

# THE PASTOR AND THE MATRIARCH OF THE GERMAN UNDERGROUND AND THEIR TIMES

A Polish Perspective

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# Chapter 4

## The Aryan Paragraph

Soon after the passing of the Malicious Practices and Enabling acts came the Aryan Paragraph, which took effect on April 7 1933.<sup>353</sup> The Bonhoeffers always had access to privileged information, but as the spectre of the Third Reich encroached more and more into German life, most of it came from Christine's husband and lawyer Hans von Dohnányi at the German Supreme Court. The Aryan Paragraph was, for Dietrich, of grave concern, and with advanced notice, he started to write his essay, *The Church and the Jewish Question* in March; he delivered it in early April to a group of pastors who met regularly at the home of Gerhard Jacobi, pastor of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church.

The Aryan Paragraph would result in a set of disturbing new laws, by which all government employees had to be of Aryan stock. Cynically packaged as the "Restoration of the Civil Service," all Jewish employees would, among other "racially impure" ethnicities, have their employment terminated. In the case of the German Church, which was essentially a state church, compliance with this directive would mean that all pastors of Jewish blood, including Dietrich's dear friend Franz Hildebrandt, would be excluded from the ministry. It was under this intense pressure on institutions all over the country to fall in line with the tsunami of National Socialist dogma that Dietrich wrote his essay.<sup>354</sup>

For the members of the German Christian Movement, the implications of the Aryan Paragraph in general, but in particular for the church, were endorsed with rapturous enthusiasm. However, what Dietrich found even more disturbing was the willingness of more mainstream Protestant leaders to consider adopting the Aryan Paragraph.<sup>355</sup> While not necessarily harbouring any ill will to Jews in general, they could see no real problem with Christians of Jewish heritage being compelled to form their own Christian church, as was the case for example with negroes in the American South. This pragmatic appeasement of Hitler, before the coming of future horrors, seemed on the surface rather benign, and they reasoned that appeasement of the Nazi state would bear the fruits of restoring the church to its glory before the Treaty of Versailles and the chaos and humiliation of the last twenty

years. After all, was not the moral degeneration of Weimar Germany self-evident?<sup>356</sup>

Dietrich, however, had seen first-hand the negative consequences of such thinking during his visit to America, especially in the South. At the time, in his letters back home to Germany, he had written that he saw no analogous situation in Germany. However, with the passing of the Aryan Paragraph, this was now becoming a stark reality. For Dietrich, the Aryan Paragraph would have been an unequivocal violation of the book of *Galations*, Chapter 3, verse 28: “there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>357</sup>

As such, a church that excluded Jews was not a church of Christ, but a heresy. However, in his address, he went further by stating that the church still had an obligation to act, even when victims of institutionalised injustice were not Christian. Naturally, everyone knew he was talking about the Jews, and with the church’s existence thus threatened, it was not enough for the church to “bandage the victims under the wheel, but to put a spoke in the wheel itself.”<sup>358</sup>

In this regard, Dietrich’s grandmother Julie Bonhoeffer was a perfect example.<sup>359</sup> On April 1 1933, Hitler declared a national boycott of Jewish stores. The pretext was to stop the perceived Jewish dominated international press from printing lies about the National Socialist regime. In effect, they were again justifying an act of unconstitutional aggression as an act of defence against actions against them and the German Volk. Goebbels ranted and raved at a rally in Berlin, and across the nation, SA men intimidated shoppers who tried to enter Jewish-owned stores, along with the offices of lawyers and doctors. Their windows were defaced in black or yellow paint with the Star of David and the word “Jude” (Jew), while SA thugs handed out pamphlets and held placards proclaiming “*Deutsche Wehrt Euch! Kauft Nicht Bei Juden!*” (Germans, protect yourselves! Don’t buy from Jews!).<sup>360</sup> Strangely, perhaps for the benefit of the “Jewish dominated international press,” some signs were in English: “Germans, defend yourselves from Jewish Atrocity Propaganda — buy only at German shops!”<sup>361</sup>

It was on this day, in this atmosphere of bigotry and intimidation, that Dietrich’s ninety-year-old grandmother decided she would nevertheless shop wherever she wanted to shop. Moreover, she was forthright in telling the brown shirt thugs of her intentions when they tried to restrain her from entering. Later that same day, she did the same at the famous Kaufhaus des Westens, the largest department store in the world at the time. For the Bonhoeffer family, the story of their brave

and defiant granny blithely marching past Nazi gorillas became the embodiment of the values they sought to live by.<sup>362</sup>

Just before this time, in late March, Paul and Marion Lehmann, whom Dietrich knew from his time at the Union Seminary in New York, came to visit. Witnessing the April 1 boycott first hand, they also saw the spectacle of the German Christians' conference, at which Göring gave an address, extolling the dubious virtues of the "Führer Principal" and admonishing them "to expect their Führer to lead in every aspect of German life, including the church." Göring later stated Hitler's proposal for the office of Reichsbischof (Nation's Bishop) to "bring all the disparate elements in the German church together."<sup>363</sup> Ludwig Müller, a rather unrefined former naval chaplain, was ultimately appointed in this "unifying" role.

For the Lehmanns, the Bonhoeffer home on Wangenheimstrasse was like a sanctuary utterly removed from the surrounding madness that Germany was spiralling into. Although they did occasionally notice big brother Klaus tiptoeing to the door in the room in which they were speaking, to check if any servants were listening.<sup>364</sup> Such was the rapidity with which the Nazis were implementing their agenda that just two months following Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, they did not know who they could trust. The Lehmanns noticed a change in Dietrich from his more flamboyant and carefree days in New York two years ago. Institutionalised discrimination in Germany was now, to his horror, becoming a reality.

This reality would have played no small part in prompting Dietrich, in collaboration with Paul Lehmann, to write a letter to Rabbi Stephen Wise in New York, an honorary president of the American Jewish committee with connections to President Franklin Roosevelt. Since the passing of the Reichstag Fire Edict, the writing of such a letter was a treasonable offence, and Dietrich knew full well that he could end up in a concentration camp for his troubles. Nevertheless, he felt honour bound to co-author the letter.<sup>365</sup>

This environment led to Dietrich making a decision he would later regret. On April 11, just ten days after the Jewish boycott, Dietrich was approached to preach a sermon for a funeral. On the surface, this seems benign enough, but it was for the ethnically Jewish father of Gerhard Leibholz, who, unlike his son, had not been baptised into the Christian church. As a man who had been passionately campaigning against the Nazis on the so-called Jewish question, Dietrich was aware that the preaching of such a sermon for one who had not been baptised

into the Christian church would be construed as incendiary and provocative.

On the other hand, the fact that Gerhard was his brother-in-law and husband of his twin sister Sabine meant that Dietrich was emotionally conflicted.<sup>366</sup> After consulting with his district superintendent, who was overly sensitive to the uproar it would cause, Dietrich declined the invitation to preach at the funeral. It was a decision he would later regret, and one he was not likely to have felt comfortable with at any time. Seven or so months later, on Reformation Sunday, even though Gerhard and Sabine had never said anything to him, Dietrich would write to them, expressing his abject regret about the weakness in his decision.

Gerhard was a popular professor of law at Göttingen, and Sabine would often attend his lectures. On the day of the boycott, Sabine made a point of attending her husband's scheduled lectures.<sup>367</sup> When Gerhard and Sabine walked down the street, the atmosphere was toxic; people who recognised them would suddenly cross over the street. When Sabine arrived, she was greeted by students dressed in SA uniforms with the words, "Leibholz must not lecture, he is a Jew. The lectures are not taking place."<sup>368</sup> Theologian Walter Bauer and a certain professor met them there, expressing their disgust with the Nazis. Worse still, many of Gerhard's relatives lost their jobs, and one of his Jewish school friends committed suicide. By now, such instances were commonplace.

At the German Christians' conference, Göring declared that everything in German society was compelled to fall in line with Nazi doctrine.<sup>369</sup> This included books and ideas, and on the night of Thursday May 11 1933 at 11pm, thousands of students gathered in every university town across Germany to perform a chillingly symbolic implementation of this objective. From Heidelberg to Tübingen to Freiburg to Göttingen, where the Leibholzes lived, mobs of student "intellectuals" marched in torchlight parades to huge bonfires, into which they hurled thousands of books declared "degenerate" in the infamous literary *Säuberung* (cleansing). In Berlin, at the stroke of midnight, addressing the mob of thirty thousand, Joseph Goebbels, of club foot and short stature, ranted into the darkness with characteristic Aryan "super-race" zeal: "

German men and women! The age of arrogant Jewish intellectualism is now at an end!...You are doing the right thing at this midnight hour — to consign to the flames the unclean spirit of the past. This is a great, powerful, and symbolic act... Out of

# Chapter 6

## Old Prussia — Birth of Ruth to Precarious Survival

In the heyday of Old Prussia, on February 4, 1867, Ruth Ehrengard Gräfin von Zedlitz-Trützschler, was born and christened on the grand Lower Silesian estate of Grossenborau,<sup>xvi</sup> with none other than the illustrious Otto von Bismarck present at the christening.<sup>502</sup>

Post-World War II, Germany's history is virtually bereft of any mention of Prussia — the nation state that had dominated the proud and unified Germany or Second Reich, founded in January 1871,<sup>503</sup> in the wake of its glorious victory over the French in the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>504</sup> Wilhelm I, then King of Prussia, a title which he retained, was adorned with the additional title of Emperor or “Kaiser” of the newly unified Germany. However, the true architect of German unification was the politically astute and adept Prussian Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898), who now became the Chancellor of the newly united Germany.<sup>505</sup> As if to accentuate French humiliation, the ceremony witnessed by the father and future father-in-law of the young child Ruth, was held in the most grand of all French palaces — Versailles.<sup>506</sup> Decades later, in 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm I's grandson, Kaiser Wilhelm II (1859-1941), led the Second Reich into the Great War, but by early November 1918, was forced into abdication and subsequent exile in Holland,<sup>507</sup> until his death in 1941.<sup>508</sup> Seven months later, in June 1919, in the same palace of Versailles, Germany, rather than celebrating the dawn of a grand new era, was compelled to sign the humiliating treaty of Versailles.

In spite of Prussia's dominant position in 1871, not all of the Prussian landed gentry embraced this notion of Otto von Bismarck's unified Reich. One such dissenter was Ruth's future father-in-law and Bismarck's oldest friend and bachelor roommate, Hans Hugo von Kleist-Retzow.<sup>509</sup> However, Prussia remained the most dominant state in Germany until 1945, before it was formally dissolved by the Allied powers on February 25, 1947.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>xvi</sup> Upper Silesia is upstream on the Odor (Polish: Odra) River from Lower Silesia. Breslau/Wrocław is in Lower Sielsia. See footnote <sup>xlvi</sup> for Polish WWII Supplement II “The Gleiwitz (Gliwice) Incident” for further clarification.



In April 1882, Ruth's father Robert first pointed out the young Jürgen von Kleist-Retzow to the impressionable fifteen-year-old Ruth from his governor's box.<sup>511</sup> This was during a concert outside Oppeln in the military compound; Ruth was instantly enchanted by his dashing presence. However, until Jürgen's formal written proposal to Ruth in October 1885,<sup>512</sup> their meetings were fleeting. Before writing his letter, as was the custom, Jürgen had asked Ruth's father for permission. Ruth had yearned for Jürgen, and was resigned that she would never see him again, much less marry him. Upon reading Jürgen's letter, Ruth's reply was: "tausendmal ja!" — "a thousand times yes!"<sup>513</sup> Now, as a young wife, she had an inordinate fear that she would lose him again, during his overnight absences in performing his duties as the district Landrat. Only death, years later in 1897,<sup>514</sup> would permanently separate them. After which, Ruth never married again.

In 1885, Charlotte, the wife of Jürgen's father Hans Hugo von Kleist, passed away. Her death left her husband so distraught, that he could not bear the thought of burying his wife,<sup>515</sup> and so had her laid in a casket in the church crypt. Seven years later, when Hans Hugo passed away, he was also laid in a casket in the church crypt next to his wife. When Ruth's husband Jürgen first showed her the crypt of his deceased mother in February 1886,<sup>xvii</sup> just days after their marriage at Grossenborau, Ruth, a native Silesian, incorrectly perceived this as a bizarre Pomeranian tradition, since only in the extreme depths of winter would the Silesians not immediately bury their own.<sup>516</sup>

Five or so years later in November 1897, when Hans Hugo's son and Ruth's dear husband Jürgen died at age 43,<sup>517</sup> Ruth decided to have him laid to rest beside his parents in the crypt; Jürgen's unmarried brother and sister had been reluctant to bury their parents in the Kieckow cemetery.<sup>518</sup> For months, Ruth dressed and was veiled in black. Ruth's father, Robert senior, visited seven or so months later in June 1898, and insisted that his daughter must put the past and her grief to bed, under the responsibility that she now bore as the widowed mistress of the grand estate of Kieckow.<sup>519</sup> Ruth conceded to her father the need to move on and accept the responsibility thrust upon her by her husband's death. At the burial, the priest accordingly declared the time for

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<sup>xvii</sup> Jürgen was Ruth's husband. Hans Jürgen was Jürgen and Ruth's first child. See the family tree on page 394 of *Matriarch of Conspiracy : Ruth von Kleist 1867-1945* by Jane Pejso, originally published by Kenwood Publishing, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1991 and in 1992 by The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland Ohio 44115, ISBN 0829809317.

mourning at Kieckow over, while the weekly ritual of Ruth taking her children below into the ancestral crypt likewise ceased forthwith.<sup>520</sup> Nevertheless, the caskets of Hans Hugo and his wife Charlotte remained in the crypt until the cataclysm of 1945.xviii

Having now, in the second-half of 1898, put the grief of her husband's death behind her, the widowed Ruth realised that the modern and increasingly industrial times at the cusp of the twentieth century meant that local schooling was inadequate for her children's future, so she decided, late that year, to leave the Kieckow estate in the capable hands of her cousin Fritz von Wödtke, and moved to a large town house in Stettin (now modern-day Polish Szczecin)<sup>521</sup> to mind the children during their gymnasium education.<sup>522</sup>

That year as well, Ruth's elder brother, Robert junior, started serving in the Imperial Court in Berlin. Until 1903, he would serve as the personal adjutant to Prince Joachim of Prussia, born in 1890<sup>523</sup> as the sixth and youngest son of Kaiser Wilhelm II.<sup>524</sup> As impressive as this may sound, the down-to-earth nobleman, Robert, regarded his role as nothing more than playing nursemaid to a petulant boy, insistent on embarrassing the royal family.<sup>525</sup> However, in 1903, he would be promoted to the office of *Hofmarschall* (Court Marshall — chief administrator) for the Kaiser's court, and serve there until his resignation in 1910.<sup>526</sup> In spite of the promotion to the Kaiser's inner circle, his opinion of the Kaiser's court did not change. Throughout his twelve years in the Kaiser's court, he was frustrated in his efforts to bring about any sort of reform in what he believed to be a Byzantine circle of hangers-on, who distracted, misled and even infected the Kaiser with their gossip and petty intrigues.<sup>527</sup>

During the reception in Stettin in October 1908 for the wedding of Ruth's first daughter Spes to the local industrial magnate Walter Stahlberg, Ruth's father, Robert senior, expressed his agreement with his son's view of a vainglorious Kaiser who only listened to the worst advice.<sup>528</sup> As they were conversing in what they thought was a secluded corner of the resplendent Hotel Preussenhof, Robert senior peered over his son's shoulder to notice his daughter Ruth had been listening to every word. Brother Robert junior implored his sister not to allow the Kaiser to come between himself and her.<sup>529</sup> While Ruth seemed to heed his plea then, it was not so sixteen years later, when Robert junior's book

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xviii The cataclysm of 1945 will be discussed in Chapter 25 "Old Prussia Gone With The Wind."

was published, documenting the litany of petty intrigues in the Kaiser's court.<sup>530</sup>

In February 1912, Robert senior saw the Kaiser as indecisive to the point of being dangerous, pontificating in domestic politics while threatening in matters of foreign policy, yet incapable of acting consistently in either.<sup>531</sup> In 1890, just two years into the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the architect of German unification, resigned after a major fall-out.<sup>532</sup> Eight years later in 1898, the year Robert junior entered the Kaiser's court, Bismarck passed away in his estate near Hamburg.<sup>533</sup>

Throughout Prussia, there was the sense that the Kaiser and his chancellor did not possess political acumen, such as Bismarck had shown, to ensure the survival of Old Prussia, and a united Imperial Germany in general.<sup>534</sup> Intellectual naysayers in Berlin, and even Gertrud von Bismarck, a fellow Pomeranian Junker and great niece of Otto von Bismarck, were predicting the downfall of the Kaiser and the monarchy within Ruth's lifetime.<sup>535</sup> Such talk was depressing for the proud Ruth, in spite of her admission, deep down, of the shortcomings of her Kaiser, as previously elaborated by her brother. As Jane Pejsa commented: “

Still, one man's reign is nothing in comparison to the five centuries that have gone into the building of an orderly system in which every man and woman has a designated place and set of responsibilities and privileges to go with it. Besides, it is all part of God's plan, a secular order in parallel with, yet subservient to, the spiritual order in which Jesus Christ reigns supreme. Whatever the future holds, if the monarchy is threatened and duty calls, Ruth will be there, and she has absolute confidence that all her children, from Hans Jürgen to Ruthchen, will be there too.”<sup>536</sup>

On July 28, 1914, the fears of a now ailing Robert senior and his son, and the call to arms of Ruth's family, were realised when the empire of Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.<sup>537</sup> On the face of it, this should have just been a minor localised spat,<sup>538</sup> but the intricate web of European alliances, supposedly fostered to avert war, precipitated what would become the most cataclysmic war so far. A domino effect of mobilisation orders and declarations of war by Europe's major powers, starting with Russia's declaration of war on Austria in solidarity with

# Chapter 17

## Pastor and Spy

On the second weekend of July 1940, during Dietrich's second journey to East Prussia, which he made on his own, he met some students from the East Prussian capital of Königsberg (literally "King's mountain," now modern-day Kaliningrad in the Russian enclave),<sup>1164</sup> at a nearby weekend retreat in Bloestau. During this gathering, the Gestapo appeared and asked questions, writing down the names and addresses of the participants before breaking it up.<sup>1165</sup> Meanwhile, Hans von Dohnányi met with Colonel Hans Oster, the chief of staff of Military Intelligence (Abwehr). His aim was to gain Canaris's approval for his brother-in-law to be admitted to the Abwehr.<sup>1166</sup> It was not long in forthcoming, and Dietrich's third visit to East Prussia had the cover of a Military Intelligence assignment.

While in Königsberg on his third visit, Dietrich reported to the local Military Intelligence officer. But Superintendent Block telephoned him from Schlawe in Pomerania, stating that he had to report to the police there immediately. Upon arrival, a Gestapo officer informed him that, in accordance with orders from the Reich SS Headquarters, he was now banned from public speaking throughout Germany, on the grounds of "activity subverting the people."<sup>1167</sup> Moreover, he was to report regularly to the authorities in the town where he resided, and inform them beforehand of any travel. Upon the collapse of communist East Germany half a century later, it was discovered in their archives that one of the students Dietrich met at the retreat in Bloestau was a Gestapo informant.<sup>1168</sup>

By late July 1940, upon Dohnányi's recommendation, the decision was made for Dietrich to serve as a V-Mann (*Verbindungsmann* or confidential agent) under Admiral Canaris.<sup>1169</sup> Eventually, following a nervous six month wait, he would be granted the classification of "*unabkömmlich — UK*" or indispensable,<sup>1170</sup> which ruled out any possibility of his conscription into the army.<sup>1171</sup> However, in view of his recent problems with the Gestapo, it was seen as prudent to transfer him to the Military Intelligence office in Munich in the south of the country, where other antagonists of the Reich, most notably his friend and Vatican contact, Josef Müller, were based.<sup>1172</sup>

Curiously, however, Dietrich was never on the Abwehr payroll, and would have refused any such income as an agent.<sup>1173</sup> He did continue to receive income from the Confessing Church, but 30 to 50 percent less, due to the increasing difficulties the Confessing Church had in meeting its financial obligations to the pastors who had been suspended without pay from their pastorates. Fortunately, his twin sister Sabine and her husband still had a bank account in Germany which the Gestapo had not yet discovered; the remaining shortfall was met by Dohnányi, who maintained a special account for the benefit of the Confessing Church. It was funded periodically by Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, the former mayor of Leipzig, who collected the required funds from among his extensive contacts.

It may seem puzzling, given that the Reich Main Security Office had labelled Dietrich as subversive, that he was able to be recruited by the Abwehr, which for all outward appearances, was an instrument of Hitler's Reich. In the shadowy world of espionage, however, appearances are everything. The highest echelons of the Abwehr, from its head Admiral Canaris to Hans Oster and Dietrich's brother-in-law Hans von Dohnányi, had to portray a façade of unquestioning loyalty to the Third Reich on the one hand, while, on the other, plotting its demise — which included Hitler's assassination. In the event of his arrest and subsequent interrogation, Dietrich was told by Oster's office to tell his interrogators that "Military Intelligence works with everyone, with Communists and with Jews; why not also with people of the Confessing Church?"<sup>1174</sup>

While this seems like a very strange comment, there is the story of the German Jew Paul Ernst Fackenheim. To the outsider, Fackenheim was just another faceless prisoner, No. 26,336. But this loyal German, who had distinguished himself in World War I and had become a friend of Hermann Göring,<sup>1175</sup> would soon become "the only Jew to be willingly released by the Nazis" during WWII. A man whom the Abwehr had specific plans for. He was to be trained as a spy and ultimately parachuted into Palestine, to learn what he could of the British effort to stop Field Marshal Erwin Rommel from taking control of the Suez Canal.<sup>1176</sup> On the night of October 10 1941, Paul Fackenheim, now assigned the code name Paul Koch, boarded a Heinkel bomber and took off for Palestine. His jump was successful, and he landed safely in an orange grove. But his troubles were just beginning. Unbeknownst to Abwehr officials, in a classic case of bitter inter-agency rivalry within the Reich, in concert with National Socialist dogma, the SS leaked the mission to the British, informing them that a dangerous agent named Koch would be parachuted into Palestine.<sup>1177</sup>

British troops, tipped off about Fackenheim's arrival, swarmed to the drop zone, but he used the skills he had learned on the battlefields of World War I to evade capture. The next morning he joined a group of civilians and boarded a bus for Haifa. With British soldiers still searching for their quarry, Fackenheim was convinced that his best chance of survival was to turn himself in. He entered a British camp and told the officer that he was a Jewish immigrant from Europe who had landed on the beach the night before. When the officer saw the name "Koch" on the papers, Fackenheim was immediately arrested and sent to Cairo. There he was interrogated by British intelligence services, who were certain that he was a dangerous German spy.<sup>1178</sup> Fackenheim tried to tell them the truth about his release from Dachau, but they responded with considerable scepticism. He was placed on trial and faced the spectre of a firing squad, but he had a stubborn lawyer. Somehow, the lawyer was able to locate a woman from his hometown in Germany who vouched for his true identity. Fackenheim had dodged the bullet once again, but he remained in prison until the war's end. Sadly, his mother was deported in 1943 to Theresienstadt, where she died.<sup>1179</sup>

Another example of the double dealing demanded of the Abwehr in this environment was the use of British made plastic explosives, of the type that had been dropped all over Europe by the RAF (Royal Air Force) to equip the burgeoning resistance movements in countries occupied by the Nazis. Some of this plastic explosive was seized by the Abwehr, and used in the failed assassination plots of March 1943 and the July 1944 Valkyrie plot, because it was extremely powerful, yet easy to conceal, since its fuse functioned silently without a tell-tale hiss.<sup>1180</sup>

Hitler's SS (Shutzstaffel — Protection Squadron)<sup>1181</sup> did have its own intelligence arm, namely the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) and there was of course Hitler's secret police — the Gestapo. While in a sense, the Gestapo was separate from the SS, they both came under the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA — Reich Main Security Office), ultimately answerable to its head Heinrich Himmler. The RSHA was the all-encompassing body responsible for the concentration camps, Einsatzgruppen, and ultimately the Final Solution, which embodied the Holocaust.<sup>1182</sup> The Abwehr, on the other hand, was the intelligence arm of the regular military, including the Wehrmacht — the German regular army, the Luftwaffe — the German Air Force, and the Kriegsmarine — the German Navy.<sup>1183</sup> The vast majority of the military members of the conspirators came from the Wehrmacht, with hardly any coming from

the SS or RHSA in general; the opportunistic Arthur Nebe<sup>1184</sup> was one of the very few, or perhaps the only one.

While Admiral Canaris was not a member of the Wehrmacht, he had served in the German Imperial Navy in the Great War;<sup>1185</sup> in the war's aftermath, up until 1935, he had served in the Reichsmarine, which had that year, two years after Hitler's rise to power, been superseded by the Kriegsmarine.<sup>1186</sup> They were nevertheless still part of the regular military, and so never subordinate to the SS or Gestapo. On January 2 1935, Canaris was made head of the Abwehr,<sup>1187</sup> and in 1933, was seduced by Hitler, and was loyal to him well into 1936. Then, in a major intelligence coup for the Abwehr, Canaris had audaciously contradicted other intelligence agencies of the Reich, correctly advising Hitler that the French and British would not intervene militarily in the March 1936 Rhineland crisis.<sup>1188</sup> Canaris' perception of Hitler, however, had changed by early 1938, preceding the Austrian Anschluss in March, and in the wake of the Fritsch Affair in January.<sup>1189</sup>

Now an agent of the Abwehr, Dietrich, in the "twilight zone"<sup>1190</sup> of a double life, continued his life as no less a pastor.<sup>1191</sup> He still conducted funerals, kept in contact with former students at the front, and the few who still worked as pastors in remote villages. He still wrote personal letters to the families of students and friends who died at the front, and despite the ban from public speaking, he still held discussions in small groups, and continued to work on his book *Ethics*. None of them could know the other side of his new double life. From October 1940 until his arrest on April 5 1943, during frantic weeks of carrying out assignments for the conspiracy, travelling on overcrowded trains that were blacked-out at night, and on planes, ferries and the like, mingled with periods of working undisturbed on his theology in the home of Ruth von Kleist-Retzow in Pomerania, at the Benedictine monastery in Ettal in Bavaria, or in his attic room in Berlin, he traversed in all well over 50,000 kilometres, or one-and-a-quarter times the world's circumference.<sup>1192</sup>

That Dietrich had successfully concealed his double life from the Confessing church, is supported by what occurred at a meeting of the Confessing Church's Old Prussian Council of Brethren in early July 1940 at Nowawes (today Babelsberg; it was a remote site they often used for meetings) near Potsdam. There, Kurt Scharf, Wilhelm Niesel and others post-war, claimed that Dietrich had acknowledged Hitler's stunning victory in France as if it were the very will of God.<sup>1193</sup> They claimed that Dietrich appeared there and surprised his friends by indicating that he, like virtually everyone else, was capitulating before Hit-

# Chapter 25

## Old Prussia Gone with the Wind

By February 25, 1947,<sup>2354</sup> following the formal dissolution of Prussia by the Allied powers, great swaths of it had been absorbed into the communist “People’s” Republic of Poland, including the estates of the Kleists in the Pomeranian province in the north, and to the south, Oma Ruth’s ancestral home of Grossenborau in the Lower Silesian province.<sup>2355</sup> These became part of the “Recovered Territories”<sup>2356</sup> after World War II — so dubbed by Stalinist propaganda in a deal which had catastrophic consequences for Germany and for Poland. While Poland gained these former eastern German territories, they lost more than double the amount of land in the east to the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Lithuanian Soviet Republics; this effectively translated Poland’s territory and eastern Borderlands people westwards into the pre-war eastern Reich. For Borderland Poles, and Germans from the east of the pre-war Reich, numbering six million in all, this became the largest human migration in history.<sup>2357</sup> With it came untold misery, suffering and death.<sup>2358</sup> All was legitimised in the Stalinist mindset by the obscure, dormant and tampered-with Spa-London-Moscow telegram from July 1920, during the 1919-20 Polish Soviet War.<sup>2359</sup>

The cataclysmic death throes of the American Civil War and its aftermath from April 1865 onwards<sup>2360</sup> saw the end of the South’s agrarian way of life that had been established upon black slavery.<sup>2361</sup> Just as this era was eulogised in the novel and subsequent Hollywood epic *Gone with the Wind*,<sup>2362</sup> so too, the Prussian agrarian way of life, the only life Oma Ruth ever knew, became just a memory, eight decades later, in 1945.<sup>2363</sup> The death throes and cataclysmic aftermath of a major war, a conflict on a global scale surpassing any in history, were epitomised in the barbaric theatre of the European Eastern Front.<sup>2364</sup> Of course, the privileged agrarian Prussian class that Oma Ruth was born into, was not based on anything like the oppressive system of Black slavery, so integral to the pre-civil war society of the Old American South. Nor was it based on the system of serfdom, no less fundamental to the society of Tsarist Russia.<sup>2365</sup> For example, Jane Pejsa wrote of Ruth making her monthly visit to the village in June 1899, when she visited and took time to chat and present flowers to a mother who recently gave birth. This was followed by her visiting another household



where the man was facing death, with her words of great solace to he and his family. This being two years following the death of her dearly beloved husband Jürgen.<sup>2366</sup>

By Christmas 1943, ten months or so following the disaster for the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, with the war having turned against Germany and its Axis partner Japan on all fronts,<sup>2367</sup> all the young Prussian estate workers were now fighting at the front or already dead. Soviet and French prisoners of war were now working on the Prussian lands to cover the shortfall in manpower.<sup>2368</sup> At Kieckow, fifty Soviet prisoners were in the employ of Ruth's eldest child, Hans Jürgen, living in a converted stable and under guard at all times by a German soldier. At Oma Ruth's nearby Klein Krössin estate, there were a like number of Frenchmen guarded by German soldiers.<sup>2369</sup> While the guards turned out to be benign, the problem for the prisoners and Hans Jürgen was that the guards were monitored by a group of zealous civilian Nazi leaders from Gross Tychow; they were totally committed to the enforcement of Reich directives in regard to the treatment of prisoners of war of the Slavic *Untermensch*.<sup>2370</sup>

These included each prisoner only being allowed a single straw cover — a freezing prospect in a Pomeranian winter, as well as the prisoners' rations being limited to the bare minimum required for survival — as was the case in the concentration camps and Jewish ghettos. Yet the prisoners were expected to perform heavy manual labour every day.<sup>2371</sup> The reasoning was that, with the almost limitless supply of such manpower, the regime could enforce this prolonged starvation in the name of the extermination of the *Untermensch*.<sup>2372</sup>

However, right from the outset, Hans Jürgen insisted that every prisoner be provided with two straw mats — one to lie on and one as a blanket to survive the Pomeranian winter. Of course, this was still woefully inadequate; but he also insisted that the prisoners receive the same rations as village workers. In the village, these rations were supplemented with fruit and vegetables from the villager's gardens, and Hans Jürgen ensured that the prisoners received additional portions from the manor house larder. In the two years that Hans Jürgen had prisoners on his estate, this was how he operated. Invariably, this led to confrontations with every new Nazi official, to whom he argued that he must have healthy workers to run his estate, in spite of warnings of dire consequences. It seemed that in Pomerania at least, on his own land, a resolute landowner could still hold sway.<sup>2373</sup> Sadly, however, upon their "liberation," the Soviet prisoners served time in the Soviet Gulags, hav-

ing been branded as traitors to the Motherland.<sup>2374</sup> As Alexander Solzhenitsyn put it: “

Capitalist England fought at our side against Hitler; Marx had eloquently described the poverty and suffering of the working class in that same [Victorian] England. Why was it that in this war only one traitor could be found among them, the businessman “Lord Haw Haw” [William Joyce]<sup>2375</sup> — but in our country millions?”<sup>2376</sup>

For the time being, however, Soviet prisoners experienced the resolute benevolence of Hans Jürgen. At Christmas, his wife Mieke arranged packages for the prisoners with cards containing portraits of the Virgin Mary, obtained by scouring every town in the Belgard district. Unlike the iconoclastic Lutherans of Pomerania,<sup>2377</sup> the French Catholics and those of the Russian Orthodox faith retained icons as a cornerstone of their veneration of Christ. Hence the diligent search throughout this Lutheran stronghold for cards bearing images of the Mother of Christ.<sup>2378</sup>

However, at Pätzig, the estate of the von Wedemeyers, Ruthchen had taken an intense dislike to the group of German soldiers guarding the Soviet prisoners.<sup>2379</sup> Frustrated with the powerlessness of his mother in the face of these bullies, Hans Werner, aged fourteen, took to the attic stairs, from where he was able to look down at them, spit on them, and make a hasty retreat. Over the weeks, his aim improved before he was caught, not by the guards, but by his widowed mother. A stern lecture followed; his mother lectured him that regardless of one’s opinion of the man wearing the uniform of the Fatherland, one must never dishonour it!<sup>2380</sup>

On the night of New Year’s Eve 1943, after travelling from Berlin, Ewald Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin, the eldest son of Ewald von Kleist-Schmenzin, had sought counsel with his father about what became the second and final abortive greatcoat suicide assassination plot.<sup>2381</sup> However, with multiple cancellations by Hitler, it never came to pass, and like his fellow greatcoat conspirator, Axel von dem Bussche, Ewald Heinrich survived the war and became the final conspirator to pass away in Munich on March 8 2013.<sup>2382</sup> But seven months after Ewald Heinrich’s counsel with his father, all hell broke loose for the Kleists and their related families, as was the case for all involved in the conspiracy in the wake of Valkyrie.

In the very early morning of Friday July 21, 1944, Ewald was arrested, before the local police superintendent arrived at 5 a.m. at Kieckow to wake and inform Hans Jürgen's secretary that he too was under arrest.<sup>2383</sup> After dressing, Hans Jürgen was seated in the car alongside Ewald; they did not exchange looks or words. However, at the Gestapo headquarters in Köslin, the two conspirators and old friends found the opportunity to talk. Ewald's words proved to be, as they had been almost two decades earlier in 1925,<sup>2384</sup> prophetic: "You will probably be free one day. I shall not, but that doesn't matter so much. It may sound strange, but I feel exulted that it has come this far."<sup>2385</sup>

By noon that day, the Kleist conspirators were alone in their respective cells. Later that day, Gestapo officers arrived at Kieckow to search desks and wardrobes for incriminating evidence. By now, the names of some of the conspirators had been made public, including that of the leading figure, Colonel von Stauffenberg. However, at Hans Jürgen's estate, little was uncovered other than earlier connections to the long since prostrate Confessing Church,<sup>2386</sup> coupled with family connections to men and women already on the suspect list.<sup>2387</sup> Unfortunately, this was not the case on the Schmenzin estate, where, on Ewald's desk, a Gestapo officer (later to be "commended") discovered a handwritten letter from Winston Churchill, dated August 17, 1938: "

I am certain as I was at the end of July 1914 that England will march with France, and certainly the United States is now strongly anti-Nazi. It is difficult for democracies to make precise declarations, but the spectacle of an armed attack by Germany upon a small neighbour and the bloody fighting that will follow will rouse the whole British Empire and compel the gravest decisions. Do not I pray you, be misled on this point. Such a war, once started, would be fought out like the last to the bitter end, and one must consider not what might happen in the first few months, but where we should all be at the end of the third or fourth year."<sup>2388</sup>

For Ewald, this letter was a poisoned chalice leading to his execution seven or so months later.

About one month later, on August 18, Ewald was transferred to the Moabit (Lehrterstrasse) prison in Berlin,<sup>2389</sup> as was his son Ewald Heinrich, brought by military police from the front. As both faced the wall next to each other, Ewald whispered to his son, "Do not lose your

self-control whatever happens.”<sup>2390</sup> By early October, the pair were transferred to the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse prison, headquarters of the Reich Security Office.<sup>2391</sup> They of course were not alone, as on the 8<sup>th</sup>, Dietrich had been moved from the relatively benign environment of Tegel to this subterranean hell.<sup>2392</sup> Hans Jürgen was also reunited with his nephew Fabian von Schlabrendorff, married to Hans Jürgen’s niece Luitgarde,<sup>2393</sup> completing a Kleist family reunion of sorts.<sup>2394</sup> They were not the only ones, as the two most senior former heads of the Abwehr, Admiral Canaris and General Oster, among many conspirators and non-conspirators, made up the list of the incarcerated.<sup>2395</sup> Their treatment ranged from malevolent neglect to repeated torture.<sup>2396</sup>

In December, during the first week of Advent,<sup>2397</sup> Ewald Heinrich, who was among the conspirators making their last stand in the Bendlerblock with Claus von Stauffenberg,<sup>2398</sup> was released from prison on the personal order of the Führer. Apparently Hitler noticed a von Kleist on the prisoner list, which he scanned from time to time, and incorrectly assumed that this Kleist was the son of Field Marshal Paul Ludwig Ewald von Kleist,<sup>2399</sup> who was in no way connected with the conspiracy against Hitler, but was nevertheless a distant relative of Ewald von Kleist of Schmenzin. Ewald Heinrich was subsequently ordered to return to his front-line unit.<sup>2400</sup>

A day later, Ewald’s second wife Alice was granted her last visit with her husband.<sup>2401</sup> Afterwards, on the 7<sup>th</sup>, Ewald wrote to her: “

7.12.1944

Yesterday I finally saw you and spoke with you. That was my final great wish. I had been so uneasy that something would prevent my seeing you. Such a joy this last meeting was for me, for which I thank God. And that God sheltered you from the terrible air raid. You have made me so happy through the short half-hour [we were together]. No doubt I shall not see you again in this lifetime. Our farewell was so difficult for me. I was amazed how you held yourself together and how you did not let me see your pain. God has given you so much strength. This is a great comfort for me.

I thank God also that Ewald Heinrich walks free again. By mortal reckoning I shall never see you again — never. And yet: God’s will be done.”<sup>2402</sup>

# SOURCES AND END- NOTES

## Preface - Birth and Memory upon the Lesser Known Fault Line of History

<sup>2</sup> <sup>3482</sup> <sup>4542</sup> Concerning the three stages of Poland's partitioning in 1772, 1793 and 1795, see the book, *God's Playground A History of Poland: Volume 1: The Origins to 1795*, by Norman Davies, published by Oxford University Press Oxford, 2005, ISBN 0199253390, 9780199253395, in particular, page 386. As well, page 245 onwards of the book *The Polish Way* by Adam Zamoyski (a friend of Norman Davies), published by John Murray Publishers Limited, 1989, ISBN 10: 0719546745 ISBN 13: 9780719546747.

<sup>3</sup> Page 324 of *The Polish Way* by Adam Zamoyski.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning Hitler's invasion of Poland on September 1 1939, followed by Stalin's invasion sixteen days later on the 17<sup>th</sup>, see Polish WWII Supplement I "The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact"<sup>3268</sup> and pages 361 and 385 of the book *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler* by Robert Gellately, published by Vintage 2008, ISBN 9780712603577. See also, the Washington Post online article by Eugene Volokh, dated September 2, 2016 at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/09/02/saying-that-the-ussr-and-nazi-germany-jointly-invaded-poland-is-a-crime-in-russia/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.2a88ae8b2663](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/09/02/saying-that-the-ussr-and-nazi-germany-jointly-invaded-poland-is-a-crime-in-russia/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2a88ae8b2663). See also the English language online article at <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1472775460> on the website of *Human Rights in Ukraine* — *Website of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group* also dated September 2, 2016, which documents the danger of stating the fact of the Soviet September 1939 invasion of Poland in Putin's Russia. Both links accessed on Saturday July 25, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> For information on the 1920 "Miracle on the Vistula" — "*Cud na Wisła*" see page 225 of *White Eagle Red Star*, by Professor Norman Davies, published in 2003 by Pimlico, Random House UK Limited, ISBN 9780712606943 and the book *Warsaw 1920, Lenin's Failed Conquest of Europe*, by Adam Zamoyski, paperback published by William Collins 2014, ISBN 9780007225538.

<sup>6</sup> <sup>658</sup> <sup>2356</sup> <sup>3362</sup> Page 8 of the book *Recovered Territory: A German-Polish Conflict over Land and Culture, 1919-1989* by Peter Polak-Springer, published by Berghahn Books, 2015, ISBN 1782388885, 9781782388883. See also the map on page xix.

<sup>7</sup> Position 636.2 of the ebook *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy A righteous Gentile vs, the Third Reich*, by Eric Metaxas, published by Thomas Nel-