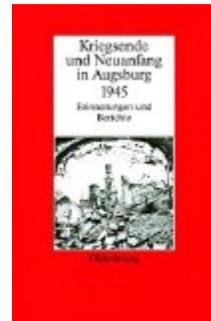


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karl-Ulrich Gelberg, ed. *Kriegsende und Neuanfang in Augsburg 1945: Erinnerungen und Berichte*. Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996. 179 pp. DM 48 ,00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-486-56157-9.

Reviewed by David A. Meier (Department of Social Sciences, Dickinson State University)
Published on H-German (April, 1997)



Issued by the *Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte* under the direction of Werner Roeder and Udo Wengst, *Kriegsende und Neuanfang in Augsburg 1945* is the seventeenth volume in a series devoted to presenting bibliographical and primary resources on select subjects. Nine documents and a commentary form the central focus of this work. Collectively, Augsburg's emergence from the Second World War takes on a distinct clarity rarely afforded in works of this brevity. Specifically, these documents depict Augsburg's transfer to Allied authority and its subsequent de-nazification. As a second objective, this work seeks a recognition of *German* efforts to liberate Augsburg before the arrival of Allied troops.

Nearly half the work is devoted to its most unique primary source—the memoir of Augsburg's first postwar mayor, Wilhelm Ott. Dated 28 April 1960, the memoir begins with Augsburg's transfer from German to Allied authorities in April 1945. Before 1945, Ott held various offices in Augsburg's city administration, and after 1939 he served as comptroller. A member of the Bavarian People's Party until 1933 and the Christian Socialist Union after 1946, Ott never joined the Nazi Party. With Augsburg's surrender in April 1945, Ott appeared natural choice to replace Josef Mayr, the former Nazi mayor. In reconstructing these events, Ott relied on his memory, supplemented by various archival documents.

Confronted with the threat of American bombers, Augsburg's local administrators quickly negotiated the surrender of the city to advancing American troops. Within Ott's memoirs, the American occupation personnel are described as polite and orderly. Within an atmosphere of controlled chaos, German civilians and American authorities worked to restore basic utilities, banking,

public transportation, medical facilities, schools, and the availability of basic foodstuffs. Problems were exacerbated by the closure of local armaments industries, military demobilization, the release of German POWs, and limited funding for the city bureaucracy. Augsburg's denazification proceeded as replacements for municipal positions were found.

Ott's detailed account of Augsburg's postwar re-emergence (specific-ally, April-July 1945) retains the sentiments of the times. For example, while personal property losses were regretted, the loss of friends, family members, and even acquaintances assumed a more personal dimension the closer the event came to the war's end. Similarly, Ott described denazification as a painful and poorly-understood experience for those involved with Hitler's NSDAP or any of its affiliated organizations. Ott's memoirs conflict in certain details with the testimonies offered by his contemporaries. Josef Mayr's June 1955 statement offers a more heroic version of Augsburg's surrender. Mayr asserted that SS, regional party leaders, and Augsburg's own city Commandant were determined to resist Allied advances to the bitter end. Confronted with a swift and massive American advance, however, such a defense of Augsburg would only have led to its complete devastation. Consequently, Augsburg's preservation became contingent upon its surrender to the Americans before the fighting began.

Kriegsende und Neuanfang's remaining seven documents emerged between April and September 1945. Rudolf Lang, described as linked with an underground German resistance, offered a German civilian's version of the city's transfer to Allied authority, with particular emphasis on measures taken to prevent additional

damage to Augsburg's bridges and city utilities. John O'Connell, a major with the 15th U.S. Infantry Regiment, confirmed the role of various German civilians, particularly Franz Hesse, in leading Allied troops into the city even as residual SS units sought to hold the bridge over the Lech river. Everett S. Cofran and Richard A. Norton's reports to G1H2, dated July and September 1945, outlined Augsburg's denazification and postwar political activities. American authorities paid close attention to the move of former Nazis (especially those affected by denazification) into the ranks of the Communist Party. Within the concluding documents, namely Robert Domm's circular from the Bishop of Augsburg and Matthias Simon's report of the Evangelical Lutheran Pastoral Office, church authorities publicly denounced National Socialism as anti-Christian. Denied any political activities by Allied authorities, church leaders pushed for the opening of parochial schools to begin the difficult process of undoing twelve years of National Socialist indoctrination of German youth. In both documents, American authorities appeared skeptical of Germany's commitment to Christian principles and its respective contribution to denazification.

As for the book's second objective, *German* efforts to liberate Augsburg before the arrival of Allied troops

appear weaker than maintained by Germans identifying with the resistance. Although a general war-weariness gripped the entire population, Augsburg's few active citizens were clearly divided between those supporting the war effort and those nominally resisting it.

Kriegsende und Neuanfang in Augsburg 1945 concludes by listing basic primary and secondary sources. As a model, it is an excellent reminder for researchers at all levels of the variety of resources currently available. References range from the local newspapers of the immediate postwar era and established authors such as John Gimbel and Edward Peterson through more recent works by such authors as Wolfgang Benz, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, and Rebecca Boehling. While quite useful, the list must be viewed as introductory and by no means definitive. Nevertheless, the primary sources and bibliographical materials presented in this work make it an ideal resource for any study of Augsburg's history from April-September 1945. It would be particularly useful for outlining the basic methodological parameters of a research project for beginning graduate students.

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-net. All rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu. *

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: David A. Meier. Review of Gelberg, Karl-Ulrich, ed., *Kriegsende und Neuanfang in Augsburg 1945: Erinnerungen und Berichte*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. April, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=923>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.