennonite history. Jacob Wipf and the three Hofer brothers represent arguably the most extreme example of conscientious objector abuse during the war; for those who sought to indict the government for its handling of resisters, these four Hutterites became exhibit A.¹ Within the Hutterite community, Joseph and Michael Hofer came to serve as exemplars of Christian nonresistance. The brothers are well remembered, to be sure, but not celebrated in a way that would lift the men above any others in the community. Joseph and Michael were buried at Rockport, in a hillside cemetery, where their ankle-high metal grave markers are pinned in the ground, offering a panel large enough to fit their names and dates of birth and death but little else. The Hofer markers are indistinguishable from those of their brethren neighbors except for a single appended word: "martyr." When the Hofer brothers died, a hometown paper, *The Freeman Courier*, ran a one-sentence notice that appeared on page 8 as part of a series of dispatches from the Wolf Creek region: "The two sons of Jacob Hofer of Rockport died in a Wash. camp [sic] and were buried at home."² The next item in the column read: "The

1. When Theodore H. Lunde submitted a list of mistreated conscientious objectors to Congressman Hubert S. Dent, chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs, he placed Jacob Wipf and the Hofer brothers first in line.—"Examples of Brutalities, Tortures and Deaths to Political Prisoners Under Military Regime," January 1919.

2. "Wolf Creek," *The Freeman Courier*, Dec. 5, 1918.

Neu Hutterthal church decided to buy a paper cutter for Bartel of China"; and below that, "Sam K. Hofer is building a kitchen and auto shed." Six days later, the paper reported on the arrival of David Hofer, while correcting the earlier error on the place of death: "David Hofer, brother to the two who died at Leavenworth, Kansas, was discharged and came home. They are from Rockport. They were transferred from Wash. to Cal. and from there to Kansas."³ Theirs was the shortest of obituaries, little more than a mention shared by two brothers who were summoned to war and never came back.

The story of the Hofer martyrs might have remained quietly remembered within Hutterite circles had it not been for an unusual partnership between the owner of a piano hardware company in Chicago and a Mennonite journalist and professor from Kansas. The business owner, Theodore H. Lunde, carried the most personal of ties to the plight of conscientious objectors—his son, Erling, was court-martialed as an objector in 1918 and was imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth, where his detention overlapped with that of the Hutterites.⁴ Under the name of his business, the American Industrial Company, Theodore Lunde published several pamphlets related to events at Fort Leavenworth, including the deaths of Joseph and Michael Hofer. Meanwhile, the journalist, Jacob G. Ewert, a coeditor of the *Vorwärts* monthly newspaper and a professor of comparative philology at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, shared Lunde's interest in the Hofer story.⁵ Though left paralyzed and confined to bed because of rheumatism (he had use of an arm and shoulder), Ewert was a tireless advocate for conscientious objectors, writing articles and counseling many draftees. He urged young men to refuse to take up arms at military training camps. He also called on denominational leaders to be more forceful in challenging the treatment of conscientious objectors, especially the kind of prison abuse to which the four Hutterites had been subjected.

The first published account of the experiences of Jacob Wipf and the Hofer brothers appears to have been "'Crucifixions' in the Twentieth

3. "Wolf Creek," *The Freeman Courier*, Dec. 11, 1918.

4. Lunde, an immigrant from Hamar, Norway, established the American Industrial Company. Because of his refusal to make war materials during World War I, he subsequently lost his factory.

5. Jacob Ewert often spelled his surname *Evert*. For example, the Tabor College letterhead on which he wrote to Newton D. Baker, the secretary of war, on Jan. 8, 1919, identifies him as J.G. Evert. But his pamphlets in the WorldCat database are attributed to Jacob G. Ewert; *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* and Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) likewise refer to Jacob Ewert. His paternal ancestors used the name Ewert, and so Evert appears to be an Anglicized version, according to the Mennonite Library and Archives in North Newton, Kan.

Century," which was issued by Lunde's American Industrial Company in December 1918. The article, about two and a half typewritten pages in length, conveys a "nearly unbelievable tale of religious persecution" experienced by the Hutterites at Alcatraz and at Fort Leavenworth. The account tells of the deaths of Joseph and Michael Hofer and of David Hofer having been released. The source for the report is Jacob Wipf, who was confined to a hospital cot at Fort Leavenworth at the time when he told the story to an army officer.⁶ The unnamed army officer in turn shared the account with Lunde. Two months later, in February 1919, Lunde published "Desecration of the Dead by American 'Huns,'" which was based on information provided by David Hofer after his return to the colony in South Dakota. A preface to the article states: "A narrative by David Hofer, which corroborates and amplifies "'Crucifixions" in the Twentieth Century,' though rendered without knowledge of the story told by Jacob Wipf." This account, of a similar length, adds details from the assault that took place on the train to Camp Lewis and from their confinement at the camp.

The second article published by Lunde, "Desecration of the Dead," appears to have been based on an article written by Jacob Ewert, "Vier Hutterische Mennoniten im Militärkerker," for *Vorwärts*.⁷ "Desecration of the Dead" is a close translation of "Vier Hutterische Mennoniten im Militärkerker," or "The Hutterite Mennonites in Military Prison." Ewert apparently translated the German article into English for Lunde, filing the articles with the postmaster in Hillsboro, as required by federal law, on February 7, 1919. Before writing the account, Ewert was in contact with David Hofer and perhaps other family members as well.⁸ He notes in the original German-language article that at the request of family members the surnames of the four men were not included in the account. In the English-language version published by Lunde, however, the full

6. Lunde chose to conceal the identity of his source, likely to avoid repercussions for the officer. Military records show that Jacob Wipf was admitted to the hospital on Dec. 13, 1918, with acute tonsillitis, and, in the words of the authorities at Fort Leavenworth, was "returned to duty" on Dec. 18.

7. The article "Desecration of the Dead by American 'Huns'" does not carry a byline or other notation directly attributing it to Jacob Ewert. But the article closely tracks "Vier Hutterische Mennoniten im Militärkerker," which was written by Ewert and published on the front page of *Vorwärts* on Feb. 7, 1919. *The Mennonite Bibliography 1631-1961* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1977), 2:57, also cites an article by Ewert titled "Die Hutterischen Mennoniten im Militärgefängnis," which also translates as "The Hutterite Mennonites in Military Prison." A search failed to turn up a library that had catalogued such an article.

8. Information from David Hofer's letter to Jonas S. Hartzler, a member of the (Old) Mennonite Peace Problems Committee, written shortly after his release from Fort Leavenworth, on Jan. 10, 1919, may also have served as source material. The letter is on file at the Mennonite Church USA archives in Goshen, Ind.

names have been added. The Ewert article was subsequently republished on several occasions.⁹

The accounts published by Jacob Ewert and Theodore Lunde are confirmed and complemented by several sources, including the memoirs of men who shared in or witnessed the experiences of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf. Among these witnesses is Andrew Wurtz, or Andreas Wurz, a Hutterite draftee and neighbor who joined them on the train to Camp Lewis and, once there, was soon separated from them; Noah H. Leatherman, who was imprisoned at Fort Leavenworth and spoke with the four men when they arrived from Alcatraz; and Howard W. Moore, an objector who published a memoir of his time at Fort Leavenworth, which overlapped with that of the Hutterites.¹⁰

The story of the faithfulness of these four Hutterites in the midst of persecution continued to spread. Ewert's article served as a key source for a four-page account of the story published in 1947 in *Das Klein-Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder* [*The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*] by A. J. Friedrich Zieglschmid, a professor of Germanic linguistics at Northwestern University and a Hutterite scholar.¹¹ Zieglschmid also credits C. Henry Smith's *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* as well as two articles in *The Christian Exponent* (excerpts from Smith's then forthcoming book).¹² Smith, in turn, gives credit to Theodore Lunde as the source of his information.¹³

9. The article was reprinted in German in similar form in *Mennonitische Blätter* 67 (Jan. 1920), 6-8; *Gemeindeblatt Mennoniten* 51 (Sept. 1 and 15, 1920), 72-72, 76-77; and *Wahrheitsfreund* 24 (April 6, 1938), 2, 6-7. The article also appeared in English under the title "Christ or Country?" in *The Plough*, no. 4 (May 1984), 8-9. John Horsch's *The Hutterian Brethren: A Story of Martyrdom and Loyalty 1528-1931* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1931) briefly mentions the Hofer brothers and cites two sources. One is Smith's *Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927). Horsch says that he also draws from a version of the story as "reported in *Die Hutterischen Brüder im Militar-Gefängnis*, by J.G. Ewert."

10. "The Memoirs of Reverend Andrew Wurtz," ed. and trans. Karl and Franziska Peter, *Hutterite C.O.s World War I* (Hawley, Minn.: Spring Prairie, 1996); *Diary Kept by Noah H. Leatherman* (Salisbury, Pa.: Roy S. Kinsinger, 1984); and Howard W. Moore, *Plowing My Own Furrow* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993).

11. A.J.F. Zieglschmid, *Das Klein-Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder* (Philadelphia: Carl Shurz Foundation, 1947), 482-486; translated from the German by Franz Wiebe, 1974, as "The Martyrdom of Joseph and Michael Hofer, 1918." Zieglschmid cites "a printed pamphlet" by Ewert as a source for his account of the men in *Das Klein-Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder*.

12. *The Christian Exponent* published the excerpts as "Keeping the Faith, III" (July 3, 1928) and "Keeping the Faith, IV" (July 17, 1928). Both excerpts were drawn from Smith's *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites*. These excerpts, in turn, credit Theodore H. Lunde, the president of the American Industrial Company, as the source of information.

13. Smith offers no title for the account attributed to Lunde. The only publishing information is the place, Chicago, and the date, February 1919. This would correspond with "Desecration of the Dead by American 'Huns.'"

Given the limited number of known references from which to draw, the published accounts of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf have generally extended only two or three or four typewritten pages. The telling is invariably chronological, generally beginning with the train ride to Camp Lewis and ending with the deaths of Joseph and Michael Hofer at Fort Leavenworth. Some more recent versions draw on government documents to offer a more complete picture of the experience of the four men. For example, the record of their court-martial runs about forty pages, most of which is presented in question-and-answer form, a verbatim transcript of the testimony of several witnesses and of the four accused men.¹⁴

One of the most authoritative recent accounts is offered by Gerlof D. Homan in *American Mennonites and the Great War: 1914-1918*, part of the Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History series under the aegis of the Mennonite Historical Society.¹⁵ His version of the story covers three pages. After presenting the central facts, including some drawn from government records, Homan brings a historian's considered judgment to bear on the case, offering an interpretive lens that is missing in many earlier versions. Though the four Hutterites were unusual in refusing to do any work during detention, even after they had been placed in prison, Homan said, officials "surely lacked the compassion, sensitivity, and plain decency to make some allowance" for their convictions.¹⁶ Joseph and Michael Hofer were indeed, he concludes, martyrs for their faith, "victims of inhuman military and penal systems."¹⁷ Homan draws on government records, including the court-martial transcript, and two other works that are frequently cited in writings about the men: *Hutterite Conscientious Objectors and Their Treatment in the U.S. Army During World War I*—a growing collection of stories that was first assembled by Joseph K. Wipf and John Stahl and translated from the German by Karl and Franziska Peter—and *Das Klein-Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder*, edited by Zieglschmid.¹⁸

14. "Record of the Trial of Recruits David J. Hofer, Michael J. Hofer, Joseph J. Hofer, and Jacob J. Wipf," Judge Advocate's Office, 91st Infantry Division, Camp Lewis, U.S. Army, June 15, 1918.

15. Gerlof D. Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War: 1914-1918* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1994).

16. *Ibid.*, 155.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Karl and Franziska Peter, trans. and eds., *Hutterite Conscientious Objectors and Their Treatment in the U.S. Army during World War I* (Cranford, Alt.: Lakeside Hutterite Colony, 1982); A.J.F. Zieglschmid, *Das Klein-Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder* (Philadelphia, 1947). The Peters' book is a compilation of various sources, some of which have been published elsewhere, including "The Memoirs of Reverend Andrew Wurtz" and "Diary Kept by Noah H. Leatherman While in Camp During World War I."

In the most recent telling, David Laskin includes the story of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf in *The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War*, a sweeping narrative of a dozen men who were born in Europe, immigrated to the United States, and served with American forces in the war.¹⁹ The Hutterites represent a counterpoint. Like Homan, Laskin uses the trial transcript and other government records to tell the story. Laskin's account stretches to a dozen pages, as he includes a primer on Hutterite history, a glimpse of the anti-German war hysteria that swept the country (turning sauerkraut into liberty cabbage and banning Beethoven from music halls), and excerpts from the court-martial at Camp Lewis. He also credits Homan's *American Mennonites and the Great War* as well as *Hutterite CO's in World War One*, an updated and expanded version of the 1982 collection translated by the Peters.

Though deeply moving, these accounts of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf offer but a modicum of detail, generally drawn from the same small set of sources. Now, nearly 100 years after the imprisonment of the four Hutterite men, a wider window is about to open on their harrowing encounter with the American military. The recent discovery of scores of unpublished letters from the Hofer brothers makes possible a fuller and richer narrative, beginning with the storming of their train compartment by men armed with shears. Until now, the voices of the martyrs themselves, Michael and Joseph Hofer, have been largely silent in each grim retelling of the journey that ended at Leavenworth. Even David Hofer and Jacob Wipf had left but a few pages of testimony in the archival records. Grandchildren of each of the Hofer brothers have now provided copies of letters that the men sent from—and in a few cases received in—federal prison. The letters are handwritten copies of the originals, which family members said were likely buried with the men or their wives after the war. Most of the letters are written in German, with touches of Hutterisch, a dialect distinct to the Hutterites.²⁰

19. David Laskin, *The Long Way Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010).

20. John D. Roth, editor of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* and director of the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College, where he is a history professor, transcribed and translated the Joseph and Michael Hofer letters. Gerhard J. Reimer, professor emeritus of German at Goshen College, transcribed and translated the David Hofer letters, and translated various writings by Jacob Ewert. The author is grateful for their meticulous and judicious devotion to rendering a challenging German script in English. The author is also indebted to many others at the Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Ind., and the Mennonite Church USA archives in Goshen; North Newton, Kan.; and Hillsboro, Kan. Joe Springer, curator of the Mennonite Historical Library, initially noted the research potential in this wartime story; Daniel Hochstetler provided an introduction to the Michael Hofer family; Leonard Gross served as a guide to Hutterite history. In his memoir *Nightwatch: An Inquiry Into Solitude* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2009), Robert Rhodes describes the

The letters have been closely held by family members, with the grandchildren of Michael Hofer inheriting the letters of Michael Hofer, and so forth. Family members did not pursue publication of the letters or volunteer copies to a historical library. But when a researcher at work on a book about the four men visited the Miller Colony in Choteau, Montana, in February 2009, a daughter and several grandchildren of Michael Hofer shared copies of his letters. Mary Hofer Kleinsasser, age 90 at the time and the daughter of Michael Hofer, and three of her children—Sarah, Michael, and Joseph Kleinsasser—presented the letters in the home that Mary and Sarah share. The Kleinsassers, in turn, provided an introduction to Anna Hofer Wurtz, who lives at the Miller Colony and is a granddaughter of David Hofer. Anna Wurtz shared copies of the letters of David Hofer, as saved by members of his family. At the nearby Rockport Colony in Montana, Katie Jacob Waldner, a granddaughter of Joseph Hofer, said she did not have copies of any letters written by her grandfather, but she agreed to contact her cousin, Joe Hofer, of the Kyle Colony in Saskatchewan. During the author's visit at the Kyle Colony in May 2009, Joe Hofer provided copies of his grandfather's letters. To date, research inquiries have failed to turn up a comparable packet of prison letters written by Jacob Wipf.

As a whole collection, including letters written by and received by the three Hofer brothers during their time under military authority, the letters number seventy-nine. Of that number, the brothers wrote fifty-nine and received twenty. The brothers began writing on May 26, 1918, while they were en route to Camp Lewis. The saved correspondence is heaviest in the month of June, when the men were locked up in the guardhouse at Camp Lewis, awaiting court martial and then transfer to Alcatraz. Though fewer in number, there are letters from every subsequent month of captivity: July, August, September, October, and November. Michael and Joseph wrote their last letters in the collection to their wives, both named Maria, on November 17, 1918, while the men were traveling from Alcatraz to Leavenworth. In little more than two weeks, both men were dead. Most of the letters were written by the men to their spouses, with several letters directed to other family members or to colony leaders. In turn, the men received letters from their parents, siblings, and others at the colony. Frequent references to letters that failed to arrive make clear that, however substantial this saved collection, the actual body of correspondence was much greater. References in the letters themselves suggest that military officials blocked delivery of some of the correspondence, on security or other

Hutterisch language as "a veritable road map of all the places the Hutterites have lived over the centuries, from Austria to Transylvania to Ukraine and North America" (p. 78).

grounds. And in the end, family members may not have saved some letters that were delivered.

The story of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf can now be told with a greater measure of authority, detail, insight, and empathy. Just as Melanie Springer Mock used private diaries to recover the voices of four conscientious objectors in *Writing Peace: The Unheard Voices of Great War Mennonite Objectors*, so too these letters lend a kind of personal drama and poignancy to the historical record.²¹ In the accounts published before now, the four Hutterites often blur into one conscientious objector, largely undergoing the same set of experiences as a singular familial body up until the death of Joseph and Michael. The letters allow individual voices to emerge from the moment the men board the train for Camp Lewis. While the brothers certainly fall back on similar greetings and phrasings—the letters often open with a variation of “the peace of the Lord be with us and with you” and quickly assure family members that they are holding fast in the faith and staying in reasonably good health—they also serve as distinct commentators along the journey. Where one apologizes for poor penmanship because of the hurtling train, another comments on the towering mountains that speak of God’s handiwork. Letter by letter, we learn about their hardships, hopes, and theological struggles, and, as time goes by, their growing sense of apocalyptic foreboding. Perhaps above all, we can appreciate more clearly their unwavering devotion to Christ and their conviction that, whatever their travails on earth, they were heavenbound. Here follows an expanded account of the wartime experiences of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf, supplementing the core narrative with excerpts from their letters.

THE WARTIME EXPERIENCES OF FOUR HUTTERITE C.O.'S: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

Jacob Wipf and the three Hofer brothers—David, Joseph, and Michael—prepared to leave the Rockport Colony on May 25, 1918, heavy-hearted recruits bound for Camp Lewis in Washington. For the trip, they wore homemade clothes familiar in any of the seventeen colonies in South Dakota: a black jacket, black pants, plain shirt, and black shoes.²² In their satchels they packed Bibles, the book they treasured above all others, and spare sets of clothing. If they followed the

21. Melanie Springer Mock, *Writing Peace: The Unheard Voices of Great War Mennonite Objectors* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2003).

22. Interview with Joe Hofer, a grandson of the draftee Joseph Hofer, June 4, 2009. Joe Hofer lives at the Kyle Colony, near Kyle, Saskatchewan. As a young man, in his 20s and 30s, he worked alongside Jacob Wipf, who recounted his experiences in the war.

advice given to Michael A. Stahl, a Hutterite neighbor who left for Camp Funston in Kansas in September, they took only clothes not worth saving, anticipating that their personal belongings would be burned or thrown away once they arrived at camp. The army had directed the men to take as little as possible; uniforms and supplies would be issued upon arrival. The people of the colony gathered around the men that afternoon, no one knowing when they would meet again. The Rockport Colony consisted of about 25 families, numbering 180 members. The colony owned 4,000 acres, one field after another of wheat growing and cattle grazing. In the course of the war, Rockport would send ten men to military camps, more than would be drafted from any other colony in the state.

Both those who would leave and those who would stay that day appeared as if they might have been transported from a European village in the Old World. Walter G. Kellogg, an army major who interviewed hundreds of conscientious objectors on behalf of the government during the war, said it bluntly: "They remain now as their forefathers were three centuries ago. . . . Civilization, apparently, has passed them by."²³ The Hutterites were rooted in the Protestant Reformation, separated from their neighbors by large fields and old traditions. When they worshiped, as they did each day, they used an archaic form of High German, the language of their sacred hymns and sermons (around the house, they switched to a German dialect called Hutterisch). During church services, the minister would not preach a sermon of his own, but would instead read a text written in Europe centuries earlier. Why share possessions? Peter Riedemann, a church leader in the 1500s, said it plainly: "[At] the beginning God ordained that people should own nothing individually but should have all things in common with each other. . . . Therefore, whoever will adhere unwaveringly to Christ and follow him must give up acquiring things and holding property."²⁴ Why renounce war? Jakob Hutter, whose influence as an early leader would be known in part through the legacy of his name, said, "We do not want to hurt or wrong anyone, not even our worst enemy. . . . [W]e want to show by our word and deed that men should live as true followers of Christ, in peace and unity and in God's truth and justice."²⁵

The Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf were anxious over what awaited them at Camp Lewis, which was closer to the frontlines than they had

23. Walter Kellogg, *The Conscientious Objector* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 40-41.

24. John J. Friesen, ed. and trans., *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1999), 119-120.

25. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, vol. 1 (Rifton, N.Y.: Plough Publishing, 1987), 139.

ever expected to go. As baptized members of the Hutterite community, they had pledged never to take up arms, not even in self-defense. It was a pledge made by Hutterites across generations, as they sojourned from Europe to Russia to South Dakota.²⁶ After Russia announced that Hutterites and Mennonites would have to serve in the armed forces, a Mosaic delegation of ten Mennonites and two Hutterites (Paul Tschetter and his uncle, Lohrentz) visited the United States and Canada in 1873, in search of their own arable promised land and freedom from military service. The Hutterites secured an audience with President Ulysses S. Grant, who encouraged them to come to the United States and, through his secretary of state, Hamilton Fish, assured them that “for the next fifty years we will not be entangled in another war in which military service will be necessary.”²⁷ And yet, well short of fifty years, on June 5, 1917, the Selective Service Act of the federal government of the United States had required all physically able men between the ages of 21 and 30 to prepare for duty. Provisions in the act allowed the Hutterites and other conscientious objectors to avoid combat on the battlefield, but, if drafted, they still had to report to a military camp to register for noncombatant service and receive their assignment. Ministers in the colonies had instructed the drafted men that, once they arrived at training camps, they should do nothing that might be construed as advancing the war effort. The local Hanson County draft board enjoyed a great deal of latitude and could have granted the men exemptions from any military service because they had wives and children. When asked whether they had a parent, spouse, or child dependent solely on them for support, each man honestly answered no, knowing that the community would care for each member. That gave board members the latitude they needed to sign up the men for war.

Jacob Wipf and the Hofer brothers had grown up together, attending grade school at the home colony until they were pulled away to work in the fields in their early teens. They were literate to be sure, but outside of the Bible, not very well read; the community put a premium on

26. This doctrine is anchored in the New Testament, particularly Matthew 5:38-44: “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”—Biblical references draw from the King James Version.

27. J. M. Hofer, ed., “The Diary of Paul Tschetter, 1873,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 5 (July 1931), 217.

productivity in the field or in the workshop, and not in book learning. On their draft cards each described himself as of medium height and build, with brown hair. As might be expected, given the Hutterites' directive to marry within the fold, they were also related; Joseph Hofer was Jacob Wipf's brother-in-law.²⁸ The Hutterites encouraged large families, and the men and their wives were well on the way. David, who was 28, and his wife, Anna, had five children, ages 6, 5, 3, and 2, and a newborn, 3 months old. Michael, who was 24, had been married for only a year; his wife, Mary, had given birth to their first child, a daughter named after her mother, two months earlier. Third in line was Joseph, 23, who was saying goodbye to his wife, Mary, Jacob's sister, and their two children, ages 2 and 1. Mary was pregnant with a third child, who would be born in eight months. The eldest member of the group, Jacob, 30, and his wife, Kathrina, had three children, ages 7, 5, and 3. Joseph Hofer's wife, Maria, remembered that her son, Joseph, who was nearly 3, ran along behind the wagon as the men pulled away, their wives, wearing polka-dot kerchiefs, left standing in tears. The men went by dirt roads south and west to Parkston, about thirty miles away, to catch the late afternoon train. At the station they met up with Andrew Wurtz, another Hutterite, who was from the Old Elm Springs Colony, and together they boarded the train.²⁹

The men knew that they were targets for harassment, or worse; their clothing, beards, and accents gave them away as Hutterites. Resentment against the Hutterites had been mounting throughout the spring as the war effort intensified. Like all Americans of German ancestry, their loyalty was suspect. On the very day that the men left for Camp Lewis, the South Dakota Council of Defense issued the German Language Order, which prohibited all teaching of German, in public and private schools. High school students had burned German textbooks in Faulkton, in the presence of supportive board members. Across the state, and the nation, efforts to eradicate German reflected a kind of hysteria. Sauerkrat became "liberty cabbage," and hamburger turned into "victory steak." Near the town of Vermillion, South Dakota, Rhine Creek became "Marne Creek." Germania Hall in Sioux Falls, which hosted state constitutional conventions, turned into "Columbia Hall."

The Hutterites, of course, had additional strikes against them, besides their use of the German language at home, in school, and in church. As

28. In many versions of the wartime account, Jacob Wipf is mistakenly introduced as a brother-in-law of the three Hofer brothers. In fact, he is a brother-in-law of only one, Joseph.

29. In some accounts Andrew Wurtz is referred to as Andreas Wurz, the German equivalent. This article follows his lead in using Andrew Wurtz: "The Memoirs of Reverend Andrew Wurtz," in *Hutterite C.O.'s World War I*.

every South Dakotan knew, they refused to bear arms for the country or to buy Liberty Bonds or otherwise help to finance the war effort. In the face of that resistance to what most Americans regarded as an unquestioned patriotic duty, the neighbors were restive. Earlier that month, the Liberty Loan Committee of nearby Yankton, composed of prominent professionals and businessmen, decided that \$10,000 in bonds would be a reasonable quota to set for the Jamesville Colony. When the colony resisted, the committee rounded up 100 head of cattle and 1,000 sheep and drove them to Utica; from there, they shipped the animals to Yankton, where the cattle and sheep were sold for \$16,000 at auction to benefit the war campaign. The Hutterites said that the animals were worth more than two times that amount, or about \$40,000. *The Sioux Falls Press* weighed in on May 10, 1918:

Irregular? Yes, by ordinary peace standards of conduct. But these infernal ideas that are cropping up here and there in this country that an American citizen claiming the benefits of this land can choose for himself whether or not he shall help the nation protect itself against destruction are somewhat irregular too. If the Mennonites [and Hutterites] do not like the idea let them pack up what they can carry away and return to that part of Europe whence they came. We shall ask them to be so good as to leave behind the land this nation practically gave them.³⁰

Once on board the train, the five Hutterite men found themselves moved from car to car. At first, they were placed in the rearmost car, where they remained until the evening. The taunting must have begun early because before nightfall a conductor led them through the train to a different car. But the recruits here, many of whom were from Canton, South Dakota, east of the colonies, objected to having to share their space with Hutterites. The conductor, who was clearly worried about how the tensions among the men might play out, led the Hutterites to a third car, saying, "I want to give you a place where you can be by yourselves; they're supposed to behave."³¹ In this third car, fully aware of the risks they might face as pacifists on a train full of young men getting stoked for war, the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf took a precautionary measure. With a 2-by-4 piece of lumber, they barricaded the compartment door so that no one could enter the room.³² All was quiet through the night and into Sunday morning, when the men managed to have an impromptu worship service, already feeling far from home and sure in their judgment of the Americans with whom they were

30. *The Sioux Falls Press*, May 10, 1918.

31. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer, May 26, 1918.

32. Andrew Wurtz, "The Memoirs of Reverend Andrew Wurtz."

journeying. As Michael Hofer said, "We were able on Sunday until noon to be edified a little in the fear of the Lord and in the word of God, which was a special grace of God from the heavenly father. For these poor people (the world) are to be pitied as they travel along the broad path to hell."

For the Hutterite men, who were born and raised in South Dakota and likely had never before left the state, there was a sense of awe in traveling across the country. From South Dakota, the route headed west through Montana and Idaho before arriving in Washington, a distance of about 2,000 miles. They were especially impressed by the mountains, a sign of a world well made. David Hofer wrote to Anna, his wife:

He is our wise Creator, when we see his handiwork, how everything is so wisely created. We've been in the mountains all day; that's a wonder to see. Mountains . . . [thousands of] feet high, very dangerous to travel. Sometimes [the train] goes right through the mountain, into one side of the mountain and out on the other side. It's up to two miles through the mountain. Some places [we pass] under rocks; if they should come down, we'd all be buried, but our heavenly Father has protected us from encountering any accident so far.³³

For Michael Hofer, it was a wonder the mountains held fast: "Sometimes it seems as if the car will topple over since the mountains hang . . . over us as if they are falling down upon us."³⁴

David, Joseph, and Michael Hofer, as well as Andrew Wurtz, contribute to the account of what happened next. Michael Hofer wrote: "Our savior has indeed said that they will come to us in sheep's clothing, but in truth they are ravenous wolves. By their fruit they shall be known."³⁵ When the train arrived in Judith Basin, Montana, southeast of Great Falls, men knocked on the door of the compartment where the Hutterites had barricaded themselves. The Hutterites knew two of the men, William Damfer, a 30-year-old lawyer from Alexandria, and James Albert Montgomery, a farmer; all of them had registered for the draft on the same day in Beulah, South Dakota. Damfer said that he wanted to talk with them and asked that they open the door, if only a little. Wurtz described their apprehension: "Out of fear, we did not respond nor open the door for a period of time. However, as we all knew him, and as he said that we should open the door only an inch, we did not anticipate

33. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer, May 27, 1918.

34. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, May 26, 1918.

35. *Ibid.*

trouble.”³⁶ They should have known better. “They stormed our room,” Wurtz continued, “and then we were placed in great peril.”

Before the shears came out, David Hofer recalled, the intruders wanted to talk: “They began to talk about our faith and carrying [on about the] war. Then it was about our beards and together with our captain [apparently a reference to Montgomery] they carried on like hypocrites and led Jacob Wipf into another car and shaved him completely.”³⁷ The men came back and grabbed Joseph Hofer this time, and also cut off a good part of his hair and beard. Michael Hofer received the rough treatment next, followed by brother David. Only Andrew Wurtz seemed to have escaped the full treatment; the band of men—Joseph Hofer described them as “a mob”³⁸—apparently cut only a few locks of his hair before the conductor brought an end to the final barber assault (Wurtz’s hair and beard would be shorn on arrival at Camp Lewis). The conductor moved the Hutterites into a small room several cars ahead, their fourth place on the train, directing them not to let anyone else come in. As soon as they were settled, Joseph said, the men bowed their heads: “We offered up a prayer to God and asked with sighs that he would forgive them for [their actions]!”³⁹

As if to make amends, the supervisors of the train approached the men at dinner time, inviting them to eat. At first the men refused, but then agreed to go, when, as Joseph said, the supervisors promised them that they could eat together. While it is not clear whether the supervisors joined them at the table, they apparently shared warm words, as Joseph noted: “The conductor asked us whether we spoke German. We said, ‘Yes!’ He said that he can too.” With midnight approaching, Michael Hofer wanted his wife, Maria, to know that all was well: “It’s now 11:30 and time to go to sleep. We are going here so fast through the mountains and beside the mountains. If one thinks back how we have come here from our dear community, one could cry bitterly. Especially if one reflects on where we are being taken. It is deplorable. But God has promised us that he will stand and go before us if we only will trust in him.”⁴⁰ Indeed, there was no more trouble during the remainder of the trip. The train arrived at Camp Lewis in Seattle around 5 in the morning on Tuesday, May 28.

Stretching across about 70,000 acres, Camp Lewis was the largest of the army’s cantonments, both in capacity and in the number of states

36. Andrew Wurtz, “The Memoirs of Reverend Andrew Wurtz.”

37. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer, May 26, 1918.

38. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, May 26, 1918.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, May 26, 1918.

whose soldiers it housed. The recruits from Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming, and many more from Minnesota and the Dakotas, all headed to Camp Lewis, traveling as far as 2,000 miles. During the summer of 1917, work crews had constructed 1,757 buildings, put down 50 miles of roads, and laid 27 miles of sewers and 37 miles of water pipe. *The Tacoma Ledger* called it “the most stupendous construction project ever attempted in the northwest.”⁴¹ Recruits began arriving in September 1917; the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf came as part of the final surge of incoming troops. At the beginning of the week during which they arrived, the camp had 40,443 men; by the weekend, it grew to more than 52,000, a city less than a year old that was already half the size of nearby Tacoma (population, 96,965). Most of the men were being trained for trench warfare on the frontlines in France.

The day after their arrival Michael Hofer’s opening lines to Maria about trusting in God’s care soon gave way to deep worries:

Dear spouse, we have now come into a suffering that no one before has ever imagined. It is indescribable what is happening here in this world. And as our dear savior says in the New Testament that we also should come before kings and princes for my namesake, but we should not fear what we should say, for the Holy Spirit will speak through you. Dear spouse, they tell us whoever does nothing will be sent to the guardhouse. That is where we are now. They tell us that we will be in the guardhouse for a very long time. Today, someone left who had been here for five years, and we cannot hope for anything otherwise.⁴²

The sense of foreboding continued: “If we should no longer see each other again, then may God grant us that we see each other again in heaven.” In closing, he reminded her that his letters would pass through military censors: “I cannot seal this letter, since it will be read by others.” Even so, he urged Maria to share the letter with a minister at the colony, David D. Hofer, who in turn “should not delay” in taking up their case with the government.

The men landed in Guardhouse No. 54 after they refused to follow orders and participate in the workings of the camp—after they refused, in effect, to become soldiers of any status, combatant or otherwise. On the day of their arrival all of the new recruits lined up alphabetically, with a typist at the end taking down names, occupations, and hometowns for the enlistment and assignment card. One of the sergeants

41. *The Tacoma Ledger*, June 26, 1917.

42. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, May 29, 1918.

approached Robert S. Shertz, a second lieutenant, with a smile. "These men over here," he said, pointing to the Hutterites, "they just came along, and said, 'This is as far as we go.'"⁴³ The officers repeatedly pressed the men to line up in formation as well as to fill out the enlistment and assignment cards, which would allow them to leave the guardhouse, but the men were steadfast in their refusal. The card required each recruit to list his hometown, age, and basic information. The men said they could not do so because of three words printed on the cards: "Declaration of Soldier." In their mind, they were not U.S. soldiers.

While the letters early on hint at the troubles the men were facing at Camp Lewis, they rarely describe their daily routines or special hardships in detail. Joseph mentioned that he and his two brothers, Jacob Wipf, and Andrew Wurtz were led away to separate cells in the guardhouse. After a day, he had managed to see only Michael, who had seen only Andrew. What words they exchanged, we never learn. Joseph also said that at mealtimes the men were accompanied to the dining hall at all times by guards, some of whom led the way and others of whom followed behind. They also received vaccinations under the arm, as did the other recruits. Even though they were locked up as if criminals, Joseph said that they had met with unexpectedly good care during the first two days: "Until now we have not had to withstand a great deal, that is, in regards to our bodies. They are good-hearted people. We cannot thank God enough for this, for such is his great love and mercy."⁴⁴

David Hofer was less sanguine in a letter to his wife, Anna. He urged her to use her imagination in picturing their situation: "Dearly beloved Ehtheil," he wrote, using a Hutterite term of endearment, "if you think about where we are, far from home and farm, from wife and children, then I can't describe the misery in which we find ourselves."⁴⁵ Like Michael, David reminded his wife that they must be circumspect in what they write: "I must close now with my simple writing and one has to be careful what we write, and we can't write very often, not as often as we would hope. . . . We are not permitted to seal our envelopes. We have to hand them over to an officer who looks them over."⁴⁶ Joseph, too, counseled discretion in a letter to his wife: "Be careful about what you

43. "Record of the Trial of Recruits David J. Hofer, Michael J. Hofer, Joseph J. Hofer, and Jacob J. Wipf," Judge Advocate's Office, 91st Infantry Division, Camp Lewis, U.S. Army, June 15, 1918.

44. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, May 30, 1918.

45. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer. The letter was apparently written between May 27 and June 8, 1918, though the exact date is unclear.

46. *Ibid.*

write. Every letter is opened and read."⁴⁷ He also revealed that the men found a kindly soul and a way around the directive that they write in English: "For you should know that we have no official permission to write in German. But it is a good man who is in charge of the prisoners. So we requested of him that we can write in German."

As they awaited their court-martial, the Hofer brothers said that they had been summoned several times before the camp commander to explain their unwillingness to work. Michael described the encounters: "We have already been ordered frequently to appear before the commandant; but have testified without fear and with God's help to our faith. They say that everything would go just fine for us, but what work would we be willing to do? But we tell them that we can do nothing."⁴⁸ David also emphasized that only through God did they find the words to speak: "We are still in the guardhouse and have been to the headquarters because of our basis of belief. With the help of God we have explained the basis of our faith, and with a calm heart."⁴⁹ One such interrogatory session took place on a Sunday, June 2, when the men were searched and "forced to endure many temptations to sign our names," apparently to the enlistment and assignment cards.⁵⁰ It was not, they said, much of a Sabbath.

Newton Baker, the secretary of war, believed that all men, including members of the historic peace churches, might be persuaded to do their part during the war—if not as soldiers in combat, then as noncombatants assigned to provide medical care, haul supplies, or build bridges. But even as noncombatants, men were classified as soldiers in the army. Of the twenty-four million men who registered for the draft between May 1917 and November 1918, 64,693 men filed claims for conscientious objector status. Among those objectors, 20,873 were called up for service. After spending time in camps, nearly 80 percent of these men (about 16,000) agreed to take up arms. In the end, only 3,989 held fast to their convictions against military combat. Of that number, about 1,300 agreed to serve in a noncombatant capacity; an equal number, 1,300, were furloughed to farms or other civilian work when that option became available in the summer of 1918 (the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf did not have a chance for such a furlough, since they had already been charged). Those who remained were the so-called absolutists, refusing to accept either combatant or noncombatant assignments. About two-thirds of the absolutists, 940, ended up in a kind of segregated purgatory at the

47. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 8, 1918.

48. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 8, 1918.

49. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer, June 8, 1918.

50. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 11, 1918.

training camps, where commanders allowed them to bide their time. The remaining one-third, 450, were court-martialed and sent to military prisons.⁵¹

David, Joseph, and Michael Hofer, along with Jacob Wipf, were tried jointly on June 10, with six military officials—two lieutenants, two sergeants, a corporal, and a private—called up as witnesses at the court-martial. The most common charges thus far in the war were two related violations of the Articles of War, disobeying a superior officer (No. 64) and disobeying a noncommissioned officer (No. 65). The four Hutterites stood accused of doing both, in regards to orders to sign the enlistment and assignment cards and to fall in with their platoon. After the witnesses for the prosecution spoke, Jacob Wipf approached the bench and affirmed (he made a point of not being sworn in) to tell the truth. The early line of questioning pursued the Hutterites' possible links to the enemy, Germany:

Q: Now, what are the principles of your religious organization as they have existed from the beginning? That is, with regard to participation in war?

A: I don't understand that, quite.

Q: Are the members of your church permitted by your church principles to engage in war?

A: They are strictly against war. That is why we left Russia.

Q: Are you forbidden to be a soldier?

A: Yes.

Q: Are you loyal to Germany?

A: What does that mean?

Q: Are you in favor of Germany?

A: No; no.

Q: Why do you use the German language and the German printing in your work?

A: Well, they started there in Germany, and they just kept going as a colony and always kept talking like this. But my father can speak the Russian language. But, we have never gotten out in the world, and just kept that language because they started in Germany.

51. Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 56-60, puts the figure of those who remained conscientious objectors at 3,989, as does Harlan F. Stone in "The Conscientious Objector," *Columbia University Quarterly* 21 (Oct. 1919), 253-272. Kellogg, in *The Conscientious Objector*, lists 3,900.

Q: You have no particular liking then, for the ideals or citizenship of Germany?

A: We have nothing for Germany.

The prosecutor wanted to know exactly why the men would not serve in the armed forces in any capacity.

Q: Are you willing to take part in any noncombatant branch of the service of the army?

A: No; we can't.

Q: What are your reasons?

A: Well, it is all for war. The only thing we can do is work on a farm for the poor and needy ones of the United States.

Q: What do you mean by poor and needy ones?

A: Well those that can't help themselves.

Q: Would you include soldiers who are crippled for life?

A: Yes. They are poor and needy ones. . . .

Q: If you were in the service, such as the Medical Corps, where you would attend the wounded soldiers, would your conscience and the teachings of the church permit that?

A: We can't do that, because a soldier, he will go and fight, and that is helping the war, and we can't do that.

Q: And if there were wounded soldiers about, you couldn't help them? You couldn't help them because you would be afraid they might recover and go back to the war; is that it?

A: Well, it would be helping the war.

Q: Would you be willing to be placed on a farm by the government and grow wheat for soldiers?

A: No.

The prosecutor then wanted to know if the commitment to nonviolence extended to the home.

Q: Does your religion believe in fighting of any kind?

A: No.

Q: You would not fight with your fists?

A: Well, we ain't no angels. Little boys will scrap sometimes, and we are punished; but our religion don't allow it.

Q: To put the case like this: If a man was attacking or assaulting your sister, would you fight?

A: No.

Q: Would you kill him?

A: No.

Q: What would you do?

A: Well, in a way, if I could get her away, I might hold him. If I was man enough, I would do that. If I couldn't, I would have to let go. We can't kill. That is strictly against our religion.

The Hofer brothers also testified, though they received fewer questions. The court adjourned at 4:20 p.m., less than three hours after the proceedings had begun. All four men were found guilty and sentenced to 20 years of hard labor, "at such place as the reviewing authority may direct."

David Hofer immediately wrote to share his thoughts with Anna:

That was a difficult test. Dear Ehtheil, that is something our dear brothers, fathers and patriarchs never had to do, what we young brothers in faith had to do. We had to defend our beliefs in front of the twelve sworn-in ones. But God stood at our side, and gave us voice and wisdom and a calm heart. I had no more fear than I would have if I were at home. Then they asked us if we could work on a farm raising wheat for a soldier. We said no, but if you would send us to the farm of poor suffering people, we could work there. Maybe we said too much, but it seems to us that we could work in such a situation, because our brothers had said that if the government would put us on a farm by ourselves, there we could work. There our preachers could visit us, perhaps also our families. Dear Ehtheil, if only our heavenly father could lead us out of this misery, no matter where, even if into dire poverty.⁵²

For his part, Michael wanted Maria to know that "God our Heavenly Father still cares for us":

[The military officials] also don't know what they should do with us. They have told us that everything must go to the president. He will decide what will be done with us. God the Lord will take care of his own. He also will not forsake us if we only continue to trust in him. The prophet said, Lord, when there is affliction, then men search for you. When you discipline them, then they call out to you in fear. My dear spouse, we paid too little attention to the wonderful time of grace. For now one is able to see what he is missing when the community is taken away—namely, when evening descends and we could all gather nicely for prayer. We, however, must accept it with patience, and say with the poet: when

52. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer, June 12, 1918.

the just person is in pain, God wants to make him joyful, and those with broken hearts should laugh again. While a Christian is here [on earth] he must walk through streets of sadness, but I will stand by him, the highest trust and help in the midst of everything.⁵³

Joseph, too, wrote to his wife, Maria, a day after the court-martial but without the apparent heaviness of heart that one finds in the letters from David and Michael. He even manages what could be taken as a playful reference with regard to the first letter he had received from Maria:

Now my dear spouse, we are still imprisoned in the guardhouse. But we were not at home—that is, in the guardhouse—when your letter arrived. We were before the court being court-martialed. We do not know, however, how things will turn out. Our case will come before Newton Diehl Baker, the secretary of war in Washington. Whatever they make of it we will have to accept. There is someone here who has been in prison for five years. But this does not alarm us. God is with us. And if God is with us, who can be against us?⁵⁴

In the weeks that followed, the men remained confined in the guardhouse. Michael Hofer described their glimpses of camp life: “We go from one window to another. There our sorrowful eyes see nothing more than how the world leads its life.”⁵⁵ During the day they continued to be able to read their Bibles and hold their own worship services, though they could not sing aloud. (“But one can also praise our great God in stillness,” Michael wrote).⁵⁶ Like Michael, David said that he went from window to window, never seeing anyone that he knew. In this place, he said, he often thought of his small children at home—and why God would have them all go through this experience. “Sometimes I think so much about it that I would like to scream, but that is of no use,” he wrote. “One has to have patience until it seems to God that it is time to lead us out of this misery.”⁵⁷

For Joseph, one of the greatest challenges was the tedium that came with being locked in a guardhouse:

We are now very well treated, ever since we were court-martialed. We have not had any temptations. But the “sitting around” is not for a person who is used to working. But we must wait with patience to see what our loving heavenly father allows to happen to

53. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 11, 1918.

54. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 11, 1918.

55. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 18, 1918.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer, June 14, 1918.

us, and must accept it. Who knows to what end? Certainly not for any harm, but rather for the benefit of our poor souls.⁵⁸

In these letters God often appears as a stern disciplinarian, which the men take as a model for their own method of parenting. Of this testing by God on the grounds of Camp Lewis, Joseph writes: "And because we deserve our punishment, we must accept it with patience, even if it seems difficult for the flesh. For this is a tough word: take my cross upon you!"⁵⁹ He urges Maria to rear their son in a like manner: "And raise up the dear child in the fear of God, and spare no effort and no discipline. Spare not the rod. And don't think: Oh, the poor children! No. Bend the sapling when it is still small and allows itself to be bent. For when it is too strong, you have already failed."⁶⁰

On Friday, June 14, just before bedtime, the authorities came and took away Andrew Wurtz and an unnamed Mennonite detainee. Wurtz returned on Sunday morning, and that afternoon spent two hours with the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf; he was removed again on Monday afternoon, this time to the base hospital. On July 1, Michael Hofer reported that they had no news of the whereabouts of "Brother Andreas." Andrew Wurtz would later detail the efforts to which military officials went to compel him, isolated from the others, to work under military command. Once a sergeant ordered him to polish the soft wood floor of a barracks. Wurtz refused, saying that to do so would advance the war effort:

[The] sergeant ordered ropes brought which were used to bind each leg and while I had the polisher handle, they pulled one leg at a time. Suddenly, they pulled both ropes, causing me to fall backwards, hurting my back and head and rendering me unconscious. They pulled me along the floor, up and down the hallway over the door ledges. I uttered an outcry—the slivers from the floor had penetrated my entire body. (I had only a light T-shirt and pyjamas on).

Yet, that was not enough; next, they took me into my room, filled the bathtub with cold water, told me to remove my clothes (which I did) and forced me under the water. I tried to hold my breath but could not; the four men could not hold me under the water. They cried again; I saw that I was becoming unsuccessful in my attempt to hold my breath. I said, "In Jesus name, I have to give up my life; I hold my promise that I promised on my knees." They held me

58. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 14, 1918.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 11, 1918.

under the water till they thought that by this time I should be expired. They lifted me out of the water and all I heard them say was that they would be back later to do it again. Around twelve o'clock they took my pulse and I heard them say that I was still living.⁶¹

Eventually, Wurtz agreed to work in the camp garden—but only alone, not in the company of men in uniform. He was able to visit with the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf on the night before they were transferred to Alcatraz. Wurtz would later be moved to a dairy farm where he carried manure compost for three months and then was released.

While nearly all of the surviving letters are those sent by the men to their wives, several of the letters carried news from home. It is clear that some of the letters never reached the men, and of those that did, some are no longer in the families' possession. Two weeks into their confinement, David Hofer said that he had not yet heard from his wife, Anna. But when Anna wrote to David on June 14, she assured him that she had already written five letters, two of which were returned. She kept track of the passing time by counting the Sabbaths. "Yesterday was the sixth Sunday already and God knows how many more Sundays it will be until we see each other with our mortal eyes, perhaps never more in this world, but we hope to see each other in glory."⁶² In a second letter, she added, "Dear David, it appears that I will have to spend my life with my children by myself."⁶³

Three weeks into their stay, Joseph seemed surprised that he had not received more letters and that he and the others had not had any visitors from home:

We are still in good health, both in body and soul. But you can imagine, dear spouse, how one might be disposed when you are gone from home for three weeks and have received only three letters from home and also have not seen anyone, so that it appears as if everyone is afraid to come here. What should we do here all alone? However, we also do not need to despair, if it should appear to us sometimes as if you have forsaken us. . . . You, of course, are not the only one who can write. I also have brothers and sisters, and also your brother. Tell them that they should visit us, and not be satisfied with only offering greetings.⁶⁴

61. "The Memoirs of Reverend Andrew Wurtz."

62. Letter from Anna Hofer to David Hofer, June 14, 1918.

63. Letter from Anna Hofer to David Hofer, June 22, 1918.

64. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 18, 1918.

Early on, Susanna Hofer, mother of the three brothers, urged her boys to hold fast:

May he continue to be with you and comfort you in your misery, as he has promised that he will be with us until the end of the world. Let us only trust him. My dearly beloved children, what dangerous days are coming upon us, and it is probably as our Savior has said, that faith will be no more and love will lose its warmth and injustice will take over. Let's not give up in the tribulation that has come upon us. . . .⁶⁵

Another minister at Rockport, Joseph J. Wipf, was more frank in his account of how the Hutterites were faring at home. He noted that three other young men—likely Joseph Kleinsasser, John Waldner, and Michael D. Hofer—had shipped out to a military camp. He also reported that Jacob Wipf's father was among a group of men who had traveled to Canada to purchase land for new colonies, "because the way it seems we cannot stay here, for we are not safe on any roads and highways. Today they attacked our brothers and wanted to shear them; they were twenty-five and six of ours, but the way it seems, God did not permit them to do this, for the clippers didn't cut, and they returned home unscathed."⁶⁶

On Saturday, June 22, the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf learned that they would be sent to Alcatraz in the coming weeks. Michael Hofer spoke as one whose faith was being sorely tested, but had stayed strong:

We are completely yielded to the Lord. Whatever burdens he gives, he also provides a way out that we can endure it. . . . For God will also be with us there (that is, Alcatraz). He has promised to his own, that when they pass through the fire, he will stand beside them so that the flames do not burn them. And if you go through the water, I will protect you so that you do not drown in the torrent.⁶⁷

Beyond having faith in the Lord's protection during whatever trials might befall him on earth, Michael also kept his eye on the promise of an eternal reward. In perhaps the last letter that he sent from Camp Lewis, he focused on better days to come: "For nothing else is promised to us except that we must enter the kingdom of God through the cross and suffering."⁶⁸

65. Letter from Susannah Hofer to David, Michael, and Joseph Hofer, June 17, 1918.

66. Letter from Joseph J. Wipf to David, Joseph, and Michael Hofer and Jacob Wipf, June 28, 1918. Joseph Kleinsasser, a Hutterite minister from the Milltown Colony in South Dakota, became a tireless advocate for the men, corresponding with Frederick Keppel, the assistant secretary of war responsible for conscientious objectors, and other officials.

67. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 24, 1918.

68. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, July 1, 1918.

The day after finding out that they were bound for Alcatraz, Joseph wrote one of his longest letters home, equivalent to more than two typewritten pages. Clearly, the weight of the twenty-year term hung heavy about him as he wrote to Maria, "my dear and never-to-be-forgotten spouse." He saw only suffering ahead, and then a reward:

We, however, must hold firmly to God and plead to him with prayers for the strength of his holy spirit, so that we might win the battle and remain firm unto the end, and fight for truth as so many of our forefathers did who came out of the fight with bloodied heads. And now they are yonder and have received their reward. And, dear spouse, if we want to go there where they are now, then we must also follow in their footsteps and give heed to their faith. For the children of God are called to nothing else than to affliction, cross, tribulation, persecution and hatred from the world.⁶⁹

The weeks that followed continued to test their spirits. He described the two high fences that surrounded the guardhouse in which they were locked up, "as if we were the worst scoundrels imaginable."⁷⁰ Increasingly, there are references to a reunion in heaven: "And if it should be that we do not see each other again in this sorrowful world, then it will hopefully happen yonder where no one can separate us again; where there will be no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, and instead there will be found there pure joy and happiness."

The men bid farewell to Camp Lewis on Thursday, July 25. Chained together in pairs, they spent two days traveling to Alcatraz in the company of four armed lieutenants. The guards removed the chains from their feet during the day, but kept their hands manacled at all times. At night, the men slept on their backs, chained in pairs. As might be expected, they slept little. On their arrival at Alcatraz, on Saturday, July 27, they were commanded to put on military uniforms; when the men refused, guards took them to the basement of the prison, a place of solitary confinement known as "the hole." They were given uniforms and warned, "You'll die here. We took four out of here dead just yesterday."⁷¹ As unwilling to wear a uniform at Alcatraz as they were at Camp Lewis, the men remained in their underwear. For the first four and a half days they received half a glass of water each day but no food. Rats ran wild in the dark of their cells, where each man was held in isolation. At night they slept without blankets on the cement floor that was wet from water that oozed through the walls. During the last 36-

69. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, June 23, 1918.

70. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, July 10, 1918.

71. Letter from David Hofer to Jonas S. Hartzler, Jan. 10, 1919.

hour period in "the hole," each man's hands were crossed one over the other and chained to bars in the door, drawn up so high that only their toes touched the floor. In this position, guards struck their arms with knotted lashes; Michael Hofer passed out after one of the beatings. Once David Hofer heard Jacob Wipf cry out, "O, Almighty God!" When guards led the men up the narrow steps and into the outside yard after nearly five days, other prisoners gathered around them in a show of sympathy. With tears in his eyes, one of the inmates said, "It is a shame to treat human beings that way."⁷² The four men tried without success to put on their jackets that day in the yard; their arms were too swollen.

When the men wrote home, they shared few details of their traumatic introduction to life at this forbidding prison. Either they chose to self-censor their accounts or prison officials sanitized their words for them. There is no mention in the letters of sleeping on wet concrete in their underwear, of standing for hours in chains, or of being beaten by guards. Even so, one finds a greater measure of foreboding and despair in Michael Hofer's first letter home, written about two weeks after they had left Camp Lewis:

My dear wife, I want to write you a few lines regarding my health and my faith. I was sick for two days, but now I am better. I am also still strong in my faith in God and in the hope that my letter will reach you in the same spirit. We arrived in Alcatraz on July 27. We are now in the military prison of Alcatraz behind iron and locks. We don't know what will become of us. Our twenty-year sentence is not yet firmly established. We wish that God would come and bring an end to the world, for there is indeed nothing good left in the world.

. . . My dear spouse, if we no longer see each other in this world, then it is my hope in God that it will happen in the next world where no one will be able to separate us—where we will remain forever in joy.⁷³

Joseph, also, says nothing of the conditions at Alcatraz but much about how fleeting time is on earth: "We are here today, and tomorrow we are no more. It is as Paul says: like the grass that grows today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven."⁷⁴ He reminds Maria that for the full accounting of their time as prisoners, the family can hear directly from the Hofer brothers' father, who apparently had arrived at Camp Lewis to see them shortly before they were transferred to Alcatraz.⁷⁵

72. *Ibid.*

73. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, Aug. 7, 1918.

74. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, Aug. 7, 1918.

75. Family members also visited the four men at both Alcatraz and at Fort Leavenworth.

The absence of details in their letters home from Alcatraz, and the brevity of the letters in comparison with those from Camp Lewis, is striking. More than a month into their stay, Michael Hofer only alluded to the hardships they were facing. "First," he wrote, "a heartfelt greeting from me in chains. . . . I wish that I could see you with my eyes. The prospects of that do not seem to be good, but nonetheless I remain in hope that it will still happen, even if not very soon."⁷⁶

David Hofer also spared his family any description of life behind bars in Alcatraz:

My dear Ehetheil and children, I'm sure you'll be anxious to hear how things are going during these dark days. We're all quite well, temporally and spiritually, and wish you the same. . . . It seems that we're supposed to stay here in this misery. But we have to pray to God that he will lead us on the right path. We all do not expect to see each other in this world anymore, the way it seems now, but we should not despair, with God's strength we hope to overcome, as we have promised God, we trust in him. He's the only one who can help us, as he did in olden days.⁷⁷

The men also faced new limits on how often they could write home. At Camp Lewis, they were able to write several times a week; here at Alcatraz, prisoners could write no more than twice a month. From the letters that arrived back at the colony in South Dakota, the families of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf would not have known that the men were locked up in their cells day and night; that only on Sundays were they allowed out into the courtyard, and then only for one hour, and always under the watch of guards. Joseph Hofer allowed only this oblique reference: "Here everything is militaristic, as it was in the camp."⁷⁸

Their letters, on the other hand, often convey assurance that the men are in reasonably good health and that God will see them through this trial. Michael Hofer wrote:

I and the brothers are healthy in body and soul and we wish the same health to you and to the whole community. If only I could see our little daughter! But everything is in the hands of God, our heavenly Father. We cannot thank him enough for the support that he has shown to us. He only wants to see what his children will do.⁷⁹

76. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, Sept. 3, 1918.

77. Letter from David Hofer to Anna Hofer and children, Aug. 18, 1918.

78. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, Aug. 19, 1918.

79. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, Sept. 16, 1918.

Joseph addresses his wife, Maria, with apocalyptic resignation in a letter on October 20, nearly three months into their stay at Alcatraz:

As I understand it, you are in good health. I am as well, both in body and soul. You asked a question: how do I feel? I feel—and this is true—that the time of our resolution is drawing closer. For what is now already unfolding in the world is almost a fulfillment of what the savior in his word has taught us. Therefore the time of his coming cannot be very far off. Let us therefore watch and pray as he has commanded us, so that he will find us awake when he comes.⁸⁰

On November 14, 1918, the men began the final leg of their journey in detention.⁸¹ This time six guards, all sergeants, accompanied the Hutterites, who were once again chained in pairs.⁸² They traveled by train through Texas, en route to Fort Leavenworth in Kansas. The trip took four days and five nights. Michael Hofer wrote his last letter from the train, on the fourth day of the trip:

Grace and peace be with you. I want to write to you that we are now on the way to Fort Leavenworth, . . . Kansas. We don't know, however, what will become of us there. Only God the almighty knows if we will see each other again in this world, for we go from one affliction to the other. We plead earnestly to God, for he has promised us that not a single hair falls from our heads without his will. And if we do not see each other again in this world, then we will see one another in the next world.

Dear spouse, I have received two letters from you and one from dear brother Peter. You can imagine that I wept when I read that you are sick, along with our dear little daughter. Don't go leave the house too soon. Keep yourself warm.

I am still healthy in body and soul and wish for you the same, and for all the brothers and sisters—which is the greatest treasure that a human could receive here on earth.

Now I will close with a heartfelt greeting to all the brothers and sisters in the community, but especially to dear Davidvetter. He

80. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, Oct. 20, 1918.

81. It is not clear why the men were transferred from Alcatraz to Fort Leavenworth at this time. Fort Leavenworth had long been the central detention place for conscientious objectors. The transfer may have been linked to the Armistice, which had been announced several days earlier, on Nov. 11.

82. Some sources show a discrepancy in the date of their arrival at Fort Leavenworth. In the letter that David Hofer sent to J. S. Hartzler after Hofer's release, he refers to being taken to Leavenworth on Nov. 24. But in his letter dated Nov. 17, 1918, Michael Hofer said they were four days into the trip, putting their date of departure from Alcatraz on Nov. 14 and their arrival on Nov. 18. Fort Leavenworth authorities officially list the date of their arrival for processing as Nov. 19.

should remember us in his prayers. And I remain your sorrowful husband. Michael Y. Hofer, until death.⁸³

Joseph, likewise, wrote his final letter to Maria while in chains as the train crossed the Southwest. He lets slip, for the first time, his certainty that they will not see each other again on this earth, but only in heaven:

My precious, dear wife, Maria Hofer. Since I suddenly have a little time and paper, I want to let you all know something of my condition. I am still in good health in body and soul, and on the way to Fort Leavenworth. I do not know how things will fare with us there.

We are going as we did to Alcatraz, but the other way around. We will arrive there on Tuesday. We might not see each other again. And the only way that you can help us is through prayer to God who alone can redeem us from all evil, and who gives the strength to endure the fiery arrows of the evildoers.

My dear wife, since we will no longer see each other in this troubled world, then we will see each other yonder through the power of God. With this we must be satisfied with that which God allows to happen. And he will not lay upon us more than what we, with his strength, can endure. . . .

And when you look at our scrawling you can well imagine how low our spirits are, for we are where the waves are roaring and in that time when the seas throw up the dead—if you can only see this in the right way.

This is all for this time, my dear wife. For this is not a good letter at all, since it shakes and bounces so much. Now to close. My best greetings to you and our dear children, father and mother and all the brothers and sisters in the faith.⁸⁴

The men arrived at Fort Leavenworth, on Tuesday, November 19, at 11 at night, fully spent. David Hofer recounted their difficulty in traveling any further:

We were marched through the streets, up the hill to the barracks, carrying our suitcases, and other luggage. When we arrived we were worn out and very sweaty and warm. We were told to undress. We did so, and were required to stand in the chilly night air in our sweated underwear for two hours before the warden came with prison garments. At 5 o'clock the next morning we were required to appear again and wait for some time in the sharp

83. Letter from Michael Hofer to Maria Hofer, Nov. 17, 1918.

84. Letter from Joseph Hofer to Maria Hofer, Nov. 17, 1918.

morning air. Michael and Joseph complained of sharp pains in their chest, and were taken to the hospital, sick.⁸⁵

Jacob Wipf and David Hofer refused to work at Leavenworth, as they had refused at Alcatraz and Camp Lewis. They were placed in cells, their hands shackled high up through the bars of the doors; in this way, they stood for nine hours each day. For the first fourteen days, they would receive only bread and water. Meanwhile, Michael and Joseph grew increasingly sick. David Hofer wired home, saying the men were near death. Their wives, father, and a brother were mistakenly directed by a railroad agent to Fort Riley; though delayed by a day, they arrived at Leavenworth in time to see Joseph and Michael; Joseph was barely able to communicate. He died at 8:30 the following morning, November 29. The guards said that family members could not see him. But Joseph's wife, Maria, pushed past the guards and demanded permission from the head officer. He relented. With tears in her eyes, she approached the coffin, and there found Joseph in death dressed in a military uniform that he had steadfastly refused to wear in life. Michael Hofer died a few days later, on December 2. The Office of the Surgeon of the Disciplinary Barracks identified pneumonia as the cause of death for both men. They may have been victims of the Spanish flu, which was sweeping through the prison just when the men arrived from Alcatraz. The Fort Leavenworth annual report for 1918 showed a surge in deaths that fall and winter, many apparently related to the flu: July, 1; August, 0; September, 0; October, 59; November, 7; and December, 4. At the family's pleading, prison officials did not place Michael in military dress. Both men were sent home to the Rockport Colony in South Dakota for burial.

David Hofer recalled standing in his cell with tears streaming down his face after his brothers had died. With his hands chained fast, he couldn't wipe them away. He simply stood and wept. He asked to be moved to a cell closer to Jacob Wipf. Instead, an official soon told him that he was being discharged and should gather up his belongings.⁸⁶ David unsuccessfully tried to see Jacob before leaving for home, but a guard promised to pass along a note. David and Jacob would see each other five months later, in April 1919, when Jacob was finally free to return to the colony. In January of that year, in a letter to Jonas S. Hartzler, a Mennonite leader who both counseled draftees and

85. Letter from David Hofer to Jonas S. Hartzler, Jan. 10, 1919. The details that follow are largely drawn from this letter, which Hofer sent in response to Hartzler's request for an accounting of his trials in prison during the war.

86. David Hofer was released on Dec. 4, 1918.

negotiated with government leaders in Washington, David Hofer reflected on the months of confinement:

I praise God for my release, but my soul goes out in behalf of the other prisoners who are confined there in ways that no human being should ever be asked to endure, much less people who have never been guilty of any crime, but because of their relation to Jesus Christ, could not possibly do all that they are asked to do, and because of that, are made to suffer so severely.⁸⁷

Considering the historical record a century later, the confinement and suffering of the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf grows perhaps even more tragic because it was avoidable. So much misfortune lay in the timing. The treatment of the four Hutterite men appeared to fly in the face of the military's own expressed counsel in handling these cases. In one of several instances of unfortunate timing for the men, this counsel arrived two weeks after their trial. The War Department issued a statement on June 25 calling for a sensible compromise with objectors who would not work—a compromise that would allow the men to avoid imprisonment. The reasonable alternative lay with farm furloughs, which had been available on the books for several months and now would be put to use. The furloughs would allow men who would not lift a hand while in uniform to still make a valuable contribution:

In short, every effort is being made to respect the sincere scruples of a small minority of our people, at the same time that their power to contribute to the nation's efficiency is turned to good account. There is unquestionably strong sentiment in many quarters against the granting of immunity from military service to any group in our population, however small. But many objectors are not without the courage of their convictions. They would resist compulsion to the end. We might imprison or shoot them. Prussian practices such as these would hardly appeal in a Democracy. On the other hand, a method which conserves the man-power of the nation, and accords to furloughed objectors a lot that is enduring and serviceable, but in no sense pampered, will, it is believed, commend itself to the common sense and practicability of the American people.⁸⁸

The War Department's readiness to grant furloughs came as a relief to conscientious objectors across the country. But for those objectors whose cases had been expedited, the generous tone of the department's statement would bear little connection to the reality of life behind bars.

87. Letter from David Hofer to Jonas S. Hartzler, Jan. 10, 1919.

88. News release from the War Department, June 25, 1918.

Deciding who would qualify for farm furloughs fell to the three legal experts who composed the Board of Inquiry. Early in the summer of 1918, the board members began to interview conscientious objectors and, by gauging their sincerity, place them in combatant or noncombatant service in the military, or, in cases where the men were judged sincere in their pacifist convictions and wanted to be as distant as possible from the military, on a farm selected by the government; in exceptional cases, the board could also recommend that an objector be assigned to reconstruction work in Europe under direction of the Society of Friends. The board was made up of Major Richard C. Stoddard, chairman of the Judge Advocate's Office in the army; Judge Julian W. Mack of the Federal Court; and Dean Harlan F. Stone of Columbia University Law School, who would later become a chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. In August, Stoddard was sent overseas, replaced by Major Walter G. Kellogg, who also worked in the Judge Advocate's Office. Members of the Board of Inquiry visited Camp Lewis on July 9 to interview the conscientious objectors there. The Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf were locked away in the nearby guardhouse, having been convicted one month earlier. The board acknowledged the presence of the four Hutterites but classified them apart from the other objectors. The board report noted that the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf had already been court-martialed: "Therefore no opinion now expressed."⁸⁹ The board did not have authority to reconsider such court-martial cases.

The Hutterites were not alone in refusing orders as they did, but the charges and court-martial came swiftly, perhaps as an example for Andrew Wurtz and others. If the four Hutterites had been kept in the guardhouse but not immediately brought up on charges or tried by court-martial, it is likely that they would have appeared before the Board of Inquiry and been successful in their appeal for a furlough. The odds were highly favorable. The majority of recruits from the peace churches who refused noncombatant service were found to be sincere and transferred to farms or to reconstruction work in Europe. In June and through the rest of the year, the board examined 2,100 men, with only 122 being found insincere. Two other Hutterites from the Rockport Colony, Joseph Kleinsasser and Michael D. Hofer, point to the path that the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf came so close to being able to take. Kleinsasser and Hofer left the colony for an army training camp one month later, on June 28. When they arrived at Camp Funston, they likewise refused to do any kind of service. But instead of being placed in a guardhouse and brought up on charges, they had an opportunity to

89. Report on Conscientious Objectors at Camp Lewis, from the Board of Inquiry to the secretary of war, Newton D. Baker, July 9, 1918.

appear before the Board of Inquiry, where they were found to be sincere in their stance. By September, both men were working on farms through the furlough program, while the Hofer brothers and Jacob Wipf languished in the steely, dark bowels of Alcatraz. Joseph Kleinsasser and Michael Hofer would be home in time for Christmas. By then, Joseph and Michael Hofer were being remembered as martyrs, the only two Hutterites to die during the war.⁹⁰

90. John Horsch, *The Hutterian Brethren: A Story of Martyrdom and Loyalty, 1528-1931* (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1931).