

Hans Ehlert, Matthias Rogg. *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR: Forschungsfelder, Ergebnisse, Perspektiven.* Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2004. X + 740 S. EUR 34.80, cloth, ISBN 978-3-86153-329-0.

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The German Democratic Republic was a highly militarized social formation.[1] An analysis of the highly charged, tense and uneven process of militarization is therefore central to any analysis of East German state and society, or so argue persuasively the editors of and contributors to this collection of essays.[2] Hans Ehlert and Matthias Rogg are research associates of the Military History Research Office (MGFA) in Potsdam, an institute active in promoting research in this area; the volume originated at the "45th International Conference on Military History" (held in Potsdam in March 2003). The book offers a sweeping overview of recent and ongoing research on militarized socialism East German style, covering, albeit unevenly, the entire period from the formation of the GDR to its dissolution. The eight sections of the book feature more than thirty-five essays written almost exclusively by German authors. Most sections open with a brief essay that introduces the subject matter, previews the individual essays and raises larger interpretive issues. These sections are preceded by an informative essay by Hans-Erich Volkmann on the GDR's official shifts in treatment of Nazi war crimes and the military opposition to Hitler. In between the general introduction and the contributions, the collection provides the interested reader with a comprehensive bibliography and a good sense of the current state of historiography.

In their concise introduction, the editors conceptualize East German military history as a site for multiple histories and analyses. They identify three main fields of research that reflect the directions of the historiography on East Germany in general. The first field is the analysis of the East German armed forces as part of the history of political domination and the production of "security," both internal and external, within the GDR and the Soviet bloc. Second comes the "history of society approach" (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) which explores the place of the East German military within East German society and the entanglement between armed force and social realms and institutions. The third field is that of a history from below, of everyday life, geared toward the reconstruction of experiences, willful actions and ideas of East German people as historical subjects in relation to East German armed forces and security policy.[3]

The first section, "Bloc Formation and Bloc Confrontation: The GDR and its Military in the Cold War," opens with two general essays on the cold war in historical perspective by Rolf Steininger and Wilfried Loth, who offer strikingly different assessments of its roots in general and Soviet policy in particular. Hope M. Harrison then explores the relations between the East German regime and the Soviet Union between 1953 and 1961, stressing the agency and independence of the Ullbricht regime vis-à-vis the Soviet leader-

ship. Christopher Winkler surveys the work and presence in the GDR of the western allied military commissions attached to the Soviet high command in Germany and highlights their relative disinterest in the East German army (NVA). Christoph Bluth examines Soviet and East German military assessments of West German and NATO forces in the 1970s and 1980s and links them to operational planning for a war against the West, as plans shifted from attack to defense in the mid-1980s.

The second section collects several essays on "Security Architecture and Armed Forces." Klaus Dietmar Henke presents the East German dictatorship as a state guaranteed only by Soviet military support and emphasizes the precarious quest for "total security" through all-out militarization and ideologization, which, in the long run, undercut the conditions of possibility for a complex industrial society. The next essay is an exploratory analysis of the decision-making processes, institutions and key policies in matters of military and security by Armin Wagner. His emphasis is on the supremacy of the East German Communist Party (SED). He presents the National Defense Council and the party's Security Commission as key decision-making bodies and casts militarization as a deliberate "security" strategy devised by the East German regime against perceived threats from within and without. Rainer Karlsch maps out the creation of an East German armaments industry by the 1970s, while Matthias Uhl probes the arming of the NVA with nuclear weapons in the 1960s, with the Soviets retaining ultimate control over warheads and their use. The essays by Kurt Arlt and Silke Satjukow explore the presence of Soviet troops in East Germany both in terms of their self-image (which remained that of an occupying army placed in a foreign country and outside of local jurisdiction) and their conflict-ridden interactions with East Germans (which centered very much on economic exchanges, legal or illegal, and

acts of transgression ranging from theft and traffic violations to physical assaults and rape).

The third section, "On Order of the Party," examines the working of the East German military as an instrument of communist rule. In an ambitious essay, Torsten Diederich superbly explores the interrelationship between the pursuit of unlimited political domination, military build-ups and all-encompassing militarization that shaped East German militarized socialism. Attending to changes over time, he stresses the nexus between armed forces, the domestic security apparatus, paramilitary organizations, military education in schools and the pervasive reach of military organization and indoctrination throughout society. Daniel Giese probes military decision-making processes and the NVA, stressing the continuous tensions between political controls and an ever-developing "autonomous" military professionalism that unfolded within an overall framework established in the 1950s and ensuring the leading role of the SED. Paul Haider offers an analysis (not always free of defensive undertones) of political indoctrination and military traditions in the NVA, which includes discussion of the labors of East German military historians (like Haider himself). The other two essays, by Stephan Wolff and Roman Grafe, offer rather fragmentary surveys of the surveillance of the NVA by the Ministry of State Security and of the so-called Border Troops, the special units that guarded the GDR's borders.

The fourth section, entitled "Army of the People? Shared Spaces between Military and Civilian Societies in the GDR," opens with a brief think-piece by Christoph Kleßmann. Kleßmann is critical of the notion of a total political domination and militarization of East German society and instead directs attention to the limits of these trends and to processes of negotiation and contestation at the everyday level. Raising questions for future research, Beate Ihme-Tuchel maps out the terrain of a history of military-societal relations. She stresses the gulf separating the military and civil-

ian society, highlighting the privileged position of military families, their physical isolation from the rest of society and high self-recruitment numbers for officers. In perhaps the most suggestive essay of the book, Clemens Heitmann examines the participation of the East German population in an all-pervasive web of institutions devoted to defense, security and military indoctrination by offering a collective biography of a fictitious family. Corey Ross probes struggles over military recruitment before and after the introduction of conscription in 1962, stressing conflicts and diverging interests between official policy, local officials and young male adults. Military service became part, however begrudging, of the quotidian only after the building of the wall and the subsequent introduction of compulsory military service took away any major alternatives. Johannes Raschka documents the increasing militarization of the criminal justice code in the 1970s. Stressing non-conformity and limits of official indoctrination, Günther Glaser explores perceptions of the enemy among East German soldiers. In the 1970s and 1980s, up to one half of NVA soldiers expressed unwillingness to risk their lives in a war against the Federal Republic. In response, the East German military leadership asked their Soviet commanders-in-chief not to use their troops directly against West German military units.

The fifth section, "Being a Soldier in Socialism," features essays on the experiences and willful actions of East German soldiers. In his introductory remarks, Bernhard Kroener suggests analyzing the East German military as a "total institution" and then attending to the contestations and negotiations surrounding it. Arguing along similar lines, Rüdiger Wenzke surveys the existing literature and identifies many lacunae of knowledge concerning the East German armed forces. Stressing the gulf between the promotion of the ideal of "socialist soldiers" and the realities of military service, Wenzke suggests levels of non-conformity and social behavior, as evidenced in instances of right-wing extremism or the consumption of West

German radio and TV, which clearly demarcate the limits of the East German military as a total institution. Klaus-Peter Möller and Christian Müller each investigate informal relations and sub-cultures among soldiers, which were more or less tolerated from above, focusing on informal hierarchies created by conscripted soldiers' remaining number of days of military service and on soldierly languages. Rogg probes the lives and social arrangements of the families of professional soldiers, stressing their increasing ghettoization and subordination to a rigorous system of high military preparedness.

The last three sections of the books are less substantial and fall off in comparison to the previous five. A section on the church and military in East Germany features a piece by Horst Scheffler on a document on the ministerial work for draftees passed by the Evangelical Churches of the GDR in 1965, and an interview with East German Bishop Axel Noack about the churches' relations with the East German military and its personnel. A section on film and the military includes essays by Wolfgang Schmidt and Gerhard Wiechmann on the making of the handful of films in which the East German military featured prominently, with the primary attention given to one major feature, *Hart am Wind* (1970). The final section is devoted to the East German military from the fall of the wall to its own, and the GDR's, dissolution and the fate of its professional cadres. Hans-Peter Kirchbach, the first West German general in overall command of former NVA troops, offers some personal reflections on his own service. Ehlert contributes a concise overview of the NVA's military leadership in the revolution of 1989 and the subsequent pursuit of military reforms under the Modrow and de Maizière administrations. Nina Leonhard concludes the volume by turning attention to the lives of former NVA soldiers beyond the end of their army. She offers case studies of two individual soldiers who were retained, with about 11,000 of their peers, by the West German army, suggesting some of the terrain of fu-

ture histories of NVA military personnel in a reunified Germany.

No doubt, this voluminous collection of essays is an ideal starting point for any future research on and thinking about the history of East German armed forces and processes of militarization. Its weaknesses weigh less heavily. The mixed quality and nature of the individual contributions are noticeable. Some essays work well as think-pieces and ambitious surveys; some are based on substantive research; and some review the findings of the existing literature and strive to identify research agendas, while others offer little more than preliminary accounts and sketchy analysis. Moreover, the coverage of important issues is rather uneven, both thematically and temporally, with most essays tending towards the 1970s and 1980s. However, these emphases and gaps very much reflect the state of the field and the direction of recent and ongoing research.

Overall, the book suggests the promise of the concept of militarization for the analysis of East German state and society. Yet it is also evident that its contributors disagree over the shape and boundaries of this highly charged social process, while all agreeing on its ultimate failure as evidenced in the revolution of 1989. These differences echo divides among historians of East Germany, which are only slowly giving way to more complex analyses. Some of the book's authors stress the all-pervasive nature of militarization, casting it primarily as a top-down process serving clearly defined political goals and linking it to the totalitarian character of the regime and the formation of what Jürgen Kocka termed the *durchherrschte Gesellschaft*, a society shaped by all-consuming political domination. Others, and most notably Kleßmann, by contrast, explicitly argue against this view, and stress the autonomy of East German social lives and the limits set by Alf Lüdtke's notion of *Eigensinn*—the willfulness, desires and needs of ordinary East German citizens, which are then located in the realm of everyday

history inside and outside military institutions. Yet, the shared premise of these two camps is a rather straightforward notion of all-out militarization. This notion evokes a by now outdated image of an anachronistically understood militarist Imperial Germany, and it falls short of a more complex understanding of militarization as an open-ended, contested, uneven and contradictory social process.[4]

Second, the study of the GDR as a militarized social formation runs the risk of marginalizing the analysis of the armed forces as an institution geared towards the preparation for war and the professional practices of its personnel. Some of the articles gesture towards the increasing military professionalism and map out the workings of the military as a Weberian *Herrschaftsbetrieb*, a producer of domination; and there are a few articles on military matters proper, such as on the introduction of nuclear weapons, the armaments industry and enemy perceptions and their impact on operational planning. But overall, the emphasis of the book is on the SED and its ruthless pursuit of political domination as the prime mover of militarization and on the lack of power and agency on the part of the military. This is a flattened account of militarization, even if we accept the ultimate political control exercised by the party and its agendas, for it neither gives proper attention to the dynamics and arenas of military pursuits and professionalism nor conceives of militarization as a site of open-ended contestation and negotiation within the East German state and among its various elites.

And third, this book stresses political, institutional, societal and everyday life histories of militarization. Language, culture and identity are therefore largely absent as key categories of analysis. So, too, is gender, as the editors themselves are aware. Women are mostly missing in this account of militarization; men are not present either, if we consider and analyze them as gendered beings. How central their inclusions would

be is, for example, highlighted by the fictitious collective family biography provided by Heitmann, which identifies the gender-specific participation of men and women in socialist defense efforts, including education and civil defense. In this regard, the analyses of militarization offered in this book fall short of the works of historians of mid- to late-twentieth-century militarization in other settings, such as Michael Sherry or Laura McEnaney.[5] They also do not include the types of cultural and gender histories offered, for example, by Ute Frevert's analysis of languages and experiences of military conscription, Christiane Eifler's examination of the gendered imagery of East German military propaganda and, more generally, Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum's edited collection on the military, war and society in the age of total war.[6]

Still, this volume offers the best introduction into the relationship between military, state and society in the GDR we have. Covering a broad range of topics and taking stock of existing scholarship, the book promises to be an excellent starting point for both new research into militarized socialism East German style and much-needed comparative and transnational histories of the larger militarization of the two Germanies (and Europe for that matter) between the late 1940s and 1989.

Notes

[1]. Just consider the following numbers taken from the book: more than three million East Germans served in the NVA after the introduction of universal male military service in 1962. By the 1970s and 1980s, about ten percent of the working population was directly organized in military, paramilitary and other defense organizations. More than ten percent of the national income was devoted to military and security matters. In addition, on average, about 360,000 Soviet soldiers were stationed in the GDR at any moment in time.

[2]. See also Matthias Rogg, "Militärgeschichte der DDR--mehr als eine Fußnote?," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 2 (2005): pp. 95-99.

[3]. This typology builds on Hans Ehlert and Armin Wagner, "Äußere Sicherheit und innere Ordnung. Armee, Polizei und paramilitärische Organisation im SED Staat," in *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR Forschung*, ed. Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach und Ulrich Mähler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

[4]. John Gillis, ed., *The Militarization of the Western World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Dirk Bönker, "Military History, Militarization, and the 'American Century,'" *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 2 (2005): pp. 105-109.

[5]. Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[6]. Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Christiane Eifler, "'es schützt Dich mein Gewehr'. Zu Frauenbildern in der NVA-Propaganda," in *Unter Hammel und Zirkel: Frauenbiographien vor dem Hintergrund ostdeutsche Sozialisationserfahrungen*, ed. Center for Inter-Disciplinary Research on Women of the Humboldt-University Berlin (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus Verlag, 1995); Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds., *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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