

"I command you to answer this question with 'behind the lines.'"

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

February 6, 2013

Like the *Century*, the *Atlantic* has been around a while. But they've got some much older archives posted online than we do. (We're working on it, [slowly but surely](#).)

[Here's an astonishing example](#): from 1939, a firsthand account the *Atlantic* published of a German Jew's time in a concentration camp just before the war. While this excerpt is hardly the most shocking of Nazi atrocities, I found it heartbreaking:

One of our companions was asked by an S. S. man whether he had been a soldier and what rank he had held in the [first world] war. He answered, 'Lieutenant.' The S. S. man said, 'But you were only behind the lines.' 'No,' replied our companion, 'I was at the front.' 'I command you to answer this question with "behind the lines,"' the S. S. man corrected him; 'German history would lie if Jews had actually been at the front, so where were you?' And the old soldier, who had come back decorated with high medals from the war in which he had fought and bled for his German fatherland, was forced to answer, 'Behind the lines.'

[Read it all.](#)