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Gerhard Saelter. *Grenzpolizisten: Konformitaet, Verweigerung und Repression in der Grenzpolizei und den Grenztruppen der DDR 1952 bis 1965.* Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2009. x + 480 pp. EUR 34.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-86153-529-4.

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The Evolution of Border Units: From Police Officers to Military Detachments

Since the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), scholars have been confronted with the challenge of historicizing communist East Germany in a post-Cold War world. In many ways, historiographic trends have focused on organizational or functional aspects of the GDR's political complexities. Gerhard Sälter's work *Grenzpolizisten: Konformität, Verweigerung und Repression in der Grenzpolizei und den Grenztruppen der DDR, 1952-1965* seeks to add to, rather than necessarily contradict, existing scholarship on the communist East. Indeed, Sälter attempts to provide an analysis of border units, the evolution from Soviet-directed border police to increasingly militaristic border guards, and the measures taken against, toward, and by individuals in these units. Sälter analyzes several key themes regarding border police, particularly individual motivation, mentality, and action (and the shifts that take place), the role of widespread surveillance by the structure and mechanisms of the state apparatus, and the reproduction of compliant military units guarding the omnipresent East-West border, both internal and external.

Sälter lays out his book in well-organized chapters. In the first chapter, he provides important background regarding the importance of the border during the period of Soviet occupation, after Soviet withdrawal, and into the 1960s. He makes clear that the East-West border dominated the discourse, and the regulation of border crossings prior to 1961 was crucial. After the construction of the Berlin Wall, the nature and activities of the border patrol evolved. In the second chapter, Sälter focuses on the border units in particular, outlining the separation of the GDR from the Soviet Union and the increasingly militarization of the border police. He breaks down the evolution of the units into phases: the development of the border police prior to 1952; the expansion and stabilization of the units between 1952 and 1957; the phase leading up to August 1961; the period after the construction of the Berlin Wall; and the instruction and supervision of the SED.

Chapters 3 through 6 identify different aspects of the border regime, including personnel matters, prescribed norms forming the underpinning of the administration of the border service, and the standardization of social relations of individual servicemen. Sälter takes care to point out that recruitment measures and the makeup of the officer corps were different prior to the introduction of conscription in January 1962, pointing to the very real issue of training and utilizing guards who were not immediately ideologically disposed to service on the border, or even enforcing GDR policy regarding refugees. It is here that Sälter introduces effective analyses of individual case studies. For example, Sälter utilizes the career of "L. V." on the border to illustrate the problems and challenges associated with the introduction of conscription into the border service, administrative practices designed to (re)educate police officers, and attempts to institute a sense of loyalty to both the troop and the nation (p. 116). Particularly important here was the role of the West, how individual service officers viewed the West, and their degree of loyalty to the border patrol.

Chapters 4 and 5 are perhaps the strongest in Sälter's work. These chapters focus on the role of norms and how service officers attempted to navigate them while at work on the border. Sälter also acknowledges how norms reinforced the goals of the structure, especially regarding the border. Emphasis on obedience (without question, in most cases), the continued identification of refugees and émigrés as "the enemy," and the presence of discipline were essential as the GDR sealed the border to the West. Sälter argues that a change of mentality, especially regarding those fleeing the GDR, was necessary for armed border guards to remain effective

(p. 203). Building on this examination of the mentality of border guards (and what made it acceptable for them to fire on unarmed civilians), Sälter provides another explanation. He argues that strict regulation of social relations, especially of the private sphere and with border populations, removed border guards from the general population. That is, social norms functioned differently at the border than away from the border and the barracks. This group worked under mutual supervision and surveillance, a virtual panopticon that made widespread or group resistance difficult. The specter of the West always loomed in the background, its status as enemy enforced through bans of goods, movements, and information.

Chapter 6 begins Sälter's analysis of how the structure, particularly of the SED and later the Stasi, affected the border service. Sälter identifies the element of political influence, noting that political training was necessary to create an ideological consensus in the building of military order and hierarchy, as well as watchfulness and discipline. The concept of solidarity with the other socialist states in the Soviet bloc and loyalty to the GDR was conflated with love and commitment to the homeland (Heimat) (p. 263). Engaged in the most disciplined (and most notorious) surveillance of border police was the Stasi, the topic of chapter 7. Sälter details the different ways the Stasi inserted itself into the operations of the border service, especially at the level of officer. Mistrust of the state and denunciations combined to create a pressure-cooker of surveillance within border units.

Chapter 8 detailed how individuals within the border service resisted complete control by the political structure. Rather than large-scale group resistance, Sälter contends, resistance and denial occurred on a more individual level. Typical examples of this type of resistance included drinking or sleeping rather than maintaining watch, allowing or even aiding escapes, obstructing orders, verbally criticizing officers or the government, and, as a last resort, desertion. Officers carried the burden of responsibility for anticipating possible desertions. Sälter then devotes a lengthy, if exhaustive, chapter to repression, which centered on obedience rather than ideological or political conformity. Tools at the state's disposal included punishment, criminal prosecution, and labeling noncompliant individuals traitors. In more case studies, Sälter examines and explains the standards for and uses of criminal cases brought against individuals. The results of prosecution, he argued, could be used for political propaganda on the part of the SED or Stasi, all with the aim to reinforce SED sovereignty. Criminal proceedings could thus result in death sentences for desertion.

Overall, Sälter situates his analysis of individual border police, their activities, and most importantly their mentalities, against the background of the GDR's increasing authoritarian impulse to control the East-West border. Sälter demonstrates convincingly that border guards were often caught between the political structure–embodied by apparatuses such as the SED and the Stasi–and the people. Sälter avoids blanket statements or conclusions about individual border guards as well as the totalitarian nature of the GDR. He thus brings his analysis to a micro level within the context of the macro level. His use of case studies, his extensive archival research in the military archives in Freiburg, and a multitude of other archival collections ground his study firmly in evidence, without reliance on anecdotes. Inclusion of interview material might have strengthened his argument, his explanation that such excerpts would have scattered the time period (and geographic location) of his study notwithstanding. Sälter's book successfully adds to the growing social and military historical scholarship on the GDR, and is readable even for those who do not specialize in the field.

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