

Ludwig Baumann, who often asked that question, deserted the Nazi-German armed forces on June 3, 1942. After capture, he was first sentenced to death by a military court. Later he was “pardoned” but suffered for years in several concentration camps till finally serving “probation” in a penal battalion. It is only thanks to extraordinary luck that Ludwig survived the Second World War. From 1990 to 2018, he was the chairperson of Federal Association of Victims of Nazi Military Justice.

After 1945, victims of the Wehrmacht’s military justice – conscientious objectors to military service, deserters and so-called Wehrkraftzersetzer (those who had undermined the military morale) – were for decades defamed as cowards and traitors. It was not until 1997 that the German parliament, the Bundestag, officially stated: *“The Second World War was a war of aggression and annihilation, a Nazi German crime.”*

During the 1980s, in the course of protests against the arms race and new threats of war, Ludwig started to campaign for the sentences against deserters and others to be declared null and void and for compensation to be paid to the victims of the Nazi-German war judiciary. At least 30,000 death sentences, of deserters chiefly, had been passed, of which 22,000 were carried out from 1939 to 1945 – making this the lowest point in the German history of criminal law.

In the decades after the war, surviving victims of the Nazi war tribunals continued to be smeared as cowards and traitors. Those who had opposed soldiering and war were denied recognition for what they had done – or rather not done. They were considered to be ex-convicts with a criminal record and were excluded from any compensation given to other war victims. In stark contrast to that injustice, ex-Nazi lawyers and judges who had survived the war unscathed were allowed to continue their careers as if there had never been any Nazi war crimes.

Slowly the campaigning work paid off. In the early 1990s laws were passed that gave the victims a right to apply for and receive (insignificant) compensation, and laws on legal rehabilitation were passed in 2002 and 2009. However, Nazi war injustice still casts its long shadow.

**It remains important that those who refused to participate in a criminal war should be respected for what they did. The honouring of their memory must continue to play an important part in Germany when planning new memorials, exhibitions and commemorations.**



## **Federal Association of Victims of Nazi Military Justice**

### **Current and future projects**

The Association of Victims of Nazi Military Justice was founded in 1990 by a group of victims with the aim of achieving legal rehabilitation and compensation for all victims of Nazi German war injustice.

From 1990 until 2018, Ludwig Baumann from Bremen was the voluntary chair of the Federal Association’s board. The scientific board has Professor Manfred Messerschmidt from Freiburg as honorary chair and Professor Wolfram Wette, also from Freiburg, as chair.

Although it took over fifty years, the Association were justifiably satisfied with the overturning of the Wehrmacht’s wrongful judgements. The Association’s board and members now have the following objectives:

- To conduct further scientific analysis of the unlawful nature of the Nazi-German judicial system, in particular biographical studies of victims and perpetrators.
- To archive and document the struggle for legal rehabilitation; to identify contributions that encourage peace-building.

- To demand the construction of memorials for the victims by, or with the support of, statutory bodies.

- To ensure information and advice be given to victims still alive, to their loved ones, and to the descendants of victims now dead.

### Further information:

Official website:

<http://upgr.bv-opfer-ns-militaerjustiz.de/>  
(German only)

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig\\_Baumann\\_\(Wehrmachtsdeserteur\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludwig_Baumann_(Wehrmachtsdeserteur))  
(German only)

See also the informative website for Ludwig Baumann, which was set up by peace-activist friends from Potsdam on the occasion of his 90th birthday in December 2011:  
<http://ludwigbaumann.de/> (German only)

Ludwig Baumann, *Niemals gegen das Gewissen: Plädoyer des letzten Wehrmachtsdeserteurs*. Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2014, ISBN 978-3-451-30984-7 (co-written with Norbert Joa).

Lars G. Petersson, *Hitler's Deserters – When Law Merged with Terror*, Fontheil-Media, London 2013, ISBN 978-1-78155-269-8

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**“What better thing could  
you have done than betray  
Hitler’s war?”**