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Konrad H. Jarausch, Klaus Jochen Arnold, eds.. *"Das stille Sterben...": Feldpostbriefe von Konrad Jarausch aus Polen und Russland, 1939-1942.* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008. 387 pp. EUR 15.90, cloth, ISBN 978-3-506-76546-8.

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In a letter to his wife from the garrison town of Mienia, Poland, in the winter of 1940, Konrad Jarausch wrote: "It is strange how life moves one little by little from the path one finds as appropriate, and how it forces one to do other things and come out on top" (p. 189). As a secondary school teacher of religion, an intellectual, and a man of deep Protestant faith alarmed by the marginalization of Christianity under National Socialism, his conscription into the German army six months earlier had plunged him into a new and unwanted milieu. For the next two years until his death from typhus, Jarausch remained in the Wehrmacht, largely in the East, chronicling in letters to his loved ones back home the realities of German rule there. His nuanced, at times critical views of the German army and its failures in the East; the glimpses into the mentality of ordinary soldiers found in the work; and the contextualization of Jarausch's experiences provided by both Konrad H. Jarausch, Lurcy Professor of European Civilization at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and son of Konrad Jarausch, and Klaus Jochen Arnold, research associate at the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, makes *"Das stille Sterben...": Feldpostbriefe von Konrad Jarausch aus Polen und Russland 1939-1942* an important contribution to the research of the German army, its occupation policy in the East, and the Holocaust.[1]

The book is divided into two main parts, the first of which, the introduction, is divided into three subsequent parts. After a brief overview, written by Konrad H. Jarausch and Arnold, which provides some historical background to the letters as well as the methodology applied by the authors to their analysis, the German edition offers insight into Konrad H. Jarausch's difficult relationship to the father he never knew in "Vatersuche: Annäherungen an ein problematisches Erbe." The last section of the first part, written by Arnold and entitled "Soldat im Osten: Konrad Jarausch und der Gang des Krieges," contextualizes KonradJarausch's military career during the Third Reich and his subsequent fate by comparing his experience to what is known through other surviving primary sources, such as the war diaries of the

Dulag 203 where Jarausch served. Arnold's expert knowledge of the subject matter is also reflected in his deft handling and citing of the secondary literature of the field. The second main part and central aspect of the book remains Jarausch's Feldpostbriefe, or letters from the field, which were the tenuous link to the life all soldiers had left behind.

Jarausch's letters reveal a man whose world was defined by religion, work, and family. Possessing an intellectual and spiritual bent that likely distinguished him from many with whom he served, he appeared excited by the prospects of leading men on their spiritual journey. At the same time, he despaired of the inroads National Socialist ideology had made in replacing Christian faith among his peers. It was his religion that offered him a personal refuge throughout his deployment, although it also undoubtedly contributed to his status as an Einzelgänger (loner) in his unit. "I don't have many friends," he wrote his wife shortly after mustering into the Wehrmacht in 1939, a sentiment expressed repeatedly in his letters (p. 128). A passionate reader and keen observer, he was well attuned to his surroundings in Poland and later Russia, eschewing war tourism for a deeper understanding of ***Land und Leute*** (land and people). In both countries, Jarausch spent much time studying the local language independently and with private tutors, sometimes prisoners of war, and exploring the countryside. A classic teacher-scholar, his occasional lectures for the men of his unit were well received and one suspects helped him overcome the isolation to which his intellectual bent and introverted nature contributed.

If Jarausch could admit that he was not exactly soldier material, he still felt he belonged in the war. His political views identify him as a German nationalist, one who did not question the need for action against Poland and later, at first, against the Soviet Union. His writings while stationed in Poland express how necessary it was for Germany to crush ***that*** Polish state against which it struck, and express disapproval of his comrades who again and again forgot that the true aim of the subjugation of Poland was to establish German "Lebensraum" for future decades (pp. 158-160). Dispatched to help administer a Durchgangslager, or camp for prisoners of war transiting further west, shortly after the invasion of the Soviet Union, his first impressions of that country were wonder at the bombastic socialist architecture found in Minsk that evoked a sense of both the artificial and imposed that defined bolshevism. The old, agrarian Russian "world" that he encountered was described as "dirty and without German order," suffering from bolshevism's repeated attempts to eradicate "human sensibilities" (pp. 286, 300).

Jarausch's deep Christian faith informed not only his anti-bolshevism, but also the empathy he often expressed in his letters for the plight of the Eastern peoples with whom he came into contact, especially civilian women and children. In contrast to the persecution of the Jews, which he noted but did not generally comment on further, Jarausch was more vocal in his criticism of the rape and pillage that accompanied the subjugation of Poland, writing in November 1939: "it is just terrible here [what's going on] with the Polish women" (p. 136). He conceded that local Poles who derisively greeted their German overlords on Christmas 1939 had"some reason" for this (p. 149). Shortly after arriving in Russia, he devoted a longer passage to the appearance and behavior of Russian women traumatized by the war. Characterizing the emerging relationship between occupier and occupied, he wrote that "it is ... grotesque, how intimately many associate with the Russians--in contrast to all clichés--and how both parties benefit from this" (p. 311). Jarausch's letters are replete with further such observations that illustrate a greater interaction between the Eastern army and the local population than generally acknowledged, an interaction that in its nature ran counter to prevalent images of the Ger-

man political and military leadership of the Slavic enemy as Untermenschen (subhuman). Even in August 1941, after stubborn Soviet resistance and ever more draconian orders from German high command toward Red Army soldiers and civilians alike conflated to sustain a level of barbarity not seen on other fronts, Jarausch noted: "All in all, not all Russians are really 'pigs' or 'beasts.' That was also to be assumed beforehand, but it is still good when one can see this and speak about it first-hand" (p. 291).

He was stationed at Dulag 203 from late summer 1941 until his death in January 1942, which coincided with the most desperate period for Soviet prisoners of war in German captivity, a time that contributed a great number to the three million deaths of Soviet prisoners of war in German captivity during the war.[2] The criminal planning of Operation Barbarossa, which called for large battles of encirclement while making little preparation for the expected enormous numbers of prisoners of war; the invasion's resultant dislocation of the local economy and destruction of the means of production; and the preinvasion decree that the Wehrmacht was to feed itself exclusively from Russia led to an increasingly bitter fate for all those Red Army soldiers who had surrendered in the belief that they would be treated in accordance with international convention. "This is hell," remarked one Russian prisoner of war to Jarausch in October 1941 (p. 328).

Despite his convictions and earnest efforts to, in his own words, "avert some misery," Jarausch was largely powerless against it, sometimes perpetuating it (p. 328). He bartered with his prisoners of war, gaining their valuables for cigarettes or bread. At other times, he profited from "organizing" his fellow soldiers, the standard euphemism for plundering the civilian population that accompanied the German advance. In October 1941, when nighttime temperatures made the situation of Soviet prisoners of war in open air camps like Dulag 203 critical, he wrote to his wife: "You have probably already seen that your concerns regarding my rations are groundless. Even when we are now not receiving our dinner rations from home, we take care of ourselves. In that regard I have profited a few times from [my] ruthless comrades" (p. 325). In what may have been his most personal confrontation with the genocide proceeding around him, he did not appear to act in any way to help his Russian teacher--who was half-Jewish--escape arrest and probable execution by the SS, remarking in his letter only about the "painful and sudden stoppage" of his Russian tutoring (p. 335). Regarding the work of the Einsatzkommandos (mobile killing squads) operating nearby, Jarausch briefly noted: "The SS is cleansing [the area] frightfully" (p. 326).

Jarausch's letters are additionally useful in providing a micro level perspective on the hunger plan or strategy currently debated by scholars.[3] Here one can find disagreement between the intentions codified in the Grüne Mappe (Green File) of the Wirtschaftsstab Ost (Economic Staff East), which allowed a minimal subsistence only to those Soviet civilians and prisoners of war who worked for the Reich, and the reality on the grounds of Dulag 203. At least in the case of Jarausch, head of the Dulag's kitchen, a certain humanistic impulse informed his efforts to feed his prisoners more than was allowed by regulations when possible, a concern for their well-being that put him at odds with some of his comrades. In this connection, Arnold finds that the history of Dulag 203 contradicts the thesis put forth by other scholars of a de facto targeted annihilation of the Red Army prisoners of war by the German army, and there is much in Jarausch's letters to support this position (p. 90). Even in this case, however, Jarausch's benevolence did little to alleviate the "quiet dying" taking place at the time in this and most other prisoner-of-war camps in the East: in the same letter that Jarausch wrote about his struggle to provide adequate rations to his prisoners against the objections of the "bean-counters," he mentioned that he was called to investigate a

case of cannibalism (p. 330). Regardless of whether situation or intention carried the day, the result was for many prisoners of war the same.

There are of course limits to what can be learned from Jarausch's letters. Jarausch served exclusively in the rear areas, after German rule had been established. His admission to a friend in late August 1941 that "we see enough of what misery the war brings, although we were again spared the worst" hints at the by then openly brutal nature of the war at the front that he did not experience first-hand (p. 300). As personal correspondence meant for his wife or family friends, his writing often only touched on the genocide and depravations that he witnessed without providing information on the local triggers, subsequent course, or consequences. Given that German soldiers were aware that their letters home were monitored, this is hardly surprising. The editors' selection of the letters, while allowing the reader to focus on the most interesting passages, also limits our ability to see Jarausch as a complete entity.

Arnold rightly describes the difficulty that modern-day researchers have in correctly deducing the thoughts--and therefore motives--of the individual actors, but nevertheless makes the attempt when postulating that the German soldiers of Dulag 203 did not share their provisions with starving prisoners of war in the rare times of surplus because "it never dawned on them" (p. 83). But could not widespread support among these soldiers for National Socialist racial ideology that defined these prisoners as unworthy of food unless they worked for the Wehrmacht be a more plausible explanation for the indifferent treatment--or lack of treatment--of them? Could this not also be the reason for the lack of understanding among Jarausch's comrades when he attempted to reduce the camp's mortality rate through better rations?

In closing, the work makes an important contribution to the research of the German army, its occupation policy in the East, and the Holocaust. It underscores the importance of the bottom-up approach to the historiography of Adolf Hitler's war of extermination in general and the important insights that can be gained from letters from the front in particular. Only by examining the latitude of experiences, behaviors, and actions at the grassroots level of the German army can researchers hope for a more differentiated picture of an institution whose image in the public consciousness has recently vacillated between polar extremes. Through Jarausch's compelling letters we are confronted by a reluctant accomplice who, while holding personal beliefs and views that differed from the tenets of National Socialism, seemed to overcome this cognitive dissonance through a fatalistic resignation to his duty.

Notes

[1]. An English version of this work is available. It is not a direct translation of the German version, but reworked for the American-English academic market. See Konrad Hugo Jarausch, ed., ***Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[2]. Christian Streit, ***Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945*** (Bonn: Dietz, 1997), 10, puts the number of Soviet prisoners of war dying in German captivity at 3.3 million; while Christian Hartmann, ***Wehrmacht im Ostkrieg: Front und militärisches Hinterland 1941/42*** (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 789, reduces the number to 3 million.

[3]. Rolf-Dieter Müller, ***Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg***, vol. 4, ***Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion*** (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), 176, was the first to write of a ***Hungerstrategie*** but downplays this strategy as unrealistic and impractical; Christian Gerlach, ***Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944*** (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 46-58, puts for-

ward the concept of a more encompassing *Hungerplan*; Johannes Hürter, *Hitlers Heerführer* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), 491, argues that neither term is appropriate and should be abandoned in favor of a *Hungerkalkül* (starvation policy); and Jörn Hasenclever, *Wehrmacht und Besatzugspolitik in der Sowjetunion: Die Befehlshaber der rückwärtigen Heeresgebiete 1941-1943* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2010), 46, tends to support Müller's interpretation, finding Gerlach's *Hungerplan* as well as Hürter's *Hungerkalkül* "only conditionally helpful."

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