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**Violence in Defeat:
The Wehrmacht and Late-War Society in East Prussia,
1944-1945**

Bastiaan Willems

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Abstract of thesis

During the battles for East Prussia in the final year of the Second World War, the ruthless conduct of German troops resulted in vast material and personal damage. By focusing on the besieged 'Festung Königsberg' in the spring of 1945, this dissertation argues that the violence that transpired in Germany in 1945 can only be understood by devoting sustained attention to local actors and factors. By combining social history and military history approaches, the research restores agency to the German army, the Wehrmacht, as an active participant in the radicalisation of the German home front. This case study demonstrates that due to the fragmentation of Germany, the decisions and orders of Wehrmacht commanders had a disproportionately large impact at a local level. The radical nature of these decisions was the direct result of the commanders' violent experiences during the preceding years, while the barbarised mindset of the rank-and-file encouraged the rigorous enforcement of military authority. The dissertation's findings contribute to four themes within the historiography of the Second World War. First, it contributes to the recent debate surrounding the German *Volksgemeinschaft* by drawing attention to the limits of loyalty to the regime, and the actors and events that prompted this fidelity to shift. Secondly, by analysing a large number of unused archival sources, it provides the first in-depth urban history of everyday life in Königsberg during its 1945 siege. Thirdly, it challenges the conventional historiographical view in which fanatical Party officials were the main perpetrators of late-war violence by emphasising the significance of the Wehrmacht as a key actor. Even though large numbers of German troops operated in close proximity to German civilians, their conduct has hardly been considered as an explanation of the events of 1945. Lastly, this dissertation combines and transcends the different perspectives on German domestic and martial law, suggesting that the two were ever more closely intertwined as the war progressed, resulting in a shift of behavioural patterns. The focus on Königsberg and its immediate surroundings has allowed for a re-examination of late-war society, being the first to focus attention on the triadic relationship of Wehrmacht, Party, and civilian population.

Declaration of own work

I, Bastiaan Willems, declare that this thesis has been composed solely by me, the work presented is my own, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signature

Date

to Kirsty

Acknowledgements

This project was born out of my Bachelor's and Master's theses, which examined the different aspects of the Red Army's siege of Königsberg. My first thanks therefore to go to my supervisors on these projects, Dr. Ad van Kempen, Dr. Iain Lauchlan and Professor Pertti Ahonen. It was Pertti who encouraged me to pursue a PhD as well, and who advised me to further examine the population of Königsberg during its siege in 1945. After Pertti's departure to Finland, Dr. Stephan Malinowski took on the role as primary supervisor, a development that suited the direction of the dissertation particularly well. In the third year, the Soviet element of the PhD was dropped, and Iain stepped down from the project in favour of Dr. Tim Buchen. Stephan and Tim have been invaluable in carrying this project to the finish line. Throughout the period, I repeatedly turned to Dr. David Kaufman for a broad range of issues, while Dr. David Motadel, Professor Evan Mawdsley and Professor Johannes Hürter were good enough to share their expertise on their specific fields. Dr. Valery Galtsov and Viktor Apryshchenko allowed me to work on my argument at their universities in Kaliningrad and Rostov; subsequently, Dr. David Glantz and Dr. Ilya Dementsev gave me the opportunity to sharpen it by letting me publish in their journals.

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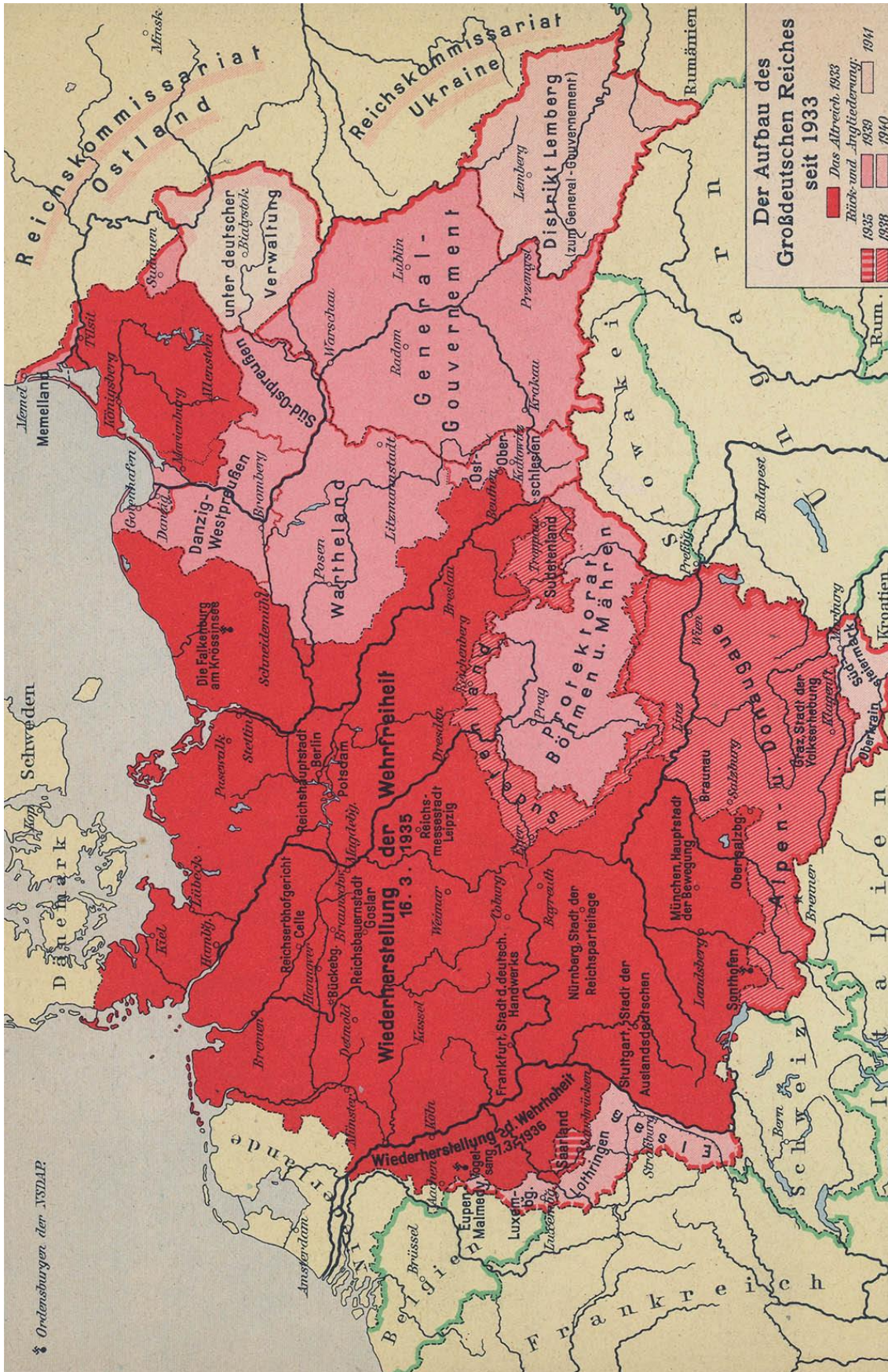
Katherine Rossi and Dr. Michał Palacz read large parts of my manuscript and made valuable comments. Without doubt, however, I owe the greatest depth of gratitude to Dr. Vince Colthurst, without whose constructive criticism this dissertation would have looked completely different. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents. Their patience and encouragement have been the bedrock of my own confidence in the project, allowing me to pursue my passion.

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List of abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ARLZ | Auflockerung, Räumung, Lähmung und Zerstörung – Breaking-down, Evacuation, Paralyzing and Destruction |
| ASK | Archiv Stadt Königsberg |
| BArch | Bundesarchiv |
| BdM | Bund deutscher Mädel – League of German Girls |
| BDO | Bund Deutscher Offiziere |
| GAKO | Gosudartsvennii Arkhiv Kaliningradskoi Oblasti |
| HJ | Hitlerjugend – Hitler Youth |
| IfZ | Institut für Zeitgeschichte |
| KPD | Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands – Communist Party of Germany |
| NKFD | Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland – National Committee for a Free Germany |
| NKVD | Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs |
| NSDAP | Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – National Socialist German Workers' Party |
| NSFO | Nationalsozialistischer Führungsoffizier – National Socialist Leadership Officer |
| NSF | Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft – National Socialist Women's League |
| NSV | Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt – National Socialist People's Welfare |
| OKH | Oberkommando des Heeres – Supreme High Command of the German Army |
| OKW | Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – Supreme Command of the Armed Forces |
| OT | Organisation Todt |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| RVK | Reichsverteidigungskommissar |
| SA | Sturmabteilung |
| SD | Sicherheitsdienst |
| SS | Schutzstaffeln |
| TNA | The National Archives |
| V-1 | Vergeltungswaffe 1 |
| V-2 | Vergeltungswaffe 2 |
| WPrO | Wehrmacht-Propaganda Offizier – Wehrmacht propaganda officer |



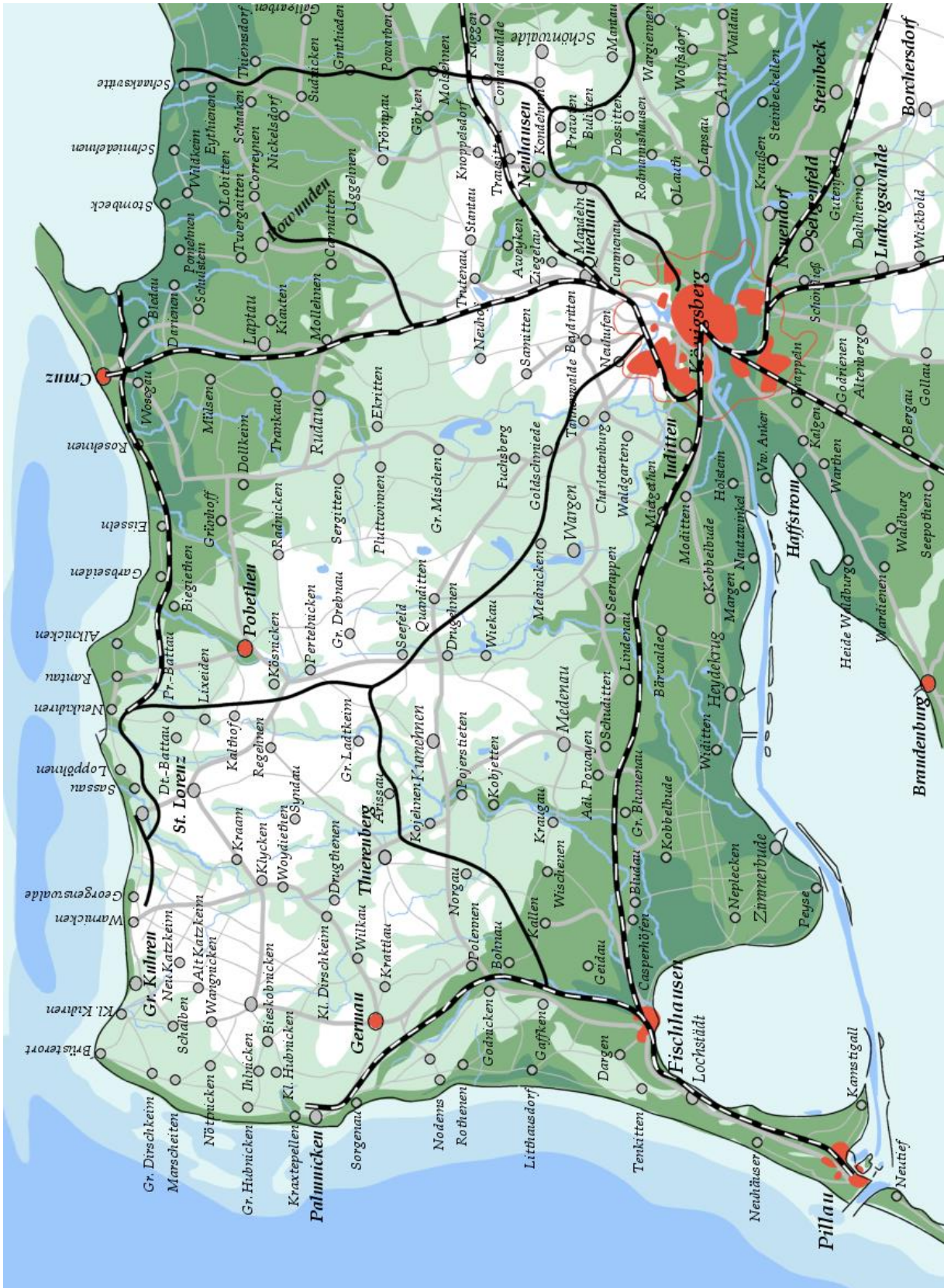
Map 1: Der Aufbau des Großdeutschen Reiches seit 1933, *Deutsche Schulatlas*, 1942. East Prussia is the north-easternmost province, or *Gau*



Map 2: East Prussia, 1939 (after annexation of Memel, prior to annexation of Sudauen)



Map 3: Königsberg, Pharus-Plan 1940



Map 4: Das Samland, Familienforschung Steinke

Introduction

I. Historiography and purpose of the study

In 1945, as part of the last act of the most devastating war in history, a wave of violence swept over Germany. For most Germans, the first months of 1945 became synonymous with unparalleled destruction, seemingly arbitrary death from without and within, and unequivocal and total military defeat.¹ How these three notions related to each other is much less known, if only because '1945' was almost immediately appropriated. In post-war West-Germany the notion of a *Stunde Null*, or 'zero hour', was introduced to represent May 1945, highlighting the break with Germany's totalitarian past. Adhering to this concept meant that all misery that had befallen the country had to be traced back to Nazism, which was readily done.² At the same time, East-German scholars presented the violence in 1945 as proof of widespread disagreement with a regime that had pursued the 'imperialist interest of German monopoly capital', while also playing up the role of the anti-Fascist resistance.³ Moreover, virtually from the moment Allied troops entered their communities, Germans throughout the country drew on the terror and fear they felt in 1945 to present themselves as victims of National Socialism.⁴ This dissertation proposes a new approach towards the perception of late-war violence. Above all, it seeks to restore agency to the German army, the *Wehrmacht*, and examines the mark it left on the German wartime community.

Both the sheer scale and the diversity of violence were unparalleled in German history, and to untangle the various strands of responsibility, culpability, and involvement, this dissertation will restrict itself to an analysis of events in East Prussia and its capital, Königsberg. We will return to further underlying reasons for this decision below, and will first address the general narrative. In 1945, the omnipresent violence throughout Germany led to a

¹ Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945, From War to Peace* (New York: Pocket Books, 2010), 4-7.

² Manfred Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, C.H. Beck, 1999), 159-60.

³ Hajo Dröll, "Die Zusammenbruchskrise des faschistischen Systems in Deutschland," in *Arbeiterinitiative 1945: Antifaschistische Ausschüsse und Reorganisation der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland*, ed. Lutz Niethammer, Ulrich Borsdorf and Peter Brandt (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 1976), 173.

⁴ Saul K. Padover, *Lügendetektor: Vernehmungen im besiegten Deutschland 1944/45* (Frankfurt a.M., Eichborn Verlag, 1999), 9.

sense of ‘general hopelessness’ among its population, as Allied bombardments reduced city after city to rubble, while revenge-driven Soviet troops assaulted tens of thousands of women in eastern Germany.⁵ The final months of the war also saw a massive increase in German versus German violence, or intra-ethnic violence, mainly in the form of decentralised summary courts-martial. Since this type of violence took place against the backdrop of the widespread racist violence that has come to define the National Socialist regime, it is generally – but inaccurately – grouped together with it. During the previous years, the Nazi regime had persecuted racial minorities and social outsiders, but within its own borders had at least sought to keep repression and mass murder from the public eye.⁶ In the final months of the war the violence against these groups escalated and increasingly took place out in the open. These so-called ‘*Endphaseverbrechen*’, ‘Crimes of the final phase’, have been the focus of in-depth research. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, these crimes were examined within the framework of their respective organisations, such as the Gestapo, the Hitler Youth, the prison system, and the concentration camp system. Scholars convincingly demonstrated that there was not a single Nazi institution that did not resort to radical measures during the final months of the war.⁷

Further research followed shortly afterwards, and placed these crimes within the context of the crumbling German community. Scholars like Sven Keller stressed that despite the Nazi regime’s failure to meet most of its promises, which was clear to most Germans by the summer of 1944, it was still able to mobilise the German population for the defence of their country by means of increasingly radical laws and orders.⁸ The radicalised Party official as the

⁵ Heinz Boberach (ed.) *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheime Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945, Band 17* (Herrsching: Pawlak Verlag, 1984), 6734.

⁶ David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), Chapters 4 and 7; Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: MacMillan, 2000), 631-62; Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus, *Social outsiders in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University press, 2001); Saul Friedlander, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 92-93. Famously, Adolf Eichmann’s December 4, 1940 memorandum saw ‘The Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ in the ‘transfer of the Jews out of the European economic space of the German people to a still-to-be-determined territory’.

⁷ Daniel Blatman, *The death marches, the final phase of Nazi genocide* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011); Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Hitler’s Prisons, Legal Terror in Nazi Germany*, London, Yale University Press, 2004, 319-331; Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004), 215-230. Gerhard Paul, “‘Diese Erschießungen haben mich innerlich gar nicht mehr berührt.’: die Kriegsendphasenverbrechen der Gestapo 1944/45.” In *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg: ‘Heimatfront’ und besetztes Europa*, edited by Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann, 543-568. Darmstadt, Primus Verlag, 2000

⁸ Sven Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende: Gesellschaft und Gewalt 1944/45* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), 419-26; Cord Arendes, Edgar Wolfrun, Jörg Zedler (ed.), *Terror nach Innen: Verbrechen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, (Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2006).

linchpin of the violence towards the German population was fairly readily accepted, since National Socialism and violence are inextricably linked.⁹ ‘Looking at the ruinous landscape left behind by National Socialism – a landscape shaped by war, racism, exclusion and murder, violence seems to be the common denominator,’ Richard Bessel rightly observed, further noting that when the Third Reich broke down in 1945, violence itself was the only aspect of National Socialist system to sustain.¹⁰

Yet, one of the biggest differences between the violence in 1945 to that of earlier years, was that it focused on ‘regular’ German *Volksgenossen* as well, rather than merely on the different minority groups. In rapid succession, the regime established summary courts-martial (15 February and 9 March), implemented the ‘Nero-order’ (19 March), which called for the destruction of the German infrastructure, and the ‘flag order’ (3 April), which, for all German men, made hoisting a white flag punishable by death. These orders shared the communality that they were meant to affect the larger German public. Instigated by the Nazi elite and steeped in Nazi rhetoric, they have been considered ‘the last gasp of the regime’, willing to drag all Germans into destruction along with them.¹¹ The decentralised and disparate nature of the violence, which, moreover, seemed to flare up with little warning or rationale, further allowed scholars to draw parallels between earlier Nazi political violence, such as in 1932-33, and the violence in 1945.¹² However, the fractured state of Germany by 1945 made it significantly harder for policy decisions taken in Berlin to be implemented ‘on the ground’. By confining the research to one province, this dissertation examines how the central decision-making processes translated into intra-ethnic violence at a local level.

Within the historiography of ‘1945’, sustained attention has also been devoted to the violence committed by Soviet troops against German refugees. The persistent narrative is that a failing Party bureaucracy that prevented, and often forbade, the population of threatened areas

⁹ On Party behaviour in Eastern Germany, see especially: Alastair Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany, 1944-1945: the darkest hour* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2010)

¹⁰ Richard Bessel “Eine ›Volksgemeinschaft‹ der Gewalt,” in ‚*Volksgemeinschaft*‘: *Mythos, wirkungsmächtige soziale Verheißung oder soziale Realität im ‚Dritten Reich‘?* ed. Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 359.

¹¹ Manfred Zeidler, “Der Zusammenbruch des NS-Staates”, in *Kriegsende in Deutschland* ed. Ralph Giordano (Hamburg, Ellert & Richter, 2005), 42-49.

¹² Sven Keller, “Volksgemeinschaft and Violence: Some Reflections on Interdependencies.” In *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives* ed. Martina Steber, Bernhard Gotto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 226-39. See also Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany 1925-1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

from preparing for evacuation, and in turn left them at the mercy of the Soviets.¹³ This dissertation will focus on the considerations that underpinned the different evacuation measures in East Prussia, expanding on the research of Heinrich Schwendemann, who examined the motivations behind strategic and tactical decisions taken by Wehrmacht commanders during the final months of the war.¹⁴ It will closely link it to the research of David Yelton, who examined the establishment and deployment of the *Volkssturm* militia during the final year of the war.¹⁵ These two scholars both established that the military was much more closely involved in decisions that directly impacted the German civilian population.

The continuing focus on Party behaviour means that the largest and most violent player present in Germany in 1945, the German Wehrmacht, has remained underappreciated as an actor. Although the Wehrmacht's role in the defeat of the Third Reich has been examined, historians rarely link it with the intra-ethnic violence that took place during the final fighting in Germany.¹⁶ Research into the motivations behind the violent behaviour among the ranks of the Wehrmacht goes back to Omer Bartov's 1985 standard work *The Eastern Front, 1941-45, German troops and the barbarisation of warfare*, which not only addressed the violent interaction its members had with an environment they perceived as hostile, but also provided an insight into the ideological indoctrination to explain the troops' motivations.¹⁷ In the decades that followed, Wehrmacht behaviour on the Eastern Front remained the focus of in-depth studies. The crimes committed by the Wehrmacht during the German occupation of the Soviet Union are central in these works, and numerous scholars convincingly demonstrated that the Wehrmacht was actively involved in the Holocaust, while also participating in countless acts of genocide against local populations. The focus on the policies in the Soviet Union, however, also means that the examination 'stops' at the German border: the summer of 1944 is generally the end-point of these studies.¹⁸ Whereas numerous studies address the violent behavioural

¹³ Theodor Schieder (ed.), *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa, Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse, Band I*, (1954; repr., Munich, Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984).

¹⁴ See for example: Heinrich Schwendemann, "Der deutsche Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45." In *Kriegsende 1945: Verbrechen, Katastrophen, Befreiungen in nationaler und internationaler Perspektive*, edited by Bernd-A. Rusinek, 125-150. Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 2004

¹⁵ David Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm: The Nazi militia and the fall of Germany 1944 1945*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002.

¹⁶ Andreas Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage: Die bewaffnete Macht in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944 bis 1945* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005)

¹⁷ Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45, German troops and the barbarisation of warfare*, (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁸ Among the many work, see for example: Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008); Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des*

patterns of the Wehrmacht in occupied cities in Eastern Europe, so far, no research exists that asks critical questions about the relation between the Wehrmacht and its own urban population.¹⁹ This dissertation addresses this gap by extending this line of research into Germany itself by examining in detail conditions in Königsberg during the final months of the Second World War.

Within the research into military behaviour on the Eastern Front, moreover, the first occupation years (1941-1942) are examined more extensively, since during this period a string of deadly, racially motivated ‘criminal orders’ was implemented that were subsequently discussed in the field and elaborated on in war diaries.²⁰ The findings of these studies are nevertheless of key importance to understand what happened later in the war as well. Christian Hartmann, for example, examined the ‘interplay between the military developments and the behaviour of the combatants’ and found that different military circumstances prompted different acts of violence.²¹ That troops continued to be radicalised through interaction with their environment is easily overlooked, and especially during times of military defeat the mental and physical strain led to a sharp increase in violence.²² As soldiers kept interacting with their environment in reaction to different wartime developments, ‘barbarisation’, and thus the nature of violence, evolved continuously. It seems therefore unlikely that, after four years on the Eastern Front, either as occupiers or as fighters, German troops could simply leave their violent mindset behind as they crossed back into Germany. This leads to the central question this dissertation asks: what was necessary for the Wehrmacht to turn against its own population?

Vernichtungskrieges 1941 - 1944; Ausstellungskatalog (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002); Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia*, (Oxford: Berg, 1989); Timothy Patrick Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire: German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1942-1943* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988); Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998).

¹⁹ Stephan Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation im Osten: Besatzeralltag in Warschau und Minsk 1939-1944* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010).

²⁰ A great introduction to this vast historiography is: Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, Ulrike Jureit, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005). Beyond Bartov’s research, two pioneering works are: Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 1999) Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941 - 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978). On the use of courts-martial against Soviet citizens, see: F. Römer “„Im alten Deutschland wäre solcher Befehl nicht möglich gewesen“. Rezeption, Adaption und Umsetzung des Kriegsgerichtsbarkeitserlass im Ostheer 1941/42.” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56, no.1 (2008)

²¹ Christian Hartmann, *Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 245, 243-423.

²² See, for example: J. Kilian, “Wehrmacht, Partisanenkrieg und Rückzugsverbrechen an der nördlichen Ostfront im Herbst und Winter 1943,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 61, no. 2 (2013), 173 – 199.

The rationale behind radical Wehrmacht behaviour has long been sought in the ideological indoctrination of the troops, but, although this is undoubtedly important, it means that other explanations have been left largely ignored.²³ Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius drew attention to the German military's stay in Russia during the First World War, showing that a radicalised Nazi mind set was not at all a prerequisite for a harsh occupation and brutal behaviour towards populations.²⁴ Other factors, such the strain of war, are still largely left unexplored. Whereas war neurosis (what is today called 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder') is examined in depth when it concerns the other belligerents during the Second World War, an examination of the mental state of German troops is still absent.²⁵ Nazi medicine itself lay at the core of this underappreciation, since troops' mental illnesses did not fit into the idea of a healthy fighting *Volk*. As German soldiers' mental traumas were equated to cowardice, or even considered as treasonous, they remained unaddressed during the National Socialist era, while also in post-war Germany the general advice was to 'trivialise, tone down, consciously forget and suppress' traumatic experiences.²⁶ How Germans dealt with mental trauma has received little attention, although the topic is gaining prominence.²⁷

Only recently has a group of German scholars, led by historian Sönke Neitzel and the social psychologist Harald Welzer, set out to assess the 'military-sociological and social-psychological' motivations of German soldiers. With war as the frame of reference, the authors found the views of German troops on 'fighting, killing and dying' to be rather similar in comparison to modern-day American soldiers.²⁸ This group also included Felix Römer, who published the landmark work *Kameraden*, using the bugged conversations of German prisoners

²³ Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). See particularly Chapter 4: The Distortion of Reality

²⁴ Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

²⁵ See for example: Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005)

²⁶ Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich: The Göring Institute*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 82; Hilke Lorenz, *Kriegskinder: Das Schicksal einer Generation* (Munich: List, 2003), 19.

²⁷ Svenja Goltermann, *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden: Deutsche Kriegsheimkehrer und ihre Gewalterfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2009); Jörg Echternkamp, *Soldaten im Nachkrieg: Historische Deutungskonflikte und westdeutsche Demokratisierung 1945-1955* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014)

²⁸ Sönke Neitzel, Harald Welzer, *Soldaten, On Fighting, Killing and Dying, The secret World War II transcripts of German POWs* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012); Christian Gudehus, Sönke Neitzel Harald Welzer (ed.), »Der Führer war wieder viel zu human, viel zu gefühlvoll«: *Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht deutscher und italienischer Soldaten* (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011), See also: Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normale Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt a.M., Fischer Verlag, 2005)

of war, recorded at Fort Hunt, Virginia. For Römer, the National-Socialist indoctrination is merely one of the dimensions to explain the behaviour of Wehrmacht soldiers. The ‘actual combat and the dynamics of violence, the historical-cultural framework of the respective society and its military, the culture within the actual unit, and finally also the individual disposition of each combatant’ were the main driving forces behind military conduct.²⁹ The troops’ attitude towards their fellow countrymen, however, could not be included in the work, since the time of capture of the examined German POWs mostly predated the Allied advance into Germany. It is nevertheless noteworthy that among these men the concern for and the treatment of the German population was apparently hardly worthy of sustained conversation. The research into the role of the German armed forces during times of violent transition is currently experiencing a revival, with German military involvement increasingly sought – and found – at the centre of intense domestic violence.³⁰ This dissertation fits into this new current.

We now turn to the main questions this dissertation addresses. It argues that the violence against German civilians during the defence of their country can only be understood by restoring agency to the soldiers of retreating Wehrmacht units as active participants, thus looking beyond the traditionally viewed actors. To what extent could the arrival of military units in Germany help to explain the spike in violence in Germany in 1945? Was this violence deliberate, or was it a by-product of the fighting? Was it ordered, or was it spontaneous? What explains the difference in behaviour between these units and those German troops that were already garrisoned throughout the country? Every possible answer, in turn, only prompts more questions. What could be gained by exercising violence, and who gained from it? Most importantly: why would German troops and Party officials decide to resort to violence against their fellow countrymen, and how did they justify this to themselves? Finally, this dissertation seeks to distinguish continuities and discontinuities in military behaviour as troops returned from fighting abroad to fight on the home front. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine to what extent the violence in 1945 can be separated from its totalitarian context. By presenting a microhistory of East Prussia and Königsberg, this dissertation presents a new view on the role of the Wehrmacht within the German society. As we saw, research so far mainly addresses the extent to which National Socialism impacted the Wehrmacht, yet it hardly examines what mark the Wehrmacht left on the German wartime community. Analysing the interplay between

²⁹ Felix Römer, *Kameraden, Die Wehrmacht von innen* (Munich: Piper, 2012), 468.

³⁰ See particularly: Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Party and Wehrmacht bodies, this dissertation seeks to clarify how the two actors shaped late-war German society.

II. Methodology and source base

Examining events that occurred in Germany in 1945 means wading through a dense historiography. The secondary literature is virtually infinite, and some of the most highly regarded historians have written about it in recent times.³¹ It seems therefore almost impossible to take a fresh look at the way events transpired, especially when it concerns a loaded topic such as violence. Therefore, rather than examining Germany as a whole, this dissertation will examine the events in Germany's easternmost province, East Prussia, from the autumn of 1944 onwards, with a particular focus on its capital, Königsberg. Soviet troops reached the province's borders in the late summer of 1944, which led to a series of defensive measures being taken. That autumn Königsberg was declared a fortress (Festung), and as such was besieged by Soviet troops between late January and April 1945, after Soviet troops had overrun much of the rest of East Prussia. The German city Königsberg no longer exists; today it is known as Kaliningrad, the capital of the Russian *Oblast* with the same name, an often-overlooked exclave wedged between Poland and Lithuania. As the area fits awkwardly in the story of (West and East) Germany its recent history has been largely ignored by historians.³² This means that many generalisations still dominate our current perception of the city, while the lack of scholarship, in some extreme cases, forced established scholars to resort to citing amateur historians.³³

The first obstacle in researching East Prussia is the highly fractured source base. Parts of Königsberg's archives were evacuated in late-1944, and, as of early 2017, archival sources

³¹ See, for example: Ian Kershaw, *The End, Hitler's Germany, 1944-45* (London: Allen Lane 2011); Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945, From War to Peace* (New York, Pocket Books, 2010); Stephen Fritz, *Endkampf, Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014), Ch. 10: Untergang.

³² It fits, however, in the story of "Germans", and played an important role in the *Historikerstreit*. See: Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin: Siedler, 1986); Collection of essays by multiple authors, *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich: Piper, 1991).

³³ Kershaw, in *The End*, uses the work of Isabel Denny, *The fall of Hitler's Fortress city: The battle for Königsberg 1945* (London, Greenhill Books, 2007).

concerning the city are still on the move.³⁴ Sources that specifically focus on East Prussia and Königsberg were found in the *Archiv Stadt Königsberg* in Duisburg, the archive of the *Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum* in Lüneburg and the *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kaliningradskoi Oblasti* in Kaliningrad, although none of these can boast a coherent or organised collection of primary source material focusing on the era. The broader German context has been reconstructed with considerably more ease, with sources found in the larger archives of the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin-Lichtenfelde, the *Bundesarchiv-Lastenasugleich* in Bayreuth, the *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv* in Freiburg, the National Archives in Kew, and the archives of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich. This Europe-wide search, and the wide range of sources encountered there, has inevitably led me towards considering the different variables at play during Germany's final defence of East Prussia. Important regional studies, such as that of Jill Stephenson, who analysed Württemberg during the National Socialist era, drew attention to the differences existing between the German provinces, urging future historians not to draw sweeping conclusions.³⁵

If East Prussia is to serve as a case study for violence in late-war Germany, appreciating the province's unique factors, while at the same time providing a framework that allows us to better understand the larger context of this violence, is the most challenging task of this dissertation. After Soviet forces had cut through East Prussia in January 1945, Königsberg became one of the clearest examples of what is referred to as the late-war 'islandization' ('*Verinselung*') of Germany: the fragmentation of the regime that allowed local authorities to assume a more active role.³⁶ Between late January 1945 and early April 1945 the city was besieged, limiting its contact with the outside world. As such it can be rightly considered a 'microcosm', whose uniqueness should be examined before continuing to the main questions this dissertation seeks to answer.³⁷ At the same time, the inclination to generalise always lures,

³⁴ Fabienne Piepiora "Museum Haus Königsberg verabschiedet sich," *Der Westen*, January 10, 2015, <http://www.derwesten.de/staedte/duisburg/museum-haus-koenigsberg-verabschiedet-sich-id11449984.html>

The holdings of the Archive and Museum of Stadt Königsberg are transferred to the Ostpreussische Landesmuseum, which is currently being expanded. Most archival files are still boxed.

³⁵ Jill Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front, Württemberg under the Nazis* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006); "The Volksgemeinschaft and the Problems of Permeability: The Persistence of Traditional Attitudes in Württemberg Villages" *German History* 34, no. 1 (2016): 49-69.

³⁶ Wolfgang Franz Werner, »*Bleib übrig!*« *Deutsche Arbeiter in der nationalsozialistischen Kriegswirtschaft* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1983), 329. Andreas Kunz refers to this process in the military context as 'atomisation. See: Andreas Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage: Die bewaffnete Macht in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944 bis 1945* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005)

³⁷ The term 'microcosm' is borrowed from: Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, *Microcosm: A Portrait of a Central European City* (London: Pimlico, 2003)

if only because Nazi propaganda was determined to present a view of an egalitarian society.³⁸ Moreover, due to years of practice, by 1945 most high-ranking Nazi officials were extremely skilled in presenting their message. As a result, using their orders can indeed seem more appealing to historians than using the stiff, telegram-style orders of commanders, who had little reason – and even less time – to devote energy to style or sentence structure. The risk of following National Socialist principles as a base for understanding German behaviour becomes particularly apparent in a diary entry of Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, dated 27 March, 1945:

I express my astonishment to Slesina that in the west not one symbol of resistance has manifested itself, as it has in the east, like in Breslau or Königsberg. He asserts that the population in the West is beaten senseless by the months and years of enemy bombing, and that they prefer a horrible end over an endless horror. I believe it has also to do with the fact that the people in the west are by nature not as tough as those in the east. The people in the west are closer to France, that over-civilized country, while the people in the east are closer to Poland and Russia, the more primitive countries of Europe.³⁹

This simplified explanation, rooted in the pseudo-scientific Social-Darwinist theories held so dear by the Nazis, is a logically insufficient answer. At the same time, Goebbels' statement highlights that after twelve years of National Socialist propaganda, there were still local differences that needed to be observed. Despite continuous efforts of different East Prussian expellee organisations, who after the war had sought to present the strong local culture as a kind of hurdle that prevented any significant change, it is nevertheless clear that National Socialism reached deeply into East Prussia. By retracing its appeal and reach in the province, we can determine the factors with which East Prussians identified as the war reached the borders of their province in the summer of 1944. Borrowing from the field of nationalism studies, we find that most of its scholars 'share the understanding that identities are something opposed to [self-] interests', and, therefore, establishing which actors challenged those interests

³⁸ Richard Bessel, "The War to End All Wars: The Shock of Violence in 1945 and Its Aftermath in Germany," in *No Man's Land of Violence. Extreme War in the 20th Century*, ed. Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbord (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006), 85.

³⁹ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1945: Die letzte Aufzeichnungen* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1977), 391-92. Horst Slesina was to run the *Werwolf* guerrilla radio station in the areas conquered by the Allies

during the final stage of the war gives us the best indication of the balance of power in Königsberg.⁴⁰

The assessment of these different factors forms a substantial ‘preamble’ to what is the main aim of the dissertation: examining the role of the German Wehrmacht in the intra-ethnic violence in Germany in 1944-1945. Establishing who benefited from the violence is an important aspect of this dissertation, but a Germany-wide approach can lead to a singling out of sources that fit the presumptions of the researcher. By limiting this dissertation to East Prussia, the cross section will seek to uncover actors that have previously been underappreciated. This will be achieved through juxtaposing Party and Wehrmacht orders to a wide variety of situation reports, journals, diaries, questionnaires, and private recollections. These sources allow us to retrace the decisions of the perpetrators and the motives that lay behind them, and might help us to better understand why Germany’s defeat was so total. Above all, it can tell us much about the priorities of those in charge in the final months of the war.

III. Structure of the thesis

This dissertation consists of two parts: attention is equally divided between the environment in which violence occurred, and the violence itself, since only through a reinterpretation of the environment can we reappraise the different actors. Although current research is grounded in a solid primary source base and presents a nuanced perspective, our view of the violence in Germany during the final months of the war is essentially the same as in 1950.⁴¹ Therefore, we will first assess some of the core concepts that form the framework of this thesis.

Chapter 1 starts with an analysis of the relationship between the *Volksgemeinschaft* and Total War in East Prussia. Establishing the native population’s mentality towards the war teaches us about those people who would become the main victims of late-war violence. Subsequently, we will determine what impact the Party and the Wehrmacht had on their behaviour, using the construction of the *Ostwall* and the establishment of the *Volkssturm* as ‘stress-tests’. Having for the first time connected the three actors to East Prussia, we then turn

⁴⁰ Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology, Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 17-18.

⁴¹ The link between ‘the fanatical Nazi’ and violence can be found as early as the late 1940s. The work that stands out in this regard is: Jürgen Thorwald, *Es begann and die Weichsel – Das Ende am Elbe* (1949 and 1950; repr., Munich: Knaur Zeitgeschichte, 1979). An examination of the appeal of this work is: D. Oels: „Dieses Buch ist kein Roman“. Jürgen Thorwalds „Die große Flucht“ zwischen Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerungspolitik,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 6, no.3 (2009), 367-390.

to the assessment of a concept that has so far been largely ignored: the actors' appreciation of their immediate environment, and more precisely their appreciation of a city. Although the violence in 1945 was not restricted to cities, we will see that they form the most suitable platforms to examine it. Once these core concepts are assessed, we can turn to Königsberg in 1945, seeking to answer the first main question of this thesis: what was the balance of power in the city? Chapter 2 concerns itself with the question about how this balance of power manifested itself, analysing the way propaganda in Königsberg presented the different events that took place on a local, national and international level. An assessment of the themes explored in local media will help to reveal how, in a fractured Germany, local authorities presented their message, and how they sought to link it to the larger picture.

Chapter 3 then shifts to an examination of the evacuation in East Prussia, where we will examine the collaboration between the Party and the Wehrmacht. It will help to establish their authority, as well as the radicalising nature of their proximity. Nowadays, 'evacuation' is understood as the transportation of civilians, and it is this view that perseveres about the provinces in Eastern Germany as well. Analysing the evacuation measures, retracing what their exact purposes were, moreover, can help us to understand the relationship between the Party and Wehrmacht on one hand, and the civilian population on the other. Lastly, Chapter 4 will continue to explore the consequences of the German troops' proximity to the German population. It focuses on two elements: the introduction of the radicalised mindset of the German troops in German society, and the adherence to military law in German society. How did these two elements shape the behaviour in Königsberg? It traces the radicalised legislation that was implemented to the origins of military law, once again highlighting that this law did not take the need of civilians into account.

The conclusion will above all focus on the findings of the last chapters. It will show that, as earlier on the Eastern Front, there are clear limits to the well-worn idea of the Wehrmacht as an obstacle for the radicalisation of German society, instead showing that, once back in Germany, it played a key role in the practice of violence during the last months of the Second World War.

1.

Regionality and Total War in East Prussia

Introduction

In late January 1945, the East Prussian capital of Königsberg was threatened with encirclement. The city was still packed with civilians, and many of them, such as Wilhelm Strüvy, a prominent and well-respected member of the East Prussian community, had a small window of time to flee Königsberg and leave East Prussia. Despite his age – Strüvy was 58 – he repeatedly turned the opportunity down, choosing to take part in the defence of the city instead, feeling that ‘If the province falls, I can fall as well!’¹ During those same days, a woman explained her motivation to stay in Königsberg to her doctor, assuring him that the city would hold out: ‘Our Führer will not let us be captured by the Russian, he’ll rather gas us.’² These radical statements reveal a willingness of German contemporaries to closely connect personal well-being to their immediate environment, an environment that, with few exceptions, had been completely transformed during the previous years of ‘Total War’. Germans’ perception of war had – due to the lack of alternative news sources – above all been shaped by their own propaganda and their personal experiences. Therefore, although these fanatical sentiments reveal the permeability of the regime’s language, they hardly reveal which legislation and which bodies shaped the day-to-day decisions civilians had to make at the time. Indeed, to fully understand the place of the German civilian during times of Total War, we should venture beyond their perception of it, outlining the processes that lay at its foundation.

This chapter follows the path of the population of Königsberg throughout the war by examining their direct environment, starting with an examination of East Prussia as a whole and continuing with Königsberg in particular. The interplay between actors and environment lies at the core of this chapter and is crucial to an understanding of the radical behaviour that manifested itself in 1945. Contemporaries and historians alike have so far traced late-war violence in Germany back to two tracks of thought. As a rule, the violence is treated both as a

¹ “Wilhelm Strüvy siebzig Jahre,” *Das Ostpreussenblatt*, October 10, 1956, 3.

² Hans Graf von Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch. Aufzeichnungen eines Arztes aus den Jahren 1945–1947* (Munich: dtv, 1961), 18-19. Note the mention of ‘The Russian’ as a single entity, rather than ‘the Russians’ (plural) as identifiable human beings. This phrasing is part of continuous efforts to dehumanise the Soviets.

continuation of radicalised domestic Nazi policy, while further excesses are explained through the age-old adage ‘war is war’: since war is inherently violent in nature, the barbarity it engenders is a logical result.³ This sentiment has allowed both the Wehrmacht, as well as the German civilian population, to be portrayed as passive actors, swept up in the maelstrom of war, subject to this radicalisation, but hardly contributing to it. The focus on East Prussia and its capital Königsberg allows us to trace back the motivations of the bodies involved, the language that was used in the decision-making process, as well as the friction the implementation of policy caused in German society. Moreover, restoring agency to the different actors on a local level will help us separate thought-through deliberations from decisions prompted by circumstances, providing us with a more nuanced view of what led to the radicalisation of German wartime society.

I. East Prussia’s path to 1945

To establish what underlay the violence in East Prussia, the first step is to determine how the behavioural patterns of the different actors had developed during the prior years. It is tempting to explain the violence as a product of a society shaped by National Socialism by following the official line of the regime. Propaganda at the time consistently portrayed Germany as a Nazified state, which was encapsulated in the word *Volksgemeinschaft*, or ‘people’s community’. On 24 February 1945, Königsberg’s *Preußische Zeitung*, like most other party outlets, celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the declaration of the National Socialist party programme. Shortly after the First World War, the Nazis presented twenty-five points to achieve their vision for Germany. According to the editors of the *Preußische Zeitung*, the existence of a *Volksgemeinschaft* had emboldened the German people: ‘Then a crippled nation, today a people fighting with extreme fanaticism. Then a survivor of a disintegrated social order, today a developing [and] unwavering *Volksgemeinschaft*.’⁴ Progress within German society was consistently traced back to the added value of institutions and policies introduced by the Nazis,

³ Sven Keller, “Volksgemeinschaft and Violence: Some Reflections on Interdependencies,” in: *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 226-239; Ian Kershaw, *The End*, esp. Chapter 6: Terror comes home. William T. Sherman, September 1864, “If the people raise a howl against my barbarity and cruelty, I will answer that war is war, and not popularity-seeking.” Antonio Gramsci, January 1921: “War is war, and he who embarks on that adventure must feel the full force of the beast that he has awoken.”

⁴ “Ich prophezeie den Sieg des Deutschen Reiches!,” *Preußische Zeitung*, February 25, 1945.

thereby downplaying the continuities with the pre-Nazi era. Yet, every adult had a frame of reference that extended beyond the twelve years of the National Socialist dictatorship. This section therefore will address the social changes that took place prior and during the National Socialist era, and determine which impact they had on East Prussia.

Psychological studies tell us that behavioural patterns of both individuals and groups can largely be determined by evaluating the perception of past experiences, and it seems therefore sensible to start the examination of East Prussia at the beginning of the populations' living memory, in the late nineteenth century.⁵ During this period, the heyday of the Second Reich, German nationalism, actively fuelled by the monarchy and *völkisch* movements, reached previously unknown heights. Sustained energy was devoted to the question what it meant to be German, resulting in debates about where the borders of 'Germandom' lay, how these had come about historically, and how they corresponded with the current situation. In the age of Empire, the predictable conclusion was that Germany needed to expand, a notion that it shared with virtually every other European state. Within the German debates, the county's eastern borderlands were presented as points of friction between the Germans and the Slavs. East Prussia, Germany's easternmost province, played a prominent role in these debates, as it was both the province that embodied Germany's aspirations for a colonial empire that would expand eastwards, as well as the province where the *angst* for an invasion by barbaric Slavic neighbours took its clearest shape.⁶

East Prussians saw their fears confirmed in late 1914, during the first months of the First World War, when three major battles and numerous smaller border fights were fought out between German defenders and the Russian armies that had entered East Prussia. Although the battles ended in clear German victories, the material and personal damage had been enormous. More than a third of the population fled in August and September 1914, while of those who stayed behind some 1,500 died at the hands of the Russian troops. Besides vast material damage to the province, some 13,000 of its civilians were deported to Russia, of whom well over a third would not return. The fighting for the province reached every front page in Germany with the German victory at Tannenberg in August 1914, and ended in late February 1915 with a following victory at the Winter Battle of the Masurian Lakes. As such, East Prussia held a

⁵ D. Dietrich, "National Renewal, Anti-Semitism, and Political Continuity: A Psychological Assessment," *Political Psychology* 9, no. 3 (1988): 385-411.

⁶ Gregor Thum, "Megalomania and Angst: The Nineteenth-Century Mythization of Germany's Eastern Borderlands," in *Shatterzones of Empire: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* ed. Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 23-41; Roderick Stackelberg, *Idealism debased: From Völkisch ideology to National Socialism*, (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1981), 1-18.

unique position in Germany's First World War experience, being the only German province to have experienced actual combat.⁷

During the interwar period, few East Prussians are likely to have changed their attitude towards their neighbours. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles had given birth to the 'Polish Corridor' which granted the newly-formed state of Poland access to the sea, thereby cutting East Prussia off from the rest of Germany. It was a 'thorn in the flesh' that most Germans – East Prussians in particular – wanted extracted. Much of the fear they felt, stemmed from the realisation that the German army, the *Reichswehr*, (with a strength of a mere 100,000 men as a result of the restrictions of Versailles) would be unable to provide any opposition to the Polish army, which possessed some 300,000 troops.⁸ As Poland waged a number of wars with neighbouring states, most importantly with Lithuania and the Soviet Union, war remained on East Prussia's doorstep (primarily in the east and south), adding to the feelings of unease and insecurity. Shortly after the First World War, the western part of the Neidenburg district, which included the city of Soldau, had to be handed over to Poland. A last humiliation came in 1924, when as a result of the 'Klaipeda Revolt' the area north of the river Memel was separated from the province and incorporated into Lithuania. Moreover, 'in the region of the corridor', Roger Moorhouse found, 'ethnic cleansing against the German population was on the rise.'⁹ On all sides East Prussia was compromised, becoming the embodiment of what throughout Germany was referred to as 'the bleeding frontier'.¹⁰

During this period, the fate of East Prussia continued to be placed within a history of a centuries-long battle with the east: the victories at Tannenberg in 1914 were widely publicised as a revenge for the battle lost by the Teutonic Knights in 1410 on that 'same' location. Numerous books were published along this line, most famously *Schlachtfelder in Ostpreußen*, a work written by officers from the province, which addressed all the battles that took place between the Middle Ages and 1918.¹¹ The *Tannenberg-Denkmal*, of which construction started in 1924, also embraced this medieval memory culture, its layout deliberately reminiscent of a

⁷ Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), 160-81.

⁸ Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 21.

⁹ Roger Moorhouse. "'The sore that would never heal': The Genesis of the Polish Corridor." In *After the Versailles Treaty: Enforcement, Compliance, Contested Identities*, ed. Conan Fisher and Alan Sharp (London: Routledge, 2008), 193.

¹⁰ Andreas Kossert, *Ostpreußen: Geschichte und Mythos* (Munich: Siedler, 2005), 217-232.

¹¹ Wehrkreiskommando I, *Schlachtfelder in Ostpreußen* (Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Volz & Co. Kg., 1932).

Teutonic castle.¹² The feeling of being beleaguered by ‘the East’ had a tangible impact on East Prussia, and resulted in the construction and strengthening of fortification works throughout the province. Moreover, paramilitary organisations spawned in the province, arising out of the fear that the small *Reichswehr* would be unable to defend East Prussia in case of a Polish incursion. Already prior to the National Socialist dictatorship, the *Reichswehr* actively tapped into this fear, and particularly members of the armed wing of the NSDAP, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) proved willing to assist in the country’s defence. The army offered military training to these men, and these efforts were particularly successful in East Prussia.¹³

More widely, Germany, which in the early 1920s was seriously politically divided, also had to overcome severe domestic crises. On numerous occasions unrest turned violent, as different factions and parties made grabs for power.¹⁴ This led to a rise of a yearning to be part of a stable country, unified behind a set of core values, which had last been the case during the first weeks of the First World War, when a ‘manufactured image’ of euphoric nationalism had taken hold of the country.¹⁵ Many parties and organisations therefore stressed the importance of creating a *Gemeinschaft*, a community, which they considered far superior to the traditional *Gesellschaft*, or society. The National Socialists also believed in the added value of a *Gemeinschaft*, which they, in line with a popular strand of thought, structured around the *Volk*, the ‘healthy, undefiled members of the community, whose devotion to the national good had not been corrupted by selfish materialism.’¹⁶ They connected to this idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* the ‘promise of normality’, both in the private and public sphere, a ‘goal that ordinary Germans had been longing for since at least 1915, after hopes of a quick victory

¹² Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36-38, 127-34.

¹³ Richard Lakowski, *Ostpreußen 1944/45: Krieg im Nordosten des Deutschen Reiches* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016), 60-63; Kurt Dieckert and Horst Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen. Der umfassende Dokumentarbericht* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1998), 16-20; Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 22; Christian Tilitsky, *Alltag in Ostpreussen: Die geheime Lageberichte der Königsberger Justiz* (Würzburg: Flehsig, 2003), 10.

¹⁴ Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 38-39. Interesting within the scope of this dissertation is Fritzsche’s use of words, as he asserts that ‘the people’s community was also always a statement of collective strength. It expressed “the peace of the fortress” that enabled Germans to mobilise against their external enemies in World War I.’

¹⁶ Stackelberg, *Idealism debased*, 4-5; Under Nazism, *Volk* was defined as a ‘community of blood’. See: Ingo Haar, “German *Ostforschung* and Anti-Semitism.” in *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1919-1945*, ed. Michael Fahlbusch and Ingo Haar (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 2.

in the First World War had been dashed.’¹⁷ They saw the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a promise for a better future, and, to achieve this community, it required the constant participation of the people. As such, the *Volksgemeinschaft* was meant as a dynamic process, rather than a clearly-defined final objective.¹⁸ Central to the National Socialist *Volk*-thinking was the emphasis on Germany as a self-sufficient state, which meant that East Prussia, as an agricultural province, would continue to receive considerable economic benefits.¹⁹ This vision resonated particularly well among the majority of the East Prussian population, especially its rural protestant inhabitants, and during the March 1933 elections, the last elections before Hitler established a dictatorship, East Prussia was the province with the highest percentage of NSDAP voters, an absolute majority of 56.5 per cent.²⁰ Much of this support should be traced back to the tireless efforts of Erich Koch (1896-1986), who in 1928 came to the province to head the newly-created Nazi ‘*Gau Ostpreußen*’ as its Gauleiter (provincial leader).²¹ Since most Gauleiters – Koch included – were Party members from the first hour (‘*Alter Kämpfer*’) they could count on Hitler’s unconditional trust and support. As such, they yielded massive informal powers as well, which allowed them to assert increasing control over every aspect of their provinces.²²

What certainly struck a chord locally during the Nazi rule were the efforts to incorporate East Prussia’s martial heritage into the regime’s official line, placing it, like before, into the perceived centuries-long struggle with ‘the East’.²³ The Nazi regime took over care for the Tannenberg Denkmal, which up to then was privately funded, rechristening it *Reichsehrenmal*

¹⁷ Andreas Wirsching, “*Volksgemeinschaft* and the Illusion of ‘Normality’ from the 1920s to the 1940s,” in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 150.

¹⁸ Michael Wildt, “*Volksgemeinschaft*: A modern perspective on National Socialist Society,” in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 43.

¹⁹ Dieter Hertz-Eichenrode, *Politik und Landwirtschaft in Ostpreußen 1919–1930: Untersuchung eines Strukturproblems in der Weimarer Republik*, (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1969), 2; Magnus von Braun, *Weg durch vier Zeitepochen: Vom ostpreußischen Gutsleben der Väter bis zur Weltraumforschung des Sohnes* (Limburg a.d. Lahn: C.A. Starke Verlag, 1965), 198-205, 210-225; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals, Reflections on Roosevelt’s America, Mussolini’s Italy, and Hitler’s Germany, 1933-1939* (New York: Picador, 2007), 224-25.

²⁰ Martin Broszat, *The Hitler state: The foundation and development of the internal structure of the Third Reich* (London: Longman, 1981), xvii; Richard Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 361-71, 485.

²¹ Karl Höffkes, *Hitlers politische Generale, Die Gauleiter des Dritten Reiches, Ein Biographisches Nachschlagewerk* (Tübingen, Grabert-Verlag, 1997), 185-86.

²² Jochen von Lang, *Bormann, The Man Who Manipulated Hitler* (London: Book club Associates, 1979), 241-43; Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 59.

²³ See for example: “Vorbild Ostpreußen: Ein leuchtendes Beispiel der Tatbereitschaft aller,” *Völkische Beobachter*, August 7, 1944, quoted in Franz Seidler, „*Deutscher Volkssturm*“, *Das letzte Aufgebot 1944/45* (Munich: Herbig, 1989), 31. “As a result of being under a centuries-long threat of the East, East Prussia is a land of soldiers.”

Tannenberg.²⁴ A straight line was also drawn from the war Nazi Germany was to wage to the battles of the Teutonic Order in the Thirteenth century against the pagan Pruzzi; its Grand Master, Hermann von Salza (1165-1239), for example, had an SS Panzer battalion named after him, which, dripping with symbolism, would in July and August 1944 even defend the ‘Tannenberg Line’ in Estonia.²⁵ Gauleiter Koch further adhered to the martial narrative: ‘The history of East Prussia’, he wrote in a guide about the province, ‘is one of struggle. Struggle shaped the East Prussian people, it created their spiritual attitude.’²⁶ Meanwhile, the resonance of National Socialist principles and prejudices among large swaths of the East Prussian nobility shows that the Nazis achieved considerable success in fashioning their movement as a worthy standard bearer of Prussian militarism.²⁷

In line with both the traditional way of thinking about the province and the National Socialist line, Gauleiter Koch saw East Prussia as ‘a vanguard, path breaking outpost for the German people on their way from the west to the east.’²⁸ According to the *Deutsches Institut für Außenpolitische Forschung* (German Institute for the Research of Foreign Policy) the German cities in the East, ‘founded and settled by the knights of the German Order and citizens of the old tribes, became the centres of higher culture, and were able to radiate their formative power far beyond the borders of the German people (...) upon the Slavic hinterland.’²⁹ According to a widely-published speech of *Reichswirtschaftsminister* Walther Funk at the opening of the October 1941 *Ostmesse* (Königsberg’s biannual fair to promote eastern goods), East Prussia was to serve as a ‘transit highway’ between the rest of Europe and the *Ostraum*.³⁰ The province’s agricultural heritage was harnessed to this imperialist martial reading in the form of the ‘*Blut und Boden*’ (blood and soil) rhetoric. Slogans like ‘The German sword has liberated the east. Now the farmer follows with the plough’ met with agreement of most East Prussians.³¹

²⁴ Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory*, 36-38.

²⁵ Holger Thor Nielsen and Richard Landwehr, *Nordic warriors: SS-Panzergranadier-Regiment 24 Danmark, Eastern Front, 1943-45* (Coventry: Shelf Books, 1999), 111.

²⁶ Kossert, *Damals in Ostpreussen*, 104.

²⁷ Stephan Malinowski, *Von König zum Führer: Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 73-89, 476-82; Christopher Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947* (London: Penguin, 2007), 151-3, 655-65.

²⁸ Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals*, 224-25.

²⁹ Deutsches Institut für Außenpolitische Forschung, *Europa, Handbuch der politischen, wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Entwicklung des neuen Europa* (Leipzig: Helingsche Verlagsanstalt, 1943), 138.

³⁰ BArch R55/317, 49-58. Rede des Reichswirtschaftsminister und Reichsbankpräsident Walther Funk anlässlich der Eröffnung der Deutschen Ostmesse in Königsberg Pr. Am 12. Oktober. 12-10-1941; Our Special Correspondent, “German Plans for Russia,” *The Times*, October 14, 1941:3. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 13 April. 2016)

³¹ Heinz Schreckenberger, *Ideologie und Alltag im Dritten Reich* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2003) 117-29.

As a *Grenzland* (border region), East Prussia was strongly affected by Lithuanian and Polish influences. Large parts of the province, especially its south-eastern part, the *Masuren*, consisted of people who spoke either Polish or their own distinct language, Masurian (*Masurisch*). These people, mainly protestant farmers, considered themselves Germans, which they convincingly showed in 1920, when in the plebiscite for self-determination of the region, an overwhelming 98 per cent of them voted to stay part of Germany. Thirteen years later, a majority of them also voted for the NSDAP.³² This cultural and ethnical diversity had long been celebrated as a positive, but in the 1920s it was increasingly seen as a threat to *Volk* unity, prompting a fervent Germanisation drive of different newly-established *Heimat- und Deutschtumsverbände*.³³ After the Nazi takeover, these associations were disbanded or incorporated (*Gleichgeschaltet*) into the National Socialist *Bund Deutsche Osten*, which stepped up the efforts. Many place names were Germanised, in some areas of the *Masuren* up to 70 per cent.³⁴ Nevertheless, it took until 1939, until it was explicitly forbidden, for church services in the region to discontinue in Polish.³⁵

The change in the appreciation of the multi-ethnic nature of the province, and the challenges this posed, can best be observed in Königsberg's academic culture. Scholars from Königsberg's Albertus-University, a '*Grenzland*-university', had been at the forefront of *Ostforschung*, the research on Eastern Europe and the region's relation to the German people. As Nazi officials saw the potential of these efforts for their racial agenda, they redirected funding to different research projects, which increasingly served to provide a pseudo-scientific foundation for German questions about ethnicity, resettlement, or population control.³⁶ Michael Burleigh considered these scholars 'hardened warriors' in issues of Germandom, eager to align their scholarship to political priorities. Many of these 'experts' were subsequently deployed in the occupied east, posing increasingly radical solutions to race matters, as such actively giving shape to Germany's war of annihilation.³⁷ It would therefore be incorrect to consider East Prussia as untouched by National Socialism, as the regime's racism permeated

³² Michael Burleigh, *Germany turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*. 2nd ed. (London: Pan Books, 2001), 185-87.

³³ A. Kossert, "„Grenzlandpolitik“ und Ostforschung an der Peripherie des Reiches. Das ostpreußische Masuren 1919-1945," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 51, no.2 (2003): 127

³⁴ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 203-10; Kossert, "Grenzlandpolitik," 136-38.

³⁵ Kossert, "Grenzlandpolitik," 136-38.

³⁶ Haar, "German *Ostforschung* and Anti-Semitism," 1-16; Kossert, "Grenzlandpolitik".

³⁷ Burleigh, *Germany turns Eastwards*, 54-55, 138, 169, 212-13.

important parts of its community, rallying both members of East Prussia's smaller communities, as well as its academia.

Also Gauleiter Koch, who in the early 1930s still occupied the socialist left wing of the Nazi Party, eventually became one of the regime's most notorious racist hardliners.³⁸ In the second half of the decade, he adopted, internalised, and eventually propagated, the regime's discriminatory dogmas in East Prussia. On 16 July 1941, in extension to his duties in East Prussia, Hitler appointed him as 'Reichskommissar für die Ukraine', Reich commissar of Ukraine, which he would govern with an iron fist.³⁹ Koch brought many of his East Prussian subordinates with him, and left little doubt as to what was expected of them: 'I will draw the very last out of this country. I did not come to spread bliss. I have come to help the Führer. The population must work, work, and work again', he told a Party meeting in Kiev. 'We definitely did not come here to give out manna', he continued, 'We have come here to create the basis for victory.'⁴⁰

Although the province's close ties to National Socialism were unmistakable, there were also large parts of East Prussia, especially its countryside, where the *Volksgemeinschaft* was less influential. This was mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, East Prussia was sparsely populated, which did not justify the presence of different National Socialist offices.⁴¹ Moreover, on average only one in 25 people on the country side possessed a radio set, and, as there were also hardly any cinemas in these less populated areas, the regime struggled to get its message across.⁴² Secondly, most farmers were content with their rural lifestyle, which meant that few of them used the institutions of the *Volksgemeinschaft* to challenge their socio-cultural position.⁴³ For most people on the East Prussian countryside, as indeed a report from

³⁸ Jürgen Manthey, *Königsberg, Geschichte einer Weltbürgerrepublik* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2005), 647-48.

³⁹ Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945*, 406.

⁴⁰ Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 106-10; Internationaler Militär Gerichtshof Nürnberg, *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof Nürnberg 14. November 1945 – 1. Oktober 1946, Band XI, Amtlicher Text in deutscher Sprache Verhandlungsniederschriften 8. April 1946- 17. April 1946*, (Nürnberg: Reichenbach Verlag/ Obersten Kontrollrat, 1947), 595-6, Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 385-87.

⁴¹ The impact of these offices on local communities is discussed in: Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft*, 142-43; Jill Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front, Württemberg under the Nazis* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 168.

⁴² Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 152; J. Stephenson, "The Volksgemeinschaft and the Problems of Permeability: The Persistence of Traditional Attitudes in Württemberg Villages," *German History* 34, no. 1 (2016): 59-60.

⁴³ Connelly, "The uses of Volksgemeinschaft", 155-57.

Königsberg's Gestapo observed in July 1935, the *Volksgemeinschaft* remained an abstract idea that few of them subscribed to on their own accord.⁴⁴

In September 1939 Germany went to war, which brought a new, yet not completely unfamiliar, set of challenges for the East Prussian population. Immediately prior to the start of the war, rationing was introduced throughout Germany for many major consumer goods.⁴⁵ In conjunction with this, laws were passed to counter the illicit slaughter of animals, although the practice nonetheless grew throughout the course of the war. Sentences were particularly harsh in East Prussia, and even included death penalties, causing an outrage among the rural population.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the strict laws remained in place, as the regime was determined to avoid a collapse of the home front as a result of undernourished urban populations. These measures could not prevent some people from feeling disadvantaged by the new situation, which led to a polarisation between townspeople and farmers, echoing themes from 1914-18, further highlighting the differences which traditionally existed between townspeople and the rural population.⁴⁷

In East Prussia, mobilisation for war significantly changed the community structure. East Prussia ranked among the provinces with the lowest number of indispensable (so-called *uk-gestellt*) workers, which meant that a large proportion of men could be taken out of the work force to serve in the armed forces. For example, in terms of percentage, East Prussian industries provided the highest numbers of industrial workers to the army.⁴⁸ As former farmers constituted the largest segment of the German army, the men of *Wehrkreis I* (East Prussia military district) were disproportionately represented among its ranks from early on. As a result, entire school classes were sent to the countryside to perform *Erntedienst*, harvest duty, during extended summer holidays to make good their absence.⁴⁹ Concurrently, the regime's wartime measures to conscript women into the work force encountered less indignation in East Prussia than in Germany's urbanised provinces; since agricultural enterprises traditionally depended on female labour, this movement was not an uncommon one.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft*, 156.

⁴⁵ Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front*, 168; Jeremy Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 4: The German Home Front in World War II* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1998), 511.

⁴⁶ Tilitzky, *Alltag in Ostpreussen 1940-45*, 52-4.

⁴⁷ Stephenson, *Hitler's Home Front*, 172-173. Stephenson, "Problems of Permeability," 58.

⁴⁸ Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1999), 316; Richard Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 296; Richard Overy, *Historical Atlas of the Third Reich* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1996), 99.

⁴⁹ Helga Gerhardi, *Helga: The True Story of a Young Woman's Flight as a Refugee and How She Re-united Her War-scattered Family* (Aylesbury: Virona Publishing, 1994), 61.

⁵⁰ Noakes, *Nazism 1919-1945, Volume 4*, 316-24; Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, 354-55.

The community structure was also effected by evacuation from bombed areas. As Germany's easternmost province, which, moreover, possessed little heavy industry, East Prussia was bombed significantly less than the western parts of the country, and few East Prussians could therefore relate to the plight of their bombed-out compatriots.⁵¹ Memel and Königsberg were bombed by the Soviet Air Force immediately after the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, but these attacks were considered as little more than 'little fleabites' back in Berlin. As a result of the limited bombing of the province, East Prussia, from mid-1943 onwards, became a reception area for almost 200,000 'Luftkriegsevakuierete', air war evacuees, mainly from Berlin. Their reception was a matter of adjustment, and the personal sacrifices its population had to make whilst billeting these people caused some friction. Population levels in the province had never been so high, which resulted in a stricter rationing of food, gas, and electricity.⁵² Furthermore, many former city dwellers, mainly Berliners, had trouble adjusting to the unfamiliar food and conditions of East Prussia's country side, and, according to Dr. Max Draeger, the president of Königsberg's Higher Regional Court, "complained" far more than the quiet, reserved East Prussians.⁵³ In turn, when relatively well-fed Königsbergers were evacuated to Saxony after their city was bombed in August 1944, the young Sigrun Pluske was placed with a 'kind' family, which nevertheless 'really did not want us, because they said "You had so much food during the years of war, while we had all the bombing and very little food. Now you come and eat our little food"', so there was a little hate on account of that.⁵⁴ The war forced the German population to confront deep-rooted local differences that had long existed between the different provinces, but, as these remarks show, little effort was made to bridge the divide.

During the war, East Prussia again played its traditional role as bridgehead, and was used twice as a springboard for military campaigns: in the autumn of 1939, in the period leading up to the invasion of Poland, and in the spring of 1941, in preparation to 'Operation Barbarossa', the invasion of the Soviet Union. Numerous reports from the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) show that it was common among East Prussians to pride themselves on their close

⁵¹ On the impact of the allied strategic bombing campaign on German wartime morale, see: Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 201-207; Overy, *Historical Atlas of the Third Reich*, 102.

⁵² Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter*, 401; Tilitsky, *Alltag in Ostpreussen*, 59.

⁵³ Marlis Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans, Public mood and Attitude during the Second World War* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984), 263.

⁵⁴ Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, Catalogue Nr. 12287, Sigrun Johanna Wilhelmiene Strooband, Reel 2. See also: Dorothea Bjelfvenstam, *Man nannte uns Hitlermädchen: Kinderlandverschickung von Königsberg nach Sachsen* (Föritz: Amicus-Verlag, 2012), 7-8,

proximity to the troops, as they were able to hear soldiers' stories before the rest of the population, an extra source of first-hand information at a time when this was scarce.⁵⁵ The province was to remain a bridge between the rest of Germany and the northern and central sector of the Eastern Front throughout the war, and trainloads of supplies passed through the province constantly, while wounded soldiers were brought back to the province's many army hospitals.⁵⁶ Indeed, in an attempt to downplay the rate at which the war was claiming its toll, East Prussian magazine and newspaper editors were ordered to keep obituaries limited in size.⁵⁷ Although these factors firmly tied East Prussians to a war that was portrayed as being waged for the benefit of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, at the same time its institutions (such as the *Ortsgruppe* or the *Kreisleitung*) devoted less and less attention to the concerns of civilians, instead increasingly adopting auxiliary military roles.⁵⁸ This development meant that these local Party offices lost their relevance: rather than being manifestations of a society based on reciprocity between the state and its citizens, they represented a one-sided arrangement where the population gave and the regime took, and the offices' decreased interaction with the local community encouraged the East Prussian population to return to more traditional loyalties.

It is considerably harder to determine how well the Nazi racial agenda resonated within the province. The conquest of vast territories in Eastern Europe opened up new opportunities for the regime to pursue its genocidal policies, which meant that it had to divert resources away from more easily relatable domestic issues, as such putting a strain on the promise of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The regime's attention to the different minority groups considered racially inferior revealed the disparity between the concerns of the regime and those of the German public. By 1944, over 200,000 foreign labourers worked in East Prussia, a number that increased to 237.000 by September 1944.⁵⁹ Polish forced labourers had been the first to arrive

⁵⁵ See, for example, the attitude of East Prussians during the run-up to, and in the first days of Operation Barbarossa in: Heinz Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945, Band 7* (Hersching: Manfred Pawlak Verlag, 1984), 2273, 2275, 2463.

⁵⁶ Kossert, *Damals in Ostpreussen*, 128; Joachim Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen, Nachdrucke aus den Rundbriefen der „Ostpreußischen Arztfamilie“ 1945-1995* (Starnberg: Druckerei Josef Jägerhuber, 1996), 375-379.

⁵⁷ Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Kaliningradskoi Oblisti [Hereafter: GAKO] "Nemetski Fondi", Fond H-54, No. 12, Opis 1, Delo 12.1.113. Abschrift: Der Regierungspräsident, Nr. I a A 18.01. Königsberg/Pr, d.14. April 1944. An die staatslichen, mir nachgeordneten Dienststellen des Bezirks. PP. Der Reichsminister der Innern Berlin NW 7, d. 31. März 1944 III a 5050/44 II 6322. Betrifft: Nachrufe.

⁵⁸ Carl-Wilhelm Reibel, *Das Fundament der Diktatur: Die NSDAP-Ortsgruppen 1932-1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 351-59; Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party: A social profile of members and leaders, 1919-1945*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 221-28.

⁵⁹ BArch R59/65, 52: Die ausländische und die protektoratsangehörigen Arbeiter und Angestellten im Großdeutschen Reich nach den wichtigeren Staatsangehörigkeiten in den Gauarbeitsamtsbezirken am 15.

in East Prussia in larger numbers, mainly as farm hands. With most German men at the front this led, despite a strict ban, to many unauthorised contacts between German women and Polish men; an unremarkable development given the significant Polish influence in the province's history. Nevertheless, penalties for those caught were notoriously harsh as the court of Königsberg, its judges felt, had to be exemplary in its convictions, since, as East Prussia was the German province closest to the East, its inhabitants were more likely to succumb to racial impurity.⁶⁰ This approach revealed the tensions between the requirements of war and achieving a racially-pure *Volksgemeinschaft*: pursuing one goal inevitably meant compromising the other, which was nevertheless something the German leadership was unwilling to accept.

Moreover, while most Germans had still hardly internalised the regime's anti-semitic line, and did not share its sense of urgency, in East Prussia, as elsewhere, the execution of the Holocaust could count on the 'tacit support' of the majority of the population.⁶¹ As early as 1929 Jewish gatherings had been disrupted by armed Nazi gangs, and in 1935 police reports mention near-lynchings in the province. During the *Kristallnacht*, on 9 November 1938, Königsberg's *Neue Synagoge* went up in flames, and from January 1939 onwards, the city's Jews were increasingly forced into special 'Jew-houses'.⁶² In June 1942 most of East Prussia's Jewish population were deported and were killed in the Maly Trostenets extermination camp on the outskirts of Minsk, and in August of that year a last large group of elderly Jews was deported to Theresienstadt.⁶³ Meanwhile, East Prussia's Roma and Sinti Gypsy communities

Februar 1944; GAKO, "Nemetski Fondi", Fond H-21, No.46, Opis 1, Delo, 2,1, 59: Liste der im Gaugebiet Ostpr. Eingesetzte ausländ. Arbeitskräfte (Stichtag 30.9.1944).

⁶⁰ Andreas Kossert, *Ostpreußen, Geschichte und Mythos* (Munich: Siedler, 2005), 303.

⁶¹ Robert Gellately and Nathan Stolfus, "Social Outsiders and the Construction of the Community if the People" in *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*, ed. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stolfus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-5, 10; Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 229-30.

⁶² Kossert, *Ostpreußen*, 286-92; Fritz Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg in Preußen, III. Band, Vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zum Untergang Königsbergs*, (Cologne: Böhlau, 1971), 146-9. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that most of these events were orchestrated by the local Party leadership. See: Stephenson, "Problems of Permeability," 52-53.

⁶³ "Hitlerites Invade Jewish Gathering at Koenigsberg," *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, February 26, 1929, <http://www.jta.org/1929/02/26/archive/hitlerites-invade-jewish-gathering-at-koenigsberg>; Alfred Gottwaldt, "Die Deportation der Juden aus Ostpreußen 1942/43", in »Das war mal unsere Heimat...« *Jüdische Geschichte im preußischen Osten* ed. Uwe Neumärker and Andreas Kossert (Berlin: Die Stiftungen Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung und Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas, 2013), 125-35. Two large transports left from Königsberg, one to Maly Trostenets outside Minsk on 24 June 1942 and one on 25 August 1942 to Theresienstadt. A number of smaller transports followed. By mid-1943, only some 30 Jews remained. For a general outline on the exclusion and extermination of Königsberg's Jews, see: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, *Die jüdische Minderheit in Königsberg, Preussen: 1871 - 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), esp. Ch. IV: 'Im Dritten Reich'. On the deployment of Jews in Königsberg's industries. See: Michael Wieck, *Königsberg, Zeugnis vom Untergang einer Stadt* (Augsburg: Bechtermünz Verlag, 1998), 116-84.

were persecuted. Initially they were herded into a purpose-built camp in Königsberg, being used as forced labourers in an adjacent factory, but in March 1943 the camp was closed down, after which its inhabitants were deported to Auschwitz.⁶⁴ By then, the killing conducted by *Einsatzgruppen*, the SS paramilitary death squads, would have been widely known in the province German population, but, as David Bankier stressed, a ‘conscious decision’ was made to ‘turn a deaf ear’ to it across Germany.⁶⁵ This stemmed from two uneasy realisations: they had defined themselves opportunistically in the light of their changing environment, and their perverted consciousness had, as a result, enabled the province to actively facilitate the racial war of extermination.⁶⁶

The remote and recent past placed East Prussians in a situation where at the one hand they could rationalise their actions in terms of their own history, while on the other fully satisfying the demands of the National Socialist regime. Thus, while the regime encouraged the persistence of local ideas and traditions, it would also champion its central message, which revolved around the creation of a national *Volksgemeinschaft*. The lack of consistency between the two currents of thought did not seem to bother the regime unduly, as long as the population acquiesced in the direction it took. The absence of the Party institutions in large parts of East Prussia, and the lack of their appeal, meant that the Nazi efforts to recast life on a local level were unsuccessful in the province. War only increased the gap between East Prussians and the larger German society, as the insecurity of the war meant that few of their concerns ventured beyond their immediate horizon. It seems therefore unlikely that the population’s behaviour during the last year of the war can be traced back to the permeability of the Nazi ideology. At the same time, it is likely that most East Prussians felt that they, along with the majority of the German population, had ‘burned their bridges’ and had no option but to tie their fate to the outcome of the war.⁶⁷ The East Prussians’ commitment to the war efforts should not be judged along the lines of agreement with the regime. Instead, their compliance was largely routed in the lack of viable alternatives. As the war went on, the regime’s demands towards its population continued to increase, culminating in the proclamation of Total War. The effects of this development will be discussed in the next section.

⁶⁴ Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 93.

⁶⁵ Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 145-46.

⁶⁶ Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 264-68, 285.

⁶⁷ Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich*, 266.

II. Total War in East Prussia

What encompasses ‘Total War’ has proven hard to determine. East Prussia’s diarists, when describing the increasingly drastic measures that were being taken on the home front, do not use the word ‘Total’ in their description of the war. Instead, they point to personal changes in their lives without necessarily linking them to a larger picture. Perhaps in an effort to emphasize the communality of human suffering during war time, there is a certain tendency to view Total War as a monolithic concept.⁶⁸ When it concerns the Second World War, most historians have rightly pointed out that the war Germany waged could hardly be considered ‘Total’; instead, these debates stress the unwillingness of the German leadership to fully commit its resources to it.⁶⁹ The German military historian Jürgen Förster points out that the term ‘Total War’ was hardly used at the time, but instead distinguishes five terms German military and political leaders often put forward: ‘total armament’, ‘total mobilisation’, ‘total administration’, ‘total control’, and ‘total command of operations’.⁷⁰ Although Förster does not imply that this enumeration should be considered complete, these terms prove useful as tools of measurement in the analysis of the factors that contributed to the prolonged defence of East Prussia. Perhaps the most outstanding observation about our current perception of ‘Total War’ is the small role the army seems to play in it. Looking at Förster’s concepts, we see that only ‘command of operations’ belongs on the battlefield itself. Total War is thus about providing the Wehrmacht with the means to continue the fight, rather than about the fight itself.

This section reconstructs the dialogue that underpinned Germany’s Total War efforts. It first considers the importance of analysing Total War on a local level, after which it will move toward a discussion of two case studies, the construction of the *Ostwall* around the borders of East Prussia, and the formation of the East Prussian *Volkssturm*. A useful starting point for this reconstruction is Generalleutnant (later Field Marshal) Wilhelm Keitel’s 1937 assertion that Total War demanded ‘the marching in step of the Wehrmacht and the civil

⁶⁸ See for example: Jochen Hellbeck, “Battles for Morale: an entangled history of total war in Europe,” in: *The Cambridge History of the Second World War, Volume III, Total War: Economy, Society and Culture*, ed. Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

⁶⁹ Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 321-23; Jürgen Förster, “From “Blitzkrieg” to “Total War”, Germany’s War in Europe” in *A World at Total War, global conflict and the politics of destruction, 1937 – 1945*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, Bernd Greiner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 89-107; Kershaw, *The End*, 23-26, 38-44; Ralf Reuth, *Goebbels, Eine Biographie* (Munich: Piper, 2000), 516-47; Stephenson, *Hitler’s Home Front*, 153-92.

⁷⁰ Förster, “From “Blitzkrieg” to “Total War”, 90.

administration', as it immediately introduces the three major groups of actors involved: the Wehrmacht, Party and state bodies, and civilians.⁷¹ So far, the Wehrmacht has received little attention, mainly because, due to propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels' landmark *Sportpalast* speech of 18 February 1943, the Party became associated with the term. Yet, the Wehrmacht's sheer size warrants further examination of this question – by 1945 it still consisted of some 10 million troops, the majority of whom was either garrisoned in Germany or fighting on its territory.⁷²

Initially, the proclamation of Total War in February 1943 changed little in the everyday lives of most Germans, since, in the words of Jochen Hellbeck, 'Nazi leaders remembered acutely the course of the First World War and distrusted civilians' ability to shoulder the burdens of war.'⁷³ Until early 1944 the envisioned 'Spartan lifestyle' that Germans on the home front were to adopt comprised of little more than the token closure of cinemas and theatres, a measure that, given their sparse presence in East Prussia, had particularly little effect on its population.⁷⁴ It took until July 1944, with the appointment of Joseph Goebbels as Reich Plenipotentiary for Total War, for far-reaching measures to be taken. The Allied bombing forced Goebbels to rethink the structure of armaments production, which he, in consultation with Armaments Minister Albert Speer, decided to organise on *Gau* level.⁷⁵ This decision provided the *Gauleiter* with considerably more powers. As part of this Total War effort, Gauleiters were tasked to close down factories and shops, and they were also placed in charge of implementing decrees that sought to secure manpower for the armed forces.⁷⁶ In her work on Total War, Eleanor Hancock stressed that although on a provincial level she found 'no indication that these decrees were being circumvented or that the Gauleiters were reluctant to impose hardships on the people', she also found that 'firm leaders would decide how many workers were to be given up only when replacement workers actually arrived', without being pressured by Gauleiters.⁷⁷ Depending on the Gauleiter the scope of Total War could even be decided on a local level, and its driving forces were thus undeniably centrifugal in nature, and

⁷¹ Förster, "From "Blitzkrieg" to "Total War", 90.

⁷² Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilde, Vernichtungskrieg, Legende* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002), 183.

⁷³ Hellbeck, "Battles for Morale: an entangled history of total war in Europe", 360.

⁷⁴ Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 423-25; Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans*, 263; Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, 152.

⁷⁵ Hancock, *The National Socialist leadership and Total war*, 147-50.

⁷⁶ Noakes, *Nazism 1919-145, Volume 4*, 74-76.

⁷⁷ Hancock, *The National Socialist leadership and Total war*, 156, 163

even led, as Hans Mommsen found, to a ‘dissolution of coherent government’.⁷⁸ The hardships imposed by the regime and the sacrifices it demanded differed from province to province. As such, Total War counteracted the egalitarian principles of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, making it difficult for Germans to adhere to its mission as the war continued.

By early 1944 the possibility of an invasion of German territory became a pressing issue, and discussions of the topic could no longer merely be regarded as defeatist. From the first days of the war onwards, the organisation of domestic military affairs had been increasingly left to provincial authorities, with the final authority being placed at the province’s Gauleiter in his capacity as *Reichsverteidigungskommissar* (Reich Defence Commissioner, or RVK). RVKs were to control the civil defence of the *Reich* and oversee all administrative branches within the *Wehrkreis* (military district) which they administered. The purpose of the RVK was to ‘align the measures concerning the civil defence and the concerns of the armed forces in closest possible cooperation with the appropriate army departments in the *Wehrkreise*.’⁷⁹ Since all legislation the military wanted to implement at a provincial level had to be put in front of RVKs (and their staffs), so the Wehrmacht’s ability to interfere in internal politics was limited; something Hitler consistently sought to effect.⁸⁰

The Wehrmacht and Party thus had to work closely together, building on the framework that had been put in place, both on national level and by the RVK staffs. The first detailed circular concerning a combined agenda regarding Germany’s defence, dated 31 May 1944, was distributed by the Party Chancellery. It showed a constructive attitude towards the army and a seemingly sincere intention to cooperate: ‘In the smooth interaction of all German defensive forces lies the guarantee for quick and effective action and thus for success.’⁸¹ Two further decrees concerning the ‘cooperation between Party and army in an area of operations within the Reich’ were distributed on 13 July 1944, and 20 September 1944.⁸² The day after the September decree Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt distributed an upbeat memorandum to highlight the opportunities of collaboration, asking the Gauleiters ‘to act towards the population

⁷⁸ Hans Mommsen, “The Dissolution of the Third Reich,” in *Conflict, Catastrophe and Continuity: Essays on Modern German History*, ed. Frank Biess, Mark Roseman and Hanna Schissler (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 104.

⁷⁹ Reichsgesetzblatt Teil I, den 2. September 1939 - Nr. 158: Verordnung über die Bestellung von Reichsverteidigungskommissaren

⁸⁰ Jürgen Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Eine Strukturgeschichtliche Analyse* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 34; Hüttenberger, *Die Gauleiter*, 155.

⁸¹ Percy Schramm, *Kriegstagebuch des OKW, Band IV: 1. Januar 1944- 22. Mai 1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Bernard & Graefe, 1961), 1565-68.

⁸² Detailed orders (Befehl des Chefs OKW betr. Vorbereitungen für die Verteidigung des Reiches) can be found in: Schramm, *Kriegstagebuch des OKW, Band IV*, 1569-72.

in a way that makes them aware of the necessity of this struggle and every single budding consequence,' and expressing his confidence in the cooperation, given that he already knew 'with what tireless devotion the Gauleiters and all of their subordinated Party departments commit themselves to Führer and Fatherland.'⁸³ We should keep in mind that this language was meant as a way to reach out, and did not necessarily reveal any true sentiment on von Rundstedt's behalf, especially as the relationship between the Party and the army at the time was particularly strained. That summer, on 20 July, Hitler barely survived a bomb placed by Oberst Claus von Stauffenberg, while the army's simultaneous coup to take over the government, 'Operation Valkyrie', was only just thwarted.⁸⁴ It meant that Hitler lost the last shred of trust in his generals.⁸⁵

Unsurprisingly, the decrees – which curtailed military operational freedom on German territory – have repeatedly been mentioned in the same breath as the assassination attempt, but looking at the dates of the two decrees we see that they hardly betray that the measures were implemented out of an irrational anger towards the military. The first of the two decrees was issued a week before the assassination attempt, the second decree a full two months afterwards, which left enough time for the ensuing storm to calm down before it was introduced. Moreover, in the case of an attack on home soil a country's army and its civil bodies simply *had* to collaborate, making – in the case of Nazi-Germany – a Party involvement in defensive measures unavoidable. It is neither a hallmark of a totalitarian regime, nor a sign of brutalisation. When a German invasion of Britain beckoned in 1940, the British government assumed a martial role that was rather similar to Germany's in 1944; it monitored civilians' reactions to the war, established a Home Guard, organised evacuation, and built defences.⁸⁶

The first effort in which the Party assumed a prominent role was the construction of the *Ostwall* (East-wall) defences along the eastern borders of Germany. Alastair Noble, the first historian to draw attention to this endeavour, rightly points out that the singular term '*Ostwall*' is deceptive, since the *Ostwall* actually consisted of a series of defensive lines.⁸⁷ He maintains that the construction of the defences was mainly organised by the Party without consulting the

⁸³ BArch NS 6/ 348, 25: Anlage zum Rundschreiben 255/44 vom 21.9.1944.

⁸⁴ Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party: A social profile of members and leaders 1919-1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983) 226-29; Hancock, *The National Socialist leadership and total war*, 127-46; Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 492-94.

⁸⁵ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-45: Nemesis* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 687.

⁸⁶ Peter Fleming, *Invasion 1940: An account of the German preparations and the British counter-measures* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), 84-99.

⁸⁷ Noble, "The Phantom Barrier", 442.

army, a point of view adopted by Ian Kershaw as well.⁸⁸ Yet, the idea of erecting defensive positions at the rear of the front was put forward by the army from the moment that the tide of the war turned against Germany. As early as January 1944 Generaloberst Heinz Guderian, who after the assassination attempt on Hitler was appointed Chief of Staff of the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH), and as such was placed in charge of the defence of the Eastern Front, pushed for the creation of a defensive position along the older German and Russian frontier fortifications. In his memoirs, Guderian states that their main purpose was to assure ‘temporary inactivity’ in the east in order to evict the western Allies, who were expected to conduct a large scale cross-channel operation that spring.⁸⁹ This was in line with the findings of the Karl-Heinz Frieser, who likened Germany’s broader European defensive strategy for 1944 to a room with two doors: the door to the east was to be barricaded, while the western door could be opened with the goal of throwing the invaders out.⁹⁰ Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, shortly after his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Reserve Army, told an audience of officers on 25 July that ‘The time for intelligent operational methods is past. In the east, the enemy is on our borders. The only type of operation available here is to advance or to stand still.’⁹¹ Both Generaloberst Guderian and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel passed down orders to commence the construction of fortifications in Eastern-Germany.⁹² Meanwhile, on 13 July, Gauleiter Koch had called up all German males between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five from the border districts of East Prussia, which was immediately followed by the assertion that ‘an impassioned appeal of the Führer to the idealism and patriotism of the entire people would be sufficient to call hundreds of thousands of volunteers to the colours within a few days so to erect a dam in the east.’⁹³

The construction of the *Ostwall* was accompanied by a massive propaganda campaign, which stressed the link between *Front* and *Heimat*. Although the regime left no doubt that participation in the construction was obligatory, it was widely portrayed as a popular

⁸⁸ Noble, “The Phantom Barrier”, 466; Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany*, 26-8; Kershaw, *The End*, 101-105. For his analysis of the construction of the *Ostwall*, Noble (for no apparent reason) ignored military documents, and instead relied almost exclusively on propaganda reports and post-war questionnaires. Both downplayed military involvement, for reasons to which we will return below.

⁸⁹ Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970), 326.

⁹⁰ Karl-Heinz Frieser “Irrtümer und Illusionen: Die Fehleinschätzungen der deutschen Führung,” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweiten Weltkrieg Teil 8 Die Ostfront 1943/44 Der Krieg im Osten und an den Nebenfronten*, ed. Karl-Heinz Frieser and the MGFA (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2007), 522.

⁹¹ Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 717.

⁹² Noble, “The Phantom Barrier”, 445.

⁹³ Noble, “The Phantom Barrier”, 446-47; BArch R55/616, 105: Berlin, den 13. Juli 1944, An den Herrn Leiter Pro i.V. Pg. Sondermann Betrifft: Errichtung eines Grenzschutzes im Osten.

movement.⁹⁴ There should be little doubt that a sincere sense of patriotism combined with a deep-seated fear for the Soviets was common among the workers (a theme to which we will return in Chapter 2), but far-reaching means of coercion were nevertheless used to assure participation as well. These measures included prison sentences and death penalties according to martial law, revealing the army's impact on the province.⁹⁵ Irrespective of its military use, the digging was a means of pacifying the province's population, as media outlets diverted attention from the looming Soviet threat, transforming the construction of the *Ostwall* into an expected manifestation of the province's resolve. No evidence suggests that the Wehrmacht opposed this 'total mobilisation' of civilian populations, as this practice had for years been common on the Eastern Front. During those years, the army had come to rely on the forced assistance of civilians in the construction of defensive works and many other auxiliary tasks.⁹⁶ Troops had grown desensitised to the vast use of slave labour, which had been explained as vital to the war effort, thereby directly linking the suppression of populations to traditional concepts of obedience, honour and patriotism.⁹⁷

Gauleiter Koch received repeated praise from different army commanders for his assistance.⁹⁸ Noble asserts that they were 'press-ganged' into expressing their gratitude, but what Koch could achieve in East Prussia was exactly what the military could not: rallying large numbers of people and materials for the defence of the province.⁹⁹ After the Soviet summer offensive of 1944, 'Operation Bagration', which had been disastrous for the Wehrmacht, it completely lacked the resources to oversee these efforts themselves. In his war diary, General Raus, the commander of the Third Panzer Army, noted that 'everywhere people could be seen digging', and extensively praised the resourcefulness of the workers.¹⁰⁰ Over 300,000 East Prussians were called up in what Koch called a *Levee en Masse*. An additional 200,000 forced labourers, mainly from Lithuania and Poland, and 25,000 men of the *Reichsarbeitsdienst* (RAD) also took part in the construction.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, Koch repeatedly played up his role, claiming that 'without the Party there is no *Frontgau* East Prussia', and maintained that 'only

⁹⁴ Noble, "The Phantom Barrier", 449.

⁹⁵ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany*, 101.

⁹⁶ Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 158-171.

⁹⁷ Omer Bartov "Trauma and Absence: France and Germany, 1914-1945." in *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939-45*, ed. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), 354.

⁹⁸ Noble, "The Phantom Barrier", 450-51.

⁹⁹ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany*, 106.

¹⁰⁰ Erhard Raus and Steven Newton, *Panzer Operations* (London: Da Capo Press, 2003), 305-6.

¹⁰¹ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/593, 4-7: Waldemar Magunia, Präsident der Handwerkskammer Königsberg Der Ostwall, seine Entstehung, sein Verlauf und sein Bewährung mit Kartenskizzen (10.4.1955)

the Party can take up the responsibility to guide the masses.’¹⁰² Even though this bragging caused scorn among the ranks of the military, what the Party expected for what it brought to the table – recognition – was thus more than fair.

Over the autumn, Soviet troops were halted at the borders of the province, so a period of calm set in during which the Wehrmacht assumed ultimate authority over the defensive efforts in the province. Oberstleutnant Karl Wilhelm Thilo, a seasoned and ruthless veteran staff officer, whom Guderian appointed to oversee the construction of the defences, even went as far as to refer to the positions as ‘*OKH-Stellungen*’, positions of the OKH. On 6 February 1945, three weeks after the start of the Soviet winter offensive, he started his evaluation report on the *Ostwall* construction with the statement that ‘Under the long-term leadership of the General Staff, by the call up [and] use of a large number of people, a multi-layered defensive position system has emerged between August 1944 and the beginning of the Russian offensive.’¹⁰³ Since the digging took place close behind the front line, army pioneers were often present to guide the efforts as well.¹⁰⁴ Notwithstanding, the Party remained actively involved throughout the process. On 11 January 1945, the Party Chancellery reported to Oberstleutnant Thilo that 65,000 people were still involved in the digging of defensive positions in East Prussia, and over 700,000 in total throughout eastern Germany. The same report indicated that *Gau* East Prussia had agreed to transfer 15,000 civilians previously under its own supervision to Army Group Centre to assist in the construction of its positions.¹⁰⁵

Yet, there were conflicts between Gauleiter Koch and the OKH, most infamously regarding the construction of defences around Königsberg. Up to the Soviet offensive in mid-January 1945, to the frustration of army commanders, Koch continued to divert manpower to build the 190 kilometres-long ‘Heilsberg-Deime-position’, even though in November 1944 the army had ordered the construction of the 87 kilometres-long ‘Frischung-Kanal-position’ as

¹⁰² BArch Ost-Dok. 8/510, 6: Kurt Dieckert, Verbindungsoffizier zwischen Zivilverwaltung und 3. Pz. Armee: Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944-1945 (April 1948)

¹⁰³ BArch RH 2/332, 57: Generalstab des Heeres Abt. Landesbefestigung Nr. 2145/45 geh. 6. Februar 45. Gedanken zum Stellungsbau auf Grund der Winterschlacht. ‘unter Einsatz eines zahlenmässig grossen Volksaufgebotes’.

¹⁰⁴ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/584, 3: Wenzel, Oberregierungsrat, Referent beim Reichsverteidigungskommissar Die Einstellung des Gauleiters Koch zum ostwallbau und zur Räumung Ostpreußens, Verhältnis zwischen Koch und Reg. Präsident Dargel 1944-1945 (10.12.1952) BArch Ost-Dok. 8/593, 7: Magunia, Der Ostwall (10.4.1955). For concrete orders of pioneers to local Party officials, see: BArch RH2/316, 133: Oberkommando des Heeres Gen St d H/ Gen d. Pi u. Fest/ Gen z.b.V. – Staffel ZNr. 11400/44 geh. H.Qu.OKH., 10.11.44.

¹⁰⁵ BArch RH 2/331b, 95: Op Abt/Abt Lds Bef. 11.1.45 Vortragsnotiz.

there would be no troops available to defend the position that Koch favoured.¹⁰⁶ The working relationship between the Party and army in East Prussia during this period was aptly described by Heinrich Lindner, a high-ranking official in Koch's staff, as 'bearable'.¹⁰⁷ In addition, conflicts not only emerged between the Party and the army, but also among different commanders. Generaloberst Guderian had to interfere in a conflict between General Mikosch and the frustrated commander of the 'Inster-Angerapp-position', Generalmajor Kraeber, since Mikosch had passed down incorrect orders to prevent the strengthening of this position. Guderian sent a telegram to reverse Mikosch's orders, stressing that they had been 'inaccurate'.¹⁰⁸ Guderian's interference does not, however, seem to have alleviated the conflict between the two men, since just over a week later Kraeber was transferred to Army Group South, where he was put in charge of the construction of similar positions.¹⁰⁹

By the beginning of the Soviet winter offensive the majority of the positions were not yet completed, which army commanders after the war repeatedly blamed on conflicts with the Party.¹¹⁰ However, there should be no doubt that the 'Total command of operations' was assumed by the Wehrmacht. *Oberregierungsrat* Wenzel, one of Gauleiter Koch's advisors, recalled in that regard to the construction of the *Ostwall*, 'The Wehrmacht basically both set out the greater lines as well as the wishes for its implementation.'¹¹¹ The increased army influence is also indicated by two internal propaganda reports on the digging, both from early November 1944, which do not mention the Party at all, but simply refer to the '*Schanzwerk der Bevölkerung*' (entrenchment work of the population), or as '*Grenzbefestigungen*' (frontier fortifications).¹¹² Countless army orders dating from the autumn still exist that talk in depth about the construction of defensive positions. Party orders are considerably more scarce.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ BArch RH 2/331b, 93: Fernschreiben gez. Guderian OKH/GenStdH/ Op Abt/ Abt. Lds Bef Nr. 445/45 g.Kdos. 12.1.45; BArch RH 2/332, 58: Generalstab des Heeres Abt. Landesbefestigung Nr. 2145/45 geh. 6. Februar 45. Gedanken zum Stellungsbau auf Grund der Winterschlacht.

¹⁰⁷ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/561, 3: Regierungsrat, Heinrich Lindner, Unterabteilungsleiter beim Reichsverteidigungskommissar, Bau von Befestigungen in Ostpreußen 1944-1945 (10.12.1952).

¹⁰⁸ BArch RH2/ 316, 108: Fernschreiben gez. Guderian Chef GenStdH Nr. 4071/44 g.Kdos 12 Nov 1944.

¹⁰⁹ BArch RH2/ 316, 85: Fernschreiben gez. v. Bonin OKH/ GenStdH/ Op Abt (Fest) Nr. 14869/44 geh 21.11.44

¹¹⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 26-32.

¹¹¹ BArch Ost-Dok.8/584, 3: Wenzel, Die Einstellung des Gauleiters Koch (10.12.1952)

¹¹² BArch R55/608, 30: Der Chef des Propagandastabes Berlin, den 8.11.1944. Vertraulich! Mundpropagandaparole Nr. 5 Betr. Bedeutung der Grenzbefestigungen; BArch R55/602, 103: meldung nr. 3002 an pm abt. propaganda z. hd herrn sondermann: material ueber den volkskrieg in ostpreussen. 13-11-1944.

¹¹³ See for example: BArch RH 2/316 108-110: Fernschreiben gez. Guderian Chef GenStdH Nr. 4071/44 g.Kdos 12. Nov 1944. BArch RH 2/316, 112-114: Der Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres Op Abt (Fest) Nr. 11 886/44 g.K. H.Qu., 11.11.44 Anweisung für den Ausbau und die Verteidigung ständiger Festungen; BArch RH 2/317, 70: Oberkommando des Heeres GenStdH/Op.Abt./Org.Abt. Nr II/47289/44k.Kdos H.Qu, den 8. Dezember 1944 "Unterstellungsverhältnis der Abschnitts- und Festungs-Kdten im Osten". On

In the summer of 1944 East Prussia's population got its first sense of what it was like to be part of a Total War, as large parts of the province were mobilised to assist in the construction of the *Ostwall* defences. Farmers lamented their deployment during the harvest time, while many positions were dug through fields, which significantly diminished the crop yields for the years ahead.¹¹⁴ Eventually, work on the *Ostwall* continued until the start of the Soviet offensive in January 1945. Extensive indoctrination through Party outlets assured that civilians interpreted the efforts as Party led, which, since the army's involvement was simultaneously downplayed, cemented the Party's status as the most prominent proponent of Total War. However, we should not confuse the Wehrmacht's limited presence in the national media with an unwillingness on its part to deploy civilians. This preparedness becomes particularly clear when analysing the Volkssturm, whose establishment we will now examine.

The Volkssturm, Nazi-Germany's last-ditch militia, has been subjected to more comprehensive research than the *Ostwall*.¹¹⁵ We will therefore divide our examination of the Volkssturm into two parts: this section will examine the period from its establishment in late-September 1944 until the initial defence of Festung Königsberg in late January 1945, in order to determine how the Party-Wehrmacht relations shaped the militia. In Chapter 4 we will return to the Volkssturm, and analyse its deployment during Königsberg's siege (late January 1945 – early April 1945). As with the *Ostwall*, the Volkssturm is traditionally presented as a brainchild of the Party, although the research of David Yelton has shown that it was the Wehrmacht that spearheaded its creation, by measures to include elements of the German home front in the defence of Germany from 1941 onwards. By August 1943 all men born after 1884 (i.e. fifty-nine years or younger at the time) were registered by orders of the Chief of the OKW, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, although they were not yet to be called up.¹¹⁶ The Party, on the other hand, initially opposed the creation of a militia, mainly driven by the notion that its creation would negatively impact home front morale.¹¹⁷ However, while in August and early September 1944 Guderian gave shape to the new militia, by mid-September the final responsibility was

Party orders dated between 11 July and 9 September, see: IfZArch MA 736/ NSDAP Hauptarchiv Gau Ostpreussen, Königsberg Pr., den 2 Dezember 1944. Aufstellung A. Ostwallbau (K. Aktion)

¹¹⁴ Kurt Dieckert and Horst Großman, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen. Der umfassende Dokumentarbericht*, 12th ed. (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1998), 31.

¹¹⁵ David Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm: The Nazi militia and the fall of Germany 1944 1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Franz Seidler, «Deutscher Volkssturm», *Das letzte Aufgebot 1944/45* (Munich: Herbig, 1989); Hans Kissel, *Der Deutsche Volkssturm 1944/1945: Eine territoriale Miliz im Rahmen d. Landesverteidigung* (Berlin: Verlag E.S. Mittler, 1962)

¹¹⁶ Rudolf Absolon, *Die Wehrmacht im Dritten Reich: 19. Dezember 1941 bis 9. Mai 1945* (Boppard am Rhein: Boldt Verlag, 1995), 287.

¹¹⁷ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 7-12, 18.

definitively shifted to the Party. That it was thus the Party that came to oversee the Volkssturm was largely due to the lack of confidence Hitler had in the military after 20 July, as we have seen above.¹¹⁸

On 25 September 1944 Hitler issued the 'Führer decree concerning the formation of the German Volkssturm' to his Gauleiters.¹¹⁹ The scope of the Volkssturm was to be all-embracing: on 18 October a national call-up made clear that it was to include 'all able-bodied men from 16 to 60 years.'¹²⁰ The higher age groups, the East Prussian propaganda office maintained, would provide steel to the force: 'The soldier of the First World War can weather a storm (*'ist Sturmerprobt'*), is steadfast and he does not lose his nerves.'¹²¹ Nevertheless, the age of the recruits became the focal point of widespread scorn: 'It is a stew, consisting of young vegetables and old bones!'¹²² Since participation was obligatory, mocking the Volkssturm was perhaps the most effective way to express disagreement with the course the regime was now taking, as well as a way to channel some of the anxieties that arose as a result of the call up. In East Prussia, where the Volkssturm was mustered with great zeal and almost immediately deployed, ridicule was rife, and, as a result, was closely monitored and reported on.¹²³

It was again the Party that took the initial lead in East Prussia. Gauleiter Koch even outdid his Führer and ordered the creation of the East Prussian Volkssturm two days before the rest of Germany.¹²⁴ According to Wenzel the idea for the Volkssturm originated here from the experiences of the mobilisation for the Ostwall and it is not hard to see why he thought so.¹²⁵ While explaining the validity of the Party's role in the establishment of the Volkssturm to his Kreisleiters in early October, Koch recalled 'How in a few hours [after the call for the construction of the Ostwall] the first ground was moved, and how from these humble beginnings already in eighty-two days a gigantic defensive work has risen. At the time, I only relied on ourselves and on the force of our province.'¹²⁶ Koch noted that the Ostwall had been dug in a National Socialist spirit; now it was time to man it as such. It was also apparent that

¹¹⁸ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 12-13, 19-31.

¹¹⁹ Martin Moll, *Führer-Erlasse 1939-1945* (Hamburg: Nikol Verlag, 2011), 460. *EdF über die Bildung des Deutschen Volkssturm*, 25 September, 1944.

¹²⁰ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 13.

¹²¹ BArch R55/602, 103-05. meldung nr. 3002 an pm abt. propaganda z. hd herrn sondermann: material ueber den volkskrieg in ostpreussen. 13-11-1944.

¹²² Werner Haupt, *Königsberg Breslau Wien Berlin Der Bildbericht vom Ende der Ostfront* (Friedberg: Podzun-Pallas Verlag, 1978), 33.

¹²³ See for example: Paul Ronge, *Im Namen der Gerechtigkeit, Erinnerungen eines Strafverteidigers* (Munich: Mindler Verlag, 1963), 307.

¹²⁴ Dieckert and Großmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 63-64.

¹²⁵ BArch Ost-Dok.8/584, 6: Wenzel, Die Einstellung des Gauleiters Koch (10.12.1952)

¹²⁶ Seidler, «*Deutscher Volkssturm*», 297.

the raising of the Volkssturm again allowed him to take his spot in the limelight in the Party's Total War efforts.¹²⁷

By the time the East Prussian Volkssturm was decreed, two Soviet Fronts (the equivalents of Army Groups) were already threatening East Prussia. One of them, the First Baltic Front headed by Army General Ivan Bagramyan, stood in central Lithuania, only 150 kilometres from the East Prussian borders. On 5 October, it started its push to the Baltic with the port city of Memel, the northernmost East Prussian city, as its strategic goal. Already four days later, on 9 October, it had reached the Baltic at Heydekrug, south of Memel, thereby cutting the city off. Memel's Volkssturm men – completely unprepared – were immediately deployed in its defence and suffered heavy casualties.¹²⁸ The neighbouring Third Belorussian Front under Army General Ivan Chernyakhovsky launched an operation towards the heart of East Prussia on 16 October, known in German historiography as the 'Gumbinnen Operation'.¹²⁹ Volkssturm units were again deployed and, together with the divisions of the Third Panzer Army, they halted the thrust before Gumbinnen, a city in the East of the province, after which the Soviet troops were pushed back. By the end of the month the offensive had been repelled and the Volkssturm, according to the East Prussian propaganda office, could proudly look back on its baptism of fire. Moreover, 'except for isolated and unimportant misunderstandings the cooperation [with the Wehrmacht] is outstanding.'¹³⁰ Privately, however, Gauleiter Koch took another line, and, on 25 October, he sent a telegram to Reichsleiter Martin Bormann to highlight the performance of the Volkssturm during the last days, while simultaneously accusing the army leadership of poor performance.¹³¹

Notwithstanding, during the final months of 1944 the Party and the Wehrmacht in East Prussia established close liaisons to improve relations. Although Gauleiter Koch continued to oppose these efforts, most Kreisleiters, who in many cases headed the Volkssturm battalions, were open to a closer collaboration.¹³² Initially, the Wehrmacht used the Volkssturm to perform a string of semi-military tasks, such as organising the evacuation of goods and civilians, and digging defensive positions. Yet, by December army commanders treated the Volkssturm

¹²⁷ Seidler, «*Deutscher Volkssturm*», 55-56, 297-99; Alastair Noble, "The people's levy - the Volkssturm and popular mobilisation in eastern Germany 1944-45" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no.1 (2001), 172.

¹²⁸ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany*, 132. Heinz Schön, *Die letzten Kriegstage: Ostseehäfen 1945* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1995), 44.

¹²⁹ Dieckert and Großmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 16-17.

¹³⁰ BArch R55/602, 104: meldung nr. 3002 an pm abt. Propaganda z. hd herrn sondermann betrifft: dortiges fernschreibe nr. 45 vom 7.11.1944.

¹³¹ Franz Seidler, «*Deutscher Volkssturm*», 326-27.

¹³² Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 120-21; BArch Ost-Dok. 8/536, 7: Dr. Paul Hoffmann, Regierungspräsident beim Oberpräsidium Königsberg, stellv. Oberpräsident: Räumungsplan für Ostpreußen 1944 (11.3.1955)

virtually the same as other units. In the north of East Prussia, near Tilsit, for example, six Volkssturm battalions (mostly mustered in nearby Ragnit and Tilsit and numbering around 240 on average; barely half of the regular battalion strength) were to man positions close behind the front line in anticipation of the Soviet offensive.¹³³ By the end of 1944 Volkssturm units were fully incorporated into the military chain of command, and, as Yelton found, ‘army and corps commanders had full tactical and logistical control over every Volkssturm battalion engaged in Eastern security occupations.’¹³⁴

When the Soviet offensive into East Prussia finally commenced in January 1945, Volkssturm battalions were fully deployed in its defence, often with little regard to their fighting value. In some cases, such as during counterattacks on the town of Schlossberg, near the province’s eastern border, a Volkssturm battalion was wiped out due to a lack of cooperation with the nearby 1st infantry division.¹³⁵ Yet, closer cooperation with the army did not necessarily lead to a better chance of survival for Volkssturm units. At the village Nautzken, near Königsberg, the commander of the 286th division dismissed the concerns of the commander of a Volkssturm ‘*Standbattallion*’ (a type of unit meant for rear area work) that his men would be completely useless in battle. The battalion was ordered to defend positions against the mainstay of the Soviet Thirty-third Army, with predictably devastating results.¹³⁶ It needs to be pointed out, however, that there were certainly instances when the Volkssturm performed well beyond expectation, and that they were not mere cannon fodder. Indeed, as Yelton found, ‘the army rated the Volkssturm units as adequate, despite its high casualties.’¹³⁷ Some 10,000 Volkssturm men defended Königsberg during the initial fighting for the city in late-January 1945, many of whom had earlier defended their own towns and villages closer to the East Prussian border, and in some cases had thus been fighting for over two weeks. Especially in the northern and eastern sectors of Königsberg they were able to fight off

¹³³ BArch RH 24-9/ 138, 63: Bezug: FS Pz.AOK 3 v.10.12.44 Betr.: Volkssturm.: BArch RH 24-9/ 138, 134: Bezug: FS Pz.AOK 3 Ia Nr. 12493/44 geh. v. 20.12.44; BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 106-107: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps K.Gef.Stand, den 11.11.1944 Ia Nr. 4006/44 geh. On further details on the appreciation and collaboration, see: BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 108-109: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps K.Gef.Stand, den 11.11.1944, Ia Nr. 4029/44 geh.

¹³⁴ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 119.

¹³⁵ Werner Richter, *Die 1. (ostpreussische) Infanterie-Division* (Munich: SchildbuchdienstVertrieb, 1975), 144; Vasili Boiko, *S dumoj o Rodine* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1982), 237.

¹³⁶ Helmut Borkowski, *Die Kämpfe um Ostpreußen und das Samland 1944 – 1945* (Lengerich: Self-Published, 1994), 41-42.

¹³⁷ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 120

sustained Soviet attacks, initially virtually on their own, later with the help of newly-arrived German units.¹³⁸

Germany's geopolitical position by mid-1944, with the Allies poised to invade from both the east and the west, forced Party and Wehrmacht to work closely together. By analysing Total War on a provincial level, this section has managed to move away from the persistent focus on a select Nazi elite, and instead reconstructed its impact on the lives of civilians. In East Prussia, the construction of the *Ostwall* and the establishment of the Volkssturm involved a previously unknown, virtually 'total' scale of mobilisation. The two efforts share important similarities: they were openly championed by the Party, who took up the propagandist lead as well, even though it had been the army that initially conceived these measures and had pushed for them. German propaganda consistently highlighted the close cooperation between the army and the Party, particularly focusing on the latter's role in these projects. This aimed to sustain morale, as too large an emphasis on the army would have increased the anxiety of the German population that the battle front was approaching their homes. The army nevertheless assumed 'total command of operations' by organising the digging efforts and gradually taking control over the deployment of Volkssturm units. As historians have indicated, the resulting friction should largely be traced back to the unwillingness of men like Koch to relinquish power in their provinces to the army. Nevertheless, with the Wehrmacht on German territory these inroads were inevitable.

III. Cities at Total War

So far, we have discussed some of the conditions that need to be met to distinguish 'limited' war from 'Total' War, but civilians often simply interpreted Total War as a war that directly impacted their immediate environment. No comprehensive effort has been made to factor 'environment' in to the debate, and although the battles in Germany were fought in an urbanised environment, in densely populated cities, the 'metropolitan dimension of Total War' has

¹³⁸ Willems, "Defiant Breakwaters or Desperate Blunders?", 362-63, 371; Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 122. On the continuous defensive operations of a Volkssturm battalion during the first two weeks of the Soviet offensive, starting in the border town of Goldap and ending in Königsberg, see: Bruno Just, Wolfgang Rothe and Horst Rehagen, *Hitler's Last Levy in East Prussia: Volkssturm Einsatz Bataillon Goldap (25/235)*, trans. Frederick P. Steinhardt (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2015)

largely been disregarded.¹³⁹ Within the framework of Total War, the city is above all seen as a source of industrial labour, but this is only one of its elements.¹⁴⁰ Cities housed Party headquarters, presses, recruitment offices, factories, governmental offices, and, eventually, also the fighting itself took place in cities. In other words, all of Förster's aspects of Total War were present in cities, and Königsberg was no exception. This section establishes the state of thinking about cities among the different German actors by the time they organised their defence, which will help to explain the decisions that were made in Königsberg, and the friction that existed between the Party and the Wehrmacht. As the German troops who fought in Königsberg had all fought on the Eastern Front (as had the majority of German troops), and many of the Party members had been stationed in the occupation of Ukraine, this section will start on the Eastern Front before it discusses the cities in Germany.

When German troops entered the Soviet Union in 1941, it was clear to all that they would not only have to fight the Red Army, but also the country's challenging environment. It shaped the Wehrmacht's 'mindscape', the 'mental landscape conjured up by looking out over an area'.¹⁴¹ Until the winter of 1941, vast open plains equalled victory: it was on the plains of the Soviet Union, and earlier in France, that the Wehrmacht had conducted its most successful operations. In this mindscape, the city played a subordinate role and hardly weighed in the notions of manoeuvre. Cities, if anything, were perceived negatively. The capture of large cities cost high casualty numbers, slowed down the speed of a German offensive or even brought it to a halt, and, especially after Stalingrad, cities became synonymous with military defeat.¹⁴² Antony Beevor best captures the link between the agony of fighting in close quarters and its deeper strategic implications:

'If you only understand what terror is,' a German wrote in a letter captured by the Russians. 'At the slightest rustle, I pull the trigger and fire off tracer bullets in bursts from the machine gun.' The compulsion to shoot at anything that moved at night, often setting off fusillades from equally nervous

¹³⁹ Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene, "Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War: An Introduction." In *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, edited by Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene 1-46. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 1.

¹⁴⁰ See for example: Rüdiger Hartmann, "The war of the cities: industrial labouring forces," in *The Cambridge History of the Second World War, Volume III, Total War: Economy, Society and Culture*, ed. Michael Geyer and Adam Tooze (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 298-328.

¹⁴¹ Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, 151.

¹⁴² Adrian Wettstein, *Die Wehrmacht im Stadtkampf 1939-1942* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), 415-21

sentries down a whole sector, undoubtedly contributed to the German Sixth Army's expenditure of over 25 million rounds during the month of September 1942 alone.¹⁴³

None of Germany's great victories were achieved in cities, but the fear of city fighting was especially the result of Soviet operational choices. General Friedrich von Mellenthin, one of the first German commanders who sought to provide an insight in the fighting on the Eastern Front, recalled that 'As every Russian attack was aimed at large towns (possibly with a view of attracting Stalin's notice in a Special Order of the Day) these places were avoided like the plague.'¹⁴⁴ This confirms the findings of the historical geographer, G.J. Ashworth, who, as a result of his research into the role of cities during times of conflict, rightly pointed out that during the Second World War, as during other conflicts of the twentieth century, 'remarkably few examples of the deliberate choice of an urban battlefield' could be found.¹⁴⁵

Once in German hands, the role that the Wehrmacht gave to the Soviet Union's cities was a traditional one, that of a centre for the control of the surrounding areas and their resources. Such areas, those closest to the front line, remained permanently under army jurisdiction, 'partly because of the shifting of the front line, partly because of the continued unrest in the area, and partly because (...) the military resisted all efforts to transfer additional areas to civil government.'¹⁴⁶ The military maintained that the main purpose was strictly utilitarian, above all 'the maintenance and protection of the logistics and communication networks that served the front lines.'¹⁴⁷ Yet, although approval of, or ambivalence towards, Nazi policies is taking a political stance in itself, even if we disregard this, a certain political vision was needed to run the vast territory that came under military control. During the occupation of the Soviet Union, little effort was put into treating a city as a social responsibility beyond mere pragmatism, but army commanders nevertheless found that urbanised zones prompted civil and civic questions, such as the establishment of schools or the setting up of semi-autonomous local governments of 'friendly peoples'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Antony Beevor, "Total Warfare in the City: Stalingrad, Berlin – and Baghdad," in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. Stefan Goebel and Derek Keene (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 157.

¹⁴⁴ Friedrich von Mellenthin, *Panzer Battles 1939-1945, A study of the Employment of Armour in the Second World War* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1955), 269.

¹⁴⁵ G.J. Ashworth, *War and the city* (London: Routledge, 1991), 115.

¹⁴⁶ Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies*, 2nd ed. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981), 95

¹⁴⁷ Mulligan, *The Politics of Illusion and Empire*, 123-24.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

The cities further to the rear were governed by German civil authorities rather than by the Wehrmacht; in these cities, the Nazi occupation policy manifested itself much more clearly. Warsaw, for example, ‘was stripped of her role of capital’, and ‘was to have no political, social or economic significance for the Poles’.¹⁴⁹ Famously, once captured, Leningrad and Moscow were to be completely erased from the map.¹⁵⁰ Yet, the large administrative framework that was in place in such cities to enable the occupation makes it easier to trace back the Wehrmacht’s socio-political impact on them. These cities had a distinct military character, consisting of a large permanent contingent of Wehrmacht troops working in armaments, in signals, in repair- and construction units, in military hospitals, for the air force, at training courses, or for the military police.¹⁵¹ Members of the armed forces used these cities as rallying points, as part of the stopovers to the front. This assured that there was always a large military presence, which in turn meant that the army believed it also had a say in their daily governance, and thus sought to exact influence on local (German occupation) authorities. In his work on the occupation of Warsaw and Minsk, Stephan Lehnstaedt noted that the Wehrmacht, because of its large role in assuring order and safety in these cities, saw local German authorities not as equal partners, and, ‘given the large number of soldiers, it is hardly surprising that members of the Wehrmacht often felt themselves the real masters of the city’. As a result, as Lehnstaedt concluded, ‘despite numerous officially proclaimed appeals from both sides, a smooth, virtually seamless cooperation did not exist at all.’¹⁵²

The notion that potential riots and uprisings slumbered under the surface, and that the army would have to be called in to suppress them, diverting units from their core tasks, further increased the Wehrmacht’s (perceived) standing. For Army Group Centre and Army Group A, which would eventually defend eastern Germany in 1945, this was confirmed during the Warsaw uprising in the summer of 1944. As the uprising took place in their rear, thus also threatening their supply lines, and local German authorities could not quell it, they had to bring up their own troops during a period when the Soviet summer offensive, Operation Bagration, was at its height.¹⁵³ These factors further contributed to the perception cities as a particular menace to the army.

¹⁴⁹ Joanna K.M. Hanson, *The civilian population and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 14.

¹⁵⁰ Franz Halder, *War Journal of Franz Halder* (Fort Leavenworth: Archives Section, 1950), 212.

¹⁵¹ Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation im Osten*, 36.

¹⁵² Lehnstaedt, *Okkupation im Osten*, 39.

¹⁵³ John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin: Stalin’s War with Germany, Volume Two* (London: Cassell, 2008), 272-73, 277-78.

But even though cities were perceived negatively, once the Wehrmacht returned to Germany, it had to re-evaluate their military value. Indeed, Germany was considerably more urbanised than the Soviet Union, which would inevitably shape the organisation of the defence. Orders regarding the *Ostwall* defences in East Prussia show that cities such as Königsberg and Lötzen were considered of vital importance within the overall defence scheme, but, at the same time, these orders reveal no deliberate effort to abandon the defence of field positions in favour of the defence of cities.¹⁵⁴ Although, as we will see below, propagandists placed German cities at the centre of Germany's defensive efforts, they were not considered as a self-contained system. Defensive lines were continued to be made across fields, and built-up areas were incorporated into that defence as 'knots' in those lines.

Yet, especially in this latter phase of the war, defending cities rather than plains had some added value: Germany possessed a massive stockpile of captured guns, which were of less use in field operations, but which could be utilised from fixed positions. A rigid defence, moreover, meant less reliance on mobile warfare, which in time of fuel shortage was a particularly welcome added bonus.¹⁵⁵ Also the Allies would not be able to fully exploit their preponderance in tanks in cities, as streets hampered their mobility.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, if German commanders had learned anything from the attack on cities like Stalingrad, it was that their destruction through aerial bombardment was certainly not guaranteed to favour the attackers, and could just as well solidify a position's defence. This learning curve was seen during the German defence of the Abbey and village of Monte Cassino, which had been completely flattened by Allied bombers. German troops held out against far superior Allied forces, and their tenacious defence soon became one of the favourite themes in German propaganda.¹⁵⁷ That 'Hitler built walls around his Fortress Europe, but he forgot to put a roof on it,' as the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt told a reporter in the summer of 1943, did not have to be spelled out to Wehrmacht commanders, since by early 1944, when the fortress strategy was implemented, this had long been a given.¹⁵⁸ In the West, Aachen, which was to be turned into a 'German Stalingrad', and in particular 'Festung Metz', became the embodiments of this

¹⁵⁴ See particularly: BArch RH 2/332, 57-59: Generalstab des Heeres Abt. Landesbefestigung Nr. 2145/45 geh. 6. Februar 45. Gedanken zum Stellungsbau auf Grund der Winterschlacht.

¹⁵⁵ Wettstein, *Die Wehrmacht im Stadtkampf*, 401.

¹⁵⁶ On the American bombardments on the Panzer Lehr division, see: Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army), 238-40.

¹⁵⁷ Wettstein, *Wehrmacht im Stadtkampf*, 392-97; I.C.B. Dear, *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) s.v. Monte Cassino, battles for.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Persico, *Roosevelt's Centurions: FDR and the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2013), 304.

mind-set. In Eastern Germany, the Lower Silesian capital Breslau was used in a similar fashion before it fell.¹⁵⁹

That the defence was increasingly centred on urban areas was picked up by Germany's adversaries as well. An article in the *Soviet War News* in December 1944 instructed the Red Army troops who entered Germany that 'Generally there are five or six hamlets per square mile. The big township are no more than five or six miles apart. The enemy can therefore arrange mutual fire support.'¹⁶⁰ Also the official American 'Handbook on German Military Forces' highlighted that 'The Germans regard towns and villages as excellent strongpoints, particularly if the buildings are of masonry. Towns also are regarded as excellent antitank positions because of the considerable infantry-artillery effort necessary to neutralize them.' But it noted that 'this passive type of defence is only an expedient due to German shortages of mobile equipment and manpower.'¹⁶¹ This was an accurate observation, which fully appreciated the increased use of the city within the Total War, touching on aspects of 'total command of the battlefield', 'total armament' and 'total mobilisation'.

The decision to defend its cities might have been foisted on Germany, but it nevertheless represented a final step towards 'Total War'. That the choice was made for a large part due to a lack of military alternatives was obscured by bullish language, which sought to present the cities' defence as a deliberate choice. 'Nothing can be defended so outstandingly as a major city or a field of rubble... Here we must defend...the country...', Nicolas Stargardt recently quoted Himmler as proclaiming in November 1944.¹⁶² Given that virtually every German city by that time had been transformed into a field of rubble, such rhetoric was the only way to reformalise Germany's options. But this language is insufficient to explain the radical actions of the troops, and therefore the next chapter will distinguish between the city as a propagandist symbol and the city within German late-war military strategy.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS- Weltanschauungskrieg? Kriegsführung und Partisanenbekämpfung in Frankreich 1943/44* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 499-500. On Aachen, see: Edgar Christoffel, *Krieg am Westwall 1944/45, Das Grenzland im Westen zwischen Aachen und Saarbrücken in den letzten Kriegsmonaten* (Trier: Verlag der Akademischen Buchhandlung Interbook, 1989), 122-153. On Metz, see: *Ibid.*, 222-31. The commander of the Metz garrison was captured by American forces and his conversations concerning the city's defence were tapped. See: Römer, *Kameraden*, 284-99.

¹⁶⁰ A. Vasilyev, *Siege Parties v. Blockhouses - Drawing teeth of E. Prussian Defences*, 14 December 1944

¹⁶¹ U.S. War Department "Handbook On German Military Forces" (Mar'45)

¹⁶² Stargardt, *The German War*, 459.

IV. Cities as ‘fortresses’: strategy and conjecture

The above assessment offers a starting point for analysing the Wehrmacht’s appreciation of cities during the final fighting in Germany itself, showing that the army was ill-at-ease in cities. This section will analyse the changes in this perception as troops moved back into Germany, and examines what lay at the base of these changes, especially in regard to the concept of Total War. Important here is the implementation of the fortress strategy, which would come to shape the way German cities were defended.¹⁶³ As such, it continues our examination of the ‘metropolitan dimension of Total War’.

Within German military history, the city had played a very limited role. Even as a defensive concept, the city was largely absent from military thought.¹⁶⁴ The closest framework that existed for the defence of a city was the Clausewitzian notion of defending a *Festung*, ‘fortress’, which dated from the 1830s: ‘Imagine a country where not only the large and prosperous towns, but every sizeable one is fortified and defended by its citizens and the farmers of the surrounding areas. The speed of military operations would be so reduced, and so much weight thrown into the scale by defending inhabitants, that the skill and determination of the enemy would dwindle almost to insignificance.’¹⁶⁵ In Clausewitz’s theorization of a fortress, a city’s civilian population was treated as an integral part of its defence, as a resource, and as such it fitted particularly well within the notion of Total War a hundred years later. As the front line pushed towards the German borders in 1944, Clausewitz’s ideas about fortresses were elevated to a full-fledged strategy, which was introduced on 8 March 1944. The lack of innovation was not at all denied, but rather played up, as the first paragraph of Hitler’s War Directive 53, which established the strategy, shows:

The fortified area will fulfil the same function of fortresses in former historical times.

They will ensure that the enemy does not occupy these areas of decisive operational

¹⁶³ The German fortress strategy was first implemented abroad, in France and the Soviet Union. See: Sönke Neitzel, “Der Kampf um die deutsche Atlantik- und Kanalfestungen und sein Einfluß auf den alliierten Nachschub während der Befreiung Frankreichs 1944/45,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 55 (1996) 381-430; Bastiaan Willems, “Defiant Breakwaters or Desperate Blunders? A Revision of the German Late-War Fortress Strategy,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28, no. 2 (2015): 353-56; Frieser “Irrtümer und Illusionen”, 518-25; Gert Fricke, „Fester Platz“ Tarnopol 1944 (Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1986)

¹⁶⁴ Wettstein, *Die Wehrmacht im Stadtkampf*, 54-55, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 395.

importance. They will allow themselves to be surrounded, thereby holding down the largest possible number of enemy forces and establishing conditions favourable for successful counter-attacks.¹⁶⁶

As an avid amateur historian, Hitler would have been able to name several sieges in comparatively recent history, which, due to a persistent defence, managed to turn the tide of a war, such as the siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War, the siege of Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War, and the defence of Adrianople. The dogged resistance at Metz and Paris had significantly prolonged the Franco-Prussian war, and was acutely remembered by the German General Staff.¹⁶⁷

The implementation of the fortress strategy poses a number of historiographical problems, especially regarding the meaning and appreciation of the word ‘fortress’. The word ‘fortress’ today conjures up images of a medieval walled city, but this is neither what Clausewitz had in mind, nor what the German High Command thought it should be. Although in 1944 a fortress indeed had a city as its core, its general idea was based on the ‘Prussian System’ of the late nineteenth century, that of a string of forts five to ten kilometres outside of a city that could cover each other by artillery. In Königsberg, a series of twelve forts had been completed in 1882, which had been incorporated into the *Ostwall* defences in late 1944.¹⁶⁸ The city, like all other fortresses, received dozens of extra heavy artillery pieces out of the stockpiles of captured foreign guns to perform its role as such.¹⁶⁹ Even the highly critical Major Kurt Dieckert, who in the standard work, ‘Der Kampf um Ostpreussen’, placed question marks over the city’s defensive value, privately admitted that ‘Despite defective and outdated fortifications, Königsberg could nevertheless be regarded as a fortress.’¹⁷⁰ Like Königsberg, there were about twenty cities in eastern Germany that could be considered a ‘fortress’ along these lines, and eventually the strategy even yielded some limited results.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's War Directives 1939-1945* (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964), 159-163; Walter Hubatsch, *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegsführung 1939-1945: Dokumente des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht*, (Utting: Dörfler im Nebel-Verlag, 2000), 243-250.

¹⁶⁷ Hew Strachan, “*From Cabinet War to Total War: The Perspective of Military Doctrine, 1861-1918*”, in *Great War, Total war: combat and mobilisation on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.

¹⁶⁸ Ashworth, *War and the city*, 46-47; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 13-15.

¹⁶⁹ BArch RH2/316, 82-83 Ob.Abt (Fest) 22.11.44. Vortragsnotiz 1.) Festugs-Artillerie

¹⁷⁰ BArch Ost-Dok. 10/890: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Die Einschließung und Belagerung von Königsberg: Berichte betrifft Königsberg, 25

¹⁷¹ Bastiaan Willems, “Defiant Breakwaters or Desperate Blunders? A Revision of the German Late-War Fortress Strategy,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28, no. 2 (2015): 356.

Yet the fortress strategy as a whole was unsuccessful, and its feasibility was questioned from the moment it was implemented.¹⁷² None of the twenty-nine cities in the Soviet Union that were designated as fortresses in March 1944 held more than a few days after they were attacked during Operation Bagration in July and August of that year.¹⁷³ We should also keep in mind that the fortress strategy in Germany also partly served to institutionalise Hitler's militarily unsophisticated 'fall-where-you-stand'-rhetoric, while the adherence to it simply came down to a lack of alternatives: between 1830 and 1940 Germany had become highly urbanised and conducting operations while ignoring the cities was simply impossible. Nevertheless, in September 1944 Hitler propagandistically declared all German cities to be fortresses: 'Every bunker, every block of houses in a German city, and every German village has to become a fortress where the enemy either bleeds to death, or which buries those who occupy it in man-to-man battle.'¹⁷⁴ Yet, without a set of orders attached to the proclamation, this remained mere rhetoric.

It is at this point that we should pay attention to the use of the word *Festung* within the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, the language of the Third Reich, as well as its reception. A fortress was closely connected to the safeguarding of a set of values and beliefs. These, in turn, would bolster the defence of that fortress, especially in times of setbacks. Already in January 1932, in a major policy speech held at the *Industrieklub* in Düsseldorf, Hitler elaborated on this interplay:

In purely materiel terms a crisis would be felt a thousand times stronger when a people are not presented with any ideals. (...) Take a fortress and bring down severe deprivation on it: as long as those in it see deliverance, believe in it, hope it will happen, they can endure the diminished rations. Take the last hope of a possible deliverance, of a better future, out of their hearts, and you will see how these people suddenly view the diminished rations as the most important of their lives.¹⁷⁵

A fortress was thus often used as a spiritual entity, or as a powerful metaphor, rather than as a physical location. Metaphysically, a fortress grew to be a set of values and beliefs *in itself*. Thus, even a single soldier could be considered a 'fortress': the phrase 'every man a fortress' was said to have been coined by German troops encircled in Stalingrad, and found its way into

¹⁷² Frieser "Irrtümer und Illusionen", 518-21.

¹⁷³ Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin, The German Defeat in the East*, (New York: Dorset Press, 1986), 316-328.

¹⁷⁴ BArch NS 6, 348, 25: Anlage zum Rundschreiben 255/44 vom 21.9.1944.

¹⁷⁵ Max Domarus, *Hitler Reden und Proklamationen 1932 - 1945 I. Band Triumph (1932-1938)* (Neusstadt a.d. Aisch: Verlagsdruckerei Schmidt, 1962), 89.

National Socialist newspapers.¹⁷⁶ In his memoirs, Großdeutschland veteran Guy Sajer likened his attitude to a fortress, but attached negative connotations to it, writing about the battles of 1944 that ‘although we were already beaten ten times over, our terror became a fortress of despair, which the Russians found difficult to breach.’¹⁷⁷ The link between a fortress and National Socialist ideas was further strengthened by the presence of hundreds of castles that were dotted around Germany. These were readily used to romanticise warfare, connecting contemporary Germans to their ancient forefathers by underscoring the *Volk*’s martial traditions.¹⁷⁸

Meanwhile, late 1941 had seen the establishment of the concept of *Festung Europa*, which rested on two pillars. Not only was it the geographic location of Germany’s New Order, but the notion that *Festung Europa* was embattled, ‘threatened on all fronts (...) to be enslaved and dulled’, was immediately connected to it.¹⁷⁹ By late-1944 ‘Festung Europa’ no longer existed. The western Allies had landed in Normandy and the Soviets were pushing through Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltics and the Balkan. Yet the propagandist concept of ‘Festung’ was still very much alive. On 1 September, 1944, State Secretary Dr. Naumann spoke in Danzig, to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the city’s return to the Greater German Reich. If Germany’s enemies ‘believe [themselves] to be at the eve of victory’, Naumann vowed, ‘they are mistaken. (...) Festung Germany will be defended like no fortress before has been defended – this is when our hour will come!’¹⁸⁰

The implementation of the fortress strategy reveals the extent of the radicalisation of the Wehrmacht and Party by 1944, and shows how interwoven their agendas had become. It was not merely a manifestation of the last convulsions of a dying regime, hell-bound to drag its citizens into a Total War. The desperate and disillusioned Wehrmacht, which, due to its close affiliations with the Nazis, only a few years earlier had ‘believed itself to live in an epoch of German military history which had not existed “since the Great Elector”,’ now adhered to a strategy for the defence of Germany that deliberately exposed the civilians it had vowed to

¹⁷⁶ Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 307.

¹⁷⁷ Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier* (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1977), 382.

¹⁷⁸ Fabian Link, *Burgen und Burgenforschung im Nationalsozialismus: Wissenschaft und Weltanschauung 1933-1945* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 50-60.

¹⁷⁹ Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii, A Philologist’s Notebook* (trans: Martin Brady) 3rd ed. (London: Continuum, 2000), 152, 212; Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 239-40. On the propagandistic limitations to the term, see: Pyta, *Hitler, Der Künstler als Politiker und Feldherr*, 520.

¹⁸⁰ “Staatsekretär Dr. Naumann in Danzig: Unsere Gegner täuschen sich!”, *Völkischer Beobachter*, Berliner Ausgabe, September 2, 1944.

protect to deadly combat in the name of that same regime.¹⁸¹ The vast propaganda that accompanied the strategy had two purposes: on one hand it was the regime's seal of approval, but at the same time it was meant to counter the reservations that many commanders expressed behind closed doors. Indeed, as we will see in the next section, the Party elite used the Wehrmacht's critique of the strategy both as a way to point to defeatism, as well as proof that the Wehrmacht questioned the regime's authority.

V. The struggle for final authority in Germany's defence

The Wehrmacht's increased presence in Germany kindled a number of fears within the ranks of the Party. As we have seen, during the war the Party had devised frameworks to prevent Wehrmacht influence in internal affairs, but, since the brunt of the army outside the borders over this period, there had been little need to review these systemic changes. But with millions of troops moving into Germany in the autumn of 1944, it should come as no surprise that the Party became more anxious about the role the Wehrmacht would assume. This section is divided into several parts. We will firstly examine the position from the Party point of view.¹⁸² Since it was the Party that had managed to increase its power inside Germany most during wartime, it was the Party that had most to lose with any change of the *status quo ante* mid-1944. The section will then address the Wehrmacht's perception of the German home front, before examining the efforts to bridge the divide between the different actors.

There was little reason for the Party to see the Wehrmacht's arrival in Germany as anything but a likely infringement of its autonomy over internal politics, since there had certainly been precedents in recent memory. Only twenty-five years earlier, as the Second Empire collapsed in the wake of the lost war, a disproportionately high number of demobilised German soldiers had joined the different right-wing *Freikorps* (Free Corps) paramilitary groups, which sprung up all over the country. These *Freikorps* played a vital role in the suppression of different communist uprisings in the newly-established Weimar Republic, most

¹⁸¹ Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, 26-27. Meant is Friedrich Wilhelm, Elector of Brandenburg (1620-1688), whose political and military achievements were closely entwined.

¹⁸² On a general examination of the impact of 'infighting' during the last years of the war, see: Mommsen, "The Dissolution of the Third Reich", 106.

famously the January 1919 Spartakist uprisings.¹⁸³ In March 1920, in turn, the *Freikorps*-backed Kapp Putsch tried to overthrow *Reichspräsident* Friedrich Ebert's democratically-elected government.¹⁸⁴ Although these veterans evidently did not return from the war with a common agenda, the willingness to influence domestic policy – even after having fought abroad for years and having been largely detached from civilian life – was a purpose they shared. Also, the regular armed forces, the 100,000-man *Reichswehr*, had to be called in repeatedly to restore order during the fragile Weimar Republic, meanwhile, high-ranking officers continued to occupy important positions in the different Weimar governments.¹⁸⁵ During the early years of the Nazi dictatorship the army continued to maintain a significant influence over internal politics, until Hitler managed to diminish its power and subordinate it to the state.¹⁸⁶

The Second World War again saw the Wehrmacht in a political role, although not within Germany itself. During the occupation of the Soviet Union, it was allowed to adopt and implement its own political vision of the occupied territories.¹⁸⁷ Not much imagination is needed to regard the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front an autonomous 'state', independent from the rest of Germany, possessing far-reaching powers over a large number of subjects, controlling a vast territory a thousand kilometres from Berlin, and, of course, holding a 'monopoly of legitimate and physical force.'¹⁸⁸ Indeed, shortly before the war, in October 1937, Goebbels explicitly referred to the Wehrmacht as a 'state within a state', fearing that, since 'politically the generality had learned nothing', it would present a dissonant voice within his propaganda.¹⁸⁹ Certainly, the implications of the Wehrmacht as an independent pillar within the National Socialist society – a notion initially championed by Hitler himself – remained a constant worry throughout the war.¹⁹⁰ Even as the tide of war turned against Germany, and the

¹⁸³ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Bd. 4: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914-1949* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003), 243-44. Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 18-19, Ch. 6: Atrocities and Mobilisation, Ch. 7: Weimar's Order to Execute.

¹⁸⁴ Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Bd. 4*, 406-7; Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic 1918 – 1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 3-11.

¹⁸⁵ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 415-16, 425, 427-66.

¹⁸⁶ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, 468-496.

¹⁸⁷ Both Chapter 3 and 4 address the continuities between Wehrmacht rule in the Soviet Union and its arrival in Germany

¹⁸⁸ Merriam-Webster s.v. "State."; Max Weber, *The essential Weber: a reader* ed. Sam Whimster (London: Routledge, 2004), 131-32.

¹⁸⁹ Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, 25; Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil I Aufzeichnungen 1923-1941, Band 4: März – November 1937* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2000), 379. (entry of 28 October 1937).

¹⁹⁰ Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, 22, 25-26.

Wehrmacht was pushed out of the Soviet Union, it maintained many of its ‘state-like’ qualities. It possessed a vast police apparatus, its own justice system (to which we will return in Chapter 4), and its own press corps and presses (Chapter 2), meeting many of the requirements of ‘Total Control’. Moreover, the army possessed one of the most sophisticated communication networks, which not only served to pass down orders from unit to unit, but could also be used to communicate the military’s demands directly to the war economy, which could further aid ‘Total Armament’.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, the Wehrmacht had an organisational structure in place specifically designed to perform well under duress, and would therefore be well-suited to the challenges of ‘Total administration’ and ‘Total Mobilisation’. Underpinning all this, from divisional level downwards, army units consisted of men with all the civilian skills to operate independently from the state, such as butchers, cobblers, vets, doctors, and so on. Trying to fit this massive organisation into Party and state structures was therefore unfeasible, especially given that the military structure remained more or less intact, while the German civilian society itself was slowly crumbling. Moreover, as we will see in Chapter 2, the Party was well-aware of its waning popularity, and, in order to drum up popular support, had itself championed a Total War society that closely linked the *Heimat* to the *Front*, a ‘*Kampfgemeinschaft*’. As a result, the army still enjoyed a certain popularity among the German population that the Party had long not enjoyed.

The main tool at the disposal of the Party to prevent the Wehrmacht from gaining undue influence in the political sphere was to accuse it of a lack of loyalty towards the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The Wehrmacht was portrayed as a milieu that the regime had failed to penetrate, a hotbed of what Martin Broszat has coined ‘*Resistenz*’ that allowed for an ‘inner emigration’ from the regime.¹⁹² The Party elite presented the failures on the Eastern Front as a form of betrayal and a failure of National Socialist spirit among the Wehrmacht’s ranks.¹⁹³ Indeed, Hitler, throughout his career, remained sceptical of the army’s willingness to fight for the regime, especially at times when commanders had been unwilling to follow his orders.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Andreas Kunz, “Die Wehrmacht in der Agonie der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944/45. Eine Gedankenskizze,” in *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*, ed. Jörg Hillmann and John Zimmermann (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2002), 108-109. A diary entry of the Chief of the Operations Staff of the OKW, Alfred Jodl, mentions “120,000 long distance calls and 33,000 telegrams” on 26 January 1945 alone.

¹⁹² Martin Broszat, “*Resistenz* and Resistance,” in *Nazism*, ed. Neil Gregor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 241-44.

¹⁹³ Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Meldungen aus dem Reich: Die geheime Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945, Band 17* (Herrsching: Pawlak Verlag, 1984), 6653 (22 July), 6686-87, (28 July), 6700 (10 August); Stargardt, *The German War*, 453; Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans*,

¹⁹⁴ Wilhelm Keitel and Walter Gorlitz, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Keitel*, trans. David Irving (London: William Kimber, 1965), 166-67; Kershaw, *The End*, 197-203. The question to what extent Nazi teachings

Likewise, although after the assassination attempt of 20 July the plotters were presented as ‘a very small clique of (...) criminally stupid officers’, behind closed doors the matter was treated as an almost characteristic – to some extent anticipated – manifestation of a larger problem among the ranks of the military.¹⁹⁵ Although the Wehrmacht’s lack of loyalty to the community was mainly used as a pretext to prevent it from assuming too much power, it was nevertheless a powerful accusation that brought about a reaction that was very real. An internal ‘clean-up’, nothing short of a minor purge, was requested by the army itself and followed shortly after the assassination attempt in an effort to restore its tainted honour.¹⁹⁶ This autumn purge not only affected the General Staff and interior military positions, it placed field commanders under scrutiny as well. An elaborate British intelligence report of autumn 1944 read that in East Prussia ‘The political morale of all the personnel is being very carefully checked’. It further noted that ‘In addition to this, a drastic purge among all officers from the rank of major up is taking place in both [the Sixteenth and Eighteenth] Armies as a result of the belief at Hitler’s H.Q. that the officers were mainly to blame for the German collapse in the Baltic States. Courts of enquiry are conducting a detailed investigation into the activities of all officers, from battalion commander inclusive, upwards.’¹⁹⁷ Moreover, the sight of the chaotic army pouring into East Prussia (which will be examined in chapter 3) did little to strengthen its role in the province’s hierarchy, and served as further ‘proof’ of the Wehrmacht’s unreliability.¹⁹⁸

Yet, Hitler’s unwillingness to trust the Wehrmacht’s political reliability was largely unfounded. Felix Römer has established that, despite the personal reservations that some of the commanders felt towards the regime, virtually none of them considered renouncing their oath to the Führer.¹⁹⁹ This is in line with the British intelligence report, which concluded that ‘There are no indications in East Prussia of any desire, either on the part of the personnel of the armed forces or of the civilian population, to overthrow the Nazi regime, although Hitler personally, and the Nazi Party as a whole, are universally unpopular.’²⁰⁰ The conclusion in the last clause

permeated the Wehrmacht has occupied historians since the 1960s. On the origins of the debate, see: Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *The army, politics and society in Germany, 1933-45: Studies in the army’s relation to Nazism, War, Armed Forces and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), vi-ix.

¹⁹⁵ Stargardt, *The German War*, 452-54.

¹⁹⁶ Max Domarus, *Hitler Reden und Proklamationen 1932 – 1945, II. Band Untergang (1939-1945)* (Neusstadt a.d. Aisch: Verlagsdruckerei Schmidt, 1963), 2137.

¹⁹⁷ TNA HW 1/3341, Germany: Morale of Armies in East Prussia, 22-11-44. On the ‘troubled conscience’ of German troops during the latter half of the war, see: N. Stargardt, “The Troubled Patriot: German Innerlichkeit in World War II,” *German History* 28, no.3 (2010): 326-342.

¹⁹⁸ Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter, Erich Koch*, 440

¹⁹⁹ Römer, *Kameraden*, 306-9.

²⁰⁰ TNA HW 1/3341, Germany: Morale of Armies in East Prussia, 22-11-44.

might have been somewhat overstated, but the middle-ranking and lower-ranking Party officials, ‘*Bonzen*’, were indeed largely despised among the troops.²⁰¹ In particular, there was resentment over the role of these men in the defence, many of whom were considered to be bragging dilettantes. After the war, Eberhard Knieper, a former fortress staff officer, reflected that one of the main frustrations among the top ranks of the army was that they felt that the Party undeservedly sought to lay sole claim on the right to rally the population for the city’s defence.²⁰² One of the main fears of the Wehrmacht was to appear ‘soft’, and understandably it saw these kind of calls as ‘warning shots’, since they implied that the Party was trying to assume even more powers at the army’s expense.²⁰³ For the discredited army, addressing the potential weaknesses of a too large role of the Party thus not only served to organise the defence of Germany, it was also a way to show its teeth and hold its own against its major rival.

Two issues stand out in the way the Wehrmacht sought to prevent further inroads from the Party while on German territory. Firstly, as we have seen, the Wehrmacht had always been in charge of the so-called ‘area of operations’ close behind the frontline, whereas the Party possessed no expertise whatsoever in this respect.²⁰⁴ It was entirely plausible that this lack of experience would hasten a quick collapse of an area’s defences when under attack, since inexperienced Party officials were likely to lose their heads. In this respect, the Wehrmacht possessed a mighty tool: especially up to mid-February 1945, it possessed virtually sole authority over summary courts-martial, which meant that they could round up everyone – including Party officials – who they felt had ‘totally failed’ to do their duty during critical moments. The presence of two independent justice systems operating alongside each other was indeed considered a dangerous precedent, and in early February 1945, Gauleiter Joachim Eggeling of Halle-Merseburg advised Reichsleiter Bormann to address the matter. The sight of Wehrmacht officers sitting in judgement over wavering Party officials threatened to undermine the Party’s standing, and Eggeling believed that this practice should be avoided.²⁰⁵

Secondly, generals were quick to stress that there was no war-weariness among troops, and there had been no ‘revolutionary manifestations’ among the troops in 1945 as there had

²⁰¹ Römer, *Kameraden*, 79-90.

²⁰² ASK 22304-4: Oberleutnant Eberhard Knieper (O 3 der Festung), Bericht über meine Erlebnisse in Königsberg in der Zeit von Mitte Februar bis Anfang April 1945 (undated)

²⁰³ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 36.

²⁰⁴ This will be discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

²⁰⁵ IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 13202379. Beleg Nr. 5, 10. Febr. 1945 An die Partei-Kanzlei z. Hd. Herrn Reichsleiter M. Bormann. gez. Eggeling Gauleiter

been in 1918.²⁰⁶ Military morale among troops was said to be consistently higher than that of German workers.²⁰⁷ Although this was not the same as possessing a National Socialist spirit, ‘assuring victory’ was the Wehrmacht’s core task within Germany’s *Weltanssschauungskrieg* (war of world views), and one that from late 1944 gained in importance given that the other aims of the war (annihilation, exploitation and domination of the east) could not be achieved during the defence of Germany.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the generals, who had all experienced the First World War and its aftermath, still felt a sense of guardianship over Germany, and the idea that during the previous war army had not been defeated on the battle field, but as a result of a stab in the back by a war-weary and traitorous home front, was deeply embedded in the Wehrmacht.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, war-weariness was increasingly observed on the home front, and the Party was seen giving in to the demands of the population, for example by postponing cuts in rations. Party elites were unwilling to subordinate everything to the demands of the military, so the Wehrmacht could reasonably argue that it was once again being held back.²¹⁰

These conflicts were not unwelcome to the Wehrmacht. In the words of Ian Kershaw, Hitler ‘was generally unwilling to resolve disputes by coming down on one side or the other, much preferring parties to a dispute to sort it out themselves’, after which he could support the side that had managed to come out on top.²¹¹ The Wehrmacht had most to gain by stirring up the current state of affairs, and thus had a vested interest in creating a conflict, in order to enhance its position within the state. At the same time, we should be careful not to read more into this conflict than might have been the case. Scholars have recently started to challenge the models introduced in the 1980s, which, broadly speaking, placed behaviour in Nazi Germany

²⁰⁶ Sönke Neitzel, *Abgehört: Deutsche Generäle in britischer Kriegsgefangenschaft 1942-1945* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2005), 189.

²⁰⁷ Timothy Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the ‘National Community’* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 334.

²⁰⁸ Förster, *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat*, 59-60. Förster asserts that “To achieve the gigantic “purpose of war” of the German people – victory, annihilation, exploitation and domination – four instruments, so-called pillars, were envisaged: Wehrmacht, SS, Four-Year Plan, and administration. In order to effectively master this important task, the areas of Hitler’s “4 commissioners” were not clearly separated, but closely interlinked.”

²⁰⁹ On the activities of prominent Wehrmacht generals during the period immediately following the First World War and during the Weimar Republic, see Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer: Die deutschen Oberbefehlshaber im Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion 1941/42* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), 86-111; Michael Geyer, “Endkampf 1918 and 1945: German Nationalism, Annihilation, and Self-Destruction,” in Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod (eds), *No Man’s Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the twentieth century* (Göttingen, 2006), pp. 35–68; Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 164-66, 179–81.

²¹⁰ Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich*, 362-66.

²¹¹ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*. 2nd ed. (London, Edward Arnold, 1991), 75.

in a paradigm of ‘resistance/collaboration’ which, according to some, ‘perpetuates a fundamental misreading of motivation, behaviour and impact.’²¹² Although it would be naïve (or better: deliberately negligent, echoing the line of historians like Golo Mann) to disregard (dis)agreement with the regime as a factor to explain behaviour, we will see throughout the course of this thesis that there are indeed limitations to adhering to this paradigm.²¹³ Instead, much more attention will be paid to actions that were motivated by the circumstances, opportunities and limitations that presented themselves.

It is here that we turn to the legislation concerning fortress cities, as they offer the clearest example of bridging this divide at a local level: the level at which the interaction between most Party officials and Wehrmacht officers actually took place. In late 1944, a fair number of Eastern Germany’s larger cities were declared fortresses, among them Danzig, Königsberg, Lötzen, Gotenhafen, Thorn, Graudenz, Oppeln, Breslau, Glogau, Posen, Schneidemühl and Pressburg. More would be later added to the list, such as Frankfurt am Oder and Berlin. The measures taken for the fortress cities offer us the clearest indication of the interaction between Wehrmacht and Party in Germany’s cities. In particular, the problem of ultimate authority needed to be solved. The most comprehensive attempts to tackle this came from the *Oberkommando des Heeres*, led by Generaloberst Heinz Guderian. In mid-December 1944 Guderian proposed the establishment of a *Gemeinsamer Arbeitsstab* in every fortress.²¹⁴ Under this system, Gauleiters would designate a *Festungsbeauftragte der NSDAP* (Fortress-commissioner of the NSDAP) for every fortress, who would be responsible for its political matters, as well as the care of civilians:

In case of an encirclement this commissioner stays in the fortress and is subordinate to the fortress commander. From then on, he will be particularly tasked to do everything to strengthen the indomitable will to resist of the troops (in cooperation with the NSFO) and to deploy the Volkssturm units present in the fortress.²¹⁵

²¹² Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, “Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Towards a Social History of Politics in Hitler’s Empire” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 4 (2015) 871-72. For the original model, see: Detlev Peukert, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde, Anpassung, Ausmerze und Aufbegehren unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1982), 97.

²¹³ Golo Mann, *Deutsche Geschichte 1919-1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Bücherei, 1961), 22-23.

²¹⁴ BArch NS 19/3814, 1-5: Der Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres Gen Qu./ Abt. Kriegsverw. Nr. II/2200/44 g.Kdos, H Qu OKH, den 17.12.1944 Betr. Bevorratung und ARLZ-Maßnahmen auf zivilen Sektor im Bereich der Ostfestungen

²¹⁵ BArch NS 19/3814, 2-4.

The RVK, at the same time, would appoint a *Referent* (consultant) for ‘all civilian *Reich* defence measures, particularly supply and ARLZ-measures’.²¹⁶ The *Leiter der Gemeindeverwaltung* (head of local government, normally the *Oberbürgermeister* – mayor) was also to find a place on the combined staff, but all the civilian officials were to be subordinated to the fortress commander.²¹⁷ The proposal fitted into Guderian’s belief that a fortress commander should be ‘master over life and death of all persons present in the fortress.’²¹⁸ However, the Party disagreed with this scheme, arguing that in Germany fortress commanders should merely have ‘the right to give instructions, but no subordination structure which grants the rights to judge about life and death of all persons in the fortress. That was true for fortresses abroad, but not for Germany.’²¹⁹ What the army demanded was thus a much greater degree of autonomy than the Party was willing to allow.

The Party’s foot-dragging was closely connected to the authority it claimed the Wehrmacht lacked in regard to governing a city’s population. But at the end of the day much would come to depend on local ‘moral authority’. This meant that moral authority could only be asserted during the defence of the city in question. How this transpired in Festung Königsberg will be examined in the next section.

VI. Towards a new community

With the conscious decision to defend Germany’s cities, war reached the pinnacle of totality for much of the German population. Never had so many Germans been so close to warring belligerents. In an examination of late-war violence, understanding the dynamics of a city is therefore of key importance. Cities were environments where people of different social strata

²¹⁶ BArch NS 19/3814, 2. ARLZ-Arbeitsstäben (*Auflockerung, Räumung, Lähmung und Zerstörung* or Task Forces for Breaking-down, Evacuation, Paralysing and Destruction).

²¹⁷ BArch NS 19/3814, 2, 5.

²¹⁸ BArch RH 2/316, 112-13: Der Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres Op Abt (Fest) Nr. 11 886/44 g.K. H.Qu., 11.11.44 Anweisung für den Ausbau und die Verteidigung ständiger Festungen.

²¹⁹ BArch RW 4/704, 5: WFSt/Qu 2 (Ost) Nr. 0150/45 geh. F.H.Q., den 6.1.1945 Betr.: Rücksprache mit dem Sachbearbeiter der Parteikanzlei für Evakuierungsfrage. The issue was eventually resolved on 17 February 1945, when Bormann distributed the final memorandum, concerning the ‘Command structure for cut off troops and rules on fortresses, defensive areas etc.’, drawn up by Field Marshal Keitel. Party members were partially placed outside of the authority of the fortress commander. See: BArch NS 6/ 354, 71-80: Der Leiter der Partei-Kanzlei Führerhauptquartier, den 17.2.1945, Rundschreiben 88/45g Betrifft: Befehlsführung bei abgeschnittenen Truppenteilen und Bestimmungen über Festungen, Verteidigungsbereiche usw.

and beliefs could easily gather together, and friction was never far away. Nowhere is this better conveyed than in an alarming report, written by a certain *Leutnant* Haussleiter, a National-Socialist Leadership Officer of the Fifteenth Army, which fought in Western Germany. His report reached Guderian (who as ‘Chef der OKH’ was mainly concerned with the Eastern Front) via the *Oberbefehlshaber West*, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt. Guderian had immediately sent the report to Bormann, who in turn passed it on to Himmler.²²⁰ The findings can rightly be considered as broadly accepted among those men within the Party and Wehrmacht that were willing to fight to the end.

The decent soldier remains at the front. Nobodies and shirkers, however, leave their lines. They already form a dangerous mass in the large cities, and, upon the dissolution of order, immediately turn into agents of sinister movements. These masses at the same time spread rumours and all negative attitudes. They obviously represent the scum of the nation.

These men, who ‘loaf around for weeks’ on stations throughout the country, were defeatists whose message, Haussleiter observed, found large audiences in ‘every jam-packed waggon or hairdresser’. They could easily disappear into these crowds when they were called out, something Haussleiter found when he tried to catch one of these men. Some of the workers that listened to the stories, in turn, told troops that their factories had ceased to work, while women openly discussed hiding them.²²¹ In his report, Haussleiter repeatedly expressed the need to set examples to counter the behaviour, clearly adhering to the notion of ‘violence as a means of communication’.²²² Although Haussleiter’s report is almost grotesque in its analysis and proposals, it demonstrates why cities and their immediate environment serve as the best-possible framework to examine the wave of violence that swept over Germany. The urban presence of dissenters with a wildly different outlook to the official discourse made German cities into pressure cookers, in which the use of violence became a readily accepted valve.

Building on the findings of the previous section, we will now turn to Königsberg. As we will see throughout this dissertation, the dynamics described above were also present there. Traditionally, it is the Nazi ideology that is used to explain these hard-line sentiments. But what immediately stands out in the assessment of the city’s siege is that the Wehrmacht vastly

²²⁰ The function of the NSFO, the Nationalsozialistischer Führungsoffizier, will be discussed in Chapter 2.

²²¹ IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 10700993. Führerhauptquartier, den 1. März 1945 Bo/Lch. Herrn Reichsführer-SS Himmler Betrifft: Beobachtungen im Heimatkriegsgebiet; IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 10700994-10701000 Geheime Kommandosache, Abschrift von SSD-Fernschreiben Chef des Genstb. Ob. West/ NSFO Nr. 75/45 g.Kdos. von 28.II.45 an Chef OKW

²²² Sven Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende: Gesellschaft und Gewalt 1944/45*, (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), 422.

outnumbered Party officials. Our first question should therefore be to what extent the arrival of the Wehrmacht shaped behaviour in Königsberg. How would its members use their authority vis-à-vis the Party to impact life in the city? We will shortly address the main actors that arrived in the city in late-January 1945, as well as those who were already there but subsequently assumed a different role. Establishing the working relationship between the main actors will eventually allow us to determine the grounds on which they based the decisions they took during the two-month siege.

On 28 January, 1945 *General der Infanterie* Otto Lasch, the former *Wehrkreis* commander of East Prussia, was appointed as fortress commander of Königsberg.²²³ The minutes of the military conference at Hitler's headquarters on 27 January 1945 show that Generaloberst Guderian, who knew General Lasch from earlier military conferences, personally recommended him to Hitler, referring to Lasch as 'the most notable personality we have up there.'²²⁴ The appointment took place during an unfolding crisis, which arose on 23 January 1945, when Soviet troops of the Third Belorussian Front crossed the river Deime, the last natural barrier before Königsberg. They had started their offensive into East Prussia a hundred kilometres further to the east only ten days earlier.²²⁵ Although the appointment was an army matter, Gauleiter Koch immediately sought to enhance his role. In the late hours of 27 January, he summoned Lasch and told him about a phone call he just had with Hitler. Stressing that Hitler had asked the Gauleiter about Lasch's 'qualification and reliability', Koch implied that his approval was needed in the process.²²⁶ But in his memoirs, Lasch claims that when he was summoned by Koch, he told him that 'There would, in my opinion, be only one use [for me], which is as fortress commander.'²²⁷ This implies both that Lasch was prepared to stand up to the Party, and that he had already given sustained thought as to what was expected of him

²²³ Otto Lasch (1893-1971) joined the army 1912. *Leutnant*: August 1914, *Oberleutnant*: March 1918. Transferred to police in 1919. *Polizei-Hauptmann* 1921. Joins NSDAP: May 1, 1933. *Polizei-Major*: November 1933. Transferred back to Wehrmacht October 1935. In June 1941 conquers Riga as *Oberst* and regimental commander. Goes on to command the 217th Infanterie Division and the LXIV. Korps before accepting the position as commander of Wehrkreis I as *General*. See: Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 7-11. BDC M0087 Lasch, Otto. Mitglieds Nr. 2056645. Geboren 25.6.93, Ort: Pless, Beruf: Pol. Hptm.; Verheiratet; Eingetreten: 1.5.33; BArch PERS 6/251: Heeres-Personalamt. Personalakten für Lasch, Otto; BArch PERS 6/300107: Lasch, Bernhard Otto.

²²⁴ Helmut Heiber and David Glantz, *Hitler and his Generals, military conferences 1942-1945: the first complete stenographic record of the military situation conferences, from Stalingrad to Berlin*, trans. Roland Winter, Krista Smith and Mary Beth Friedrich (London: Greenhill, 2002), 632-33; BArch RH 2/317, 69: Fernschreiben gez. Guderian Generaloberst und Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres 7.12.44

²²⁵ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/510, 15: Kurt Dieckert, Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944-1945 (April 1948); Erickson, *The road to Berlin*, 455, 465-69.

²²⁶ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 37-38, 128; ASK 22034-4, Hauptmann d. Res. Sommer: Vermerk (undated)

²²⁷ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 37.

as a soldier. Indeed, a fortress commander was expected to be a ‘specially selected, hardened soldier, preferably of General’s rank.’²²⁸ Prior to and during a siege his task was to ensure ‘ruthless exploitation of all options’ and oversee the ‘extensive use’ of the population. Whereas in Russia fortresses were considered to contain mainly fighting troops, in Germany civilians were bound to be present in larger numbers.²²⁹

On the first evening of his appointment Lasch called several Party members and army commanders to his headquarters for a meeting. The General, according to Dr. Eugen Sauvant, one of the officials present, spoke in a serious tone of the ‘*Führerbefehl*’ to hold the city ‘until the last bullet’, thus stressing the gravity of the situation and, in turn, implying the existence of a direct link between Hitler and himself.²³⁰ By doing so, he further diminished Gauleiter Koch’s role in the fortress, but it was above all Koch’s own behaviour that undercut his authority. By the time that Lasch held the meeting, Koch had already made a number of decisions that were not only frowned upon by the army, but by Party members as well. Since the Party was responsible for the population’s evacuation, its actions were closely observed. When on 21 January Koch ordered the families of *Gauleitung* employees to be evacuated by a special train, panic struck among the population.²³¹ It was a decision that alarmed some of the more committed Party members. It seemed to confirm the pessimist prediction of Propaganda Ministry officials, who, according to Eleanor Hancock, ‘judged some 80 per cent of the 7 to 8 million Party members to be “driftwood”, awaiting defeat.’²³² To add to this, on 27 January Koch suddenly announced the general evacuation of Königsberg, preparing neither the population nor the Party for it. Not only were Soviet troops already within striking distance by then, the temperature at the time was well below -20°. ²³³ Meanwhile, Koch was absent from

²²⁸ Trevor-Roper, *Hitler’s War Directives*, 160. On the establishment of an independently-thinking German officer corps, and its importance in the Second World War, see for example: F. Römer „Im alten Deutschland wäre solcher Befehl nicht möglich gewesen“. Rezeption, Adaption und Umsetzung des Kriegsgerichtsbarkeitserlass im Ostheer 1941/42.“ *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56, no.1 (2008), 69-75, 88-93. See also: David H. Kitterman, “Those Who Said “No!”: Germans Who Refused to Execute Civilians during World War II” *German Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (1988), 241-254; Römer, *Kameraden*, 297.

²²⁹ Hubatsch, *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegsführung*, 243-45.

²³⁰ ASK 22034-4: Dr. Eugen Sauvant: Die letzten Tage von Königsberg 27. Januar bis 10. April 1945 (undated), 2. *Oberstleutnant* Dr. Eugen Sauvant (1894- 1974) was one of the more critical voices in Lasch’s staff.

²³¹ Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944-45* (London: Macmillan, 2004), 322; ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated).

²³² Hancock, *The National Socialist leadership and total war*, 142.

²³³ BArch Ost-Dok.8/580, 2-3: Erich Zerahn, Oberfinanzpräsident in Königsberg „Erste Belagerung Königsberg vom 30.1.-22.2.1945“ (14.10.1953); BArch Ost-Dok 8/588, 9: Dr. Hellmuth Will, Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Königsberg - Die Kämpfe um die Stadt Königsberg, Räumung der Stadt 1945 (19.2.1955); Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 36.

Lasch's meeting, since he had 'relocated' to Pillau.²³⁴ This behaviour damaged his reputation among three of his closest remaining subordinates, Waldemar Magunia, Kreisleiter Ernst Wagner and Deputy Gauleiter Ferdinand Grossherr.²³⁵ Koch's thinly-veiled flight corroded his authority, as well as that of the Party officials who 'relocated' with him.

A comparison with Gauleiter Karl Hanke of Lower Silesia immediately shows the close link between authority and the decision to stay put. Hanke did not leave his besieged capital of Breslau, earning him numerous accolades. His ability to hold sway over, and even to dismiss, the fortress commander of Breslau was in sharp contrast with Gauleiter Koch's attempts to do the same.²³⁶ It had long been common within Party circles that the Party's 'spirit' rested on the willingness of its committed members to take things into their own hands, which had proven of vital importance in the early days of its existence, known as the *Kampfzeit*. As Hans Mommsen has pointed out, from 1943 onwards 'Party propaganda spoke relentlessly of the crucial experience of the *Kampfzeit*, through which obstacles should be overcome.'²³⁷ Thus, although Koch had boasted that Königsberg was to be held to the last man, he now appeared insincere, cowardly, and irresponsible.²³⁸ The remaining Party members realised that it was the army, headed by Lasch, which actually followed up on the promises.²³⁹ Privately Lasch had his doubts about holding the city, but he did not share these with Party members. According to Dr. Sauvant, the general told him that 'We know what awaits us. We can probably hold the city for some time, but Germany is lost. We can no longer hope for the city to be relieved in the current war situation. What happens next, the gods know.'²⁴⁰ This uncertainty was omnipresent in all branches of the Wehrmacht during these days in Königsberg.

Gauleiter Koch's move to Pillau effectively cut East Prussia's Party elite in two, as it created a clear dividing line between those who left and those who stayed behind. The

²³⁴ Edgar Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreussen 1944/45* (Bad Neuheim: Podzun-Verlag, 1964), 196.

²³⁵ Werner Terpitz, *Wege aus dem Osten. Flucht und Vertreibung einer ostpreußischen Pfarrersfamilie*, (Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, Munich, 1997), 46; Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 92-3, 445, ASK 22034-4; Waldemar Magunia: Abschrift (12.2.1955), 3; ASK 22034: Oberstabsinterdant der Reserve Friedrich Dorf Müller: Zusammenstoß mit dem stellv. Gauleiter Großherr (undated). Wagner was sent to the fortress in the night of 27-28 January 1945: Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 65.

²³⁶ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive*, 202-4, 221-5. Most noteworthy is Hanke's appointment as *Reichsführer-SS* in late April 1945, after Heinrich Himmler lost his credibility to Hitler.

²³⁷ Mommsen, "The Indian Summer and the Collapse of the Third Reich," 116-19.

²³⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 8/588, 9: Dr. Hellmuth Will, Die Kämpfe um die Stadt Königsberg (19.2.1955); Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 436.

²³⁹ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 41-64; Rendulic, *Gekämpft, gesiegt, geschlagen*, 337-40; Werner Haupt, *Als die Rote Armee nach Deutschland kam* (Friedberg: Podzun-Pallas-Verlag, 1981), 19.

²⁴⁰ ASK 22034-4 Dr. Eugen Sauvant: Die letzten Tage von Königsberg 27. Januar bis 10. April 1945 (undated), 2.

remaining Party members now had more in common with the army commanders in Königsberg, and this notion shaped their perception of the unfolding events. Yet these Party members saw that, besides the Party, army units also abandoned Königsberg, and had already noticed similar behaviour before, notably in Ukraine and on the borders of East Prussia the previous summers.²⁴¹ Luftwaffe men were seen retreating through Volkssturm lines, and blew up their canons before having fired a single shot.²⁴² The navy had a number of warships sail to the western Baltic, near Denmark, while orders were passed down to destroy docks and other harbour installations.²⁴³ Most of the army's staffs left Königsberg as well.²⁴⁴

Although it is clear that the remaining Party members condemned the departure of their colleagues, the sources are inconclusive as to why they appeared more forgiving in their assessment of the Wehrmacht. They seemed relatively unconcerned by the Wehrmacht's behaviour and focused on those who remained in Königsberg instead. To explain this behaviour, a few general observations might be made. By and large, in Party circles personal loyalty trumped any reliance on institutional patterns.²⁴⁵ Gauleiter Koch's move west was undoubtedly considered disloyal by those – and to those – who stayed behind. Furthermore, it was evident to even the staunchest National Socialist that, once a Soviet offensive was set in motion, the German army could not easily halt it. The army was above all responsible for the protection of Reich territory, and the Wehrmacht's departure from the city might thus be a bitter necessity, while the *Partei flucht* inherently meant self-preservation at the expense of the civilian population they left behind.²⁴⁶ On 18 January 1945, an editorial in the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* stressed that 'The strength of a people never solely lies in its weapons. Wars are always and only decided by the inner strength and the will of a people.'²⁴⁷ Whereas

²⁴¹ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany*, 100. See Chapter 3.

²⁴² BArch Ost-Dok. 8/510, 26: Kurt Dieckert, *Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944-1945* (April 1948); TNA HW 1/3495: BONIFACE report, 30 January 1945; ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated), 2.

²⁴³ TNA HW 1/3479: Intelligence Report January 24, 1945; TNA HW 1/3495: BONIFACE report, 30 January 1945.

²⁴⁴ On the evacuation of the Third Panzer Army, see: BArch Ost-Dok. 8/557: Burkhard Müller-Hillebrand, Generalmajor, Chef des Generalstabes des Panzer-Armeeoberkommandos 3, *Die Kämpfe der 3. Panzerarmee in Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 10. On Luftwaffe evacuation see: Dieckert and Großmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreußen*, 216. On the evacuation of the *Wehrkreis* staff, see: Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 10, 35. On the general chaos among staffs in late January 1945, see: BArch Ost-Dok 8/510, 26: Kurt Dieckert, *Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944-1945* (April 1948).

²⁴⁵ Mommsen, *The Indian Summer and the Collapse of the Third Reich*, 112; Martin Broszat, *The Hitler state: The foundation and development of the internal structure of the Third Reich* (London: Longman, 1981), 44.

²⁴⁶ ASK 22034-4: Major i.G. a.D. Dr. Hans Schäfer, *Ia der Festung, Der Fall Königsbergs* (1.12.56), 2.

²⁴⁷ "Die Stärke," *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 January 1945,

the army showed a willingness to defend the city, most Party members did not express this at all. Moreover, the fact that from the first moment Lasch actively involved Königsberg's Party members in the city's defence not only insured that they believed they were taken seriously, it also placed them against the Party members who had fled.²⁴⁸

Shortly after his appointment as fortress commander, Lasch moved to the *Oberpostdirektion*, the regional post administration, at the Hansaring in the north-west of the city. Although Gauleiter Koch still disagreed with the Party's subordinate role in Königsberg, he nevertheless appointed Kreisleiter Ernst Wagner as *Festungsbeauftragte der NSDAP* among the lines of Guderian's scheme. Wagner almost immediately reached out to Lasch: although the Kreisleiter could have chosen to move into the *Gauhaus* on the *Große Schloßteichstraße*, he instead set up his 'post' in the *Rundfunkhaus*, across the street from Lasch.²⁴⁹ Wagner became Lasch's point man for civilian matters and, twelve years after the fact, the general noted that Wagner 'did his duty in every respect'.²⁵⁰ Königsberg's *Oberbürgermeister*, Helmuth Will, stayed behind in the city too. He received widespread praise, but his presence was above all symbolical, as the city's administration was left to *Rechtsanwalt* Dr. Kurt Eske.²⁵¹

The Wehrmacht, for its part, reached out as well. After hearing that the cooperation between the Wehrmacht and the Party was poor, 'especially in East Prussia' (a clear reference to Gauleiter Koch), the Party Chancellery asked for the appointment of 'a *Verbindungsoffizier* [Liaison officer] between the Army Group and the *Gauleiter und RV-Kommissaren*.' It would be his task to keep the Gauleiter informed on the military situation, and generally to liaise with the Party.²⁵² On his first day as fortress commander Lasch appointed to this role the highly respected Major der Reserve Gunter Ipsen, who, during peace time, had been a Sociology Professor at the Albertina University in Königsberg. During the war he had proved to be an outstanding soldier, receiving the Close combat clasp and the German Cross in Gold.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ ASK 22034-4: Waldemar Magunia: Abschrift (12.2.1955), 3-4.

²⁴⁹ ASK 22034: Auszugsweise Abschrift aus einem Bericht von Wegener, Der Untergang von Königsberg (undated); Telefonbuch Königsberg 1941: s.v. Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei Dienststellen in Königsber BArch Ost-Dok.8/580, 4: Erich Zerahn, Erste Belagerung Königsberg (14.10.1953).

²⁵⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 65.

²⁵¹ ASK 23304-2: Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945 (Die Festungszeit der ostpr. Hauptstadt) (Verfaßt um 1946). According to a short message in *Wir Ostpreussen*, 1 October 1949, Dr. Eske died 'in May 1946 in the GPU prison.' The GPU (State Political Directorate) by that time did not exist anymore. Meant is the NKVD.

²⁵² BArch RW 4/704, 3: WFSt/Qu 2 (Ost) Nr. 0150/45 geh. F.H.Q., den 6.1.1945 Betr.: Rücksprache mit dem Sachbearbeiter der Parteikanzlei für Evakuierungsfrage.

²⁵³ BArch Ost-Dok.8/591, 42: Günther Heysing, Oberleutnant, Kriegsberichter „Von Leningrad bis Königsberg“ Ostpreußische Erinnerungsblätter eines Kriegsberichters (Dezemer 1953); Ost-Dok.8/586,

Although friction continued to exist throughout the siege between the Party and the Wehrmacht, we will see that the two sides tried to reach something of a ‘civil truce’ in order to mobilise the local population.²⁵⁴ Despite their hopeless situation, the Party-state-Wehrmacht collaboration in besieged Königsberg continued to be characterised by a willingness to continue to function as before (*Weiterfunktionieren*), even though the insistence on the continuation of the city’s governmental machinery could not really be rationalised, nor its use easily explained.²⁵⁵

This section has examined the interactions between the Party and Wehrmacht elite during the first days of Königsberg’s siege. Rather than examining their relationship with the regime through the prism of *‘Resistenz’* or ‘loyal reluctance’ to explain the establishment of the local balance of power, a more pragmatic assessment of the situation ‘on the ground’ seemed to have laid at its foundation. In this rapidly changing environment Berlin was far away, and the different actors seem not have been too troubled by any ideological commitment. In this sense, their behaviour was reminiscent of the *Kampfzeit*, during which one’s initiative was of key importance to overcome challenges. The process was not sophisticated: Gauleiter Koch and General Lasch played a local power game. But this nevertheless had important stakes: the moral authority over the city. The flight of the Party provided Lasch with enough leverage to assume authority. After the war, he would define Königsberg’s community as ‘one big family that worked together for better and for worse’ (within the German martial tradition, rooted in patriarchy, this made him the ‘father’ of this community).²⁵⁶ Kreisleiter Wagner saw it as a ‘clean and tough community of hardship’²⁵⁷ Both descriptions – but especially Lasch’s – are self-serving, but nevertheless show that the Total War experience of the civilians in Festung Königsberg was defined by those present in the city itself, rather than by distant Party officials and Wehrmacht commanders. It is also evident that the Wehrmacht and the Party did not necessarily have different agendas for the period that lay ahead. The cooperation between the two actors show that the dynamics in Festung Königsberg should not be framed as ‘fanatical Party versus an unwilling Wehrmacht’. Although the two actors might have had different

3: Dr. Victor Werbke, Stabsoffizier beim Festungskommandanten von Königsberg - Aufstellung neuer Truppenteile in Königsberg, Verhältnis zwischen Stab Lasch (General d. Inf. Und Kommandant der Festung Königsberg) und Parteidienststelle (4.6.1953); Christian Tillitzki, “Wie ein versunkenes Vineta, Albertina 1944-1945,” *Ostpreussenblatt*, September 25, 1999, 12.

²⁵⁴ Broszat, *The Hitler State*, 22.

²⁵⁵ Wolfgang Franz Werner, »Bleib übrig!« *Deutsche Arbeiter in der nationalsozialistischen Kriegswirtschaft* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1983), 350-52.

²⁵⁶ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 64.

²⁵⁷ Ernst Wagner, “Aufruf an der Königsberger Volkssturm,” February 5, 1945, quoted in Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 139-40.

motivations to keep fighting as the city was being encircled by late-January 1945, that willingness *in itself* was strongly present among both Königsberg's Party elite, as well as the Wehrmacht commanders charged with the city's defence.

Conclusion

The defence of Germany in 1945 was built around its cities, and local dynamics would determine how its population would experience the final months of the war. During the previous years of Total War, Germany had already had increasingly centrifugal tendencies that assured that the Volksgemeinschaft came to be defined on a local level, while wartime circumstances themselves – notably the availability of food and the frequency of bombing raids – contributed to the further retreat of local populations from the German community at large. For East Prussians, the impact of Total War was only really felt when they were called up to construct the *Ostwall* during the summer of 1944. The army, which had taken up positions around the East Prussian border, oversaw most of the efforts, showing that despite the constraints that were imposed at a national level, it still managed to exert significant influence at a local level. A similar tendency was seen with the East Prussian *Volkssturm*. By the end of 1944 Army and Corps commanders had gained full control over the militia's deployment, even though the Party was technically in charge. Meanwhile, up to the autumn of 1944, the Wehrmacht had largely been absent from Germans' Total War experience, yet as the number of troops that moved into Germany increased, so did the Wehrmacht's influence over everyday life.

The clearest harbingers that Total War was about to impact on the population's immediate environment were the efforts to bring cities and their urban areas into the defensive schemes. Urban areas were incorporated into larger defensive systems, with key cities being designated 'fortresses'. The defence of cities themselves was new in modern German history, but as the country was highly urbanised there were no other valid options. Moreover, since both the General Staff and the members of Hitler's intimate circle ruled in favour of an active involvement of civilians in the defence of their *Heimat*, they pushed forward with the strategy. The decision to defend German cities was almost universally negatively received further down the chain of command. Troops had long dreaded fighting in cities and equated them with military setbacks, with Stalingrad as the most obvious example, a notion that was only

confirmed during Operation Bagration in the summer of 1944. Local Party elites, in turn, saw their authority being challenged by the increasing powers the military was granted to organise the defence of cities. To prevent further inroads into their power, Party members repeatedly questioned the Wehrmacht's loyalty to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. This constant hammering of reliability linked actual authority over cities to the issue of 'moral authority'. Yet when in January 1945 the fighting for 'fortress Königsberg' was about to commence, numerous Wehrmacht staffs and significant elements of the Party elite, including Gauleiter Koch, left the city. Those who remained only concerned themselves with immediate civic problems, and sought to find common ground in the mutual determination to keep the city out of Soviet hands. The next chapter will examine the language that was used in the fortress, to determine the extent to which Königsberg's garrison broke with the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and what motivations lay behind that process.

2.

Redefining Königsberg: historical continuity in praxis

Introduction

By late January 1945 the Soviet offensive into East Prussia had successfully managed to cut off Königsberg and its wider environs from the rest of Germany. As noted above, this caused a brief power vacuum, but governance soon returned. After these turbulent days, the local administration resumed and would remain firmly in place until Festung Königsberg fell on 10 April.¹ This chapter seeks to answer how and why those in charge during this period sought to define their community. Whereas military and Party authorities in some areas surrendered without a single shot, others, like in Königsberg, decided to fight to the last bullet. This cannot be solely explained by an assessment of the opposing forces involved and concerns about the post-war era; self-image, as we will see, was of decisive importance.

Significant energy was expended to propagate the ‘new’ values of Festung Königsberg. On 31 January 1945, within a few days of Königsberg’s encirclement, *Die Festung Königsberg*, the ‘battle-paper for labourers, soldiers and men of the Volkssturm’, was published for the first time.² That tagline hinted a search for identity. Indeed, a week later this message had been altered, while the official Party newspaper of East Prussia’s NSDAP branch, the *Preußische Zeitung* presented itself as a ‘Paper for the entire Volksgemeinschaft’, which was explained as ‘Wehrmacht, Volkssturm and population’.³ Königsberg would be defined by a set of values on which those in the city could agree, rather than by values imposed on them by Berlin.

The need to define a communal ‘fortress-identity’ had emerged in late 1944, when military and Party authorities discerned a drop in morale and a lack of discipline among both population and troops. It will be argued here that this negative mood (*Stimmung*) surfaced

¹ Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 151; ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated), 3; Waldemar Magunia, Abschrift (12.2.1955), 10, Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 35.

² BArch Ost-Dok. 10/890, 176-77: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Die Einschließung und Belagerung von Königsberg: Berichte betrifft Königsberg: *Die Festung Königsberg*.

³ Preußische Zeitung, 8 February, 1945.

because the racially-fuelled *Weltanschauungskrieg*, the ‘war of world views’, had lost its appeal as a propagandist tool, prompting a search for an alternative. Among the general populace, the authorities estimated, a deep-rooted attitude persisted that the defensive war fought on home soil lacked favourable prospects or a deeper purpose. To counter these sentiments, and to cement its rule, Königsberg’s fortress command tapped into a traditional discourse of ‘banal nationalism’, thereby allowing the army to once again perceive itself as the guarantor of the country’s historical continuity.⁴ Yet, in order to eventually link the new state of affairs in Königsberg to the violence it engendered, this chapter goes beyond an analysis of the new propagandist course. For the people trapped in Königsberg, the siege saw the transformation of their society from a *Volksgemeinschaft* to a *Kampfgemeinschaft*, with ‘*Kampf*’, in turn, changing from a conceptual ‘struggle’ to an actual ‘battle’ (i.e. from a ‘community of struggle’ to a ‘battle-community’). Whether they agreed with the new course or could identify with this newly-imposed identity is less known. This chapter will examine whether the parameters of the new *Kampfgemeinschaft* indeed represented Königsberg’s community.

I. Visions of the East Prussian community in late 1944

By the summer of 1944, the East Prussians were slowly turning away from the National Socialist regime, which, up to that point, had been beneficial to East Prussians. Propaganda had long cemented the relationship between East Prussians and the regime, but as the tide of war turned proved able to detach themselves from some of the regime’s core messages. It would, however, be a simplification to merely portray this as opportunism. From its conception, the NSDAP had put itself forward as the ‘Guardian of the *Volksgemeinschaft*’, but by mid-1944 – with even troops themselves increasingly fearing that they ‘could not do justice to the traditional role as protector of wife and child’ – the population now believed that it had to look after – and even defend – itself.⁵ This, in turn, would have far-reaching consequences. National Socialist propaganda had always presented the German people as the ‘victims of the tide of

⁴ Siniša Malešević, *Identity as Ideology, Understanding Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 146-50, 204-06. On the connection between ‘*Stimmung*’ (mood) and ‘*Haltung*’ (attitude) during wartime, see: Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans*, 5.

⁵ Library of Congress: Die NSDAP sichert die Volksgemeinschaft - Volksgenossen braucht Ihr Rat und Hilfe so wendet Euch an die Ortsgruppe <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004680176/> Accessed 25 November 2016; Echternkamp, *Soldaten im Nachkrieg*, 71.

events' that transpired from 1914 onwards, which had been a powerful narrative to explain Germany's path to war, since war was championed as the only way to undo this injustice.⁶ A victim narrative was now likely to re-emerge, but with the glaring difference that Germans could present themselves as victims of the National Socialist regime, since it was the Nazis that had exposed them to the dangers of war. How this shift in attitude resonated in East Prussia will be discussed in this section.

For East Prussians August 1944 became the watershed month of the war, a month in which East Prussia turned from a province where 'the plight of the time could be forgotten' into a war-zone.⁷ The month started festively with a four-day-long string of recitals, concerts and torchlight processions, as the Albertus University celebrated its four-hundred-year anniversary.⁸ Rectors from across the country were invited to attend the festivities, a commemorative stamp was presented and the university inaugurated no less than eight new chairs. It could all be mistaken, a doctor noted, for a peace-time event.⁹ During the summer the weather had been particularly agreeable, adding to a false sense of safety.¹⁰

Yet, anxiety was already creeping up on the East Prussian population. Throughout the summer the Soviet offensive, 'Operation Bagration', pushed westwards and by late July the frontline crossed the extended border of East Prussia near Bialystok.¹¹ Two weeks earlier an East Prussian official had bluntly written to his colleague that 'these days our people look with concern to the Eastern Front. The breakthrough of the Bolsheviks near Wilna (Vilnius) is gradually recognized in all its severity by the entire German people.'¹² The biggest blow to the morale of East Prussians came in the last week of August, when two RAF bomber raids destroyed much of the city centre of Königsberg, turning it into a flaming inferno that left 4,200 dead and 150,000 people homeless.¹³ Nevertheless, already by mid-July orders were passed

⁶ Wirsching, "Volksgemeinschaft and the Illusion of 'Normality' from the 1920s to the 1940s," 151.

⁷ Karl Springenschmid, *Raus aus Königsberg! Wie 420 ostpreußische Jungen 1945 aus Kampf und Einsatz gerettet wurden* (Kiel: Arndt, 1993), 20.

⁸ IfZArch MA 736/ NSDAP Hauptarchiv Gau Ostpreussen: Semesterbericht der Studentenföhrung Ostpreußen für die Monate Juli, August und September

⁹ Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg*, 158; Hans Graf von Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch. Aufzeichnungen eines Arztes aus den Jahren 1945-1947* (Munich; dtv, 1961), 47.

¹⁰ Hans-Werner Rautenberg, "Der Zusammenbruch der deutschen Stellung im Osten und das Ende Königsbergs. Flucht und Vertreibung als Europäisches Problem," in *Das Königsberger Gebiet im Schnittpunkt deutscher Geschichte und in seinen europäischen Bezügen*, ed. Bernhart Jähmig and Silke Spieler (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen, 1993), 115.

¹¹ *Osvoboshdenie gorodov*, s.v. "БЕЛОСТОК."

¹² BArch R55/616, 105: Betrifft: Errichtung eines Grenzschutzes im Osten, 13 July 1944.

¹³ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive*, 165-69.

down to prevent people from leaving the province.¹⁴ To add to their concerns, East Prussians increasingly came into contact with German troops, which entered the province in large numbers. If the bombing had not already roughly rid them of the illusion that their province was out of reach of the war's horrors, the arrival of these soldiers left no doubt that war was, in fact, very close by.

In late July, the front line came to a standstill along the borders of East Prussia, and stayed there until mid-October. As discussed earlier, during this period large parts of the population were actively involved in digging defensive positions, both close behind the front line and deeper into East Prussia. Meanwhile, a quarter of the East Prussian population was evacuated from vulnerable areas.¹⁵ Yet, criticism of evacuation measures increased in the wake of the so-called 'Gumbinnen Operation' of October 1944. On 16 October, Soviet troops started this offensive and within a few days overran most of the evacuated areas, after which areas had yet to be evacuated were captured as well. In his diary, even Goebbels expressed criticism towards Gauleiter Koch's evacuation measures, as he felt that Koch had overestimated the strength of the Wehrmacht and had relied on it too much in his decision to only evacuate the far east of East Prussia.¹⁶

Public anxieties were further stoked up by the events in and around Nemmersdorf, an East Prussian village that was captured by Soviet troops in the morning of 21 October 1944. Two days later, in the early morning of 23 October 1944, it was recaptured by German troops. At least twenty-six German civilians, most of them women, children, and elderly, were found killed in Nemmersdorf, and by 26 October this information had reached Goebbels.¹⁷ 'These atrocities are terrible indeed,' he wrote in his journal. 'I will use them as an opportunity for a big press release, so that among the German people even the last guileless waverers will be clear about what awaits the German people if Bolshevism actually takes hold of the Reich.'¹⁸ Goebbels' thinking was influenced by what he called a 'strength-through-fear' approach. Its main aim was for the German people to 'remain convinced – as indeed the facts warrant – that this war strikes at their very lives and their national possibilities of development, and they must

¹⁴ BArch R55/616, 59, pm 9.7.44 15.45 an das rpa ostpreussen z.h.d.Leiter koenigsberg; BArch R55/616, 86-9, Betrifft: Einführung von Reisebeschränkungen auf Grund der militärisch-politischen Lage, July 10, 1944; BArch R55/616, 93: kbg. 10.7.44. 18.35 uhr nr.3014 an pm abteilung pro. z.hd. herrn sondermann

¹⁵ See Chapter 3. Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa I*, 65, 15E.

¹⁶ Elke Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Teil II Diktate 1941-1945, Band 14: Oktober bis Dezember 1944* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1996), 100. (entry of 25 October 1944).

¹⁷ Bernhard Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944: Was in Ostpreußen tatsächlich geschah* (Berlin: edition ost, 1997), 9, 119-20, 146-47.

¹⁸ Fröhlich (ed.), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Band 14*, 110. (entry of 26 October)

fight it with their entire strength.’¹⁹ On 27 October the *Völkischer Beobachter* opened with a massive front-page article: ‘Terrible crimes in Nemmersdorf’ and in the following days the coverage continued, with the casualty number being inflated to sixty-one.²⁰ The campaign, however, backfired. Not only were East Prussians surprised to find out that Nemmersdorf had not been evacuated, but the reported atrocities only intensified the fear of the Soviets.²¹ Indeed East Prussian propaganda officials were now reluctant to publicise such Soviet actions: ‘The question of the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks in the areas of East Prussia occupied by them is not to be gone into at present, so as to avoid any atmosphere of panic among the population.’²² Yet ‘after “Nemmersdorf” nothing was the same again,’ the German historian Andreas Kossert concluded about the state of mind of the East Prussian population.²³

In the meantime, the military presence in the province was growing. The attitude among these troops varied. On one hand, there were formations such as the 1st (*Ostpreussische*) infantry division, one of Germany’s elite units, whose men were fiercely determined to keep the Soviets away from their homes.²⁴ In early October, a call to all branches of the Wehrmacht to defend East Prussia resulted in an additional 10,000 volunteers for the province.²⁵ At the other end of the spectrum were the four *Volksgranadier* divisions that were raised in the province during these months. The quality of these troops was much lower and political education was considered required to motivate them for the coming battle. Some of the stresses and strains within the army were illustrated by one soldier, Herbart Nerger. The regime-loyal Nerger had volunteered for the front, and was appalled by what he heard during a stopover in Königsberg during the last days of October 1944. ‘The words skedaddle and vamoose (‘stiften und türmen gehen’) are commonplace’, he wrote to a comrade of his former *SA-Standarte*. When he tried to greet his bunk-mates with ‘Heil Hitler’, it resulted in astonishment and

¹⁹ Leonard Doob, “Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 14, no.3 (1950): 433, 438-39.

²⁰ Furchtbare Verbechen in Nemmersdorf, *Völkischer Beobachter*, 27 October, 1944; Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 146.

²¹ B. Fisch “Nemmersdorf 1944 – ein bisher unbekanntes zeitnahes Zeugnis,” *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 56 no. 1 (2007): 105-6; Peter Longerich, *Goebbels: A Biography* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), 660-61.

²² TNA HW 1/3301A/ West Europe, 31 October 1944. General: Time of dispatch: 1pm 26.10.44, Directive, No. 22 of 26/10, From SS Main Office, Signed Unterstuf Holst.

²³ BArch R55/608, 29: Der Chef des Propagandastabes, Berlin, den 7.1.1944. Vertraulich! Mundpropagandaparole Nr. 4 Betr.: Nemmersdorf; Andreas Kossert, *Damals in Ostpreussen, Der Untergang einer deutschen Provinz* (Munich: Pantheon Verlag, 2008), 144-45.

²⁴ Martin Humburg, “»Ich glaube, daß meine Zeit bald gezählt sein dürfte« Feldpostbriefe am Ende des Krieges: Zwei Beispiele,” in *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*, ed. Jörg Hillmann and John Zimmermann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), 254-59.

²⁵ Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 172.

hostility. ‘The leading sentiment is to call it quits just as soon as possible. (...) My hope is that it is different with the troops at the front, and that a healthier spirit prevails there.’²⁶ These tensions were further reflected in the behaviour of two company commanders of a Volkssturm battalion in late October: while one of them was brought up before a court martial on a charge of ‘cowardice in face of the enemy’, the other remained confident in, yet critical of, the strength of the defence.²⁷

Higher up the chain of command, the staffs of the different Armies in East Prussia were in sombre mood. They had seen how numbers had dwindled since the start of Operation Bagration, and by November 1944 knew that a next Soviet offensive was only a matter of time. In December 1944, the war correspondent Günther Heysing spoke with General Gerhard Matzky, who commanded the corps that defended the Gumbinnen area. Matzky’s assessment of the coming fighting was grim. ‘The first line of trenches is churned up so much [by the Soviet artillery] that hardly a man survives. When after hours of destructive fire, the tank-squadrons and the swarms of infantry attack, they can march on right away.’²⁸ Nevertheless, the military authorities used Christmas to try and boost the morale of the troops, providing cigarettes, books, food, and, above all, a generous amount of liquor. News about the Ardennes Offensive, the ‘Führer’s Christmas present’ further raised the mood, as did Hitler’s New Year’s speech.²⁹ Yet, it escaped few commanders that at the turn of 1945 the mood in East Prussia, both among troops and civilians was clearly fragile. For the period that lay ahead, a new mentality would have to be created among the defenders. This will be discussed in the next section.

II. Towards a closer collaboration

On 12 and 13 January 1945, the Second and Third Belorussian Fronts started their final offensive into East Prussia. The artillerist Kurt Orgel, who after being wounded awaited transport from the port of Pillau, initially misjudged it as a ‘small, local counter-attack’,

²⁶ BArch NS 19/813, 2-4: Abschrift, Königsberg, den 28.10.1944. Lieber Walter!

²⁷ Bruno Just, Wolfgang Rothe, Horst Rehagen, *Hitler’s Last Levy in East Prussia: Volkssturm Einsatz Bataillon Goldap (25/235)*, trans. Frederick P. Steinhardt (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2015), 31-39.

²⁸ BArch Ost-Dok.8/591, 27-28: Günther Heysing, Oberleutnant, Kriegsbericht, „Von Leningrad bis Königsberg“ (December 1953)

²⁹ Stargardt, *The German War*, 477; Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive*, 182.

showing the success of the propagandist efforts at downplaying the threat.³⁰ On 16 January, the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* on 16 January described the ‘German soldiers as a wall around East Prussia’, promising that the attackers would ‘bleed to death’ on the positions that had earlier been dug.³¹ Two days later, as the offensive showed no signs of slowing down, the newspaper adopted a more cautious tone, and steeped its lead article in military jargon. It was claimed that, due to the sheer mass of forces, the offensive was bound to gain some initial ground, but, ‘the defence needs to set aside a certain amount of time to deploy its operational and tactical reserves.’³² The Soviets, however, kept pushing, even after the reserves had been deployed: the Third Belorussian Front captured Tilsit on 20 January and Gumbinnen on 21 January, while on 23 January troops of the Second Belorussian Front reached the *Frisches Haff* lagoon east of Elbing, cutting off the troops north-east of it from the brunt of the German forces.³³ On 29 January Soviet troops completed the encirclement of Königsberg. This had a big impact on morale.³⁴ ‘The awareness of being trapped severely affected the mood’, a company commander later noted about the atmosphere in his unit.³⁵ The remaining civilians were even more affected by the new circumstances. Suicide was openly discussed, making it abundantly clear how little trust the population had in the defenders.³⁶ Indeed, in the first two weeks of the encirclement about 120 people committed suicide, largely out of fear for their imminent future at the hands of the Soviets.³⁷

In turn, the presence of large numbers of soldiers who were often openly hostile to Party members emboldened many civilians to express their aversion, something that until a few weeks earlier had only been possible in private.³⁸ Growing numbers lost trust in the sincerity of official propaganda, eroding the fundamentals of the National Socialist system. Furthermore, not only were local Party members seen to be dodging military service, but it was evident that

³⁰ Stargardt, *The German War*, 492-93.

³¹ “Deutsche Soldaten wie eine Mauer um Ostpreußen,” *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 January 1945.

³² “Verbissener Widerstand gegen Massenansturm,” *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 January 1945.

³³ Howard Grier, *Hitler, Dönitz, and the Baltic Sea: The Third Reich's Last Hope, 1944-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 109-112.

³⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 8/588, 2: Dr. Hellmuth Will, Die Kämpfe um die Stadt Königsberg (19.2.1955)

³⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 10/889, 60: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Einsatz von weiteren Einheiten des Heeres, der Waffen SS, der Marine und Luftwaffe (1956)

³⁶ Schieder, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, 83; Von Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 24.

³⁷ BArch Ost-Dok. 10/888: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Einsatz der 1. Ostpreußischen Infanteriedivision, 32; Christian Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 156-66.

³⁸ Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72-73.

Gauleiter Koch and his Kreisleiters had been shamelessly enriching themselves.³⁹ All this added to stresses within the fortress.

There was also a growing external threat. With the front pressed against Königsberg, the Soviets made sustained attempts to influence its garrison and population.⁴⁰ The lead role in this effort was reserved to the NKFD, the *Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland*, an anti-Fascist movement consisting of former German prisoners of war and left-wing German émigrés. The main task of the NKFD in East Prussia was to convince its population to turn their backs on the Nazi regime, a course it had pursued since early 1944.⁴¹ Throughout 1944 their means had been too limited to make any impact, while Goebbels' atrocity propaganda had undermined their credibility: they were no longer merely seen as consorting with Germany's enemies, but rather as facilitators of their bestial behaviour. 'Russian propaganda in East Prussia,' a British intelligence report noted in November 1944, 'is now a complete failure. Nobody pays the slightest attention to it.'⁴² But during the two-month siege of Königsberg the NKFD became more threatening. Loudspeaker cars were used on a large scale to stress the hopelessness of Königsberg's garrison, interspersed with tempting promises to those who were willing to give up the fight. On other occasions reports of the Soviet Information Bureau were read out, describing the Soviet advance or the conclusions reached at the Yalta Conference.⁴³ The artillery spotter Wolfgang Eisenblätter was repeatedly exposed to this propaganda, and after the war acknowledged that 'the arguments were indeed plausible to us', although, at the same time, he stressed that 'they did not have the intended motivational effect.'⁴⁴

The failure of the appeal of German propaganda, and to a lesser extent, given their treacherous reputation, the need to counter the propaganda of the NKFD, forced the fortress command to shape its own message. The Party and the Wehrmacht thus needed to collaborate

³⁹ Kater, *The Nazi Party*, 213-15; Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 191-94; Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 43.

⁴⁰ "The refutation of enemy propaganda" was of increasing importance during this stage of the war. See: IFZArch MA 757: Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, Schriftverwaltung Akt.Nr. Geh./ 353. H.Qu., den 23. Februar 1945. Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Weichsel, Via/ NSF: Richtlinien für die Arbeit dess NSFO

⁴¹ P. Biddiscombe, "'Freies Deutschland" Guerrilla Warfare in East Prussia, 1944-1945: A Contribution to the History of the German Resistance," *German Studies Association* 27, no. 1 (2004): 45-62.

⁴² TNA HW 1/3341, Germany: Morale of Armies in East Prussia, 22-11-44

⁴³ Louis Clappier, *Festung Königsberg* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1952),132; Balfour, *Propaganda in War*, 360; Guido Knopp, *Der Sturm: Kriegsende im Osten* (Berlin: Econ, 2004), 90-91; ASK 22034-4, 2: Hauptmann Banneitz, Ic der Festung: Erlebnisbericht über meine Tage in der Festung Koenigsberg (undated); Alexander Marinov, *Komsomol v soldatskoj shineli* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988), 98.

⁴⁴ OL XI E 2 Eisenblätter Eis, Wolfgang Eisenblätter *Von Königsberg nach sonstwohin, Aus dem Leben einer Ponarther Familie*, 23.

together to create a new sense of local identity. The new course did not represent a deliberate break with the earlier Nazi propaganda, it merely placed different emphases on topics than the earlier propaganda, while other topics were downplayed or disregarded. The course they chose can best be described as the adoption of ‘banal nationalism’, a locally-oriented *Kampfgemeinschaft* which harked back to Königsberg’s past. Michael Billig, the social psychologist who coined the term, drew on Hannah Arendt’s analysis of Adolf Eichmann to stress that banality should not be confused with harmlessness. ‘Banal nationalism can hardly be innocent: it is reproducing institutions which possess vast armaments,’ which, he argued, ‘can be mobilised without lengthy campaigns of political preparation.’⁴⁵ During the siege of Königsberg this nationalism was used to search for ‘continuity’ in German history by increasing the impact historical feats had on its garrison and the population, while also downplaying the influence of National Socialism.

The last chapter showed that by late January 1945 the balance of power in the fortress had tipped in favour of the Wehrmacht. That two army propaganda companies (Propagandakompanie 689 and Heereskriegsberichterzug Mitte) arrived with the retreating troops further increased the army’s influence.⁴⁶ Yet, it was the Party that presided over Königsberg’s press and radio. According to the war correspondent Günther Heysing, the *Reichssender Königsberg* (where Kreisleiter Wagner had set up his command post) remained the ‘voice of the fortress’ throughout Königsberg’s siege.⁴⁷ As a timely evacuation of the staff and the printing presses of the *Preußische Zeitung* to Fischhausen (a village that fell under Koch’s authority) had failed, they also remained available to the fortress.⁴⁸ Thus the army had to work with the Party in this task. The new collaboration could best be observed at the *Ostpreußische Druckerei*. Not only did it print the official Party newspapers and provide the administrative documents (such as ration cards), it also started printing divisional newspapers and military pamphlets. When the power supply in the fortress became unreliable, the army in turn supplied the press with one of its own generators to keep it going.⁴⁹ As a result, from the beginning of the siege, sustained efforts were made to convey a message on which both the

⁴⁵ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 6-7.

⁴⁶ <http://www.lexicon-der-wehrmacht.de/Gliederungen/Propaganda/Propaganda-R.htm>

⁴⁷ BArch Ost-Dok.8/591, 49: Günther Heysing, Oberleutnant, Kriegsberichter, „Von Leningrad bis Königsberg“ (December 1953); Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, 401-2.

⁴⁸ ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated), 4.

⁴⁹ Otto Dikreiter, “Das letzte Kapitel, 10000 Milchkarten für Säuglinge.“ *Das Ostpreussenblatt*, 22 July, 1967.

Wehrmacht and the Party could agree. The next sections will examine what this message entailed.

III. Abandoning the greater good

For many of those trapped in Königsberg, the Soviet offensive into East Prussia confirmed the negative image of the regime that had matured during 1944. It lay bare the regime's limitations, above all showing that its role as the 'Guardian of the Volksgemeinschaft' was, by 1945, grossly misplaced. This should be seen as the main reason why local propagandists opted to embrace the idea of a locally-oriented *Kampfsgemeinschaft*. As the war progressed, German propagandists had presented Germany as an embattled *Kampfsgemeinschaft*, and within this, *Kampf* was interpreted as a metaphysical struggle to secure the country's world views.⁵⁰ As we will see, propagandists in Königsberg definitively broke with this broad interpretation, redefining both the meaning of *Kampf* and the scope of the community.

Within this new identity, geopolitics were less important. The most striking political event that took place during Königsberg's fortress era, the Yalta Conference, was largely ignored by Königsberg's press. On 18 February, the 'Nachrichten des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht', a newsletter for high-ranking commanders, reported on the conference's outcome, but its details were 'not meant for publication, but only meant to inform the higher [military] departments.'⁵¹ Elsewhere, Yalta was trivialised and mainly used to 'uncover' the growing tensions between the Allies, rather than as ammunition to keep on fighting.⁵² According to the *Preußische Zeitung*, the conference merely proved 'that England had completely got stuck between the two millstones of the plutocratic imperialism of the USA and the Bolshevik imperialism of Moscow.' In turn, attention was drawn to the 'adventure-politics' of the United States, which was 'indifferent to the fate of Europe.'⁵³ It was reported that millions of German slave labourers were to be sent to Soviet Union to repay the war-debt, while Germany would be occupied until the year 2000.⁵⁴ Yet, these stories were merely consigned to the paper's back pages.

⁵⁰ See: Browning, "The Holocaust: Basis and Objective of the Volksgemeinschaft?"

⁵¹ BArch RW 4/352, 3-4: Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. Nachrichten des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht. Berlin, den 18.2.1945.

⁵² „Ich sagte Jalta, nicht Malta!“ *Preußische Zeitung* 21 February, 1945.

⁵³ "Die Lehren von Jalta", *Preußische Zeitung*, 19 February, 1945.

⁵⁴ "Bis zum Jahre 2000!", *Preußische Zeitung*, 19 February 1945.

The new line instead focused on a simple message: fight for the survival of the city. This was in itself all not an easy ‘sell’. Königsberg had suffered heavily from two Allied bombardments in late August 1944, which destroyed fifty-three per cent of the built-up areas, especially the city centre.⁵⁵ Soviet artillery further reduced much of the city to ruins during the two-month siege. ‘There was a dull atmosphere of the downfall of the world’, the writer Rudolf Naujok recalled over a decade later. ‘The feeling of walking through a mortuary was impossible to get rid of.’⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the approach local propagandists took from the very beginning was to emphasize that everyone in the city was in the same boat. The fact that the city was surrounded and constantly shelled from late January onwards was presented as a test. Posters distributed throughout the city, co-signed by General Lasch and Kreisleiter Wagner, read that: ‘In the thunder of guns, the stout hearts prove themselves. There is no going back here.’ The encirclement would give birth to an ‘unconditional battle-community’ consisting of ‘soldiers, men and women’, which would be invincible. These posters also linked the anticipated steadfast behaviour in Königsberg directly to the preservation of the rest of Germany: ‘That’s how we will do it. All of us together will hold Königsberg until the time that the Reich achieves victory over our mortal enemies.’⁵⁷ A similar message could be found on specially designed Volkssturm posters. In Königsberg, these posters featured two men holding weapons, while the silhouette of Königsberg’s castle could be seen in the background.⁵⁸ These messages were consolidated by defiant speeches. On 5 February Kreisleiter Wagner highlighted that for ‘better or for worse we are connected to the fate of fortress Königsberg.’ On 1 March, he focused on ‘the fate of our city and the freedom of our East Prussian *Heimat*.’⁵⁹ By rallying people to the defence of their *Heimat*, an almost tangible, emotionally-laden concept, they were contributing to the more indefinable ‘Reich’ as well.

Alongside this, there was to be an illusion of normality. Large swathes of the *Preußische Zeitung* were reserved for seemingly mundane everyday matters. Thus, Wagner himself would often provide short articles about how to run a household (‘Residues of dry bread can be used

⁵⁵ Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, *The strategic air offensive against Germany 1939-1945 Volume IV Annexes and Appendices* (London, H.M.S.O., 1961), 484-86.

⁵⁶ Rudolf Naujok, “Das Mädchen von Königsberg,” *Ostpreussen-Warte*, June, 1958, 11.

⁵⁷ ASK 22034 - Königsberg 1939-1945, Undated pamphlet (late January 1945): Haß unsere Pflicht, Rache unsere Tugend.

⁵⁸ Newsreel ‘Aus der Festung Königsberg’, *Die Deutsche Wochenschau*, March 22, 1945.

⁵⁹ Ernst Wagner, “Aufruf an der Königsberger Volkssturm,” February 5, 1945, quoted in Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 139-40; Günther Heysing, “Der Geist von Königsberg: Festung der Waffen und Herzen”, *Berliner Morgenpost*, March 3, 1945.

to make tasty bread soups’).⁶⁰ Meanwhile, it was reported that at least three cinemas remained open during the siege, showing films on a daily basis, of which one of these was a special *Soldatinnenkino*.⁶¹ At *Reichssender Königsberg*, which kept broadcasting until 7 April, significant effort was put into the rearrangement of the record collection. To supplement these musical offerings, a seventy-strong symphony orchestra was formed, consisting partly of foreign labourers and prisoners of war.⁶² But despite these initiatives, the Party continued to be looked upon with suspicion within the Königsberg fortress. Party speakers were treated with hostility, and in the areas that housed large numbers of refugees they were hardly given the chance to speak. In the working-class neighbourhood Liep, a former stronghold of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschland* (KPD) they were booed and laughed at, while dogs were encouraged to bark whilst they talked.⁶³ Clearly, more space needed to be put between the old message of the regime and the new local realities.

IV. The search for continuity

On 15 February 1945, the former Berlin correspondent, Alfred T. Brattel, wrote an inflammatory article about Königsberg in the Aberdeen-based *Press and journal*. ‘Königsberg, not Berlin, is the real and spiritual capital of Prussia and all that it stands for,’ Brattel believed, continuing that ‘To Prussians, it is what Mecca is for the Arabs and what Reims means to the French.’ The article went on to list every negative cliché about the city, which explained the article’s sub-heading: ‘Königsberg, Mecca of Prussians, Deserves What She’ll get.’⁶⁴ By choosing this wording, Brattel attributed guilt to Königsberg *itself*, raising the premise that the city had ‘provoked’ certain treatment throughout its history, and still did so. What Brattel omitted – and every Allied journalist or Nazi propagandist those days with him – was that

⁶⁰ Ernst Wagner, *Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt: Preußische Zeitung*, February 19, 1945, p2

⁶¹ *Preußische Zeitung*, 20 February, 1945: Die Kinospielezeiten; Welch, *Propaganda and the German cinema*, 217-22; Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 71. In his memoirs, which concern Dresden, Victor Klemperer puts forward the idea that cinemas in Germany were shut in February 1945 to prevent people from gathering. The opposite was true for Königsberg. See: Victor Klemperer, *To the Bitter End: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer 1942-45* (London: Phoenix, 1999), 489.

⁶² BArch Ost-Dok.8/591, 49: Günther Heysing, Oberleutnant, Kriegsberichtler, „Von Leningrad bis Königsberg“ (December 1953); ASK 22034-4 Wegener, *Untergang Königsberg*, 3; Ruth Geede, „Die Vergangenheit ist noch längst nicht vergangen.“ *Das Ostpreussenblatt*, 29 January 2000.

⁶³ *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72-73.

⁶⁴ Alfred T. Brattel, *Red Army’s Road to Berlin*, *Press and journal* (Aberdeen, Scotland), February 15, 1945: 2.

Königsberg was also known as Immanuel Kant's 'city of pure reason', and as a bridge between Europe and the East.⁶⁵ That the city's martial heritage was emphasised within the fortress in 1945 was perhaps predictable, but it is interesting to reflect on the impact of this on the garrison's behaviour. Since 'war altered the physical city, often at a stroke, and, at the same time, opened up new spaces of thinking about the metropolis', connecting the material 'Festung Königsberg' to the perception and interpretation of it helps us to further the examination of the 'metropolitan dimension of Total War'.⁶⁶ Therefore, what follows is an assessment of the manner in which Königsberg's history was framed and conveyed, since, according to the German historian, Sven Oliver Müller, 'Propaganda was most successful there where it was not used to sway people, but rather where it could build from a traditional nationalist knowledge base.'⁶⁷

That traditional knowledge base of Königsberg was that it was the *alte Krönungsstadt*, the coronation city of Prussian monarchs, and the city of Immanuel Kant, to which we will return shortly. Days after the encirclement, a fanatical *Obergefreiter*, Herbert Schnellhammer, wrote the article 'Our Duty!' for the *Festung Königsberg*, in which he spurred on his comrades by tapping into the city's history. 'Königsberg! City of Prussian military tradition, centre of Prussian duty and Kantian philosophy - Königsberg! The city that during unfortunate times brought Prussia together against the Napoleonic enemy: the proud history of Prussia will these days be tested through deep inner commitment.'⁶⁸ The Prussian military heritage was omnipresent in Königsberg. The fourteen forts of Königsberg's fortress belt read as a who's who of the Wars of Liberation and the defiance against the French in the early 1800s, with names such as 'Gneisenau', 'Friedrich Wilhelm III', 'Stein', and so on, while the inner city was protected by 'Der Wrangel' and 'Der Dohna'.⁶⁹ The 1st (*Ostpreussische*) Infanterie division was even mustered in East Prussia, Königsberg having been the garrison city of one

⁶⁵ Hans-Werner Rautenberg, "Der Zusammenbruch der deutschen Stellung im Osten und das Ende Königsbergs. Flucht und Vertreibung als europäisches Problem," in *Das Königsberger Gebiet im Schnittpunkt deutscher Geschichte und in seinen europäischen Bezügen*, ed. Bernhart Jähnig und Silke Spieler (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen 1993), 115-16.

⁶⁶ Goebel and Keene, "Towards a Metropolitan History of Total War", 2. The intention to examine the 'constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings' is captured in the term 'Thirdspace'. See: Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge (Ma.): Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 2.

⁶⁷ Sven Oliver Müller, *Deutsche Soldaten und ihre Feinde, : Nationalismus an Front und Heimatfront im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2007), 91.

⁶⁸ Herbert Schellhammer, "Unsere Verpflichtung!," *Festung Königsberg*, February 2, 1945.

⁶⁹ Hannsjoachim Koch, *A History of Prussia*, (London: Longman, 1978), 160, 188-92; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 15.

the division's regiments since 1716.⁷⁰ The vast majority of the divisional general staff officers that entered Königsberg in January came from noble Prussian backgrounds.⁷¹

The uniquely Prussian character of the city was even considered by some to pose some challenges to the Nazi regime. 'Prussian' Königsberg lent itself to serve as a counter weight to 'National Socialist' Berlin, and Hitler himself was thoroughly aware of that. In late January 1945, as Generaloberst Rendulic recalled in his memoirs, 'Hitler conveyed his concern to me, that in case of a loss of Königsberg the so-called Seydlitz group would establish a rival-government in the old Prussian coronation city under Russian patronage.'⁷² In Berlin the rumour also circulated that a rival government would be established in Königsberg, although in reality Stalin by 1945 had long given up on the idea.⁷³ The Soviets also sought to appeal to the garrison's sense of Prussian history. According to the Soviet Colonel-General Nikolai Khlebnikov, leaflets were shot into the city, urging 'the enemy soldiers and officers to lay down their arms and surrender in order to avoid vain bloodshed, as the same already happened with Königsberg on January 22, 1758 when Russian troops entered the city.'⁷⁴ Indeed, during most of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Königsberg had been occupied in an orderly fashion by Russian troops, after the city submitted to Empress Elisabeth I of Russia.⁷⁵ However, such capitulation was strongly opposed by the army and, while Deputy Gauleiter Grossherr might have entertained the idea, General Lasch distanced himself from any such surrender.⁷⁶

The Prussian military heritage – stripped from any Nazi connotation – indeed became one of the pillars of the fortress's propaganda.⁷⁷ Königsberg, many officers felt, had not been tainted by Nazism in the same way as in Potsdam and Berlin, and the departure of many Party activistst only strengthened this notion: Königsberg became even more pure in its

⁷⁰ Walther Grosse, "Königsberg (Pr.) als Garnisons- und Festungsstadt," *Deutsches Soldatenjahrbuch 1967*, 229.

⁷¹ Besides the Chief of Staff of Königsberg Oberst Von Süsskind-Schwendi, Ia of 5th Panzer div.: Major Von Knyphausen, Ia of 69th Inf. Div.: Major Von Witzleben, Ia of 561st VGD.: Major Von Wangenheim. Only the Ia of 367 ID, Major i.G. Telle, had no noble background.

⁷² Rendulic, *Gekämpft, gesiegt, geschlagen*, 338;

⁷³ Wolfram Wette, Ricarda Bremer and Detlev Vögel, *Das letzte halbe Jahr, Stimmungsberichte der Wehrmachtpropaganda 1944/45* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2001), 253: "Once Königsberg falls, a provisional German government will be proclaimed in which Paulus and Seydlitz should get senior posts." Wolfram Pyta, *Hitler: Der Künstler als Politiker und Feldherr. Eine Herrschaftsanalyse*, (Munich: Siedler, 2015), 606.

⁷⁴ Nikolai Khlebnikov, *Pod grohot soten batarej*, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1974), 360.

⁷⁵ Rautenberg, *Der Zusammenbruch der deutschen Stellung im Osten*, 119-20.

⁷⁶ ASK 22034-4 Undated annotated document by an unknown staff officer: Ferngespräch des Kreisleiter Wagner mit Gauleiter Koch am 7.4.1945, See Chapter 3.

⁷⁷ Interestingly, not the entire Prussian heritage was adopted. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, for example, remained completely unmentioned.

Prussianism.⁷⁸ Therefore, when Königsberg's propagandists used the concept of *Kampfzeit* they did not invoke political parallels of 'struggle'. Instead, *Kampfzeit* referred to the fighting for the city itself as part of the Prussian virtues of obedience and determination, and was not linked to the 'battle of the streets' of the 1920s and early 1930s. Although street fighting seemed inevitable in the near future, and Nazis had regularly and violently clashed with Communists during the *Kampfzeit*, this parallel was not explored.⁷⁹ Rather, 'Prussian anecdotes' were printed in the *Preußische Zeitung*, further underlining Prussian military values.⁸⁰

The change to a Prussian military-dominated propaganda had advantages for the Party as well. Nazi Party officials seemed to have been aware of the limits of their power and popularity, to a greater extent than is often acknowledged. The overt Nazi propaganda angered large parts of the population, and was widely scorned. Since Stalingrad, the official explanation of Nazi propaganda for the mounting losses had been that a near defeat always preceded eventual victory.⁸¹ The infamous radio-speech of Goebbels, 'Hannibal ante portas!', which drew a historical parallel with Hannibal's advance on Rome, and the subsequent Roman victories which led to the eventual destruction of Carthage, was considered as shameless by some of the more critical listeners.⁸² Also Veit Harlan's (grossly historically inaccurate) epic 'Kolberg', which focused on the town's siege by French troops in 1807, was shown in Königsberg. The movie was flown into the city to bolster the garrison's fighting spirit, but was received with mixed feelings. 'Kolberg' showed the city's defence as organised by the steadfast mayor, Joachim Nettelbeck, and the energetic major (later field marshal) August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, who prevailed due to their willingness to make deep sacrifices for the greater good.⁸³ Again, the historical parallels were so obvious that a doctor who viewed it considered

⁷⁸ For the reception of Hitler's speech in the *Garnisonskirche* in Potsdam in 1933 and the link to Field Marshal Hindenburg, see: Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 470-71. Moreover, according to Brattel, Königsbergers had two hundred years earlier 'coined the mock phrase "Every second Berliner comes from Breslau", meaning that there is no such thing as a pure-blooded Prussian in Berlin.'

⁷⁹ Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany 1925-1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 87-89; Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg*, 114-16.

⁸⁰ *Preußische Zeitung*, 21 February, 1945.

⁸¹ Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party: Volume II 1933-1945* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 414.

⁸² von Lehdorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 51.

⁸³ David Welch, *Propaganda and the German cinema 1933-1945* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983), 225-34. The willingness to persevere in a besieged fortress for the sake of the people was further stressed by the fact that the movie was flown into La Rochelle in France (a *Festung* cut off by the Allies since September 1944), where it symbolically premiered at the same time as in Berlin, on 30 January 1945. In a broadcasted telegram to Goebbels, the fortress commander, Vice-Admiral Ernst Schirlitz, expressed 'our

it as a ‘weird imposition’, asking himself: ‘Are we supposed to look upon our Kreisleiter as a Nettelbeck?’⁸⁴ The answer to that question came on 3 March, when the article ‘The spirit of Königsberg: fortress of weapons and hearts’ opened with the lines: ‘Nobody here thinks about softening up. A Kolberg-mood prevails.’⁸⁵ This official Party propaganda was never abandoned, but was pursued less rigorously. A parallel propaganda, subtler in its National Socialist wording, was adopted instead. A more martial tone was adopted, and as such the Party was once again able to validate its role in *Menschenführung*.

In the meantime, the army’s increasing influence over the fortress’ line of propaganda at the expense of the Party, akin to a miniature *Gleichschaltung*, worried Gauleiter Koch. His view of Königsberg as a kind of ‘military dictatorship’ in the midst of his province – exactly what the increasing powers of the *Reichsverteidigungskommissar* had sought to counter – explains his sustained efforts to undermine the new state of affairs.⁸⁶ These efforts increased after the recapture of the area between Königsberg and Pillau in late February 1945. Shortly afterwards, during one of Koch’s rare visits to Königsberg, he pointed out to Magunia that, had the army not abandoned the trenches he had dug, the situation would have been considerably better.⁸⁷ To further his influence, Koch dispatched twelve Kreisleiters to Königsberg. They took over some of the tasks the military had previously overseen, but also spread a joke to discredit the army: ‘Es steht schlecht um die Festung. Der Kommandant ist lasch und sein Stabschef ein Süsskind.’ (It is looking bad for the fortress. The commandant is *lasch* and his chief of staff a *Süsskind*). *Lasch* here refers to General Lasch, but at the same time the word translates as ‘feeble’ or ‘lax’, whereas *Süsskind* refers to Hugo Freiherr von Süsskind-Schwendi, the chief of staff of the fortress, but also translates as ‘sweet child’, as such portraying him as helpless and inadequate.⁸⁸ In Berlin, Koch continued to discredit Lasch and passed on the joke to Goebbels, who must have taken it on board, noting in his diary on 25 March 1945 that ‘he [Lasch] does justice to his name’⁸⁹ In turn, among the ranks of the army, Koch was referred to as the ‘Satrap of Neutief’, thus underlining his continued absence from

gratitude for the dispatch of the film on 30 January and our pledge to emulate the courageous struggle at home.’

⁸⁴ Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 71.

⁸⁵ Günther Heysing, “Der Geist von Königsberg: Festung der Waffen und Herzen“, *Berliner Morgenpost*, March 3, 1945.

⁸⁶ Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 415-16.

⁸⁷ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/594: Waldemar Magunia, 6; BArch NS 19/2606, 52.

⁸⁸ Thorwald, *Die Ungeklärten Fälle*, 169-71.

⁸⁹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1945*, 377-78. ‘Er tragt seinen Namen zu recht.’ A week later Goebbels fell out with Koch, due to his absence from Königsberg, see: *Ibid.*, 510.

Königsberg.⁹⁰ Even the Soviets picked up on this feud, shooting pamphlets into the city which informed the population that Gauleiter Koch was the ‘first Volkssturm man’ who left Königsberg, an example they should follow.⁹¹ It is therefore perhaps less of a surprise that, in his post-war analysis of the fortress era, *Oberbürgermeister* Will claimed to have felt that the resistance of the fortress was more diminished by political intrigue than by military decisions.⁹²

V. Losing faith in the Führer, gaining local heroes

By 1945, not only had faith in the Nazi Party largely crumbled, ever larger parts of the population openly ventilated criticism of Hitler as well. Germans felt abandoned by the Nazi leadership, which, in case of East Prussians, was even literally so. According to Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Hitler’s presence in his military headquarters in Rastenburg had always had ‘a very soothing effect on the population’ of East Prussia, but after Hitler’s departure in November 1944 this illusion of safety also fell away.⁹³ As a result, as Goebbels noted in his diary, ‘neither the Führer in person, nor the National Socialist concept, nor the National Socialist movement are immune from criticism’, a development referred to by the historian Stephen Fritz as ‘a wholesale rejection of the social-revolutionary promise at the heart of the Nazi idea.’⁹⁴ As a result of his declining appearance in the press Hitler became, in the words of Ian Kershaw, ‘a distant, shadowy figure’ to more and more Germans.⁹⁵ In East Prussia this was no different, with rumours circulating in late 1944 that Hitler was sick, or possibly even dead. His New Year’s speech in 1945 at least soothed some of these sentiments, but did little to restore his ‘charismatic leadership’.⁹⁶ Among the troops, in particular, his ‘strategic genius’ was being questioned, even though he remained closely involved in the developments concerning Königsberg. As several reports of staff meetings show, Hitler repeatedly highlighted the city’s importance and ensured that weapons and ammunition would arrive in the city, but none of this was used to encourage a renewed respect for their Führer.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Thorwald, *Die Ungeklärten Fälle*, 171. The hamlet of Neutief will be discussed in chapter 3.

⁹¹ BArch NS 19/2068, 62; ASK 22304: Kemsies, 9.

⁹² BArch Ost-Dok 8/588, 5: Dr. Hellmuth Will, *Die Kämpfe um die Stadt Königsberg* (19.2.1955)

⁹³ Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Keitel*, 190-91; Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-45*, 737-41.

⁹⁴ Stephen Fritz, *Endkampf: soldiers, civilians, and the death of the Third Reich* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 34- 35.

⁹⁵ Kershaw, *The End*, 389; Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 219-25.

⁹⁶ Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive*, 182.

⁹⁷ Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’*, 220; BArch RH2/335: 137, 221, 223.

During Königsberg's siege, Hitler featured prominently in the newspapers only on three occasions. The first time was on 31 January, when large parts of his speech, commemorating the seizure of power in 1933, were published. The second time was on 25 February, a day after the twenty-fifth anniversary of the proclamation of the Party Programme, when his speech (which was read out by Secretary of Propaganda Hermann Esser, rather than by Hitler himself), and a telegram to Gauleiter Koch, were printed in the *Preußische Zeitung*. Hitler's final appearance in the newspapers came on 20 March, when he was reported to have received Hitler Youth boys at the Reich Chancellery.⁹⁸ The demise of the 'Hitler-myth' has been studied in depth by Ian Kershaw, whose conclusions still hold up today, thirty years later. Yet how the hole caused by the departure of Hitler's personality cult was filled has received less attention. The need to redefine role models (perhaps precisely because the Hitler-myth had been so all-embracing) was clearly visible in Königsberg. The short history of unified Germany had left the country with few worth-while heroes (with Immanuel Kant himself already in the late eighteenth century stating that the Germans did not possess national pride).⁹⁹ Therefore, the role models that the fortress' propagandists chose were local ones.

In the first and only divisional newspaper of the 561st Volksgrenadier Division, '*Die Sturmglöcke*', an entire article was devoted to General Ludwig Yorck von Wartenburg, the Prussian hero of the wars of liberation of 1813, including his picture and some quotations that were as appropriate in 1813 as they were in 1945. The impact of his (distilled) legacy is not to be underestimated, as in Königsberg military decisions were sometimes even judged through the eyes of Yorck, even when the resulting actions were contradictory to Hitler's view. To East Prussians, Yorck's claim to fame was his decision to declare himself neutral at the Battle of Taugoggen north of their province, in 1812, while he was supposed to fight alongside the French. By doing so, he went against the wishes of his King, Frederick William III, effectively changing sides. Königsberg played an important role in these events: five days after his deed, Yorck entered Königsberg, and urged the members of the *Ostpreußische Landtag*, which had gathered without the King's permission, to arm the people, triggering the Wars of Liberation that ended the loathed French rule. When Kreisleiter Wagner was sounded out about his

⁹⁸ BArch Ost-Dok. 10/890: 176-177; „Ich prophezeie den Sieg des deutschen Reiches!“, *Preußische Zeitung*, 25 February, 1945 20 tapfere Hitlerjungen vor dem Führer, *Preußische Zeitung*, 20 March, 1945.

⁹⁹ Fritz, *Endkampf*, 63.

willingness to overthrow Gauleiter Koch, he was asked to consider a ‘Yorckish deed’ by imprisoning Koch and declaring Königsberg an open city.¹⁰⁰

Another local role model, by far the most famous son of the city, was the philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose legacy was reinterpreted to fit the propagandist aims of 1945. In 1941 S.D. Stirk, a German graduate from both Oxford and Breslau universities who had migrated to Britain before the war, wrote a ‘war-book’, seeking to explain some of the uses of Prussianism in National Socialist thought. He summed up how Kant’s notion of ‘duty’, which in his eyes was meant as an ‘integral part of a noble conception of man as an independent and autonomous being’, had been hollowed out: ‘It has really been emptied of its ethical content and has come to mean blind obedience to the letter of the laws and to the command issued by the state and those in authority.’¹⁰¹ The propagandists of the Third Reich did indeed not venture beyond Stirk’s observation, with the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* already stating before the siege that ‘Kant’s notion of duty is embedded in each and every German soldier and German worker, even if he has never read a single line of Kant.’¹⁰² Along similar lines, Professor Baumgarten, dean of the philosophic faculty of the Königsberg’s Albertus University, broadcast a message from the fortress ‘in the memory of Kant’, condemning Churchill’s post-war ideas and rallying people to fight.¹⁰³

More contemporary local role models were used as well. The recipients of the Knight’s Cross, Germany’s highest award for valour, were announced in the *Preußische Zeitung*, with East Prussian recipients receiving special attention.¹⁰⁴ Best-known in Königsberg was Ernst Tiburzy, one of only four Volkssturm members ever to receive the Knight’s Cross. During a Soviet attack on the city on 2 February, Tiburzy knocked out a tank with a Panzerfaust, although the Soviet advance towards the city continued. When one of his subordinates intended to retreat, Tiburzy shot him. Staying put, despite being wounded, he knocked out four more

¹⁰⁰ Koch, *A History of Prussia*, 194-97; ASK 22095-1: Die Sturmglocke, Divisional newspaper of the 561st VGD, March 1945; ASK 22032-2 Werner Strahl Erlebnisse Januar bis Mai 1945; Ruth Wagner, Hans-Ulrich Stamm, *Die Letzten Stunden daheim: Ostpreussens Schicksal in schwerer Zeit*, (Staats- und Wirtschaftspolitische Gesellschaft E.V., Köln, 1972), 97; Grosse, “Königsberg (Pr.) als Garnisons- und Festungsstadt,” 231. The actions of men like Yorck were part of the ‘collective memory of the officer corps’ and forced an officer to act according to “God and his conscience”. See: Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer*, 63.

¹⁰¹ S.D. Stirk, *The Prussian Spirit: A Survey of German Literature and Politics 1914-1940* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941) 82-83

¹⁰² Andreas Kossert, *Damals in Ostpreussen, Der Untergang einer deutschen Provinz* (München, Pantheon Verlag, 2008), 136.

¹⁰³ ASK 22034-3: Aus der Rundfunksprache von Professor Baumgarten

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* of 18 January 1945, and *Preußische Zeitung* of 21 and 24 February 1945, and of 20 March 1945.

tanks, after which the attack was called off. This limping man with one eye remaining, but still in action, was the epitome of a fight until the end: this was exactly the kind of tangible heroism propagandists were looking for.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, on 5 February Kreisleiter Wagner devoted a large part of a speech to him, while in that same speech Hitler was mentioned only once in passing.¹⁰⁶ A few days later the *Preußische Zeitung* opened with the celebration of Tiburzy's feat and reported his divisional commander's speech, which tied the soldier's bravery into the 'greater-German' context: 'As first Gau of Greater Germany East Prussia has, as a result of true popular support [and] due to the leadership of its Gauleiter, not only preceded all other *Gaue* in the construction of positions and the raising of the Volkssturm, it now also has an East Prussian Volkssturm leader that is the first to be awarded this distinction of bravery.' Wagner's rather brief supplement, 'Gauleiter Koch is proud of you, and sends his regards!', reveals that the Party was taking its lead from the army.¹⁰⁷

The 'Volkssturm-man' in himself was another propaganda tool. All necessary virtues could be allocated to him, including steadfastness, discipline, and courage. The values of the East Prussian Volkssturm were presented as a continuation of Prussianism, rather than as National Socialist traits, with Waldemar Magunia claiming that 'The East Prussian Volkssturm man had the discipline of this ancient Prussian *Soldatenland* in his bones.'¹⁰⁸ Addressing the different local Volkssturm units, Wagner – himself a native East Prussian – avoided speaking about Germany, but focused exclusively on the people of Königsberg. When he spoke to the units he often spoke of 'us' or 'we' to indicate the local collective identity.¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, General Lasch kept a low profile locally in the propaganda effort. Although he was featured prominently in *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* in the last week of March 1945, side by side with Gauleiter Koch, no 'forced-upbeat' interview with Lasch appeared in local newspapers, no propaganda pamphlets bearing his name were distributed. With limited

¹⁰⁵ Kissel, *Der Deutsche Volkssturm*, 63; Newsreel 'Ernst Tiburzy', *Die Deutsche Wochenschau*, March 22, 1945

¹⁰⁶ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ Wilke, "Ein Ostpreuße erster Ritterkreuzträger des Volkssturms," *Preußische Zeitung*, February 16, 1945, p1. The reference to a divisional commander, moreover, shows that in Königsberg the Volkssturm was fully incorporated in the Wehrmacht command structure, and did not operate as separate battalions anymore. See Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁸ ASK 22034 – 4: Waldemar Magunia: *Der Volkssturm in Ostpreußen 1944/45*. See also: Ruth Wagner and Hans-Ulrich Stamm, *Die Letzten Stunden daheim: Ostpreussens Schicksal in schwerer Zeit* (Cologne: Staats- und Wirtschaftspolitische Gesellschaft E.V., 1972), 75: 'The watchword "every man for himself" does not belong in the East Prussian dictionary.'

¹⁰⁹ ASK 22034 - Königsberg 1945-1948: Pamphlet 9 February 1945: Aufruf! Packt alle an!; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 140.

personal links to the city, he seems to have restricted himself to one appeal to the troops, which mainly seemed to have served to convey his appointment as fortress commander.¹¹⁰ Local personalities were thus placed at the forefront of Königsberg's propaganda. This both manifested itself in Party outlets, such as the *Preußische Zeitung*, and in military newspapers. To establish to what extent Königsberg was unique in pursuing this approach, the next section will continue to examine this theme by addressing more directly the role of the spoken word within late-war propaganda.

VI. The NSFO and the *Mundpropaganda* in Königsberg

In order to bolster the army's fighting spirit during times of defeat, 1943 had seen the introduction of the NSFO, the 'Nationalsozialistischer Führungsoffizier', or National Socialist Leadership Officer, whose task it was to transfer the National Socialist world view to the troops. During the fighting in Germany, Hitler stated that 'the National Socialist world view and political attitude must be used as the strongest weaponry.'¹¹¹ According to the research of Waldemar Besson, Bormann put Hitler's order into practice by dispatching groups of NSFOs to hard-pressed areas of the front.¹¹² Although these men were presented as a vital link between the regime and the army, and as support for the notion that the army was willing to embrace National Socialist principles, it is hard to define an archetypical NSFO. Some officers in Königsberg took their appointment as NSFOs very seriously, while others, such as *Leutnant* Bodo Kleine, only took up the function after being ordered to do so. Kleine subsequently questioned whether his talks had any effect on the troops at all.¹¹³

These men were at the forefront of one of the most important dilemmas of those days: was the defence of Germany of overriding importance, or were National Socialist teachings to

¹¹⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 139. Interestingly, the Soviets immediately used Lasch as a tool. He was forced to sign a pamphlet that was shot in large numbers into the Pillau pocket, prior to the offensive of that grouping, from 13 April 1945 onwards.

¹¹¹ W. Besson, "Zur Geschichte des nationalsozialistischen Führungsoffizier," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 9 no. 1 (1961), 114.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 77-79, 83, 114-15; Jürgen Förster, "Motivation and Indoctrination in the Wehrmacht, 1933-45." In *Time to kill, The soldiers experience of war in the West, 1939-1945*," ed. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), 264, 271. See also: G. Weinberg, "Adolf Hitler und der NS-Führungsoffizier (NSFO)," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 12, no.4 (1964), 443-456.

¹¹³ Bodo Kleine, *Bevor die Erinnerung verblaßt, Infanterist an der Ostfront: zwischen Woronesch und Königsberg - Kriegsgefangenschaft in Rußland 1942/1948* (Aachen: Helios, 2004), 85.

be upheld during Germany's gravest hour, no matter the cost?¹¹⁴ Many commanders in Königsberg decided – or were forced to decide due to circumstances – on the former. For example, even though the Volkssturm was initially a Party-led organisation, its East Prussian units had received little political education. The overriding need to halt the Soviet offensive into East Prussia in October 1944 meant that its men received weapons training only.¹¹⁵ That in hard-pressed fortresses even fewer soldiers were interested in politics seemed to have dawned on some of the more realistic members of the Wehrmacht. It is worth quoting at length an instruction, dated 15 February 1945, to NSFOs who were serving inside a fortress.

At least once a week, troops are to be given a political address, during which it should be made clear to them that Fortress Garrisons are not forgotten, but that in most cases the Homeland is much harder hit than the Fortresses. It should be impressed upon the troops that further reserves are to be expected, but that these will have no softening effect on the Homeland. Commissars are to stick to the truth, and they are told that it is better to appear ignorant on certain points rather than to tell lies. There is to be no instruction of the troops on political themes. National Socialist Leadership is what counts, not National Socialist education. The object is not to know, but to will. Appeal is to be made to the troops' emotional and traditional values. Soldiers are never concerned with theories, but only with immediate problems. The superiority of National Socialism to reactionary plutocracy and destructive Bolshevism is to be stressed. The final objective of such talks must be to produce confidence that the Germans can still win and that the will to see it through is thoroughly inculcated.¹¹⁶

Different NSFOs, however, gave different emphases to their roles. The NSFO who contributed to the newspaper of the XXVIII. Korps, *Die Samlandfront* did not seek to pursue a political line with his readers. He merely painted a picture of the recent recapture of the Samland peninsula, Operation 'Westwind' (which we will discuss in Chapter 3), and stuck to military events and statistics. On the back of the same pamphlet General Hans Gollnick, the corps commander who had led the operation, praised his troops by focusing on their diverse German origins and their combined mission of evicting the Soviet troops, who were – somewhat

¹¹⁴ IfZArch MA 757: Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, Schriftverwaltung Akt.Nr. Geh./ 353. H.Qu., den 23. Februar 1945. Oberkommando der Heeresgruppe Weichsel, Via/ NSF: Richtlinien für die Arbeit des NSFO

¹¹⁵ Seidler, „*Deutscher Volkssturm*“, 155.

¹¹⁶ TNA HW 1/3523, Boniface report, 15 February 1945: Memorandum from the German Naval Command in the West, on Political Leadership, with particular reference to the tasks of National-Socialist Political Commissars with Fortress Commandants.

surprisingly – not portrayed as Germany’s mortal enemies, but rather as a ‘dogged’ (*‘verbissen’*), and indeed rather human, opponents.¹¹⁷

The course that the NSFOs in Königsberg took can also be distinguished by their implementation of *Mundpropaganda*, ‘mouth-’ or ‘whisper-propaganda’, in the city. With the decreasing availability of news through ordinary channels, the German population increasingly dared to – but at the same time had to – rely on rumours and hear-say.¹¹⁸ This had not gone unnoticed by propagandists, and in late 1944 they adopted the rumour as an official propaganda tool. Special Wehrmacht-Propaganda officers (WPrO) were appointed at Wehrkreis-level, whose task it was ‘to strengthen public confidence in the leadership, and to substantiate the public’s belief that this war must be won at all costs, and can only be ended with our victory.’¹¹⁹ In Königsberg the Wehrmacht introduced a set of rumours in late February - early March 1945 as part of the *Mundpropaganda* efforts. Some civilians and some soldiers saw through them, but many of these rumours were taken seriously.¹²⁰ The rumours focused exclusively on local matters that preoccupied the people in Königsberg. A post-war evaluation of the mood in the city, written by Walter Kemsies, an intelligence officer who was present at the time, speaks about the introduction of a rumour indicating that the Russian troops had become demoralised, having underestimated the strength of the garrison of Königsberg. Instead, the Russian troops in East Prussia had gathered for an attack on the German troops surrounded in Courland, further to the north, and therefore would have no troops left to attack Königsberg. Apparently, the fact that other parts of the German army were now threatened was of little consideration for the propagandists, as long as the situation in the city was eased. A similar pattern can be detected in other rumours spread: encircled German troops in Insterburg and Tilsit were said to have linked up and were marching towards Königsberg while some 500,000 men of the Wlassow Army had broken out from an area near Warsaw and were also heading to the city. Himmler was also claimed to be gathering his Army, and approached the city via Danzig. According to an SS intelligence report, this rumour resonated particularly well among the troops. On top of that, it was rumoured that 500 Tiger tanks had been offloaded in the port of Pillau, and were shortly to be made available to bolster the city’s defence.¹²¹ The ‘Mundpropaganda’ and the

¹¹⁷ BArch RH 24/28, 106. Die Samlandfont, 1 March, 1945.

¹¹⁸ Müller, *Deutsche Soldaten und ihre Feinde*, 89.

¹¹⁹ Wette, Bremer and Vögel, *Das letzte halbe Jahr*, 17-20.

¹²⁰ IfZArch ZS/ A-2/ 04 – 140: Gerhard Kretschmer, Nuernberg-Zabo, d. 11.4.49. On the natural tendency to try to extract meaning from a confusing environment, and the role rumour plays in this tendency, see: R. Rosnow, “Psychology of Rumor Reconsidered,” *Psychological Bulletin* 89, no. 3 (1980): 582-85.

¹²¹ ASK 22034 - Königsberg 1945-1948, *Walter Kemsies*, 9. ASK 22034 -4: Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945, 3; BArch NS 19/2068, 60.

activity of the NSFOs thus reflected the tendency to focus on local threats, and as such reveal that enough institutional flexibility existed to allow for this. The next section will examine the most infamous sub-genre within Nazi propaganda, atrocity propaganda, to determine whether these findings can be extended into this field as well.

VII. Atrocity propaganda

For better or for worse, Nazi propagandists had committed themselves to bringing Soviet atrocities to the attention of the German public. By early 1945, however, there were ever louder voices, also coming from the Party elite, that urged that they be presented in a more nuanced light.¹²² The representation of atrocities formed a key element in the German propaganda during the last year of the war. East Prussians held a special place in this propaganda, being the first to experience the rage of ‘Moscow’s hangmen’.¹²³ Yet, the backlash caused by the ‘Nemmersdorf’ campaign showed that the German *Volksgemeinschaft* did not wholeheartedly embrace this course. Moreover, at times the propaganda contributed to a further corrosion of German society, with people in Western Germany being unmoved by the death of ‘a couple of people in East Prussia.’¹²⁴

Initially, in late January – early February 1945, the fortress command too seemed to have failed to grasp that the basic emotional response to atrocity propaganda by those remaining in Königsberg was fear, rather than steadfastness. A general feeling of defencelessness prevailed among the civilians in the city: two-thirds of them were refugees, of which the vast majority were women, children and elderly.¹²⁵ The first pamphlet that General Lasch and Kreisleiter Wagner drafted, however, did not address their fears and insecurities, but simply attacked the ‘Bolshevik hordes’ instead. Addressed to ‘soldiers, men and women of Festung Königsberg’, it told that ‘Courage and steadfastness are our honour, hate and revenge the watchwords!’¹²⁶ This wording had long been commonplace among the ‘barbarised’ German Eastern front soldiers, and for most of them the tone of the pamphlet was justified: some of the

¹²² IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 13202379. Beleg Nr. 5, 10. Febr. 1945 An die Partei-Kanzlei z. Hd. Herrn Reichsleiter M. Bormann. gez. Eggeling Gauleiter

¹²³ Longerich, Goebbels, 907.

¹²⁴ Steinert, *Hitler's war and the Germans*, 304-5.

¹²⁵ ASK 22034-4: Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945, 4.

¹²⁶ ASK 22032-3: Haß unsere Pflicht, Rache unsere Tugend

soldiers who retreated into Königsberg had also seen action around Nemmersdorf. General Lasch himself had at the time just been appointed commander of Wehrkreis I, making it one of his first experiences in the province.¹²⁷ Civilians, on the other hand, were thoroughly upset by the pamphlet. ‘Herr General, what do you hope to obtain by the appeal we have found posted up everywhere, with your signature appended?’, Hans Graf von Lehndorff protested in a letter about the pamphlet: ‘You are not going to bamboozle anybody with “Heil Hitler” anymore.’¹²⁸ Although von Lehndorff cherished little hope that his letter would have any impact, newspapers show that in the weeks that followed the topic of atrocities was pushed more into the background.

This approach towards atrocities changed in late February, in the wake of ‘Operation Westwind’, during which German troops recaptured large areas between Königsberg and Pillau. The first village that was recaptured was Metgethen, just west of Königsberg, where a large number of corpses were discovered that showed signs of mutilation and rape.¹²⁹ This did not mean, however, that propagandists immediately sought to exploit the ‘opportunity’ they were presented with. During the first days after the recapture of the Samland area the topic was ignored, for which there was an obvious reason. A sense of euphoria dominated among the civilians in Königsberg, the soldier Heinz Stendtko remembered about those days.¹³⁰ This was confirmed by two SS reports, describing the mood of the population as ‘confident’ on 21 February, and still a week later, on 26 February, noting that ‘due to the successes on the Samland the mood of the people is good.’¹³¹

However, General Lasch ordered an investigation into Metgethen, probably with the purpose of handing over the findings to the Wehrmacht Bureau on War Crimes, as had happened in Nemmersdorf.¹³² The local *Sicherheitsdienst* prepared a ‘photo report of the

¹²⁷ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 24; Sven Oliver Müller, *Deutsche Soldaten und ihre Feinde*, 91-114; Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45*, 76-92.

¹²⁸ Lehndorff, *East Prussian diary*, 23. The pamphlet actually did not read ‘Heil Hitler’, but ‘Es lebe der Führer!’

¹²⁹ Large parts of post-war testimonies can be found in: Kulturstiftung der Deutschen Vertriebenen, *Vertreibung und Vertreibungsverbrechen, 1945–1948: Bericht des Bundesarchivs vom 28. Mai 1974, Archivalien und ausgewählte Erlebnisberichte* (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der Deutschen Vertriebenen, 1989) and: Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *Anmerkungen zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1986), 67-71; ASK 22034-4: Waldemar Magunia: Abschrift (12.2.1955); ASK 22034-4: Hauptmann Banneitz, *Ich der Festung: Erlebnisbericht über meine Tage in der Festung Königsberg* (undated)

¹³⁰ Knopp, *Der Sturm*, 83.

¹³¹ BArch NS 19/2068, 18-19, 34. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 21.2.45; Königsberg 27.2.45; BE: SS-Stubaf. Friedrichs

¹³² A.-M. de Zayas, ‘The Wehrmacht Bureau on War Crimes,’ *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 2 (1992): 385.

murdered and desecrated Germans by the Bolsheviks in Metgethen.’¹³³ One source indicates that ‘Gaupropagandaleiter W. followed the advancing German troops, made pictures on the spot and interrogated liberated civilians. Two days later he wrote the memorandum “Revenge for Metgethen!”.’¹³⁴ The first article on the subject ‘Metgethen...! Metgethen...!’, written by the war correspondent Günther Heysing, appeared on 25 February on the second page of the *Preußische Zeitung*, a week after the area had been recaptured.¹³⁵

Over the following days, a two-stage process can clearly be distinguished: soldiers knew much earlier than civilians about the events at Metgethen. Walter Kemsies noted that ‘What the advancing soldiers saw, surpassed by far the propaganda up till now.’¹³⁶ Anton Detlef von Plato, a former general staff officer of the 5th Panzer division, wrote in the post-war divisional history that as their tanks passed through the village, soldiers immediately wrote ‘Revenge for Metgethen’ on their vehicles. Testimonies about the number and state of the people the soldiers found vary widely. Numbers were inflated as high as 3,000 victims, although no wartime source has survived with a figure that comes even close to this. The SS report mentions that 91 bodies were found by the Sicherheitsdienst.¹³⁷ But even if the real number was lower, the shock that was caused as a result of it bolstered the fighting spirit in the entire region, with the same report mentioning a ‘boundless rage’ among the troops, assuring that ‘virtually no’ Soviet prisoners were made.¹³⁸

The next step was to present the atrocity to the local population, but the information they would receive about Metgethen was extremely limited. The *Preußische Zeitung* provided no detailed account of the massacre itself, and, looking at the available sources, it appears that civilians were kept away from the village in the days that followed its recapture. ‘Metgethen’ was kept in the realm between myth and reality. Banners that read ‘revenge for Metgethen’ were hung throughout the city, while posters appeared with ‘METGETHEN RACHE’ (Metgethen revenge), which depicted a Soviet skeleton, clinching a knife between his teeth, holding a barely dressed and emaciated woman, which he obviously had killed. Like before,

¹³³ Library of Congress, Bildbericht über von den Bolschewisten ermordete und geschändete Deutsche in Metgethen, accessed April 13, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005675708/>

¹³⁴ Kemsies, *Stimmungsbilder*, 8. This pamphlet did appear, but the role of Gaupropagandaleiter Maertins is unknown. As Kemsies refers to him as ‘Gaupropagandaleiter W.’, it could also have been a completely different person.

¹³⁵ Günther Heysing, *Metgethen...! Metgethen...!*, *Preußische Zeitung*, 25 February, 1945.

¹³⁶ ASK 22034-4: *Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr.*, 7-8.

¹³⁷ Kulturstiftung der Deutschen Vertriebenen, *Vertreibung und Vertreibungsverbrechen, 1945–1948*, 146; BArch NS 19/2068, 37.

¹³⁸ Christian von Opper, Hartmut Mathieu, *Im Rücken des Feindes: Erinnerungen von Edgar Burger 1925 – 1945* (Schwalbach: books on demand, 2004), 85-87; BArch NS 19/2068, 37.

the sight of these posters caused a backlash, and many of them were removed by the population, fearing that upon entering the city, the Soviets would in their turn be enraged by them.¹³⁹

For the civilian population of Königsberg, Metgethen became the embodiment of doom and immediately replaced Nemmersdorf as such.¹⁴⁰ It was a final pillar of Königsberg's embattled *Kampfgemeinschaft*. The brutality of the Soviets that was observed by German troops meant that the nation-wide notion of *Kampfgemeinschaft* was stripped of any deeper meaning: it was insufficient to represent 'Kampf' as 'struggle': the events at Metgethen showed that Kampf could only mean 'battle'. Whereas the proverbial 'struggle' lacked urgency (as we saw, the 'struggle with the east' had been going on for centuries and had most of the time not been a struggle at all), the immediate need to 'battle' against an enemy that stood within ten miles of Königsberg's city centre was now clear to all.

Conclusion

During the two months of Königsberg's siege, army commanders and Party officials decided on a communal message that was centred on the willingness to fight for Königsberg, rather than for Germany as a whole. They realised that few civilians in the city believed that the promise of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could be achieved in the foreseeable future and were well aware that people's concerns did not venture beyond their immediate environment. The result of these realisations was that they embraced the notion of a locally-oriented *Kampfgemeinschaft*.

The course that was decided on was a product of trial and error, but eventually broke with some of the accepted themes of Nazi propaganda. Overall, propaganda in Königsberg became more locally focused, and appealed to the population's sense of 'banal nationalism'. A distinct effort was made to closely connect the Festung Königsberg to the traditional martial perception of the city. The concept of final victory, *Endsieg*, was pushed to the background, and perseverance, *Durchhalten*, was linked to the city itself, rather than to Germany as a whole. With the Führer-myth undermined, the remaining civilians were asked to look to their 'own' history, from where Kant and Yorck were encouraging them to assist in the defence of

¹³⁹ Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72; Thorwald, *Die Ungeklärten Fälle*, 156, 166; Wieck, *Königsberg, Zeugnis vom Untergang einer Stadt*, 176; Ursula Cheeseman, *Unter der Zeitbrücke: Aufzeichnungen einer Ostpreußin*, (Germany: Books on Demand, 2000), 91.

¹⁴⁰ An examination of the *Völkischer Beobachter* showed that Metgethen was not even mentioned once on national level.

Königsberg. Meanwhile, in regard to the issue of atrocities, the message of hate and revenge was not haphazardly repeated, as propagandists gave much thought to how and to whom to present it. Only when proof of atrocities was found in nearby Metgethen did they evoke the hate and revenge rhetoric, but still only after a week-long embargo on the news.

The fortress' propagandists created an easy-to-follow idea: everyone in Königsberg was expected to persevere in the city in order to prevent the city from falling into enemy hands. The way this new line was supposed to be interpreted was unsophisticated but effective: soldiers understood this as defending the population of the city, while the population of the city understood this as aiding soldiers. Rather than defending some greater German ideals until final victory, the simple fact that one could look others directly in the eye created an acute sense of personal responsibility. Certainly, not all German cities could be turned into such a community. Königsberg's strong regional pedigree and its designation as a fortress enabled this, while the 'willingness' to become part of this new society also arose due to lack of other options. The relative ease with which the National Socialist world view was reshaped to fit a mould of traditional nationalism thus means that the maltreatment of the civilian population – the central issue of the following two chapters – did not necessarily have to be rooted in Nazi fanaticism. The next chapter will therefore seek to answer the following question: if *Gemeinschaftsfremd* (community alien) meant being excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft*, what did it mean in regard to the *Kampfgemeinschaft* that the Party and army sought to create?

3.

The East Prussian civilian between local self-interest and strategy

Introduction

In his memoirs, the *Großdeutschland* veteran Guy Sajer painted a depressing picture of the refugees he encountered in the port of Pillau. While waiting to be transported in March 1945, Sajer, who had taken part in some of the most intense fighting on the Eastern Front, was upset by the ‘heart-wringing’ plight of the children he saw there. ‘Many were lost. When they tired of calling their mothers, they collapsed into floods of tears which nothing and no one could console. These were the smallest ones, too young to grasp any explanations. Their faces dabbled with tears, which instantly froze, remain one of the most pathetic images of that time.’¹ Tragic stories like these are abundant: tens of thousands of refugees were waiting to be evacuated from Pillau between January and April 1945. Both at the time, and particularly in the early post-war era, Wehrmacht commanders, civilians, and scholars alike pinned the misery of Eastern Germany’s population on the poor organisation of the Party, a view that has persisted.²

What these contemporaries failed to grasp was the impact the Wehrmacht itself had on the decisions that were taken in the province. The Eastern Front had been a ‘school for violence’, whose lessons, as we shall see, defined the way both rank-and-file troops and the officer corps regarded the evacuation of their own population.³ The German army even provided material that precisely laid out what could be learned from the enemy, which, for example, was the case with a pamphlet entitled ‘The Soviet measures for the successful defence of Leningrad’. Stripped of any racial preconception, its authors stated that prior to and during the siege of Leningrad ‘the evacuation was ruthlessly carried out. Only those qualified for the defence were allowed to remain in the city.’⁴ Many parents, for example, did not know where

¹ Guy Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier* (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1977), 528-29.

² Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 76-78; Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 119-22; Karl Dönitz, *Zehn Jahre und Zwanzig Tage* (Bonn: Athenäum-Verlag, 1958) Chapter 22: Regierungschef; Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive*, 99-100; Kershaw, *The End*, 108-12, 176-77.

³ Römer, *Kameraden*, 410.

⁴ BArch NS 19/2721, 3. Die sowjetischen Maßnahmen zur erfolgreichen Verteidigung Leningrads. The document is undated, but other documents of the same series, ‘Befehle der Heeresgruppe Weichsel,

their children were evacuated to, the pamphlet went on, which added to the general confusion, but this was considered inevitable. The pamphlet not only reveals the intention of the army to take an active part in the evacuation, it also makes clear that the care for the civilian population was of secondary importance. Using the war diaries of the German high command, war-time reports and newspapers, supplemented by the early post-war questionnaires of prominent East Prussians, this chapter restores agency to the Wehrmacht in the organisation of the evacuation. It will show that from the moment the German troops entered East Prussia in mid-1944, the evacuation of civilians was fully subordinated to the demands of the Wehrmacht, and, since evacuation required military materiel, was actively obstructed by them.

In the current historiography, the analysis of the Wehrmacht's role in the evacuation of Eastern Germany's population begins with the final Soviet offensive in January 1945. In recent years, the German historian, Heinrich Schwendemann, in answer to the question about which role the Wehrmacht played in the plight of those it claimed to protect, has convincingly argued that German warfare in 1945 was not at all geared towards ensuring the safety of German citizens.⁵ But despite his in-depth research, his works have two shortcomings. By focusing a large part of his attention on the first weeks of the Soviet offensive, Schwendemann (unconsciously) presents the military as suffering a momentary lapse of judgement during a chaotic situation. Secondly, by restricting the analysis to the military, thereby excluding its interaction with other actors, his research lacks a wider context. By not only reconstructing the motivations of the different actors, but also the environment in which they operated, we can trace how the evacuation of East Prussia's population fitted into the traumatic events of 1945.

I. Wehrmacht treatment of property in evacuated areas

When in August 1944 the front reached East Prussia, the German soldiers had just been engaged in heavy fighting in Belarus and the Baltics. It had been a chaotic retreat, as Army

insbes. zur Stärkung des Kampfgeistes' (*Orders of Army Group Vistula, in particular for the strengthening of the fighting spirit*), are all dated between 10 and 20 February 1945.

⁵ Heinrich Schwendemann, "Strategie der Selbstvernichtung. Die Wehrmachtsführung im "Endkampf" um das "Dritte Reich", in: *Die Wehrmacht, Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller, Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999), 224-44; *Ibid.*, "'Deutsche Menschen vor der Vernichtung durch den Bolschewismus zu retten': Das Programm der Regierung Dönitz und der Beginn einer Legendenbildung", in *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland*, ed. Jörg Hillmann, John Zimmermann (Munich, Oldenbourg, 2002); *Ibid.* "Tod zwischen den Fronten," *Spiegel Special*, June 2002, 42-47; *Ibid.* „Schickt Schiffe“!, *Die ZEIT* 3, 2005, 84. Schwendemann's views later featured in Kershaw's *The End* and Bessel's *Germany 1945*.

Group Centre had been mauled during the Soviet summer offensive, 'Operation Bagration'.⁶ Many of the troops who retreated into East Prussia had lost their confidence in final victory, and, as East Prussia's propaganda office in mid-July complained, their subsequent mood 'severely distressed the population' as well.⁷ As more and more Wehrmacht units moved into the province, the complaints intensified. Although optimistic in public after the war, Major Dieckert privately noted that it had been 'a gypsy-like sight when support units arrived, and one believed to be in the Thirty-Year-War, rather than a modern one, fought with tanks and planes.'⁸ This demodernisation has long been linked to the army's increasingly barbarous behaviour, especially on the Eastern Front, and changed little as it crossed the borders of Germany.⁹ German civilians learnt that their army barely consisted of purely German troops anymore, but were assisted by a massive number of Soviet helpers, *Hilfswillige* or *Hiwis*.¹⁰ The *Trosse*, according to an order of the Third Panzer Army, were 'to be combed out to the extreme for German soldiers', and replaced by *Hiwis*.¹¹ For many German civilians it was hard to comprehend that the army had made the effort to bring these Soviet helpers to East Prussia, and Gauleiter Koch soon reported to Berlin that appalled locals had seen army trucks filled with '*Hiwis* and whores'.¹²

However, it was, above all, the army itself, already poorly regarded due to its failure to fend off the Soviet offensive, which drew negative attention. A lower-ranking Party official was so confounded that he wrote a six-page report on the troops, and labelled what he saw as 'sabotage': 'On the vehicles, one can find mostly chickens, ducks, geese, pigs, cows, sofas, armchairs, mattresses, bed frames and so on, but little place is reserved for equipment that is necessary to fight a war.' On these cars, he noted, only few officers could be found. They could be found in bars.¹³ In early August, Koch wrote to Reichsleiter Bormann that 'As a result of the contact with the people from the east, the troops apparently seem to have forgotten that they are no longer in the occupied eastern areas, but in the Reich.'¹⁴

⁶ John Erickson, *The Road to Berlin*, (London: Cassell, 2008), 200-30; 411-30.

⁷ Römer, *Kameraden*, 16-18, 205-16; BArch R55/ 616, 107: Kbg. Nr. 3004 14.7.44. an pm, abteilung pro z.hd. herrn sondermann

⁸ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/510: Kurt Dieckert, Verbindungsoffizier zwischen Zivilverwaltung und 3. Pz. Armee, Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944-1945, 4.

⁹ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 12-28.

¹⁰ BArch RH 10/144, 57: Personelle Lage am Stichtag der Meldung 1.1.1945. Even the elite 5th Panzer Division consisted of 826 *Hiwis*, 5,3% of the total manpower.

¹¹ BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 28 FS an Pz. AOK 3 Bezug: Pz. AOK 3 - Ia Nr.10451/44 geh. v. 26.10.44

¹² Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 263.

¹³ BArch NS 19/2606, Abschrift Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei Kreisleitung Scharfenwieze, Scharfenwieze, den 12.7.1944, 6-11.

¹⁴ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 263.

Koch's observation, although undoubtedly meant to discredit the army, cannot simply be dismissed as such, as there are certainly grounds for this observation. For well over a year the army had been forced to yield ground to the advancing Red Army, and it had received comprehensive orders on how to treat their immediate environment during times of retreat. These orders included the destruction of property and the forced evacuation of populations and goods.¹⁵ Throughout 1943-1944, 'destruction' and 'evacuation' became two sides of the same coin: what could not be evacuated, was to be destroyed. 'Evacuation' became an umbrella term for increasingly radical measures: millions of Soviets were expelled from their homes, while German troops prevented spring sowing and destroyed crops, turning much of Belorussia into a 'desert zone'. Rather than this destructive behaviour being punished, it was actively encouraged.¹⁶ By mid-1944, the concept of evacuation had been largely detached from its traditional meaning, the safeguarding of populations.¹⁷

Wishing to avoid being caught between fleeing civilians and the advancing Red Army, the generals pushed for the evacuation of the East Prussian border districts.¹⁸ In August 1944 the areas north of the river Memel, as well as the north-eastern border districts Tilsit, Ragnit, Pillkallen, Stallupönen and Goldap were evacuated, with few exceptions. In mid-October 1944, German troops of the Third Panzer Army repelled the first major attack of the Third Belorussian Front on East Prussian territory. The front line then stabilised along the northern border of East Prussia, although Soviet troops did manage to capture a strip of land thirty miles into the East of the province.¹⁹ This led to a second evacuation drive, which took place in late October. A further strip of twenty miles in depth, which included the eastern half of the

¹⁵ Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008) 327-28.

¹⁶ Alexander Werth: *Russia at war* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964), 773, 863.

¹⁷ Both Hague Conventions (1899 and 1907) do not pay attention to the evacuation of civilians during times of war. Already in the 1930s, 'Evacuation' was closely linked to military actions. See: *Der Große Brockhaus*, 15th ed. (1933), s.v. Räumung, im Militärwesen das Aufgeben einer Stellung oder eines Gebiets, mit dem Zweck, sich einer drohenden Niederlage zu entziehen (...) Eine entscheidende Maßnahme ist die Abschiebung der Bevölkerung aus den Kampfgebieten (Evakuierung). Sie dient neben den milit. Zwecken auch der Sicherheit der Bevölkerung selbst; Meyers Lexicon, 8th ed. (1937), s.v. "Evakuierung" (lat.), zwangsweise Entfernung von Bevölkerungsteile auf Zeit aus ihrem Wohngebiet, z.B. wenn dieses Kriegsschauplatz zu werden droht. Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht*, 122-23.

¹⁸ Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 434; BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 30: FS an PZ. AOK 3 Bezug: Pz. AOK 3 – Ia Nr.10261/44 geh. 20.10.44. Little evidence suggests that actual concern for the population played any role of significance in this decision. The commander of the IX. Armeekorps also derogatorily noted that he felt that the inferior-deemed *Trosse* were to be sent far away ('weit abzuschieben') from the front so not to hamper the manoeuvrability of the fighting troops in case of an attack.

¹⁹ Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 60-61.

Allenstein district and most of the Gumbinnen district, was evacuated, uprooting over 600,000 people, or one fourth of the East Prussian population.²⁰

The evacuees had to leave behind the majority of their enterprises, as most of them could not be dismantled and transported away. As the Soviet attack was expected, in July 1944 Field Marshal Keitel had ordered preparations for the so-called ‘ARLZ-measures’ on German territory, which concerned the breaking-down, evacuation, paralysing and the destruction of military and civilian materiel that was threatened by the Allied advance.²¹ The measures, which were fully implemented in September 1944, were modelled after earlier legislation that had been set out by the *Wirtschaftsstab Ost* (Economic Staff East) in February 1943 in anticipation of a German retreat from Ukraine. The purpose of these measures was ‘the furthest-possible preservation of economic goods and man power for the German war economy, and the weakening of the enemy’s war potential through the paralysis and destruction of production facilities and their products, as well as the transporting off of man power.’²² By presenting the destruction of property during times of retreat as a way to assure an effective German war economy, the measure was posed as a pragmatic act. Its devastating effects for the remaining population were of secondary importance.

In Königsberg, the German defenders deliberately flooded parts of the Nasser Garten suburb to prevent Soviet troops from advancing too rapidly.²³ In March 1945 engineers blew up the façade of the university since the statues on it posed a safety concern in case of Soviet shelling, and during the final storming the railway bridge was detonated as well.²⁴ These actions make it hard to maintain that the infamous ‘Nero order’ of 19 March 1945, which concerned the ‘Demolition measures on Reich territory’, was circumvented on any moral grounds, a view that after the war was championed by Albert Speer.²⁵ The language of this order was similar to that of the earlier ARLZ measures, and served little purpose beyond

²⁰ Schieder (ed.), *Die Vertreibung der deutsche Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße, Band I*, 15E

²¹ ARLZ is short for: Auflockerung, Räumung, Lähmung und Zerstörung. See *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 1569-72: Befehl des Chefs OKW betr. Vorbereitungen für die Verteidigung des Reiches (July 19, 1944).

²² Rolf-Dieter Müller (ed.) *Die deutsche Wirtschaftspolitik in den besetzten sowjetischen Gebieten 1941 – 1943: Der Abschlußbericht des Wirtschaftsstabes Ost und Aufzeichnungen eines Angehörigen des Wirtschaftskommandos Kiew* (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1991), 553-59. For an elaboration of the order, see *ibid.*, 560-80; Wolfgang Schumann (ed.) *Deutschland im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Teil 6: Die Zerschlagung des Hitlerfaschismus und die Befreiung des deutschen Volkes (Juni 1944 bis zum 8. Mai 1945)* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 243-45; See also: BArch RW4/704, 3-6: Rücksprache mit dem Sachbearbeiter der Parteikanzlei für Evakuierungsfrage, 6 January 1945.

²³ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 60.

²⁴ Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg*, 167. Sumowski, “Jetzt war ich ganz allein auf der Welt”, 67-68.

²⁵ Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1969), 450-55.

rubber-stamping a practice that was already commonplace throughout the country.²⁶ Certainly, army commanders presented their ‘unwillingness’ to fully embrace the order as an act of defiance against Hitler. The fortress’ *Oberstabsintendant*, Friedrich Dorf Müller, for example, claims to have discussed the order with the fortress’ chief of staff, Süßkind-Schwendi, who, as a dramatic gesture, threw the order in a kiln. The points that were earmarked for destruction, the waterworks at Peyse and the city’s mills, were guarded from then on to discourage overzealous Party fanatics from attempting to put them out of action.²⁷ Nevertheless, it was clear that Wehrmacht commanders would destroy German property as they saw fit.

Even more ambiguity existed over the evacuation of goods. The different divisions of the IX. Armeekorps, which defended the northern part of East Prussia, were ordered by its commander, General Rolf Wuthmann, to build ‘*Erfassungskommandos*’ (appropriation commandos). Wuthmann instructed that ‘every house and every barn is to be searched. All kinds of stocks, equipment, finished goods, raw materials, machinery, whose return is worthwhile, are to be collected at stations in nearby places...’²⁸ As long as it benefited the ‘*Kampfführung*’ (conduct of battle) appropriation was permitted. Yet, too much was appropriated, or ‘salvaged’ under the rubric of *Kampfführung*, something that was quickly picked up on by Wuthmann.²⁹ Not only were troops careless and disrespectful towards German property, searching houses led to plunder: ‘Those who appropriate objects that are not directly needed for the conduct of battle or the preservation of the troops’ effectiveness, such as jewellery and furniture will be punished for looting.’³⁰ Looting, however, simply increased after it became apparent that only a small fraction of the goods could be evacuated.³¹ The notion that ‘everything will fall into the hands of Ivan anyway’, as a soldier told an evacuee from Tilsit, removed many of the soldiers’ reservations.³² This behaviour worried army commanders, and in a lecture one of the staff officers of the IX. Armeekorps stressed that ‘the continuation of the fight on German soil means protection of German property. Unfortunately,

²⁶ Moll, *Führer-Erlasse*, 486-87. Moll, *Führer-Erlasse 1939-1945*, 486-87. Doc. 394: *Zerstörungsmaßnahme im Reichsgebiet (sog. “Nerobefehl”)*, 19 March 1945.

²⁷ ASK 22034-4: Friedrich Dorf Müller, Vernichtung des Führerbefehls „Verbrannte Erde“ (undated), ASK 22034-4: Hauptmann Banneitz, Ic der Festung: Erlebnisbericht über meine Tage in der Festung Königsberg (undated)

²⁸ BArch RH 24/9 /293, 27: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps Qu./IVa/VII K.H.Qu., den 5.11.44. Anlage 13

²⁹ BArch NS 6/135, 83: An den NS-Führungsstab der Wehrmacht II P – No/Kg. 14.3.45

³⁰ BArch RH 24-9/ 294, 60: Generalkommando IX. A.K. Ia/Qu/IVa K.H.Qu., den 24. Oktober 1944. Abschrift Betr. Landesausnützung.

³¹ On the limited means available for the evacuation of goods, see: BArch RH 24-9/ 291, 10:

Kriegstagebuch IX. Armeekorps Nr. 11, 1944

³² Linck, *Königsberg 1945-1948*, 12.

many soldiers are still not yet clear about this.’³³ Civilians, governmental and Party bodies all expressed concern, frustration and outrage. In the *Volksgemeinschaft* plunder during times of war ranked among the most despised acts. The punishments for those caught, (considered *Volksschädlinge*, or ‘Public Vermin’), were notoriously high.³⁴ Soldiers, on the other hand, normally got away with it and often ‘covered up’ for each other (a practise known as ‘*Deckungskameradschaft*’). They allowed each other to ‘organise’ – steal – food and goods, not only abroad, but in East Prussia as well.³⁵

The young house wife, Charlotte Gottschalk, experienced this injustice at first hand. ‘We noted one Sunday morning that our stables had been cleared out, rabbits and poultry were gone. The police could – or would – do nothing, because the trail led to the nearby railway tracks, where until earlier in the morning a military train had stood. “German soldiers do not steal,” was the comment! Well, that was the end of it.’³⁶ Visiting the evacuated town of Ostenburg in mid-October, the president of Königsberg’s Higher Regional Court, Dr. Max Draeger, was appalled to see that in its courthouse German troops had plundered most of the furniture and furnishings.³⁷ Just over a month later, on 24 November, Draeger visited the towns of Tilsit and Ragnit, where he found that ‘Most houses, even the courts, have been looted terribly, allegedly by soldiers and Volkssturm men. All doors and cabinets are broken, drawers are pulled out, everything lies on the floor like a deserted mess; a horrible sight’³⁸ A scathing report sent to SS-Standartenführer Dr. Brandt, who was part of the personal staff of Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, concerned the observations of another official who visited the evacuated areas as well. It described how houses were being stripped by German troops ‘to build bunkers or make fire’, while the nearby forest was ignored. Their behaviour was closely linked to the radicalisation on the Eastern Front: ‘The troops, who for many years have been deployed in the non-German Eastern territories, seem not at all clear about the fact that they are once again on German soil and that they are to defend German values.’³⁹

In the Soviet Union, plunder had become completely accepted. Predating ‘Operation Barbarossa’ German officials had pushed for the implementation of the ‘Hunger Plan’, which

³³ BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 195. Vortrag Ic über Lage. Undated, most likely second half of November 1944.

³⁴ Süß, *Tod aus der Luft*, 152-53.

³⁵ Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 117-18.

³⁶ Charlotte Gottschalk, e-mail message to author, November 2009.

³⁷ Christian Tilitzki, *Alltag in Ostpreussen 1940-45. Die geheimen Lageberichte der Königsberger Justiz*, (Würzburg: Flechsig, 2003), 282.

³⁸ Tilitzki, *Alltag in Ostpreussen 1940-45*, 298-99.

³⁹ BArch NS 19/2606, 39: Der Reichsführer-SS als Sonderbeauftragter f. Pflanzenkautschuk, 9. Dezember 1944

was a double-edged sword. By seizing food from the Soviet countryside, millions of racially inferior Slavs were expected to perish, while this ‘living off the land’ also meant that the Wehrmacht’s stay in the Soviet Union would have less impact on the food situation back in Germany. Plunder was presented as a natural part of the soldiers’ everyday life, and the behaviour could not be shaken off easily once back in Germany.⁴⁰ It is therefore of little surprise that General Wuthmann feared that the scale of plunder of his Korps’ troops in East Prussia would ‘damage the reputation and standing of the German soldier’.⁴¹ In a circular, Wuthmann called for luggage checks of soldiers on leave prior to their departure, as well as for more thorough checks of the *Feldpost*, since cases had already been discovered where German soldiers had mailed German property to their relatives.⁴² In fact, NSFOs were to instruct their men on the treatment of German property near the front: ‘The property of each evacuated *Volksgenosse* is sacred, and every soldier has to treat and protect the possessions of each *Volksgenosse* as if it were his own.’⁴³ Plunder was also witnessed in Königsberg. In late January, for example, soldiers were seen kicking in doors searching for alcohol and tobacco upon returning from the front.⁴⁴ Indeed, Walter Kemsies reported that some troops appeared to have no respect for private property in the city:

Unclean elements were still trying exploit the plight and predicament of the poorest, stole and plundered, lied to, and mocked them. Regrettably, most of them were German soldiers – thankfully the majority of them were the scum of the Wehrmacht, deserters and cowards – who laid hands on the refugees or on their paltry possessions, who confused the poor refugee woman who had lost her nerves, who unhitched the refugees’ horses, took their vehicles, [and] stole their last jewellery.⁴⁵

Plunder would remain an unresolved issue until the end of the war, and reports about the army’s behaviour remained commonplace.⁴⁶ The belief of many troops that defeat (either of Germany or of their own unit) was imminent only seems to have encouraged them to continue

⁴⁰ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 476-80; Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2014) 114-58.

⁴¹ BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 18: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps Ia Nr. 3832/44 geh. K. Gef. Stand, den 1.11.44 Hinweise Nr. 5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ BArch RW/62-1, Der politische Soldat, Januar 1945: Deutsches Eigentum im Frontgebiet.

⁴⁴ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/602: Gustav Makowka, Bürgermeister a.D., 5.

⁴⁵ ASK 22034-4: Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945, 2.

⁴⁶ BArch NS 6/135, 83: An den NS-Führungsstab der Wehrmacht II F – No/Kg. 14.3.45; BArch NS 6/354, 100-101: Rundschreiben 156/45 g. Betrifft: Plünderungen durch deutsche Soldaten in geräumte Gebieten, 24.3.1945. 890 copies of this document were distributed, it was prepared by Reichsleiter Martin Bormann, written “by order of the Führer”, and signed by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel.

plundering; of those who plundered, the notion that they were looting *German* goods hardly seemed to have mattered. In the Soviet Union, troops had been taught to appropriate property as they saw fit, with little regard to the human consequences of their behaviour. This behaviour clearly continued once back in Germany. In comparison to the Soviet Union the scale was more limited, but we should not merely presume that this can only be traced back to a respect for their own *Volksgenossen*. For Wehrmacht troops, the main difference between the two countries was that in the Soviet Union they had operated in an environment that – especially when it concerned the treatment of civilians – had been effectively lawless from the very start, whereas in Germany they were expected to adhere to a set of laws.⁴⁷ The next section will therefore dissect the legislative framework in Germany, and determine what leeway troops had and where their behaviour was curtailed.

II. Evacuation measures between the Party and the Army

Up to the summer of 1944, when German troops reached the borders of their country, the Wehrmacht had overseen a series of mass evacuation efforts. During the retreat from the Soviet Union it had forcibly expelled millions of Soviet citizens, along the lines of the previously discussed ARLZ measures. Many of these civilians were brought to Germany in a deliberate effort to rob the Red Army of potential manpower, and to increase manpower in Germany's factories. Furthermore, to allow unrestricted movement in the area of operations, and to quell partisan activity in their rear, most larger military units cleared areas up to twelve miles behind the front. Horrible scenes unfolded. German troops regularly burned down entire villages to force civilians out. As potential workers were of most use, mothers were separated from their children, while men who refused to leave were often shot on the spot. Civilians were ordered to walk 15 miles a day, often with little to no food and drink, and mostly without shelter.⁴⁸ At the same time, the evacuations caused a strain on the already overburdened army and were a clear sign that the tide of war had turned. Meanwhile, organising these evacuations diverted the Wehrmacht from its core tasks. Having to take care of these people and decide their fate took both a mental and physical toll, as it was near-impossible for German troops not to be

⁴⁷ Felix Römer, "The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies: The Army and Hitler's Criminal Orders on the Eastern Front," in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, ed. Alex Kay, Jeff Ruhterford and David Stahel (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 76.

⁴⁸ Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht*, 322-28; J. Kilian, "Wehrmacht, Partisanenkrieg und Rückzugsverbrechen an der nördlichen Ostfront im Herbst und Winter 1943," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 61, no. 2 (2013): 173 – 199.

confronted with the moral decline of their army.⁴⁹ In this light it is perhaps more understandable that after the war army commanders stressed that the evacuation of German civilians in late 1944 was organised by the Party, and that they themselves only played an advisory role once back in Germany, a view that persists today.⁵⁰ This needs to be reviewed.

On paper, the evacuation measures in Germany were clearly delineated: RVKs bore the final responsibility for the evacuation of civilians, while the army was tasked with the evacuation of goods.⁵¹ Yet, this division of responsibilities was not as strict as it appears: according to East Prussia's *Regierungspräsident*, Dr. Paul Hoffmann, an evacuation plan had been drawn up in late 1943, and evacuation routes had been 'coordinated with the Armed Forces in order to avoid congestion of roads.'⁵² In addition, for Königsberg and other *Festungen*, Wehrkreis commanders, well before any Soviet offensive, were to inform local Gauleiters 'how many and what civil population is required in the fortresses to achieve the objects of the fortress commander, which population is allowed to stay, or is yet to be taken in.'⁵³ Thus, in East Prussia the military had a clear say in the organisation of the evacuation of German civilians.

In late 1944, military intelligence increasingly showed the might of the Soviet opponent, and there was little doubt that in case of a main attack German forces had to yield ground. Commanders anticipated that East Prussia might be cut off, and that they eventually would have to fall back on the defences that shielded the Samland, which, due to its large hinterland, lend itself perfectly for a prolonged defence. This was conveyed to Gauleiter Koch, and as inter-Gau evacuation was deemed unfeasible in case of a main attack, the Party preferred

⁴⁹ Willy Reese, *Mir selber seltsam fremd: die Unmenschlichkeit des Krieges, Russland 1941-44* (Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2004), 191-97; Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht*, 327-28; Stargardt, "The Troubled Patriot".

⁵⁰ Dieckert and Grossmann, 72-81. Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany*, 128-45.

⁵¹ *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 1567

⁵² BArch Ost-Dok. 8/536: Dr. Paul Hoffmann, Regierungspräsident beim Oberpräsidium Königsberg, stellv. Oberpräsident: Räumungsplan für Ostpreußen 1944, 3. On the role of the Wehrkreis command in the evacuation measures in Königsberg, see BArch Ost-Dok. 8/560: Walter Marquardt, Oberregierungsrat beim Oberpräsidium in Königsberg: Die Aufstellung eines Räumungsplanes für Ostpreußen 1943-1945, 2.

⁵³ BArch NS 19/3814, 2-4: Der Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres H Qu OKH, den 17.12.1944 Gen Qu / Abt. Kriegsverw. Nr. II/2200/44 g.Kdos Betr. Bevorratung und ARLZ-Maßnahmen auf zivilem Sektor m Bereich der Ostfestungen. No document still exists that mentions specific numbers of refugees in Königsberg, but of Festung Glogau this document has survived. See: BArch RH 2/332, 192: Op. Abt. (I/W) 20.2. 1945 Notiz gez. Obers Graf zu Eulenburg, Fest. Kdt. (Appendix 1)

an evacuation within the province itself.⁵⁴ This led to a series of inadequate evacuations.⁵⁵ During the evacuation most attention was paid to the rural population, which was ‘taken in’ together with its cattle on the Samland, while other vulnerable people, consisting mainly women, children and the disabled, was evacuated to Saxony, Silesia or Brandenburg.⁵⁶

Yet, despite the role of the Gauleiters in the evacuation, documents of the IX. Armeekorps show that the Party’s evacuation measures were clearly communicated to the army on a regular basis. Some information between the Gauleiter and the Kreisleiters was even forwarded to the different divisions of the Korps, in order to keep them up to speed on the movement of the East Prussian population in and near evacuated areas.⁵⁷ Much of this communication dealt with the matter of reluctant evacuees, since many East Prussians were long-established (*‘sehr bodenständig’*) in the province and reluctant to leave their homes.⁵⁸ Over 1,700 families stayed behind in and around the city of Memel alone. The historian Ruth Kibelka found that the willingness of the rural population to remain in East Prussia was influenced by their possession of a horse-drawn cart, which they felt allowed them to evacuate themselves at short notice.⁵⁹ Indeed, many either ignored the evacuation orders, or returned as quickly as possible. Oberst Schaefer, who oversaw many of the evacuation measures, noted shortly after the war that

As the front continued to hold more and more people trickled back into the evacuated border areas, to complete the autumn harvest. Whereas these were initially only men with horses and farm implements, eventually entire families returned, which, even after completion of their work in the fields, remained on their farms, so that the evacuation of the border districts had to be ordered again once the Russian winter offensive commenced.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Tilitzki, *Alltag in Ostpreußen*, 283-84, 292-93. Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum Kleine Werke IV M 4 DIE, 4: Erich Diester, Zur Tagung der Kulturwarte am 6. u. 7. März 1965 in München: Verjagt – beraubt – geschändet – erschlagen! “Kreis Schlossberg is cleared between 17 and 23 October. The reception district is Wehlau. Continuing the Treck is fundamentally prevented.”

⁵⁵ Heinrich Schwendemann, “Der deutsche Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45” in *Kriegsende 1945: Verbrechen, Katastrophen, Befreiungen in nationaler und internationaler Perspektive*, ed. Bernd-A. Rusinek, (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004), 129.

⁵⁶ Schieder (ed.), *Die Vertreibung der deutsche Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße, Band I*, 15E, 65; BArch RH2/316, 118: Op Abt (IH) 11. November 1944, Evakuierung Ostpreussen.

⁵⁷ BArch RH 24-9/ 137, 194: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps Ia K.Gef.Stand, den 18.11.1944 Betr. Rückkehr von Zivilisten in das Räumungsgebiet.

⁵⁸ Tilitzki, *Alltag in Ostpreußen*, 287.

⁵⁹ Kibelka, *Ostpreußens Schicksalsjahre*, 29.

⁶⁰ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/565: Oberst Schaefer: Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Räumung in Ostpreußen 1944-1945, 2

Inevitably, the army had to deal with these matters near the front. On 5 November 1944, the staff of the IX. Armeekorps received instructions concerning Koch's evacuation orders. The divisions stationed in the area were tasked with the evacuation of the population immediately behind the front, while the evacuation of areas further to the rear was to remain the task of the civil administration, although the local Kreisleiters bore the final responsibility in both cases.⁶¹ To ensure that civilians actually stayed away from the evacuated areas, troops were now ordered to report everyone they encountered without valid papers, after which these people were transported to the nearest *Kreisleitung*, escorted by a non-commissioned officer.⁶²

Yet, perhaps most striking is that the orders to the army leave no doubt that the evacuation drive should first seek to get the cattle to safety before it concerned itself for the civilian population. Assuring that cattle were brought out of harms way was considered a priority, unworthy of any explanation.⁶³ Indeed, the minutes of a meeting on 6 January 1945 between the OKW and high-ranking officials of the Party further illustrated that civilians were considered expendable:

For both housing and supply the limits of capacity are almost reached, substantial further evacuation measures within the Reich territory are not possible anymore. On this point the Party chancellery has the same view as the OKW, [namely] that a too extensive evacuation will put the people who are to be evacuated, and eventually also the remaining *Volksgenossen*, in a difficult position (...) If necessary, leaving behind the civilian population in territory to be occupied by the enemy must be accepted.⁶⁴

This section has shown that in the run up to the final Soviet offensives both the higher Party officials, and the higher echelons of the Wehrmacht, were acquainted with, and agreed upon, the domestic evacuation procedures, and subsequently executed them. In the Soviet Union, the overriding importance for army commanders was the clearance of their area of operations. Yet, unlike in the Soviet Union, these evacuations were not marked by racially-motivated mass-violence; this agenda fell away as German troops crossed back into East Prussia. Now

⁶¹ BArch RH 24-9/ 293, 27: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps Qu./Iva/VII K.H.Qu., den 5.11.44. Anlage 13

⁶² Ibid. For similar orders in Western Germany, See: Schumann (ed.) *Deutschland im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Teil 6, 245.

⁶³ BArch 24-9/ 137, 27: Generalkommando IX. Armeekorps Qu./Iva/VII K.H.Qu., den 5.11.44. Anlage 13; BArch RH2/316, 118: Op Abt (IH) 11. November 1944, Evakuierung Ostpreussen.

⁶⁴ BArch RW 4/ 704, 7,8: WFSt/ Qu 2 (Ost) Nr. 0150/45 geh. F.H.Qu., den 6.1.1945. Betr. Rücksprache mit dem Sachbearbeiter der Parteikanzlei für Evakuierungsfragen.

concerned with their own *Volksgenossen*, the concept of evacuation regained some of its ‘human aspects’ for the different army commanders. But at the same time, this section reveals that commanders were complicit in leaving civilians to their fate. The next two sections will further address such moral judgements, and examine how the military procedures impacted their own population.

III. The question of German refugees within German strategy

After a year of fighting a series of defensive operations without a coherent strategy, the German high command, perhaps against its better judgement, managed to regroup and implemented the highly-unpopular fortress strategy.⁶⁵ An entry in the war diary of the Ninth Army, dated 22 June 1944, when the front still stood deep in the Soviet Union, read that ‘The Army considers the orders concerning the establishment of fortified areas as particularly dangerous. It is therefore looking with bitter feelings towards the upcoming battles, knowing that it is bound by orders which, according to its conscience, it cannot accept as correct.’⁶⁶ The strategy, moreover, was introduced at a time when many German generals already considered the war as good as lost.⁶⁷ To keep commanders in line, a stream of directives that merely ‘derived from impressions or necessities of the moment’ poured out of the Führer Headquarters, which, as the deputy chief in the OKW, Walter Warlimont, pointed out, meant that these directives lost their authority.⁶⁸ As a result, more and more generals sought ways to ‘reinterpret’ the orders and directives they received, a development that was not lost on Hitler. On 19 January 1945, he ordered that every intended operational movement down to divisional level had to be put before him, and that he expected to read nothing but the ‘unvarnished truth’.⁶⁹ The order shows the widespread distrust that was mutually felt between field commanders and the OKW and the OKH, directed by Hitler. Moreover, the OKH also seemed to be losing its grip. Speer noted

⁶⁵ Bernd Wegner, “Defensive ohne Strategie. Die Wehrmacht und das Jahr 1943,” in *Die Wehrmacht, Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag), 208-209.

⁶⁶ Frieser “Irrtümer und Illusionen: Die Fehleinschätzungen der deutschen Führung,” 520-21.

⁶⁷ On 1941 economics see Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 321; *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 1560: A memorandum, compiled by Alfred Jodl, stressed that the ‘catastrophe of the Winter 41/42’ marked the point after which it was clear that ‘no victory could be won.’ Still after the war, the former Chief of the General Staff Generaloberst Franz Halder would maintain that ‘The war is only lost, if one gives up himself.’ Andreas Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage: Die bewaffnete Macht in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944 bis 1945* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2005), 53-59.

⁶⁸ Walter Warlimont, *Im Hauptquartier der deutschen Wehrmacht 1939 bis 1945, Grundlagen - Formen - Gestalten, Band 2* (Koblenz: Weltbild Verlag, 1990), 433.

⁶⁹ BArch RH2/ 331 a, 149: Geheime Kommandosache Der Führer Nr.00688/45 g.Kdos. 19. Januar 1945

‘that the [OKH] had definitively given up informing Hitler correctly and instead occupied itself with war games.’⁷⁰ Guderian remembered meetings at which the entire OKH staff was drunk, so much so that they were even standing on the tables.⁷¹ The unwillingness to adhere to a strategy, however, did not mean that German troops intended to give up the fight. Heinrich Schwendemann has put forward the idea that German generals continued to fight long after they knew the war was lost, in what he calls the ‘strategy of self-destruction,’ because, until the very end, ‘the Wehrmacht leadership loyally implemented the guiding principles of the Führer,’ if only because by then they did not know otherwise.⁷² To assess what German strategy comprised of by 1945, this section will examine both Schwendemann’s notion, as well as the extent that commanders sought to reinterpret the orders they received, since these two notions were seemingly contradictory.

Those commanders who after the war sought to champion themselves as defenders of refugees had little choice but claim that they had turned their backs on the OKW and OKH, since the orders these bodies passed down in late 1944 and early 1945 left little doubt that the refugee question was little more than a side issue. The OKW, which during a main attack took over control over the railway, ranked the refugee matter as fifth and final in importance, which, as its war diary noted, ‘practically meant that all refugee trains were cancelled.’⁷³ Behind this lay a grim reality. At least six East Prussian military hospitals were evacuated in orderly fashion after the Soviet offensive had commenced, and arrived by train in Königsberg without significant delays along the way.⁷⁴ Yet, at the same time, many civilian refugees desperately tried to head west as well, but found that for them transportation by rail was extremely limited. Indeed, in Königsberg, armed soldiers blocked the access to the station for refugees, and those trains that were eventually destined for refugee transport were often shunted into sidings for days to allow for unhindered military movement.⁷⁵ People were desperate to get to Pillau, on the westernmost tip of the Samland, from where ships were said to be leaving to safety.⁷⁶ In despair, parents who were denied access to the trains pushed their children through the windows, while fights on the train erupted in the search for a place. The trains were packed so

⁷⁰ Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 93-94.

⁷¹ Duffy, *Red storm on the Reich*, 46.

⁷² Schwendemann, “Strategie der Selbstvernichtung“, 229.

⁷³ *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 1150 and 1322-23: 20.2, 6-3-1945: 1. Wehrmacht-transports (operational and supplies); 2. Coal; 3. Food; 4. Notprogram of RuK-ministry; 5 Refugees.

⁷⁴ BArch RH 53-1/27, 1: Wehrkreisarzt I Bericht!

⁷⁵ Kershaw, *The End*, 177-78; Schwendemann, *Tod zwischen den Fronten*, 44-45

⁷⁶ Today, Pillau is the Russian town of Baltiysk.

tight that many people lost consciousness.⁷⁷ The conditions in the trains heading south-west – via Elbing to the *Reich* – were even worse. Unaware that Elbing had been captured on 23 January, they kept heading in that direction. As a result, some trains halted for days in the blistering cold. Many suffered from hypothermia, and several even died inside the trains.⁷⁸

Fleeing via road was even harder. During the operations in East Prussia German army officers increasingly complained about carts of refugees hindering military traffic. For example, along the streets south of the river Pregel, an officer of the 5th Panzer division wrote of endless lines of refugees, heading west, congesting the roads to Königsberg, and, as the fuel had to come from that direction, only limited amounts of the badly needed supplies reached the troops.⁷⁹ Sometimes the troops on the spot took the law into their own hands. Heinz Simat, a veteran of the 349th Volksgrenadier division, recalled the behaviour of his unit at the small town of Norkitten, where congested lines of refugees tried to cross the Pregel: ‘Often the military vehicles rigorously drove the refugee carts off the road, and the largest vehicles time and again ignored their right of way.’⁸⁰ Thus, a few days after the offensive had commenced, civilians were forbidden to use the province’s main roads, *Reichsstrasse 1* and *Reichsstrasse 138*.⁸¹ Also the roads in the area between the river Deime and the road between Königsberg and Cranz were put off limits for civilians. When the fighting neared Königsberg, even its *Ringchaussee* was closed off for civilians.⁸² A dramatic account of a female refugee appears in one of the standard works on the flight of the German population:

Miss G.K. hastens through the no man’s land between the fronts. She reaches Königsberg, together with her neighbour, his wife, and their ten children. German soldiers close off the entrance streets. “Königsberg is a fortress. No civilians are allowed to enter.” Miss G.K. pleads, begs, cries. In vain. She, too, must join the refugee stream that continues westwards.⁸³

⁷⁷ BAArch Ost-Dok 8/602: Gustav Makowka, Bürgermeister a.D., 4; KAZ 16-1, 17-1, 18-1; Knopp, *Der Sturm*, 73, 75.

⁷⁸ Schieder (ed.), *Die Vertreibung der deutsche Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße, Band I*, 67-68.

⁷⁹ Anton Detlef von Plato, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision: 1938 bis 1945* (Lüchow: Gemeinschaft d. Angehörigen d. Ehem. 5. Panzerdivision, 1978), 377, 379.

⁸⁰ Heinz Simat, *Blutiger Abschied, Tatsachenbericht über die verzweifelten Abwehrkämpfe der 349. Volksgrenadier-Division in Ostpreußen von Januar bis April 1945* (Stade: Self-Published, 1986), 27. For a similar story, observed by the Commander of Army Group Centre, see Kershaw, *The End*, 199.

⁸¹ Kreisgemeinschaft Wehlau, *Heimatsbuch des Kreises Wehlau Alle-Pregel-Deime-Gebiet I. Band* (Leer: Verlag Gerhard Rauterberg, 1975), 568-69.

⁸² ASK 22034-4: Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945, 2.

⁸³ Edgar Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreussen 1944/45* (Podzun-Verlag, Bad Neuheim, 1964), 200.

On 23 January, at the height of the flight of East Prussia's inhabitants, even the road between Königsberg and Pillau, the main artery used by these refugees, was closed to civilians.⁸⁴ The refugees were therefore forced to use byways, or, even had to go through fields.⁸⁵ In effect, it meant that their trecks did not even reach walking speed, and many were unable to reach the shelter of a town or village by the end of a day. During the last two weeks of January, when the temperature almost constantly fell below minus twenty or even minus thirty degrees, many refugees froze to death.

On 23 January Soviet troops reached the Frische Haff near Elbing, which meant that all Germans east of it were cut off. From then on, the seemingly most straight-forward way to escape East Prussia was by boarding a ship from the port town of Pillau, on the westernmost tip of the Samland, to the Danzig – Gotenhafen area, or directly to reception areas in northern Germany and Denmark.⁸⁶ The research of Schwendemann, however, has found that in the period between late January and late April 1945, when East Prussia was eventually overrun by Soviet troops, the transport of refugees was only of minor importance to the *Kriegsmarine*.⁸⁷ Many documents show that during these months the army had absolute priority.⁸⁸ For example, on 22 January *Großadmiral* Dönitz informed Hitler that 'since the transportation of divisions and the supply of Army Group Courland, which without replenishment would come to a standstill in no time, must necessarily take precedence, nothing remains but to dispense with the evacuation of refugees.'⁸⁹ On 28 January he reiterated that 'the refugee transports by sea can be carried out only as far as they do not hamper the transportation of combat troops to and from Kurland and Norway, two areas that were still occupied by German forces.'⁹⁰ Not only did the evacuation of civilians receive the least priority, which meant that hardly any resources were allocated to it, but also from the moment the Soviet offensive commenced the army repeatedly pushed for a Führer-order to forbid the 'manifold hectic evacuations', which, in their eyes, only 'jeopardised military operations'.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Schön, *Ostsee* 45, 94.

⁸⁵ ASK 22034-4: Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945, 1-2; BArch Ost-Dok 2/20: Königsberg. Die Drangsale einer deutschen Frau nach dem Kriege. von G.K.S (August 1951), 366-67.

⁸⁶ Danzig and Gotenhafen are today the Polish cities of Gdańsk and Gdynia.

⁸⁷ Schwendemann, "Strategie der Selbstvernichtung"; Schwendemann, "»Deutsche Menschen vor der Vernichtung durch den Bolschewismus zu retten«."

⁸⁸ See for example: BArch RH 2 / 332, 242: Fernschreiben OKH/ GenStdH/ Op Abt (roem. 1a) Nr. 2373/45 g.Kdos 24.2.45; BArch RH 2/ 335, 106-107: Fernschreiben Betr. Abtransport aus Ostpreußen OKH/ GenStdH/ Op Abt röm. 1a Nr. 4167/45 g. 4.4.45.

⁸⁹ *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 1600-1601.

⁹⁰ *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 1602.

⁹¹ Schwendemann, "Der deutsche Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45," 138.

This meant that most of the refugees from Königsberg were stranded in Pillau. After the departure of the Party leadership from Königsberg, Pillau had become the domain of the Party. The town, with a pre-war population of 10,000 could not cope with the tens of thousands of refugees who arrived there and steadily swelled to 50,000 by mid-February.⁹² In this period, Gauleiter Koch organised a ‘*Gauleiteraktion zur Erhöhung der Lebensbilanz*’ (Gauleiter campaign for the increase of living standards) in Pillau, although the results were limited.⁹³ When asked by his long-standing subordinate, Waldemar Magunia, why he had chosen to stay behind in Pillau, rather than to return to Königsberg, Koch explained that his presence at the port town allowed him to more effectively oversee the evacuation of East Prussia’s population.⁹⁴ Although this conveniently meant that he was kept away from the front line, during the last months of Koch’s rule, his focus would indeed remain on the evacuation question, rather than on the defence of East Prussia. In Berlin, he started lobbying – without success – for additional shipping space for refugees.⁹⁵ Karl Friedrich, a representative of Gauleiter Koch later wrote that ‘The disastrous situation around Danzig and Gotenhafen meant that for weeks no ship even came to Pillau. Even the few ships that brought cargo (war materiel and food) to Pillau, were not allowed to take any refugees on board and had to leave Pillau empty.’⁹⁶ In the light of the armed forces’ priorities, all Koch’s efforts to secure additional cargo space for refugees were thus doomed to fail from the start.

It is here that one of the key concepts of the National Socialist regime manifests itself: its ‘cumulative radicalisation’, a term coined by Hans Mommsen. ‘Cumulative radicalisation’ emerged as the most convincing answer to the *intentionalist-functional* debate about the origins and implementation of the Holocaust. The initial *intentionalist* approach to the Holocaust suggested that a masterplan for the destruction of the European Jewry was already in place in the 1920s, and could be executed from the moment Nazi-Germany had taken control of Europe. *Functionalists* considered this approach too linear, and instead interpreted the Holocaust as a series of initiatives emerging from different organisations, who, encouraged by

⁹² BArch R55/ 616, 184: Komm. Leiter Pro Ref.: MR Imhoff, Berlin, den 15. Februar 1945 An den Herrn Staatssekretär Betr.: Lage in der Evakuierung .

⁹³ ASK 22034: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945, 1.

⁹⁴ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/594, 6: Waldemar Magunia - Gauleiter Erich Koch und die Räumung Ostpreußen. Gauleiter Koch, whose headquarters were on the Frische Nehrung at Neutief, had firstly ensured his own safety. At all times, two ice breakers were ready to sail out west. See: Ostpreussenblatt, 13 March 1954 and 20 February 1954.

⁹⁵ Meindl, *Ostpreussens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 446-448.

⁹⁶ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/508: Karl Friedrich, Beauftragter des Reichsverteidigungskommissars Ostpreußen „Bericht über Flüchtlingsabtransporte in Pillau im Jahre 1945“, 3.

the Nazi elite, set out policies depending on the arising opportunities. The theory of cumulative radicalisation sought to bring the two theories together by restoring agency to a multitude of actors, proposing that ‘the outwardly conjured unity to strengthen the political will nurtured the rivalry of those officials seeking expansion of their competencies and extension of their power.’⁹⁷ In 2004, Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner argued that ‘cumulative radicalisation’ should be viewed as a ‘momentum built up in a partly self-selecting, partly self-driven Jewish policy underpinned by a general racist consensus’, and the former would later expand on this by applying it to the Armenian Genocide as well.⁹⁸ Judging by the way emerging issues were approached over refugees in East Prussia, it appears that the momentum Bloxham and Kushner recognised within ‘cumulative radicalisation’ could outgrow its Holocaust setting, as Party and Wehrmacht resorted to similar interactions to those earlier employed. In 1945, this meant that if the Party wanted to maintain its influence over issues concerning domestic defence, it would have to follow the hard line that the Wehrmacht was taking. As the Wehrmacht pushed even further, the Party emphasised the regime’s teachings as a ‘defence mechanism’ to validate its position. We will firstly examine how this way of thinking manifested itself on national level, before we turn to East Prussia.

In mid-February, Reichsleiter Bormann passed a circular to the Gauleiters, showing his agreement with the measures that had so far been taken by the military in Eastern Germany. If anything, he implied that the measures to limit evacuation were not far-reaching enough. Large-scale evacuation as a result of the Allied offensive in the west, he foresaw, ‘would meet in the Reich interior the stream of fugitives from the East, thus hampering military and civilian movements.’ Therefore ‘even women and children [are] to remain, but noboday capable of working for the Allies [is] to be left. Elements of the population remaining behind [are] no longer to be regarded as traitors.’⁹⁹ As a result of these measures, by February 1945, 80,000 East Prussian civilians were already in Soviet hands, according to estimates of Königsberg’s

⁹⁷ Hans Mommsen, “Der Nationalsozialismus. Kumulative Radikalisierung und Selbstzerstörung des Regimes,” in: *Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon, Band 16* (Munich: Lexicon Verlag, 1976), 786. I dismiss Mommsen’s notion of the Wehrmacht as one of the ‘moderating influences of the traditional ruling groups’. Instead, Peukert’s findings that Party, administration, SS, Police, Business and Wehrmacht all ‘had [their] vassals and a relatively secure power base, but each tended to interfere with the areas of responsibility of the others’ comes much closer to this notion. See: Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1987), 30.

⁹⁸ Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust: Critical historical approaches* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 137; Donald Bloxham, *Genocide, the World Wars and the Unweaving of Europe* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 37-75.

⁹⁹ TNA HW 1/3520, 15 February 1945.

fortress command.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, in early March, when the refugee crisis in East Prussia was at its height, Dönitz once again stressed that ‘Assuring the control of [sea] ways, maintaining maritime transports, and the support of land fronts by naval artillery remain our most important tasks in the Baltic Sea, the fulfilment of which must be striven for with all available means.’¹⁰¹

The effects of these decisions can clearly be seen in Pillau. The man responsible for the evacuation of the port was Deputy RVK Dr. Bruno Dzubba, who, despite his earlier role in the evacuations of Memel, Tilsit and Zichenau, was poorly regarded, but whose views seemed to correspond much closer to those of the army than to his immediate superior, Gauleiter Koch.¹⁰² Louis Clappier, a former French prisoner of war, in an authoritative novel that he based on his personal experiences and recollections of others, typified Dzubba’s attitude towards refugees as follows: ‘Refugees are people, who don’t want to fight (...) Refugees are people that want to flee at all costs, because they fear cannons or Russians. For this kind of people there is no urgent interest. They are to be got rid of, so that the battle area does not clog because of an unnecessary accumulation of civilians.’¹⁰³ Throughout February, March and April, the care for the refugees in Pillau thus remained poor, even though the refugee crisis grew ever more pressing. Here we see evidence of the sort of ‘cumulative radicalisation’ Mommsen referred to as Party interests converged with those of the military.

This section’s focus on how the refugees became victims of military strategy seems to imply that there was a general mind set among the top ranks of the Wehrmacht to conduct, what Schwendemann calls, a ‘war against its own population’ in order to continue the fight.¹⁰⁴ Viewing these orders as part of a war against their own population, however, risks distracting attention from those who they had actually waged a war against: the populations of occupied Europe, especially the Soviet Union. What can be established, however, is that commanders used the concept of strategy in a strictly utilitarian fashion. For all intents and purposes these men were morally numbed, and ‘sound’ operational conduct trumped humanitarian considerations. The behaviour of commanders was not rooted in resigned ‘self-destructiveness’, as Schwendemann proposes, but appears as a navigation between their

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix 2: Number of civilians in Königsberg, January to April 1945.

¹⁰¹ BArch NS 6/354, 171: Anlage 3 zur Bekanntgabe 162/45 g. von 27.3.1945. Abschrift! 26. Kurzlage des Ob.d.M. vom 9.3.1945.

¹⁰² ASK 22034: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945, 1.

¹⁰³ Louis Clappier, *Festung Königsberg*, (Cologne, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1952), 50-51.

¹⁰⁴ Angelika Schindler, “Krieg gegen die eigene Bevölkerung,” ARTE. Last modified February 26, 2007, http://www.arte.tv/de/Default_20page/5000.CmC=851210.html

allegiance to Germany and their oath to Hitler on one the hand, and the need for self-preservation and their loyalty to their troops on the other hand. These considerations were unconcerned with civilians. This section also reveals that the behaviour of Party members in Germany in 1945 might partly be explained by the fact that many of them felt that they had to come into line with military necessities. The solutions that were favoured became increasingly radical in nature, which ended in a deliberate choice to rank the needs of civilians ever lower. To explore these considerations further, the next section will therefore examine how the evacuation in Königsberg was organised, and which considerations lay it its core.

IV. Evacuation policy in Königsberg

Examining the way that the evacuation from Festung Königsberg was carried out can teach us a lot about what transpired in 1945. Firstly, with the Wehrmacht and Party both assuming prominent roles in the city (with the Wehrmacht taking over control of parts of local government and the Party adopting more military tasks), we can measure the effects of ‘cumulative radicalisation’ in Königsberg’s evacuation measures. Secondly, a study of the city’s evacuation can help us to understand the military imperatives that drove General Lasch as well as the relationship between the wider fortress authorities and the local population.

The evacuation process under examination here needs some brief clarification. During the January offensive, the different Soviet armies had lost a significant part of their manpower and materiel, and in early February their commanders convinced the Front command of the immediate importance of regrouping and replenishing their exhausted units.¹⁰⁵ They therefore strengthened their positions around the city and held a tight grip on it, but, on the other hand, did not launch any sustained attacks on German positions. Since Königsberg was virtually completely encircled during this period, evacuation could only take place by ship, using the sea lane between Königsberg and Pillau. Soviet artillery was positioned on the coast and could target these ships, which meant that they could only sail at night, so the number of evacuees

¹⁰⁵ Bagramyan, *Tak shli my k pobede*, 513-15; Galitsky, *V bojah za Vostochnuju Prussiju*, 344-45.

during this period was low.¹⁰⁶ It is thus more worth-while to examine the period when the fortress command had the means at its disposal to organise a more effective the evacuation.

Therefore, the starting point of this section is ‘Operation Westwind’, the German military operation that would come to define Königsberg’s fortress era. The aim of the operation was to restore the lost link between Königsberg and Pillau. The operation had been planned from the moment the link was lost in late January, was supported by the *Kriegsmarine*, and commenced on 19 February, when three divisions attacked from the area around Pillau eastwards, while three divisions attacked westwards from Königsberg.¹⁰⁷ A day later the units linked up, and on 25 February the area was secure enough to restart the rail link between Königsberg and Pillau.¹⁰⁸ In his memoirs, General Lasch claimed that Operation Westwind sought ‘to create the opportunity to transport away large parts of the clustered civilian population,’ and get new supplies in, although an extensive report on the goals of Army Group North, sent one week after the start of Operation Westwind, does not refer to the care for civilians.¹⁰⁹ We will therefore examine to what extent the operation benefited the civilian population, and how, in the period that followed, the authorities used the opportunities created by the operation to ensure the civilians’ evacuation from the area.

On 17 February 1945, General Hans Gollnick, the commander of the ‘Samland Group’ (under which Festung Königsberg fell at the time) ordered Lasch to assign the 1st infantry division and parts of the 5th Panzer division to Operation Westwind.¹¹⁰ Lasch, however, decided to commit significantly more troops to the operation. He would deploy the entire 1st infantry division, the entire 5th Panzer division, as well as the 561st Volksgrenadier division, leaving only two divisions, the 367th and 69th infantry division, to defend the city. This decision met with opposition from his superiors, as it left the fortress dangerously exposed, but

¹⁰⁶ IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 13201458 Komm.Leiter Pro Ref. MR. Imhoff. Dem Herrn Staatssekretär. Berlin, den 21. Februar 1945. Betr.: Lage der Evakuierung. Report states that between 29 January and 19 February 33,000 people were evacuated by means of sea transport.

¹⁰⁷ BArch RH 2/328, 235: OKH / GenStdH/ Op Abt (röm 1a) Nr. 450081/45 g.K. Chefs. 7.2.45. Weisung für Heeresgruppe Nord!; Grier, *Hitler, Dönitz and the Baltic Sea*, 112-13; Christopher Duffy, *Red Storm on the Reich: The Soviet March on Germany, 1945* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 164-66.

¹⁰⁸ Dieckert and Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen*, 158-59; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 68-75; Grier, *Hitler, Dönitz and the Baltic Sea*, 118-19; Kurt Mehner, *Die geheimen Tagesberichte der Deutschen Wehrmachtführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939-1945, Band 12: 1. Januar 1945 – 9. Mai 1945* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1984), 222.

¹⁰⁹ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 69; BArch RH 2/ 328, 242-245: Fernschreiben an Chef des Gen St d H, gez. Rendulic Obkdo. H.Gr. Nord Ia Nr.1543/45 g.Kdos.Chefs

¹¹⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 68; Kabath and Forstmeier, “Die Rolle der Seebrückenköpfe beim Kampf um Ostpreussen,” 334-35.

the General willingly accepted responsibility in case of failure.¹¹¹ His initiative was criticised by his army colleagues, even though it would contribute significantly to the eventual success of the operation.¹¹²

What factors determined Lasch's decision to commit three divisions and, as such, disregard the wishes of his superior? Most likely, a commander's concern for the welfare of his troops would have weighed heavily on his mind. Lasch, in particular, was a deeply paternalistic officer. Generaloberst Erhard Raus, under whom Lasch served half a year earlier, wrote in an assessment that Lasch was a 'very good officer who knew how to quickly transform his newly established division into a solid unit. However, [Lasch] sometimes puts the interests of his troops too much in the foreground.'¹¹³ Moreover, Lasch, like most commanders, felt that the defence of Königsberg could only end in the garrison's capture by Soviet troops. He, on the other hand, was one of the Wehrmacht's experts with regard to the break-out out from pockets. A year earlier, he had broken out of the Brody pocket in western Ukraine, bringing his troops back to a safe line.¹¹⁴ What was more, something similar had been undertaken in late January 1945, three weeks before Operation Westwind, by the commander of the Fourth Army, General Friedrich Hoßbach. On 23 January Soviet troops reached the Frische Haff near Elbing, which meant that the German troops east of it were cut off. Hoßbach knew that being encircled made supplying his Army a considerably harder challenge, and therefore wanted to restore a connection with the main German lines. Without consulting the OKH, the General thus started to prepare a break-out westwards, but when the news of his attempted break-out came out, the commander was sacked.¹¹⁵ Lasch thus knew that he could not abandon the city, but he was

¹¹¹ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 68-70.

¹¹² Anton Detlef von Plato, *Die Geschichte der 5. Panzerdivision: 1938 bis 1945* (Lüchow: Gemeinschaft d. Angehörigen d. Ehem. 5. Panzerdivision, 1978), 384.

¹¹³ BArch PERS 6/300107: Lasch, Bernhard Otto: 16.8.44 Raus, O.B. 1. Pz.Armees This loyalty worked two ways, and his funeral in 1971 was attended by a number of his subordinates. See: F.G. "Abschied von General a.D Lasch," *Das Ostpreussenblatt*, May 15, 1971, 13.

¹¹⁴ BArch PERS 6/300107: Lasch, Bernhard Otto: 1.8.44. Balck, Kom.Gen. XXXXVIII. Pz.K.

¹¹⁵ Schwendemann, "Tod zwischen den Fronten," 42-43; Kershaw, *The End*, 199. Hoßbach's decision to abandon that part of East Prussia also meant that he abandoned the other German units that were fighting in the area, notably the Third Panzer Army, which contributed to the outrage at Hitler's headquarters. See: Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 400-401. Schumann (ed.) *Deutschland im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Teil 6*, 511: The Chief of Staff of Army Group Centre, Generallieutenant Otto Heidkämper noted on 24 January 'Hoßbach does not care about the Third Panzer Army, which he wants to abandon, (...) 'if it means he can only save his Fourth [Army]'

keen to open a route to Pillau. But such an operation risked leaving Königsberg's entire population exposed.¹¹⁶

To understand the enormous danger Lasch put Königsberg's population in, we should address the city's topography. Königsberg was cut into a northern and a southern half by the river Pregel. The southern half was almost completely encircled by Soviet troops, so German units there had considerably less opportunity to retreat, since they would have to cross the Pregel to get to safety. Lasch left the defence of southern Königsberg to the battle-worn 69th infantry division, which he 'bolstered' with inferior Volkssturm and police units. The north connected to the Samland, and it was from there that the operation was launched westwards. It was also there that Lasch placed the 367th infantry division, the strongest remaining formation in the city. Had Königsberg been attacked by Soviet forces in response to Operation Westwind, it is likely to have fallen almost immediately, given the limited forces left to defend it.¹¹⁷ As General Lasch was fully aware of the danger he put the city in, he clearly did not have the safety of the population as uppermost in his mind.¹¹⁸ Indeed, his depiction of Operation Westwind as a conscious attempt to secure the safety of civilians trapped in the city is a travesty.

What, then, transpired between 25 February and early April, when Königsberg was eventually stormed by Soviet forces? What first needs to be stressed is that in their treatment of civilians Königsberg's fortress command and East Prussia's Party elite should not be seen as isolated actors, since the OKW was well-aware of the situation in the province. Officials in East Prussia did not operate in a vacuum, and were dependent on decisions taken higher up the chain of command, as we saw in the previous section. Around 20 February 1945, a report was discussed at the OKW, which addressed East Prussia's refugee crisis. Some 2.3 million inhabitants were said to have been living in the province when the Soviet invasion commenced, many of whom were displaced by the time the report was compiled. Estimates of their whereabouts showed the following numbers: 320,000 in the Danzig area; 500,000 in Pomerania; 200,000 in Saxony; 140,000 in Mecklenburg; 100,000 in Schleswig-Holstein; and 100,000 in other parts of the *Reich*. This totalled approximately 1,400,000 inhabitants. The

¹¹⁶ In his self-serving telling of the events in Festung Königsberg, von Süßkind-Schwendi choose to not devote any attention at all to the motivations that lay behind the break-out. See: Hugo Frhr. von Süßkind-Schwendi: "Aus meinem Soldatenleben - Teil V," *Deutsches Soldatenjahrbuch 1993*, 347-352.

¹¹⁷ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 96-99; Blankenhorn, ... *und fahr'n wir ohne Wiederkehr*, 164-70.

¹¹⁸ ASK 22034-4 Generalleutnant O.v. Natzmer: Einsatz der 4. Armee ab Februar 1945, 2 ; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 68-70. The assessment of the Volkssturm follows in Chapter 4.

report stated that ‘of the residual 900,000, around 500,000 serve in the Wehrmacht, Volkssturm, and so on. The final 400,000 inhabitants still have to be evacuated from East Prussia. 135,000 of them are in Königsberg, 200,000 in the Heiligenbeil Pocket, 40,000 on the Samland peninsula.’¹¹⁹ The OKW estimated that the evacuation of these 400,000 people would take fourteen days.

Days after the recapture of the southern Samland, Gauleiter Koch dispatched ten Kreisleiters to the city to once again take over the civilian administration, much to the frustration of the Wehrmacht commanders.¹²⁰ The Party started pushing for evacuation, but with little means at its disposal it would require the help of the Wehrmacht.¹²¹ Although the army eventually took the credit, there is little evidence to suggest that the fortress command devoted sustained attention to the evacuation of Königsberg’s civilian population.¹²² Theoretically, Königsberg’s evacuees were to be brought to the port of Pillau, from where they could be transported to the west. Indeed, on 26 February, shortly after Operation Westwind, the evacuation of Königsberg began with the evacuation of 14,000 inhabitants, and the following day another 17,000 were evacuated from the city, which highlights that the means – most importantly ships’ cargo space – were made available to the fortress command.¹²³ In Pillau, however, there was insufficient space to house the refugees. To accommodate them, four transit camps were set up on the western Samland, in the villages of Peyse, Fischhausen, Neuhäuser and Rauschen. In practice, this meant that, rather than leaving the province, evacuees were unceremoniously dumped into an administrative no-man’s land between Pillau and Königsberg. The camps soon started to become overcrowded since they could not absorb the massive number of refugees, not only from Königsberg, but also from the Heiligenbeil Pocket. Hunger became rampant as a result of the complete neglect to organise the provision of food, and it did not take long for epidemics to break out. A medical commission despatched to the camps warned that if the hygiene did not improve immediately, the camps would see ‘a mass mortality of women and children.’¹²⁴ Dysentery duly broke out, and caused many deaths,

¹¹⁹ *Kriegstagebuch des OKW, Band IV*, 1326-27.

¹²⁰ ASK 22034-4: Major i.G. a.D. Dr. Hans Schäfer, Ia der Festung, Der Fall Königsbergs (1.12.56), 2.

¹²¹ Appendix 2: Number of civilians in Königsberg, January to April 1945.

¹²² ASK 22034-4: Major i.G. a.D. Dr. Hans Schäfer, Ia der Festung, Der Fall Königsbergs (1.12.56), 4.

¹²³ BArch NS 19/2068, 32. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 26.2.45; BArch NS 19/2068, 34. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 27.2.45.

¹²⁴ BArch NS 19/2068, 59. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 9.3.45; BArch NS 19/2068, 71. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 17.3.45; Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72-73

and only the late arrival of doctors managed to contain the epidemic from spreading further.¹²⁵ Conditions grew so bad that several thousand refugees prepared to go on a ‘hunger march’ to Königsberg as a way of protest. Meanwhile, none of the prominent Party-members dared to visit the camps as they feared they could be attacked by an angry mob. Instead, lower-ranking Party officials were dispatched to talk to the evacuees.¹²⁶ As these men were poorly informed about the situation at hand, they were of little use in aiding the refugees.

According to *Oberfeldarzt* Dr. Paul Schroeder, a medical liaison officer to the fortress staff, many thousands actually flooded back from the camps to Königsberg when the situation became unbearable.¹²⁷ General Lasch confirmed that ‘before long, the women that were accommodated there showed up to me with their children and prams and asked me, wringing their hands, to allow them back in their houses and lodgings, since they at least had something to eat there.’¹²⁸ Lasch, reluctant to inform the returnees about the true state of the defence, but eager to point to the shortcomings of the Party, allowed most of them back in. Gerhardt Kretschmer described the atmosphere in the fortress command: ‘Everyone discreetly cursed the Gauleiter, who was supposedly somewhere in Pillau (...), not taking care [of the population] at all; yet no one stuck his hands out themselves even the slightest.’¹²⁹ Yet the poor evacuation of civilians stood in stark contrast to that of wounded soldiers. Throughout late February, March, and early April, commanders in East Prussia would continue to put their men first. On the morning of 6 April, just hours before the anticipated final storming of Königsberg, Lasch ordered a train with 10,000 slightly wounded troops to leave the city.¹³⁰ These troops were part of a contingent over 150,000 soldiers who, after being wounded, were evacuated out of East Prussia to the west by well-organised transports; a measure which, as Schwendemann found, served to maintain battle morale.¹³¹ Moreover, during the same period, Army Group North successfully pushed for the transfer of troops out of East Prussia.¹³²

¹²⁵ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/602: G.Makowka, Bürgermeister a.D., 8-9, Meindl, *Ostpreußens Gauleiter Erich Koch*, 450; Starlinger, *Grenzen der Sowjetmacht*, 41-42; Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72.

¹²⁶ Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72

¹²⁷ Starlinger, *Grenzen der Sowjetmacht*, 41-42. See also: Diechelmann, *Ich sah Königsberg sterben*, 9-10.

¹²⁸ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 76-77; BArch Ost-Dok. 8/531, 19: Klaus von der Groeben, Landrat des Kreises Samland. Das Ende in Ostpreußen. Den Ablauf der Geschehnisse in Samland. (1.10.1952)

¹²⁹ IFZ ZS/ A-2/ 04 – 140, Gerhardt Kretschmer, Nuernberg-Zabo, d. 11.4.49

¹³⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 80; Ost-Dok. 8/598: Adolf Klein, Angehörige bei Oberforstamt Elchwald in Pfeil: Einsatz der Volkssturm in Königsberg 1945, 102. Schwendemann, “Der deutsche Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45,” 142. Between 1 and 20 March 1945, over 60,000 wounded of Army Group North, meticulously documented, were evacuated from the ports of Pillau (19,299), Danzig (21,039) and Gotenhafen (21,718). See: BArch RH 2/333, 116: Op Abt. I M/K 22.März 1945 Vortragsnotiz. Betr.: Verwundetenabtransport H.Gr. Nord (Nach Angabe MVO)

¹³¹ Schwendemann, “Der deutsche Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45,” 142.

¹³² BArch RH2/332, 214: Abschrift von Fernschreiben vom 21.2.45 An OKH / Gen St d H / Op Abt

After the war, men like Lasch maintained that they could do little but follow orders.¹³³ However, the worsening military situation did not necessarily mean that the hands of army commanders were tied. As there was an appreciation of the situation on the ground at the OKH and OKW, commanders were given the flexibility to make decisions based on their own discretion. But they constantly subordinated civilian concerns to those of the military. Shortly after the conflict, *Landrat* Klaus von der Groeben remembered that ‘We negotiated with the various departments (...) for sufficient transport possibilities and the construction of a pontoon bridge over the *Pillauer Tief*. The commander of Pillau considered it important that some precaution was taken, but vigorously opposed the idea that Pillau could be used as a passage for refugees at all.’¹³⁴ A 500-metre pontoon bridge from Pillau to the *Frische Nehrung* would have provided a road from Königsberg to Danzig that refugees could pass on foot. Yet, as it hampered the supply to the Heiligenbeil Pocket, the plan never materialised. Furthermore, although it is hard to quantify, the unwillingness of both Wehrmacht and Party to overcome petty quarrels also had a detrimental effect on the evacuation. On the *Frische Nehrung*, for example, where the command structure was unclear, the deployment of police units led to arguments as to who was accountable. Gauleiter Koch stressed that, since their job was to assist in the evacuation of civilians, these men should be subordinated to him. On the other hand, General von Natzmer, the commander of Army Group North, considered the deployment area to be the main factor in determining their place in the command structure, in which case they were under the authority of the army. The deputy *Höhere SS und Polizeiführer Nordost*, Otto Hellwig, eventually sided with the army, but not before voicing his discontent in two reports about the state of affairs, one of them to Himmler himself.¹³⁵ Thus, the success of the combined effort did not merely rest on the availability of resources; their poor deployment, resulting from local feuds fought out over the heads of the civilian population, severely hampered both East Prussia’s evacuation and its defence.

The poor attitude of commanders and Party officials in East Prussia towards evacuation determined the behaviour of Königsberg’s civilian population. Some twenty daily situational reports, written by officials of the Königsberg-based *SS-Oberabschnitt Nordost* to Reichsführer SS Himmler between 15 February and 23 March 1945, have survived and make it abundantly clear that the population widely opposed evacuation. On 21 February it was noted that ‘The

¹³³ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 23. „Aber der Mensch denkt und das OKH lenkt.“

¹³⁴ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/531: Klaus von der Groeben, 4.

¹³⁵ BArch NS19/2606, 52-53: Der Höhere SS- u. Polizeiführer Nordost, O.U., den 12.2.1945, An Reichsführer-SS Persönlich; BArch NS 2606, 57: Der Höh.SS u. Pol.Führer Nordost, Pirel, den 14.2.1945.

population generally refuses to be evacuated, because Königsberg is considered as safe. Moreover, people believe that presently nothing can happen [to them], since many of those [officials] who left Königsberg during the critical days have returned.’¹³⁶ Stories about the sinking of the liners *Wilhelm Gustloff* and *Steuben*, two of the biggest naval disasters in history, made people wary of travel by sea.¹³⁷ ‘Meanwhile,’ Karl Friedrich remembered, ‘news about the conditions in Pillau had spread in Königsberg, so several transports left Königsberg empty or only half full.’¹³⁸ Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, the living conditions in Königsberg were considerably better than on the Samland. On 4 March, for example, only 4,000 of the 16,000 people showed up to be evacuated.¹³⁹ Also, as the war progressed, more and more reception areas were in immediate danger of being threatened by the western Allies, while in early March the *Volksgruppenführer* in Denmark, Jens Möller, advised against housing refugees in Denmark, since ‘for the German refugees a forced quarter at Danish families is significantly worse than the most primitive mass accommodation in collective accommodations.’¹⁴⁰

People who were earmarked for evacuation sometimes hid for days so as not to be evacuated. The pleas of Party officials fell to deaf ears. Evacuation staffs often faced heavy resistance and had to use force to get the people to move out of their lodgings, making the Party even more unpopular.¹⁴¹ Indeed, the reports suggest that the fortress command took only took evacuation seriously between 24 February and 10 March, after which it was ‘postponed until further notice’ due to ‘technical issues’.¹⁴² Meanwhile, the atmosphere at the Königsberg’s Party headquarters became increasingly isolated.¹⁴³ The majority of the brought-in Party members, who had already cared little about evacuation in late January, resorted to an ostrich-like policy and, according to Wegener, held feasts that included loose women and high-quality

¹³⁶ BArch NS 19/2068, 19. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 21.2.45.

¹³⁷ Schön, *Ostseehafen*, 169-70; On the sinking of the *Steuben*, see: Schön, *Ostsee ’45*, 261-309.

¹³⁸ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/508: Karl Friedrich, Beauftragter des Reichsverteidigungskommissars Ostpreußen, 7.

¹³⁹ BArch NS 19/2068, 47. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 4.3.45.

¹⁴⁰ BArch RW 4/705 – Osten Operationsgebiet Reich, allgem. Schriftverkehr Febr. April 1945 Befehlsreglung im Osten des Reichsgebietes, Jan. 1945.

¹⁴¹ BArch NS 19/2068, 47. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 4.3.45; Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72.

¹⁴² BArch NS 19/2068, 60. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum, Königsberg 10.3.45.

¹⁴³ Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 72.

food, employing their own winemaker, chef and butlers.¹⁴⁴ As March progressed, fewer and fewer Party officials bothered to devote any attention to Königsberg's evacuation. The insouciance of Party officials, and the unwillingness of the Army to discuss the issue, reveals that no one in the fortress command felt the need to evacuate any further inhabitants. There was the belief that evacuees would be going from the 'frying pan into the fire', and there seems to have been no willingness to challenge this assumption. Moreover, as virtually all local men were ordered to assume defensive roles in Königsberg, most families had to make the decision whether or not to stay together.¹⁴⁵ For example, the family of Irene Schumacher weighed up the options of staying behind against the possibility of being captured by the Soviets: 'My father had never been in the Party. Through documents it could be proven that he had been dismissed in 1934 as a teacher, because he had turned against the Hitler regime. The Russians would also recognize this.'¹⁴⁶ Such calculations fit into a largely forgotten undercurrent in wartime German society, namely that at the time there were Germans who believed 'that the Russians are not that bad,' and simply hoped the war to be over as soon as possible.¹⁴⁷ Many families of Volkssturm men and regular troops decided to stay at the side of their husbands or fathers and take their chances.¹⁴⁸

This leaves the question of how many German civilians remained in Königsberg by the time of the final storming in early April. Some forty sources, compiled either during the siege or shortly after the war by prominent figures, indicate that by the end of January 1945 the number stood at 200,000, decreased during February and early March, but increased again in the latter half of March, so that directly prior to final assault some 100,000 civilians were left behind in the city.¹⁴⁹ These civilians lived primarily in the neighbourhoods of Juditten, Amalienau, Speicherdorf, Balleith, Rosenau, Ponarth, Kalthof and Lauth, which were mostly Königsberg's suburbs.¹⁵⁰ There was also possibly a further hidden element. *Oberfeldarzt* Dr.

¹⁴⁴ ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated), 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ We will return to this in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁶ Schön, *Ostseehafen*, 166. As a Times article pointed out, this line of reasoning often backfired: 'Germans are anxious to establish the belief that their previous political affiliations were above suspicion and that their acquiescence in the Hitler regime was enforced. They seem quite unaware how angry they make the Russians with their futile cries of "Rotfront!" or their protestations that they had once voted Communist.'; TNA FO 371/ 46859. Paper clipping, 7 March 1945: Herrenvolk no More, Russian Impressions from the Occupied Zones.

¹⁴⁷ Deichmann, *Ich sah Königsberg sterben*, 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ursula Cheeseman, *Unter der Zeitbrücke: Aufzeichnungen einer Ostpreußin*, 91.

¹⁴⁹ Appendix 2: Number of civilians in Königsberg, January to April 1945.

¹⁵⁰ ASK 22034-4: Walter Kemsies: Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945, 5; OL XC Königs3c Mat: Hermann Matzkowski: Bericht über die Vorkommnisse und Zustände in Königsberg/Pr. seit der Einnahme durch die Sowjettruppen im April 1945 (Bremen, 2. Mai 1946)

Paul Schroeder noted that many returning refugees from the Samland ‘did not seek to get ration cards, because they did not want to become registered, be it for digging trenches, for the Volkssturm, or other tasks.’¹⁵¹ He thus estimated that around a third of the remaining population (which he put at approximately 130,000) went into hiding until after the storming in early April.¹⁵² These people had to survive in conditions reminiscent to those of cave-dwellers.¹⁵³

From a humanitarian standpoint, the evacuation of Königsberg can only be considered a failure. Many thousands of people remained in the besieged city, even though many of these people could have been evacuated during February and March 1945. However, viewing the evacuation measures purely through this lens misses the point, since for the fortress command this was not the main issue at all. In 1945 the chain of command rapidly eroded in the face of military events and prevented its effective control over its areas of operation - a process known as the ‘atomisation’ of warfare.¹⁵⁴ This fractured state encouraged military commanders like Lasch increasingly to act according to their own discretion. Their loyalty seemed to have primarily remained with the troops they had commanded throughout the war. Indeed, assuring that his men would live to see the end of a war had always been part of the unwritten understanding between a general and his troops, and with the end of the war only weeks away there was little reason to divert from this ethos in the spring of 1945. The choices that Lasch made in preparation for Operation Westwind showed the danger he was willing to expose civilians to, but the priorities of the Wehrmacht and Party became even clearer in the six weeks that followed. There was little concrete action taken in regard to the evacuation question, and the refugee camps that were established on the Samland received only marginal attention. The ‘cumulative radicalisation’ translated into a reluctance to allocate resources to the matter, which led to negligence and, eventually, to a resigned attitude among both parties. Can the stance of the fortress command be considered a continuation of the mentality created by the implementation of the different ‘criminal orders’ (*‘verbrecherische Befehle’*) on the Eastern Front? During the final storming of Königsberg civilians found themselves caught between belligerents in a heavily fought-over city war zone. The next section will examine up to what point the fortress command could have stepped in to assure the safety of the population, thereby

¹⁵¹ Starlinger, *Grenzen der Sowjetmacht*, 41.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵³ Rudolf Naujok “Das Mädchen von Königsberg,“, *Ostpreußen-Warte*, June 1958, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 96.

probing commanders' readiness to expose Königsberg's civilians to the violence of the battlefield.

VI. The inability to surrender

By the beginning of April, the fortress command was well aware that the final storming was only days away.¹⁵⁵ In his memoirs, Lasch stated that few officers, not even himself, cherished any hope that the assault could be fended off.¹⁵⁶ The OKH, however, made it clear that Königsberg was to be held 'under all circumstances'.¹⁵⁷ For three days, from 3 April to 5 April, the Soviet artillery conducted a preliminary bombardment, and on 6 April the actual storming commenced. The Eleventh Guards Army attacked from the south, the Forty-third and Fiftieth Army attacked from the north and east. West of the city, the Thirty-ninth army cut the connection between Königsberg and the Samland. In the early afternoon of 8 April troops of the Forty-third and Eleventh Guards Army met in the Amalienau suburb west of the city centre, completing the encirclement. On the night of 9 to 10 April, General Lasch surrendered the fortress.¹⁵⁸ On 10 April, the report of the OKH concluded that 'the overall impression (final radio messages from the fortress, aerial reconnaissance, enemy reports) is that the garrison of Königsberg, after brave battles in the rubble of the burning city, has been defeated by the onslaught of three Armies.'¹⁵⁹ Those last radio messages, some wired by Lasch himself, indeed tell a story of a 'heroic defence', but also tell another story: 'Due to aerial bombardment and constant artillery shelling the entire city is as good as destroyed. As a result of personnel and material losses the battle strength of the troops has been strongly reduced. High casualty numbers among the civilian population.'¹⁶⁰ This section will focus on how these people died, and why their deaths should be seen as the result of the army's preparedness to fight – quite

¹⁵⁵ BArch RH 2/2026, 32: Funkspruch Abgegangen: 15.3. ObKdo.H.Gr.Nord roem 1 c/AO Nr.802/45 geh.; BArch RH 2/ 335, 133: Op Abt / Ia 4.4.45 Notiz nach Führervortrag Nacht 3./4.4.45; BArch RH 2/335, 174: Op Abt IN/K 6.4.45 Abschrift von FuFe vom 6.4, 13.00 Uhr AOK 4 Ia Nr. 4489/45 geh.

¹⁵⁶ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 78-79.

¹⁵⁷ BArch RH2/335, 231: Adjutant des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres Nr. 1250/45 g.K. H.Qu.OKH, den 7.4.45. Notizen nach Führervortrag am 7.4.5 nachm.(sic) The phrase 'Until the last drop of blood', which is often used by scholars to point to radicalisation in late-war Germany, is a propagandist concept and does not feature at all in this kind of orders.

¹⁵⁸ Lakowski, *Ostpreußen 1944/45*, 201-15.

¹⁵⁹ Mehner, *Die geheimen Tagesberichte der deutschen Wehrmachtführung*, 367. Incidentally, this report also tells something about the state of German intelligence at the time, since there were actually four Soviet Armies.

¹⁶⁰ BArch RH2/2027, 45: Funkspruch Abgegangen 7.4. um: 2325. Absendende Stelle: Fest .Kdt. Königsberg

literally – to the last bullet. It will also assess if the Fortress Command was criminally negligent.¹⁶¹

First, we will examine some of the alternatives, and establish whether these were executable, which we will do by comparing Königsberg to other fortresses. Peter Lieb has found that commanders of some of the encircled fortresses in France in 1944 established contact with their Allied besiegers to organise the evacuation of French civilians, which in some cases was successful. Although Lieb rightly questioned to what extent this was done on humanitarian grounds, it was already more than Königsberg's fortress command was willing to consider.¹⁶² General Lasch – like every fortress commander in Eastern Germany – categorically refused to parley with the Soviets, as he fully expected Soviet troops to act barbarously. Moreover, as we have seen, he had actively sought to create a polarising atmosphere that ruled out any contact between the two belligerents. Also, a distrust in the population's willingness to keep fighting, which will be discussed extensively in Chapter 4, certainly was a factor. In Aachen, for example, war-weary German civilians guided Allied forces to hide-outs and had betrayed the location of German positions, much to the dismay of the city's commander.¹⁶³ Closer to Königsberg, in mid-January, Soviet forces had shelled positions on the Deime river at Labiau after these had been disclosed by civilians.¹⁶⁴ As civilians were closely involved in the defence of Königsberg, there was no doubt that, were they to fall in Soviet hands, Soviet intelligence would be able to extract information from them, which would have impeded the city's defensibility.

Another option was surrender. Contrary to what is often thought, it was Königsberg's Party elite that was the first to call for a cessation of the fighting. As soon as the fighting had begun on 6 April, Deputy Gauleiter Großherr proposed to Gauleiter Koch that Königsberg should be declared an open city, and that a new front be established to the north.¹⁶⁵ A day later, on 7 April, Kreisleiter Wagner also called on Koch to demand that the fighting cease in Königsberg. This conversation was overheard by *Oberstabsintendant* Friedrich Dorf Müller: 'Tell your friend – he probably meant the Führer – that the troops have fought heroically, in

¹⁶¹ Michael J. Allen, *Textbook on Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2015), 109. Examination when 'negligence' can be considered criminal.

¹⁶² Lieb, *Konventioneller Krieg oder NS-Weltanschauungskrieg?*, 488, 497-98.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 500.

¹⁶⁴ Afanasii Belobodorov, *Vsegda v boju*, (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978), 314.

¹⁶⁵ ASK 22034-4: Friedrich Dorf Müller, *Oberstabsintendant der Reserve: Ferngespräch des Kreisleiter Wagner mit Gauleiter Koch am 7.4.1945* (undated); ASK 22034-4: *Obergefreiter Sinzig: Meine Erinnerungen an die letzte Stunden in Königsberg* (4.12.56)

Königsberg is achieved what was humanly possible. It would be madness and a crime against the civilian population to continue to fight.¹⁶⁶ Koch, however, had no intention to ask for a surrender. But, in any case, this would have met with strong opposition from the army; another indication of ‘cumulative radicalisation’. Indeed, whereas throughout 1943 and 1944 a number of prominent foreign cities – Rome, Florence, Athens and Paris – had been declared open cities, either on the initiative of their commanders or with the full knowledge of Hitler, in late 1944, Himmler proclaimed that ‘No German city will be declared an open city. Every town and every village will be defended at all costs.’¹⁶⁷ Königsberg’s fortress command adhered to this maxim without question.

Why was the army so unwilling to capitulate without a fight? In the early 1990s, the social historian, Erhard Lucas-Busemann, analysed the fall of Königsberg and Breslau, where he explicitly addressed the ‘incapability to capitulate’ of the two fortress commanders.¹⁶⁸ It foreshadowed a debate that would define the second half of the 1990s: that of the complicity of the Wehrmacht in Germany’s war of annihilation. Lucas-Busemann pointed to the commanders’ familiarity with the *Barbarossa-Erlass*, the *Kommissarbefehl*, the *Richtlinien für das Verhalten der Truppe in Rußland*, as well as the cooperation between Wehrmacht and SS behind the front.¹⁶⁹ As Lasch’s regiment had been present in July 1941, when the infamous Riga pogrom commenced, while later his 217th infantry division had encircled Leningrad, it would be impossible to maintain that he had not been actively been complicit in crimes against humanity on the Eastern Front, or that he had no knowledge of the war’s genocidal aspects.¹⁷⁰ These factors certainly were important in Lasch’s inner circle, but, especially since he maintained that he believed he had done nothing wrong while in the Soviet Union, they can only provide a part of the reason why Königsberg’s fortress command fought on for four days before it finally decided to surrender.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ ASK 22034-4: Friedrich Dorf Müller, Oberstabsinterdant der Reserve: Ferngespräch des Kreisleiter Wagner mit Gauleiter Koch am 7.4.1945 (undated)

¹⁶⁷ Alexander Gillespie, *A History of the Laws of War: Volume 2: The Customs and Laws of War with Regards to Civilian in Times of Conflict* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2011), 25

¹⁶⁸ Erhard Lucas-Busemann, *So fielen Königsberg und Breslau* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 93-94.

¹⁶⁹ Lucas-Busemann, *So fielen Königsberg und Breslau*, 92-93.

¹⁷⁰ Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, *The “Final Solution” in Riga: Exploration and Annihilation, 1941-1944* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 61-65. Lasch does not deny that the German military had committed war crimes, and explicitly mentions that the commander of the Fourth Army, General Friedrich-Wilhelm Müller, whom he thoroughly disliked, was executed by the Greeks in 1947.

¹⁷¹ Lasch, *Zuckerbrot und Peitsche*, 67, 70-73.

For the German army, honour was at stake. What the OKW seemed to have grasped very well was that surrender, in the first place, was a personal decision. It is therefore unsurprising that in the current historiography personal and psychological factors are emphasised in surrender, rather than purely military considerations.¹⁷² The German army had sought to connect surrender to dishonour as early as the fall of France in the spring of 1940, when – as a final humiliation – the French army was forced to accept Germany’s armistice terms at the exact spot near Compiègne and in the same railway carriage where Germany had been forced to do the same in 1918.¹⁷³ By 1942 the tables had started to turn and from 1943 onwards it was the German army that found itself surrendering. For example, the capitulation of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad in early 1943 was considered a national tragedy, and was followed by the establishment of the communist-led NKFD and BDO (*Bund Deutscher Offiziere*) under General Seydlitz and Field Marshal Paulus, acts that were perceived as a stain on the prestige of the Wehrmacht.¹⁷⁴ By 1945 some commanders had decided to commit suicide rather than surrender unconditionally, with Field Marshal Walter Model choosing to shoot himself in a forest, rather than having to oversee the capitulation of his Army Group.¹⁷⁵ In Königsberg, no commanders committed suicide, but surrendering a fortress, a ‘symbol of the nation’s unwavering willingness to fight’, ranked among the most dishonourable acts a general could contemplate.¹⁷⁶ A surrender was deemed unworthy of the German military tradition. Indeed, on 7 February 1944, a month before the defence around fortresses was elevated to strategy, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel used a classic ‘fall-where-you-stand’-rhetoric to convey what he expected of commanders that had been entrusted with the defence of a city or area: ‘Capitulation, ceasing the resistance, evasion or retreat do not at apply to fortress- and battle commanders. The fate of the fortress- and battle commanders is connected with the area entrusted to him. Also the commander of a ship goes under with it with the flag in mast. The history of German soldiery has never known a different view.’ To show the seriousness of the order, the memorandum’s preamble pointed out that two commanders had already been executed after they had left their positions.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Niall Ferguson, “Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat: Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War,” *War In History* 11, no. 2 (2004): 152-53.

¹⁷³ Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127.

¹⁷⁴ Jürgen Förster, “Die Niederlage der Wehrmacht: Das Ende des »Dritten Reiches«,” in: Seelower Höhen 1945, ed. Roland Foerster (Hamburg: Verlag E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1998), 8.

¹⁷⁵ Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany*, 152.

¹⁷⁶ Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 224.

¹⁷⁷ BArch NS 19/3118, 8: O.U. den 7.2.1944 gez Keitel Feldmarshall OKW/WFSt/ Op (H) Nr.0906/44/geh.

Lasch could have been in no doubt about his duty to uphold the honour of the Wehrmacht. Being entrusted with the defence of a city like Königsberg (and the same goes for other fortresses) was a high point in a military career, and violating the trust of the men that had enabled this career tarnished that.¹⁷⁸ On 8 April 1945, hours before communication broke down with the outside world, he received a telegram from General Müller, the commander of the Fourth Army, under which authority *Festung* Königsberg fell, stressing that Lasch's officers' honour bound him to hold Königsberg to the last bullet.¹⁷⁹ This is most likely why in his memoirs, whilst he was keen to emphasise that he had decided to capitulate 'to bring an end to the terror' for the sake of the population, he also went to great lengths to show that when the surrender of Königsberg took place, the city had almost completely been overrun, except for some small isolated pockets of resistance.¹⁸⁰ In the face of defeat, Lasch, like most commanders, did not subscribe to the idea of 'dying with honour' which Hitler had sought to instil among the troops.

Indeed, the discrepancy between the string of orders envisaging a soldier dying 'with a weapon in his hand', and commanders' resolve to base their decisions on the tactical situation, is indeed well-established in the literature.¹⁸¹ Königsberg was not the first fortress to surrender, and Lasch's behaviour was in line with German military behaviour elsewhere. In September 1944, for example, after Hitler's initial protestations, Army Group North was evacuated from Estonia, so *Festung* Reval (Tallinn) and *Festung* Wesenburg (Rakvere) fell without a fight.¹⁸² Famously, in August 1944 *Festung* Paris was surrendered without Hitler's consent and against his explicit will.¹⁸³ In East Prussia, both *Festung* Elbing, but more importantly *Festung* Lötzen, one of the cornerstones of the province's defence, were left virtually undefended.¹⁸⁴ As a result, by 1945 Hitler's trust in army commanders had almost completely vanished in regard to the fortress strategy. On 26 March, he ordered that from then on only naval officers could be

¹⁷⁸ A peculiar story features in the *Kriegstagebuch des OKW*. According to Percy Ernst Schramm, who kept the OKW war diary, '2 officers who swam through the *Haff* stated that, contrary to the reports, the Commander of Königsberg, General Lasch, was still fighting as enemy tanks appeared in front of his command post.' Schramm states that he was forced to add that these statements were 'probably wrong', but claimed to have considered Lasch an 'upright man' with a 'sense of responsibility for the soldiers entrusted to him.' See: *Kriegstagebuch des OKW Band IV*, 54, 1246.

¹⁷⁹ ASK 22034-4: Obergefreiter Sinzig: Meine Erinnerungen an die letzte Stunden in Königsberg (4.12.56)

¹⁸⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 107.

¹⁸¹ Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 244-61.

¹⁸² Sean McAteer, *500 Days: The War in Eastern Europe, 1944-1945* (Pittsburgh: Red Lead Press, 2008), 273.

¹⁸³ *Kriegstagebuch des OKW*, 346-48, 358, 472, Manfred Overesch, *Das III. Reich 1939-1945, Eine Tageschronik der Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur* (Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag, 1991), 525-28.

¹⁸⁴ Duffy, *Red Storm on the Reich*, 171-72; Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 400.

appointed as fortress commanders, ‘since already many fortresses [have fallen], but still no ship has been lost without a fight to the end.’¹⁸⁵ The order undoubtedly hurt the pride of the top ranks of the army, but it is unlikely that it led to more resolved fortress staffs.

To further ‘encourage’ commanders to fight to the end, the practice of *Sippenhaft*, family liability punishment, was greatly expanded during the last year of the war: in cases such as surrender or desertion, a soldier’s family risked imprisonment on his behalf.¹⁸⁶ This also weighed on Lasch’s mind. Army General Ivan Bagramyan observed that during interrogation of the captured German Generals, ‘The fortress commander looked particularly downcast and wretched. (...) We had learned from radio monitoring that the imbecile Führer had declared him a traitor for the surrender of the fortress and ordered the arrest of his family. Obviously, General Lasch was depressed by this.’¹⁸⁷ The nature of an encircled fortress made it impossible for anyone outside of it to prevent its capitulation, but by systematically linking surrender to the breaking of trust and the military tradition, and to the threat of punishment of family members, the OKW nevertheless built in some ‘delaying factors’ in regard to a fortress’ surrender.

A further consideration was the practical difficulty of assuring a surrender. The reputation of one of the best-understood signs of surrender, the white flag, had steadily diminished throughout the war.¹⁸⁸ Probably the most infamous example took place on 29 December 1944, when in two Budapest neighbourhoods two Soviet envoys, both carrying white flags, were killed, even though their arrival at the German lines had been announced

¹⁸⁵ John Zimmermann, “Die deutsche militärische Kriegsführung im Westen 1944/45” in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweiten Weltkrieg 10/1 Der Zusammenbruch des Deutschen Reiches 1945 Die militärische Niederwerfung der Wehrmacht*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2008), 347. Apparently, Hitler had forgotten, or choose to ignore, the battle at River Plate of December 1939, during which the captain of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, Hans Langsdorff, decided to scuttle his ship off the coast of Montevideo, rather than to attack the British force of three Royal Navy cruisers. See: Winston Churchill, *The Second World War Volume I: The Gathering Storm* (London: Houghton Mifflin Company 1948), 459-477.

¹⁸⁶ Loeffel, *Soldiers and Terror*, 516. As Germany continued to ‘shrink’ in 1945 the measure lost its appeal, mainly because family members were often already in areas captured by the Allied forces. See: Erich Kuby, *Das Ende des Schreckens* (Hamburg: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 64; Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 271.

¹⁸⁷ Bagramyan, “The Storming of Königsberg” 242; See also: Eberhard Beckherrn and Alexei Dubatov, *Die Königsberg Papiere, Schicksal einer deutschen Stadt, Neue Dokumente aus russischen Archiven* (Munich: Langen Mueller, 1994) 16-17: Oberstleutnant Iwanow asked the captured General Lasch during interrogation: ‘Do you already know, that a Hitler-court has sentenced you to death?’ The General replied ‘I am not really troubled by that.’ Only the situation of his family, which had been evacuated to Denmark, worried him.”

¹⁸⁸ Officially recognised during the Hague convention of 1907. See: “Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague IV); October 18, 1907,” accessed July 11, 2016. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp Annex to the Convention Art 32.

well in advance.¹⁸⁹ The OKW and OKH approached the matter by stressing that the international coverage of the shooting of the parleys was nothing but a ‘mendacious version of events’ that only sought to accuse the German army of breaching international law. To prevent this kind of negative press in the future, parleys would ‘no longer be received, but have to be sent back before reaching our lines.’¹⁹⁰ In effect, this order made capitulation talks significantly harder to organise.

There was similar pushback when Wehrmacht troops themselves considered the use of white flags, with some commanders even forbidding their men to prepare them.¹⁹¹ By 1945, even as the potential for surrender was obvious to everyone, sustained efforts were made to discourage troops from contemplating it. To prevent capitulation talks, Walter Model, the commander of Army Group B, in late March 1945 went as far as to order that ‘Manifestations of subversion and acts of sabotage at the command post, regardless whether the offender is a soldier or a civilian, are to be prevented by armed force.’¹⁹² Model’s portrayal of commanders willing to consider negotiations as offenders (*Täter*) symbolises the widespread dismissal and scepticism towards the practice. It should therefore be questioned whether Himmler’s infamous ‘flag order’ of 3 April (‘When a white flag appears from a house, any male inside is to be shot’), which has generally been linked to the National-Socialist *Durchhalte*-terror, had any additional impact.¹⁹³ Although in all likelihood army envoys in Königsberg were indeed fired on by Party members, the opposition to the use of a white flag was by then already widespread in the Wehrmacht. For example, Obergefreiter Sinzig, Oberst von Süsskind-Schwendi’s orderly, was only ordered to put up the white flag over General Lasch’s command post ‘once the first Russian machine gun fire coming from the Paradeplatz can be heard.’ Furthermore, Sinzig remembered that even though Lasch’s bunker lay directly under the Paradeplatz, which meant that Soviet troops were only dozens of metres away by the time the flag went up, there was still opposition to it from soldiers:

There I see a little boy hop from funnel to funnel and suddenly the little fellow (I guess he is 16 or 17 years old) is in front of me and points to the white flag that I had now hoisted and said: “What

¹⁸⁹ Murder of Soviet negotiators in Budapest area, *Soviet War News*, January 1, 1945, 2-3.

¹⁹⁰ BArch RH2/ 331a, 176: OKH / GenStdH / op Abt (röm 1 a) Nr. 796/45 g.Kdos. 22.1.45

¹⁹¹ Römer, *Kameraden*, 366.

¹⁹² Elisabeth Koolhaas, “»Aus einem Haus, aus dem eine weiße Fahne erscheint, sind alle männliche Personen zu erschießen« Durchhalteterror und Gewalt gegen Zivilisten am Kriegsende 1945,” in *Terror nach innen Verbrechen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, ed. Cord Arendes, Edgar Wolfrum and Jörg Zedler, 65-66.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

kind of nonsense is this? Our comrades are out there, defending [sic] and bleeding to death, and you hoist the white flag here.”¹⁹⁴

Indeed, this type of defiance meant that fighting went on long after the military situation had become hopeless. When on 8 April the city was cut off after the link-up between the Forty-third and Eleventh Guards Army, Marshal Vasilevsky immediately ordered leaflets to be thrown over the city in order to persuade Lasch to surrender, but Lasch still refused to do so and continue to fight.¹⁹⁵ That decision brought battle into the midst of the civilian population, where there was a fight ‘for houses and streets with extreme severity.’¹⁹⁶ It is at this point that any of Lasch’s post-war assurances that he had taken into account the safety of the population fall flat. The garrison’s self-propelled guns were so close to field hospitals that doctors had to ask them to move, so to respect the rules of the international Red Cross, while some of the German troops who passed through them meanwhile continued to fire on enemy combatants.¹⁹⁷ In his memoirs, Michael Wieck, one of the few ‘certified Jews’ (a ‘*Geltungsjuden*’) that had remained in Königsberg by 1945, called Lasch out on this ‘discrepancy’: ‘Had you, General Lasch, really cared about the civilian population and the preservation of human life, like you claimed afterwards, you should have capitulated much earlier. Not only when the Russians were already at the Paradeplatz in front of your bunker, or near to it.’¹⁹⁸

General Lasch eventually decided to surrender on the morning of 9 April. By that time the garrison was almost out of ammunition, and only parts of the inner city were still in German hands.¹⁹⁹ All contact with the outside world had been lost.²⁰⁰ Moreover, Lasch knew that the 5th Panzer division, which had stayed behind on the Samland after ‘Operation Westwind’, would not attempt to relief the fortress’ garrison, while a final westward break-out attempt by troops north of the river Pregel had also failed. That attempt, conducted around midnight on 8-9 April, was supposed to remain secret from the population, but word nevertheless got out, and as more and more civilians gathered near the area from which the attack was to be launched the element of surprise was lost. Soviet artillery started shelling the gathered masses, inflicting

¹⁹⁴ ASK 22034-4 Sinzig: *Meine Erinnerungen an die letzten Stunden in Königsberg*.

¹⁹⁵ Alexander Vasilevsky, *Delo vsej zhizni* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1978), 464-65; Galitsky, *V bojah za Vostochnuju Prussiju*, 414.

¹⁹⁶ Mehner, *Die geheimen Tagesberichte der deutschen Wehrmachtführung*, 364.

¹⁹⁷ Deichelmann, *Ich sah Königsberg sterben*, 17; von Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 62; Günter Braunschweig, “Untergangstage in Königsberg.” In *Jahrbuch der Albertus-Universität zu Königsberg, Pr.*, 3 (1953), 200

¹⁹⁸ Wieck, *Königsberg: Zeugnis vom Untergang einer Stadt*, 218.

¹⁹⁹ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 104.

²⁰⁰ Mehner, *Die geheimen Tagesberichte der deutschen Wehrmachtführung*, 364.

a large number of casualties.²⁰¹ This was another indictment of the negligence of the army and Party.

The General, thus, fought on as long as it made any military sense, although – and this is where he broke with the National Socialist rhetoric – he had no intention to sacrifice his life, or those of his staff, in the process. Nevertheless, even in this dire situation, the call for surrender caused a backlash among some of the troops. In his memoirs, Lasch plays up the role of the SS, which wanted to continue the fight, but among other troops who wanted to continue were the staff of the 69th infantry division, which had retreated into the city in late January.²⁰² Such defiance was not unique in East Prussia. Perry Biddiscombe found that in mid-April, a week later, many of 5th Panzer Division's officers, faced with depleted ammunition stocks and limited operational space, believed that 'the division's best bet would be to destroy its tanks and infiltrate southwards through Soviet lines in order to launch a partisan campaign, or perhaps to form small battle groups and independently march back to German lines.' The division's commander decided against it, and many of the troops subsequently mutinied.²⁰³ Thus, the decision to (dis)continue a defence of Königsberg, rested significantly on local actors and circumstances, as indeed the research of Neitzel and Welzer has shown. For Königsberg's fortress command, the decision to surrender came at the last possible moment. Yet, still thirty years after the war, the fortress' chief of staff, Susskind-Schwendi felt the need to stress that what the fortress command effectively intended was 'not a capitulation of the fortress. Königsberg had already fallen. It was a surrender of the remaining troops.'²⁰⁴

To arrange the surrender, envoys were dispatched from the different strongholds in order to make contact with Soviet troops.²⁰⁵ After a few hours, during which time the fighting continued, envoys sent by the commander of the *Trommelplatz* barracks, Oberstleutnant Bruno Kerwin, finally managed to reach Soviet lines. After initial contact had been established, Kerwin was summoned to a Soviet regimental headquarters, where he had to convince the commander of the sincerity of the message. Again, many hours passed. Eventually, he guided Soviet representatives through German lines, and in the late evening he arrived at Lasch's

²⁰¹ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 95-103; Blankenhorn, ... *und fah'r wir ohne Wiederkehr*, 164-73.

²⁰² Perry Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!: the history of the National Socialist Guerrilla Movement, 1944-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 215. Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 42.

²⁰³ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf!*, 110.

²⁰⁴ Hugo Freiherr von Susskind-Schwendi, "Kurze Rückschau auf die militärischen Ereignisse in Königsberg (Pr.)", afterword to *Unter dem Sowjetstern: Erlebnisse eine Königsbergerin in Nordostpreußen 1945-1947*, by Elfriede Kalusche (Munich: Schild Verlag, 1981), 226.

²⁰⁵ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 104-106.

command post with the words ‘General, as ordered I have executed a soldier’s saddest task. Here is the Russian envoy.’²⁰⁶ Kerwin’s sentiments underline just how deep-seated the aversion to surrendering was within the army hierarchy.

Finally, around 2 a.m. on 10 April the capitulation was signed.²⁰⁷ The terms of surrender offer a final glimpse into General Lasch’s motivations and concerns and leave no doubt that military considerations were of significantly more importance than the care for the population. None of the ten points listed in the document concerned Königsberg’s remaining civilians. Instead, the document opened with three points guaranteeing officer privileges: assuring that they could keep their blade weapons, an orderly, and their kit.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the document did not put an end to the fighting. Lasch stressed that ‘Eliminating remaining strongholds is the task of the Russian army’, and, as a result, isolated pockets, large enough to be seen by the Army Group reconnaissance air planes, kept fighting until days after the fortress’ capitulation.²⁰⁹ Eventually the fighting moved to the basements, which during the siege had been interconnected. As the capacity of the air-raid shelters built in the war was limited, many people had taken shelter in these basements. To clear them, Soviet soldiers used flamethrowers and grenades, further contributing to the civilian death toll.²¹⁰

Due to three days of preliminary bombardment, four days of heavy street fighting, combined with continuous artillery bombardment and aerial bombardment by 2,500 aircrafts, and the mopping up of isolated units in the days that followed the capitulation, the high civilian casualties in Königsberg are understandable. The more important question of why, despite the presence of a corridor to Pillau, so many civilians were still in the city by April, has nevertheless remained largely unaddressed. Even after it became clear that the final assault was only days away, the fortress command devoted little attention to the evacuation of the civilian population. Meanwhile, opportunities to come to some arrangement with the Soviets to spare civilian lives were spurned. The fortress command categorically refused to take civilian

²⁰⁶ Bruno Kerwin, “Dokument der Geschichte: Königsberg im April 1945,” *Das Ostpreußenblatt*, July 14, 1979, 10.

²⁰⁷ IfZ ZS/ A-2/ 04 – 34: Bruno Kerwin, Herford/ Westfalen, Bruchstrasse 6, den 9. April 1949. Different times of surrender are mentioned, also because German sources adhere to local time and Soviet sources adhere to Moscow time.

²⁰⁸ Eventually his kit was stolen, and Lasch would complain about it until deep in the 1950s to Marshal Vasilevsky in person. Especially as he left behind a burning city, ‘his complaints about personally suffered hardships in captivity, which after all are part of the occupational hazard of an officer, appear embarrassing’. See: “Das Gepäck des Generals,” accessed April 3, 2016, <http://www.zeit.de/1965/34/das-gepaeck-des-generals>

²⁰⁹ Mehner, *Die geheimen Tagesberichte der deutschen Wehrmachtführung*, 369.

²¹⁰ Biddiscombe, *Werwolf*, 215-16.

considerations into account, did not declare Königsberg an open city, and rejected multiple possibilities to discuss the surrender of the garrison. The final capitulation still reveals no sign of empathy towards the remaining population. Therefore, we can only conclude that the Wehrmacht took a conscious decision to expose civilians to the violence of urban warfare. It was the German military itself that was largely responsible for the deaths of thousands of their own civilians.

Conclusion

If we are to analyse the Wehrmacht's approach towards evacuation in 1944-45, we must first understand what evolved over the years before. On the Eastern Front, the concept of 'evacuation' had been steadily hollowed out: when it concerned goods, it came to mean 'theft', and when it concerned people, it came to mean 'displacement'. It was with this mindset that the Wehrmacht returned across the borders of Germany during the summer of 1944. During the final year of the war, it was the German population itself that was to be evacuated by its authorities. The series of evacuations that took place in East Prussia were prompted by the Soviet offensives, although care for the civilian population was of subordinate importance. The deployment of able-bodied civilians at the *Ostwall*, which we discussed in Chapter 1, has already illustrated this, but evacuation would eventually encompass the entire population of East Prussia. This chapter has shown that, for the Wehrmacht, evacuation measures remained, above all, concerned with the securing of goods, and in cases when evacuation did concern civilians, they were above all motivated by the need to clear an area of operations. In the evacuated areas soldiers displayed behaviour that had marked the previous years; indiscriminate destruction and plunder of German property was extremely common, and it did not take long for commanders to realise that the soldiers, brutalised by years of serving on the Eastern Front, exploited the domestic chaos in a similar fashion. These issues remained unresolved until the end of the war.

Whilst most commanders at the OKH and OKW knew that, after 1943, there was little chance to end the war in 'final victory', and, moreover, no coherent strategy existed to achieve that, they still did not champion large-scale evacuation measures that would ensure the safety of civilians. In anticipation of the Soviet offensive, only the evacuation of goods was considered in detail by the military. This, however, did not mean that the Wehrmacht left the evacuation of civilians solely to the Party. The evacuation of civilians was discussed on all

levels: both between the high command and the RVKs, as well as between individual divisions and the Kreisleiters of the areas in which they were situated. As long as the Wehrmacht was ensured manoeuvrability in the area of operations, it willingly followed the orders and requests of the Party. The chaos of the first weeks of the Soviet offensive in January 1945 – so often blamed on the Party and the Soviets – was therefore anticipated by the Wehrmacht.

Once the final Soviet offensive commenced in January 1945, RVKs lost most of their power, and local army commanders became finally responsible for East Prussia, but continued to disregard the plight of the population. As the behaviour of General Lasch shows, the misery of civilians was not merely the collateral damage of operational conduct. The main roads in East Prussia were closed to civilians, a measure that was ruthlessly enforced. Commanders also left the evacuation of civilians to the Party after the front had stabilised in late January, even though it was clear that the Party could not handle the developing refugee crisis. The Wehrmacht expressed no intention to come to the aid of the struggling Party authorities. At national level, the OKW and OKH ranked the evacuation as least important, and instead pushed for the transport of military materiel. To a certain extent, the choices for Königsberg's fortress command were thus limited, but the sheer absence of attention to the local refugee question – especially the situation in the refugee camps on the Samland – is nevertheless striking. This should not necessarily be simply traced to the unwillingness of men like Lasch and Wagner; more likely, this mindset resulted from the indifference the matter caused as a result of the incapability to align the refugee question with the defence of the city. Therefore, in the period between 'Operation Westwind' and the final storming of Königsberg in April 1945, neither Party nor Wehrmacht was willing to devote adequate resources to it.

Whereas in the summer of 1944 Party and Wehrmacht at least sought to form a coherent, albeit limited, evacuation policy, by the spring of 1945 neither concerned itself with the plight of the civilian population. This chapter has sought to explain this change through the lens of 'cumulative radicalisation'. There had long been disputes between the Wehrmacht and the Party concerning the different overlapping authorities and responsibilities, both domestically and abroad. But rather than being a mitigating factor, upon their return from the Soviet Union the Wehrmacht brought with it an institutionalised disregard for civilians and their property as it returned from the Soviet Union, instead devoting all possible resources to fighting defensive battles. Party officials, in turn, believed that they had no option but to follow suit. By 1945, both Party and Wehrmacht had thus manoeuvred themselves into a position where

the only way to demonstrate their value was by focusing on Germany's defence rather than assuring the safety of its population.

4.

Königsberg as a community of violence

Introduction

So far, this thesis has mainly examined the indirect repercussions of the Wehrmacht's presence in Germany. This final chapter will venture beyond these findings, and examine the role of the Wehrmacht in the direct violence during the final months of the National Socialist regime. We will analyse how the defence of Königsberg was organised, and will particularly focus on the role of violence against civilians as a means of coercion. In a recent examination of violence in late-war Germany, Sven Keller found that 'violence not only affected its direct victims, but communicated unambiguous messages to others, displaying the sway and dominance of the new *and* social order that was to be.'¹ Keller, like most historians, primarily explains the violence in 1945 as a continuation of the National Socialist culture of oppression and intimidation.² By doing so, he seemingly ignores that the regime had lost its monopoly on violence, having to share it with the 10-million-strong Wehrmacht that was retreating further and further into Germany territory.³

Once this is recognised, it opens the door to a new approach towards understanding the interaction between the German troops and Party officials on the one hand, and the civilians they were ordered to protect on the other. Examining the agendas of the different actors allows us to reconstruct their place within Königsberg's society during the final months of the war. The year 1945 engendered a wave of German intra-ethnic violence that has largely been pinned on Nazi officials, and, to a lesser extent, on stubborn, indoctrinated troops. Challenging this means prying into an open wound, since the question of why Germans continued to fight in 1945 tends to assign blame.⁴ Yet, as we have seen, given the diminishing reach of the state

¹ Keller, "Volksgemeinschaft and Violence," 227.

² Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*.

³ Wette, *Die Wehrmacht*, 183.

⁴ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 3.

during the last year of the war, a top-down explanation seems inadequate to understand the scope of the violence. This chapter explores this hypothesis.

I. The German soldier returns to Germany

When, in mid-January 1945, the Soviet offensives into Germany commenced, the German military, for the first time since the Wars of Liberation in the early 1800s, had to conduct large-scale operations in the midst of its own population.⁵ As a result of extensive research into the behaviour of the Wehrmacht abroad, the German soldier's radicalised behaviour towards the foreign populations is beyond dispute.⁶ However, how the *Weltanschauungskrieg* affected his general outlook on civilian life as a whole, and how the underlying mindset manifested itself once back in Germany, has hardly been addressed. This section argues that the behavioural patterns that enabled troops to cope with the 'everyday life of the war of annihilation' (as 'a sum of repression, exploitation, enslavement and the exposure to deadly situations') did not disappear once the racial rationale fell away as they were pushed back into Germany.⁷ There were, moreover, unique conditions on the German home front, which allowed violent behaviour to be sustained into 1945. An interesting approach comes from Richard Jung, a German psychiatrist who already in 1961 argued that the particularly violent nature of the war on the Eastern Front, 'coupled with the distance from home and the consequent paucity of leaves, [lessened] the chance of breakdowns among men too preoccupied with fighting for their lives, far from any reminders from home.'⁸ This begs the question what happened when they were fighting at home. By addressing some of the factors that were in play in 1945, this section provides a starting point for the understanding of the seemingly random and uncontrolled late-war violence, although – to prevent writing a justification – we should be careful to draw too far-reaching conclusions from these findings.

⁵ As we already saw, the German army fought in East Prussia in the second half of 1914 and early 1915, but these operations were limited in nature. Moreover, the Russian incursion was unanticipated and the fighting was not placed within the wider context of fighting in the interior, but seen as an exception. See: Watson, *Ring of Steel*, 160-81.

⁶ See: Hartmann, Hürter and Jureit, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte*.

⁷ Christoph Rass, "Verbrecherische Kriegsführung an der Front: Eine Infanteriedivision und ihre Soldaten," in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz eine Debatte*, ed. Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter and Ulrike Jureit (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2014), 89.

⁸ Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich*, 318.

Although Total War demanded ever-greater civilian energies to be devoted to the war effort, civilians and soldiers remained two distinct groups. Although within the Wehrmacht there were ‘overlapping convictions’, and recent research has found that most generals only had a superficial understanding of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, they fully allowed themselves to be integrated in the new German state and increasingly internalised its doctrines.⁹ This should always be kept in mind while examining the Wehrmacht, but to understand the friction between civilians and troops, it is nevertheless necessary to pay attention to the differences, rather than to the similarities. These should be respected, since a dissociation from civilian behaviour is a key aspect of military life, which is not at all unique to the German Wehrmacht. An analysis of recent sociological studies has found that many veterans – especially those who saw combat – have problems adapting to civilian life.¹⁰ Indeed, the inherent purpose of army training has long been to ‘break down the ties that bind young men to society at large’, while at the same time serving to create a new bond based on camaraderie.

By the start of the Second World War, the German army could look back on a long tradition in this regard.¹¹ Omer Bartov has shown the relative ease with which the working class was absorbed in the German army, turning members of the SPD and KPD alike into loyal soldiers.¹² Likewise, Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer have recently argued that, rather than the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, ‘the decisive factor in [the soldiers’] basal orientation – the way in which they perceived and interpreted events – were the military value system and the immediate social environment’, which hardened due to a long exposure to the violence of war.¹³ The wartime behaviour of United States’ marines towards Japanese soldiers and prisoners of war (including the infamous ‘skull-cooking’) indeed shows that brutalisation does not require a dictatorship or years of sustained political indoctrination.¹⁴ Many young German men even decided to join the army as a way to escape the oppressive nature of the National Socialist community.¹⁵

⁹ Johannes Hürter, “The Military Elite and the Volksgemeinschaft,” 266-67

¹⁰ A. MacLean and G. H. Elder Jr., “Military Service in the Life Course,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, (2007): 175-196. These veterans showed increased levels of criminal behaviour and poorer socio-economic development.

¹¹ Martin van Crefeld, *The Culture of War* (New York: Spellmount, 2009), 46-56.

¹² O. Bartov, “The Missing Years: German Workers, German Soldiers,” *German History* 8, no.1 (1990): 50-57, 62-65.

¹³ Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 317-18.

¹⁴ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 116-120.

¹⁵ Thomas Kühne, *Kameradschaft: Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert*, *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 114.

Rather than a National Socialist spirit, the wartime Wehrmacht was above all held together by an atmosphere of *Kameradschaft* (camaraderie), which was built around small core groups. It encouraged ‘real manly’ behaviour, which often translated into debauchery, drinking bouts, minor theft, and sexual escapades; all practices that were strongly condemned back in Germany, but widely accepted in the army. During times of stress on the battlefield, *Kameradschaft* proved to be resilient and, unsurprisingly, was not perceived as negative, since it held troops together and helped to maintain their staying power. However, it also encouraged units to focus their anger against a mutual enemy, and prompted them to react violently against threats to cut comradesly ties.¹⁶ Soldiers constantly felt watched and judged by their comrades; ‘hardness’ was the norm and showing signs of ‘softness’ was frowned upon.¹⁷ As such, *Kameradschaft* further deepened the wedge between the civilian population and the army.

Moreover, during the years prior to 1945, German troops had adopted the *modus operandi* that the local population they interacted with – clearly distinguishable by its habits, behaviour, and language – could not be relied upon. Soviet civilians, in particular, were viewed with the deepest suspicion. This mistrust was not at all focused on men of fighting age: as early as September 1941 Rear Army Group Centre commander General Max von Schneckenborf instructed troops to pay sustained attention to ‘the elderly, women, and adolescents’, since he felt that partisans misused the fact that German troops tended to view these groups with less suspicion.¹⁸ Furthermore, from mid-1943 onwards, Germany’s allies – Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Finland – capitulated and subsequently declared war on Germany, confirming the deep-rooted distrust of German soldiers towards ‘outsiders’.¹⁹

Yet, although it would be tempting to assume that German soldiers felt at ease once back in Germany, the troops’ behaviour in East Prussia revealed that they also questioned their compatriots’ reliability. The lack of trust resulted from the persistent repetition of the ‘stab in the back’ myth, one of the corner stones of German interwar self-assertion, which had stressed that the German army had not been defeated on the battlefield in 1918, but due to a perceived betrayal on the home front.²⁰ Some of these sentiments were rekindled by German civilian behaviour. Increased levels of divorce and suicide directly impacted troops’ morale.²¹ War-

¹⁶ Kühne, *Kameradschaft*, 113-71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 131-35, 140-42

¹⁸ Browning, “The Holocaust: Basis and Objective of the Volksgemeinschaft?”, 224.

¹⁹ Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941-1945* (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2007), 294, 342-45.

²⁰ Geyer, “German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare”, 550-54.

²¹ Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, 37; Christian Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 119-20.

weariness remarks were heard from 1941 onwards and were widespread by 1943.²² By that time Germany was being bombed round the clock, so soldiers on leave heard these kind of remarks among the population much earlier than among their own men, and they were ‘puzzled and shocked by the bad manners of the civilian population.’²³ As a result of the scarcity of food, it was noted that some civilians ‘scolded wounded soldiers because they did not eat in their hospitals, but contested the food in the restaurants.’²⁴ Work discipline in the factories, especially among women and adolescents, deteriorated significantly throughout the war.²⁵ Already in 1943 the fear for a repetition of ‘1918’, a collapse of the home front, was felt so strongly that the Ministry of Propaganda started a campaign to highlight the differences with twenty-five years earlier.²⁶

What further added to the schism between troops and civilians in 1945 was their different appreciation of Germany’s plight. Many soldiers took much longer to realise that the war was lost. And even if this notion had registered, it hardly impacted individual behaviour, since, according to the research of Neitzel and Welzer, ‘actions and decisions in concrete situations are usually made without reference to the “big picture.”’²⁷ This factor logically gained in importance in 1945. Moreover, as was found in the same study, in a potentially hostile environment, soldiers are likely to experience threats, regardless of whether they are real or perceived.²⁸ When we apply these findings to the unsuccessful battles in East Prussia in 1945, we indeed see that troops were often unwilling either to pin defeat on their own failings or on the maturity of Soviet operational conduct, instead looking for other explanations for the defeats. Thus, the proximity of German civilians to the battle field made them a convenient scapegoat. With the frontline running through Germany the fear of desertion grew, since it was correctly assumed that soldiers could more easily go into hiding with the help of local people who spoke the language.²⁹ During the relative calm that predated the Soviet offensive many soldiers had taken part in anti-partisan actions, making it clear that the enemy – once again – most likely looked like an ordinary civilian, or worse still, like a German soldier.³⁰ The fear of

²² Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution*, 141-45.

²³ Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 37, 39; Marlis Steinert, *Hitler’s War and the Germans, Public mood and Attitude during the Second World War* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984), 196-98.

²⁴ Werner, »Bleib übrig!«, 331.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 319, 321.

²⁶ Brochure: “1918 ≠ 1943” (Munich: Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP, 1943)

²⁷ Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 317.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 321-29.

²⁹ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 42-3.

³⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 8/519: Hans Leberecht von Bredow, Oberst der Gendarmerie, Partisanenbekämpfung in Ostpreußen, 2-3.

men wearing the same uniform can best be explained by looking at the casualties of that year: the massive number of casualties had to be made up by equal numbers of new recruits, the man in the next foxhole was increasingly a stranger.³¹ Whereas the average time between recruitment and death of a Wehrmacht recruit drafted in 1939 was four years, in early 1945 this had plummeted to a month.³² Especially worrying was the turnover of officers: tens of thousands of men were hurriedly trained to fill the depleted ranks, although a majority of these men, according to a report of an officer course, 'lack the inner calling of a military and political leader, many even [lack] the willingness to become an officer.'³³ The turnover, in turn, meant that ever fewer troops knew the men that formed their chain of command. On 11 November 1944 the OKH passed down an order concerning 'defensive measures against infiltration of hostile or treacherous elements', which explained how troops should verify orders from unknown officers. The order had already been distributed before, in early August that year, but, 'given the imminent new main attack on the Eastern Front', troops were again to be taught on the matter.³⁴

The OKH was certainly not wrong to do this: one of the Soviet Union's most famous dissidents, Lev Kopelev, whose unit, a political department of a Soviet Front, was responsible in East Prussia for 'propaganda and psychological warfare against the enemy', recalled how special members of the NKFD, dubbed 'commissars of panic', were dropped behind German lines in order to 'spread rumours about the Soviet advance, to yell, "The Russians have broken through!", "Tanks behind us!", and the like at opportune moments, and generally to spread confusion in the German ranks.'³⁵ Still unwilling to pin the mounting defeats on the quality of the Soviet operational conduct, the Wehrmacht and Party kept searching for hostile elements among its own ranks to explain the situation. A circular distributed on February 1, 1945, instructed that 'suspicious persons, whether they wear the uniform of the German Wehrmacht, Organisation Todt, or a Party uniform, are to be carefully checked by the police or the appropriate Wehrmacht patrols. All vehicles that are moving out westwards are therefore to be

³¹ Rüdiger Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1999), 238, 318. Over 560,000 soldiers fell in July and August 1944, at the height of Bagration. In January 1945, as the final Soviet offensives commenced, the number of casualties peaked at 450,000. In February, March and April, between 280,000 and 300,000 German soldiers died each month.

³² Overmans, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, 318.

³³ Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 177-81.

³⁴ BArch RH 2/316, 125-126: OKH/GenStdH/ Op Abt (roem. 1a) Nr.7009/44 g.Kdos. roem.2.Ang. 10.11.1944

³⁵ Lev Kopelev, *No Jail for Thought* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), 15, 35.

checked with particular care.’³⁶ Yet, *all* civilians moved west, fleeing ahead of the Soviet troops, and every time a unit fell back it was westwards. As such, any move to safety could be deemed as suspicious.

What compounded matters was that the German rank-and-file was given considerable leeway in judging whether actions they observed were a threat to fighting strength. In November 1944, the OKH passed down orders concerning deserters, stating that soldiers intending to desert were to be fired upon by their own comrades.³⁷ This was once again stressed in the ‘Provisions on the conduct of officers and men in times of crisis’, distributed on 28 January 1945. Not only was the use of deadly force encouraged if this was considered the only way to maintain discipline, the provisions also opened the door for further indiscriminate violence: ‘He who, in the case of major breaches of duty, acts courageously and responsibly (...) shall not be held accountable, even if he exceeds his powers.’³⁸ This measure potentially allowed every soldier to become both judge, jury, and executioner. Despite the apprehensive atmosphere that was present in the army, and despite the fact that these men – often stressed and burned out after long periods of fighting – could hardly be considered as objective, they were still actively conditioned to look at their surroundings for signs of defeatism and sabotage.³⁹ Thus, fanatics within the army were not only enabled to kill suspicious alien elements, they were also encouraged to be active participants in maintaining discipline among their own ranks and act upon it personally when breached. For example, the Volkssturm Knight’s Cross holder, Tiburzy, was not only hailed by Kreisleiter Wagner for knocking out five Soviet tanks, but also for the fact that he shot a platoon commander who had ordered his man to fall back.⁴⁰ Similarly, in a post-war questionnaire, *Oberstleutnant* Hans-Heinrich Wendtlandt, a regimental commander, told how in late January 1945 he put a *Luftwaffe* major in front of a court-martial after he had lost his nerves, although, Wendtlandt claimed, ‘the

³⁶ BArch NS 6/354, 54: Der Leiter der Partei-Kanzlei, Führerhauptquartier, den 1.2.1945. Rundschreiben 47/45 g. Betrifft: Feindpropaganda. The ‘Organisation Todt’ (OT) was a civil and military engineering group that worked in close cooperation with Nazi authorities.

³⁷ BArch RW 4/725, 14 – Maßnahmen gegen Überläufer, Landesverrat in der Kriegsgefangenschaft

³⁸ Der Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht: “Bestimmungen über das Verhalten von Offizier und Mann in Krisenzeiten”, 28 January, 1945. Printed in: Rudolf Absolon, *Das Wehrmachtstrafrecht im 2. Weltkrieg - Sammlung der grundlegenden Gesetze, Verordnungen und Erlasse* (Kornelimünster: Bundesarchiv, Abt. Zentralnachweisstelle, 1958), 93-94.

³⁹ O. Bartov, “The Conduct of War: Soldiers and the Barbarization of Warfare” *The Journal of Modern History* 64, Supplement: Resistance Against the Third Reich (1992), 35-8.

⁴⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 140.

verdict [had] not become known' to him.⁴¹ These two cases show signs of what is referred to as 'forward panic', which the sociologist Randall Collins describes as follows:

A forward panic starts with tension and fear in a conflict situation. This is the normal condition of violent conflict, but here the tension is prolonged and builds up (...) There is a shift from relative passive – waiting, holding back until one is in a position to bring a conflict to a head – to be fully active. When the opportunity finally arrives, the tension/fear comes out in an emotional rush.⁴²

On occasions when this violence could not be directed at the enemy who had caused the panic, it was directed at the “next-best” threat: cowards or shirkers. A SS situation report from Königsberg, dated 17 February 1945, seemed to illustrate the widespread willingness of troops to have their say in matters of life and death: ‘Among the troops there is huge outrage about the flight of doctors and the hospital personnel. It is being demanded that those who fled, as well as the officers of the [abandoned and ignited] ammunition depots, who have also fled, are to be executed.’⁴³ Some soldiers nevertheless contemplated abandoning their comrades. In a surrounded fortress with a stable front, moreover, defecting – as such becoming part of the ‘*Verrätergesindel*’, traitor scum – was even more likely to occur since troops had more time to weigh their options.⁴⁴ Every man who eventually decided to defect played into his comrades’ confirmation bias. The function and position that fortresses occupied in Germany’s defence, moreover, made it more likely that soldiers with mental health problems were garrisoned there, which, in turn, increased the chance of violence. As the war progressed, doctors saw a sharp increase in chronic stomach disorder, which was often a symptom of deeper psychological problems. From mid-1943 special ‘stomach battalions’ were established, which were to occupy positions away from the front. Some of the garrisons of Königsberg’s forts consisted of these kinds of units.⁴⁵ To compound matters, being encircled in fortresses – unflatteringly referred to as ‘Kessel’ (boilers) – weighed heavy on troops, and in a number of cases even led to a phenomenon referred to as ‘*Kesselpsychose*’ (boiler psychosis).⁴⁶

All these factors made it likely that Wehrmacht violence against civilians would not be limited to occupied territories. Considering the state of mind regarding civilians, and the

⁴¹ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/579, 9: Hans-Heinrich Wendtlandt, Oberstleutnant, Kommandeur des Grenadierregiments 1094: „Der Endkampf“ (undated)

⁴² Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 85.

⁴³ BArch NS19/2068, 7. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle, Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum Königsberg, 15.2.45.

⁴⁴ BArch NS19/2068, 62. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle, Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum Königsberg, 13.3.45; “Verachtung dem Verrätergesindel,” *Preußische Zeitung*, February 11, 1945.

⁴⁵ Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich*, 316; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 111.

⁴⁶ Frieser, “Irrtümer und Illusionen,” 521–524.

mental strain caused by the military defeats, coupled with the increasing willingness and reliance on soldiers themselves to pass judgement, there is much reason to assume that violence could, in a domestic setting, retain much of its arbitrary character. But one major difference between the Soviet Union and Germany was the lawlessness in the former, which would suggest that the violence in Germany could be curbed once soldiers were subject to domestic laws. The next section will examine how this issue played out.

II. Upholding military law in Königsberg

As we have seen, on 28 January 1945, General Lasch accepted the position as fortress commander. Establishing his authority, especially with regard to the Party, was one of his primary concerns during the first days of his appointment. This section will examine how Lasch cemented his position by establishing a ‘Wehrmacht rule of law’ in Königsberg. By pushing through martial law in the city before the Party could regroup itself, he presented it as a *fait accompli*.⁴⁷ As we will see, this would in turn enable Lasch to pursue his own agenda more effectively. Moreover, the implementation of martial law impressed a military way of thinking on the city, thereby giving credence to the Wehrmacht as the ultimate authority.

Prior to Lasch’s appointment as fortress commander, the commander of the 1st infantry division, General Schittnig, had held that position, as his division was the only unit to arrive in the city more or less intact, and with a staff large enough to oversee the running of the fortress.⁴⁸ When Lasch took over the city was in a state of chaos and therefore, upon his appointment, he asked for, and was given, a 100-man staff that had earlier been part of the 1st infantry division. The type of character that was expected for these positions was something that Hitler himself had clearly communicated since the earliest beginnings of the fortress strategy. On 21 June, 1944, he encouraged Generalleutnant Karl-Wilhelm von Schlieben, the commander of the encircled *Festung* Cherbourg, to ‘put the toughest men in the fortress on your staff and root out

⁴⁷ H. Heer, “Extreme Normalität. Generalmajor Gustav Freiherr von Mauchenheim gen. Bechtolsheim: Umfeld, Motive und Entschlussbildung eines Holocaust-Täters” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51 no. 8 (2003): 752-53.

⁴⁸ BAarch Ost-Dok. 10/888, 30: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Einsatz der 1. Ostpreußischen Infanteriedivision (1956/59) Auszugsweise Abschrift aus dem Tagebuch Prof. Schelsky (Batl. Adj. Ers. Batl. Füs.Rgt. 22)

every appearance of cowardice or timidity.⁴⁹ In Königsberg, the bulk of these men, especially its officers, came from the city itself, as it had served as the garrison city of some of its regiments for over 300 years.⁵⁰ The symbolic value of these men defending their home city was not lost on the editors of the *Preußische Zeitung*: ‘The fortunes of war have willed that numerous sons of the East Prussian *Heimat* have become the defenders of their Gau-capital.’⁵¹ Of course, it was not so much the ‘fortunes of war’, but rather the deliberate choices of the OKH, which in August 1944 had transferred the division from Nord-Ukraine to Army Group Centre to bolster the defence of East Prussia.⁵² If psychological considerations had been part of the decision to move the division, the OKH was certainly successful in this regard, as soldiers appeared to gain motivation from fighting for their province. In *Feldpost* letters to their families they shared their concerns about the fate of East Prussia, but also expressed great pride in defending it.⁵³ Nonetheless, the might of the Soviet advance in January 1945 had destroyed much of the quasi-romantic notion that they were fighting for their *Heimat*. On 26 January 1945, the war diary of the 1st infantry division noted: ‘It is almost unbearable here – the city that we once left so happy and confident for victory is in great commotion.’⁵⁴ Abroad German troops had learned to quell unrest by executing the many ‘criminal orders’, especially by the use of collective punishment.⁵⁵ But things were more complex in Germany.

Königsberg had been a fortress since late 1944, but martial law, the defining characteristic of the Königsberg’s fortress era, was only introduced as Soviet troops approached the city, for which Lasch, as fortress commander, bore the final responsibility.⁵⁶ Germany’s wartime laws were in constant flux: when Lasch took command, the most recent changes to the ‘Wartime Criminal Code of Procedure’ (*Kriegsstrafverfahrensordnung*) were barely two

⁴⁹ TNA HW 1/2992, 2: West Europe, 21 June 1944

⁵⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 38-39; Werner Richter, *Die 1. (ostpreussische) Infanterie-Division*, 150; BArch Ost-Dok.8/591, 43: Günther Heysing, Oberleutnant, Kriegsberichter, „Von Leningrad bis Königsberg“ (December 1953)

⁵¹ Herbert Schellhammer, “Unsere Verpflichtung!,” *Festung Königsberg*, February 2, 1945.

⁵² Georg Tessin, *Verbände und Truppen der deutschen Wehrmacht und Waffen SS im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939-1945, Zweiter Band: Die Landstreitkräfte 1-5* (Frankfurt a.M: Verlag E.S. Mittler, 1966), 21.

⁵³ Humburg, »Ich glaube, daß meine Zeit bald gezählt sein dürfte«, 254-59.

⁵⁴ BArch RH 26-1/100, 83: KTB der I.ID (aufgezeichnet von Hptm. Albrecht Meier-Hartigshof) 1939-1945, 23. Januar – 26. Januar 1945.

⁵⁵ See, for example: Norbert Müller, *Okkupation, Raub, Vernichtung: Dokumente zur Besatzungspolitik der faschistischen Wehrmacht auf sowjetischem Territorium 1941 bis 1944* (Berlin: Militärverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1980). On collective punishment, see: 64-66.

⁵⁶ BArch RH 2/332, 14. OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt/AbtLds Bef Nr. 1877/45 geh. 2.2.45 J.A. gez. Wenck ‘Commander of Festung Königsberg, Gen. d. Inf. Lasch, has the right of ratification and repeal [in proceedings before the military tribunal] (Bestätigungs- und Aufhebungsrecht im Verfahren vor dem Feldkriegsgericht) as described by gem. § 79, Abs. 3, Ziff. 2 KstVo. (Kriegsstrafverfahrensordnung) Compare service instructions for fortress commandants’

weeks old.⁵⁷ So, rather than discussing their finer details, we will try to define how they were interpreted. Already by the beginning of the Second World War, the German military court system had been fully aligned with National Socialist thought. Death sentences were mainly reserved for cases of desertion and the ‘decomposition’ of military strength (*Wehrkraftzersetzung*) and, as such, they differed little from earlier military courts. What was different was the way that a verdict was reached. From August 1939 onwards, judges were ordered not necessarily to base their judgements on the facts alone, but rather to give a verdict that would serve the ‘people’s and military community’ (*Volks- und Wehrgemeinschaft*).⁵⁸ As some judges prior to the court proceedings already knew that they would pass the death sentence, they were known to resort to political tirades, rather than explaining their verdict along judicial lines.⁵⁹ Wolfram Wette found that military courts allowed themselves significant leeway by basing death sentences on the rather broad concepts of abetting the enemy or causing a disadvantage to their own military.⁶⁰ By the end of 1944, according to the research of Manfred Messerschmidt and Fritz Wüllner, 26,000 to 27,000 people had been executed by army courts, 18,500 of whom were soldiers.⁶¹ The historian Stephen Welch has shown that the traumatic defeat of the First World War, during which only eighteen German soldiers had been sentenced to death for desertion, severely impacted the conduct of the National Socialist military justice system, concluding that ‘The relative moderation of German military justice in the First World War came under sharp attack in the immediate post-war years by critics who argued that it was one of the factors which had contributed to Germany’s defeat.’⁶² This lenience was thoroughly rooted out during the Second World War, while also the Wehrmacht itself enforced a much stricter self-discipline, even without being pressured by National Socialist bodies.⁶³

⁵⁷ Reichsgesetzblatt Teil I, Nr. 3 Ausgegeben in Berlin am 22. Januar 1945: Elfte Verordnung zur Durchführung und Ergänzung, Verordnung über das militärische Strafverfahren im Kriege und bei besonderem Einsatz. Vom 11. Januar 1945.

⁵⁸ Ulrich Baumann and Magnus Koch, „*Was damals Recht war...“ Soldaten und Zivilisten vor Gerichten der Wehrmacht* (Berlin, Be.Bra verlag, 2008), 27, 30.

⁵⁹ Wolfram Wette and Detlef Vogel, *Das letzte Tabu: NS-Militärjustiz und »Kriegsverrat«*, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007), 32

⁶⁰ Wette and Vogel, *Das letzte Tabu*, 23

⁶¹ Manfred Messerschmidt, Fritz Wüllner, *Die Wehrmachtjustiz im Dienste des Nationalsozialismus. Zerstörung einer Legende* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1987), 78-79.

⁶² Stephen Welch, “‘Harsh but Just’? German Military Justice in the Second World War: A Comparative Study of the Court-Martialing of German and US Deserters,” *German History* 17, no. 3 (1999): 376; Kershaw, *The End*, 220; Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 63.

⁶³ Robert Loeffel, “Soldiers and Terror: Re-evaluating the Complicity of the Wehrmacht in Nazi Germany,” *German History* 27, no. 4, (2009), 514–530. Using *Sippenhaft*, or family liability punishment, Robert Loeffel proposed that rather than reflecting the desire of the Gestapo, ‘it was the *Wehrmacht* itself that drove the attempt to apply terror’ against its own troops.

Welch has stressed that severe punishments were not only meted out because they ensured ‘absolute obedience and discipline’, but also because desertion revealed the soldier’s inability to grasp the importance of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁶⁴ A deserting soldier was labelled a *Wehrmachtsschädling*, a military parasite, which, as Welch found, often sealed his fate even before the trial itself: ‘The invocation of the deserter as a parasite, an asocial outsider, a degenerate, or a psychopathic inferior meant that it was no longer necessary to devote much attention to discovering the actual motives of the individual deserter; it was sufficient simply to demonstrate that his type represented a threat to the community.’⁶⁵

Alongside this, there was a profusion of public executions of foreign civilians, especially on the Eastern Front. Collective punishment had been instituted as German troops invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, and mass executions, mostly under the rubric of quelling incipient guerrilla activity, became standard practice.⁶⁶ The many pictures of hanged Soviet partisans – either real or supposed – taken by German soldiers suggest that there was a kind of gratification in their open display, if not to say some pride. In the war against Judeo-Bolshevism, the so-called *Weltanschauungskrieg*, the line between combatant and non-combatant blurred, and the rise of the partisan movement meant that German soldiers developed a tendency to consider civilians as a legitimate threat. Although this should certainly not be seen as an excuse for the excessive amounts of violence in the Soviet Union, or the violence that lay ahead, it might help to explain the behaviour of German troops in 1945. The way civilians were dealt with fell well outside the rules of war set out by the Hague conventions. As *Generaloberst* Franz Halder noted in his war diary, their prosecution was ‘no job for Military Courts (...) This war be very different from the war in the West. In the East, harshness today means lenience in the future.’⁶⁷

For most of the war the home front and front line were separated by hundreds of miles, but in late 1944 the two came together. How did military courts operate once back on the home front in relation to civilians? Immediately after his appointment Lasch established a fortress court.⁶⁸ Theoretically, it was the task of the military police, *Feldgendarmarie*, and officer patrols, *Streifen*, to bring in deserters to face judgement by this court. However, since the

⁶⁴ Welch, ‘Harsh but Just’?, 381-82.

⁶⁵ Welch, ‘Harsh but Just’?, 382-83.

⁶⁶ Neitzel and Welzer, *Soldaten*, 329.

⁶⁷ Hamburg Institute for Social Research, *Crimes of the German Wehrmacht: Dimensions of a war of annihilation 1941 – 1944, An outline of the exhibition* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2004), 7.

⁶⁸ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 129; BArch Ost-Dok. 10/890, Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Die Einschließung und Belagerung von Königsberg: Berichte betrifft Königsberg, 127. Presiding judge: Oberfeldrichter Walter von Zeddelmann, Assessor: Oberstleutnant d.R. Wilhelm Strüvy.

immediate defence of Königsberg and the restoration of order were of overriding importance, they were permitted to pass their own judgement, and subsequently act on it. This procedure, known as ‘drumhead court-martial’ (*Standgericht*), had developed throughout the war. In June 1943 Hitler had ordered the establishment of ‘Special drumhead courts-martial’ which served to ‘fast-track the judgement of political crimes’ worthy of death or imprisonment, stressing that ‘the enforcement should immediately follow the confirmation of the judgment.’⁶⁹ On 20 September 1944, the legislation was expanded: ‘So far, the military and general criminal courts were appointed separately for trial of political offences directed against the community. The Total War does not justify this anymore. It requires a unified defence [against] any decomposition of the national resilience of our people.’⁷⁰ Three days later, on 23 September, the OKW passed down ‘Measures against disintegration in the troops’. In the immediate rear of Army Groups, ‘*Feldjägerkommandos*’ were to crack down on the spot against signs of disintegration ‘with extreme severity’ to prevent soldiers from detaching themselves from the frontline and just hanging around in the rear to await defeat, as had happened in 1918.⁷¹ Keller has argued that as a result of the bugbear of 1918, the manner in which *Standgerichte* proceeded ‘assumed an avenging character’ against those who did not want to continue to fight to the end, as surrender led to chaos and humiliation.⁷² This mindset, bolstered by the language found in the different orders, encouraged these men to act both autonomously and extremely ruthlessly, and General Lasch, as the supreme legal authority in the fortress, allowed the military police and the *Streifen* virtually unrestricted leeway.⁷³

The chief editor of the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, Martin Wegener, closely observed the behaviour of these men, and illustrated that the distinction between soldiers and civilians seemed to disappear:

Officer patrols were sent through the basements to fetch the hiding soldiers, who in some cases had already changed to the civilian clothing that was present in abundance in the abandoned houses.

The vast majority of the soldiers willingly obeyed the command to return to their units at the front.

⁶⁹ Moll, *Führer-Erlasse 1939-1945*, 342. Doc. 255: *Verfolgung politischer Straftaten in der Wehrmacht*, 21 June 1943.

⁷⁰ Moll, *Führer-Erlasse 1939-1945*, 458. Doc 364: *Erlaß des Führers über die Verfolgung politischer Straftaten von Angehörigen der Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS und Polizei*, 20 September 1944.

⁷¹ “Befehl des OKW gegen Auflösungserscheinungen in den Truppenverbände (Auszug)” quoted in: DZW 6, 96. See also: Jürgen Förster, “Die Niederlage der Wehrmacht: Das Ende des »Dritten Reiches«,” in *Seelower Höhen 1945*, ed. Roland Foerster (Hamburg: Verlag E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1998), 10; Two months later, the tone again hardened. See: BArch, NS 6/354, Maßnahmen zur Ausrottung von Etappenerscheinungen.- Befehl des Chefs des OKW vom 28. Nov. 1944.- B 19/45g. See also: Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 19,44.

⁷² Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*, 421; Geyer, “Endkampf 1918 and 1945”, 42-43.

⁷³ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 57-59; Wette and Vogel, *Das letzte Tabu*, 24-25.

There was also resistance of the most serious kind, which required the strongest application of the laws of war. More common than among soldiers were the executions among the plunderers, thieves and murderers from the ranks of *Ostarbeiter*, refugees and locals. The drumhead courts that were deployed for these culprits only knew one punishment, even for small thefts: death through hanging. One of the assessors, an *Ortsgruppenleiter* (local leader) of the Nazi Party who normally oversaw the administration of a large hospital, otherwise known as an unusually good-natured man, answered to the question, whether he could justify such judgments for his conscience: "They and we are helped the best with it, and this is decisive for me." Incidentally, headquarters demanded the speedy removal of the bodies of the hanged, among whom were women.⁷⁴

Indeed, the fortress command readily invoked the threat of summary execution. Werner Terpitz, a young forced recruit of the 561st Volksgrenadier Division remembered: 'On big yellow posters on the hoardings stood: All sixteen- to sixty-year olds have until 3 February to enrol in the Volkssturm or the Wehrmacht. Failure to comply is punishable by death.'⁷⁵ From a military point of view the patrols were highly successful, as they ensured that over 20,000 men, mostly stragglers, were returned to the front line, initially as 100-man emergency units, which later, when the front stabilised, could be incorporated into divisions.⁷⁶ The process of becoming part of these emergency units is best described by Guy Sajer, a veteran of the *Großdeutschland* division:

Our group was gone over with a fine-toothed comb by the *Kommandos* responsible for sending men back to their original units. As they didn't know where most of these units were, the best they could do was to form the strays into new groups, which everyone wished to avoid. These new units, with no official affiliation or assignments, simply sapped the actual strength of the army as recorded by military registration and on the maps at headquarters. The men assigned to these varied and unmeasurable groups could not be fitted into any logical organisation. Already classified as missing or dead by their original units, they were officially considered dead, and used as unexpected reinforcements whom there was no reason to spare.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ ASK 22034-4 Auszugsweise Abschrift aus einem Bericht von Wegener, Der Untergang von Königsberg (undated), 1. The presence of Party-officials in this procedure will be discussed below.

⁷⁵ Werner Terpitz, "Das letzte Aufgebot: Mit sechzehn Jahren als Soldat im untergehenden Königsberg," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 16, 1985, sec. Ereignisse und Gestalten

⁷⁶ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 58, BArch RH 26-1/112 1, 155 Hans-Joachim Schröder: Die letzte Monate des Div. Füs. Batl. 1; BArch Ost-Dok.8/586, 2: Dr. Victor Werbke, Stabsoffizier beim Festungskommandanten von Königsberg. Werbke adds that the number was close to 10,000 within four days.

⁷⁷ Sajer, *The Forgotten Soldier*, 140-41. This account stems from late 1942, but the process had not changed in the years that followed.

With the introduction of martial law, everyone in Königsberg could be measured by the same yardstick: the ability to contribute to the city's defence. During the first week of the siege, the *Streifen* showed a complete disregard for the physical and mental state of those they encountered, and cracked down on any perceived threat, of which – in their eyes – desertion was the most obvious manifestation. Men were not allowed to leave the city anymore, while doctors were forbidden to write sick leaves.⁷⁸ Anyone who refused to go to the front was effectively deemed a deserter.

The quality of the men the *Streifen* picked up appeared to be of the least importance. Lothar Finke, an Eastern Front veteran who arrived in the city in late January, recalled that the searches by these *Heldengreifkommandos*, 'hero-snatcher commandos', were not limited solely to soldiers, but also focused on 'old, recovering and partly disabled men' and was an 'unpleasant and unfriendly activity.'⁷⁹ Despite his young age, even Hans-Burkhardt Sumowski noted civilians' fear and resentment of the military police.⁸⁰ Adolf Klein, who was sent with his Volkssturm unit to Königsberg, remembered how his men desperately tried to avoid being picked up by *Streifen*. When they were eventually rounded up, he felt treated like 'herded cattle, which would be brought to the slaughter in the coming hours.'⁸¹ Indeed, Volkssturm men disproportionately fell victim to drumhead courts, since their units were most likely to disintegrate. Even though they had been incorporated into the military command structure, their battalions were often only to be deployed in the defence of their home towns. When this failed – which it usually did in the first weeks of the Soviet offensive – Volkssturm units were likely to retreat in disorderly fashion. Many of these men had been called up to serve in the defence of East Prussia only after the offensive had already commenced, and, unlike other units, they had never experienced a retreat before.⁸² Poorly supplied, poorly armed, poorly clothed, and often in poor health, the men were soldiers only in name, which, moreover, most felt they were.⁸³

⁷⁸ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/602 Gustav Makowka, Bürgermeister a.D., 5; GAKO "Nemetski Fondi", H54, No 48, Opis 1, Delo 11.1.9: Abschrift Wehrmachtkommandantur Königsberg (Pr) Abt. IIa, den 10.2.1945, Standort-Befehl.

⁷⁹ Lothar Finke, *Eine silberne Uhr in Königsberg* (Frankfurt a.M: Fischer Verlag, 1993), 35-7.

⁸⁰ Sumowski, *"Jetzt war ich ganz allein auf der Welt"*, 59.

⁸¹ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/598 Adolf Klein, Einsatz der Volkssturm in Königsberg 1945, 44-47.

⁸² BArch RH 2/ 331b, 74: Fernschreiben gez. Guderian, Generaloberst und Chef des Generalstabes des Heeres. OKH / GenStdH / Op Abt / Abt Lds Bef Nr. 539/45 g.Kdos. 14.1.45

⁸³ Shortly after the war, the psychologists Shils and Janowitz rightly pointed out that Volkssturm men had 'not broken their family ties to the slightest extent. They still remained members of a primary group which did not fuse into the military primary group. See: Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948), 288.

Even though the officers of the 1st infantry division were ordered to crack down on people originating from their immediate peace time surroundings, they did not consider their assignment to conflict with their conscience.⁸⁴ ‘The first task is to establish order,’ wrote Hauptmann Lenz, an adjutant in the staff of the 1st infantry division, after the war. ‘With the help of the wounded officers of the division stragglers are picked up, collected and placed in emergency units and quickly thrown [into battle] at threatened parts of the front.’⁸⁵ In their efforts to search for deserters the officers of the 1st infantry division showed no leniency and seemed proud of their behaviour, as the war diary of the division attests: ‘With an iron broom the streets are “swept”,’ an officer of the 1st division noted in the divisional war diary in late January 1945. ‘We succeed to restore the order everywhere in a few days. (...) Saboteurs and shirkers are bore down on – nasty rumour-mongers will be put a stop shortly.’⁸⁶ On 2 February, *Generaloberst* Lothar Rendulic, the commander of Army Group North, which fought in East Prussia, passed down a circular to his subordinates to clarify how they should proceed upon encountering stragglers: ‘From 3 February onwards, all soldiers of all branches of the Wehrmacht that are encountered away from their unit, in streets, towns or refugee columns, or at field dressing stations without being wounded, and declare to be stragglers seeking their unit, are to be summarily shot! Flying courts-martial are immediately employed to this end.’⁸⁷ In the post-war years, this type of orders has caused Rendulic to be viewed as a dyed-in-the-wool Nazi, but the order was eventually copied by all commanders in Germany, including more moderate men, such as Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, the Commander in Chief in the West. Rather than a testimony of loyalty towards the Nazi regime, it is more likely that men like Rendulic saw the orders as a continuation of military law.⁸⁸

On 10 February, just over a week after the encirclement of Königsberg, *The Times* reported on the measures taken by General Lasch: ‘Königsberg is now in a desperate plight, though the garrison commander has repeated his orders to fight to the last and rounded up some

⁸⁴ Within the Holocaust historiography, this theme has extensively been studied. See particularly: Browning, *Ordinary Men*

⁸⁵ BArch Msg 2 / 240, 35: Militärische Berichte über den Kampf in Ostpreußen 1944-1945: Kampf um Ostpreußen 1945 Von Hauptmann d. R. Lenz, Adj. Beim Stab der 1. Inf. Div. Frühjahr 1956

⁸⁶ BArch RH 26-1/100, 84: KTB der I.ID (aufgezeichnet von Hptm. Albrecht Meier-Hartigshof) 1939-1945, 29. Januar – 15. Februar 1945.

⁸⁷ Heinz Schön, *Flucht aus Ostpreußen 1945, Die Menschenjagd der Roten Armee* (Kiel: Arndt-Verlag, 2001), 25-26.

⁸⁸ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 18.

1,500 deserters for punishment duties on the front line.’⁸⁹ In the post-war years Lasch downplayed the scope of his actions and the reach of the *Streifen*. He had one of his former subordinates, *Oberstleutnant* Dr. Sauvant, write down his recollections, rather than presenting his own. ‘In the interest of maintaining discipline it was impossible to avoid, in special cases of blatant cowardice and desertion, the enforcement of court martial death sentences by shooting.’ Sauvant subsequently stated that for Lasch, as the commander with the final responsibility, this was tough, but nonetheless considered an ‘overriding requirement of duty’.⁹⁰ The Wehrmacht’s duty, those days, was keeping the city out of the hands of the Soviets, something that was actively conveyed to the civilian population. After the summary execution of two soldiers at the *Nordbahnhof* in the afternoon of 1 February, Major Ipsen, the NSFO of Festung Königsberg, gave a speech to those present, which was printed the next day in the ‘*Festung Königsberg*’ newspaper: ‘With the enemy at the gates of the city’, noted Ipsen, ‘it is important that every one of us, soldier and Volkssturm man, woman and Hitler Youth, keeps their nerve in these critical hours, and is firm and determined to persevere and to fight.’ He continued that ‘It must and will succeed that Königsberg’s brave battle community not only withstands these hours of crisis (...), but also decisively contributes to the imminent turning point!’⁹¹ Passers by often witnessed people being executed near the *Nordbahnhof* and the *Hauptbahnhof* during the last days of January in Königsberg. These were not only soldiers strung up for desertion, but also civilians executed for looting. Many of these executions were obligatory to visit for soldiers to deter them from deserting, and bodies were often left for days, with placards attached to their chest indicating both their ‘crime’ and, in case of soldiers, their former unit.⁹² By the end of January order had returned in Königsberg, and the *Streifen* and military police had played an important role in achieving this. In some cases, civilians had personally asked them to drive away plunderers, showing that they became almost immediately recognised as figures of authority.⁹³

The visible presence of the *Streifen*, and the harsh line they took, were the clearest manifestations that a change of power had occurred in Königsberg. In his work on the first year of the Weimar Republic, Mark Jones points to the ‘pedagogical violence’ used in Berlin by the

⁸⁹ Our Special Correspondent. “On Main Road to Stargard.” *Times* (London, England) 10 Feb. 1945: 4. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 7 Mar. 2016. This information almost certainly reached the *Times* via Soviet military sources.

⁹⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 59.

⁹¹ “Feiglinge werden erschossen.” *Festung Königsberg*, February 2, 1945.

⁹² BArch Ost-Dok. 8/602 Gustav Makowka, Bürgermeister a.D., 5; Sumowski, “Jetzt war ich ganz allein auf der Welt”, 61; Clappier, *Festung Königsberg*, 93; Guido Knopp, *Der Sturm*, 81; Boree, *Ein Abschied*, 38-39.

⁹³ Lehndorff, *Ostpreussisches Tagebuch*, 28-9.

newly-formed German state to ‘found its authority and prove its will to rule’: this section shows that similar motivations were at play in Königsberg in 1945.⁹⁴ The readiness to crack down on perceived stragglers, saboteurs, and shirkers – including civilians – distinguished the Wehrmacht from the Party.⁹⁵ There should be no doubt that violence and authority were intrinsically linked in Königsberg, and that, after serving on the Eastern Front, many commanders had considerably more expertise in this regard. This made the army the major stakeholder in the public violence against the local community. Yet authority could not rest on violence alone. The next section will therefore examine what efforts the fortress command made to accommodate the population of Königsberg, and assess how these shaped the understanding between civilians and the former.

III. Königsberg under siege

Two seemingly contradicting trends are clearly distinguishable in Königsberg. As we will see in the subsequent sections, the fortress command cracked down on any sign of disintegration. At the same time, both Party and Wehrmacht invested much energy in maintaining a sense of normality in the fortress.⁹⁶ To explain this paradoxical behaviour, this section consists of two parts. Firstly, it provides an overview of the efforts that were made to accommodate the civilian population. We will then turn to the reservations and concerns the fortress command connected to these efforts. The conclusion of this section will establish how this behaviour related to the broader German context, in order to eventually determine how it tied into the radicalisation that took place in 1945.

During Königsberg’s siege, the fortress command mainly seemed to have operated with two principles regarding civilians: assuring their basic needs, most importantly food and housing, and keeping track of their movement. In the first weeks of the encirclement, in early February, the provisioning of the civilian population was well-organised. As a document concerning the provisioning of ‘fortresses of which their inclusion at least has to be reckoned

⁹⁴ Jones, *Founding Weimar*, 4.

⁹⁵ BArch RH 24-9/ 212, 7: Generalkommando IX. A.K. Abt. IIa/IIb Nr.3762/44, K.Gef. Stand, den 29.10.44, Korps-Tagesbefehl Nr.10. “Strafsachen sind stets Eilsachen!”

⁹⁶ On the shifting of the concept of normality, see: Hannes Heer: Extreme Normalität. Generalmajor Gustav Freiherr von Mauchenheim gen. Bechtolsheim: Umfeld, Motive und Entschlussbildung eines Holocaust-Täters in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft (ZfG)* 51. Jahrgang 2003 Heft 8, 729-753

with', dated 25 February 1945, shows, food supply for fortress cities was assured well in advance of their encirclement.⁹⁷ Moreover, as Königsberg had been a major supply hub for the Eastern Front, it housed many warehouses that contained food stocks, and the fortress could rely on the plentiful cattle that had been brought in from the east of the province.⁹⁸ Table 1 indicates that in a number of aspects the weekly rations in Königsberg fell below the national level during the siege. But, contrary to the statistics, most civilians remember the fortress era as a time when food was well distributed, and few complained about food shortages.⁹⁹

| | National weekly ration 5 February to 4 March. ¹⁰⁰ | Weekly ration Königsberg 5 to 11 February. ¹⁰¹ | Weekly ration Königsberg 12 to 18 February. ¹⁰² |
|--|---|--|---|
| Bread | 2,225 grams | 2,500 grams | 2,500 grams |
| Fat | 156,25 grams | 150 grams | 125 grams |
| Meat | 362,5 grams | 375 grams | 250 grams |
| Sugar | 312,5 grams | 200 grams | 125 grams |
| Spreads | - | 187,5 grams | 125 grams |
| Cereals | 225 grams | 150 grams | 125 grams |
| Legumes | - | - | 125 grams |
| Coffee subst. | 31,25 grams | 62,5 grams | 62,5 grams |
| Cheese | 15,63 grams | - | - |
| Potatoes | 2,500 grams | Unknown* | Unknown |
| Fish | 62,5 grams | - | - |
| * On 23 February, the Preußische Zeitung: 'maximum 2 kg potatoes per person per week'. | | | |

Table 1: Weekly rations in Königsberg, February 1945

Furthermore, pregnant and breastfeeding women received extra rations of nutrients, butter and milk, babies received extra fats, but also diabetics received extra meat and nutrients, while also

⁹⁷ BArch RW4/710 Betr. Verpflegungsbevorratung der Festungen und Verteidigungsbereiche. F.H.Qu., 25.2.1945. This document does not discuss Königsberg, but a number of other 'Eastern Fortresses', such as Gotenhafen, Danzig, Kolberg, Breslau, Olmütz and Pressburg

⁹⁸ BArch NS 19/2068, 19: An Reichsführer-SS Betrifft: Meldungen aus den Ostraum, Königsberg, 21.2.45.; Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, 205; Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 477.

⁹⁹ Richard Overy, *Historical Atlas of the Third Reich* (Middlesex: Penguin 1996) 94 – 95; Noakes and Pridham 513-15.

¹⁰⁰ Numbers are from monthly rations of February 1945 as cited in Noakes, *Nazism 1919/1945 Volume 4: The German Home Front in World War II*, 515, divided by four.

¹⁰¹ Numbers were printed in the Preußische Zeitung of 3 February 1945.

¹⁰² Numbers were printed in the Preußische Zeitung of 8 February 1945.

the gastrointestinal ill received extra fats.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the matter of housing was also tackled with relative ease. As we have seen, in the wake of the bombing of Königsberg many people fled the city, and in early January another wave of civilians had departed. *Blockwarte* assessed which buildings were unoccupied and the homeless received the keys of the houses they had been allocated.¹⁰⁴ There was still running water and the local Siemens plant supplied energy.¹⁰⁵

In a wider sense, the fortress command actively worked to assure an atmosphere of normality. On 19 February certificates for household goods were distributed, which could be used in six different stores throughout the city. A seventh store for household goods opened on 23 February, together with another for textiles and a store for footwear.¹⁰⁶ By order of Kreisleiter Wagner, all stores were to open their doors on Sunday as well. Three cinemas played a total of 42 films per week.¹⁰⁷ And even though the Albertus University had officially been closed, some lectures continued, albeit on a much smaller scale.¹⁰⁸ On top of the nine banks that already ensured that salaries and pensions were paid to labourers, employees, officials and teachers, the giro-office was reopened for three hours a day.¹⁰⁹ These efforts were appreciated by the population, and gave rise to a ‘timid optimism’.¹¹⁰ Different police authorities also continued to function. *Feldwebel* Mathias Nölke, for example, visited both the Gestapo headquarters and the *Polizeipräsidium* (police headquarters) in early March, trying to get clarification about his father-in-law, who was missing.¹¹¹ Although historians tend to view the police apparatus in 1945 merely through the lens of radicalisation, documents in Königsberg show a string of ordinary tasks that were still being executed by local police authorities. In mid-February, for instance, police patrols were sent through the streets to check up on blackout measures.¹¹² Whenever Volkssturm men were wounded during training, it was the task of the

¹⁰³ Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt, 20-2; Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt 23-2

¹⁰⁴ Sumowski, «Jetzt war ich ganz allein auf der Welt», 61.

¹⁰⁵ ASK 22034-4: Hptm. d. R. Lemke: Die letzten Tage von Königsberg; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt, 19 February 1945; Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt, 23-2

¹⁰⁷ Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt 20-2; Clappier, *Festung Königsberg*, 121.

¹⁰⁸ Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg*, 164.

¹⁰⁹ Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt 21-2; Der Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt 22-2; von Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 50.

¹¹⁰ von Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 50; Clappier, *Festung Königsberg*, 121.

¹¹¹ Manfred Backhausen “Von Düsseldorf über Königsberg und Riga nach Griten: Bürgermeister Mathias Nölke (1912 – 1962)” <http://www.mjb-verlag.de/media/5f98fe0ac2c541beffff800ffffff1.pdf>

¹¹² GAKO “Nemetski Fondi”, Fond H-54, No 48, Opus 1, Delo 11, 1. 9: Abschrift. Wehrmachtkommandantur Königsberg (Pr) den 10.2.1945 Standort-Befehl; GAKO “Nemetski Fondi”, Fond H-54, No 49, Opus 1, Delo 11, 1. 71: Der Polizeipräsident, Kommando der Schutzpolizei. Königsberg (Pr), den 20.2.1945. Befehlsstand Mündlich am Frau, Fräulein Margarete Horch hier Rudauerweg 28

police to compile a report on it, which was done with great attention to detail.¹¹³ People could still officially get married in March.¹¹⁴ These efforts were a stark contrast with the minimal care that was provided in the refugee camps on the Samland, and made the decision to remain in a besieged city appear sensible, rather than life-threatening.

This does not mean that people in Königsberg were oblivious to the danger the city was in; it would be fairer to consider their attitude as 'resigned'. Wolfgang Franz Werner has long established that most German civilians in 1945, 'in the light of the inevitable defeat, would not expose themselves to further risks, and at least wanted to undergo the downfall in a familiar environment.'¹¹⁵ Indeed, many parishes continued to operate as priests did not want to abandon their 'flock'.¹¹⁶ Church services remained particularly well-attended and peaked at Easter, just days before the final storming.¹¹⁷ This fits in with the research of Jill Stephenson, who, in her analysis of the German home front during the war, found that 'in time of crisis, people turned - or in some cases returned - to traditional allegiances, most notably the Christian Churches.'¹¹⁸

However, the accommodating stance of the fortress command towards civilians did not come about without hesitation or concern. As indicated, military commanders had always tried to remove civilians from the area of operations, not only to allow for unrestricted movement, but also to quell potential partisan activity. It was relatively easy to drop agents behind the lines on the Samland peninsula, who could then make their way into Königsberg.¹¹⁹ The Soviets actively played on these fears by dropping leaflets into the fortress, which encouraged civilians to stop working and hide deserters until Soviet troops arrived.¹²⁰ The fear increased as the siege went on, and on 19 March a 'Großrazzia' was conducted by the police to search for enemy agents. Of the 2,560 people checked, 23 were detained by the authorities.¹²¹ Indeed, the *Preußische Zeitung* devoted much attention to the topic of fear in Königsberg. On 8 February, a week after the city's encirclement, it was announced: 'Anyone can have fear. When it is dealt

¹¹³ GAKO "Nemetski Fondi", Fond H-54, No 55, Opis 1, Delo 11, 1.486: Abschrift. Der Kommandeur der Schutzpolizei Königsberg, den 16.3.45 Befehlsstelle. Fernspruch von Abschn.Kdo. Süd (Oberltn. Fischer) 16.3.45, 11.30 Uhr

¹¹⁴ Gause, *Die Geschichte der Stadt Königsberg*, 166.

¹¹⁵ Werner, »*Bleib übrig!*«, 351.

¹¹⁶ Linck, *Königsberg 1945-1948*, 10-11.

¹¹⁷ von Lehdorff, *Ostpreussisches Tagebuch*, 56; Martin Wegener, "Ostern 1945 in Königsberg, Ein Tag trügerischer Ruhe vor der Katastrophe." *Das Ostpreussenblatt*, April 5, 1950.

¹¹⁸ Jill Stephenson, "War and Society: Germany in World War II," *German History* 3, no. 1 (1986): 17.

¹¹⁹ BArch NS19/2068, 62. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle, Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum Königsberg, 22.3.45

¹²⁰ BArch NS19/2068, 65. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle, Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum Königsberg, 15.3.45.

¹²¹ BArch NS19/2068, 65. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle, Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum Königsberg, 15.3.45.

with, everything is clear. [However,] those who, out of fear, become cowards, throw in the towel and become criminals.’¹²²

In particular, civilians were not to be trusted with military information, but this was near-impossible, especially in the crowded basements of the inner city. Günter Braunschweig, the commander of a detachment of self-propelled guns recalled that ‘keeping our actions a secret is impossible, we are sitting, squatting, and lying almost on top of each other, rather than next to each other.’¹²³ During the fortress era, a stream of articles in the *Preußische Zeitung* sought to encourage the inhabitants to keep to themselves. Discretion was presented as a Prussian virtue.¹²⁴ Everyone was made aware that there were saboteurs and spies in the fortress. In a fictitious story, presented as if had actually occurred, a front-page article, ‘The secret’, explained ‘what garrulous women brought about.’ The gossip of one of them included a story about German soldiers who walked through her garden at night. This was overheard by a ‘spy’. A few days later, a German patrol was ambushed in her garden.¹²⁵ The official advice to avoid such betrayals was stern and simple: *Mund halten* – shut up.¹²⁶ The efforts certainly paid off, as an SS report of early March illustrated: ‘Among the population and the armed forces there is outrage over a broadcast message (...) that a liqueurs and soap factory in Königsberg is now producing ammunition. This is considered as a breach of military secrets.’¹²⁷ The treatment of the refugees on the Samland, which we discussed in the previous chapter, makes clear that the well-being of the population was not the fortress command’s prime concern. Nevertheless, from a military point of view, keeping a large civilian population in the city made sense, mainly because allowing civilians to stay in Königsberg assured that they continued to contribute to the local war effort

At first sight, the efforts to maintain the living conditions in Königsberg, and the wave of violence that swept over the city, seem unrelated. To connect these two processes, we might turn to the concept of ‘moral licencing’, a theory that examines ‘the internal balancing of moral self-worth and the cost inherent in altruistic behaviour.’ This research suggests ‘that affirming

¹²² “Partei-Ortsgruppen helfen mit Rat und Tat!” *Preußische Zeitung*, February 8, 1945.

¹²³ Braunschweig, “Untergangstage in Königsberg,” 183.

¹²⁴ “Preußische Anekdoten,” *Preußische Zeitung*, 21 February 1945, 2.

¹²⁵ R. Dahlmann, Das Geheimnis, *Preußische Zeitung*, 21 February, 1945,

¹²⁶ Editorial, *Preußische Zeitung*, 7 February, 1945; ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated), 3.

¹²⁷ BArch NS19/2068, 47. An Reichsführer-SS Feldkommandostelle, Betrifft: Meldungen aus dem Ostraum Königsberg, 5.3.45.

a moral identity leads people to act immorally.’¹²⁸ We have already seen that moral authority was of great importance in the establishment of the fortress command. The creation of ‘normality’ in Königsberg tied into the same tendency, as it provided a justification for the way the fortress command behaved towards the city’s population. The authority of General Lasch and his staff was assured through draconian measures, but – from a moral standpoint – this was justified in order to assure public order. It was unmistakable that the military in late-January had restored order in Königsberg. Subsequently, a disciplined populace, controlled by the fortress command, had, against the odds, increased the liveability in the city. For Lasch, the balance sheet of his rule was therefore positive. This, in turn, meant that the fortress staff felt empowered to take further far-reaching measures to assure the continuation of this community. Any hesitation to deploy civilians in the defence of the city fell away. As we will see in the coming sections, these measures were extensively used, becoming a vital element in the *Kampfgemeinschaft* the fortress command sought to create.

IV. *Festungsdienst* in Königsberg

In his memoirs, General Lasch claimed to have transformed Königsberg into a *Kampfgemeinschaft*, a ‘battle community’, thanks to the willingness of the population to assist in its defence.¹²⁹ This narrative was developing during the siege itself, as from early February onwards, the *Preußische Zeitung* spoke of Königsberg as a *Festungsgemeinschaft*, a ‘fortress community’.¹³⁰ Establishing how this community came to replace the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which had sufficed up to then, and what the new community encompassed, will help to explain the role of German civilians during the final months of war.

On 9 February, the fortress command took its final step towards Total War when it proclaimed *Festungsdienst*, or Fortress Service. Explanatory pamphlets, meant for all Königsbergers – men, women, and children – were distributed among the population. The content of the pamphlets originated from Kreisleiter Wagner, who nevertheless stressed that they had been agreed by Lasch. A martial tone, borrowed from the army, dominated the pamphlets. It was clear from the wording that the civilians who were still in Königsberg were

¹²⁸ Sonya Sachdeva, Rumen Iliev, and Douglas L. Medin, “Sinning Saints and Saintly Sinners. The Paradox of Moral Self-Regulation,” *Psychological Science* 20, no. 4 (2009): 523–528.

¹²⁹ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 64, 139.

¹³⁰ Untitled editorial, *Preußische Zeitung*, February 11, 1945

to prove themselves worthy of being defended, and, in a way, ‘earn’ that right: ‘Not only weapons and machines offer us protection, but above all the strong hearts. Danger and distress separate the wheat from the chaff. Sweat saves blood! Everyone pitches in!’ The Kreisleiter went on:

The Bolshevik stands before the gates of our city. Shoulder to shoulder with the Wehrmacht and the men of the Volkssturm we will defend our city. We will build out Königsberg into an impenetrable fortress and hold it until the Bolshevik hordes are annihilated by the armies of the Reich.

Therefore, I order, in agreement with the battle commander, for every Königsberger, a fortress duty for four hours per day.¹³¹

Interestingly, in his assessment of the defensive measures in Königsberg, the German historian Heinz Schön cited parts of this pamphlet, but left out the passage that referred to the army, thus portraying the Party as the sole radicalised actor in the final stage of the war. He argued that ‘every Königsberger knew that the Party saw only one task for all: “Fight and win – or die!”’¹³² Schön’s assessment probably stems from the fact that the Party oversaw the implementation of the Fortress Service, since the allocation to the different sites of deployment was done by the local *Ortsgruppe*, but it downplays the role of the Wehrmacht.¹³³

On 11 February, on the front page of the *Preußische Zeitung*, the call to service was repeated, and the scope of the call more closely defined. It was stressed that only ‘mothers of infants and pregnant women’ were to be excluded from the Fortress Service.¹³⁴ As most of the men were long at the front, Fortress Service was thus mainly intended for older children, the elderly, and women who would serve for four hours per day. Failure to report for Fortress Service meant that one would not be eligible for ration cards.¹³⁵ Hans-Burkhardt Sumowski,

¹³¹ ASK 22034-4: Pamphlet: 9 February 1945: Aufruf! Packt alle an! Note that Wagner incorrectly speaks of a battle commander, rather than a fortress commander.

¹³² Heinz Schön, *Die letzten Kriegstage: Ostseehäfen 1945*, (Stuttgart: Motorbuch Verlag, 1995), 147. The phrasing “Fight and win – or die!” is a stylistic invention of Schön. This wording was not used in Königsberg, but would certainly have been fitting.

¹³³ Each Kreis, headed by a Kreisleiter, was divided into different Ortsgruppen consisting of maximum 1,500 households. In 1941 there were 60 Ortsgruppen in Königsberg, which were headed by *Ortsgruppenleiter*. According to the early analysis of Frederick Schuman, *Ortsgruppenleiter* were ‘appointed by the Gauleiter, on the nomination of the Kreisleiter. Each was designed to be small enough so that its leader could be personally acquainted with all the members.’ See: Frederick Schuman, *Hitler and the Nazi Dictatorship: A Study in Social Pathology and the Politics of Fascism* (London: Robert Hale & Company, 1936), 71; Telefonbuch Königsberg 1941: s.v. Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei Dienststellen in Königsberg.

¹³⁴ Ernst Wagner, Aufruf zum Festungsdienst!, *Preußische Zeitung*, 11 February, 1945.

¹³⁵ Wilhelm Starlinger, *Grenzen der Sowjetmacht im Spiegel einer West-Ostbegegnung hinter Palisaden von 1945-1954* (Würzburg: Holzner – Verlag, 1955), 36, 41-42.

who was only eight years old at the time of Königsberg's siege, remembers how he was asked to haul grenades with his sled, pass artillery coordinates, and help mine a bridge. Meanwhile, his grandmother was ordered to sew ammunition pouches, while his grandfather was deployed in a tank repair depot.¹³⁶ The prevalence of older people was so clear that among German troops Königsberg was referred to as 'Festung der Greise': the fortress of the elderly.¹³⁷ Much of the Fortress Service consisted of constructing defensive positions, sometimes under Soviet artillery fire. During the first days of its implementation supervisors therefore showed up with carbines to ensure order, but armed guards were immediately forbidden by General Lasch, due to the outrage their sight caused.¹³⁸

A central role in the Fortress Service was allocated to the *NS-Frauenschaft* (NSF), or National Socialist Women's League, the women's wing of the Nazi Party. Since the SS, SA and the *Hitlerjugend* were already incorporated into the military command structure, the NSF remained the only noteworthy National Socialist organisation that could theoretically boast some independence from the Wehrmacht.¹³⁹ Although there are some sources that show that women were trained for combat roles in East Prussia from late-1944 onwards (known as *Fraueneinsatz*), nothing suggests that German women were deployed as soldiers in and around Festung Königsberg.¹⁴⁰ Rather, the Fortress Service was reminiscent of the *Kriegshilfsdienst*, or Auxiliary War Service, which was implemented in July 1941 with the purpose of drafting women into clerical work for the military or local administration, or into armaments.¹⁴¹ The notable difference, of course, was that the Auxiliary War Service was not in an immediately threatened area.

As part of the Fortress Service, the NSF was ordered, for example, to 'set up a sewing room for every Volkssturm battalion, where the men of the battalion can constantly have their laundry and socks fixed.'¹⁴² More importantly, most of the care for refugees, bombed out

¹³⁶ Sumowski, *Jetzt war ich ganz allein auf der Welt*, 64-5, 68.

¹³⁷ ASK 22034-4: Major i.G. a.D. Dr. Hans Schäfer, Ia der Festung, Der Fall Königsbergs (1.12.56), 1-2.

¹³⁸ GAKO "Nemetski Fondi", Fond H-54, No 48 Opis 1 Delo 11,1,9: Abschrift Wehrmachtkommandantur Königsberg (Pr) Abt. IIa, den 10.2.1945, Standort-Befehl.

¹³⁹ The considerably smaller Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (NSDStB) and the Nationalsozialistischer Kraftfahrerkorps (NSKK), the two other Nazi organisations, played no role of importance in Königsberg in 1945. For the German considerations about the deployment of German women in combat - and support roles, see particularly: Perry Biddiscombe, "Into the Maelstrom: German Women in Combat, 1944-45," *War & Society* 30, no. 1, (2011), 61-89 and D'Ann Campbell, "Women in Combat: The World War II Experience in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and the Soviet Union," *The Journal of Military History* 57, no. 2 (1993), 313-318.

¹⁴⁰ Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 678; Biddiscombe, *Into the Maelstrom*, 69.

¹⁴¹ Jill Stephenson, "Women's Labor Service in Nazi Germany," *Central European History* 15, no. 3 (1982), 260-63.

¹⁴² Ernst Wagner, "Die Bevollmächtigte Kommissar des Gauleiters gibt bekannt," *Preußische Zeitung*, February 11, 1945.

families, and mothers with small children was left to the NSF.¹⁴³ Together with the German Red Cross, the NSF ran all hospitals in the fortress, a role that was repeatedly played up in the propaganda: ‘We visited these women in the hospitals and found all professions among them. On top of their chores and the care for their children and families, they worked in the sewing rooms, the catering, in the *Ortsgruppen* and so on, only to return a few hours per day to look after “their” wounded.’¹⁴⁴ The Party thus placed itself completely at the disposal of the Wehrmacht and although the NSF remained recognisable as a Party-controlled body, its National Socialist values took a back seat during the siege.

The way Fortress Service impacted daily life in besieged Königsberg tells us much about Germany’s transition from a *Volksgemeinschaft* to a *Kampfgemeinschaft*. When the war turned against Germany, many, if not most Germans considered the *Volksgemeinschaft* as a purely utilitarian concept. It increasingly became, as Clemens Vollnhals put it, ‘an apathetic emergency organisation that had only one goal: surviving the war.’¹⁴⁵ The idea of a *Kampfgemeinschaft*, which emerged out of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, better reflected the wartime sentiments of the German population ‘Kampf’ was initially defined as ‘struggle’, in which the war itself, according to Christopher Browning, represented a ‘struggle for self-defence and survival of a threatened and beleaguered racial community.’¹⁴⁶ As the war reached the borders of Germany, the concept rid itself of its metaphysical baggage, and ‘Kampf’ was interpreted in military terms, as ‘battle’. Whereas the *Volksgemeinschaft* ideally consisted of a people with a shared vision, Königsberg’s ‘battle community’ simply consisted of combatants and those who helped to prolong the defence. The introduction of the all-encompassing Fortress Service made inclusion in this community obligatory, and a clear way to determine who contributed to that community and who did not. For some civilians, this even meant taking their place on the front line. The implications of this will be addressed in the next section.

¹⁴³ Die NSDAP Ostpreußen, “Hier Spricht die Partei,” *Festung Königsberg*, February 2, 1945; “Partei-Ortsgruppen helfen mit Rat und Tat!,” *Preußische Zeitung*, February 8, 1945; “Wo ein Wille, da ist ein Weg,” *Preußische Zeitung*, February 22, 1945. On Volksoffer, see: Reichsgesetzblatt Teil I, January 11, 1945. Verordnung des Führers zum Schutz der Sammlung von Kleidung und Ausrüstungsgegenständen für die Wehrmacht und den Deutschen Volkssturm.

¹⁴⁴ Wilke, “Bewährte Kräfte der NS-Frauenschaft im Einsatz,” *Preußische Zeitung*, February 21, 1945.

¹⁴⁵ Clemens Vollnhals, “Disillusionment, Pragmatism, Indifference, German Society after the ‘Catastrophe’,” in *The Legacies of Two World Wars, European Societies in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Lothar Kettenacker and Torsten Riotte (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 186.

¹⁴⁶ Christopher Browning, “The Holocaust: Basis and Objective of the Volksgemeinschaft?,” in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 223.

V. The Volkssturm in Königsberg

In a series of meetings in late December 1944 and early January 1945 the army pushed for Volkssturm battalions to be used as an active part of Königsberg's security garrison.¹⁴⁷ Although arguments over their exact size and deployment continued in the weeks that followed, by the time the first Soviet troops approached the city there were indeed a number of battalions that could be deployed in its defence.¹⁴⁸ When on 26 January Soviet troops undertook a surprise attack (coup de main) east of the city at Palmburg, it was the Volkssturm, rather than the army, who fought them off. In Mandeln, in the same area, they even held the line while Luftwaffe units fled through their lines. The Bäckerberg, a hill overlooking Königsberg in the north, was similarly held by the Volkssturm during the first days of the attack on the city, and the earliest Soviet attack on Neuhausen was fended off by Volkssturm units, led by Kreisleiter Wagner.¹⁴⁹ On 2 February, one of these militiamen, Ernst Tiburzy, managed to knock out five Soviet tanks, thereby stopping an attack in its tracks, a feat for which he received the Knight's Cross later that month.¹⁵⁰ To bolster Königsberg's defence, in late January the Gestapo even released 'decent' criminals from prison, and immediately sent them to Volkssturm units at the front, where they joined the astonished defenders.¹⁵¹ More than the city's inhabitants might have known, and certainly more than they were given credit for, Volkssturm troops held large parts of the city's eastern sector for two days, virtually on their own, against 'sustained attacks' from a Soviet corps, unaware whether reinforcements would arrive or what was happening around them.¹⁵²

From the moment the Volkssturm was established by the Party in late 1944, the central complaint many field commanders consistently put forward concerned the militia's fighting capability as an independent unit. 'We lack manpower for our infantry regiments but they form

¹⁴⁷ BArch RH 2/ 331b 158-161: Op Abt/ Abt Lds Bef 252/45 geh. 5.1.1945. Vortragsnotiz Betr. Begriffsbestimmung der "Festung Königsberg" sowie Arbeitseinsatz zum Ausbau der Festung; Volkssturmeinsatz in Ostpreussen.

¹⁴⁸ BArch RH 2/317, 103: Fernschreiben mit Anschriftenübermittlung, OKH/GenStdH/Op.Abt/Abt.Lds.Bef. Nr 13079/44 g.K. 14.12.1944 gez. v. Bonin

¹⁴⁹ ASK 22034: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945. 3; ASK 22034: Magunia, Abschrift, 4,5; Ost-Dok. 8/588: Dr. Hellmuth Will, Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Königsberg, 2; BArch Ost-Dok. 10/890: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Die Einschließung und Belagerung von Königsberg, 60.

¹⁵⁰ Kissel, *Der Deutsche Volkssturm 1944/1945*, 63.

¹⁵¹ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 27; Tilitzki, *Alltag in Ostpreußen*, 308; BArch Ost-Dok. 8/598: Adolf Klein, Einsatz der Volkssturm in Königsberg 1945, 61. This release was in line with orders passed down by the Reich ministry of Justice in late 1944. See: Wachsmann, *Hitler's Prisons*, 331.

¹⁵² Boiko, *S dumoj o Rodine*, 256; Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 45; Willems, *Defiant Breakwaters or Desperate Blunders?*, 362-364, 370-71.

the Volkssturm. It is absolute madness' an officer told the war correspondent Günter Heysing: 'alone they are only cannon fodder.'¹⁵³ During the last months of 1944, Wehrmacht commanders continued to complain about the poor performance as a result of the restricted cooperation. On 27 January 1945, Hitler finally heeded to their complaints, and ordered that the Volkssturm be fully embedded into army's command structure: 'The experience in the East shows that Volkssturm, emergency and ersatz units, when placed on their own resources, have only slight fighting value and are quickly smashed. The fighting value of these units, for the most part numerically strong but inadequately armed for modern combat, is incomparably higher in the framework of troops of the field army.'¹⁵⁴ In effect, the order signalled that, from then on, the army would get the final say over the deployment of Volkssturm units, but also implicitly admitted that the Party had been unable effectively to lead these units. When the front around Königsberg stabilised in the first week of February, the Volkssturm men were duly incorporated into the fortress's military command structure.

In practice, this meant that Königsberg's Volkssturm contingent was slowly cannibalised. Some 10,000 Volkssturm members served in ten to twelve battalions in late January, of which 5,000 remained by early April, days before the final storming.¹⁵⁵ Throughout February and March, many of the older and less-able bodied Volkssturm men were deployed to rear-area work that was often less demanding.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, almost immediately, most young boys were taken from their Volkssturm units, and drafted into the 1st infantry division, the 5th Panzer division, or the 548th or 561st Volksgrenadier division.¹⁵⁷ Hauptmann Lenz remembered that

The Division strives – just like the 5th Panzer Division, which is also present in the fortress – to again form units out of wounded and new recruits. The representative of Reich Defence Commissioner Gauleiter Koch, Kreisleiter Wagner (himself a reserve officer in the division),

¹⁵³ Alastair Noble, "The people's levy - the Volkssturm and popular mobilisation in eastern Germany 1944-45," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no.1 (2001), 174-75.

¹⁵⁴ BArch RH 2/331a, 57: Fernschreiben mit Anschriftenübermittlung. Abschrift von Führerbefehl: Betr.: Einsatz der Volkssturm, OKW/WFSt Op/Org-Nr. 00937/45 g.Kdos. vom 27.1.1945. This translation is taken from a British intelligence report, See: TNA HW1/3510, 3: BONIFACE report, 6 February 1945.

¹⁵⁵ Kissel, *Der Deutsche Volkssturm*, 63; Ost-Dok.8/580, 4; BArch RH 2/335, 175-176: Op. Abt/ I N/ LdS Bef. Vortragsnotiz Betr.: Festung Königsberg, 6.4.1945.

¹⁵⁶ Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 119-20; ASK 22032: Magunia, 1; BArch Ost-Dok. 8/602, Gustav Makowka, Bürgermeister a.D, 6; BArch Ost-Dok. 10/890, 127; Kissel, *Der Deutsche Volkssturm 1944/1945*, 54.

¹⁵⁷ Ost-Dok.8/579 Hans-Heinrich Wendlandt, Oberstleutnant, Kommandeur des Grenadierregiments 1094, „Der Endkampf“ (Die Öffnung des Landesweges vom Samland nach Königsberg, Kampf um Königsberg, Gefangenschaft) 1945-1949, 9, 13.

provides the division with young recruits subordinated to him, particularly several hundred Hitler Youth members.¹⁵⁸

Sometimes their young age stunned the division's veterans. Hauptmann Schröder, the commander of Füsilier battalion 1, part of the 1st division, recalled that

The battalion received 60 to 80 *Hitlerjungen* of the ages 14 and 15 as recruits for training in early February. With some shock, we accepted these half-kids. The swearing in took place in a dignified and festive form at the tennis court. With great and unparalleled zeal, these boys dove into their training. The majority could not be supplied with steel helmets, as they were too large and fell over their eyes during firing. A solution was only partly found. Because of their youth, they received special rations, not alcohol or cigarettes, but bonbons and chocolate instead.¹⁵⁹

These accounts were not exceptions. Volkssturm battalion 25/141 'Lützow' consisted entirely of sixteen and seventeen-year-old boys, and, after first being used as auxiliaries, they were deployed alongside an infantry battalion.¹⁶⁰

In addition, the Volkssturm units that consisted of exclusively older men also had to give up their 'youngest'. The adjutant of Volkssturm battalion 25/235, *Leutnant* Bruno Just wrote in his diary on 6 March 1945 that 'We had to turn over all the men born in 1901 and younger to the Wehrmacht. After this the youngest is 44 years old.'¹⁶¹ Even disabled men were drafted into the Volkssturm. For example, Heinz Kroll, who had a prosthetic leg, was, after six medical examinations by the Wehrmacht, deemed suitable to serve in the Volkssturm and was sent back from Pillau to Königsberg.¹⁶² That this behaviour was widespread can best be seen by a headline of the *Preußische Zeitung*, 'Despite prosthetic leg at the forefront of a battalion reserve against the enemy', which not only showed that these severely disabled men were used for rear area work, but were also deployed at the front line.¹⁶³

The training of Volkssturm men intensified, with special attention paid to the Panzerfaust, a single-shot anti-tank weapon, but arguably one of the easiest weapons to

¹⁵⁸ BArch Msg 2 / 240, 37 Kampf um Ostpreußen 1945 Von Hauptmann d. R. Lenz, Adj. Beim Stab der 1. Inf. Div. Frühjahr 1956

¹⁵⁹ BArch RH 26-1/112 1. Inf. Div. Kampf um Ostpreußen und um Königsberg (Sammlung von Erlebnisberichten) 1945, p 157. Dieckert and Grossmann, 158, BA-MA RH 26-1/100, p84

¹⁶⁰ Springenschmidt, *Raus aus Königsberg*, 24-25, 30-35. On the mythisation of Lützow, see also: George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 24.

¹⁶¹ BArch Ost-Dok 8/600, 25. Bruno Just, Bataillonsadjutant. The memoirs of Just have recently been translated. See: Bruno Just, *Hitler's Last Levy in East Prussia: Volkssturm Einsatz Bataillon Goldap (25/235) 1944-45* (Solihull: Helion & Company, 2015)

¹⁶² BArch Msg 2 / 240, 81, 83: Bericht des Herrn Heinz Kroll, früher Wehlau, jetzt Braunschweig.

¹⁶³ "Trotz Beinprothese an der Spitze der Bataillonsreserve gegen den Feind," *Preußische Zeitung*, 21 Februar 1945.

master.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, accidents happened fairly frequently during the weapons training.¹⁶⁵ Reading between the lines, the focus on the Panzerfaust revealed that the instructors did not fully trust Volkssturm men as part of their units, since the weapon was especially suited to individual men, or a twosome, rather than groups.¹⁶⁶ This, in turn, had an impact on the Volkssturm's reputation among Soviet troops, who regarded Volkssturm men with Panzerfausts as fanatics, and willing to continue to fight on their own. They were referred to as '*Faustnikov*', Moses Gorelik, a Jewish partisan from Belorussia, who eventually fought in Königsberg, remembered. The men of his unit 'killed *Faustnikov* on the spot, because no one looked at their age [and] they burned many of our tanks!'¹⁶⁷ Moreover, dressing these men remained a problem. As army uniforms were scarce, many were supplied with Party uniforms. Wearing a Party uniform was like a red rag on Soviets troops, and, as Waldemar Magunia stressed, had an adverse effect on Volkssturm morale.¹⁶⁸

The Volkssturm was used as a kind of manpower pool, and the way its recruits were deployed seems to have been motivated by the intention to keep the 'hard core' of seasoned veterans of the different Wehrmacht divisions intact, which allowed their staying power to remain at a relatively high level.¹⁶⁹ The young boys were separated from the older conscripts, and their motivation seems to have been an important factor in that decision.

These boys were convinced that everything that this war asked of them they would do better than the 'old', a designation in which they even included their fathers. What the 'old' had ruined, they, the 'young', had to put right, indeed, they were certain that they, in this almost lost war, could bring about a decisive turn.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ Newsreel 'Panzerfaustschiessen in einer deutschen Stadt', *Die Deutsche Wochenschau*, March 22, 1945: 'Even women can operate this weapon with ease'.

¹⁶⁵ GAKO "Nemetski Fondi", Fond H-54, No 55, Opis 1, Delo 11, 1.486: Abschrift. Der Kommandeur der Schutzpolizei Königsberg, den 16.3.45 Befehlsstelle. Fernspruch von Abschn.Kdo. Süd (Oberltn. Fischer) 16.3.45, 11.30 Uhr; BArch Ost-Dok. 8/510, Kurt Dieckert, Kampf um Ostpreußen 1944-1945, 26; BArch Ost-Dok.8/567: Walter Elkes „Vom Pregel zur Elbe“ (Einsatz von Jagdkommandos des Volkssturmes) 1945, 4; Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 123.

¹⁶⁶ BArch RH 2/334, 132: Der Generalinspekteur der Panzertruppen H.Qu.OKH, 19. März 1945. Nr. 178/45 g.Kdos Betrifft: Panzernahkampf; Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*, 105.

¹⁶⁷ "Gorelik Moisey Khaimovich," accessed November 25, 2016, <http://iremember.ru/memoirs/partizani/gorelik-moisey-khaimovich/>

¹⁶⁸ ASK 22034-4: Waldemar Magunia: Der Volkssturm in Ostpreußen 1944/45 (10.April 1955), 2.

¹⁶⁹ Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 29-58; Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht", 286-87: Shils and Janowitz observed that "German officers saw that solidarity is fostered by the recollection of jointly experienced gratifications and that accordingly the groups who had gone through a victory together should not be dissolved but should be maintained as units to the greatest degree possible."

¹⁷⁰ Springenschmidt, *Raus aus Königsberg*, 30. See also: Kunz, *Wehrmacht und Niederlage*, 233: On 27 March 1945 Reichsjugendführer Artur Axmann asked of the Hitlerjugend to 'Be boundless in the love to

These youngsters were assigned to ‘*Kampfgruppe I.I.D.*’ (Battle group 1st infantry division), which consisted of two small regiments. During ‘Operation Westwind’, they were put in the first line of attack. Like most officers of the 1st infantry division, Hauptmann Lenz felt that during the offensive to restore the link between Königsberg and Pillau they ‘proved themselves worthy of the grand tradition of the division.’¹⁷¹ After the first pioneers had removed mines, the young Hitlerjugend boys stormed into the no-man’s-land towards the first objective, the hamlet of Metgethen. An officer remarked that ‘This day is a glorious chapter of the German youth, similar to Langemarck’.¹⁷² ‘Like madmen!’, another told a war correspondent. ‘They ran away from me. Just ran off to the front. They pulled the [barbed] wire apart with their hands, as if there are no mines in between. And then straight into the foxholes of Ivan to wreak havoc!’¹⁷³ It led, however, to high casualties amongst these boys, whom of many had only served for a mere two weeks. The fanatical Hauptmann Hans-Joachim Schröder recalled that ‘The attack squadrons suffered nearly 50 per cent dead and wounded. In the next few days, squadron leaders had to inform many a Königsberg mother about the heroic death of her son.’¹⁷⁴ The young boys, as a whole, were repeatedly hailed in the aftermath of Operation Westwind, while the older age group did not receive similar praise.¹⁷⁵

In contrast, the older militiamen were mainly used in the defence of the city. Their service in the Volkssturm was much less driven by fanatic élan, but, as Yelton found, rather by ‘traditional values of patriotism and duty, a long-standing distrust of and distaste for their Slavic neighbours, and the desire to protect family and possessions against the feared Bolsheviks.’¹⁷⁶ They were thus placed in less hard-pressed areas of the front. In turn, the Soviets were well aware that they had older men in front of them, and tried to demoralise them,

your people, and just as boundless in your hate against the enemy. It is your duty to guard, when others get tired; to stand, when others yield.’

¹⁷¹ BArch RH 26-1/112, 125-127: 1. Inf. Div. Kampf um Ostpreußen und um Königsberg (Sammlung von Erlebnisberichten) 1945; BArch Msg 2/ 240, 37: Kampf um Ostpreußen 1945 Von Hauptmann d. R. Lenz, Adj. Beim Stab der 1. Inf. Div. (Frühjahr 1956)

¹⁷² BArch Ost-Dok, 10/888, 83: Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert: Einsatz der 1. Ostpreußischen Infanteriedivision (1956/59). According to the bulletin of the *Oberste Heeresleitung*, on November 11, 1914, ‘West of Langemarck, young regiments, while singing “Deutschland, Deutschland über alles” attacked the first line of enemy positions and conquered them.’ It marked the beginning of the ‘Myth of the heroic youth’. See: Bernd Hüppauf: “Schlachtenmythen und die Konstruktion des „Neuen Menschen“,” in: *„Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch“. Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkriegs*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz (Essen: Klartext, 1993), 45-47. See further: Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 70-71.

¹⁷³ BArch Ost-Dok.8/591: Gunter Heysing, Oberleutnant, Kriegsbericht, 48

¹⁷⁴ BArch RH 26-1/112 1. Inf. Div. Kampf um Ostpreußen und um Königsberg (Sammlung von Erlebnisberichten) 1945, 127, 157.

¹⁷⁵ “Heroischer Angriff Königsberger Hitler-Jungen”, *Preußische Zeitung*, 23 February 1945

¹⁷⁶ Yelton, *Hitler’s Volkssturm*, 133.

blasting ‘old grandfathers, go home!’ from loudspeaker cars in the sectors where Volkssturm units lay.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, days before the final storming they dropped leaflets aimed specifically at the Volkssturm, reiterating that ‘the Nazi chiefs delay the fighting, throw you, peaceful citizens of East Prussia, in the battle, and try to convince you, that you should “save” your Heimat.’ But, it was stressed, ‘You know yourself, what kind of “fighters” you are.’¹⁷⁸ The Soviets were correct in their assessment. There should be no doubt that these older Volkssturm men were considered expendable: in the defence plans of Königsberg, the priority was placed on the north of the river Pregel, where the city connected to the adjacent Samland peninsula.¹⁷⁹ Most of the Volkssturm units, however, were assigned to positions south of the river, with little chance of escape, while the more effective units were placed to the north.¹⁸⁰ The Hitler Youth boys had much better chances to survive: Volkssturm battalion 25/141 ‘Lützwow’, consisting solely of young Volkssturm boys, was even ordered to stay out of the fighting entirely and managed to escape the city, in order to be deployed in Berlin.¹⁸¹

There is no doubt that the Volkssturm suffered heavily in the fighting. The manner of their death was often brutal. Siedler found that in Königsberg ‘a very significant number (...), who in brown uniforms fell into the hands of the enemy, were murdered in an often bestial manner.’¹⁸² In all, the Volkssturm suffered much heavier losses than the regular Wehrmacht: of the roughly 10,000 men of Königsberg’s original contingent, 2,400 – a quarter – was listed as dead or missing in action after the war.¹⁸³ That many of these men – young boys, invalids, elderly – should have properly been evacuated out of the city as civilians was hardly considered at all. Instead, they were subject to ever more military coercion, which will be discussed in the next section.

¹⁷⁷ ASK 22034-4: Aufzeichnungen des Hauptschriftleiters der Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung Wegener über seine Erlebnisse in Königsberg Januar/März 1945 (undated), 4.

¹⁷⁸ Pamphlet „Volkssturmmänner!“ Collection of author.

¹⁷⁹ BArch RH 2/ 328, 240: OKH/GenStdH/Op Abt (roem 1a) Nr. 450 137/45 g.Kdos. Chfs 21.2.1945 gez. Guderian. Yelton found that of the Volkssturm men that fought on the Eastern Front, almost three quarters of those missing in action were 45 years or over. Yelton, *Hitler’s Volkssturm*, 133.

¹⁸⁰ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 83.

¹⁸¹ Karl Springenschmid, *Raus aus Königsberg! Wie 420 ostpreußische Jungen 1945 aus Kampf und Einsatz gerettet wurden* (Kiel, Arndt, 1993), 47-48. The title of this book is misleading, since these boys were not ‘saved’, but ordered by the OKH to be transported to assist in the defence of Berlin. See: BArch RH 2/335, 102-103 Op Abt I N/K Nr. 4116/45 g.Kdos 3. April 1945 Abschrift von FS H. Gr. Nord an 2. Und 4. Armee; BArch RH 2/335, 106-107 Fernschreiben Betr. Abtransport aus Ostpreußen, OKH/GenStdH / Op Abt röm. 1a Nr. 4167/45 g. 4.4.45

¹⁸² Seidler, „*Deutscher Volkssturm*“, 247-8.

¹⁸³ Seidler, „*Deutscher Volkssturm*“, 374.

VI. Radicalisation through the pretext of law

The intensive efforts to transform Königsberg into a battle community were accompanied by the increasing violence of the drumhead courts-martial. In the current historiography, this violence is generally traced back to Party legislation, particularly to the ‘Ordinance on the Establishment of Courts-Martial’, implemented on 15 February 1945 by Reich Minister of Justice, Otto von Thierack. The decree called for the formation of drumhead courts-martial in areas that were immediately threatened.¹⁸⁴ Three weeks later, on 9 March 1945, this ordinance was followed by Hitler’s decree to establish ‘Flying Courts-Martial’ or the *Fliegende Standgerichte*.¹⁸⁵ That decree authorised roving execution squads to base their judgement on suspicion rather than clear evidence alone. It is tempting to view the violence as a continuation of the National Socialist violence, which started in 1932 - 1933, a view that is put forward by Sven Keller.¹⁸⁶ There is a strong case for his argument, since up to then, at a local level, Kreisleiter had often presided over ‘kangaroo-courts’ in their cities, and *Ortsgruppenleiter* had indeed led the charge against subversive elements in their respective districts.¹⁸⁷

Yet, Keller’s line of reasoning has a number of limitations. By 1945, after six years of war, violence was different in nature. Death – by ‘terror-bombing’ or on the front line – had become part of everyday life. Whereas in 1932 and 1933 acts of Party violence in Königsberg caused an outrage worthy of international headlines, by 1945 violence had become normalised, and considered part of the overall consequence of Total War.¹⁸⁸ More importantly, by merely portraying violence as an inherent part of Nazi society, and by consistently linking the German intra-ethnic violence in 1945 back to the ‘dyed-in-the-wool National Socialists’, Keller underplays the dialogue between the different actors that took place at the time, and thus fails to appreciate its versatile nature.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, not all Party dignitaries were in favour of an increase in the use of summary courts-martial. Gauleiter Joachim Eggeling of Halle-Merseburg asked whether it was ‘politically acceptable (...) to summarily try’ Party officials after they had failed to do their job and then to subsequently report on this failure in newspapers: ‘How

¹⁸⁴ Reichsgesetzblatt Teil I, 20. Februar 1945 – Nr. 6: Verordnung über die Errichtung von Standgerichte; Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 60; Kershaw, *The End*, 224-25.

¹⁸⁵ Moll, *Führer-Erlasse 1939-1945*, 483. Doc. 390: *Bildung eines Fliegenden Standgericht*, 9 March 1945.

¹⁸⁶ Keller, “Volksgemeinschaft and Violence.”

¹⁸⁷ Kater, *The Nazi Party*, 223-24. Merrion Webster s.v. kangaroo court: A mock court in which the principles of law and justice are disregarded or perverted

¹⁸⁸ On 1932 see for example: OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT, Nazi Terrorist Outbreak. The Times (London, England), Tuesday, Aug 02, 1932; pg. 10; OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT, The Königsberg Outrages. The Times (London, England), Wednesday, Aug 03, 1932; pg. 9.

¹⁸⁹ Keller, “Volksgemeinschaft and Violence,” 233.

are political leaders to be trusted by the population, if such derailments are cried out every day? (...) Among the Wehrmacht such incidents are kept secret, in order not to damage the nimbus of leadership.’¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the radicalising nature of this fragmentation of law was also recognised, and its implications were discussed between the highest representatives of Party and Wehrmacht. ‘As always with heavy setbacks, the present stage of the war is marked by a tendency to search for those responsible for – or guilty to – it,’ a draft proposing a more careful approach towards summary courts-martial read. Wehrmacht officers blamed Party officials for the defeats, while Party officials tried to pin the responsibility on the military commanders. ‘On both sides there are quitters and deserters,’ the draft continued:

The Party and the Wehrmacht now only have the duty to stand together, fight together, and eradicate parasites from their ranks. So, when the execution of the holder of a Golden Party Badge is announced, this is no reason for the Wehrmacht to take position against the Party; vice versa, for the Party there is no cause for *Schadenfreude* when officers are sentenced to death for desertion or dereliction of duty.¹⁹¹

As a reappraisal of the summary court practices, the draft came much too late in the day, in mid-March 1945, and never made it into law: by then, the direction taken was irreversible. Throughout the war, there had been a steady militarisation of home-front law, and Germany’s juridical apparatus explicitly expressed the intention to fashion it to better correspond with the military ethos. In 1939, shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, the then Justice minister, Franz Gürtner, opened the periodical ‘*Deutsches Strafrecht*’ by stating that ‘During war time we demand that soldiers ruthlessly and without hesitation commit life and limb to the defence of their people. Also in the *Heimat*, the personal fortune has to be ruthlessly subordinated to the idea of the defence of our people.’¹⁹² By 1945, those Party members who championed von Thierack’s ordinance were clear as to where they got their inspiration: in a circular to the Gauleiters, which *Reichsleiter* Martin Bormann distributed on 9 March 1945, he stressed that, in his opinion, it was the example of Generaloberst Rendulic’s treatment of ‘so-called stragglers’ in the area of his Army Group, and his use of flying courts-martial, that had served

¹⁹⁰ IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 13202379. Beleg Nr. 5, 10. Febr. 1945 An die Partei-Kanzlei z. Hd. Herrn Reichsleiter M. Bormann. gez. Eggeling Gauleiter.

¹⁹¹ IfZArch Akten der Partei-Kanzlei der NSDAP: 13201916: Entwurf für ein gemeinsames Rundschreiben des Leiters der Partei-Kanzlei und des Chefs des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht, 21 March 1945.

¹⁹² Süß, *Tod aus dem Luft*, 153-54.

as inspiration.¹⁹³ Also, that same week, Goebbels, who had ‘anxiously awaited’ von Thierack’s decree, praised the efforts of Rendulic in his diary:¹⁹⁴ ‘In East Prussia Rendulic has restored order again. In one of his reports I read that when he took over the Army Group, he counted some 16,000 soldiers that “lost their unit”. He reduced that number in no time to 400, using most rigorous means. (...) Rendulic seems to have the ambition to be among the first of our modern army leaders.’¹⁹⁵ Goebbels expressed similar praise for Generaloberst (later Field Marshal) Ferdinand Schörner, who

spends most time alongside the fighting troops, with whom he has admittedly a harsh, but yet also a trusting relationship. He especially targets the so-called “trained stragglers”. With that he means soldiers who time and again see the chance to detach themselves from the troops in critical situations and make off to the hinterland under some pretext. He is rather brutal to those characters in that he has them strung up on the first possible tree with a sign that reads: “I am a deserter and I have refused to protect German women and children.” That surely exerts a very deterrent effect on the other deserters or on those who consider deserting.¹⁹⁶

Although, as we saw in the previous sections, executions of German citizens were already well underway by the time von Thierack’s decree was passed, it was nevertheless an important moment. Its implementation signalled the beginning of a period in which both Wehrmacht, Party, and state, fully believed in their absolute right to judge their compatriots’ ‘determination to fight’.¹⁹⁷ In Königsberg, this led to a diverse set of law enforcers. In a post-war report, Walter Kemsies, a German intelligence officer present in Königsberg during its siege, mentions that checks were conducted by police-units, *Feldgendarmarie*, *Jagd-Kommandos* of the SS and SD, as well as regular army officers and the Gestapo: ‘These measures caused numerous soldiers and civilians without proper papers to be imprisoned, yes, even executed. Often, this was unjust and illogical.’¹⁹⁸ A few days after von Thierack’s ordinance, Gauleiter Koch despatched six special SS squads, each consisting of twelve men, into the city to carry out these duties: ‘The SS guard of Königsberg has to carry out raids and patrols in all accommodation and flats of

¹⁹³ BArch NS6/354, 88: Der Leiter der Partei-Kanzlei, Führerhauptquartier, den 9.3.1945. Rundschreiben 123/45 g. Betrifft: Maßnahmen zur Stärkung der Front durch Erfassung Versprengter. Rendulic’s order concerning flying courts-martial was cited in full.

¹⁹⁴ Kershaw, *The End*, 224.

¹⁹⁵ Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1945*, 161; Kershaw, *The End*, 224.

¹⁹⁶ Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1945*, 165.

¹⁹⁷ Reichsgesetzblatt, Verordnung über die Errichtung von Standgerichte. Vom 15 Februar, 1945.

¹⁹⁸ ASK 22034: Walter Kemsies: *Stimmungsbilder aus Königsberg i. Pr. 1945 (Die Festungszeit der ostpr. Hauptstadt)*, 10.

war wives [i.e. wives whose husbands are serving at the front] and prostitutes and summarily shoot all encountered conscripted men without a valid leave pass.’¹⁹⁹ The plethora of ‘law enforcers’ has given rise to many sweeping assumptions regarding their motives. Although Klaus-Dietmar Henke accused such men of ‘settling old scores’, and having a ‘private lust for power, [and] pathological bloodthirst’, in Königsberg some of the executioners seemed to have been conflicted by their actions.²⁰⁰ After two Party officials had conducted a public execution of two soldiers who, during the final storming, had deserted and changed into civilian clothing, they immediately fled to the hinterland themselves, only to be caught and executed the following day.²⁰¹

Nevertheless, the randomness of the checks and the executions created a climate of fear in the city. Louis Clappier, a French prisoner of war remembered that ‘A minimum of terror was enough to strike fear and apathy into the population. (...) The *Streifen* of the military police combed the cellars and bunkers, hunting for deserters, people without papers and suspicious foreigners.’ In addition to the *Nordbahnhof* and *Hauptbahnhof*, in February and March the Königsberg zoo was also used as a place of execution.²⁰² This visible violence, under the guise of the rule of law, ensured that civilians continued to cooperate and were easier to control.

Thanks to the focus on the drumhead courts-martial, we tend to forget that other courts in Königsberg continued to operate as well. Both the fortress court, which General Lasch established, as well as the *SS und Polizeigericht XXVII*, which handled police cases in Königsberg, continue to pass sentences.²⁰³ Yet, unlike the drumhead courts, when these courts passed death sentences, it often did not result in immediate execution. Instead, up to the final storming, soldiers who were sentenced to death were sent to a penal battalion, *Polizei Battallion Elias*. In all likelihood, this battalion was deployed in the south of Königsberg and completely wiped out.²⁰⁴ Yet, the main difference between the drumhead courts and these courts was that

¹⁹⁹ Armin Fuhrer and Heinz Schön, *Erich Koch, Hitlers brauner Zar: Gauleiter von Ostpreussen und Reichskommissar der Ukraine* (Munich, Olzog, 2010), 178.

²⁰⁰ Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *Die amerikanische Besetzung Deutschlands* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 847.

²⁰¹ Fuhrer and Schön, *Erich Koch, Hitlers brauner Zar*, 179.

²⁰² Clappier, *Festung Königsberg*, 121; On the importance of the use of public places to conduct violence, see: Pamela Swett, “Political Violence, Gesinnung, and the Courts in Late Weimar Berlin.” In *Conflict, Catastrophe and Continuity: Essays on Modern German History*, edited by Frank Biess, Mark Roseman and Hanna Schissler, 104-116. Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2007, 62.

²⁰³ GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-54, No. 36, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 476: SS-und Polizeigericht XXVII Königsberg (Pr.), den 26.2.45. An den Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei Königsberg (Pr); “Feiglinge wurden erschossen”, *Festung Königsberg*, February 2, 1945.

²⁰⁴ GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-54, No. 35, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 470: Der Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei Königsberg. Königsberg (pr.), den 20.3.1945 Betr. Strafsache gegen den ehem. SS-

accused soldiers were still able to argue their case, and, occasionally, walked away with minor sentences, such as extra guard duty.²⁰⁵ Being tried by these courts, however, was a privilege that was denied to civilians, who continued to be subject to the arbitrariness of the drumhead courts.

Whether judged by the regular courts or by the drumhead courts, the rationale for their judgements was virtually always the same. Most condemned were judged in the light of a continuous struggle for Germany and by their willingness to fend off ‘un-German’ influences, rather than merely within the framework of the National Socialist cause. The case of 51-year old Alois M., a *Rottwachtmeister der Schutzpolizei der Reserve*, which was brought before the *SS und Polizeigericht XXVII* in late February 1945, is an example. Fearing he was about to be overrun by the Soviet advance, M. deserted his unit on 29 January, changed into civilian clothing and hid in different houses and basements. On 7 February, he was found by the *Streifen* and handed over to the SS Court. His death sentence was read out to police troops in the fortress:

The Court has indeed recognized as mitigation that the accused has done his duty in the [First] World War and had been awarded with the Iron Cross Second Class. Also taken into account is that the defendant was judged to be satisfactory so far. But due to the severity of the deed, these mitigating circumstances cannot preserve the defendant from receiving the harshest punishment. He who in this decisive phase of the war tiptoes around the fulfilment of service and as such not only breaks his oath to the Führer, but also betrays the German *Volksgemeinschaft*, must be eradicated according to the harshness of war. He who out of cowardice wants to avoid deployment, has to lose under all circumstances the life that he so cowardly tried to save. That expects every decent and well-behaved soldier, who in loyal fulfilment of duty during heavy fighting every day bravely puts his life on the line. The famous principle, based on the front-experience of the Führer, that the brave soldier can indeed fall, but that the weaklings have to fall under all circumstances, is unrelentingly carried out by the court.²⁰⁶

Sturmann Günter Neumann – hier Abordnung zum Pol.Btl. Elias; GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-54, No. 34, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 468: 8. Pol. Komp. Königsberg (Pr), den 30.3.45. An das Kommando der Schützpolizei; BArch NS6/135, 62: Betr: Einsatz von zum Tode verurteilten Soldaten. 24 December 1944.

²⁰⁵ GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-54, No. 43, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 492: Königsberg (Pr), den 20.3.1945 Vernemung! Adolf Plügge. GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-494, No. 45, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 494: 8. Kompanie Königsberg Pr. den 20. März 1945 An das Kommando der Schützpolizei

²⁰⁶ GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-54, No. 36, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 476: SS-und Polizeigericht XXVII Königsberg (Pr.), den 26.2.45. An den Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei Königsberg (Pr); GAKO “Nemetski Fondi” Fond H-54, No. 37, Opis 1, Delo 1, 1. 477: Der Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei Königsberg. Königsberg, (Pr.), den 27.2.1945

That this sentence, passed in late February by the ('regular') *SS und Polizeigericht XXVII*, was to be made public, reveals another dimension of the drumhead courts-martial. Within the context of 1945, *Standgericht* is often translated as 'summary court-martial', a speedily convened court without ceremony. Although trials of *Standgerichte* were unquestionably speedy, much of the legitimacy of the drumhead courts, which more often than not consisted of men without a legal background, rested precisely on linking their judgements to the larger German military legal tradition. The ceremonial element of the drumhead courts, attaching a sign around the necks of the victims or gathering a crowd to witness an execution, was a vital part of the process.²⁰⁷ A French prisoner-of-war recalled that when he walked beside improvised gallows, the five condemned soldiers all 'had rectangular plates fixed to the chests. Inscriptions on the signs in large black letters: "I hang here because I'm a coward", or "I did not want to protect Germany".'²⁰⁸ Onlookers also played an important role in the executions. Sometimes crowds of over 1,000 people were gathered together to view these executions on the central square, the Adolf-Hitler-Platz.²⁰⁹ On occasion, also the church was used to legitimise the process. As part of a public execution of twenty-four soldiers in March, a pastor told the condemned men: 'You have to fight for your relatives at home and you cannot let them down.'²¹⁰

Executions of military personnel, Party members and civilians continued right until the surrender of the city. While walking past the *Nordbahnhof* in early March, a labourer, Karl Danisch, counted no less than seventy-two bodies – some in uniform, others in civilian clothing – with an accompanying sign stating: 'A soldier can die, a coward must die'.²¹¹ On 6 April 1945, the final Soviet storming of Königsberg started, and, although it was immediately clear that resistance would be futile, the executions continued as before. Despite constant artillery and aerial bombardment, civilians were still repeatedly forced to attend them.²¹² Another civilian, Michael Wieck, again recalled walking past the *Nordbahnhof* during these days: 'There I saw hanged soldiers, who had wanted to do the only sensible thing: stop this pointless war. They did what the army commanders – with Hitler at the top – were too cowardly to do. Instead a plate was attached to their chests: I had to die, because I am a coward.'²¹³ The

²⁰⁷ Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion*, 155-58.

²⁰⁸ Clappier, *Festung Königsberg*, 120-21.

²⁰⁹ Guido Knopp, *Der Sturm, Kriegsende im Osten* (Berlin: Econ, 2004), 81; ASK 22034-4 Dr. Twiehaus, *Die letzte Tage von Königsberg*, 1.

²¹⁰ Führer and Schön, *Erich Koch, Hitlers brauner Zar*, 178.

²¹¹ Führer and Schön, *Erich Koch, Hitlers brauner Zar*, 178.

²¹² Führer and Schön, *Erich Koch, Hitlers brauner Zar*, 179.

²¹³ Wieck, *Königsberg, Zeugnis vom Untergang einer Stadt*, 183-84.

drumhead courts-martial brought the regime's criminality right out into the open, and rank among the clearest examples of what Sven Keller has deemed 'violence as a means of communication.'²¹⁴ The ceremonial aspect of these courts is therefore of vital importance to understand their practice, as it unambiguously communicated the line that authorities expected the population to adhere to.²¹⁵

The extent of the killing is difficult to judge. After the war, in a newspaper article in the expellee newspaper *Ostpreussen-Warte*, a commentator claimed that there were 'hardly any lampposts left in Königsberg to hang the condemned.'²¹⁶ A member of one of the six SS-guard commando squads who had been despatched by Gauleiter Koch claimed to have participated in over 200 executions.²¹⁷ The Volkssturm man, Adolf Klein, remembered that the drumhead courts were dreaded among the civilian population, as 'every day [they] executed men, women and children for minor offenses, primarily in public.'²¹⁸ He estimated that, in March alone, between thirty to forty people were executed every day.²¹⁹ The names of these people were announced on large posters shortly afterwards.²²⁰ If these numbers are correct, some 1,500 people would have died throughout the fortress era as a result of the different drumhead courts-martial.

The Soviet besiegers seemed to confirm such numbers, with the Red Army newspaper 'Red Star' claiming that 'in the fortress dozens of deserters were shot each day.'²²¹ Upon entering the city, Major K. Melnikov found that many deserters 'had been shot and then hung upside down and not removed for a few days. In each edition, the newspaper "Königsberger Zeitung" had printed the lists of the soldiers executed for desertion. Platoon commanders were ordered to read the lists to their soldiers.'²²² Although the exact number of executions is impossible to reconstruct, if we accept the conservative number of 1,500 during a period of just over two months, this translates into the execution of almost one per cent of *all* the people

²¹⁴ Keller, *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende*, 406-17, 422.

²¹⁵ This is reminiscent of Michael Wildt's findings concerning the empowerment of the Volksgemeinschaft. See: Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion*.

²¹⁶ "Kurt Knuth: „Iwan, der Schreckliche“,“ *Ostpreussen-Warte*, February, 1954, 2. See also: Lucas Busemann, *So fielen Königsberg und Breslau* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 59.

²¹⁷ Lucas Busemann, *So fielen Königsberg und Breslau* (Berlin, Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 169

²¹⁸ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/598: Adolf Klein, Einsatz der Volkssturm in Königsberg 1945, 98

²¹⁹ BArch Ost-Dok. 8/598: Adolf Klein, Einsatz der Volkssturm in Königsberg 1945, 98.

²²⁰ Hensel, *Medizin in und aus Ostpreußen*, 71-72.

²²¹ "Blestyashaya Pobeda", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 10, 1945

²²² K. Mel'nikov, "Sturm Kenigsberga", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, April 10, 1945. Meant is the *Preußische Zeitung*. The statement, moreover, is incorrect, since the *Preußische Zeitung* did not print daily lists, although it did so on multiple occasions. See also: Königsberg aflame, Sydney Morning Herald, April 11, 1945.

present (civilians and soldiers), or almost three per cent of the garrison of 50,000. Comparing these numbers to the earlier findings of Messerschmidt and Wüllner, who traced the deaths of some 27,000 people back to summary courts-martial, we find that German intra-ethnic violence increased significantly in the final months of the war. The case study of Königsberg shows that extreme violence was not necessarily born out of a tendency to maintain order in an alien or hostile environment abroad; it was dependent on local factors and actors, and largely determined by those actors' preparedness to act on perceived threats.

Conclusion

In the summer of 1944, the German Wehrmacht fell back on East Prussian territory. As we saw in the previous chapter, the contact between soldiers and civilians was initially limited, since the area of operations around the province's borders was cleared of its population. The first time that German troops in East Prussia came into contact with large numbers of German civilians was in January 1945, as the Soviet offensives pushed westwards. By the end of that month, German soldiers and civilians were trapped in and around Königsberg. Of the 200,000 civilians who were present in the city when it was first encircled, around 100,000 still remained by early April, despite the existence of a corridor to the port city of Pillau. The majority of these people were fully deployed in the defence of the city, either as part of the *Volkssturm*, or because they had to perform *Festungsdienst*, with women and youths being allocated a more active role than before. The fortress command's efforts to transform Königsberg into a *Kampfgemeinschaft* offer clear insight how the concept of Total War could shape a local community. Those who were considered part of this community were not judged according to their loyalty to the *Volk*, but to their willingness to contribute to the local war effort.

This chapter has demonstrated the role the Wehrmacht played in the regulation and enforcement of the rule of law in Königsberg, particularly highlighting its preparedness to resort to extreme means of coercion. It traces this behaviour back to its stay on the Eastern Front, where – driven by 'criminal orders' – hostility between civilians and troops was actively fuelled. The connection between the *Weltanschauungskrieg* and the German army's behaviour abroad has been the focus of sustained research, yet this research has not been expanded to include military violence towards its own citizens. Although the defining characteristic of earlier Wehrmacht violence against civilians, its racial component, lost its importance as troops

moved back into Germany, other factors, such as alienation, panic, stress, and trauma, increased as the war continued. Moreover, both the sense of military camaraderie and the fear of a repetition of '1918' assured that a psychological distance remained in place between troops and civilians.

In the Soviet Union, members of the Wehrmacht had adhered to a completely different set of laws that met the demands of the barbarous nature of the Eastern Front, and, even though the laws on the German home front had also considerably hardened during the war years, military law was more stringent. This difference clearly manifested itself in Königsberg, where the remaining civilians were expected to adapt – virtually overnight – to the 'extreme normality' of the front. The impossibility of this demand became evident in the first week of military rule in the city, when officer patrols struck in force against 'dissenters', rounding up men who had gone into hiding, or executing people caught entering the abandoned houses of neighbours who had fled. The population did not challenge this behaviour, but accepted it with a resigned attitude.

These developments were recognised by the Party. It feared that these emergency legal measures in German territory would weaken its authority and would lead to a further decline in support for the regime. Thus, heavily influenced by military law, in February and March 1945 it implemented regulations concerning summary courts martial along similar lines to the military. Yet, due to the fragmented state of Germany, the proclamation of these laws did not automatically lead to their implementation. Local actors would have a significant impact on the practice of these courts, as their evaluation of the situation determined the immediacy of setting an example, while their personal convictions remained of importance in individual cases. In respect to Königsberg, the two-month long proximity to the front line meant that the Party and the army used the full panoply of the law at their disposal in the most ruthless fashion. This process represented the final step in their cumulative radicalisation under the pretext of law, and eventually pushed many communities to progress towards previously unknown levels of violence.

CONCLUSION

The year 1945 will ultimately be considered as one of the most violent in German history. For the East Prussian capital of Königsberg it was its final year, since on 4 July 1946, the city was rechristened Kaliningrad, after the recently deceased Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin, who, as the political scientist Richard Krickus somewhat sarcastically pointed out, ‘never visited the place.’¹ Königsberg faced a death struggle for its status as a German city, a battle it would ultimately lose. Five years later, all German citizens had been expelled, and in the years that followed the new Russian authorities sought to erase all signs of what they considered to be ‘Prussian militarism’, culminating in the destruction of the ruins of the Königsberger Schloss in 1968.² During the siege, few people envisioned themselves as part of a German future for Königsberg. This microstudy highlights that the concerns of the principal actors did not centre on their role in the ‘Third Reich’; rather, it reveals how strongly people clung to their immediate local environment, and how this impacted on behavioural patterns.

Chapter 1 served to set the scene by analysing the main groups of actors – the East Prussian civilians, the Wehrmacht, and the Party – as well as the environment in which they operated, and the way in which they perceived it. Königsberg, the as capital of East Prussia, had long been presented as the easternmost bulwark of Germandom, and defences around the city had consistently been strengthened in fear of ‘the East’. This *Grenzland*-narrative was also adhered to under National Socialism, although this never translated into a population that was significantly more resolute than their compatriots in other parts of Germany. Nevertheless, from the summer of 1944 onwards, large parts of the East Prussian population were deployed in the construction of the *Ostwall* defensive positions along the province’s border, while that autumn its men were called up to serve in the *Volkssturm*. The two efforts – the first two Total War drives in the province – showed that, on a local level, Party and Wehrmacht were willing and able to cooperate, and that, as a sense of urgency set in, they both proved fully prepared to deploy civilians in defensive efforts. Under the surface, however, there was friction between the two, largely caused by the inroads made into each other’s traditional power structures. Whereas the Party allocated itself more martial tasks, the Wehrmacht took over large parts of local administration as the front line drew nearer. This was particularly the case in cities that

¹ Richard Krickus, *The Kaliningrad question* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 39.

² Heinrich Lange, Die Sprengung des Königsberger Schlosses: »Abriß eines einzigartigen architektonischen und geschichtlichen Denkmals« *Das Ostpreußenblatt*, April 28, 2001.

were designated *Festungen*, or fortresses, which, within the German defensive strategy, were to be held to the last man. When General Otto Lasch took control of Königsberg as fortress commander, the Wehrmacht's recent experiences in the Soviet Union would have been fresh in his mind. Not only had cities proven to be costly to conquer, the subsequent rule had been marked by distrust towards an unfamiliar population, whose hostility repeatedly led to unrest or even open rebellion. This perception differed considerably from that of local Party officials, and bore even less resemblance to the attitude of Königsberg's civilian population towards their own city.

By 1945 *Festungen* were poorly regarded by German troops: not only had the word *Festung* been completely hollowed out by their own propaganda, during Operation Bagration, the 1944 Soviet summer offensive, the strategy had proved disastrous. The German fortress cities, however, had been considerably better prepared for their function, were better stocked, and were incorporated in larger defensive systems. Consequently, Königsberg stayed in German hands in late January 1945, and would remain so for over two more months. During this period, the final authority came to rest with a staff consisting of military personnel, led by General Otto Lasch, and Party officials, led by Kreisleiter Ernst Wagner. The working relationship between the two men was good, but, to a certain extent, rested upon the willingness of Wagner to subordinate himself to Lasch. Wagner was willing to do so, because, besides legal authority, the Wehrmacht also had moral authority over the Party. There was no doubt that few of East Prussia's other Party members truly cared whether Königsberg would hold or not, since most of them, Gauleiter Koch included, had left the city shortly before the Soviet encirclement. This action ranged the remaining Party members against the absent Party elite, rather than against the Wehrmacht, not least because the army had stayed put, fighting off the Soviet attack at the city's borders. As a result, a martial mindset came to permeate the combined fortress staff. Rather than interacting with events on a national level, it was these local dynamics that determined how Königsberg's population would experience the final months of the war.

Chapter 2 stressed the city's insular nature by providing an in-depth analysis of the different themes in Königsberg's propaganda, both prior and during its siege. During the final months of 1944, large parts of the East Prussian population definitively broke with the idea of a larger German *Volksgemeinschaft*, feeling that the National Socialist regime had proved unable to meet its promises. Contributing to this notion was the realisation that the province was about to become a battle field: while the increasing presence of front-line and *Trosse* troops

on East Prussian territory kindled the first anxieties, the atrocity propaganda that followed in the wake of the Gumbinnen Operation truly fuelled the traditional fear of ‘the East’ even further. In January 1945, this fear became a reality, and by the end of the month most of East Prussia was in Soviet hands and Königsberg was surrounded.

The direction that local propagandists took during the city’s two-month siege reveals that a utilitarian approach dominated the way they sought to interact with their audience. From the first day of the siege, sustained efforts were made to forge a *Kampfgemeinschaft*, based on Königsberg’s ‘battle’, rather than on Germany’s ‘struggle’. What eventually emerged was a reaction to the population’s more outspoken aversity of the Party, and the need to provide a tailor-made answer to the NKFD agitators at the other side of the front line. Rather than paying attention to developments on a national or international level, propagandists instead devoted most of their energy to addressing local issues. The ‘Fortress identity’ came to rely heavily on what was at hand: instead of linking the defence of the city to the defence of National Socialist principles, propagandists invoked an image of Königsberg as a centuries-long embattled bulwark of Germandom. As part of this effort, the population and garrison of Königsberg were ‘spurred on’ by the heroes of Königsberg’s history, such as General Ludwig Yorck von Wartenburg and the philosopher Immanuel Kant. In the East Prussian Volkssturm Knight’s Cross recipient, Ernst Tiburzy, propagandists found a tangible example of defiance, who they repeatedly used to replace the grandiose boasts of the different Nazi figure heads.

This local approach is also reflected in the set of rumours that the fortress command sought to introduce. Their focus on local issues meant that there was little need to inform people about matters beyond their immediate horizon, while their rapid spread attests to the willingness of significant parts of the population to continue to consider the information that reached them as plausible. The fortress command’s persistence in seeking to shape popular opinion in the city can be clearly observed in the wake of the discovery of Soviet atrocities in the Metgethen suburb, west of Königsberg. The orchestrated release of the initially embargoed news, which combined coverage in the official Party outlet, the *Preußische Zeitung*, with a rumour campaign spearheaded by soldiers of the divisions deployed during the suburb’s recapture, reveals the lengths propagandists were still willing to go to by this stage of the war. Given the continuous destruction of the city, these men also had the vital task of upholding the idea that Königsberg was still worth defending. The reluctance of the population to leave the city, even as a corridor was created between Königsberg and Pillau, is a sombre testament to the success propagandists had in downplaying the dangers that the population was exposed to.

This behaviour seemingly conflicts with what is regarded as one of the core tasks of an army: the protection of its civilians. Chapter 3 points to the continuities in the behavioural patterns of the German troops from their time in the occupied Soviet Union, and established that the German troops that retreated into Königsberg in January 1945 had long had different immediate priorities. The actions of the troops who fell back on East Prussian territory already revealed that their mindset had been shaped – barbarised – by the years of war on the Eastern Front. There, these men had been taught to disregard civilian property, and this behaviour continued once back on East Prussian soil. Complaints about the poor behaviour of troops spread almost as soon as the Wehrmacht entered Germany, and turned into outrage as their stay in the province continued. The wanton destruction and the plunder of German property worried commanders, but, despite the introduction of strict orders to counter soldiers' behaviour, remained an unresolved problem until the end of the war. In the light of a continuous retreat, the soldiers' actions are understandable, especially since the decision-making processes that underpinned evacuation measures in East Prussia essentially differed little from those during the earlier years of retreat, and thus did not require the average soldier to rethink his behaviour. In this period, the impetus behind 'evacuation' was not the preservation of property. Instead, extensive orders were passed down to assure that military and civilian materiel was either broken down, evacuated, paralysed, or destroyed; a policy whose effects would be felt well into the post-war years. Troops were also to adhere to this policy once back in Germany, which, as reports of numerous local officials indicated, they did readily and without question or consideration.

As it moved into East Prussia, the Wehrmacht also played a role in the evacuation of civilians. The organisation of their evacuation rested with local Party officials, but with large parts of the province threatened by Soviet attack, they were ordered to cooperate with military commanders. Although at times the collaboration was strained, by and large Party and Wehrmacht reached agreement with relative ease. The demands of the military centred around the removal of local populations from the area of operations, and, as such, the concerns for civilians – or better the lack thereof – were identical to those earlier on the Eastern Front. Once the Soviet offensives commenced in January 1945, military concerns immediately gained the upper hand, and concern for civilians was no longer a priority. Trains and ships were prioritised for the transport of ammunition and the wounded, while roads were cleared of refugees to allow the army unrestricted movement. It is in this regard that 'cumulative radicalisation' manifested itself. Although the concept is traditionally used to explain the implementation of the

Holocaust, the implementation of the evacuation policy in East Prussia bears a striking resemblance to many of its aspects. The Wehrmacht's radical stance towards civilians found consensus among its ranks, as it allowed commanders to present themselves as determined defenders of Germany. With the defence of Germany as the overriding concern, the Party elite also accepted this course, or even tried to outdo the Wehrmacht. The pervasiveness of this attitude, however, meant that civilian interests were routinely ignored.

This becomes particularly clear during Operation Westwind, the operation that sought to connect Königsberg to the port of Pillau. By allocating three of the garrison's five divisions to it, and by positioning the strongest remaining division in such a way that it would be able to head west on short notice as well, General Lasch left the population dangerously exposed in the case of a Soviet attack. In this critical chapter of Königsberg's siege, it was clear that Lasch's loyalty lay with his troops, and that the care for the population was at best of minor importance. In the period following the successful break-out, the evacuation of civilians was still not actively pursued, despite the existence of a corridor to Pillau. In the newly established 'refugee camps' on the Samland, the care for evacuees remained low, with famine and diseases rampant. Unsurprisingly, civilians were often reluctant to be evacuated from Königsberg, and by mid-March the evacuation of Königsberg was halted. From then on, the population of Königsberg even increased, since refugees from around the city flooded back to the city in search of proper food and shelter. It meant that about 100,000 civilians found themselves in Königsberg as the final Soviet storming commenced. Although there is no doubt that the fortress command was aware of these numbers, it undertook no attempts to pursue alternatives to prevent a high civilian death toll. Multiple Soviet calls for surrender, both immediately prior to and during the final storming, or the idea of declaring Königsberg an open city, were dismissed out of hand. With surrender closely linked to dishonour, the defence of the city continued for over three days, by which time Soviet troops had advanced deep into the city centre, and were closing in on Lasch's command post. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the German army's disregard for its population are the terms of Königsberg's capitulation: no stipulations were included to assure their subsequent safety, and no efforts were made to protect their status as civilians.

This hard line can also be distinguished in the way the military sought to ensure Königsberg's *Kampfgemeinschaft*. Chapter 4 discussed how the army's arrival led to a sharp increase of intra-ethnic violence in the city. During the previous years on the Eastern Front, German troops had actively supported the regime's various genocidal policies and criminal

orders, and fought with increasing ruthlessness against a much-dreaded, visible or invisible, enemy. This resulted in a ‘barbarised’ mindset, with which they returned to East Prussia. Their arrival on German soil did not necessarily alleviate feelings of fear and anxiety, if only because on a day-to-day basis nothing changed for the troops: they still faced the same enemy, and they were still part of close-knit military structures that were held together by a sense of *Kameradschaft*. The constant rotation of troops caused by the large military losses increased a sense of mistrust among the men, while they were now also confronted with the civilians’ defeatist attitude. Parallels could be drawn to the ‘stab in the back’ of 1918 and the following collapse of order and rule of law, especially as the Party was seen giving in to civilian demands.

To quell any potential unrest, General Lasch sought to establish a ‘Wehrmacht rule of law’ immediately after his arrival in the city. Officer patrols, *Streifen*, were to restore order in Königsberg and bring deserters to the front, and, in this capacity, were given considerable leeway to determine what constituted ‘disorder’, or who exactly qualified as a ‘deserter’. During the first week of Königsberg’s siege, in late-January 1945, they executed men and women for minor infractions, signalling an abrupt departure of an already stringent Home Front regime. Other officers even acted on their own initiative and executed those they considered ‘cowards’, fully exploiting the authority that the late-war military regulations provided them with. From a military standpoint, this approach was highly successful: not only did Königsberg stay in German hands; the army was also immediately recognised as the final authority in the city. It marked the beginning of an era during which the extreme normalities of military life became the norm. In the midst of artillery shelling and aerial bombardment, the Fortress command provided food, shelter, water and electricity for the population, and also assured that stores, banks, and cinemas remained open for the people who were willing to contribute to the envisioned *Kampfgemeinschaft*. But this willingness was – of course – relative: the decision to stay in Königsberg was above all shaped by a reluctance to flee, or was rooted in the consideration that living out the war in a familiar environment would be the best chance of surviving it.

For a significant group, moreover, leaving Königsberg was strictly forbidden: as many as 10,000 Volkssturm militia men were deployed during the defence of Königsberg, and these men were fully integrated in the fortress’ command structure. The fortress command even differentiated between the different age groups: young boys were used in first wave of attack during the assault on Metgethen, whereas the older men were given defensive tasks on poorly held sectors of the front. Moreover, in early February, the fortress command proclaimed

Festungsdienst, or Fortress Service, which called for in the complete integration of the civilian population in the fortress' defensive efforts. With all men of military age already at the front, *Festungsdienst* encompassed older children, the elderly, and women, who were all to contribute to the fortress' defence for four hours per day. The decision signalled the final step towards Total War, and was justified by pointing to the safety the city provided despite being immediately threatened by Soviet forces. Subsequently, the willingness to contribute to the defence became the unofficial measuring rod of the civilians' relation to the *Kampfgemeinschaft*.

The continuing reliance on the strict military mindset ensured that – even though they were now fighting on German territory – army commanders continued to consider the defence of an area as their primary goal. There should be no doubt that the Party elite looked at the army's stringent emergency measures and its ruthless use of civilians with both admiration and concern. On the one hand, the Wehrmacht's means of coercion were seen as highly effective in ensuring the involvement of the population; on the other, set against the existing legislation, their severity and increasing grip on civilians' lives corroded the traditional rule of law. Again following the pattern of 'cumulative radicalisation', throughout February and March laws were enacted that assured the Party's place in summary court-martial proceedings. This led to an increasing and diverse set of perpetrators, in turn resulting in an explosive increase in the number of victims. Personal motivations, such as revenge, might have played a role in the severity of the summary courts-martial, but impotence in the face of the dire situation and misdirected forward panic nevertheless seem to have been of overarching importance.

It is near-impossible to determine to what extent this final intra-ethnic violence was perceived as extraordinary, since violence and National Socialism had always had a symbiotic relationship. Violence was born out of National Socialism, just as National Socialism was born out of violence. Already during the Weimar regime, clashes between SA and Communists had been framed as a Hobbesian struggle of 'every man against every man', while also a few years later Home Front support for the war effort certainly partially rested on the ability to 'bring distant terrors near' by exposing 'the aggressive intentions of Jewish Bolshevism.'³ Those distant terrors were infinitely nearer on the Eastern Front, where the lives of German troops were indeed, in Hobbes' words, 'nasty, brutish and short'.⁴ The behavioural patterns of the

³ Dietrich, "National Renewal, Anti-Semitism, and Political Continuity," 395; Förster, "Ludendorff and Hitler in Perspective," 333.

⁴ R. Hansen, "War, Suffering and Modern German History," *German History* 29, no. 3 (2011): 368.

Wehrmacht in East Prussia highlight an aspect which, within the research into its relationship to the Nazi regime, remains underappreciated: the Wehrmacht was not merely violent because it was part of the National Socialist apparatus; it was also an instrument of violence itself. Eventually, violence migrated together with the Wehrmacht, and, in the end, indeed brought the terrors of the Eastern Front to the streets of Königsberg.

Reconciling developments in other East Prussian cities with the findings of Königsberg has allowed for a better appreciation of the diversity of the different relationships in the city. In Königsberg, all aspects that were needed to pit the military and Party against the population were present, and, as such, the city fits well within the grand narrative of the fall-where-you-stand rhetoric of Germany 1945. Yet, most of East Prussia's cities, such as Allenstein, Marienwerder, Tilsit, Insterburg, or Elbing were not stubbornly defended; the extensive defensive systems around Lötzen were even abandoned without a fight.⁵ Many cities on the borders of East Prussia *were* evacuated on time. Not every house became a bunker, not every town became a fortress. Yet, the decision to base the defence of Germany around its cities was the most tangible step towards Total War, and, especially since most refugees fled towards them, brought the majority of the German population into close contact with combatants. Subsequently, the proximity of civilians' defeatist sentiments to soldiers' negative emotions of fear and suspicion had the potential to turn cities into pressure cookers.⁶

What would eventually determine how a city and its inhabitants underwent the final months of the war, however, were local dynamics, attitudes, and loyalties. In Königsberg, the complexity of behavioural patterns can best be seen by the harsh stance of the officers of the 1st (*Ostpreussische*) infantry division, who, although primarily recruited in Königsberg, did not hesitate to carry out executions of their former city neighbours to cement martial law. It is therefore impractical to talk about 'the' Wehrmacht during the final year of the war, but we can nevertheless draw some conclusions. Firstly, there are clear limits to the well-worn idea of the Wehrmacht as an obstacle for radicalisation in German society: in Königsberg, it can even be considered as a 'stakeholder of violence', since by readily resorting to it, the fortress command was able to establish its authority virtually overnight. During a time of omnipresent confusion, executions could communicate a simple message: either you assist in Königsberg's defence – or you die. Although less explicit, this was also the line that was adhered to during East

⁵ Willems, "Defiant Breakwaters or Desperate Blunders?", 359.

⁶ The range of emotions surfacing within a city faced with severe adversity is beautifully examined in Albert Camus' 1947 novel *La Peste*.

Prussia's evacuation, as those unable to contribute to the province's defence were virtually left to fend for themselves. Secondly, the Wehrmacht contributed significantly to the destruction of Germany's infrastructure, turning on the same society it had protected for years. Indeed, in its purpose, the March 1945 'Nero-order', so often portrayed as an outburst of a *Führer* disillusioned by his own people, differed little from an already widely accepted military practice. Lastly, the troops' constantly expanding image of the enemy during Nazi Germany's *Weltanschauungskrieg* also included civilians, and in that respect their brutalised behaviour towards their own population above all attests to deep-seated group imperatives. Once the Wehrmacht returned to East Prussian soil, the totality of the war ensured that the troops' preconceptions of the civilian as 'other' inevitably came into conflict with their duties as protectors. It was this tension that set the stage for the widespread violence of the war's final months.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Manpower in Festung Glogau, 20 February 1945.

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Encircled in Fortress | 9,348 people |
| Of which: reliable (<i>stoßkräftig und grabensicher</i>) hardly | 1,500 |
| Of Volkssturm | 2,000 persevering |
| Of those retreating from positions, again to be collected, and redeployed elements without battle value, completely untrained, morally inferior, about | 2,000 |
| Of conscripted civilians needed for maintaining of the viability of the city | 1,263 |
| Wounded | 1,023 |
| Civilian women, a few children and old men unable to work | 996 |
| Picked up and rucked-together foreigners | 566 |

Source: BArch RH 2/332, 192: Op. Abt. (I/W) 20.2. 1945 Notiz gez. Obers Graf zu Eulenburg, Fest. Kdt.

Appendix 2: Number of civilians in Königsberg, January to April 1945.

| Königsberg during the siege | | | | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------|---|--|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Source | Late January | February 1 -19 | February 20-28 | March | Early April | After Storming |
| Walther Kemsies, Intelligence officer | 40,000 – 45,000 inhabitants, 100,000 – 150,000 refugees | 140,000 – 150,000 refugees | | | | 50,000 – 60,000 |
| Waldemar Magunia, President Handelswerkammer | 31 January 210,000 people: civilians / Volkssturm | | | | | 100,000 – 120,000 civilians |
| Dr. Will, Oberbürgermeister | 120,000 – 130,000 inhabitants | | | | | |
| Friedrich Dorf Müller, Oberstabsinterdant | 200,000 civilians | | | | | |
| Wegener | | Well over 100,000 | | | | |
| Propaganda office East Prussia report 6-2 | | 125,000 | | | | |
| Propaganda office East Prussia report 15-2 (corrected) | | 135,000 | | | | |
| Kriegstagebuch des OKW, 15-2 | | 135,000 | | | | |
| Report to State Secretary by Propaganda office 21-2 | | -33,000 between 29-1 and 19-2 | | | | |
| SD report 26-2 | | | -14,000 | | | |
| SD report 27-2 | | | -17,000 | | | |
| Propaganda office East Prussia report 28-2 (Concerning 26-2) | | | - 51.000 refugees from KB to Pillau | | | |
| Waldemar Magunia | | | From 26-2 onwards 90,000 people to Pillau | | | |
| Major der Reserve Kurt Dieckert | | | 70.000 to Pillau, 10.000 returned | | | |
| Friedrich Dorf Müller, Oberstabsinterdant | | | Down to 90,000 and up to 130,000 again | | | |
| Dr. Will, Oberbürgermeister | | | 50,000 people over land and sea from Königsberg to Pillau | | | |
| SD report 1-3 | | | | - 800 HJ. No further Evacuation of 8.000 civilians due to full Peyse | | |
| Dr. Hans Schäfer, Ia der Festung | | | | Civilians poor back into the city | | |
| Klaus von der Groeben, Landrat des Kreises Samland, 3-3 | | | | 150-160.000 civilians. In the coming weeks 100.000 to Samland | | |
| SD report 5-3 | | | | 154,000 civilians | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|-----------------------------|---|--|------------------------------|
| SD report 6-3 | | | | Only 3,000 of 16,000 persons showed up for evacuation | | |
| Es geschah von zehn Jahren | | | | Wagner on 7-3: everyone out by 15-3, cancelled on 9-3 already | | |
| SD report 10-3 | | | | - 2,500 on 9-3 | | |
| SD report 11-3 | | | | No evacuation on 10-3. First refugee camps cleared | | |
| SD report 12-3 | | | | - 4,000 in night of 10-3 | | |
| SD report 14-3 (Concerning situation from 12-2 onwards) | | | | Evacuation postponed until further notice due to technical issues | | |
| SD report 15-3 | | | | No evacuation | | |
| SD report 16-3 | | | | No evacuation | | |
| SD report 17-3 | | | | No evacuation | | |
| SD report 18-3 | | | | 55,000 civilians | | |
| Dr. Paul Schroeder | | | | Evacuation permanently stopped after mid-March thousands flooded back | | |
| Notes of lecture to Army Group North 24-3 | | | | 70,000 civilians | | |
| Dr. Will, Oberbürgermeister | | | 70,000 – 80,000 inhabitants | | 90,000 – 100,000 | |
| Ernährungsamt des Oberbürgermeisters | | | | | 90,000 Lebensmittelkarten | |
| Dr. Sett, Gesundheitsbeauftragte des Stadtverteidigungskommissar | | | | | 150,000 just prior to storming | |
| Dr. Starlinger | | | | | 110,000 | |
| Dr. Paul Schroeder, Oberfeldarzt der Wehrmacht und Verbindungsoffizier zum Festungsstab | | | | | 130,000 civilians, 20,000 <i>Fremdarbeiter</i> | |
| Reinoss | | | | | Up to 100,000 civilians in basements | |
| General Lasch, According to Sinzig | | | | | 150,000 (?) lives | |
| Hauptmann d. R. Lemke | | | | | 90,000 inhabitants | |
| Chief of Fortress staff Stüsskind-Schwendi | | | | | 110,000 women and children | |
| Kampfgruppe Schubert | | | | | 130,000 | |
| Kreisleitung in Kemsies | | | | | 30,000 civilians died in preliminary bombardment, 6,500 soldiers | |
| Dr. Eugen Sauvant | | | | | Artillery 'devastating effect' on civilians | |
| Magunia | | | | | | 60,000 Wehrmacht/ Volkssturm |
| Kurt Dieckert, Verbindungsoffizier zwischen Zivilverwaltung und 3. Pz. Armee | | | | | | 50,000 POWs |
| Matskowski, Bürgermeister Ponarth (1-5) | | | | | | 90,000 |
| Matskowski, Bürgermeister Ponarth (15-5) | | | | | | Over 100,000 |

Appendix 3: Strength of Garrison Festung Königsberg immediately prior to the final storming, April 6, 1945.

Infantry divisions

| Division | Battalions | Attached artillery | Armoured support | Anti-tank guns | Total Strength |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 561st VGD | 8 'middle-strong' | 60 light guns 43 heavy guns | 9 Sturmgeschütze | 43 | 5,588 men |
| 548 th VGD | 6 'middle-strong' | 31 light guns 21 heavy guns | no armoured support | 21 | 3,776 men |
| 367 th Inf. Div. * | 9 'middle-strong' | 43 light guns 48 heavy guns | 7 Sturmgeschütze | 48 | 7.123 men. |
| 69 Inf. Div | 10 'average' | 41 light guns 48 heavy guns | no armoured support | 48 | 7.430 men |
| * Attached were Sich. Rgt 75 and Fest. Inf. Btl. 1441 | | | | | |

Further present in Königsberg:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Volkssturm | 5,000 men |
| Fest. Pak Verband I | 800 men |
| Festungspioniere | 900 men |
| Police battalion | 500 men |

49 foreign guns, ranging from 7,62 cm to 15,2 cm.

Total manpower:

'Kampfstärke', ('battle strength'), 28,617 men.

'Tagestärke', (daily-/maximum strength) 47,800 + 5,000 Volkssturm

Source: RH 2/335, 175-176: Op. Abt/ I N/ LdS Bef. Vortragsnotiz Betr.: Festung Königsberg, 6.4.1945.

In the days between 31 March 1945 and 6 April 1945 the staff of the 61st Infantry division and the decimated 'Kampfgruppe Hannibal' also arrived in Königsberg.

The final daily strength, therefore, must have been around 55,000.

Appendix 4: The capitulation of Königsberg

Commander of Fortress
Königsberg

10.4. 45

Order concerning marching-off of the remnants of the troops.

- 1.) The officers keep their side arms (but only blade weapons)
- 2.) Every officer can bring along a personal orderly
- 3.) The officers can bring along their kit (as long as it can be carried personally or by the orderly).
- 4.) Troops gather in companies or columns under the guidance of a responsible officer or non-commissioned officer
- 5.) They bring with them their weapons with ammunition until they encounter Russian troops. There they will then lay down their weapons and ammunition.
- 6.) Until Russian lines are reached, a white flag is to be carried at the head of every column.
- 7.) March route: Leave the city by crossing the railway bridge and the pontoon bridge constructed westerly thereof near the Nasser Garten.
- 8.) Russian troops shall not fire at German troops lined up in order
- 9.) Eliminating remaining strongholds is the task of the Russian army
- 10.) The above measures are to be executed immediately

The Commander:

LASCH
General der Infanterie

For the commander
The Chief of General staff

SÜßKIND-SCHWENDI
Oberst i.G.

Source: Museum Lasch-Bunker Kaliningrad

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