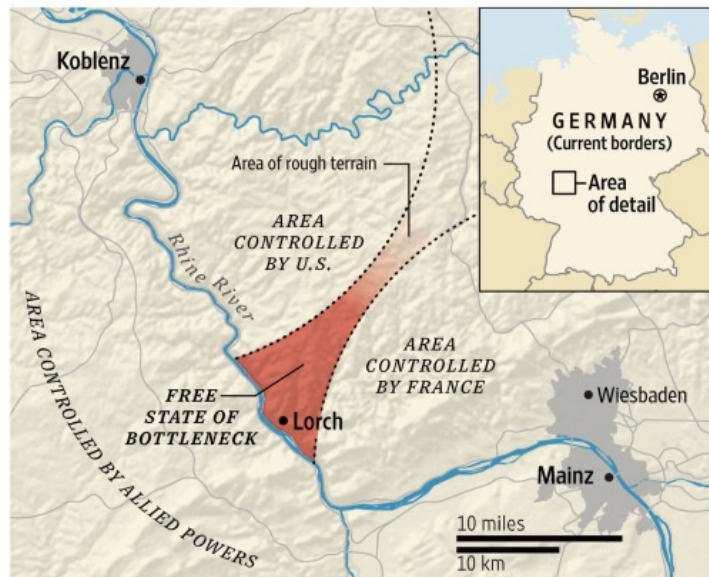


# The history of the Freestate Bottleneck

## Caught Between the Lines

Two carelessly drawn arcs around the German cities of Koblenz and Mainz following WWI created a diplomatic no-man's-land, known as the 'Free State of Bottleneck.'



Source: Free State of Bottleneck Initiative, Historians THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

It sounds like a made up story or joke today, but 80 years ago the unique Freestate Bottleneck had actually been reality. Developed during the disorders and hard times after World War I and existed from January 10<sup>th</sup> 1919 till February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1923.

How did this happen?

The provinces on the west side of the Rhine river had been occupied by the Allied Troops. To have a military presence on the east side of the Rhine river the forces decided to create at Cologne, Koblenz and Mainz semicircular beachheads with a radius of 30 km. The

beachheads of Mainz, the French side and Koblenz, the American side almost touched at Laufenselden. The circles didn't overlap, so there was a free space between the two territories remained unoccupied. It had the form of a bottleneck. The tiny Freestate Bottleneck was born.

Cut off from the rest of Germany which played his part in history as the "Weimarer Republik".

The mayor of Lorch managed and organized the Freestate. He also inaugurated the Freestate's very own money, being a rarity today and very popular for collectors and fans of the Freestate.

The supply of the 8000 inhabitants, living in the towns Lorch and Kaub and the townships Lorchhausen, Sauerthal, Ransel, Wollmerschied, Welterod, Zorn, Strüth and Egenrod was very difficult. There were no connections possible to the unoccupied part of Germany neither on the streets, nor in the air or on the water. All goods and mail transport was well organized by smugglers using secret trails.





The traintraffic completely succumbed, no train was allowed to stop in the freestate. Except for one praiseworthy time: A freight train transporting coals the French had been looting in the Rhur area was put down at the trainstation in Rüdesheim. This freight train was capured by a stout-hearted engine driver and leaded to the freestate Bottleneck, where the very welcomed and needed heating material was shared between the citizens.

In the mists of the night the smuggling over the rhine river prospered, which though was disturbed and policed from the left side of the river with strong searchlights by the French.

Some fearless Freestate boys felt the need to drop their pants at the Lorch waterside and let the French spotlight their naked backsides. The occupied parts of the rhine area smuggled wine on trails trough the woods under favour of night with ox-barrows into the save Freestate to keep the French hands off it. Among others more than 38000 liters of the vintage 1921 produced by the Prussian Academy and Research Insitute of Geisenheim were brought to Kaub with horse-barrows and stored in winecellar of Peter Bahles.

The storage in the cellares of Kaub and Lorch supported the vinifaction of the wine in such a great way, that even today these vintages obtain best prices at auctions. February 25<sup>th</sup> 1923 the Freestate was occupied by the French aganist all agreements of "Versailles" November 16<sup>th</sup> , 1924 they was forced to strike off and release the Freestate Bottleneck.

