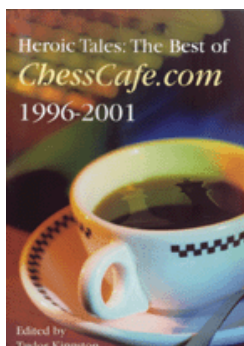




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Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



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## From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

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### Mannheim 1914

Leonard Skinner and Egbert Meissenburg have contributed much of the material for this examination of the fate of Alekhine in 1914.

#### The Legend

Anthony Guest, chess correspondent of the *Morning Post*, wrote in that paper on 12 October 1914: “The brilliant Russian master, Alechin, who was one of the tournament competitors stranded at Mannheim on the outbreak of war, paid a surprise visit to London on Friday (9 October), on his way back to Petrograd [now Leningrad]. Calling at the Chess Divan, 110 Strand, he gave an interesting account of his experiences...Alechin was the only one of the French and Russian representatives to get away, nine of them still being detained at Baden-Baden, or at Mannheim, where Janowsky remains. It is astonishing to hear that the German Chess Association which has several influential members, left these players to shift for themselves. They were a fortnight in prison, where they were brutally treated by German soldiers, who, from sheer savagery, assaulted them with the butt ends of their rifles. These competitors will have to remain in Germany till the end of the war, with the solitary exception of Alechin, who escaped at the risk of his life. A friend gave him his own pass, and by means of this the young Russian got across the border, knowing that if the deception were discovered, he would be shot at once. He came by a circuitous journey to London, taking a rest on the way to recuperate from the privations he had endured.” This account was reprinted in *Chess amateur*, November 1914, and has been widely repeated.

Before looking at the truth we should also note a mischievous article on 17 August in *De Telegraaf*, by Schelfhout, the Dutch reporter at Mannheim. It said that Elyashov, a Russian amateur, was bathing in the Rhine near a railway bridge when he was arrested on suspicion of espionage. He was released and then re-arrested for non-payment of his hotel bill, again released and told to leave the country within 24 hours. Because of the uncertain rail conditions he bought tickets for four different routes, and was again arrested because he could not reveal the owners of the other three tickets. The Germans believed him to be a Russian general, and Alekhine, who had his own car and a French chauffeur at Mannheim, to be his adjutant. The American consul came to their aid and secured the release of all the Russian masters and Elyashov, only Alekhine being detained. A photograph of him in the uniform of the law school of St. Petersburg caused him to be taken for an officer.

#### The Facts

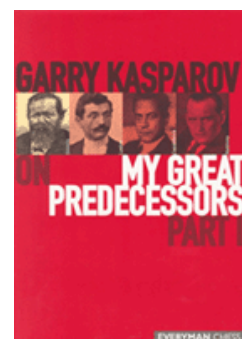
The Mannheim congress, comprising several tournaments, began on 20 July 1914. Germany declared war on Russia on July 28th and on France 1 August, Britain joining in the next day. The congress was stopped on 1 August. The *Morning Post* of 14 September gave an account of the Australian, Gunderson. “There was a hurried pro-rata distribution of the prize-fund, in which those who happened to be present participated, and Mr. Gunderson himself succeeded in getting away to Christiania [now Oslo] at a cost of semi-starvation and extraordinary fatigue, for the train was six days on what should have been a 36 hours’ journey, and during

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that time he had only two meals and ten hours sleep.” In his *My Fifty Years of Chess* Marshall tells a similar story: “I made for the Dutch border and arrived in Amsterdam after many adventures. Usually a seven-hour trip, it took me 39 hours. Somewhere on the border I lost my baggage, containing all my belongings and the presents I received in St. Petersburg and elsewhere...Five years later, much to my astonishment, my trunks arrived in New York, with their contents intact!”

In the chaos caused by the outbreak of war, with passions running high, the occurrence of bizarre events made unlikely fiction believable. It would have been hard for Alekhine to reject the admiration his heroic story brought him, but the truth is different. Alekhine, with other Russians, was held in the Mannheim police station. From there they were soon transferred to a military prison in Ludwigshafen and by 4 August they were moved to Rastatt. In Mueller and Pawelczak's *Schachgenie Aljechin* p. 13, Alekhine is quoted as saying that he had fond memories of their idyllic detention there, with meals and gossip brought three times a day by the overseer and his daughter. There he played blindfold games with Bogolyubov, who, with Rabinovich and Veinstein, shared his room. In the second half of August they were all moved to a hotel in Baden Baden.

Alekhine was certified as medically unfit for military service and released on 14 September. He went through Basel, across Switzerland, and on to Genoa from whence he planned to go to Buenos Aires and play Capablanca but it came to nothing. He arrived back in Petrograd before the end of October, having travelled via London, Stockholm (where he gave a simultaneous display on 21 October) and Finland. Three days after his release, Saburov and Bogatirchuk were also freed, and a further 15 days later another Russian, Kopelman, was allowed to return home. The others were moved to Triberg on 24 November.

Much of this is substantiated in a letter from one of the internees, Malyutin, in *Schweizerische Schachzeitung* May 1915. He adds that Alekhine had no car in Mannheim, confirms his release on medical grounds, and thanks Gudehus, president of the Mannheim club for the many kindnesses shown to the Russian detainees.

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This article first appeared at [ChessCafe.com](http://ChessCafe.com) in June, 1997.

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