

## ABSTRACT

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NATIONAL SOCIALISM, ETHNIC GERMANS,  
AND THE OCCUPATION OF THE SERBIAN  
BANAT, 1941-1944

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This dissertation examines the Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) of the Serbian Banat (northeastern Serbia) during World War II, with a focus on their collaboration with the invading Germans from the Third Reich, and their participation in the occupation of their home region. It focuses on the occupation period (April 1941-October 1944) so as to illuminate three major themes: the mutual perceptions held by ethnic and Reich Germans and how these shaped policy; the motivation behind ethnic German collaboration; and the events which drew ethnic Germans ever deeper into complicity with the Third Reich.

The Banat ethnic Germans profited from a fortuitous meeting of diplomatic, military, ideological and economic reasons, which prompted the Third Reich to occupy their home region in April 1941. They played a leading role in the administration and policing of the Serbian Banat until October 1944, when the Red Army invaded the Banat. The ethnic Germans collaborated with the Nazi regime in many ways: they accepted its worldview as their own, supplied it with food, administrative services and eventually soldiers. They acted as enforcers and executors of its policies, which benefited them as

perceived racial and ideological kin to Reich Germans. These policies did so at the expense of the multiethnic Banat's other residents, especially Jews and Serbs. In this, the Third Reich replicated general policy guidelines already implemented inside Germany and elsewhere in German-occupied Europe.

The Banat ethnic German collaboration did not derive from external factors alone. Ideological affinity between the ethnic German sense of self and aspects of National Socialist ideology, social dynamics within the ethnic German community, and the material privileges and perks the Reich extended, combined to ensure that ordinary ethnic Germans as well as their leaders proved willing and, even, eager to collaborate. Their collusion in the Reich's discriminatory and murderous policies escalated over time. It culminated in their participation in anti-partisan warfare in Southeast Europe. The bitterness and bad blood engendered by the ethnic Germans' choice to engage fully in policies proclaimed by the Reich resulted in their eventual expulsion and dispossession by the postwar Yugoslav authorities.

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AND THE OCCUPATION OF THE SERBIAN BANAT,  
1941-1944

by

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For my parents

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## ABBREVIATIONS:

## ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

BA Berlin – Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde [German Federal Archive in Berlin-Lichterfelde]

BA MA – Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv [German Federal Archive, Military Archive in Freiburg im Breisgau]

LAA – Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth [German Federal Archive, sub-branch in Bayreuth]

PA AA – Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts [Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry]

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – State Library of Berlin

Arhiv Beograda – Archive of Belgrade

AJ – Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore a.k.a. Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archive of Serbia and Montenegro a.k.a. Archive of Yugoslavia)

Vojni arhiv – Military Archive of the Serbian Defense Ministry in Belgrade

Arhiv Vojvodine – Vojvodina Archive in Novi Sad (Bačka)

Muzej Vojvodine – Vojvodina Museum in Novi Sad (Bačka)

Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin – Historical Archive of Zrenjanin (Banat)

Istorijski arhiv Kikinda – Historical Archive of Kikinda (Banat)

Narodna biblioteka Srbije – National Library of Serbia in Belgrade

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland

LC – Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

USHMM – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

## NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

A few words on the ethnic terms and place names used in this dissertation are necessary.

The adjective ‘ethnic’ preceding an ethnic denominator indicates that the person or persons thus named belong to an ethnic group but are not citizens of the relative ethnic group’s nation-state i.e. they are minority members in another state. For example, an ethnic German (Volksdeutsche) is a person of German origin and language who was not a citizen of the wartime Third Reich. By contrast, Reich Germans (Reichsdeutsche) are citizens of the Reich as well as persons of German ethnicity.

With reference to some of the Southeast-European ethnic groups discussed, I follow the following conventions:

Serb is singular; Serbs is plural; Serbian is the adjective;

Croat is singular; Croats is plural; Croatian is the adjective;

Rom is singular; Roma is plural; Romany is the adjective. (The term ‘Gypsy’ is today considered derogatory and will only be used in direct translations from original documents.)

Since this is a German-centric examination of a self-consciously German community in a multiethnic region, I have chosen to call ethnic Germans by their wartime German-language name, ‘Volksdeutsche’ (sing. Volksdeutscher). (See Introduction for a discussion of this term.) I also refer to the Banat ethnic Germans as a group as the ‘Volksgruppe’ or the ‘Deutsche Volksgruppe,’ deriving this from their official name, the Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien. I refer to other ethnic

minorities by their English names (e.g. ethnic Hungarians). I chose to use the German names of organizations and official titles (e.g. Volksgruppenführer, Wehrmacht) in order to convey the German-centric way these ethnic Germans themselves saw their world. (A Glossary of German-language terms provides translations and/or brief explanations.)

By the same logic, I call towns and villages inside the Serbian Banat by their German names. Most of these inhabited places had an official Serbian name and an unofficial but commonly used German name; some also had a Hungarian, Romanian or Slovak name, depending on the ethnic composition in individual towns and villages. The different names were often used interchangeably, even in official documents, both by the prewar Yugoslav and by the wartime Reichs- and Volksdeutsche authorities. Only in 1943 were several dozen place names officially altered so that the German names became names of primary usage. Without trying to suggest that the Banat was especially Germanized already in the interwar period, I chose, in order to avoid confusion and keep my text consistent, to call all Banat places by their German names even in the chapters dealing with the period before the Reich invasion in April 1941. A parallel list of all the place names mentioned in the text is included, and contains also some major geographical terms outside the Banat, which were mentioned in the text.

With regards geographical features such as cities and rivers located outside of the Banat, the ones familiar to English-language readers are called by the Anglicized forms of their names (e.g. Belgrade, Danube, Budapest, Bucharest). Less famous ones I call by the names they bear in the language of the nation-state to which they belonged before or during World War II (e.g. Kraljevo, Zagreb, Timișoara, Ljubljana, Maribor<sup>1</sup>). When

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<sup>1</sup> The latter two are in the part of Slovenia which was annexed directly by the Third Reich in 1941, and had their names officially changed during the war to Laibach and Marburg,

citing individual wartime memos sent from one Banat village or town to another, as well as postwar depositions and legal accusations, I used German place names even if the Serbian name is mentioned in the text.

I also call geographic regions by the name (and spelling) used in the official language of the nation-state they belonged to (e.g. the Vojvodina and its constituent parts: the Banat, the Bačka, the Baranja and the Srem). If a geographic term could refer to more than one state, I refer to it by the name it bears in the official language of the state to which it is relevant in my text (e.g. the River Tisa could be claimed by wartime Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia; I call it by its Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) name).

With reference to political movements, I followed a variation on the logic outlined above: while I call Josip Broz Tito's communist resistance movement by its widely known Anglicized name Partisans (in the original partizani), I preferred to leave the name of the Croatian fascists and the Serbian nationalist-royalist resistance alike in their original forms i.e. Ustaše (sing. and adjective Ustaša) and Četnici (sing. and adjective Četnik). The latter have been referred to in English-language scholarship by Anglicized forms of their names (including the truly bizarre and unprecedented 'Ustashi' and the inexplicable synecdoche 'Ustaša' or 'Ustasha' used to refer to the plural). However, this Serbian- (Serbo-Croatian-)speaking author finds those forms stylistically ugly, and preferred to use the original forms of the words for these two movements which

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respectively. I chose not to call them by their German names in order to avoid possible confusion: I call only places in the Banat by their German names. Likewise, Zagreb was usually referred to in wartime German documents as Agram, and Timișoara as Temeschburg – I left them their Croatian and Romanian names, respectively, for purposes of clarity, but included both names on the table in Appendix I.

are also relatively less well-known by their proper names in the English-speaking world than the ultimately victorious Partisans.

Since Serbian, Croatian and Serbo-Croatian are phonetic languages which ‘transcribe’ foreign names in accordance with their own spelling conventions, I decided not to ‘correct’ the names of ethnic Germans written according to Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) convention in various documents. All the more so since some clearly preferred to use at least the Serbianized version of their first names in order to blend in in the postwar period (e.g. Marija instead of Maria).

The term ‘Serbia’ is used here interchangeably with the term ‘Serbia proper’ to refer to the territory which belonged to the Serbian state before its expansion north of the Danube after World War I. In the period 1941-1944, this means Serbia exclusive of the Banat. The ‘Banat’ or the ‘Serbian Banat’ is the subject of this dissertation, and refers to that half of the historical Banat region west of the Serbo-Romanian border. ‘Serbia-Banat’ is a compound noun lifted directly from wartime German documents to indicate the whole of the occupied Serbian state, inclusive of both Serbia proper and the Serbian Banat.

Finally, the choice between calling the region ‘Southeast Europe’ or ‘the Balkans’ has been ideologically and politically charged especially since the 1990s, and in the Greek case since at least 1945. This author considers both equally valid and acceptable, since one is a geographic-directional and the other a historic name. They are therefore used interchangeably to describe the lands of former Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Greece during World War II. Hungary was at that time a liminal state, which could be counted as part of Central and Southeast Europe depending especially on the

diplomatic relationship under discussion. (The Nazis often counted it as Southeast-European, as they did wartime independent Slovakia.) I should also add the caveat that the Balkans are more likely to be called the Balkans when discussing National Socialist racial views of this region, since calling them 'Southeast Europe' while discussing the perceived combativeness and unruliness of their residents lacks a certain zing.

## INTRODUCTION

National Socialism put a premium on perceived racial purity and integration into the German Volk. This meant that ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche<sup>2</sup>) – people of German origin who were not citizens or, usually, residents of the Third Reich – enjoyed a privileged status among Europe's ethnic groups. They also bore the brunt of the great demands the Third Reich placed on those it embraced as its kith and kin. One ethnic German community inhabited the Serbian half of the historical Banat region (northeastern Serbia). Between the occupation of the Serbian Banat by Reich forces in April 1941 and the arrival of the Red Army in October 1944, the Banat ethnic Germans enjoyed a degree of local control and power over their home region unparalleled among ethnic German communities in other parts of German-occupied Europe. Nevertheless, they remained dependent on the Third Reich for military and ideological support. In them, perceived racial suitability, Nazi ideology and the Reich's practical interest met fortuitously with local conditions in which ethnic Germans proved willing and eager to collaborate.

The Banat Germans' collaboration took many forms: political-ideological, administrative, military and economic. The ethnic German leadership was the most enthusiastic about collaboration, but ordinary Banat Germans almost never openly expressed objections to the Nazi regime or its occupation of their home region. This was not always a sign of ideological agreement. Instead, it demonstrated how a range of

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<sup>2</sup> See below for a discussion of the term 'Volksdeutsche' in the Nazi worldview.

motives could ensure an ethnic group's complicity with a violent and exclusivist regime like the Third Reich.

The Reich did not merely project onto the ethnic Germans its ideas about their supposed racial excellence. Rather, Reich perceptions of ethnic Germans corresponded to ethnic Germans' self-perception as superior to their non-German neighbors. There was also much tension between how the Reich saw ethnic Germans and how they saw themselves. Nazi racial categories solidified preexisting ethnic differences and perceptions, making them and conflict between them seem inevitable. The Nazi regime ensured the Banat ethnic Germans' complicity through a range of material and ideological privileges, not the least of which was entrusting them with the daily administration of their home region. This, in turn, allowed ethnic Germans to wield considerable local power over the ethnically mixed Banat population. It did not, however, give them any special leverage vis-à-vis the Third Reich. In all relations between the Banat Germans and Berlin, the former willingly played the part of executor and junior partner to the latter.

The Serbian Banat covers some 9300 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>3</sup> It is bound by the Rivers Tisa and Danube in the west and south, respectively, and by the Yugoslav-Romanian border in the east and north. The historical Banat region was split at the end of World War I and the breakup of Austria-Hungary between Romania and Serbia, hence references in German documents of the 1930s and 1940s to the 'Serbian' or 'Western' Banat. The Serbian

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<sup>3</sup> Chef der Militärverwaltung Südost to OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres), "Abschlussbericht des Chefs der Militärverwaltung Südost," April 10, 1945, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-501 [Records of German Field Commands: Rear Areas, Occupied Territories, and Others]/264/214. NB: Microfilm from the National Archives will be cited thus: NARA, record group, T-number/roll number/frame number. Microfiche from all other archives will be cited thus: archive, record group, file number, fiche number, (when available) frame number.

Banat's ethnic Germans accounted for about one fifth of the Serbian Banat's population in early 1941: ca. 125,000 people, most of them peasants and artisans.<sup>4</sup> (There were an estimated ten to twelve million ethnic Germans in all of Europe, especially in the East and Southeast.)

Using the Banat Germans as a case study in collaboration and the spread of Nazi ideology beyond the Third Reich's borders allows for a study of how major trends evident across the German sphere of influence in World War II played out in interaction with specific local conditions. This is also a self-contained microhistory of one specific German occupation regime and of a minority collaborationist group, with special attention given to the reactions of the ethnic German leaders and of ordinary ethnic Germans to their altered circumstances. It examines how ethnic Germans saw themselves and the world around them, and how these perceptions prompted them to act *as well as* Reich Germans' perception and corresponding use of ethnic Germans. It contributes to

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<sup>4</sup> The last census in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia took place in 1931 and used as the basis for assigning nationality one's 'mother tongue' (a problematic criterion at best). According to it, in 1931 there were over half a million ethnic Germans in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Alfred Bohmann, *Menschen und Grenzen*, Volume 2: Bevölkerung und Nationalitäten in Südosteuropa (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1969), p. 233). Because the main criterion for assigning ethnicity was language, included among these were some 10,000 German-speaking Jews. More than 75% of all German-speaking Yugoslav citizens were Catholics, about 20% belonged to the Lutheran or Reformed Churches, and around 2% were Jews (Bohmann, 236). The Banat's 1931 population consisted of 273,573 Serbs and Croats (46,72% of the total Banat population), 120,450 ethnic Germans (20,57%), 95,760 ethnic Hungarians (16,35%), 62,284 ethnic Romanians (10,63%), 17,884 ethnic Slovaks (3,05%), and 15,589 (2,66%) others including Jews, ethnic Russians, Roma, ethnic Czechs, ethnic Slovenes, ethnic Albanians and ethnic Bulgarians (Ekkehard Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944. Die deutsche, die ungarische und andere Volksgruppen* (Munich: Rudolf Trofenik, 1991), p. 63).

Ten years later, an internal census conducted by the ethnic German leadership in the occupied Banat in 1941 posited the number of ethnic Germans there at 130,600 or 23,6% of the total Banat population ("Meldungen aus dem Reich," November 6, 1941, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), R 58 Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), file 166, fiche 1, frame 38). Given the overall low birth rate in the Banat, this number may have been inflated by a few thousand. A postwar analysis on the losses suffered by Volksdeutsche expellees at war's end probably came closest to the mark by extrapolating the number of Banat ethnic Germans in 1939 at 125,800 (L. Schumacher cited in Bohmann, p. 236).

the historiography on varieties of collaboration in Europe during World War II, the social impact and spread of National Socialist ideology, the ambiguities of the Nazi racial hierarchy and how this influenced societies in the Reich sphere of influence.

When the Third Reich and its allies invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941, Hitler decided on this move out of practical need more than ideology. For the following three and a half years, ideology and pragmatism were evident in the occupation of Yugoslav lands. They existed in an ever-shifting balance. Due to its geographic position to the south of the Soviet Union and its shared border with several countries which were already Axis members, Hitler wanted to secure interwar Yugoslavia – by alliance or conquest – as a flank of the planned invasion of the Soviet Union. As such, Yugoslavia was of secondary importance to the ideological war and the racial reshuffling the Nazis put in place in their conquered Eastern territories. Nevertheless, policies and practices in the Yugoslav lands occupied by the Third Reich ran parallel to policies implemented throughout Hitler's European conquests, and were shaped by National Socialist ideology.

The Banat ethnic Germans' self-identification revolved around the German language and culture of their ancestors, who arrived in what was then southern Hungary as part of a Habsburg settlement drive in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A self-conscious minority, the Banat ethnic Germans stressed what they saw as typically German virtues of thrift, hard work, and a fundamental defensiveness against their ethnically mixed, largely non-Germanic environment. Intensely aware of their inferior numbers and strength, they saw the unified German state which emerged in 1871 as their protector and champion throughout its changes of political system. In the period of occupation by Reich forces in

World War II, the close alignment of these ethnic Germans with the German state resulted in an alignment of their sense of self and their group interest with National Socialism as the prevalent German ideology of the time. This, in turn, inspired the Banat ethnic German leadership and ordinary ethnic Germans alike to widespread collaboration with Reich German occupiers. Moreover, the very secondary status of Southeast Europe in Hitler's grand strategy, coupled with the ideological reliability of the Banat ethnic German leadership, gave this particular ethnic German community an unparalleled access to local power and authority within its home region – though not extending further than its borders, and certainly not in relation to the Third Reich.

The relationship between the Third Reich and the Banat Volksdeutsche did not remain static during World War II. It went through three stages, all of which were dictated by exigencies of the Reich's shifting interests in Southeast Europe:

1) From the war's beginning in September 1939 until the attack of Axis countries on Yugoslavia in April 1941, the Reich's foreign policy – specifically the desire to attract Yugoslavia into the Axis by peaceful means – dictated a circumspect relationship with the Yugoslav ethnic Germans. Circumspection was intended to secure certain privileges for ethnic Germans but, more frequently, to cajole the Yugoslav government into compliance with Reich interest. In line with the preeminence of foreign policy in relations between the two states, the status of ethnic Germans in northern Serbian areas bordering on Hungary and Romania depended also on the relative strength of the latter two states. Both laid claim to the Serbian Banat in April 1941. Both had to be appeased by the Reich as its established allies. These state and ethnic relations will be explored in Chapters 1 and 2.

2) Following the division and occupation of Yugoslav lands by German, Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian forces, and the creation of the pro-Reich Independent State of Croatia in April 1941, an ethnic German civilian administration was established in the German-occupied Serbian Banat. Berlin's decision to approve the creation of this administration was inspired by a complex mixture of diplomatic, military and ideological motives. Wielding unprecedented authority over the inhabitants of its home region – ethnic Germans and non-Germans alike – the Banat ethnic German leadership remained firmly tied to Berlin's overarching need for food deliveries and, in early 1942, soldiers. In the first twelve months of the Reich's occupation of the Banat and, at least in Banat civilian affairs, until the end of the occupation, every concession or sign of preeminence the ethnic Germans were granted vis-à-vis Banat non-Germans and the collaborationist government in Belgrade confirmed their dependence on the Reich's pleasure. Moreover, the ethnic German leadership willingly surrendered even the little power to make autonomous decision it tried to exercise in the first days of the occupation in exchange for long-term guarantees of the Reich's ideological legitimation and its military protection.

The influence of the *Auswärtiges Amt* (AA, the German Foreign Ministry) in the Banat but also in Europe waned considerably in this period, especially after the failure of Operation Barbarossa to bring about a swift defeat of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the importance of diplomacy never disappeared completely. On the contrary, into the last two years of the war Hitler continued his 1930s practice of seeking allies wherever possible i.e. wherever an acceptable compromise could be made between Nazi ideology on one side, and practical conditions and needs of both the Third Reich and potential allies on

the other.<sup>5</sup> The influence of the Reich's foreign policy on the Banat Germans was greatest while Yugoslavia existed as a sovereign country. After the occupation, especially in summer and fall 1941, the AA continued to wield great power over these ethnic Germans while the possibility of their administration was negotiated between Berlin, Budapest and Bucharest. After this new administration was put in place and shortly thereafter recruitment for the Waffen-SS began in the Serbian Banat, however, the influence of the AA diminished rapidly as Himmler and Hitler's vision of an ideological and racial war became preeminent.

The elevation of Banat ethnic Germans to a leading position in their home region derived from an uneasy balance between foreign policy and ideology. This remained the case in internal Banat matters until the end of the occupation in October 1944. Yet the ethnic German leadership was not just a passive puppet of the Third Reich, and neither were individual ethnic Germans. Although in the end they always toed the Reich line and accepted, albeit mostly implicitly, their inferior position vis-à-vis the Reich and Reich Germans, the ethnic German leadership and the rank and file were not averse to making suggestions and complaints. However, they refrained from making demands against Reich Germans. Demands they usually made, with the Reich's agreement, against other Banat residents, especially Serbs and Jews. In this period, the Banat ethnic Germans were involved in anti-partisan and security activities in the Banat as well as the mistreatment of the Banat Jews and the Aryanization of their property. The shifting balance of external

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the Third Reich tolerated or deflected the demands of its ally Hungary (including the Hungarian ambition to possess the Serbian Banat) for as long as Hungary remained willing to follow Germany's lead and keep the Axis' ranks firmly closed. Failure to do so led to the invasion of Hungary by its erstwhile ally Germany in March 1944, a fairly late date in the war.

and internal influences which shaped the ethnic German administration will be explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

3) After the failure of the Axis forces' invasion of the Soviet Union to conclude in a speedy victory in 1941, the Third Reich experienced two parallel developments, both related in the Nazi worldview to the need to win the war. One was an intensification of the ideological impetus behind the war. The other was a stepped-up search for reliable collaborators and fighters for its cause. While the former produced the Holocaust, the latter resulted in the rapid expansion of the Waffen-SS. This was the shadow army Heinrich Himmler developed in order to increase his influence in the sometimes confusing Nazi system of governance with its overlapping jurisdictions. As both the main ideological *genius loci* of the Third Reich (next to Hitler) and an ambitious military leader, Himmler was in a uniquely fortuitous position to reconcile ideology with military necessity when he started recruiting ethnic Germans into the Waffen-SS. In this, he still had to bow to exigencies of the Reich's foreign policy, and limit recruitment in states which retained at least nominal independence from the Third Reich.

In the occupied Banat, however, he could and did recruit ethnic Germans with impunity. In early 1942 he and Hitler created a separate Waffen-SS division for them, called "Prinz Eugen" after Eugene of Savoy, the Habsburg general who had spearheaded the settlement of German-speakers in the region in the early 1700s. This third stage of Berlin-Banat relations continued until the arrival of the Red Army in October 1944 and the end of the Reich's occupation of the Banat. While in civilian affairs diplomacy continued to matter, in military affairs Himmler became the most important person for Banat Germans. Starting in spring 1942, the earlier need to cajole first the Yugoslav

government and, later, though to a lesser extent, the ethnic Germans themselves, was gone. It was replaced by the complete willingness of the ethnic German leadership to collude with the Reich in coercing, when necessary, its co-nationals into paying their perceived debt of honor to the Third Reich with weapon in hand. Ordinary ethnic Germans, too, failed consistently to raise objections to their mobilization by the Waffen-SS and their subsequent personal involvement in Hitler and Himmler's racial and ideological war in the Balkans.

In this the Banat Germans were guided by several motivating factors, not the least of which were their earlier collusion in policies – approved by Berlin but carried out by their own leaders – which discriminated against the Banat non-Germans and favored ethnic Germans. Also significant in ensuring ethnic German compliance was the skilful articulation of themes present in National Socialist ideology, which appealed especially to the ethnic German communal sense of self. There was no discrepancy between Nazi ideology as it was articulated in the Third Reich and in the German-dominated Banat. Yet the fact that the ethnic German leadership stressed themes which appealed especially to their co-nationals suggests that National Socialism was more flexible than it is usually given credit for, albeit without deviating from certain fundamental points such as the centrality of race and the supremacy of communal interest. The National Socialism of the Banat ethnic Germans is the subject of Chapter 6, whereas Chapter 7 deals with the Banat ethnic German military participation in the Waffen-SS, for which ideology laid the groundwork.

## Sources

The biggest challenge to writing this dissertation was the fragmentary nature of the evidence. Some of it was lost during the war, especially during the Reich Germans' retreat from Southeast Europe in late 1944. What remains is scattered in over a dozen archives and libraries (see Abbreviations: Archives and Libraries). In order to piece together a relatively holistic picture of Banat ethnic German activities in World War II and the role they played in Hitler's Europe, I used diverse sources in four languages: German, Serbian, English and even a single secondary source in French.

I first became interested in this topic by examining the Banat German press for a research paper on ethnic Germans and ideology, a topic which has received hardly any attention until now. Newspaper holdings on microfilm at the Library of Congress and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum proved to contain a surprisingly rich number of issues of these obscure newspapers. To this I later added wartime speeches of leading ethnic Germans found in contemporary newspapers and a few rare and precious books published by the ethnic German community in wartime Banat.

In view of the importance of Nazi diplomacy for the Banat Germans, documents of the AA – both published ones and those available in archives in Germany (in the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, the Political Archive of the German Foreign Ministry) and in the National Archives in College Park, Maryland – have been invaluable. Documents of other Nazi institutions with a stake in Banat affairs (the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, the Wehrmacht, the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, etc.) illuminated the overlapping interests which existed in a German occupation regime. The various branches of the Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archive) naturally contain a

treasure trove of material, but so does the National Archive in College Park. Its Captured German Records contain, scattered in a dozen or so thematic groups, a surprisingly high number of individual documents and series of documents which touch directly on Banat affairs as well as ethnic German affairs and Nazi racial policy in general.

Official proclamations published in German- and Serbian-language publications aimed at administrators and ordinary people in occupied Serbia and the Banat provided insight not only into policy, but into perceptions and informal attitudes as well. A number of occasionally obscure works of historiography and memoir literature showed how often wartime perceptions and ideological ways of seeing the world persisted into the postwar period in socialist Yugoslavia as well as among the ethnic German expellees in West Germany. The library holdings at the Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (State Library of Berlin) and the Narodna biblioteka Srbije (National Library of Serbia in Belgrade) contain a wealth of printed material from the war as well as the postwar era.

In addition to research into ethnic German ideology, the most original and pleasantly surprising part of my research involved work with two types of documents which have been barely used in works of history until now. One consists of wartime memoranda sent between different administrative offices within the occupied Banat or from the Banat ethnic German administration to the Reich Germans in Belgrade and Berlin. These include village notaries' reports on the locals' mood and activities, economic complaints, policy suggestions, applications for residence permits, and many other kinds of documents. They are scattered in town, regional and state archives in the Banat (Zrenjanin and Kikinda), the Bačka (Novi Sad) and Belgrade. They are a barely

tapped resource for historical scholarship, and the kind of documents which really allows close insight into a community's perceptions, ambitions and realities.

The other type of documents consists of two groups of statements made after the war about wartime events. The first contains depositions in Serbo-Croatian made to the Yugoslav Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača (State Commission for the Determining of Crimes Committed by Occupiers and Their Helpers), which can be found in the Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore a.k.a. Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archive of Serbia and Montenegro a.k.a. Archive of Yugoslavia<sup>6</sup>) in Belgrade. Made mostly in late 1944 and in 1945, these statements by individual Banat Serbs, ethnic Hungarians, Jews, Roma, even some ethnic Germans, and others were compiled as potential evidence at planned trials of war criminals (ethnic Germans, Reich Germans and others). Some are in the form of prose statements, others are accusations leveled against specific individuals and institutions for crimes against individuals and groups during the occupation. Although they might be inferred to contain a certain amount of score-settling, collating evidence from a sample of these documents provides a consistent and convincing picture of the forms and degrees of ethnic German collaboration. The relatively brief period of time which elapsed between the actual events and the testimonies lends them further credibility.

The second group consists of testimonies made by ethnic Germans expelled from East and Southeast Europe at the end of the war, who settled in West Germany. These

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<sup>6</sup> The future name of this archive is uncertain, since although Serbia and Montenegro are now independent of each other, there is a separate institution in Belgrade called the Archive of Serbia (Arhiv Srbije). In order to avoid confusion and ease cross-reference with works of scholarship predating Yugoslavia's breakup in the early 1990s, the staff at the Archive of Serbia and Montenegro a.k.a. Archive of Yugoslavia urge users to continue to cite materials found therein as belonging to AJ [Arhiv Jugoslavije].

testimonies were compiled mostly in the 1950s by the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and Persons Damaged by the War (Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte), and can be found in the Bundesarchiv branch in Bayreuth in the record group Ost-Dokumentation (Ost-Dok.). Included among them are testimonies of Banat Germans. Some of these testimonies are reports from former members of the Banat German leadership, which are similar to the memoir literature by other expellees in their skewed and exculpatory view of the past (see below). The Ost-Dokumentation also includes a number of testimonies and questionnaires filled out by ethnic German expellees on all aspects of their wartime activities and experiences: the war between the Reich and Yugoslavia, the occupation, privileges for ethnic Germans, relations with other ethnicities, military service, and postwar events. Though some stress the ethnic Germans' postwar suffering, many offer a refreshingly balanced and honest look into the wartime Banat as experienced by ordinary ethnic Germans. A few historians (e.g. Akiko Shimizu) have used these documents, but not to any great extent. Despite failures of memory caused by the time elapsed since the war (most of these reports were made in 1958) and a certain amount of lying which can be expected, a comparison of the information gleaned from these documents with that found in the Yugoslav depositions fills out the details of the tapestry of Banat German life and (war)times.

### Literature

Collaboration with a regime as violent, discriminatory, racist and exclusivist as the Third Reich has become a dominant theme in historiography in the last thirty or so years. The awareness that without willing collaborators the Reich could hardly control as many

European territories as it did has led to many scholastic examinations of the material incentives and ideological affinities between various groups in the Third Reich and abroad, and National Socialism. Earlier works focused on describing and analyzing the Nazi regime *per se*. Sometimes they interpreted – as did the works of Martin Broszat – Nazism’s influence as primarily instrumental in nature, a tool for the spread of German hegemony and the manipulation of domestic and foreign populations to serve Germany’s interests.<sup>7</sup> More recent works by Stanley G. Payne and Dietrich Orlow, among others, have stressed instead the ideological similarities between National Socialism and fascism in other European countries, and the corresponding willingness of fascist and far-right elites outside Germany to further Reich interests as their own.<sup>8</sup> However, these authors’ focus on ideology does not explain the full range of motives which inspired collaboration. They also cannot account for the collaboration of ethnic and social groups which may not officially embrace a far-right ideology as their *raison d’être*.

The phenomenon of collaboration illuminates two aspects of Hitler’s war: his ability to harness support, and the positive responses his armies often encountered, especially upon first entering a foreign territory. However much they may have wished to rule by blood and sword, the Nazis often found it necessary to cajole, persuade and inspire their allies and potential collaborators. Collaboration allowed groups as well as individuals in occupied territories to profit materially, oppress others, gain legitimacy, power or self-respect. For some, it vindicated their pre-existing view of the world. For the

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Broszat, “Der Nationalsozialismus und Ostmitteleuropa,” in *Die Deutschen und ihre östlichen Nachbarn. Ein Handbuch*, ed. Viktor Aschenbrenner *et al.* (Frankfurt: Verlag Moritz Diesterweg, 1967), pp. 528-532.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Dietrich Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe: German Nazis, Dutch and French Fascists, 1933-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

lowest of the low, it allowed for sheer survival. For all those in between, it satisfied a broad spectrum of physical, material, psychological and emotional needs. Collaboration could take many forms, from outright endorsement of the Nazi cause in the media, through administration or armed service, to various degrees of collusion, cooperation or accommodation (these terms lack the voluntarism and enthusiasm implied by the term ‘collaboration’<sup>9</sup>), to a failure to protest or resist Nazi policies. All these degrees of collaboration were evident in the Banat ethnic German community.

In order to ensure these different degrees of collaboration, the Nazi regime offered many ideological, psychological and material incentives to collaboration. The key issue is precisely the *mixture* of motives. Jan Tomasz Gross’s sociological analysis of occupied Poland pinpointed the two social groups which made for excellent collaborators: either a former governing elite given new legitimacy under occupation or a formerly oppressed and aggrieved minority.<sup>10</sup> Both types of groups profited from collaboration by gaining power, legitimacy, wealth and local prestige.

The prime example of a governing elite which gained a new lease on life through collaboration is Vichy France. A similar shift in emphasis occurred in the scholarship of Vichy, as it did in the scholarship on collaboration in general. Robert O. Paxton’s pioneering work focused on proving the ideological affinity between Vichy and the Third Reich, and the extent of the former’s complicity with the latter.<sup>11</sup> A later generation of historians including Philippe Burrin and Julian Jackson has examined how the Vichy

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<sup>9</sup> Klaus-Peter Friedrich, “Collaboration in a “Land without a Quisling”: Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Winter 2005), pp. 711-746.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Tomasz Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation: The Generalgouvernement, 1939-1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 123.

<sup>11</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*, revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

leadership used its new empowerment to inspire as well coerce wide sections of French society under their rule to accept concessions and engage in professional activities which implicated them deeply in Nazi crimes.<sup>12</sup> However, as Burrin pointed out, a collaborationist regime like Vichy had at least limited independence of action and sovereignty from the Third Reich, and therefore did not produce very malleable collaborators. Because it had its own claim to legitimacy and rested on political and ideological traditions independent of those in Nazi Germany, it actually divided its subjects' loyalty. It took for itself some of the support that may have gone to the Reich.<sup>13</sup>

In this respect, the second type of collaborationist group described by Gross was a better option for the Third Reich. A minority group which had been oppressed by a regime dismantled by the Nazis or had perceived itself as oppressed, would have owed its new freedom and empowerment to the Reich. As a minority, it could not challenge the Reich's claim to absolute power and control of its home region. And it had little or no leverage with which to bargain against whatever demands the Reich posed it. Such was the case in occupied Ukraine: Wendy Lower has shown how quickly ethnic Germans, Ukrainians and Soviet POWs were co-opted by the Nazi regime into executing its murderous policies.<sup>14</sup> They were inspired in various degrees by the desire for survival (physical motive), the possibility to gain some power, wealth and the opportunity to oppress others (material motive), the removal of social inhibitors and the brutalization wrought by warfare on the Eastern Front (psychological motive), and the possibility of

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<sup>12</sup> Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and Compromise*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 1996), pp. 2-4, 460-462; Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 149-155.

<sup>13</sup> Burrin, pp. 466-467.

<sup>14</sup> Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 1, 45-52.

fitting their ethnic groups within the middle or upper echelons of the Nazi racial hierarchy (ideological motive).

Much remains to be done on the sometimes nearly feudal or colonial regimes established under Nazi auspices in various parts of Europe. The title of a recent syncretic work by Mark Mazower encapsulates brilliantly the overall relationship between the Reich and occupied territories or allied states as that between the imperial center and the subjugated-but-also-accommodated periphery.<sup>15</sup> As Gross pointed out, it was impossible for the Nazis to exclude an entire majority population from at least some benefits (accrued through collaboration), short of attempting to exterminate it completely.<sup>16</sup> The Nazis attempted the physical extermination of the Jews, and the Jews were not even a majority population anywhere in Europe. With other European populations in their sphere of influence, the Nazis made various twisted forms of the social contract.

The literature on collaboration has shown repeatedly the importance of an ethnic group's standing in the Nazi racial category for its ability to collaborate. Whereas the Nazis merely allowed some members of groups of extremely low standing like Jews, Poles or Russians to participate in collaboration, the Scandinavian peoples, the French and the Czechs were accorded much more respect. This was even truer of ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche), who were officially second only to Reich Germans (Reichsdeutsche) in Hitler's worldview. In reality, however, different ethnic German communities' position depended in large part on relations between their host state and the Third Reich. This underscored the continued importance of the Reich's diplomatic efforts in wartime, and

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008); see also Lower, pp. 2, 19-23.

<sup>16</sup> Gross, pp. xi-xii.

has been demonstrated by many monographs published – like the majority of the scholastic literature on ethnic Germans – in German.<sup>17</sup>

While an overall history of the ethnic Germans during the war is lacking, the case histories examined in these monographs suggest that no other ethnic German community was given as much power within its home region as that inhabiting the Serbian Banat.<sup>18</sup> Ethnic German ambitions in states allied with Nazi Germany were hampered by the continued diplomatic need for the Reich not to alienate said host states by promoting the ethnic Germans too openly. In occupied territories, on the other hand, the perceived racial quality and reliability of the ethnic Germans was too low to entrust them with much local power beyond basic policing and concentration-camp guard duty (as was the case in Poland and the Soviet Union). If their area of residence was annexed directly by the Third Reich, they gained Reich citizenship and thus ceased to be real *ethnic* Germans (as happened in the Sudet and parts of Slovenia).

The Banat German case is therefore unique in Hitler's Europe in that they were a minority which gained undisputed administrative control over its home region, thus uniting the qualities of the two collaborationist types described by Gross. They were not

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. Johann Böhm, *Hitlers Vasallen der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Rumänien vor und nach 1945* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006); Meir Buchsweiler, *Volksdeutsche in der Ukraine am Vorabend und Beginn des Zweiten Weltkriegs – ein Fall doppelter Loyalität?* (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1984); Marie-Janine Calic, “Die Deutsche Volksgruppe im “Unabhaengigen Staat Kroatien” 1941-1944,” in *Vom Faschismus zum Stalinismus. Deutsche und andere Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1941-1953*, ed. Mariana Hausleitner (Munich: IKGS Verlag, 2008), pp. 11-22; Ralf Gebel, “*Heim ins Reich!*” *Konrad Henlein und der Reichsgau Sudetenland (1938-1945)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> It has been suggested that the ethnic Germans in the General Government were the Reich's most malleable collaborators of all the ethnic Germans (Christian Jansen and Arno Weckbecker, *Der "Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz" in Polen 1939/40*, Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Band 64 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1992), p. 11). However, Reich officials in occupied Poland were reluctant to use them for fear of these ethnic Germans' racial pollution and proximity to Poles, and failed to harness very many for active collaboration (Jansen and Weckbecker, pp. 199-200).

exceptional, however, in their overall dependence on the Reich, since dependence on an outside source of legitimacy and power is the salient quality of collaboration as such.

The case of the Banat Germans is a part of the historiography of World War II in Yugoslavia, and of the emergence of the postwar Yugoslav communist regime out of what was both a war of resistance to occupation and a civil war between various domestic factions. The failure to examine multiple coexisting motives for ethnic German collaboration renders the historiography of World War II produced in postwar Yugoslavia of limited use as a source of historical analysis. Leftist ideology required that ethnic German collaboration in Yugoslav lands be portrayed as affecting absolutely all ethnic Germans, inspired purely by rabid ideology and a pathological hatred of all things non-German. Instead of considering ethnic German motives and the interplay of external and internal factors which influenced their collaboration with the Reich, these historical works focused instead on portraying the war in Yugoslavia as the victorious struggle of left-wing, freedom-loving Slavic peoples against the foreign enemy as well as the ‘foreign’ enemy in their midst.<sup>19</sup> Some of these works showed more nuance,<sup>20</sup> but all were hampered by a fundamentally simplistic approach to the subject.

Since the early 1990s, the end of communist regimes in Europe and the violent civil war in former Yugoslavia wrought an interest in Yugoslav (now Serbian) historiography for ethnic German experiences in the immediate postwar period. New

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<sup>19</sup> E.g. Venceslav Glišić, *Teror i zločini nacističke Nemačke u Srbiji 1941-1944* (Belgrade: Rad, 1970); Slobodan Milošević, “Kvislinške snage u Banatu u službi nemačkog okupatora 1941-1944. godine,” *Vojno-istorijski glasnik*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1979), pp. 139-153; Đorđe Momčilović, *Banat u narodnooslobodilačkom ratu* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1977); Đorđe Momčilović, *Zrenjaninske vatre: Zrenjanin u ratu i revoluciji* (Zrenjanin, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> E.g. the highly descriptive but largely fair account in Sandor Vegh, “Le système du pouvoir d’occupation allemande dans le Banat yougoslave, 1941-1944,” trans. Madeleine Stevanov-Charlier, *European Resistance Movements, 1939-1945: Proceedings of the International Conference* (1963), pp. 495-561.

monographs and edited volumes of surviving ethnic Germans' testimonies have examined the suffering of ethnic Germans incarcerated and dispossessed by the Tito regime in the period 1944-1948 as a consequence of their wartime association with Nazi Germany.<sup>21</sup> These works do not, however, examine the war years. Thus the Serbian- and Serbo-Croatian-language historiography on ethnic Germans lacks an understanding of a key portion of their history. One of the goals of this dissertation is to introduce nuance and examine neglected topics of the ethnic Germans' wartime activities.

By contrast, yet with similar overall effect, the memoirs and histories produced by ethnic Germans who survived the postwar period of incarceration and expulsion from all East- and Southeast-European countries consciously downplayed the ethnic Germans' wartime collaboration in favor of accounts of their postwar suffering. In this, the expellees were abetted by the Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, its professional historians (many of whom had engaged in Nazified scholarship during the Third Reich<sup>22</sup>), and numerous expellee organizations on the local and state level in West Germany as well as the United States, Argentina and other countries where expellees eventually settled. Often marked by an unreconstructed National Socialist worldview, the memoirs and biased histories which constitute the 'Leidensgeschichte' (history of suffering) of ethnic Germans after the war had a dual political purpose. They whitewashed or disguised the ethnic Germans' part in the Nazi regime's crimes by shifting the blame onto the Reich Germans. They also invited

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<sup>21</sup> E.g. Nadežda Četković and Dobrila Sindelić-Ibrajter, ed., *Dunavske Švabice* (Belgrade and Kikinda, 2000); Zoran Janjetović, *Between Hitler and Tito: The Disappearance of the Vojvodina Germans* (Belgrade, 2000); Nadežda Radović, Dobrila Sindelić-Ibrajter and Vesna Weiss, ed., *Dunavske Švabice II* (Sremski Karlovci, 2001); Nenad Stefanović, ed., *Jedan svet na Dunavu: Razgovori i komentari*, sixth edition (Belgrade: Društvo za srpsko-nemačku saradnju, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Götz Aly, *Macht-Geist-Wahn. Kontinuitäten deutschen Denkens* (Berlin: Argon, 1997), pp. 153-183.

sympathy and material benefits for ethnic German expellees in their new home states by portraying them as victims and only victims.<sup>23</sup>

My study ends in October 1944, with a brief overview of the flight of a part of the ethnic German community in Chapter 7. I wished to piece together the history of the Banat ethnic Germans' wartime activities from the fragmentary documentary record which survived wartime destruction rather than treat the events of the war years merely as the pre-history of the ethnic Germans' expulsion. The ethnic German memory of the war will be criticized throughout the following chapters, when those remembering the war attempted to rewrite their own histories. An examination of memory as a historical phenomenon does not, however, fall within the scope of this dissertation. Its goal is to examine what happened and why, not how the participants chose to frame events after the fact.

The three major works on the Serbian Banat's ethnic Germans currently in print are also in German. While these are fine and valuable works of scholarship, they do suffer from certain shortcomings. Thomas Casagrande's study of the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" hampers a history of the division with sociological and socio-psychological theory on the individual's mental development and the ethnic group's

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. Sepp Janko, *Weg und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (Graz and Stuttgart: Leopold Stocker Verlag, 1982); Theodor Schieder, ed., *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien: Dokumentation der Vertriebung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, Volume 5, published by the Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984); Anton Valentin, *Die Banater Schwaben. Kurzgefasste Geschichte einer Südöstdeutschen Volksgruppe mit einem Volkskundlichen Anhang* (Munich: Veröffentlichung des Kulturreferates der Landsmannschaft der Banater Schwaben, 1959); Johann Wüschel, *Ursachen und Hintergründe des Schicksals der Deutschen in Jugoslawien. Bevölkerungsverluste Jugoslawiens im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Kehl: self-published, 1966).

absorption by larger (specifically national) constructs.<sup>24</sup> Akiko Shimizu's exhaustively detailed history of the occupied Banat is more descriptive and narrative than analytical.<sup>25</sup> Ekkehard Völkl's study of relations between ethnic Germans, ethnic Hungarians and others benefits from the author's command of the Hungarian language and focus on Hungarian themes, but is very brief.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, all three books lack certain pieces of the puzzle due to the authors' lack of facility with the Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) language. This restricted their use of materials which survive sometimes only in translation.

Possibly the biggest gap in the historiography of ethnic German participation in Hitler's war in any language is an absence of analysis of the ethnic German understanding and articulation of Nazi ideology.<sup>27</sup> The underlying assumption seems to be that ethnic Germans adopted National Socialism from the Reich without any modification. One of the goals of this dissertation is to examine the extent to which the Banat Germans emphasized certain themes to make them accord with their historical experience and sense of self, and how this in turn inspired them to collaborate with the Reich. National Socialism could be quite flexible within certain strict parameters, as suggested by the fact that Hitler's regime did not object to ethnic Germans articulating common themes in their own way.

The literature on the ethnic German experience of war and occupation in English-language historiography is just starting to expand. The most notable English-language

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Casagrande, *Die volksdeutsche SS-Division 'Prinz Eugen'. Die Banater Schwaben und die nationalsozialistischen Kriegsverbrechen* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Akiko Shimizu, *Die deutsche Okkupation des serbischen Banats 1941-1944 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Völkl, *Der Westbanat 1941-1944*.

<sup>27</sup> A recent book on the German-language press in prewar Poland is one of the first works of historiography to tackle this issue. Beata Dorota Lakeberg, *Die deutsche Minderheitenpresse in Polen 1918-1939 und ihr Polen- und Judenbild* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010).

works on the topic presently available are Valdis O. Lumans' institutional history of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi), the main Reich office in charge of coordinating ethnic German activities,<sup>28</sup> and Doris L. Bergen's articles on the role ethnic Germans played in the Holocaust.<sup>29</sup> Bergen especially examines the actual content of the Nazi racial category of 'Volksdeutsche' and concludes that it was at best tenuous – as were Nazi racial categories and hierarchies in general.

The ostensible Germanness of many ethnic Germans in the East was often questionable. However, the ethnic Germans of the Serbian Banat insisted on their good German credentials, though they may not have spoken German perfectly or evaded intermarriage with non-Germans. For this ethnic German community, the burning issue was the fundamental ambivalence inherent in the term 'Volksdeutscher' as used by Reich Germans. This ambivalence marked the entire wartime collaboration of the Banat Germans with not entirely positive experiences, and was as crucial for their position in Hitler's brief European empire as were the diplomatic relations between the Reich, their host state and neighboring states. Since the dual focus of this work is on ethnic German perceptions, choices and experiences as well as the Third Reich's view and use of them, a more thorough examination of what it meant to be seen – and to see oneself – as an ethnic German on the eve of World War II and during the war years is in order.

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<sup>28</sup> Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Doris L. Bergen, "The Nazi Concept of 'Volksdeutsche' and the Exacerbation of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (October 1994), pp. 569-582; Bergen, "The 'Volksdeutschen' of Eastern Europe, World War II, and the Holocaust: Constructed Ethnicity, Real Genocide," in *Germany and Eastern Europe: Cultural Identities and Cultural Differences*, Yearbook of European Studies, Volume 13, ed. Keith Bullivant, Geoffrey Giles and Walter Pappé (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 70-93.

### Volksdeutsche in the Nazi Worldview

The close association of race and space was central to the National Socialist project of expansion and conquest. During the brief existence of the ‘Thousand-Year Reich’ only the negative aspects of this project came to fruition, namely the expulsion and extermination of undesirable categories of people (such as the Jews) and the uprooting even of favored ethnic groups (such as the ethnic Germans). These negative moves were intended, however, to contribute to a positive transformation of the German Volk by allowing it to spread, colonize and regenerate areas of Europe, especially parts of Central and much of East Europe. Though inhabited by German-speaking minorities amid large non-German majorities, in the Nazi imagination these areas were associated with the German Reich precisely by this tenuous German presence in the form of people descended from medieval or Habsburg-era settlers. In tune with the Nazi rhetoric of racial regeneration, geographic locations, too, could be renewed and bettered by being settled and cultivated by racially sound stock.

In the case of East and Southeast Europe with their ethnic German minorities, the prospect of improving upon both race and space implied more than merely shifting populations around like so much inert matter, disposing of them as though they were pieces on a chess board. The connection between race and space was a dynamic link in the National Socialist worldview, embodied by the word ‘Lebensraum,’ *living space*, meaning not just space in which one could live, but a space which lived in a symbiotic relationship with its inhabitants. “[T]he East’ implies not a location, but a state of being .

. . [which is] not only a distant geographical location, but can include Germans themselves.”<sup>30</sup>

This symbiosis between people and landscape confirmed the preexisting notion of the necessity for racially sound settlers, who shared a profound connection with their area of residence. Drawing on the bastardized version of biology which was racial science, Nazi ideology presumed the existence of an intrinsic, ineradicable link between people and the landscape they inhabited, a rootedness of bloodlines in the soil, however ‘uncivilized’ the soil might seem. “This was the mysterious, disturbing and hazy realm that the Germans called the ‘East’ – a supposedly uncultivated wilderness of swamps, impenetrable forests and steppes on Prussia’s doorstep – which was only awaiting German energy and discipline to be put into order and made productive.”<sup>31</sup> The dubious East could not be improved without a strong bond with the supposed high racial quality of its German residents or new settlers. This is paradoxical given the Nazi obsession with racial purity and uniformity, which are essentially static modes of being.

In the period of the Third Reich’s dominance over much of Europe, the ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) of Central, East and Southeast Europe existed at the intersection of these ideas about racial purity, the possibility of regenerating that which was not altogether pure, and the Nazi colonial project within continental Europe. Writing specifically about the Volksdeutsche of the Serbian and Romanian Banat in 1939, Reich author Johannes Künzig waxed lyrical about the Eastwards movement of German peasants since the Middle Ages under the rallying cry “We will to the East! [Nach

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<sup>30</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Mazower, p. 4.

Ostland wollen wir fahren!],” likening settlers to “a bulwark of Germandom . . . a watch in the East.”<sup>32</sup>

Künzig interpreted the settling of what had been southern Hungary under Habsburg auspices after the expulsion of Ottoman forces in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an example of the settlers’ eternal devotion to the interests of the German Volk over those of the individual. He also pinpointed the two most important services Volksdeutsche could render to Reich and Volk: they could make their area of settlement economically productive, and defend it against enemy encroachment.<sup>33</sup> Such tangible services remained central to the Third Reich’s treatment of Volksdeutsche. Plans to use ethnic Germans as valuable racial material for the regeneration of the Volk were never fully separated from the possibilities of using ethnic Germans in more practical ways, as producers of necessary food, soldiers for the Reich, and diplomatic bargaining chips in the Reich’s foreign relations.

In an article penned for the Reich journal *Deutsche Arbeit* in 1942, Ulrich Greifelt – Heinrich Himmler’s right-hand man in Himmler’s role as Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums, RKFDV), the office in charge of population policy in occupied and annexed areas – acknowledged the complex relationship between notions of race and territory: “It was in the thousand-year struggle for a German East that we first gained a Reich through great efforts at colonization, we became a Volk of soldiers and settlers.”<sup>34</sup> Greifelt explicitly

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<sup>32</sup> “ein Bollwerk des Deutschtums . . . Wacht im Osten” Hans Retzlaff and Johannes Künzig, *Deutsche Bauern im Banat. 80 Aufnahmen* (Berlin: Verlag Grenze und Ausland, 1939), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Retzlaff and Künzig, pp. 5, 8.

<sup>34</sup> “Doch erst im tausendjährigen Kampf um den deutschen Osten gewannen wir durch grosse kolonialisatorische Leistungen das Reich, wurden wir zum Volk der Soldaten und Siedler.” Ulrich

associated the existence of the Reich with a German presence in the East, and the racial unity of the Volk with the practical efforts of soldiers and peasant settlers. The dynamic relationship between race and space went beyond ideologically charged plans for the colonization of the East following a German victory. During the war, it affected the Reich Germans' view of and attitude toward ethnic Germans already present in areas designated as German by right of historical presence or, barring that, racial superiority.

Yet another paradox inherent in the National Socialist worldview was that between the emphasis on community and unity on one side, and the mania for classification on the other. This mania drove Nazi racial experts to classify members of individual populations as well as entire ethnic groups according to their presumed racial quality.<sup>35</sup> Even the German Volk, supposedly unified *and* uniform, did not escape *de facto* division into categories of varying degrees of Germanness, as demonstrated by the very existence of the term 'Volksdeutsche.' A Reich Chancellery memo defined Volksdeutsche rather vaguely in early 1938 as persons "whose language and culture are of German origin, but who do not belong to the German Reich as its citizens."<sup>36</sup> Following the Reich's invasion of rump Czechoslovakia in March 1939, a secret memo from the Reich Interior Ministry built on the 1938 document to define Volksdeutsche as German Volkszugehörige (persons of German ethnic origin) who did not have Reich citizenship but consciously professed their Germanness as well as displaying such

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Greifelt, "Ein neuer Abschnitt deutscher Ostgeschichte," *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 6/7, June-July 1942, p. 163.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the 'race experts' who epitomized the skewed, instrumental approach to academic research and the technocratic aspect of the National Socialist regime, see Isabel Heinemann, "*Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*". *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> "die in Sprache und Kultur deutschen Stammes sind, nicht aber als Bürger zum Deutschen Reich gehören." Reich Chancellery Chief Hans Lammers memo, January 25, 1938, NARA, RG 242, T-81 [Records of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut]/417/5,163,331.

‘objective’ hallmarks as German language, culture and education.<sup>37</sup> While this document introduced race into the equation with the use of the term ‘Volkszugehörige,’ it left much leeway for the planned assimilation of at least some Czechs into the German Volk, even declaring: “A more precise elucidation of the term “deutscher Volkszugehöriger” is not possible in the current conditions.”<sup>38</sup>

The conditions alluded to in the 1939 document refer to Germany’s continued efforts to expand and attract allies by diplomatic means. The outbreak of World War II in September 1939 and, especially, the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 contributed to an evolution and exacerbation of Nazi racial policy which led eventually to the Holocaust. It also meant the evolution of more precise racial categories for desirable and undesirable populations, so that a pamphlet issued by the Nazi Party’s Rassenpolitisches Amt in 1942 outlined several categories of Germanness. It defined a ‘Volksdeutscher’ as equivalent to a ‘deutscher Volkszugehöriger’ but stressed that, despite residing in a foreign state, sometimes for generations, a true Volksdeutscher “remained true to his German Volkstum,” accepting foreign citizenship as but an “external bond” for purposes of legal and economic security.<sup>39</sup> While this conscious identification with and expression of German language and culture were desirable, racial affinity with Reich Germans was the crucial element separating the Volksdeutscher from persons who were of German origin but had become assimilated into the host society, or

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<sup>37</sup> Reichsministerium des Innern memo, March 29, 1939, NARA, RG 238 World War II War Crimes Records, entry 170, roll 4, document NG-295, frames 432-433.

<sup>38</sup> “Eine genauere Erläuterung des Begriffs “deutscher Volkszugehöriger” ist nach Lage der Verhältnisse nicht möglich.” Reichsministerium des Innern memo (1939), NARA, RG 238, entry 170, roll 4, document NG-295, frame 433.

<sup>39</sup> “seinem deutschen Volkstum treugeblieben . . . äusserliches Band” Egon Leuschner, *Nationalsozialistische Fremdvolkpolitik* (Berlin: Rassenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, 1942), p. 18.

had more foreign than German blood, or belonged to a Germanic (but not *the* German) people, etc.

In the words of an author writing during the first year of the war, “this word [Volksdeutsche] means the organic unity of Germandom [living] in foreign states, as opposed to the Western-democratic term “minority” with its dependence on numbers.”<sup>40</sup> Volksdeutsche were recognized as belonging to Volksgruppen, organic, indivisible units comprising racially and ideologically superior individuals – though not quite on a par with those living in the Third Reich itself. Contrary to the manner in which cultural and religious anti-Semitism predating the Nazi period was overlaid and exacerbated by racial science, Nazi exaltation of Volksdeutsche as guardians of Germanness in foreign lands was tempered by deeply ingrained xenophobia and a kind of latter-day *kleindeutsch* (limited to the physical borders of Germany) view of who could count as a fully fledged member of the German people.

This did not mean that the term ‘Volksdeutsche’ became static or set in stone. The two final elements in the gradually crystallizing Platonic ideal of the Volksdeutsche involved criteria for membership in Volksdeutsche organizations and the Volksdeutsche’s likely future. In July 1942, with the Holocaust and the attendant removal of racial undesirables from the East underway, Himmler signed a set of guidelines for the application of the Nuremberg Laws to Volksdeutsche, regardless of their host state. Mischlinge of the first degree (half-Jews) and most Mischlinge of the second degree (quarter-Jews) were banned from membership in Volksdeutsche organizations, as were

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<sup>40</sup> “versteht man unter diesem Wort die organisch gewachsene Einheit des Deutschtums in den fremden Staaten gegenüber dem westlerisch-demokratischen und zahlenmässig bedingten Begriff “Minderheit”.” Heinz Brunner, *Das Deutschtum in Südosteuropa* (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung Quelle & Mener, 1940), p. 56.

Volksdeutsche married to Jews.<sup>41</sup> While the conscious choice of individual Volksdeutsche to use the German language and to situate themselves within German cultural traditions remained significant in individual German Volksgruppen, the importance of race was acknowledged as paramount in determining who could belong to the Volk and who had to be excluded from it.

At the same time as the category of ‘Volksdeutsche’ was circumscribed and streamlined, Berlin made it clear that leaders of German Volksgruppen in various European states should be made cognizant of these guidelines, but not of the fact that they had been approved by Himmler. The Volksgruppenführer (leaders of ethnic German communities) were also forbidden from publicizing these guidelines, effectively embroiling them in a pact of silence with the Reich, against their own co-nationals within the Volksgruppen.<sup>42</sup> This decision stemmed at least in part from the Reich’s continued desire not to alienate those of its allies, like Hungary and Romania, whose anti-Semitic policies were not as extreme as German ones, and whose attitudes to their ethnic German minorities were often fraught with tension and resentment.

This decision also speaks volumes as to the essentially distrustful attitude of Reich officials dealing with racial Germans living outside Reich borders. While for many Germans in the period 1933-1945 the term ‘Volksdeutsche’ “carried overtones of blood

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<sup>41</sup> Some leeway was allowed for individual Volksdeutsche who used to be married to Jews and for some second-degree Mischlinge, but racial purity remained the guiding principle. “Vorschriften über die Zugehörigkeit Volksdeutscher in volksdeutschen Organisationen,” signed and dated by Heinrich Himmler on July 8, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19 Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, file 2370, fiche 1, frame 3; see also Lorenz to Himmler, June 5, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2370, fiche 1, frame 1.

<sup>42</sup> VoMi (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle) to AA (Auswärtiges Amt), August 19, 1942, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Inland II Geheim, R 100896 Volksdeutsche (Allgemeines), Volkstumsfragen, 1938-1944, fiche 2294, frame D653,110.

and race not captured in the English translation ‘ethnic Germans’,<sup>43</sup> the Volksdeutsche still seemed not quite German enough. The war did nothing to alleviate this inter-German tension. As late as summer 1944 Berlin expressed concern over a “certain pejorative meaning”<sup>44</sup> attached to the term ‘Volksdeutsche,’ but could do little more than point out the continued effective division of the Volk into ‘better’ and ‘worse’ Germans.<sup>45</sup>

However much the individual Volksdeutsche may have seemed to fit the parameters set down by the Reich’s racial experts, the facts of their residence abroad, often among majority non-Germanic populations, rendered them ideologically and racially suspect.

German occupation officials tended to see the Volksdeutsche in East and Southeast Europe as useful collaborators, traditional guardians of Europe’s cultural and civilizational borders, and somewhat sympathetic, yet ultimately pathetic, racially dubious, and far less important than Jews, anti-Axis guerrillas or the Reich’s labor needs. The truly ideal Volksdeutsche would have been content to follow orders from the Reich without complicating relations with their host states through individual initiative or policy suggestions. Himmler summed up the issue: *“In order to secure the Reich’s control over individual Volksgruppenführer, we need to find local men willing to obey Berlin’s orders blindly, whether they agree with said orders or not, whether they even understand them on the basis of Volkstumsarbeit [the Reich’s efforts to confirm and solidify ethnic Germans’ Germanness] already done.”*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’,” p. 569.

<sup>44</sup> “eine gewisse abwertende Bedeutung” VoMi to AA, June 1, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100896, fiche 2295, frame 393,474.

<sup>45</sup> VoMi to AA (1944), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100896, fiche 2295, frames 393,474-475.

<sup>46</sup> “Um den Führungsanspruch des Reichs gegenüber den einzelnen Volksgruppenführern sicherzustellen, seien draussen Männer zu finden, die bereit sind, den von Berlin gegebenen Befehlen blindlings zu gehorchen, ob sie mit diesen Befehlen einverstanden sind oder nicht, ob sie diese aus ihrer Volkstumsarbeit heraus verstehen oder nicht.” Himmler memo, May 16, 1939,

In a recent book on Nazi population and resettlement policy, historian Markus Leniger pointed out the contradiction inherent in concepts of *Volkstumsarbeit* and resettlement. While the former aimed to strengthen and entrench Germans wherever they already lived in Europe, the latter was to be their shared postwar fate after a planned German victory (and was, indeed, implemented for some already during the war).<sup>47</sup> However high the degree of suspicion directed against *Volksdeutsche* on grounds of racial pollution and cultural assimilation,<sup>48</sup> their main role in Hitler's master plan was as human raw material for the settlement-*cum*-re-conquest of the East. This again highlights the unexpected flexibility of Nazi racial categories. *Volksdeutsche* may not have been German enough for some Reich German tastes, but they would do for purposes of recreating a German Eastern paradise – likely not least since, unlike Reich Germans, *Volksdeutsche* were accustomed to living among non-Germans and in conditions inferior to those prevalent in Central Europe.<sup>49</sup>

Despite Hitler's grandiose proclamation of plans to resettle all *Volksdeutsche* back to the Reich,<sup>50</sup> foreign policy demanded that most of these plans be postponed till

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quoted in Ingomar Senz, *Die Donauschwaben* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1994), p. 95; see also Brunner, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> Markus Leniger, *Nationalsozialistische "Volkstumsarbeit" und Umsiedlungspolitik 1933-1945. Von der Minderheitenbetreuung zur Siedlerauslese* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2006), p. 225.

<sup>48</sup> This was such a serious concern that the German Army High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, OKW) reminded commanders of occupied areas in August 1941 of the definition of *Volksdeutsche* and warned them to be especially vigilant about non-Germans trying to pass themselves off as *Volksdeutsche* in order to gain privileges given to those recognized as racial Germans. Oberstleutnant Gravenhorst (aide to the German commanding general in Serbia) memo, August 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/246/145-147.

<sup>49</sup> Good overviews of National Socialist plans for racial regeneration in the East can be found in Czesław Madajczyk, "Einleitung," in *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan*, ed. Czesław Madajczyk (Munich and New Providence: K. G. Saur, 1994), pp. X-XXI and Robert L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement and Population Policy 1939-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).

<sup>50</sup> "Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers zur Festigung deutschen Volkstums vom 7. Oktober 1939," NARA, RG 242, T-81/266/2,384,344-346.

war's end.<sup>51</sup> Specifically in the case of Southeast Europe, in late summer 1941 the resettlement of most of the roughly 500,000 Volksdeutsche living in what had been the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was officially postponed till after the war.<sup>52</sup> Germany's allies Hungary, Italy and Bulgaria occupied substantial portions of Yugoslav territory. Diplomatic relations with these states dictated that plans for ethnic Germans be ratified by their host states. Such diplomatic processes not only took time, but were often interpreted as Reich interference in other states' internal matters, and resented by the Reich's allies. Not upsetting allies was crucial so long as Axis countries fought a joint battle in the Soviet Union, which effectively prevented Hitler from forcing the issue until it was too late for his regime, let alone for peaceful resettlement of ethnic Germans. They were eventually 'resettled' under duress i.e. expelled *en masse* by the Red Army and the postwar regimes in East and Southeast Europe between late 1944 and 1948.

Given the way in which the material circumstances of warfare and diplomacy modified Nazi ideological plans for ethnic Germans, Leniger's conclusion does not completely do justice to the issue. Foreign policy and ideology were sometimes

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<sup>51</sup> Grosskopf (Reich Interior Ministry) to Under-State Secretary Martin Luther (AA), August 7, 1941 and Steengracht (Secretariat of the Reich Foreign Minister) to Luther, August 2, 1941, in *Documents of German Foreign Policy* [from now on *DGFP*], Series D, Volume 13 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), document no. 187.

<sup>52</sup> This did not apply to the Volksdeutsche living in the Gottschee region in Slovenia, Bosnia and Serbia south of the river Danube – the former because this part of Slovenia had been annexed by the Reich, and the latter two because the few Volksdeutsche there lived in scattered enclaves terrorized by Yugoslav anti-German guerrillas. Their resettlement was more in aid of the overworked Reich security personnel in the Balkans than a triumph of Volk consolidation. *Ibid.*; Szczytnicka (Verband für Deutschtum im Ausland) to VoMi, November 26, 1941, BA Berlin, R 59 Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, file 28, fiche 5, frame 183.

The roughly 2000 Volksdeutsche from Serbia proper (not including Belgrade) were resettled in September-December 1941, after it became impossible for the thinly spread Reich forces in Serbia to protect them against Četnik and Partisan attack. Greifelt (Stabshauptamt of the Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums) memo, December 2, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-81/266/2,384,372; Greifelt memo, January 22, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-81/266/2,384,373.

contradictory to each other. Other times, the former could actually influence the latter. For as long as resettlement of all ethnic Germans remained a theoretical plan rather than a detailed policy ready for implementation, the Third Reich had to invest human and material resources into Volkstumsarbeit in order to ensure that the essential Germanness of the Volksdeutsche was not diluted any further. While resettlement remained the only long-term solution envisioned by Reich offices, for the duration of the war ensuring that Volksdeutsche had cultural autonomy and, if possible, special legal protection within their host states was crucial.<sup>53</sup> The idealization of the original German settlers and the real suspicion of their descendants in the East and Southeast influenced the Nazi leadership's willingness to let the matter of resettlement rest for the duration of the war. Nevertheless, the necessity of leaving Volksdeutsche where they were for the foreseeable future influenced the Reich's willingness to bolster their Germanness by providing them with political legitimation, armed protection, monetary aid, personnel, books and magazines, student trips to the Reich, etc.

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The Volksdeutsche inhabiting the Serbian Banat in this period existed in a field of tension between National Socialist ideology (with its contempt for Slavs and Jews), the diplomatic tug-of-war between Germany, Hungary and the countries of Southeast Europe, German economic demands, and the Volksdeutsche's own group identity as articulated by their Nazified leadership. The key concepts which shaped Berlin's view of the Balkans were those of Lebensraum (living space) and Grossraumwirtschaft (the

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<sup>53</sup> Brunner, p. 55.

planned revamping of European economies to ease the exploitation of raw materials from large swathes of territory in the interest of a few states, especially Germany<sup>54</sup>).<sup>55</sup>

The linking of these concepts is evident already in Weimar-era literature on the Volksdeutsche in the interwar Yugoslav state. The distinguishing characteristic of the ethnic German peasant was understood to be his devotion to hard work and his resultant material prosperity, most evident in comparison with the relative poverty of his non-German neighbors. While racial rhetoric did not figure prominently in these works, they did delineate a clear hierarchy of ethnic groups in the Balkans. The ethnic Germans stood firmly at its apex, even as these works posited economic success as the ethnic Germans' main claim to fame.<sup>56</sup> That ethnic Germans were not wholly acceptable *as Germans* even before the Nazi period is evident. Their devotion to work and material success was a back-handed compliment. It highlighted the ethnic Germans' lack of deep spiritual and cultural interests (Kultur), but this was ascribed to the school of hard knocks which was the settler's life in a foreign land.<sup>57</sup>

In Weimar, ethnic Germans were routinely portrayed as physically and spiritually oppressed by the Yugoslav authorities. This established the image of them – internalized even by many ethnic Germans – as essentially hapless, helpless, and in need of

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<sup>54</sup> As described vaguely yet grandiosely in Karl Janovsky, *Grossdeutschland und der südosteuropäische Raum* (Selbstverlag, 1940).

<sup>55</sup> Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, "Deutschland und Südosteuropa 1871-1945. Zwischen Gegnerschaft und Partnerschaft," in *Osteuropa und die Deutschen. Vorträge zum 75. Jubiläum der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde*, ed. Oskar Anweiler, Eberhard Reissner and Karl-Heinz Ruffmann (Berlin: Arno Spitz, 1990), p. 266.

<sup>56</sup> Wolfgang Aly, *Denkschrift über die Batschka und das südliche Banat. Reisebericht* (Berlin: Bernard & Graefe, 1924), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Andreas Dammang, *Die deutsche Landwirtschaft im Banat und in der Batschka* (Munich: Verlag Ernst Reinhardt, 1931), pp. 40-42, 58, 60.

Germany's protection and support.<sup>58</sup> Whatever the flaws of interwar Yugoslav minority policy, this insistence on the lack of acceptance ethnic Germans encountered could only become exacerbated with the rise of a violently racial ideology like National Socialism and the concomitant rise of Germany as Europe's leading economic, diplomatic and, eventually, military power in the course of the 1930s.

Already before the beginning of World War II, ideas about the East (and Southeast) prevalent in German culture became systematized and exacerbated by an overlay of racial biology, which provided a seemingly objective interpretative framework for earlier notions of Eastern inferiority. Physical encounters with the East and its peoples during the war served only to sharpen these perceived contrasts.<sup>59</sup> But the surface contrast between Central Europe and the East in terms of living standard, economic development and prevalent languages and cultures does not completely explain Nazi hostility. It was due in large part to the very real awareness of just how close everything the East stood for was. This was nowhere truer than in the Balkans. The Reich Germans called the river Danube a "Kulturgrenze"<sup>60</sup> separating the West (Germany and its still-scattered Volk)

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<sup>58</sup> Hermann Rüdiger, *Das Deutschtum an der mittleren Donau (Ungarn, Jugoslawien, Rumänien)* (Munich: Verein für das Deutschtum im Auslande, 1923), pp. 18-19; Paul Rohrbach, *Deutschtum in Not! Die Schicksale der Deutschen in Europa ausserhalb des Reiches* (Berlin and Leipzig: Wilhelm Undermann Verlag, 1926), pp. 336, 355-356. The former work refutes an earlier book, rare in its optimistic estimation of ethnic German integration into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed in 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia): Gerhard Geleemann, *Das Deutschtum in Südslavien* (Munich: Verein für das Deutschtum im Auslande, 1922), pp. 17-18.

<sup>59</sup> Klaus Latzel, "Tourismus und Gewalt. Kriegswahrnehmungen in Feldpostbriefen," in *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*, ed. Hans Heer and Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), pp. 448-456.

<sup>60</sup> Herbert Michaelis, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeographie des Südbanats und Nordserbiens*, doctoral dissertation defended at Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in 1939 (Berlin: Mier & Glasemann, 1940), 122; Hermann Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost 1940-1945. Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1956), p. 18. Also telling is this article title: Rupert von Schumacher, "Die Donau als Symbol der deutschen Geschichte," *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 4, April 1940, pp. 112-118.

from the (South)East, the hallmarks of which were blood feuds, banditry, patriarchal backwardness and pervasive corruption.<sup>61</sup> Yet the Reich could not ignore the reality of German minorities sharing space (both in terms of landownership and in terms of residence in a state) with hostile or, at least, suspicious non-German majorities. The ethnic Germans could afford to ignore these facts even less.

Johannes Künzig waxed lyrical in his description of a young, blonde girl from the Serbian Banat: “The face of a true German girl, a sign that the Banat Germans retained their racial purity untainted for more than two hundred years.”<sup>62</sup> Again, in reference to a gloriously mustachioed elderly peasant from the Romanian Banat: “A breed of people far from their homeland [Heimat] has unmistakably preserved its race-specific appearance for a hundred years. We might encounter this peasant equally well in the Böhmerwald today.”<sup>63</sup> Even while they willfully ignored the practical impossibility of absolutely no mixed marriages having taken place during two hundred years,<sup>64</sup> Künzig and other Reich authors routinely combined praise of Banat Germans’ racial purity with fears of the danger posed to it by a low birthrate and pervasive modernization, those eternal bugbears

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A rare exception was a two-part article by Franz Thierfelder, in which the author posited that the Balkans were only superficially ‘Oriental,’ and could still be fully integrated into European economic currents. Thierfelder wisely skirted the question of the native Balkan populations’ racial suitability for such integration, focusing instead on the region’s economic potential. This was yet another example of how race and space (in this case, economic space) overlapped, sometimes uneasily, in the Nazi worldview. Franz Thierfelder, “Vom alten zum neuen Balkan,” *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 12, December 1941, pp. 415-420 and “Der Balkan im europäischen Raum,” *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 1, January 1942, pp. 13-18.

<sup>61</sup> Neubacher, pp. 22-30.

<sup>62</sup> “Ein echtes deutsches Mädchengesicht, ein Zeichen dafür, dass sich die Banater Schwaben rassisch ganz rein und unvermischt über zwei Jahrhunderte erhalten haben.” Retzlaff and Künzig, pp. 66.

<sup>63</sup> “Unverkennbar hat hier ein Menschenschlag fern von der Heimat durch ein Jahrhundert sein stammesmäßiges Aussehen bewahrt. Dieser Bauer könnte uns heute ebensogut im Böhmerwald begegnen.” Retzlaff and Künzig, pp. 70.

<sup>64</sup> For evidence one need look no further than the many Germanized Serbian and Hungarian family names, as well as evidence in contemporary accounts (newspapers, etc.) of mixed marriages being made in the 1930s and 1940s.

of Nazi population policy.<sup>65</sup> Paradoxically, material well-being was represented as both a just reward for the ethnic Germans' generational hard work (which visibly distinguished them and the landscape their work had shaped from that of their non-German neighbors<sup>66</sup>) and a dangerously seductive factor of their lives. Wealth seduced Volksdeutsche into forgetting their duty to the Volk, having few children, intermarrying and allowing non-Germans to work their fields as wage laborers.

The Reich observer saw the average Banat Volksdeutscher as both a keeper of German cultural and racial identity in a foreign land, and as someone who “easily embraces alien [influences] in foreign countries.”<sup>67</sup> The Volksdeutsche were therefore fundamentally unreliable, in need of constant Reich supervision, ideological and material support. Well might the German Volksgemeinschaft be posited as the “[c]oncept of overarching importance, which the hundred million Germans on this earth – including the Germans in the Southeast – long for and to which they pay homage.”<sup>68</sup> In reality, Volksdeutsche could not be trusted to make independent decisions which might place their individual or group interest on a par or even above the interests of the Third Reich. They were forever junior partners in the National Socialist scheme. Many Reich policymakers (Himmler included) would likely have preferred Volksdeutsche to be inert racial material without powers of independent thought or reasoning, which could be disposed of and resettled as needed.

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<sup>65</sup> Hans Herrschaft, *Das Banat. Ein deutsches Siedlungsgebiet in Südosteuropa*, second edition (Berlin: Verlag Grenze und Ausland, 1942), pp. 265, 270; Retzlaff and Künzig, pp. 16-17; Michaelis, p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> Michaelis, pp. 5, 75-78.

<sup>67</sup> “in fremden Ländern leider allzu leicht Fremdvölkisches annimmt” Michaelis, p. 110.

<sup>68</sup> “Der allen übergeordnete Begriff und die Sehnsucht und das Bekenntnis der hundert Millionen Deutschen dieser Erde . . . Zu ihr bekennt sich auch das Deutschtum der Südostens.” Herrschaft, pp. 13-14.

In reality, obedient as the leaders of the individual German Volksgruppen were, they were never without ideas of their own about how their areas of settlement should be administered, secured and treated in the overarching scheme of the Nazi 'New Order.' In his recent history of World War II in Yugoslavia, Stevan K. Pavlowitch suggested that this phrase is a misnomer. According to Pavlowitch, the 'New Order' meant an uneasy marriage between grand (and vague) long-term plans for population movement, racial renewal and economic restructuring of Europe, and these plans' practical, short-term realization in the form of unrestricted economic exploitation of occupied territories and subjugated populations in the interests of the Reich's war machine.<sup>69</sup> Quite apart from the grandiose vision of a future Germanic East, the peripheral areas of Hitler's wartime empire served as convenient purveyors of food and raw materials for the Reich, and as a dumping ground for undesirable populations.<sup>70</sup> The Volksdeutsche of the East and Southeast gained the dubious distinction of continued residence in a racially suspect area, where they were expected to continue to represent the civilizational superiority of the German Volk. They were also supposed to feed the very Reich whose citizens looked down their noses at Volksdeutsche, and fill the depleted ranks of the Reich's armed forces. All the while, Volksdeutsche were not meant to show too much initiative, merely to act as the Third Reich's enforcers in these newly acquired peripheral areas.

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<sup>69</sup> Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The Second World War in Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 272; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "'Reichsfestung Belgrad.'" Nationalsozialistische "Raumordnung" in Südosteuropa," *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (January 1963), p. 82.

<sup>70</sup> Götz Aly, *'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, trans. Belinda Cooper and Allison Brown (London and New York: Arnold, 1999), p. 16.

CHAPTER I CONTESTED GROUND:  
THE SERBIAN BANAT IN THE THIRD REICH'S DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS  
WITH YUGOSLAVIA, HUNGARY AND ROMANIA BEFORE AND DURING THE  
APRIL WAR

The invasion and partitioning of Yugoslavia by the Third Reich and its allies Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria in the so-called April War<sup>71</sup> of 1941 consolidated the trend evident throughout the second half of the 1930s for Southeast European states to reach rapprochement or be forced into an ever closer diplomatic, economic and military relationship with the Axis powers. The Reich wooed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into signing the Axis Pact on March 25, 1941 in order to secure it as a source of food and raw materials for German markets, and to prevent its being used as a tool of British wartime diplomacy. (The latter was also the main reason for the Reich's invasion of Greece, which also took place in April 1941.) After the overthrow of the Yugoslav government which signed the Pact on March 27, the destruction and occupation of the country became the next best option for the Reich. However, even after the destruction of the Yugoslav state, diplomacy remained a significant element in the Third Reich's relations with its Southeast-European allies and with the Yugoslav territories occupied by it and said allies.

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<sup>71</sup> I will use this phrase, common in Yugoslav historiography (*Aprilski rat*), to denote the twelve-day war between the Axis and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, so as to avoid confusion incurred by the indiscriminate use of the word 'war,' as well as to distinguish it from the contemporaneous invasion and partitioning of Greece by Axis powers.

The actual division of the defeated Yugoslav state was a result of the practical need for resources and allies rather than National Socialist ideology, although ideology was often used to justify and solidify the territorial settlement. The Reich's foreign policy necessitated harmonious relations with its allies Hungary and Romania on the eve of the invasion of the Soviet Union. Paradoxically, this desire for stability in Southeast Europe also opened up space for tension as both Hungary and Romania made demands which endangered the provisional territorial settlement, and thus weakened the southern flank of Nazi Germany's projected Eastern Front. Even though the Third Reich was the dominant power in the Axis Pact and Europe in general in the spring of 1941, it relied for much of its influence on the support of its allies. Therefore its policies were never completely one-sided, as is illustrated by the tensions inherent in the three-way relations between the Third Reich, Hungary and Yugoslavia before the April War, and relations between the Reich, Hungary and Romania after it.

The nexus in which these three-way relationships played out was the Serbian Banat, the western portion of the historical Banat region divided between Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (called after 1929 the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) in 1918. In 1941 the Serbian Banat was occupied by the Wehrmacht but claimed – with varying justifications – by both Hungary and Romania. In Berlin's perspective this was an issue of, at best, secondary importance in view of its plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Banat gained in importance due to its forming a wedge of territory between Hungary and Romania.

On the eve of Operation Barbarossa, the ostensible reason why Operation 25 (the invasion of Yugoslavia) and Operation Marita (the invasion of Greece) were undertaken

was that the Reich could not afford for Hungary and Romania to engage in open enmity over this piece of land. Adding to this the fact that the Banat was inhabited by some 120.000 ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche), who saw occupation by the Reich as vastly preferable to that by either of the other two contenders, the Banat came under the jurisdiction of the Reich German (Reichsdeutsche) military occupation authorities, whose seat was in the Serbian capital of Belgrade. This arrangement was a matter of expediency which – much like the Second Vienna Award of 1940, which benefited Hungary – failed to fully satisfy either Romania or Hungary, but it prevented them from starting their own war over this contested territory. Another unforeseen result of these expedient measures – again more practical and strategic than ideological in nature – was the laying of the groundwork for a semi-autonomous Volksdeutsche administration in the occupied Banat, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

### Wartime Diplomacy

The historiography dealing with the Axis attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941 can be divided into work done by Yugoslav historians in the postwar era and work done by their West German counterparts. Velimir Terzić's work is representative of the former: Terzić makes the claim that Operation 25 was strategically related not only to the attack on Greece, but also to Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.<sup>72</sup> This assertion lends importance to the April War as a crucial part of the biggest Axis campaign, the undertaking which eventually spelled out the doom of the Third Reich.

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<sup>72</sup> Velimir Terzić, *Slom Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1941: Uzroci i posledice poraza*, Volume 2 (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1982), p. 32.

By contrast, historians such as Holm Sundhaussen, Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Detlef Vogel deflate this sense of Yugoslav self-importance. Wehler associates the attack on Yugoslavia with the attack on Greece (Operation Marita), which was caused by Italy's inept invasion of the latter.<sup>73</sup> Sundhaussen suggests that the Balkan campaign as a whole hardly detracted from preparations for Barbarossa, since only about 10% of the forces planned for deployment in the Soviet Union were actually dispatched to the Balkans.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, most of these troops were withdrawn soon after the conclusion of hostilities there, and returned to the pool of soldiers mustered for Barbarossa.<sup>75</sup> While a meeting between Adolf Hitler, Reich Marshall Hermann Göring, Field Marschall Wilhelm Keitel and Keitel's deputy General Alfred Jodl held on March 27, 1941 concluded that Barbarossa would have to be delayed by four weeks, the participants agreed to use soldiers mustered for said campaign in order to secure a swift victory in the Balkans. They did not seem overly concerned about the effect this might have on the Soviet campaign.<sup>76</sup> If Operation 25 decisively hastened anything, it was the success of Operation Marita. Its effect on the eventual failure of Operation Barbarossa remains open to debate.

In terms of the Third Reich's plans for the occupation of the Balkans, German historian Walter Manoschek acknowledges that it was useful for Nazi Germany to

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<sup>73</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalitätenpolitik in Jugoslawien. Die deutsche Minderheit 1918-1978* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Holm Sundhaussen, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens 1918-1980* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1982), p. 109.

<sup>75</sup> Detlef Vogel, "German Intervention in the Balkans," in Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann and Detlef Vogel, *Germany and the Second World War*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Freiburg, Volume 3: The Mediterranean, South-east Europe, and North Africa 1939-1941, trans. Dean S. McMurry, Ewald Osers and Louise Willmot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 525.

<sup>76</sup> Oberst Schmidt (Wehrmacht) memo, March 27, 1941, in *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik, 1918-1945* [from now on *Akten*], Serie D, Volume XII.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), document no. 217.

partition Yugoslavia and control Greece in order to secure the southeastern flank of the Russian campaign. This need for secure flanks was rendered acute by the Third Reich's failure to completely secure the conquest of Western Europe with the abandonment of Operation Sea Lion against England.<sup>77</sup> Manoschek also asserts that – unlike Barbarossa – the attack on Yugoslavia and Greece was not intended to be an “ideologically-motivated war of racial extermination.”<sup>78</sup> This is not contradicted by the streak of anti-Serb prejudice current in Austria since World War I, articulated by Hitler at the March 27 meeting with Göring and the Wehrmacht commanders. Hitler considered leaving the southern flank of Barbarossa in the hands of an unreliable, weak and essentially anti-German Yugoslav government to be potentially disastrous for the whole enterprise.<sup>79</sup> Strong as it was, this prejudice did not amount to a plan for racial annihilation. Instead, the Balkans were seen primarily as a strategically important part of a larger campaign, and as a source of agricultural products and raw materials for the German war economy. The latter followed the same logic which had governed ever closer economic relations between the Third Reich and Yugoslavia during the 1930s.

As German historian Klaus Olshausen cogently noted already in the 1970s, the occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece did not mean their automatic incorporation into the Nazi New Order. Instead, Operations 25 and Marita were expedient measures intended to prevent the possibility of a British-led Balkan front against the Reich, and to ease

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<sup>77</sup> Vogel, p. 451.

<sup>78</sup> Walter Manoschek, “The Extermination of the Jews in Serbia,” in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (New York and Oxford: Beghahn Books, 2000), p. 164.

<sup>79</sup> Oberst Schmidt memo (March 27, 1941), in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 217.

economic extraction from these countries.<sup>80</sup> Having failed to honor the Axis Pact signed by its penultimate prewar government, Yugoslavia no longer merited even the position of junior partner in the new, German-dominated Europe. The fact that its Serbian population was also seen as racially inferior and congenitally treacherous further justified its treatment as subjects without a right to claim as their own the land they lived on and the resources they used.

Sundhaussen's claim that Nazi Germany was unwilling to commit many troops to the Balkan campaign, which was seen as of secondary importance vis-à-vis the planned campaign in the Soviet Union, is upheld by the March 27 meeting, at which it was decided that Germany would obtain Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian military assistance against Yugoslavia. In Hitler's view, if the Yugoslav government and its people had forfeited the right to their territory by rejecting the Axis Pact, then Germany's three tried and tested allies would be rewarded by a promised return of territories that were the object of their revisionist claims.<sup>81</sup> It was also decided that, although it too was Germany's ally, Romania's forces would be reserved for the upcoming Russian campaign, and not used in the attack on Yugoslavia. This was reiterated in General von Brauchitsch's guidelines for the Balkan campaign of March 30, 1941: Hungarian forces, subsumed under the Reich's overall command, had to be ready to enter Yugoslavia by April 14, whereas Romania was to limit its activities to securing its border with Yugoslavia without crossing it.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Klaus Olshausen, *Zwischenspiel auf dem Balkan. Die deutsche Politik gegenüber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von März bis Juli 1941* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1973), p. 307.

<sup>81</sup> Oberst Schmidt memo (March 27, 1941), in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 217.

<sup>82</sup> General Walter von Brauchitsch (Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres), "Aufmarschanweisung für "Unternehmen 25" sowie ergänzende Weisung für "Marita", March 30, 1941, Bundesarchiv

In the case of Hungary, the piece of Yugoslav territory slated for it was the Serbian Banat, according to the Führer Directive of March 27 on the conduct of the Balkan campaign.<sup>83</sup> These early decisions set the stage for a prolonged battle of wills between the Third Reich, Hungary and Romania regarding the validity of the latter two's claims to parts of Yugoslav territory and the extent of the territories involved. They also placed the Romanian claim in a position inferior to that of Hungary from the very beginning.

Hungary was to deliver the most aid to the Wehrmacht in northern Yugoslavia i.e. the Vojvodina and northern Croatia. Since the Vojvodina region (comprising the Bačka, the Banat, the Srem and the Baranja) had been a part of the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy until 1918, its recovery had been a mainstay of Hungarian state policy in the interwar period. Revisionist texts purported that this once purely Magyar land had been settled by Serbs, Romanians and Germans during the Ottoman and Habsburg periods in a clear attempt to wrest it from its rightful, Magyar owners. These efforts were later compounded by supposed blatant Germanization under Emperor Joseph II. Ultimately the underhand scheming of the Serbian and Romanian states, exponents of a specifically Balkan backwardness, snatched the whole region from Hungary's civilizing influence after World War I.<sup>84</sup> Returning these and other lands Hungary lost by the Treaty of Trianon (1920) – i.e. reconstituting the 'lands of the Crown of St. Stephen' – became the ultimate goal of interwar Hungarian foreign policy and one of the reasons for the

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Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), RH 2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab des Heeres, file 466, fiche 1, frames 4-5.

<sup>83</sup> Führer Directive, March 27, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), document no. 223.

<sup>84</sup> Eugene Horváth, *The Banat: A Forgotten Chapter of European History* (Budapest: Sárkány Printing Company/The Hungarian Frontiers Readjustment League, 1931), pp. 17-21, 25.

rapprochement between Regent Miklós Horthy's conservative dictatorship and the Third Reich.

This goal also meant that diplomatic relations between Hungary and Yugoslavia were never free from tension, nor did the prospect of returning to Hungarian rule leave the multinational population of the Vojvodina cold. Constructive proposals for settling the issue were few and far between. Even when a plausible proposal was made it was hardly feasible, given the nature of the two states. Thus, when the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry tentatively proposed an exchange of populations in October 1940 – the 600,000 ethnic Hungarians from the Vojvodina for the 300,000 Slavic Ukrainians from Hungarian Carpatho-Ukraine – the Hungarian ambassador in Belgrade immediately demanded that the 200,000 Carpatho-Ukrainian Jews be included in the exchange, effectively sabotaging the proposal. Moreover, Hungarian Foreign Minister Count Imre Csáky was doubtful, since “[i]t would be difficult, for practical reasons, to resettle Hungarian peasants, who inhabit these rich, Yugoslav-held lowlands, to the thickly forested and mountainous Carpathians.”<sup>85</sup> Apart from both states' reluctance to accept large Jewish populations, large-scale population transfer was quite beyond the realm of possibility for these two essentially conservative states. Both lacked the ideological radicalism and the removal of peacetime constraints which rendered such projects perfectly feasible for the Third Reich, especially during the war years.

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<sup>85</sup> “E[s] sei aber praktisch schwer durchführbar, da man die ungarischen Bauern, die die reiche Tiefebene des an Jugoslawien abgetretenen Gebiets bewohnen, nicht in dem waldigen und gebirgigen Karpathenlande ansiedeln könne.” Otto von Erdmannsdorff (German Ambassador in Budapest) to AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry), October 26, 1940, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/707/332,513.

Despite the failure of this proposal, there was a marked improvement of diplomatic relations between Hungary and Yugoslavia in late 1940, crowned by the signing of a treaty of “constant peace and perpetual friendship”<sup>86</sup> in Belgrade on December 12, 1940. Though proposed by Csáky and represented to the Romanian Foreign Ministry – ever jealous of any perceived favoring of Hungary over Romania – as a purely internal matter between the two states,<sup>87</sup> it is fairly clear that this Friendship Treaty (Freundschaftsvertrag) was suggested to Hungary by the Third Reich. An outline of the Treaty was submitted to German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop for approval before it was signed, acknowledging Germany’s dominant position as extending even over its allies’ individual diplomatic moves.<sup>88</sup> The Treaty was meant to draw Yugoslavia by degrees closer to accepting its accession to the Axis, which the Reich had been persuading it to do for over a year.

Although the Yugoslav side officially clung to the belief that the Treaty signified the loss of any leverage Hungary may have exerted to fulfill its revisionist ambitions,<sup>89</sup> it remained clear that while “Hungary would not assert its territorial demands vis-à-vis Yugoslavia for the time being, [it] cannot expressly abandon them either.”<sup>90</sup> A German

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<sup>86</sup> “Treaties, Alliances, Accords, Ententes, and Pacts. Hungary,” March 15, 1941, NARA, RG 165 Records of the War Department, entry 77, box 3296, document 3860, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, November 30, 1940, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XI.2 (Bonn: Gebr. Hermes KG, 1964), document no. 431; Fabricius (German Embassy in Bucharest) to AA, December 9, 1940, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XI.2, document no. 480; State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker (AA) to German Embassy in Romania, December 11, 1940, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XI.2, document no. 514.

<sup>88</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, February 4, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/707/ 332,522; German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to Erdmannsdorff, December 9, 1940, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XI.2, document no. 478.

<sup>89</sup> “Treaties, Alliances, Accords, Ententes, and Pacts. Hungary” (1941), NARA, RG 165, entry 77, box 3296, document 3860, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> “Ungarn wolle zwar seine territorialen Forderungen gegenüber Jugoslawien zur Zeit nicht geltendmachen, könne aber nicht ausdrücklich auf sie verzichten.” Erdmannsdorff to AA, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XI.2, document no. 431.

agent given the code number 6625, who was active in Belgrade before the April War, reported just a day after the Treaty was signed that neither side had much faith in it. Hungary wanted a peaceful southern border so it could return to expanding its territory at the expense of Romania (started with the Second Vienna Award earlier that year), whereas Yugoslavia knew that once that was settled, Hungary would inevitably turn back to the Yugoslav territories it coveted.<sup>91</sup> It was equally impossible to divorce the Friendship Treaty from the prospect of closer cooperation between Yugoslavia and the Axis.<sup>92</sup> The Treaty was therefore more in the nature of a gentlemen's agreement, and a provisional one at that, and could only have held in peacetime or in the case of a Yugoslav accession to the Axis. Much like the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, neither side took the Treaty seriously in the long run, although, as we will see, at least one Hungarian politician did consider it a valid and binding document even after the Yugoslav royal coup of March 27, 1941, which overthrew the government which had agreed to Yugoslavia joining the Axis.<sup>93</sup>

In the days preceding Yugoslavia's accession to the Axis, the Hungarian government expressed concerns lest the close ties between the Reich and Yugoslavia should put a damper on Hungary's revisionist ambitions. Hungarian Foreign Minister László Bárdossy deferred to Germany's superior position in the three-way relationship between the Third Reich, Hungary and Yugoslavia by requesting that the Yugoslav accession to the Axis be made contingent on the German guarantee of a final border settlement between Hungary and Yugoslavia. He also dispatched the Hungarian

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<sup>91</sup> Agent 6625, "Ungarisch-jugoslavische Verhandlungen," December 13, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175 [Records of the Reichsführer-SS]/648/no frame number.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*; Erdmannsdorff to AA, February 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/707/332,526.

<sup>93</sup> See p. 52.

Ambassador in Berlin Döme Sztójay to take up the matter with Joachim von Ribbentrop's representative, State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker. At the time, these concerns were duly taken into consideration by the AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry), but did not merit special attention.<sup>94</sup>

However, once the royal coup ostensibly rendered Yugoslavia's membership in the Axis a moot point, Hungarian revisionism was given a new lease on life in Berlin, since it provided a useful excuse for Hungarian participation in an attack on Yugoslavia. On March 28 Hitler made a fateful, sweeping promise, presenting the situation as a "unique opportunity for Hungary to obtain revisions for which she would perhaps otherwise have had to wait for many years."<sup>95</sup> He also instructed Sztójay to inform Regent Horthy that in an armed conflict between Germany and Yugoslavia, "Germany would place no restrictions on Hungary's revisionist desires."<sup>96</sup> More specifically, a memorandum produced most likely around April 6, stated explicitly that "[t]he formerly Hungarian part [of Yugoslavia], which borders on Hungary (as far as the Danube) falls to Hungary."<sup>97</sup>

The very imprecision of these promises sowed the seeds for future difference of interpretations. Nevertheless, Horthy was more than happy to accept Hitler's veiled

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<sup>94</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, March 16, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,569-570; Weizsäcker memo, March 17, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 172.

<sup>95</sup> Hewel (aide to Ribbentrop) memo, March 28, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 215.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> "Der an Ungarn angrenzende, ehemals ungarische Teil (bis zur Donau) fällt an Ungarn." Unsigned memo, "Allgemeine Absichten für die spätere Organisation der Verwaltung im jugoslawischen Raum," no date, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), document no. 291.

proposal for a joint attack on and partitioning of Yugoslavia,<sup>98</sup> thus creating a dangerous precedent. The attack on Yugoslavia was the first instance of Hungary actually going to war in order to fulfill its revisionist aims, and it made it that much easier for the country to be drawn into Hitler's crusade in the Soviet Union two months later.<sup>99</sup>

The agreement to divvy up northern Yugoslavia between them did not mean that German and Hungarian views of the Balkans were completely aligned. This became apparent in the days leading up to the April War. The Third Reich's superior position was acknowledged by its Hungarian ally, who continued to heed German advice – and warnings – in all its future attempts at border revision. Ironically, then Yugoslav Foreign Minister Aleksandar Cincar-Marković captured this power relationship in a nutshell on July 1, 1940, when he told the *Münchener Neuste Nachrichten* that he did not fear Hungarian revisionism since Hungary “could hardly undertake anything without Germany's approval.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the grand yet vague promises Nazi Germany made while courting Hungary's assistance in the attack on Yugoslavia would have long-term repercussions, since the two allies would interpret these promises very differently under rapidly changing circumstances. Illustrating both these points was the Führer Directive of April 3, 1941, which set down specific tasks Germany's allies would have to perform in the Balkan campaign and the Yugoslav territories they would receive. It also unequivocally gave Hitler the supreme decision-making power in both military matters

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<sup>98</sup> Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy to Hitler, March 28, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 227.

<sup>99</sup> Šandor Mesaroš, “Mađarska istoriografija o diplomatskim pripremama za napad Mađarske na Jugoslaviju,” in *Vojvodina 1941: Radovi i diskusija sa skupa istoričara u Subotici 9 i 10. decembra 1966. god.* (Novi Sad, 1967), pp. 216-219.

<sup>100</sup> “pošto ne veruje da bi ona mogla ma šta da preduzme bez saglasnosti Nemačke” Yugoslav Foreign Minister Aleksandar Cincar-Marković quoted in Terzić, Volume 1, p. 276.

and issues regarding the occupation of Yugoslavia, which decisions were conveniently deferred until an unspecified later time.<sup>101</sup>

For the moment at least, harmony seemed to reign between the two allies. Hungary's decision to close ranks with the Third Reich against Yugoslavia did not, however, pass without internal objection. Hungarian Prime Minister Count Pál Teleki committed suicide in the night of April 2-3, 1941, in large part due to an avowed "conflict of conscience" provoked by Horthy's decision to disregard the Hungarian-Yugoslav Friendship Treaty, thus sullyng Hungary's honor and its standing in the world.<sup>102</sup> Teleki also despaired over the likelihood of an imminent conflict with Romania over possession of Northern Transylvania (ceded to Hungary at the Second Vienna Award)<sup>103</sup> and concern that a Hungarian attack on Yugoslavia would have the disastrous effect of a British declaration of war against Hungary.<sup>104</sup> Yet the perceived injury to Hungary's honor clearly carried the most weight with the late Prime Minister.

Horthy seemed sufficiently disturbed by Teleki's act to backtrack, but only a little. Instead of exposing his country to Hitler's wrath, not to mention abandoning his revisionist ambitions, the Regent of Hungary requested that Hitler salve Hungary's conscience by providing an excuse for the abandonment of the Friendship Treaty. Two excuses were proposed by Horthy himself: either a Yugoslav attack on or an overt Yugoslav threat to Hungary, or a declaration of independence by Croatia, which would effectively end the existence of Yugoslavia and be endorsed by Hungary.<sup>105</sup> Since the

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<sup>101</sup> Führer Directive, April 3, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 256.

<sup>102</sup> Horthy to Hitler, April 3, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 261.

<sup>103</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 5, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 267.

<sup>104</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 6, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 287; Terzić, Volume 2, 42.

<sup>105</sup> Weizsäcker memo, April 4, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 264.

proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska), which would be ruled by Croatian fascists, was a part of German war plans in the Southeast Europe, Hitler proved amenable to Horthy's request.<sup>106</sup>

On April 5 Ribbentrop informed Bárdossy – who replaced Teleki as Hungary's Prime Minister – of the official German line regarding Yugoslavia, accusing the “conspiratorial clique in Belgrade” of giving Germany's overtures for peace an answer which was “as dumb as [it was] criminal.”<sup>107</sup> This was an example of the familiar Nazi technique of preserving the moral high ground by accusing their victims of malicious intent and aggression.

Only one day later, the day when the early-morning bombing of Belgrade by the Luftwaffe heralded the undeclared start of the April War, German Ambassador in Budapest Otto von Erdmannsdorff reported that German assurances had had the desired effect of destroying the reticence caused by Teleki's suicide and prompting the mobilization of additional Hungarian forces for the campaign against Yugoslavia.<sup>108</sup> In the same spirit, on April 11, 1941 – five days after the initial German attack on Yugoslavia – Horthy issued a statement which accused the Yugoslav government of continuing the warmongering Serbian tradition of 1914, saulted the creation of an independent Croatia, and proclaimed Hungary's avowed goal and duty to win back its lost territories from Yugoslavia.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 6, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 282; Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 9, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 296.

<sup>107</sup> “Verschwörerclique in Belgrad . . . ebenso dumme wie verbrecherische” Ribbentrop to Erdmannsdorff, April 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,953.

<sup>108</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 6, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,936.

<sup>109</sup> Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 11, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 307.

The Hungarian claim on the Serbian half of the Banat seemed at that point clear-cut. However, the ownership of this region was contested by Romania, which had no historical claims on the Serbian Banat, but had three arguments in its favor: the presence of an ethnic Romanian minority in the Serbian Banat as well as the fact that this area formed one traditional entity with the Romanian Banat on the other side of the Yugoslav-Romanian border; long-standing Romanian-Hungarian rivalry, which guaranteed that no Hungarian territorial claim in either eastern Vojvodina or Transylvania would go unchallenged; and, most importantly, the importance of Romanian oil for the Reich's war effort as well as Romanian Minister President Ion Antonescu's commitment to Romanian participation in Operation Barbarossa, neither of which had anything to do with the Banat but could be used as bargaining chips. The latter was also the main reason for Hitler's decision to limit Romanian participation in the April War to securing their side of the Romanian-Yugoslav and Romanian-Soviet borders.<sup>110</sup>

Ironically, Antonescu's commitment to the Russian campaign weakened his country's claim on the Serbian Banat, since no Romanian troops would be present anywhere on the soil of defeated Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, the arguments listed above enabled Antonescu to make Romania a factor in the power relationship between the Third Reich and Hungary, effectively replacing the destroyed Yugoslav state in this three-way relationship.

Already on April 1 Antonescu expressed an interest in the Serbian Banat, but stressed that Romania's foreign policy would always defer to Germany's foreign-political

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<sup>110</sup> Führer Directive (1941), in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 256.

interests.<sup>111</sup> Antonescu thus took the same position as Hungary vis-à-vis the Reich's relative superiority in Europe in the second year of the war: the Third Reich was the dominant diplomatic power in Europe in 1941 not only because it was Europe's dominant military power as well, but because its allies gladly ceded it the top position in exchange for the prestige and power they gained by association.

If the Hungarian leadership had to overcome scruples raised by Teleki's suicide, Antonescu labored under intense political pressure at home – not least from the fascist Iron Guard – urging him to assert Romania's claim on the whole of the historical Banat region. He did so by “hinting at certain rights over the Romanian Banat,”<sup>112</sup> a choice of words that caused understandable confusion in Berlin and had to be explained by the German representative for economic affairs in Bucharest, Hermann Neubacher: “The term used by General Antonescu, “the Romanian Banat” means that part of the Banat which belongs to Yugoslavia at present.”<sup>113</sup>

Calling the Serbian Banat Romanian was not enough to win the Third Reich's support for a Romanian occupation of the region, any more than Csáky's calling the Vojvodina “Yugoslav-held lowlands”<sup>114</sup> bolstered his country's claim to rightful ownership of said lowlands. Antonescu therefore bolstered his claim by informing Wehrmacht General von Brauchitsch and Neubacher on April 3 that he respected Hitler's decision not to have Romania take part in the attack on Yugoslavia but, should Hungarian

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<sup>111</sup> Reich economic envoy in Bucharest Hermann Neubacher to AA, April 1, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,770-771.

<sup>112</sup> “gewisse Rechte auf das rumänische Banat durchblicken lassen” Neubacher to AA (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,771.

<sup>113</sup> “Unter von General Antonescu gebrauchtem Ausdruck “rumänisches Banat” ist Teil Banats zu verstehen, der jetzt zu Jugoslawien gehört.” Neubacher to AA, April 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,788.

<sup>114</sup> See p. 47.

troops enter the Serbian Banat, they would be met there by Romanian troops defending their country's claim to the territory.<sup>115</sup> Reinforcing the prospect of a localized war between Hungary and Romania was the complaint lodged the following day by Romanian Ambassador in Berlin Raoul Bossy about the prospect of a Hungarian occupation of the Serbian Banat.<sup>116</sup>

All this prompted a meeting between Ribbentrop's aide Karl Ritter and Bossy on April 5. At this meeting, Ritter carried out Ribbentrop's instructions and assured the Romanian ambassador that whatever Hungarian troops were deployed in the Vojvodina would stop west of the Tisa River, which divides the Bačka (which was occupied by Hungarian forces) from the Banat. The "so-called Serbian Banat" would thus remain "free of Hungarian soldiers."<sup>117</sup> Despite the lip-service paid to Romanian sentiment by these turns of phrase, Ritter's promise did not amount to a German permission for Romanian troops to enter the contested territory,<sup>118</sup> nor did it allow for any confusion as to which Banat was meant (a map was used). It did, however, mean that there were now practical obstacles to Hungary realizing a sweeping territorial revision in northern Yugoslavia, as it had been promised on March 28.

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<sup>115</sup> Neubacher to AA, April 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,836.

<sup>116</sup> Völkl, p. 17.

<sup>117</sup> "das sogenannte Serbische Banat . . . frei von ungarischen Truppen" Ribbentrop aide Karl Ritter note, April 5, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 277; see also Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Romania, April 5, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 276.

<sup>118</sup> Which may have been just as well, since on April 8 German Ambassador in Romania Manfred von Killinger reported that Romanian public opinion opposed military engagement in Yugoslavia and continued to see Hungary as the main opponent. Even so, Antonescu coveted the Serbian Banat as "spoils of war" ("Beute") – an inherently contradictory choice of words, but illustrative of Romanian attitudes to both Yugoslav territory and Hungarian revisionism. Killinger memo, April 8, 1941, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), NS 19 Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, file 3517, fiche 2, frame 53.

As the dominant partner in this three-way relationship at a time when the bulk of its energy was consumed by preparations for Operation Barbarossa, the Third Reich could not afford a clash between its junior partners – Hungary and Romania – or the destabilizing of either government.<sup>119</sup> As Hitler explained to Bárdossy already on March 21 – pairing a political with an economic argument – such a conflict would create a power vacuum which might allow for the spread of Soviet influence in Southeast Europe, not to mention prevent the free flow of goods along the Danube.<sup>120</sup> If Southeast Europe was to serve as a secure flank for the Russian campaign, relative stability in the whole region had to be preserved. Hitler therefore decided to keep Hungarians and Romanians physically apart by having the German forces slated to occupy Serbia proper,<sup>121</sup> occupy the Serbian Banat as well.<sup>122</sup>

The OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the German Army High Command) informed the commanders of the Romanian and Hungarian armies of this decision, with a reiteration that Hungarian troops were not to cross east of the Tisa, whereas Romanian troops were to hold to their side of the Romanian-Yugoslav border. This reneging on Hitler's promise to Horthy – that Hungary could occupy all Yugoslav lands north of the Danube – was glossed over with a reference to the relative weakness of Hungarian troops

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<sup>119</sup> Prompted by Romanian claims to the Serbian Banat and Hungarian confidence in Hitler's promise, Erdmannsdorff commented: "in my opinion we [Germany] would not permit an armed action by Romania against Hungary which, as matters stood, was almost certainly out of the question even in case Antonescu should fall." Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 9, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 296.

<sup>120</sup> Schmidt memo (aide to Ribbentrop), March 23, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 191.

<sup>121</sup> In German Alt-Serbien, Serbia south of the River Danube i.e. Serbia within its pre-1918 borders.

<sup>122</sup> Führer Directive, April 13, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 335.

needed against Yugoslavia.<sup>123</sup> This was mere lip-service, however: Hitler relied on Horthy's awareness of his weakness to implement military action independently of the Reich.

The April War lasted barely twelve days. The Yugoslav defeat was sped along by thinly stretched divisions, the moral and material setback produced by the bombing of Belgrade, airfields and major communications, and the secession of Croatia on April 10.<sup>124</sup> The successful occupation of the country culminated in the fall of Belgrade on April 13 and the capture of the Yugoslav Army High Command near Sarajevo on April 15.<sup>125</sup> The Yugoslav side requested an armistice and negotiations commenced on the same day.<sup>126</sup> The Yugoslav capitulation, signed on April 17, went into force the following day at noon.<sup>127</sup> In a message to Horthy, Hitler termed the collapse of Yugoslavia "the best Easter present for all of us."<sup>128</sup>

In the aftermath of victory, the tension produced by the ongoing territorial dispute between the Third Reich's allies had to be addressed, however provisionally. The AA proved itself a loyal Nazi institution by following Hitler's evasive example in formulating its official position: "all these questions [of future ownership of former Yugoslav territories] will be clarified at the end of the war."<sup>129</sup> In the case of the Banat specifically,

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<sup>123</sup> Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (head of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, OKW) to Wehrmacht Commander in Bucharest, April 8, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501 [Records of German Field Commands: Rear Areas, Occupied Territories, and Others]/269/291; Keitel memo, April 8, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/269/293.

<sup>124</sup> Pavlowitch, pp. 17-18.

<sup>125</sup> Vogel, pp. 521-522.

<sup>126</sup> Gerhart Feine (First Secretary of the German Embassy in Belgrade) to AA, April 15, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,071.

<sup>127</sup> Feine to AA, April 17, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,103.

<sup>128</sup> Hitler to Horthy, April 13, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 334.

<sup>129</sup> "alle diese Fragen erst bei Friedensschluss zu klären sein würden." Emil von Rintelen (aide to Ribbentrop) to Weizsäcker, April 12, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,051.

Keitel's instructions, issued on April 18 – the day the April War ended with an Axis victory – stated as one of German aims in the Balkans the “occupation of the Yugoslav territory between the Tisa, the Danube and the Romanian border [i.e. the Serbian Banat] as a territory occupied temporarily by Germany [underlined in the original].”<sup>130</sup> Later Reich claims that Hungarian revisionist goals had not been forgotten and that the Reich's occupation of the Banat was not intended to be long-term in character thus seem to contain an element of truth. In the short term, however, keeping the Hungarians and Romanians physically apart in order to ensure relative stability on Barbarossa's southeastern flank mattered more to the Reich than actual ownership of the Banat.<sup>131</sup>

For the Hungarians, this decision meant yet another delay in the realization of their revisionist goals vis-à-vis the territories of former Yugoslavia. Already on April 12, Sztójay informed Weizsäcker that Romanian threats of responding to an armed Hungarian presence in the Banat with soldiers of their own would have negative repercussions for the Romanian side.<sup>132</sup> Two days later, Bárdossy supported this by reminding Berlin, somewhat disingenuously, of Hitler's promises to Horthy regarding Yugoslav territory, and suggested immediate Hungarian occupation of the Banat so as “not to give the Romanians false hope and [have them reach] wrongheaded

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<sup>130</sup> “Besetzung des jugoslawischen Gebietes zwischen Theiss, Donau und der rumänischen Grenze als vorläufig deutscherseits besetzten Gebiet.” Keitel memo, April 18, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/269/309.

<sup>131</sup> Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion*, Volume 2 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 265; Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 233.

<sup>132</sup> Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin Döme Sztójay to Weizsäcker, April 12, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1369/D523,290-291.

conclusions.”<sup>133</sup> The pedantic, badgering tone of these missives failed to evoke sympathy in Berlin.

Sheer frustration may have prompted Hungarian troops to cross the River Tisa on April 13, occupying the northernmost tip of the Serbian Banat as far as the villages of Aranka, Mokrin and Verbitza, and the Grosskikinda-Aratsch railroad:<sup>134</sup> a tiny patch of land, but great in symbolic value in these days of jealous tension over territory.

Antonescu complained to German Ambassador in Bucharest Manfred von Killinger that this Hungarian action had had a “depressing” effect on wide circles of the Romanian army and government, prompting the AA to warn the Hungarian government against penetrating deeper into the Banat. The Third Reich’s claim that the temporary occupation of the Serbian Banat by its forces was meant to prevent Hungarian-Romanian clashes – *not* to impinge upon Hungarian revisionist claims – and had been made at Romanian urging<sup>135</sup> merely exacerbated the Hungarians’ disappointment.

In the period April 14-17, 1941 the Hungarian government continued to pelt Berlin with communications, trying to force the Reich’s hand by three principal means: requesting German confirmation that the Hungarian claim on the Banat remained undisputed, also making explicitly known Hungarian objections to the use of the term “later”<sup>136</sup> in relation to possession of the Banat which had been promised to them; listing earlier meetings and memos in which the Reich promised the Banat to Hungary<sup>137</sup>; and

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<sup>133</sup> “um nicht bei den Rumänen falsche Hoffnungen und falsche Rückschlüsse zu erwecken.” Erdmannsdorff to AA, April 14, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1369/D523,292.

<sup>134</sup> Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Hungary, April 14, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 340; Killinger to AA, April 15, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1369/D523,285.

<sup>135</sup> Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Hungary, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 340.

<sup>136</sup> ““spätere”” Erdmannsdorff to AA, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1369/D523,292.

<sup>137</sup> Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, April 15, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 353.

proposing yet again the immediate Hungarian occupation of the Banat as a preemptive strike against rumored Romanian preparations to invade this territory.<sup>138</sup> It was even rumored that Hungary might leave the Serbian Banat to Romania in exchange for Romanian territory north of the River Mureş and, more than likely, large parts of Transylvania including the towns of Arad and Cluj.<sup>139</sup> No such offer was ever actually made by the Hungarian government, which is not surprising considering it could hardly have been called a fair exchange. No Hungarian argument – nor the sheer repetition thereof – managed to persuade the Reich government to change policy again in such a short time, leaving possession of the Banat an open issue in the relations between Nazi Germany, Hungary and Romania throughout the summer and fall of 1941, and even later (see Chapters 2 and 3).

German excuses that a final division of the Yugoslav territory would have to be left till after the war also failed to calm Romanian fears, especially in view of the fact that Romania had lost territories to Hungary and Bulgaria at the Second Vienna Award, and was then asked not to participate in a campaign which brought still more land to both of the latter.<sup>140</sup> Killinger reported already on April 10 that the German consul in Jassy had observed motorized units of the Romanian army on the move, supposedly headed towards the Hungarian border in order to respond to a potential Hungarian entrance into the Banat.<sup>141</sup> Two days later, the AA instructed the German Embassy in Romania to

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*; Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, April 17, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 366.

<sup>139</sup> Auslandsdienst report from Budapest, “Ungarn und der Balkankrieg,” April 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81 [Records of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut]/563/5,340,774.

<sup>140</sup> Völkl, p. 21.

Bulgaria occupied Macedonia and a large part of southern Serbia, whereas Hungary got the Bačka, the Baranja and part of northern Croatia.

<sup>141</sup> Killinger to AA, April 10, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,039.

deflect all Romanian requests for participation in the invasion and partitioning of Yugoslavia as unnecessary. As for Romanian claims on Yugoslav territory, these were to be delayed till “the conclusion of peace,” since “with respect to anything definitive one would still have to wait for a considerable period of time.”<sup>142</sup> This vague language suggests that what was a pressing issue for Hungary and Romania, was not so for Germany. This did not mean that Reich policy – however improvised – was easily altered.

In the unkind phrase used in a German report, “[t]he Romanian press seized upon the catchphrase “Romanian minority in Yugoslavia””<sup>143</sup> in an attempt to sway public opinion in favor of Romanian military action in the Serbian Banat during the April War. The main arguments used were supposed Serbian treachery in seizing a territory rightfully Romanian at Versailles, and the erroneous claim that the Serbian Banat was inhabited by as many as half a million ethnic Romanians (a gross inflation).<sup>144</sup> Yet Romanian public opinion remained most interested in territorial revision at Hungarian expense,<sup>145</sup> and was backed by certain members of Antonescu’s government. Propaganda

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<sup>142</sup> Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Romania, April 12, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 330.

<sup>143</sup> “hat die rumänische Presse das Stichwort “Rumänische Minderheit in Jugoslawien” aufgegriffen” Auslandsdienst report from Bucharest, April 9, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/563/5,340,352.

<sup>144</sup> “Rumänien und Jugoslawien. Die Bukarester Presse zu der Frage der rumänischen Minderheiten im serbischen Banat,” *Südostdeutsche Zeitung*, April 10, 1941, BA Berlin, R 4902 Deutsches Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut, file 274, no page number; “Die rumänische Presse zur Frage des serbischen Banats,” *Südostdeutsche Zeitung*, April 10, 1941, BA Berlin, R 4902, file 274, no page number; “Belgrads verfehlte Politik gegenüber den Rumänen im Banat,” *Bukarester Tageblatt*, April 9, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/273/234; ““Unser rumänisches Banat”. Die Bukarester Presse fordert das ganze Banat für Rumänien,” *Bukarester Tageblatt*, April 11, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/273/256.

<sup>145</sup> Auslandsdienst report from Bucharest, “Die Reaktion auf den siegreichen Balkanfeldzug,” April 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/563/5,340,351.

Minister Nichifor Crainic commented piously that “Romania should not benefit from the misfortune of a neighboring country”<sup>146</sup> (presumably unless that country was Hungary).

Antonescu then tried a different tack. Invoking his tender concern for the estimated 130,000 ethnic Romanians in the Serbian Banat – an inflated yet conservative estimate vis-à-vis those offered by the Romanian press – on April 15 he suggested the introduction of a Romanian commissar to liaise between them and the Reichsdeutsche authorities in Serbia and ensure their protection from attack by Serbs. He also proposed the introduction of Romanian administrators to take some of the burden off the administration in the occupied Banat,<sup>147</sup> which would effectively give Romania a stake in the daily running of the Serbian Banat. Feigned disingenuousness served Antonescu no better than it had served the Hungarian side, which could hardly have been expected to accept a civilian infiltration of the Banat by Romanian clerks.

Ribbentrop instructed Killinger to remain “wholly receptive” to Romanian desires, but also to reject Antonescu’s suggestion politely but firmly on the grounds that the ethnic Romanians in the Serbian Banat would be under the full protection of the Wehrmacht.<sup>148</sup> An internal AA memo of April 21 makes it clear that Berlin knew perfectly well there were no more than 65,000 ethnic Romanians in the Banat. The AA forbade all encouragement of Romanian illusions regarding their chances of occupying

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<sup>146</sup> ““Rumänien dürfte aus der Notlage eines Nachbarn keinen Nutzen ziehen.” “Die Reaktion auf den siegreichen Balkanfeldzug” (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-81/563/5,340,352.

<sup>147</sup> Killinger to AA, April 15, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1369/D523,288.

<sup>148</sup> “völlig rezeptiv” Ribbentrop to Killinger, April 17, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,113.

the Banat by force of arms or administrative personnel through any speculation with or coming from the German Embassy in Bucharest.<sup>149</sup>

At the same time, Berlin recognized the need to compensate Romania with a slice of former Yugoslavia in order to preserve Romania's standing as the Reich's ally and soothe its pride in the face of Hungarian gains in the Bačka, the Međimurje (in Croatia) and the Prekomurje (in Slovenia). At the meeting between Ribbentrop and Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, which took place in Vienna on April 21-22, 1941, the division of Yugoslav territories was the main topic of discussion. However, before the meeting Ribbentrop made it clear that he would merely inform, not consult Ciano on the disposition of the Vojvodina, since this fell far outside of the Italian sphere of influence, but was of paramount importance for the Third Reich as a source of food.<sup>150</sup>

So far as a Romanian claim on Yugoslav lands was concerned, the final summary of the meeting was as vague and hope-inspiring as Hitler's March 28 promise to Horthy:

[The Bačka and the Banat] will go to Hungary . . . The Banat will initially be occupied by German troops in order to prevent clashes between Hungarians and Romanians. The necessity to provide compensation for Romania elsewhere is recognized, despite the difficulty inherent in finding [a] suitable object. A practical possibility is not at present in sight.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Rintelen to the German Embassy in Romania, April 21, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 376.

<sup>150</sup> Ribbentrop to German Embassy in Rome, April 18, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 368; Schmidt (aide to Ribbentrop) memo, April 22, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 385.

<sup>151</sup> "Bačka und Banat [line break] gehen an Ungarn . . . Das Banat bleibt zunächst von deutschen Truppen besetzt, um Zusammenstöße zwischen Ungarn und Rumänen zu verhindern. Die Notwendigkeit, Rumänien Kompensationen an anderer Stelle zukommen zu lassen, wird trotz der Schwierigkeiten, geeignete Objekte zu finden, anerkannt. Die praktischen Möglichkeiten lassen sich im Augenblick noch nicht übersehen." Schmidt (aide to Ribbentrop) memo, "Ergebnis der deutsch-italienischen Besprechungen über die Neugestaltung des jugoslawischen Raumes," April 24, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 398.

The decision which territory Romania could be granted was thus deferred until an unspecified future time. This was due not least to Hungarian objections that, while Romania was a valuable ally and certainly ought to be appeased with a bit of Yugoslavia (other than the Banat), Antonescu's constant clamoring for the Banat was irritating and difficult to explain to the Hungarian public even on the grounds that the Romanian leader was severely pressed by his domestic opposition and had to give a show of strength by attempting to unite all of the historical Banat region under the Romanian flag.<sup>152</sup>

Lacking allies in this diplomatic tussle, in the days following the Ribbentrop-Ciano meeting Romania even turned for support to the Third Reich's other Balkan ally: Bulgaria. This attempt to play Bulgaria against both the Reich and Hungary failed quickly. Ribbentrop instructed the Bulgarian government in no uncertain terms to display the "greatest reserve"<sup>153</sup> regarding Romanian demands, and to claim a lack of information about Germany's plans for former Yugoslav lands: "I would like to point out that – since the Führer and myself are personally in charge of these discussions – we do not find it desirable to let ourselves be drawn into a discussion with any third government."<sup>154</sup> There is no further record of Bulgaria's involvement in the issue of the Serbian Banat, but this would not be the last time that Romania sought allies within the Axis camp to support its territorial ambitions.

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<sup>152</sup> Hewel memo on the meeting between Hitler and Sztójay, April 19, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 371.

It does not seem beyond the realm of possibility that the decision to allow Romania to occupy Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transnistria (including Odessa) during Operation Barbarossa was related directly to Berlin's avowed duty to repay its ally's obedience, military aid and oil shipments with substantial territorial gains.

<sup>153</sup> "grösste Zurückhaltung" Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Bulgaria, April 23, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,173.

<sup>154</sup> "Hierzu bemerke ich, dass es uns nicht erwünscht ist, mit dritten Regierungen über die Besprechungen hinaus, die hier unmittelbar vom Führer und mir geführt werden, uns in Diskussionen über diese Frage hineinziehen zu lassen." *Ibid.*

A pattern quickly crystallized around the issue of the Serbian Banat's ownership. Its components were mutual suspicion between Hungary and Romania; attempts by both to play the Third Reich and its other allies off against each other in order to gain territory for one's own country; and both countries' refusal to either make a decisive bid for the Serbian Banat without German approval or stop agitating to that effect. This pattern was premised on the understanding by both the Hungarian and Romanian governments of the provisional and improvisational manner in which demarcation lines were drawn across occupied Yugoslavia. It also relied on Hungary and Romania's acceptance of their inferior role vis-à-vis Nazi Germany as the leading force in the partitioning of defeated Yugoslavia.

These two governments failed to appreciate that Nazi Germany had no intention of relinquishing any of its decision-making authority to its allies. However provisional and improvisational the demarcation lines between zones of occupation in Yugoslavia may have been, they were still determined by the Third Reich. The Reich government failed in its intention to defeat Yugoslavia quickly and then return *all* of its energies to preparing for Operation Barbarossa: the very fact that Berlin continued to have to arbitrate between its allies' bids for possession of Yugoslav lands kept it firmly involved in the Balkan Peninsula for the remainder of the war.<sup>155</sup> Ribbentrop stated this implicitly in an April 16 memorandum urging that an agreement be immediately reached with Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria regarding borders between zones of occupation in defeated

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<sup>155</sup> Olshausen, p. 308.

Yugoslavia: “Even if an understanding were only temporary in character, it will naturally have great import on the future conclusive territorial settlement in the Balkans.”<sup>156</sup>

However temporary the arrangement seemed in April 1941, for the foreseeable future the Serbian Banat would remain – German. In the days leading up to the April War, its ownership became the locus for Hungarian-Romanian tensions predating the crisis in Southeast Europe. As such, the occupation of the Serbian Banat became an example of the Third Reich’s ability to balance diplomacy and military power even at the height of its martial success. The Banat was occupied by Reich forces and attached to German-occupied Serbia proper, but another factor would make it even more ‘German.’ The 120,000 Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) inhabiting the Banat were also a factor in the power play between Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania and the Reich. Though their role in the conflict was largely that of non-combatants, these Volksdeutsche provided a material and ideological justification for a Reichsdeutsche occupation of their home region by their two-centuries-long presence in the Vojvodina and by their leadership’s ever greater closeness to the Third Reich in the months preceding the April War.

Routinely labeled a treacherous ‘fifth column’ by postwar Yugoslav historians, the Volksdeutsche community of northern Serbia never openly broke their host state’s laws or opposed its government before the royal coup of March 27, 1941. It did, however, maintain ties to Nazi Germany, which rendered many of its activities suspect. In the ten days between the royal coup and the start of the April War, the Volksgruppenführung continued to express loyalty to the Yugoslav state. By that point,

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<sup>156</sup> “Wenn diese Abreden auch nur einen vorläufigen Charakter haben können, werden sie naturgemäss doch für die spätere endgültige territorial Regelung auf dem Balkan von grosser Bedeutung sein.” Ribbentrop to Weizsäcker, April 16, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,098.

however, it was also exhorting Yugoslav Volksdeutsche to actions which benefitted the Reich rather than their host state. The process by which these Volksdeutsche's loyalty tipped decisively away from Yugoslavia (the country of their birth, citizenship and residence) and toward Germany (the country of their origin, with which they shared language, cultural and ethnic identity) is the subject of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER II DIVIDED LOYALTIES:

### YUGOSLAV VOLKSDEUTSCHE BEFORE AND DURING THE APRIL WAR

Although their supposed mistreatment offered a useful propaganda ploy for the Axis attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941, Yugoslav Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) had not been the primary reason behind this attack. They were a useful 'tool' to justify Reichsdeutsche (Reich German) armed presence and strengthen the Third Reich's claims in the northern Balkans. Both before and after the April War, these Volksdeutsche's continued presence in Southeast Europe was subject to exigencies of Reich policy, especially foreign-political relations with the Reich's allies Hungary and Romania. German foreign policy was not free of National Socialist ideology, but the Reich's diplomatic corps went about realizing Hitler's grand ideological plans in very different ways from Heinrich Himmler's ideological corps, the SS and the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA). In late 1940 and early 1941, the Yugoslav ethnic German community (Volksgruppe) responded to this diplomatic and jurisdictional tug-of-war and to internal conditions in Yugoslavia by turning gradually away from its Yugoslav loyalties. The recipient of frequent mixed signals from Berlin, the Volksgruppe nevertheless persisted in its idealization of the Reich as its ancestral homeland. It adopted the Third Reich's interests as its own, albeit in ways which did not openly threaten the precarious status quo between the Reich and Yugoslavia. Rather than actively undermining the Yugoslav state from within, the Volksgruppe showed itself dependent on external factors (namely, Reich foreign policy) by following its dictates closely both

before and during the April War. This dependence on the Reich's pleasure would remain its salient feature until the end of the war.

The Reich's essentially ambiguous attitude to these *ethnic* Germans persisted throughout the war. Before the beginning of World War II, Adolf Hitler decreed that relations between all Volksdeutsche communities and the Reich were to be regulated by the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi),<sup>157</sup> the main Reich office for relations with ethnic Germans, headed by Himmler's man Werner Lorenz, and an office tied to the RSHA under Heinrich Himmler. Volksdeutsche affairs – concerning, by definition, German minorities living in countries other than the Reich – were thus explicitly tied to matters of security and race-*cum*-nationality (Volkstum), which fell within the jurisdiction of an office concerned with internal as well as external affairs of the Third Reich. This in no way diminished the importance of Reich diplomacy in Volkstum matters, since Volksdeutsche were by definition foreign citizens. The jurisdictional conflict between Himmler and Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop regarding Volksdeutsche persisted until the very end of the war.

With the start of hostilities the need arose to regulate these matters further, since a salient feature of the Third Reich's war effort was the continued diplomatic activity of the Auswärtiges Amt (AA, the German Foreign Ministry) toward countries allied, potentially allied or not yet attacked by Germany. This "primacy of foreign policy," to borrow Eberhard Jäckel's phrase,<sup>158</sup> was a clear indication that, while the Reich was concerned with German minorities' usefulness as racial stock for the future regeneration of a

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<sup>157</sup> Hitler memo, July 2, 1938, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/2415/E221,562.

<sup>158</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power*, trans. Herbert Arnold (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 34-35.

Germanic Europe, in the context of World War II ethnic Germans were seen by the Reich primarily as a means to realize its foreign-political schemes. While this did not deprive Volksdeutsche communities in Europe of the ability to make their own policy proposals and to agitate for their interests, it tied the feasibility of said proposals to the Reich's interests in the Volksdeutsche's host states. While Volksdeutsche had to fulfill their duties as citizens of their host states, their leaders looked increasingly to the Reich for fulfillment of the ethnic Germans' specific interests – a precarious position even in peacetime, but even more so during the early war years.

As a direct result of this, even the most innocent initiative undertaken by an ethnic German Volksgruppenführung (leadership) was often interpreted by the host state as treasonous or, at the very least, seditious activity. In a state like the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, holding desperately on to its status as a neutral yet tied by economic and, increasingly, political ties to the Third Reich, this led inexorably to Yugoslav Volksdeutsche and their leaders becoming identified with the interests of (and the pressures on Yugoslavia exerted by) the Third Reich. As a Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Society for the Research of German [Life] in the Southeast, a Nazi research institution in Vienna) report cogently put it, any Volksdeutsche-community leader (Volksgruppenführer) in Southeast Europe had a ready argument to bolster his demands to the host-state authorities: the “unspoken formula, “behind me are the eighty million [Germans]”.”<sup>159</sup> Such an argument, based on the premise of Nazi Germany's physical, economic and armed superiority, hardly contributed to the same

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<sup>159</sup> “unausgesprochenen Formel . . . “hinter mir stehen 80 Millionen”.” “Bericht über das Ergebnis der Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Zeitungen und Zeitschriften im In- und Ausland im Rahmen der Jahrestagung des deutschen Auslandsinstituts Stuttgart,” most likely 1939, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Inland II C, R 100456 Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1939-1940, p. 27.

Volksgruppenführung's endeavors to represent its co-nationals as loyal citizens of their host state.

### From Staatstreu to Volkstreu

The official motto of the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche in the interwar period was that of their political party, the Partei der Deutschen in Jugoslawien: 'staatstreu und volkstreu,' loyal to the state and to the Volk. After this and all other Yugoslav political parties were banned by King Aleksandar Karađorđević's royal dictatorship of 1929,<sup>160</sup> the organization of all public Volksdeutsche activities devolved to the Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund (Swabian<sup>161</sup>-German Cultural Association), an ostensibly non-political organization which inherited the defunct political party's motto in its relations to the Yugoslav state. Following Hitler's rise to power in Germany, a younger, more radicalized generation of Volksdeutsche leaders appeared in Yugoslavia. They called themselves the Erneurer (Renewers) and were led by Josef (Sepp) Janko.<sup>162</sup> His election backed by the Reich, Janko took over leadership of the Kulturbund in August 1939. Although he

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<sup>160</sup> As part of this dictatorship, the king also changed the country's name officially from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia ('South Slavic State'), in an attempt to project the impression of ethnic unity within the multinational state.

<sup>161</sup> The moniker 'Banater Schwaben' or 'Donauschwaben' was emphasized by those it referred to – occasionally in the 1930s and early 1940s, more so after World War II – to stress the distinction between Volksdeutsche residing in the Danube Basin and Volksdeutsche elsewhere in Europe. It stemmed from the common belief that the majority of the 18<sup>th</sup> century German-speaking settlers in Southeast Europe came from Swabia. They came, in fact, from several parts of the Holy Roman Empire inhabited by German speakers, and even included some French speakers from Alsace and Lorraine.

<sup>162</sup> Born into a peasant family in the Volksdeutsche village of Ernsthausen in the Serbian Banat in 1905, Josef 'Sepp' Janko studied law in Germany and Austria, where he came into contact with National Socialist ideas in the years immediately preceding the Nazi takeover of 1933. Upon returning home, he worked as a lawyer in Grossbetschkerek (the administrative center of the Serbian Banat) until his election to the position of Kulturbund leader in 1939. "Das Porträt des Tages. Dr. Sepp Janko," *Donauzeitung* [German-language newspaper published in Belgrade], August 3, 1941, p. 3.

assumed the title of Volksgruppenführer to indicate the adoption of the National Socialist Führerprinzip as the organizational principle of the ethnic German community, the official emphasis on loyalty and obedience to the Yugoslav state as well as to the Volk remained:

We strive to be, not an element of unrest, but a constructive element of order, and to give the state no reason to distrust us, rather to see that order and discipline are the order of the day in our Volksgruppe, and that we have fulfilled all the prerequisites for a healthy economic development and for positive achievements worthy of the German Volk.<sup>163</sup>

Despite Janko's effort at demonstrating continuity, he represented a less traditional, less conservative, more Nazi-oriented current within the Kulturbund. This younger, Nazified group began to speak for the whole community at precisely the time when the Third Reich became, not only the dominant economic power in Central and East Europe, but also the dominant military power on the European continent. It was in this spirit that the Kulturbund's name was changed to Volksgemeinschaft der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Königreich Jugoslawien (National Community of the German National Group in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), or Deutsche Volksgruppe for short. The old name was not completely discarded, in order to project a sense of continuity and loyalty to the state unaffected by the change in leadership. Even so, the new Kulturbund leader certainly aspired to carrying out a mini-Gleichschaltung of the Volksdeutsche community along the lines of the cooptation of German society by Hitler in 1933.

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<sup>163</sup> “Wir trachten, nicht Element der Unruhe, sondern der Ordnung und des Aufbaus zu sein, dem Staate keinen Grund zu irgendwelchem Misstrauen zu geben, sondern darauf zu sehen, dass in unserer Volksgruppe Ordnung und Disziplin herrscht und von uns selbst alle Voraussetzungen geschaffen werden für eine gesunde wirtschaftliche Entwicklung und gute, des deutschen Volkes würdige Leistungen.” Sepp Janko's August 8, 1939 speech on his election for Kulturbund head quoted in Rolf Hillebrand, “Element der Ordnung und des Aufbaus,” *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 11, November 1940, p. 378.

Janko's election to the position of main Volksdeutsche representative in Yugoslavia – albeit one without official political power – demonstrated increased Reich influence on what should have been an internal matter of the Yugoslav state. In the increasingly polarized atmosphere between the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 and its arrival in the Southeast Europe in April 1941, the twofold loyalty of the German Volksgruppe in Yugoslavia became more and more difficult to maintain.

This was evident even in the Volksgruppenführung's public announcements from this eighteen-month period. Whereas in 1939 Janko emphasized the integration of the Volksdeutsche into the economic and social fabric of Yugoslavia, already in spring 1940 he stated that the Volksgruppe's main task was to act as a "bridge between two cultures," Yugoslavia and the Reich.<sup>164</sup> The bridge metaphor was meant to convey a sense of positive rapprochement between the two states,<sup>165</sup> but really it suggested Volksdeutsche alienation from both. Not quite as German as Reich citizens, and not fitting the South Slavic model of the ideal Yugoslav citizen, the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche could not claim either country as completely their own, and were not fully accepted by either. In the same period, Janko wrote the following equivocal programmatic statement of his political goals for the ethnic German community:

[J]ust as no one will ever succeed in driving us from this home turf [Heimatscholle], which we have labored over, or in swaying us in our sense of

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<sup>164</sup> "Brücke zu sein zwischen zwei Kulturen" "Zwanzig Jahre Kulturbund," speech given in Novi Sad in spring 1940, in Sepp Janko, *Reden und Aufsätze* (Betschkerek: Buchreihe der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien, 1944), p. 41.

<sup>165</sup> In a document he produced in his postwar years as an expellee in West Germany, former Volkgruppe official Josef Beer described the Kulturbund's prewar function with misguided and bathetic enthusiasm: "The Kulturbund was not just the framework for German life in a foreign state, but also a bridge to Germandom in the motherland." ("Der "Kulturbund" war nicht allein der Rahmen für das deutsche Leben im fremden Staat, sondern auch die Brücke zum Deutschtum im Mutterland.") Josef Beer report (1973), Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth (LAA), Ost-Dok. 16/3, frame 22.

duty vis-à-vis the state, so no one will ever restrict our natural right, to which every Volk is entitled: the right to perfect ourselves spiritually, to profess the German worldview, and to produce a culture of eternal value.<sup>166</sup>

Despite the disclaimer about loyalty to the state and real resistance to resettlement (see below), the weight of this statement rests squarely on Janko's desire for freedom to regiment the Volksgruppe along National Socialist lines – something which not all Volksdeutsche looked favorably upon.

Finally, a late 1940 article from the Reich journal *Deutschtum im Ausland* identified the ongoing war as the factor which “forged together” the Yugoslav Volksgruppe, making it “a part of the Greater German Reich . . . with all the duties and rights” that came with that status.<sup>167</sup> Almost as an afterthought, the article stated that this supposed new Volksdeutsche unity did not preclude the mutual duties between the Volksgruppe and its host state, Yugoslavia. It also failed to address the fact that, before the April War, the Volksgruppenführung simply lacked the coercive means to integrate non-Nazi Volksdeutsche into its ranks.<sup>168</sup> The Volksdeutsche leadership wanted to see

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<sup>166</sup> “genau so wie es niemanden gelingen wird, uns von unserer erarbeiteten Heimatscholle zu verdrängen oder uns in unserem Pflichtbewusstsein dem Staate gegenüber wankend zu machen, so wird es auch niemandem gelingen, uns in unserem natürlichen Rechte, das einem jeden Volke zusteht, einzuschränken: dem Rechte, uns innerlich zu vervollkommen, zur deutschen Weltanschauung zu bekennen und Kulturwerte von ewiger Dauer zu schaffen.” “Die Aufgaben des Deutschtums im Südosten,” published in *Grenzbote*, Bratislava, March 24, 1940, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 35.

<sup>167</sup> “zusammengeschmiedet . . . einen Teil des Grossdeutschen Reiches . . . der Pflichten und Rechte gegenüber dem Reich” M. Lehmann, “Der Krieg und das Deutschtum im Ausland: Jugoslawien,” *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 11/12, November-December 1940, p. 284.

<sup>168</sup> In an interview given more than five decades after World War II, Marija Šibul, a Volksdeutsche woman still living in Grosskikinda, stated categorically that before the April War no one could be forced to join the Nazified Kulturbund against their will. Nevertheless, in her estimation most Volksdeutsche her family knew did join. Testimony of Marija Šibul in Četković and Sindelić-Ibrajter, p. 101.

Likewise, one Pantschowa Volksdeutscher testified immediately after the war that he had been inscribed on the Kulturbund membership roll without his permission before the April War. He only managed to get struck off the membership toll by refusing to pay membership dues or give

such rigid regimentation become a reality. With the support of a substantial part of the Volksgruppe – arguably even non-Nazis within the Volksgruppe felt favorably toward at least some aspects of Reich policy – the Volksgruppenführung experienced the gradual polarization away from Yugoslavia and toward the Third Reich as the most important political factor in their existence.

For its part, until the attack on Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941 the Reich government consistently failed to live up to Volksdeutsche expectations that it would serve as their unequivocal champion and protector. Berlin saw Yugoslav Volksdeutsche as useful tools with which to pressure the Yugoslav government into closer cooperation. It did not pass up opportunities to use the Volksdeutsche's enthusiasm for all things German, but it discouraged any and all Volksdeutsche initiatives which upset the precarious status quo in Yugoslavia.

This attitude first became evident over the issue of resettlement of some ethnic German communities into the Reich. Hitler's October 6, 1939 speech announcing this as the future of all Volksdeutsche caused an uproar among Yugoslav Volksdeutsche. As a predominantly peasant population in a fertile region of relative political stability, most did not see resettlement as the salvation it may have been to Latvian or Bessarabian

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in to verbal abuse from more willing members. Deposition of Josif Solman from Pantschowa, December 13, 1944, Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore a.k.a. Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fund 110 Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, box 670, p. 16.

One major factor in this refusal to join was religion: the Catholic Marija Pfajfer described the conflict she had in the late 1930s with a fervently Nazi employer over wanting to take time off on Sundays in order to attend mass: "To me, Hitler was not more important than God . . . we [her family] were the Germans who went to church instead of to the Kulturbund." ("Meni Hitler nije više nego Bog. . . . mi smo Nemci koji su umesto u Kulturbund išli u crkvu.") Testimony of Marija Pfajfer in Radović, Sindelić-Ibrajter and Weiss, pp. 84, 101.

Volksdeutsche whose lives were marked by grinding poverty or Soviet oppression,<sup>169</sup> although there were exceptions.<sup>170</sup> The issue was settled quickly: the AA issued instructions to the German Embassy in Belgrade<sup>171</sup> and the Yugoslav Ambassador in Berlin, future Nobel Prize winner for literature Ivo Andrić<sup>172</sup> to the effect that the resettlement of Yugoslav Volksdeutsche was not imminent, nor was speculation about it desirable. The Reich would have preferred if, for the duration of the war, Volksdeutsche were ‘seen, not heard,’ obeyed orders and did not to cause agitation among themselves or in their vicinity through the percolation of rumors<sup>173</sup> or action independent of Reich policies.

The uneasy mixture of theoretical esteem of Volksdeutsche as representatives of the Volk and practical distrust of their ability to live up to Reich standards – really to the Platonic ideal of what a German person should be disseminated by Reich propaganda – permeated relations between Berlin and Yugoslav Volksdeutsche until the very end of World War II. It cropped up again and again, first in relations between Berlin and the Deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien, and after April 1941 in those between Berlin and the Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien (German National Group in Serbia and the Banat). The first major clash between the mixed attitude the Reich took to

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<sup>169</sup> Ernst Woermann (AA – Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry) memo, October 7, 1939, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 63/3, no page number.

<sup>170</sup> Branimir Altgayer (Kulturbund official in Croatia and future Volksgruppenführer in the Independent State of Croatia) had to warn the Volksdeutsche in Slavonia (eastern Croatia) not to sell their land as though their resettlement were imminent. Altgayer memo, October 18, 1939, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 63/3, no page number.

<sup>171</sup> State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker (AA) to German Embassy in Belgrade, October 28, 1939, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 63/3, no page number.

<sup>172</sup> Woermann to AA, October 7, 1939, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 63/3, no page number.

<sup>173</sup> “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” December 13, 1939, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), R 58 Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), file 146, fiche 1, frame 32.

Volksdeutsche in general and the twofold loyalties of Yugoslav Volksdeutsche in particular took place in the fall of 1940, when ethnic Germans from Soviet Bessarabia were resettled to the Reich by river boats sailing up the Danube through Romania and Yugoslavia.

Yugoslav Minister President Dragiša Cvetković needed to strengthen his position both inside the government and in relations with the Reich, which was pushing for a Yugoslav accession to the Axis. Thus he agreed that the Volksdeutsche being resettled would rest en route in two temporary transit camps erected near Prahovo (a village on the Danube in eastern Serbia) and at Zemun (Semlin in German), a municipality across the Danube from Belgrade.<sup>174</sup> The erection of the camps started in August 1940, and by the time the resettlement ended and the camps were torn down in November, an estimated 100,000 people had passed through them.<sup>175</sup> Despite the sheer size of this endeavor, the Yugoslav involvement in it was limited by agreement with Berlin.

The camps were granted special territorial status, and were not considered Yugoslav territory for the duration of their existence,<sup>176</sup> with the flags of the Third Reich, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Kulturbund flown in them.<sup>177</sup> The three flags reflected the fact that, the top positions in the camps were filled by personnel from the VoMi,<sup>178</sup> the camps were guarded by Serbian gendarmes whose movements were limited

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<sup>174</sup> German Ambassador in Belgrade Viktor von Heeren to AA, October 5, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120/313/238,612.

<sup>175</sup> Unsigned memo, November 9, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175 [Records of the Reichsführer-SS]/648/no frame number.

<sup>176</sup> Testimony of Egon Hellermann from Ruma (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/151, frame 693.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Commander of the Zemun camp was an SS-Untersturmführer Schnitzler. Hellermann testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/151, frame 694.

to the camps' outer perimeter,<sup>179</sup> while most of the work on the construction, supplying and lower-level work inside the camps – construction, repairs, cooking, helping during transport ships' arrivals and departures, organizing luggage, etc. – was performed by Yugoslav Volksdeutsche volunteers under Kulturbund auspices. Indeed, VoMi took it as a matter of course that Janko had at his disposal many “younger people ready for action . . . who will gladly be at [the VoMi's] disposal in this endeavor.”<sup>180</sup>

The volunteers' selfless efforts on behalf of the Bessarabian Germans were roundly extolled in reports by Reich Germans employed in the Prahovo and Zemun camps. The volunteers' primary motives seem to have been youthful enthusiasm, affection for an idealized Reich they wished to learn more about, and the opportunity to meet both Reich Germans and other ethnic Germans.<sup>181</sup> For some, these motives were undoubtedly tinged by an affinity for Nazi ideology, the desire to work for the Volksgemeinschaft of all Germans and contribute to the reshaping of Europe along National Socialist lines. In his proclamation summoning his co-nationals to participate in the resettlement project, Janko stressed precisely the latter themes: “[The Volksgruppe] now has a great opportunity to demonstrate by its völkisch efforts and its [national] socialist behavior that it is capable of mastering such tasks.”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> “jüngeren einsatzbereiten Leuten . . . die sich dem Werk freudig zur Verfügung stellen könnten.” SS-Untersturmführer Gradmann to Verbindungsstelle Berlin, August 28, 1940, BA Berlin, R 69 Einwandererzentralstelle Litzmannstadt, file 1099, fiche 1, frame 37.

<sup>181</sup> Hans Reiter (officer in charge of transportation), “Abschlussbericht über die Umsiedlung der Bessarabien-Deutschen,” November 23, 1940, BA Berlin, R 59 Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, file 375, fiche 1, frames 11-12.

<sup>182</sup> “Sie hat jetzt eine ganz grosse Gelegenheit durch ihren völkischen Einsatz und ihre sozialistische Haltung zu beweisen, dass sie solche Aufgaben zu meistern imstande ist.” “Einsatzbefehl des Volksgruppenführers,” August 13, 1940, quoted in Helmut Frisch, ed., *Werschetz (Versecz – Vršac). Kommunale Entwicklung und deutsches Leben der Banater Wein- und Schulstadt* (Vienna: Verlag des Werschetzer Buchausschusses, 1982), p. 115.

Likewise, magazine articles and propaganda pieces aimed at a Reich audience as well as speeches held to a captive audience of Bessarabian and Yugoslav Volksdeutsche in the camps stressed the importance of working for a Volksgemeinschaft which transcends its individual parts. These texts portrayed the efforts made on behalf of Bessarabian resettlers as “*direct participation in the all-German destiny . . . [which became] the Volksgruppe’s strongest experience of Gemeinschaft* [italics in the original].”<sup>183</sup> In terms more accessible to the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche participants, Volksgemeinschaft was represented by the sound of “[German] dialects from almost all the villages from Marburg [Maribor in Slovenia] to Werschetz [Vršac in the Banat],”<sup>184</sup> which could be heard among the volunteers.

Whatever their motives, the volunteers worked hard to make the transition as painless as possible for the Bessarabian Volksdeutsche. No doubt, the volunteers also wished to impress their supervisors from the Reich. At least one of the latter remained unimpressed by the Volksdeutsche’s organizational abilities, but was gracious enough to account for it by the absence of the Nazi Party’s marshalling influence in Yugoslavia and to applaud the volunteers’ dedication.<sup>185</sup> For many Yugoslav Volksdeutsche volunteers, their experiences in the transit camps were the first real contact with Germans from outside Yugoslavia, and as such must have represented a rude awakening. The Reich

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<sup>183</sup> “*unmittelbare Teilnahme am gesamtdeutschen Schicksal . . . zum stärksten Gemeinschaftserlebnis der Volksgruppe*” “Länder-Berichte: Jugoslawien,” *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 1/2, January-February 1941, p. 43.

<sup>184</sup> “Die Mundarten fast aller Dörfer, von Marburg bis Werschetz” “Länder-Berichte: Jugoslawien,” *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 9/10, September-October 1940, p. 267. For an example of propaganda materials about the Bessarabian resettlement see Emil Hoffmann and Alfred Thoss, *Der vierte Treck. Leistung und Heimkehr der Deutschen aus Bessarabien*, Volume 7 of series *Volksdeutsche Heimkehr* (Berlin and Leipzig: Nibelungen Verlag, 1941). For examples of speeches held see notes for Janko’s speeches in Janko, *Reden*, pp. 177-179.

<sup>185</sup> Reiter resettlement report (1940), BA Berlin, R 59, file 375, fiche 1, frame 11.

personnel tended to rub everyone – Serbs, Bessarabian and Yugoslav Volksdeutsche alike – the wrong way.

Despite explicit instructions to protect the Reich's good name in Romania and Yugoslavia through exemplary behavior, not to provoke political arguments, and to refrain from displaying insignia such as Nazi Party markers and German uniforms,<sup>186</sup> the VoMi personnel in the Prahovo and Zemun camps routinely wore uniforms both inside the camps and during drunken excursions outside,<sup>187</sup> treated Serbian officials with excessive and peremptory toughness,<sup>188</sup> encouraged the singing of Nazi songs and the use of the Hitler salute in camp. Such behavior did nothing to allay the suspicion of the gendarmes detailed for camp protection,<sup>189</sup> since at least some of the gendarmes shared the fear of Serbian nationalists from whom they were meant to protect the camps: that these camps were the first step to Yugoslavia meeting the fate of Czechoslovakia and Poland.

The Reichsdeutsche personnel also failed to leave a good impression on the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche, referring contemptuously to the Bessarabian Germans as “fur cap-wearers”<sup>190</sup> to indicate their close resemblance to Russians, refusing to engage in

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<sup>186</sup> SS-Sturmabführer Mulde (Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD Einwandererzentralstelle Nord-Ost), “Merkblatt für die in Jugoslawien und Rumänien eingetretenen Angehörigen der EWZ,” August 27, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-81 [Records of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut]/264/2,381,968-969.

<sup>187</sup> Agent 6625 (German agent in Yugoslavia), “Auftreten der Mitglieder der Umsiedlungskommission,” September 18, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/647/no frame number.

<sup>188</sup> Reiter resettlement report (1940), BA Berlin, R 59, file 375, fiche 1, frame 16.

<sup>189</sup> Hellermann testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/151, frame 695.

<sup>190</sup> “Pelzkappenleute” Hellermann testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/151, frame 693.

To be fair, many Yugoslavs of all ethnicities can't have had a much better opinion of the Bessarabian Volksdeutsche, as illustrated by a tale carried by the Slovenian press. It described a group of resettlers passing through Slovenia on its way to the Reich as Russian in appearance and dress, Russian in language and even in their understanding of geography. When the locals addressed them in Russian, the resettled Bessarabian peasants sheepishly inquired whether Russian territory really extended that far west. “Die bessarabischen Deutschen auf der Fahrt

manual labor or share the Volksdeutsche's rough living in camp, frequently being drunk and disorderly.<sup>191</sup> They failed to exhibit any empathy for or interest in Volksdeutsche problems, or even to recognize the unique challenges facing Volksdeutsche in Yugoslavia, appearing instead as “little Adolf Hitlers” in uniform<sup>192</sup> – ham-fisted, self-centered and altogether destructive to the Volksdeutsche's fond dream of an “infallible Reich and its infallible people.”<sup>193</sup>

Or maybe not, for the Reich as an idealized German fatherland of superior culture, race and lifestyle remained alive and well in the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche's mental landscape long after the departure of the VoMi personnel at the conclusion of the Bessarabian resettlement. This is likely a testimony to the human tendency to mentally sift through experiences until only those that support a preexisting framework of thought remain. As Ian Kershaw demonstrated the average Reichsdeutscher's ability to go on idealizing Hitler's leadership in the face of its repeated failures,<sup>194</sup> so the average Yugoslav Volksdeutscher retained an impression of his own importance as part of a Greater German Reich, unsullied by the sorry spectacle of Reich Germans whiling away the days in the Zemun camp with alcohol and superior attitudes.

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durch Assling,” *Slovenec*, October 1, 1940, PA AA, Inland II Partei, R 98952 Politik Jugoslawien, 1940-1941, p. 189.

<sup>191</sup> Agent 6625 report, September 18, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/647/no frame number; agent 6625, “Verhalten von Reichsdeutschen in Jugoslawien,” January 10, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame number.

<sup>192</sup> “Es ist doch so, dass der Volksdeutsche zuerst einmal in jeden Reichsdeutschen, zumal, wenn dieser eine Uniform trägt, einen kleinen Adolf Hitler sieht.” Reiter resettlement report (1940), BA Berlin, R 59, file 375, fiche 1, frames 16-17.

<sup>193</sup> “vom unfehlbaren Reich und seinen unfehlbaren Menschen” Hellermann testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/151, frame 698.

<sup>194</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth”: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), *passim*.

One consequence of the Volksdeutsche volunteers' participation in this resettlement effort, which likely escaped their attention at the time, was the general Serbian reaction to the whole endeavor. Stories about campsites turned temporarily into alien land, Germans parading around the Serbian countryside in SS uniforms, military training (see below) and Nazification efforts in camp percolated among the Serbian public. The ability of Reich policy (resettlement) to influence Yugoslav policy, the presence of uniformed Reich personnel and the mass participation<sup>195</sup> of Yugoslav Volksdeutsche in the resettlement camps produced a heightened level of suspicion regarding the ethnic German community as a whole. After displays of German efficiency as well as German arrogance, which accompanied the resettlement of Bessarabian Volksdeutsche, their Yugoslav counterparts' claims to being *staatstreu* as well as *volkstreu* rang hollow in late 1940, while the Yugoslav government clung ever more tenuously to the notion of neutrality in the face of Reich pressure. Thereafter, every action undertaken by the *Volksgruppenführung*, tinged as it was by pro-Nazi sympathies, reflected negatively on individual Volksdeutsche faced with the Yugoslav authorities in the form of local administrators and gendarmes.

Quite apart from tensions evident on the local level, in the six months before the April War the Yugoslav government made tangible efforts to appease its German minority, seeing in it a potential cat's paw of Reich ambition in the Balkans. Seeing the Volksdeutsche as a possible pressure point by which Yugoslavia could be levered into accession to the Axis was a perception the Reich and Yugoslavia held in common.

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<sup>195</sup> One estimate lists the total number of volunteers at over 10,000 over a three-month period. The quick turnover was intended to expose as many young Yugoslav German men and women as possible to the 'Reich way.' Reiter resettlement report (1940), BA Berlin, R 59, file 375, fiche 1, frame 12.

However, demands for minority rights like schooling in the German language were more easily granted than demands for political representation or legislation guaranteeing ethnic Germans full equality with the Slavic peoples of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It was easier and more politically inconsequential to allow those Volksdeutsche who could afford it to send their children to private German-language schools or to give leading Volksdeutsche medals in recognition of their (unspecified) services to the Yugoslav state<sup>196</sup> than to address seriously demands for Volksdeutsche political autonomy or self-administration within the state.

The demands met most eagerly by the Yugoslav authorities were those for separate schools in which classes would take place in the German language,<sup>197</sup> and in which children of German origin – Yugoslav Volksdeutsche as well as the children of Reich citizens living in Yugoslavia – could be educated separately from their non-German peers. A private German Realgymnasium and a private teacher-training college (Lehrerbildungsanstalt) for the education of German teachers to staff this and other German-language schools<sup>198</sup> in Yugoslavia were opened in Novi Vrbas (Bačka) for the school year 1940-1941.<sup>199</sup> The Volksgruppenführung exhorted German-speaking parents

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<sup>196</sup> “Odlikovanje vodstva [typo in the original] “Kulturbunda” u Novom Sadu,” *Jutarnji list* (Zagreb), November 30, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI Deutsches Arbeitsfront, Arbeitswissenschaftlichesinstitut (Zeitungsausschnittsammlung), file 28873, no page number; “Ordensüberreichung an den Volksgruppenführer Dr. Janko und seine Mitarbeiter,” *Deutsches Volksblatt* [this German-language newspaper was published in Novi Sad in the Bačka, the Kulturbund’s seat until the April War; from now on *DV*], November 20, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28873, no page number.

<sup>197</sup> These demands were modeled on Serbian demands for school autonomy in Habsburg-ruled Vojvodina before World War I. No author, “Die Autonomiebestrebungen der Serben im alten Habsburgerreich,” *Nation und Staat*, Heft 5, February 1941, p. 169.

<sup>198</sup> In 1940 German Gymnasia of various degrees were also opened in Apatin (Bačka), Belgrade and Zagreb. “Volksdeutsche Schulwesen,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-81/350/5,078,927.

<sup>199</sup> “Verordnung über die Errichtung eines Privaten Deutschen Vollrealgymnasiums in Neu-Werbass,” August 23, 1940, in Hans Rasimus, *Als Fremde im Vaterland. Der Schwäbisch-deutsche Kulturbund und die ehemalige deutsche Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien im Spiegel der*

to take their children out of state schools and put them into the more expensive private Gymnasia.<sup>200</sup>

Given the geographic spread of Yugoslav Volksdeutsche across Slovenia, Croatia and northern Serbia, with smaller numbers in Serbia proper, Bosnia and Macedonia, and the fact that in a largely farming population education above the elementary level was never at a premium, it would be fair to estimate that likely not even one half of all Gymnasium-aged Volksdeutsche youth attended a private German school before the April War. Nevertheless, in a multinational state struggling with the issue of balancing the demands posed by its various ethnic groups, the very presence of the private German schools signified the effective separation of German youth in the pedagogic sphere. Separate schools did not contribute to young Volksdeutsche's integration into the social mainstream.

On the contrary, the isolation of at least a part of Volksdeutsche youth through attendance of German-language schools caused these schoolboys to flirt openly and provocatively with National Socialism in a way which left non-German spectators and the authorities in no doubt as to where the youths were exposed to these ideas – not only in school, but at home and under Volksgruppenführung auspices, too. The Volksgruppenführung had sponsored the opening of these schools, so the exposition of National Socialist principles by school officials could not fail to be linked to the ideology embraced by the Erneurer in the name of all Yugoslav Volksdeutsche. A degree of internal opposition to the imposition of Nazism as the guiding principle for all

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*Presse* (Munich: Arbeitskreis für donauschwäbische Heimat- und Volksforschung in der Donauschwäbischen Kulturstiftung, 1989), pp. 638-639; "Verordnung über die Private Deutsche Lehrerbildungsanstalt in Neu-Werbass," August 23, 1940, in Rasimus, p. 640.

<sup>200</sup> "Deutsches Gymnasium in Novi Vrbas," *DV*, June 15, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28872, no page number.

Volksdeutsche was routinely ignored (see below). The Volksgruppenführung's official statements equated equality with other Yugoslav peoples with the free expression of Nazi ideology: "Every Volk in this area [the Balkans] must finally be allowed those rights which are its due on the basis of its numbers and importance. We demand the right to create a Volksgemeinschaft for ourselves in accordance with the German Volk's views. Therefore there is only one direction we can take: that of National Socialism."<sup>201</sup>

Thus, when upperclassmen at the Novi Vrbas Gymnasium affected tall boots and leather coats like those worn by Luftwaffe pilots, aped the goose-step, started classes with the Hitler salute, attended pro-Nazi after-class lectures conducted by their teachers, and acted disrespectfully to their few Slav teachers and to Yugoslav state insignia,<sup>202</sup> their behavior was not perceived as mere misguided youthful enthusiasm. These Gymnasium students were seen by their Slav environment as representative of their entire ethnic group. The association was made easier by such Volksgruppenführung orders as the obligatory use of the Hitler salute between students and teachers in private German-language schools.<sup>203</sup> On occasion, these students were attacked and beaten as easy targets on which frustration incurred by Reich pressure on Yugoslavia could focus.<sup>204</sup>

Physical attacks on Volksdeutsche were never as common or widespread as Reich propaganda would make them seem in the days leading up to the April War, as it sought

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<sup>201</sup> "Jedem Volke in diesem Raum muss schliesslich das Recht zugestanden werden, das ihm seiner Zahl und Bedeutung nach zukommt. Wir beanspruchen das Recht, eine Volksgemeinschaft für uns zu errichten, wie sie den Anschauungen des deutschen Volkes entspricht. Daher gibt es für uns nur eine Richtung: die nationalsozialistische." "Grosskundgebung der Deutschen in Vršac," *DV*, December 31, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28873, no page number.

<sup>202</sup> Report for the Yugoslav Education Ministry's "Dosije nemačke manjine," 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/833/no frame number.

<sup>203</sup> "Der deutsche Gruss an den privaten deutschen Schulen amtlich eingeführt," *DV*, December 10, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28873, no page number.

<sup>204</sup> "Prügeleien in Vrbas," *DV*, December 17, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28909, p. 30.

to portray its imminent invasion of Yugoslavia as – among its other goals – a rescue mission against the Slavic oppression of Volksdeutsche there. Some attacks did happen. Beyond the beating of schoolboys, there are documented instances of fights between Serbian and German amateur soccer teams, attacks on Volksdeutsche civilians by Yugoslav gendarmes and soldiers, even a few cases of outright murder, as when the official in charge of propaganda in the Grossbetschkerek Ortsgruppe (town chapter of the Volksgruppe) was shot dead in the street by a Serbian gendarme with whom the victim had quarreled previously.<sup>205</sup>

German reports of these incidents routinely described the Volksdeutsche as innocent victims. While the use of German symbols or language could account for provoking Serbian nationalist sentiment – the murder in Grossbetschkerek seems to have been more in the nature of a personal quarrel exacerbated by national difference – this was hardly justification for murder. Rather than concluding that Serbian-German tension in the Vojvodina was a powder keg waiting to blow in late 1940, it seems more appropriate to suggest that neither side did as much as it could have done to prevent these occasional clashes. If the Volksgruppenführung encouraged its members to express their Germanness-*cum*-Nazi sympathies and risk incurring the wrath of local Serbs, the Yugoslav state failed to keep its representatives of law and order in line or to encourage tolerance in its Slavic population.

Dilatoriness alone does not explain why the higher echelons of Yugoslav government failed to act more decisively to protect Yugoslavia's ethnic German citizens.

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<sup>205</sup> Agent 6625, "Ermordung des Volksdeutschen Deringer," November 18, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame number; Heeren to AA, November 18, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120/197/152,358; "Meldungen aus dem Reich," December 9, 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 156, fiche 3, frames 252-253.

There was also a high degree of official mistrust directed against a minority group whose leaders, for all their avowed *staatstreu* attitude, leaned perceptibly away from loyalty to their host state and toward *volkstreu* loyalties in the first eighteen months of World War II.<sup>206</sup> Already in late September 1939 the Yugoslav Army and Navy Ministry issued a secret order to degrade reserve officers who were “unreliable members of non-Slav minorities.” This degradation of rank was to be carried out on pretexts of disciplinary action or lack of qualifications for officer status, so as to avoid suspicion that the degraded officers’ nationality was the real reason.<sup>207</sup> Despite these precautions, the public did not fail to notice that this move was directed especially against ethnic Germans and ethnic Hungarians, suspected of affinity with Europe’s most dominant and aggressive military power and with Yugoslavia’s revision-inclined neighbor, respectively.

Official distrust of *Volksdeutsche* loyalty to the Yugoslav state found expression in routine accusations leveled against *Volksdeutsche* in positions of even minor local prominence (e.g. merchants, employees of companies dealing in raw materials, peasants rich enough to attempt large land transactions) of being German spies, receiving money from the Reich for unspecified subversive activities, organizing *Volksdeutsche* youth for

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<sup>206</sup> A rare – and ineffectual in terms of policy – example of a minority opinion on this issue was expressed by the yearly Yugoslav Interior Ministry report for 1940, which described the attitude of Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* as one of continued “civic obedience and proper dutifulness vis-à-vis the laws of the land” (“u znaku je građanske poslušnosti i korektnog izvršenja dužnosti prema zemaljskim zakonima”). The report went on to note that, with the exception of youths, who occasionally acted aggressively but only when in groups, Yugoslav *Volksdeutsche* successfully balanced their sympathies for Hitler and the Reich with loyalty to the Yugoslav state, and remained divided on the issue of whether they should submit to the new Kulturbund leadership. “Nemačka manjina u 1940 godini,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/833/no frame numbers.

<sup>207</sup> ““unverlässlichen Angehörigen der nichtslawischen Minderheiten”” Ast Salzburg, “Bericht über “Reinigung” des Heeres von volksdeutschen Reserveoffizieren,” January 16, 1940, BA MA, RW 5 OKW Amt Ausland/Abwehr, file 476, no page number.

military action (likely a legacy of rumored military training volunteers received in the camps set up for the Bessarabian Volksdeutsche), etc.<sup>208</sup>

Just how ineffectual these accusations were in identifying and isolating truly dangerous elements in the Volksdeutsche community is demonstrated by Yugoslav Army memos from fall 1940 about the possibility that non-Slavs in the Vojvodina were using their radios to listen to foreign radio stations (which was punishable by law) or even to communicate with foreign intelligence services.<sup>209</sup> The proposed solution – reviewing and, if necessary, revoking all radio permits and apparatuses in the Vojvodina – was impractical. The situation remained unchanged as late as February 1941, with non-Slavs still suspected of using their private radios for subversive purposes, but practical means of policing such actions lacking.<sup>210</sup> While the authorities shuffled their feet, the Kulturbund’s Novi Sad headquarters, called Habag-Haus, was supplied, most likely in November 1940, with a radio transmitter code-named “Nora.”<sup>211</sup> It became the means for the Volksgruppenführung to communicate directly with the Reich’s military intelligence

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<sup>208</sup> Načelnik glavnog đeneralštaba to ministar vojske i mornarice, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/786/no frame number; “Yugoslav-German Relations,” June 29, 1940, NARA, RG 165 Records of the War Department, entry 77, box 3295, document 3850, p. 2; SS-Brigadeführer Jung (with Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD) to AA, October 22, 1940, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 101098 SD-Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1940, fiche 2833, no frame numbers, pp. 11-12 of this document; “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” October 7, 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 155, fiche 1, frame 33.

<sup>209</sup> Ruководilac radova [Grossbetschkerek] to komandant 1. armi[j]ske oblasti, September 2, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/789/no frame numbers; komandant štaba 1. armi[j]ske oblasti to ministar vojske i mornarice, September 19, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/789/no frame number; načelnik glavnog đeneralštaba to ministar vojske i mornarice, September 22, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/789/no frame numbers.

<sup>210</sup> Načelnik glavnog đeneralštaba to ministar vojske i mornarice, February 26, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/821/no frame number.

<sup>211</sup> Shimizu, p. 77.

in Vienna as part of Operation Jupiter.<sup>212</sup> “Nora” would play a significant role in Volksdeutsche actions during the April War, and justifies in retrospect Yugoslav Army suspicions. Yet to have targeted all Volksdeutsche radio owners on these grounds would only have strengthened the view that German-speakers were being targeted by the Yugoslav authorities for no better reason than that they spoke German.

All these accusations fed the atmosphere of distrust between Germans and Slavs in Yugoslavia, but did not lead to actual legal action against the suspected subversives. A Yugoslav Volksdeutscher was far more likely to find himself the victim of a random beating at the hands of economically frustrated neighbors or gendarmes unwilling to wait for hard evidence than to be summoned to account for his actions before a court of law. As Lektorat Petrovgrad (Grossbetschkerek), which offered German-language classes, reported in October 1940, the growing number of Serbian pupils was a success considering the town’s Serbian population saw in every German-speaker a potential spy and regularly denounced them – not only Lektorat staff but also Volksdeutsche resident in town – to the police.<sup>213</sup> Such behavior, more irritating than genuinely threatening to the Volksdeutsche affected, was indicative of the government’s general ineffectuality in identifying and combating subversives.

This ineffectuality could easily be laid at the door of a weak central government. Indeed, the speedy break-up of Yugoslavia in the April War, with the secession of Croatia and the massive failure of its defenses, was due in large part to the failure of its central command posts. But another, more insidious element was also present in the

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<sup>212</sup> “Primedbe k radiogramima sredenim u 5 svezaka,” Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv [‘German Archive’], box 27-A, folder 1, documents 31/15-16; Shimizu, p. 77.

<sup>213</sup> “Monatsbericht,” October 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-82 [Records of Nazi Cultural and Research Institutions]/20/209,783.

prewar period: a mixed, even confused attitude regarding the German Reich and Yugoslav Volksdeutsche as its unofficial representatives. Yugoslav Minister President Dragiša Cvetković's primary task as head of the government was to preserve Yugoslav neutrality in the face of growing Reich insistence that Yugoslavia choose a side in the European conflict. If Berlin sought to use Volksdeutsche as a way of pressuring Yugoslavia into the Axis, Yugoslavia found in its Volksdeutsche a convenient means to rebuff Berlin's urging without seeming to rebuff it.

Meeting with Sepp Janko on September 5, 1940, Cvetković echoed the Volksgruppenführung's ambiguous representation of itself as a bridge between the Reich and Yugoslavia: "We should be happy to have a German Volksgruppe, which has taken on itself the role of go-between during these attempts at reaching an understanding [between the two states]."<sup>214</sup> Whether Cvetković actually believed what he said remains open to question. It is likely that he believed that seeming to meet Volksdeutsche political demands would impress the Reich favorably vis-à-vis Yugoslavia. At this same meeting, Cvetković agreed to remedy the situation regarding the degraded army reserve officers, as well as to ensure that the Volksgruppe's National Socialist regimentation would not be curbed, that administrative areas and municipalities with German majorities would get ethnic German administrators and notaries, and that limitations on Volksdeutsche purchases of land would be lifted.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> ""Wir müssen sogar froh sein, eine deutsche Volksgruppe zu haben, die eine Mittlerrolle bei diesen Verständigungsbestrebungen übernimmt."" Yugoslav Minister President Dragiša Cvetković quoted in "Meldungen aus dem Reich," September 12, 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 154, fiche 1, frame 79.

<sup>215</sup> "Meldungen," September 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 154, fiche 1, frames 79-80.

Cvetković reiterated these promises in a speech he gave in Novi Sad on October 7, 1940,<sup>216</sup> but words proved cheap. Official reports on Yugoslavia from the “Meldungen aus dem Reich” (“Dispatches from the Reich”) – a secret monthly news digest put out by the SD (Sicherheitsdienst) – for the following months routinely complained that Cvetković’s sweeping promises remained mere words on paper.<sup>217</sup> Little was done to fulfill demands<sup>218</sup> which would have amounted to greater autonomy for the Volksgruppenführung to treat its co-nationals like a small völkisch state within the Yugoslav state.

“Meldungen aus dem Reich” provide an unexpectedly concise and cogent explanation for the Yugoslav government’s inconsistent attitude. Rather than blaming it on the racially prescribed inferiority of a Slavic government, the January 1941 report linked the vacillations of Cvetković’s nationality policy to Yugoslavia’s uncertain position in Europe at the beginning of the war’s second year.<sup>219</sup> When the Third Reich seemed invincible, as it did in the fall of 1940, kowtowing to it was the most prudent course for an internally divided country clinging to neutrality. So the Yugoslav government promised the moon to its Volksdeutsche, and then dragged its feet in the hope that its geo-political position would be improved from without, as eventually it was.

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<sup>216</sup> Jung to AA (October 1940), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 101098, fiche 2833, no frame numbers, pp. 2-3 of this document.

<sup>217</sup> “Meldungen,” October 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 155, fiche 1, frames 33, 35; “Meldungen,” December 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 156, fiche 3, frames 248, 250; “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” January 27, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 2, frame 117.

<sup>218</sup> Only about 30 of the 140 degraded reserve officers were reinstated (“Meldungen,” January 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 2, frame 117). The Yugoslav Interior Ministry assured notaries in areas with large ethnic German populations that no Volksdeutscher would ever be employed in administration at the expense of a Slav or have access to confidential documents (SD [Sicherheitsdienst] to AA, December 6, 1940, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 101098, fiche 2834, no frame numbers).

<sup>219</sup> “Meldungen,” January 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 2, frame 118.

By January 1941, with the Italian defeat in North Africa decreasing the immediate danger of an ascendant Axis in Southeast Europe, the Yugoslav Volksgruppenführung's hopes were dashed as pressure mounted from the authorities as well as from individual Yugoslavs, inspired by nationalism, economic envy of the relatively well-to-do Volksdeutsche or simple spite.

The above analysis also contained an implication not considered by the "Meldungen aus dem Reich" report: that Yugoslavia's overall dependence on external forces, and the attendant vacillations of its internal policies, translated also into Yugoslav Volksdeutsche dependence on the Third Reich's shifting foreign-political interests. As a consequence, Berlin often sent the Volksdeutsche mixed signals, which resulted in a series of misunderstandings. These, in turn, revolved around the Reich's desire for Yugoslav Volksdeutsche to remain, at least outwardly, loyal citizens of the Yugoslav state, not causing tension between Yugoslavia and the Reich at a time when luring Yugoslavia into a closer association with the Axis was paramount.

One way in which loyalty to one's state can be evaluated is the individual's willingness to fight in said state's armed forces. In this, the Reich gave young Yugoslav Volksdeutsche more willing to fight for the Reich than for their country of birth all possible assistance in the period before the royal coup of March 27, 1941, so long as the issue of open defiance to Yugoslav mobilization orders did not arise. Sepp Janko's September 1940 proposal to form Waffen-SS units inside Yugoslavia was met with enthusiastic approval in Himmler's office – provided the recruits could be smuggled out of the country for training, thus failing to arouse Yugoslav suspicions.<sup>220</sup> Only the

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<sup>220</sup> Gottlob Berger (Waffen-SS chief of staff) to Reichsführer-SS (RFSS) Heinrich Himmler, September 16, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 19 Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, file 2358, fiche 1,

previous month, Waffen-SS chief of staff Gottlob Berger had suggested to Himmler to extend to Hungary and Yugoslavia the clandestine recruitment for the Waffen-SS already taking place among the Romanian Volksdeutsche.<sup>221</sup> Acting independently and probably in ignorance of these larger plans, Janko nevertheless proved himself a valuable asset to the Reich in Southeast Europe. His way of thinking coincided perfectly with Himmler's own plans to use Volksdeutsche and tie them to himself within the Reich's sphere of influence.

The most convenient opportunity for secret Waffen-SS recruitment and smuggling of recruits out of Yugoslavia was presented by Volksdeutsche voluntary service in the Prahovo and Zemun camps during the resettlement of the Bessarabian Germans in fall 1940. Under cover of medical examinations and physical exercises for purposes of hygiene and fitness, volunteers were exposed to basic military training and selected on the basis of general and racial health.<sup>222</sup> A total of some 300<sup>223</sup> Yugoslav Volksdeutsche recruits were discreetly<sup>224</sup> persuaded to volunteer for the Waffen-SS, and

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frame 2; RFSS Persönlicher Stab to Berger, September 17, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2358, fiche 1, frame 1.

<sup>221</sup> George H. Stein, *The Waffen-SS: Hitler's Elite Guard at War 1939-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 169.

<sup>222</sup> Heeren to AA, September 13, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120/197/152,314; Berger to Himmler, September 10, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/127/2,652,328; anonymous report on the Zemun camp, November 9, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame numbers, pp. 1-2 of this report.

<sup>223</sup> Estimated in Berger to Himmler, November 20, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/128/2,554,228.

<sup>224</sup> Or not so discreetly: the Yugoslav gendarmes securing the camps – and keeping them under surveillance from outside – did not fail to notice what was going on. One Yugoslav report spoke of four young Volksdeutsche from Weisskirchen, who volunteered in the Zemun camp, were subjected to medical examinations there, and then smuggled into the Reich for training with the full knowledge and financial backing of the Weisskirchen chapter of the Kulturbund. Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova to Ministarstvo vojske i mornarice, February 5 [the enclosed German translation erroneously says March 5], 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/833/no frame number.

It is unclear whether Yugoslav authorities failed to prevent this because the two transit camps were temporarily extraterritorial units outside of their jurisdiction, or because they lacked hard evidence of SS recruitment, or because they were simply relieved to see the backs of the young

smuggled out of the country, mixed in with the Bessarabian Germans.<sup>225</sup> Some of these young men were then assigned to extant Waffen-SS units in various theaters of war. Others – like Gustav Halwax (see below) or Jakob Lichtenberger and Michael Reiser, Janko’s first choices for Waffen-SS training – returned to Yugoslavia to aid in the secret recruitment, which continued even after the cover provided by the Bessarabian resettlement was no longer in place.

Berlin encouraged Volksdeutsche to choose the side of the Third Reich as long as their doing so did not endanger Reich-Yugoslav relations by drawing unwelcome attention. Yet the disappearance of several hundred able-bodied young men from the Volksdeutsche community did not go unremarked by their surroundings.<sup>226</sup> Volunteering for the Waffen-SS exhibited beyond the shadow of a doubt the extent to which the volunteers had tipped the scales away from *staatstreu* and toward *volkstreu*. This was especially evident – and damning – in the cases of those who joined the Waffen-SS and accepted instructions to ignore any forthcoming mobilization or military-service summons from the Yugoslav Army,<sup>227</sup> or those like Lichtenberger and Reiser, both of whom were reserve officers in the Yugoslav army when they elected to join the Allgemeine SS in fall 1940 before returning to Yugoslavia during the Bessarabian resettlement to aid in the later recruits’ secret transportation out of Yugoslavia.<sup>228</sup>

While Berlin firmly discouraged open Volksdeutsche defiance of Yugoslav sovereignty in late 1940, administrative miscommunication in the German capital

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Volksdeutsche upstarts being smuggled out. Josef Beer, “Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung während des Balkansfeldzuges” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 679.

<sup>225</sup> Hellermann testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/151, frame 699.

<sup>226</sup> See n. 224 on p. 94.

<sup>227</sup> Rimann (AA) to Janko, November 30, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120/197/152,424.

<sup>228</sup> Berger to Himmler, September 16, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2358, fiche 1, frame 2; Berger to Himmler, November 20, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/128/2,554,228.

actually produced some such initiatives. In December 1940 – barely a month after the successful conclusion of the Bessarabian resettlement and its attendant recruitment drive – Himmler, acting through the VoMi, ordered another secret recruitment for the Waffen-SS in Southeast Europe with a projected 200 recruits from Yugoslavia, 500 from Hungary, and 500 from Romania.<sup>229</sup> Gustav Halwax,<sup>230</sup> a Yugoslav Volksdeutscher and Waffen-SS veteran of the Western campaign of 1940, was charged with coordinating the recruitment with Janko. The recruitment was to be carried out under the guise of forming a sports club for the German Volksgruppe, with the help of an SS doctor passing himself off as a sports physician.<sup>231</sup> This recruitment drive came a cropper due to jurisdictional conflict (see below), but that did not end various schemes to provide young Volksdeutsche with ideological and military training in the Reich.<sup>232</sup>

Quite apart from the fact that Himmler had acted in contravention of the AA's continued attempts to tie Yugoslavia firmly to the Axis,<sup>233</sup> such actions did not merely provoke the Yugoslav authorities. They also inspired the Volksdeutsche to consider Yugoslavia less as their host state and country of birth, to which they owed a measure of loyalty, and more as a provisional state structure they inhabited until something better suited came along. Neither Reich encouragement alone nor Volksdeutsche desires acting

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<sup>229</sup> Heeren to AA, January 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,795.

<sup>230</sup> Also spelled Hallwax or Hallwachs.

<sup>231</sup> Rimann to AA, January 24, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2423/E226,703-704.

<sup>232</sup> In January 1941 the proposal was made to have Volksdeutsche students at Belgrade University leave the country legally on the pretext of studying in Germany for a year, and having them use their school holidays to attend Waffen-SS training. This was a more elegant solution than smuggling recruits out with Bessarabian resettlers, but no less politically touchy for all that. Agent 6625, "Lage der volksdeutsche akademischen Jugend in Jugoslawien," January 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame numbers.

<sup>233</sup> Ribbentrop refused to have anything to do with this new recruitment drive in Hungary and Yugoslavia, suggesting instead the recruitment of 1000 Volksdeutsche from Romania as less politically incendiary. Berger memo, undated [likely from early February 1941], BA Berlin, NS 19, file 3517, fiche 5, frames 227-228.

on their own could have produced the degree of disenchantment with Yugoslavia evident in Volksdeutsche ranks during the April War, when even those who did not dislike Yugoslavia *per se* saw its destruction by the Axis as a foregone conclusion. The two acting in tandem, however, could.

This disenchantment was the result of the interaction between the Volksdeutsche perception of themselves as hopelessly persecuted – a view encouraged by the Volksgruppenführung and bolstered by isolated incidents like the murder of the propaganda chief in Grossbetschkerek<sup>234</sup> – and of Reich policies and instructions regarding Yugoslavia and its Volksdeutsche. Had the latter been more consistent, the Yugoslav Volksgruppenführung would likely have been more of a passive receiver of orders from Berlin, and less of an active agent in the six months before the April War. Paradoxically, the very inconsistency of Reich and Yugoslav policy affecting the Volksdeutsche created a mental lacuna in which the Volksgruppenführung could conceive of itself as Berlin's equal partner in the Balkans. Proven wrong again and again, it clung to the notion that it could do more than just execute orders, going so far as to suggest foreign and racial policy to Berlin. Examples of the latter include Sepp Janko taking the initiative to propose Lichtenberger and Reiser for acceptance into the SS in accordance with Himmler and the VoMi's view of military training as being of "extraordinary importance for the future of all Volksdeutsche,"<sup>235</sup> and Janko demanding weapons for the Volksgruppe in December 1940.

On the latter occasion, Janko reported an allegedly increased number of attacks on Volksdeutsche perpetrated by the Yugoslav army and royalist-nationalist paramilitaries

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<sup>234</sup> See p. 87.

<sup>235</sup> "die für die Zukunft des gesamten Volksdeutschtums von ausserordentlicher Bedeutung sind." Rimann to AA (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/2423/E226,703.

(Četnici). He therefore demanded a substantial delivery of weapons for the protection of leading Volksdeutsche. The amount of weaponry requested varied from no fewer than 1000 handguns, 300 automatics and an unspecified number of machine guns,<sup>236</sup> to as many as 8000 light machine guns, 8000 or more carbines, 8000 pistols, 1200-1400 hand grenades, dynamite and bullets.<sup>237</sup> The great disparity in numbers can be explained by the fact that, not for the last time, Janko tried to get his way by applying to more than one Reich office for what the Volksgruppenführung needed. He directly exploited the competing and overlapping jurisdictions within the Third Reich. In this case, he used the competition between the AA and the RSHA for supreme jurisdiction over all Volkstum matters.

Janko's multiple requests did not guarantee success. In this period, on the eve of the signing of the Hungarian-Yugoslav Friendship Treaty,<sup>238</sup> while the Reich tried every diplomatic means available to entice Yugoslavia into the Axis, supplying Yugoslav Volksdeutsche with a large number of weapons would have been detrimental to relations between the two states. Janko's request was officially refused on the grounds that without a clear intention to bring about the "annihilation" of the Volksgruppe on the part of the Yugoslav state, the political situation would not suffer such an affront to the Yugoslav authorities.<sup>239</sup> At most a couple hundred handguns and a few submachine guns could realistically be smuggled inside the personal luggage of Volksdeutsche – likely including

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<sup>236</sup> Rimann to AA, December 17, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1451/D599,327-328.

<sup>237</sup> Agent 6625, "Waffen für die Volksgruppe," December 11, 1940, BA Berlin, R 58, file 1139, fiche 3, no frame numbers.

<sup>238</sup> See p. 48.

<sup>239</sup> "die Vernichtung" Helmut Triska (head of the AA's Volkstumsreferat) memo, December 23, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1451/D599,329.

Waffen-SS recruits – returning to Yugoslavia from the Reich,<sup>240</sup> and divvied up among the most reliably Nazified members of the Volksgruppe.<sup>241</sup> The reticence of this decision speaks clearly to the Reich’s low estimate of the Volksgruppe’s real potential for forming its own paramilitary units at the turn of 1940-1941.

A German agent in Yugoslavia known as agent 6625 addressed the issue of secrecy: the distribution of large numbers of weapons among Volksdeutsche civilians could not pass unnoticed. There are indications in the documentary record that not only was the Yugoslav gendarmerie in areas bordering the Third Reich on the lookout for weapons caches being smuggled into Yugoslavia,<sup>242</sup> but some prominent Volksdeutsche also displayed little caution in offering to procure weapons for acquaintances.<sup>243</sup>

Moreover, on January 13, 1941 the AA exerted pressure at a meeting between Ribbentrop, Lorenz and Lorenz’s subordinate Hermann Behrends, which concluded with a ban on all recruitment for or creation of any sort of SS-style unit in Yugoslavia.<sup>244</sup> This intervention had less to do with the position of the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche than with the continued necessity for friendly relations between Germany and Yugoslavia, as well as the internal power struggle between the AA on one side, Himmler and the VoMi on the other. The latter was quickly – if only temporarily – laid to rest with a jurisdictional agreement between Ribbentrop and Himmler establishing the AA’s supreme jurisdiction over all matters touching on foreign policy, even when it involved Volksdeutsche (see

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<sup>240</sup> “Waffen für die Volksgruppe” (1940), BA Berlin, R 58, file 1139, fiche 3, no frame numbers.

<sup>241</sup> Agent 6625 report, January 10, 1941 and response to same, January 7, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 1139, fiche 1, no frame numbers.

<sup>242</sup> Picot (AA) to SD, December 10, 1940, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 101098, fiche 2834, no frame number.

<sup>243</sup> Agent 6625, “Rosler, Novi Sad,” January 15, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame number.

<sup>244</sup> Nöldeke (AA) to VoMi (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle), January 16, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,788-789.

below). Lorenz informed Halwax by telegram that, despite the fact that Halwax's activities in Yugoslavia had been agreed on between the AA and the VoMi,<sup>245</sup> said activities had to stop at once. Lorenz confirmed the AA's supremacy by forwarding the telegram through the AA main office in Berlin and the German Embassy in Belgrade.<sup>246</sup>

Despite the good will displayed by the likes of Halwax and Lichtenberger to create secret paramilitary units from Yugoslav Volksdeutsche, the constraints of Reich foreign policy imposed limits on their ability to recruit, equip and train any such units. Moreover, even with the best will in the world, the Volksgruppenführung had to recognize the fact that the average Volksdeutscher led too staid an existence to fit into the ideal of the secretive paramilitary fighter. As an unnamed informer commented, “[w]ith a wink,” woe betide the Volksdeutsche paramilitary who fell into Četnik hands.<sup>247</sup> Any attempt at efficient recruitment and training of Volksdeutsche could only take place under Reich occupation – not in a Yugoslav state, even one allied with the Axis.

Despite the Reich's measured assessment of the Volksgruppenführung's standing, the latter's demand for weapons suggests it considered the Volksgruppe's position sufficiently precarious to demand fairly radical breaches of diplomatic etiquette, not to mention Yugoslav sovereignty. Whereas the average Volksdeutscher's feelings on the matter remained mixed in this period, it can be concluded that the Volksdeutsche leadership aligned itself with what it perceived as the Reich's primary interest in

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<sup>245</sup> Triska to Gerhart Feine (First Secretary of the German Embassy in Belgrade), March 26, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100935 Geheime Reichssachen des Referats Kult A (Jugoslawien), 1941, fiche 2417, no frame number.

<sup>246</sup> VoMi chief Werner Lorenz to AA, January 16, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,793.

<sup>247</sup> “Mit einem Augenzwinkern” Report on the Zemun camp, source unclear, November 9, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame numbers.

Halwax himself reported his attitude to local attempts to creating SA- or SS-style paramilitary units as one of extreme skepticism and discouragement. Heeren memo, January 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,453.

Yugoslavia (the protection of Volksdeutsche irrespective of consequences to state relations) some three and a half months before the final deterioration of German-Yugoslav relations between March 27 and April 6, 1941. However, Volksdeutsche officials continued to show a willingness to work within the Yugoslav system in order to ensure the safety of their co-nationals. Their good will increasingly became mere lip-service to a state the Nazified Volksgruppenführung under Sepp Janko ceased to recognize as its own.

Despite their disenchantment with the Yugoslav state, the Volksgruppenführung in Yugoslavia could not ignore its existence completely before the April War. The necessity for Volksdeutsche not to trespass against the laws of their host state was echoed by attempts made in Berlin in early 1941 to straighten out jurisdiction over Volkstum-related issues. The increased political activity of Volksdeutsche in Southeast-European states<sup>248</sup> – such as the creation of a Nazi Party in Romania or that of a German labor front in Slovakia<sup>249</sup> – was a sufficiently significant element in the Reich's diplomatic relations with these countries to necessitate specific guidelines. In January 1941, the AA issued secret guidelines which stated unambiguously the following: 1) Volksdeutsche were to be considered primarily citizens of their host countries, to which they owed the loyal fulfillment of duties expected of all citizens; 2) any organized and self-aware ethnic German community (i.e. deutsche Volksgruppe) had to align its activities with the

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<sup>248</sup> The Nazis often counted Hungary and independent Slovakia as belonging to Southeast Europe.

<sup>249</sup> Unsigned memo to Lorenz, January 16, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100896  
Volksdeutsche (Allgemeines), Volkstumsfragen, 1938-1944, fiche 1, frame D653141.

Reich's policies vis-à-vis its host country; and 3) all VoMi activities had to be coordinated with the interests of Reich foreign policy.<sup>250</sup>

This temporary supremacy of the AA over the VoMi and, by extension, over Heinrich Himmler – of political over racial and Volkstum interests – was confirmed when Ribbentrop sent the same guidelines to VoMi's director SS-Obergruppenführer Werner Lorenz in the days when the decision was made to invade Yugoslavia and Greece.<sup>251</sup> In these days of foreign-political tension, Ribbentrop also easily reached an agreement with Lorenz's superior Himmler, securing for the AA the "right to issue directives in all nationality matters [Volkstumsfragen] of a foreign-political nature."<sup>252</sup>

Throughout this jurisdictional power-struggle, the AA and the VoMi remained ideological institutions, but they approached their common ideological goals in different ways. As in other instances during World War II (e.g. the partitioning of Poland in 1939), especially before the explicitly racial warfare unleashed during Operation Barbarossa melded ideology and foreign policy into one more-or-less indelible whole, preparations to tie Yugoslavia to the Axis whether peacefully or forcefully gave foreign political matters greater weight. The Ribbentrop-Himmler agreement was therefore an expedient measure rather than long-term policy, and it placed the interests of Hitler's special brand of Realpolitik ahead of the desire to reshuffle Balkan populations along National Socialist lines. It meant that in early 1941 Sepp Janko and his cohorts had to step lightly lest they infringed too obviously on the prerogatives of the Yugoslav state – a state that scarcely

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<sup>250</sup> Unsigned memo to Kult A (AA office), January 16, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1306/489,026.

<sup>251</sup> Ribbentrop to Lorenz, March 30, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,209-210.

<sup>252</sup> "das Weisungsrecht in allen Volkstumsfragen, die aussenpolitischer Art sind" Ribbentrop and Himmler, "Vereinbarung über die Zuständigkeit in Volkstumsfragen," March 31, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,211.

mattered any more in their mental landscape and Weltanschauung, but which remained very much a practical and political reality.

In line with this temporary supremacy of foreign policy, in early February 1941 the AA refused suggestions submitted to it by two avowed mavericks within the Volksgruppe. Johann Wüsch, head of the Volksgruppe's Statistics Main Office (Hauptamt für Statistik) – characterized by the VoMi as an “eccentric,”<sup>253</sup> that most damning moniker in a highly regimented society – and Janko's acting deputy Fritz Metzger proposed the creation of a separate Volksdeutsche legal statute or a German-Yugoslav agreement ensuring legal protection for Yugoslav Volksdeutsche. Potentially extending also to cover the ethnic German communities in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia,<sup>254</sup> this proposal was most likely intended as a prelude to the creation of some kind of great Danube Volksdeutsche protectorate (in its literal meaning of protecting its residents), not unlike that seen to have been extended over the Czech lands.

The proposed statute was an ideological document *par excellence*. It built upon unfulfilled promises extended by Minister President Cvetković in September, and extended these to include issues not touched upon previously. If adopted, the statute would have meant the virtual creation of a racial Volksdeutsche state within the material Yugoslav state. It included the recognition of the Volksgruppe as a legal body called the Deutsche Volksgemeinschaft, organized on National Socialist principle. Membership would have been determined by belonging to a national registry from which, once a person was inscribed in it at the age of 18, one could never be removed. Since applying for inclusion in the registry was left to the individual conscience of the applicant, this was

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<sup>253</sup> “ein Eigenbrötler” Triska memo, February 6, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1451/D599,332.

<sup>254</sup> Triska memo (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/1451/D599,332-334.

not quite as radical as the principle adopted in the Reich that racial belonging was an objective fact which could be ascribed to one from without. However, it did imply that each applicant's racial eligibility would be evaluated according to some kind of objective criteria. Furthermore, the Volksgruppenführung would have been given absolute authority over Volksdeutsche in matters of taxation, schooling, public and private language use, and administration (in this, the proposed statute repeated the demands made by Janko and approved by Cvetković a few months earlier). It would have also ensured Volksdeutsche legal protection and equality vis-à-vis the Yugoslav state and its non-German citizens. In effect, the Volksgruppe would have been able to exist as a small ersatz German state not infringed upon by the Yugoslav state, yet enjoying some of the benefits of existing within it, such as a portion of the state tax revenue.<sup>255</sup> Volksdeutsche would have ceased to be citizens with rights and obligations, and become wards of the Yugoslav state with rights but no duties. Their privileged position would have been guaranteed from within by this statute, from without by the formidable economic and political presence of the Third Reich.

The statute outline was originally submitted in December 1940 – heady days following the closing of the resettlement camps on the Danube and the departure of several hundred young men for military training in the Reich. The sky must have seemed the limit to the Volksgruppenführung's political ambition. This was also the period when Sepp Janko brusquely demanded weapons from the Reich, a demand which met with as little understanding as did the suggested legal document.

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<sup>255</sup> “Gesetzentwurf zur Selbstverwaltung der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien,” passed on by agent 6625 in January 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-175/648/no frame numbers.

Wüsch and Metzger broke the chain of command and contradicted the Führerprinzip by deigning to address the AA without consulting their Volksgruppenführer first – and were thus automatically not taken very seriously in Berlin. Moreover, the practical ability of the Yugoslav government, seen by Reich and Volksdeutsche alike as very weak and no match for opposition elements within its own administration, to force through a special law protecting the Volksdeutsche was deemed woefully insufficient. Finally, in line with the subordination of Volksdeutsche interests to Reich foreign policy, the Reich had no intention of ruining its chances of drawing Yugoslavia into the Axis by strong-arming Yugoslavia into giving one group of its citizens special rights, even if those citizens happened to be ethnic Germans. Any such move was explicitly recognized as leading only to a worsening of German-Yugoslav relations, and was therefore expressly forbidden by the exigencies of Reich foreign policy.<sup>256</sup> Bluntly put, “the conclusion of an agreement between Germany and Yugoslavia on the protection of the German Volksgruppe is at present out of the question.”<sup>257</sup> The Yugoslav Volksdeutsche’s divided loyalties were not shored up by explicit assurances from the Reich.

Yugoslav Volksdeutsche were thus presented with the thorny issue of how much – and how far – they could test the loyalty they owed the Yugoslav state in favor of their desire for closer political ties between the Volksgruppe and the Reich. This became especially evident in the first three months of 1941, when the prevailing mood among the general Yugoslav population (including lower-level administrators and gendarmes)

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<sup>256</sup> Heeren to AA, February 21, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1451/D599,352.

<sup>257</sup> “der Abschluss eines Abkommens Deutschlands und Südslawiens zum Schutze der deutschen Volksgruppe z.Zt nicht in Frage kommt.” Rimann to AA, February 1, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1451/D599,330.

clashed with the overtly Germanophile attitude adopted by the government, which still clung to neutrality.

“Meldungen aus dem Reich” reported that, in the case of a German-Yugoslav conflict, “excessively jumped-up nationalist gangs” would slaughter the Volksdeutsche of Yugoslavia, as had happened previously to the Volksdeutsche in Poland (a mainstay of Reich propaganda in the days leading up to the invasion of Poland in September 1939).<sup>258</sup> These fears may have owed the most to the success of Reich propaganda, but they were fed by such individual acts of ethnic enmity as the remark made to a Volksdeutsche doctor in Grossbetschkerek by a Serbian administrator, “There are not enough trees in the Banat to hang all you Germans upon,”<sup>259</sup> or the attack on a Volksdeutscher who nearly had a swastika carved into his cheek with a knife and was told by his attackers “Now the swastika will look good on you!”<sup>260</sup> True or not, such stories increased the average Volksdeutscher’s sense of persecution by and alienation from the Yugoslav state and society.

“Meldungen” for the period January-March 1941 contain a litany of complaints of beatings, insults, broken windows, etc. directed against Yugoslav Volksdeutsche. More sinister than these were indications that in these months the Yugoslav Interior Ministry stepped up its surveillance of Volksdeutsche, and even compiled lists of people to be

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<sup>258</sup> “die masslos verhetzten nationalen Verbände” “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” March 20, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 158, fiche 2, frame 133.

<sup>259</sup> ““Im Banat gibt es nicht genug Bäume, um euch Schwaben alle aufzuhängen.”” One Peter Harold reporting an incident that took place in February 1941, Harold to NSDAP [Nazi Party], April 16, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Partei, R 98952, p. 6.

<sup>260</sup> ““Jetzt wird Dir das Hakenkreuz bekommen!”” Reported in “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” February 13, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 3, frame 222.

taken hostage in case war broke out between the Reich and Yugoslavia.<sup>261</sup> This plan was a sign that the Yugoslav authorities had badly miscalculated the Volksdeutsche's importance for or influence on Reich policy. More than before, overtly non-political Volksdeutsche activities like participation in sports clubs, choice of clothing<sup>262</sup> or having volunteered in the two camps for Bessarabian Volksdeutsche<sup>263</sup> drew the authorities' unwelcome attention, but this did not mean that the criteria on which one was deemed suspicious had become any clearer.<sup>264</sup> As the likelihood of Yugoslavia joining the Axis

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<sup>261</sup> "Meldungen," January 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 2, frame 119; "Meldungen," February 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 3, frame 221; komanda žandarmerije (Belgrade) to ministar vojske i mornarice, March 12, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/833/no frame number; komanda žandarmerije (Belgrade) to ministar vojske i mornarice, March 13, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/833/no frame number. In one of his postwar testimonies, Josef Beer remarked that hostage lists had been compiled as early as 1925, causing the majority of Volksdeutsche arrested on April 6 and 7, 1941 to be old men, not at all the upstart young Nazis feared by the authorities. Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 679.

<sup>262</sup> Volksdeutsche were not the only ones suspected of subversive activity: the wearing of a distinctive 'Magyar' style of necktie by ethnic Hungarians was seen in these unsettled days as proof of a desire for a separate, ethnic political party under the auspices of the Crown of St. Stephen. Komanda žandarmerije memo (March 12, 1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/833/no frame number.

<sup>263</sup> "Meldungen," January 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 157, fiche 2, frame 120.

<sup>264</sup> A list of persons from Georgshausen near Werschetz who were deemed dangerous and subversive included, in addition to routine descriptions such as "not to be trusted, unreliable" ("nepoverljiv, nepouzdan") such imprecise and sweepingly damning descriptions as: "works in favor of a foreign state and is very influential with non-Slav elements" (radi u korist strane države i mnogo uticajan kod neslovenskog elementa"), "Kulturbund president, a national elements gather in his house and get instructions from him" ("pretsednik "KULTURBUNDA". U njegovoj kući se skupljaju anacionalni elementi i od njega primaju instrukcije"), "his son lives in Germany" ("Sin mu se stalno nalazi u Nemačkoj."), "has a lot of influence as former municipal president" (Kao bivši pretsednik opštine, dosta uticajan.), "as former teacher of long standing has much influence with the middle class" ("Kao bivši dugogodišnji učitelj uticajan je kod srednjeg staleža."), "aggressive and very influential with the middle class – especially youth" ("Nasrtljiv i od velikog uticaja kod srednjeg staleža – naročito kod omladine."), "used to work in Germany and is a dyed-in-the-wool National Socialist" ("Kao nekadašnji radnik u Nemačkoj zadojen nacionalsocijalizmom."), "spiritual leader of the youth who are against our state and work in favor of a foreign state" ("duhovni vođa omladine, koji su raspoloženi protiv naše države a rade u korist strane države."), "caught with compromising documents, fined and jailed for them but received amnesty" ("Uhvaćen je bio sa kompromitujućim aktima usled čega je bio kažnjen, zatvaran ali je amnestiran"), "non-Slavic lower orders gather in his house to listen to the radio" ("Skuplja u svoju kuću niži stalež /neslovene/ radi slušanja radio vesti."), etc. "Spisak građana

increased, so it became more difficult for ethnic Germans to convincingly demonstrate even feigned loyalty to Yugoslavia. That being said, official suspicions remained limited to observation and report-writing right until April 6, 1941. There is no evidence that the Yugoslav government prepared to ‘slaughter’ its Volksdeutsche, whatever their non-German neighbors may have threatened in fits of pique.

### The Coming of War

The problem of divided loyalty became even more acute in the period between the royal coup in Belgrade and the beginning of the April War, when feverish uncertainty in Belgrade government circles required the Volksdeutsche – individuals as well as the Volksgruppenführung as their representatives – to strike an even finer balance between Yugoslavia and Germany. For his part, Volksgruppenführer Janko chose to err on the side of caution. He visited the president of the Danube Banovina<sup>265</sup> on March 27, the day of the coup, and assured this representative of the Yugoslav government of the Volksdeutsche’s continued loyalty to the state and its new king, Petar II,<sup>266</sup> who had ascended the throne while still a minor at the behest of a new Yugoslav government opposed to Yugoslavia’s membership in the Axis. On the same day Janko sent the following open telegram to the king:

To our ruler, His Majesty King Petar II, the German Volksgruppe of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, filled with loyalty, devotion and faithfulness, wishes from the bottom of its heart, on this historic day, a long and happy reign crowned by peace and blessed by God.

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koji su neprijateljski raspoloženi naspram naše zemlje te bi ih trebalo konfinirati ili uzeti za taoce.” June 15, 1940, Muzej Vojvodine, document 19741/3.

<sup>265</sup> Yugoslav administrative unit in the period 1929-1941, loosely translatable as ‘banate,’ indicating common origin with the name ‘Banat.’ Its head held the title of ban.

<sup>266</sup> Dr. Carstanjen (Graz) to AA, March 29, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,510; “Treuekundgebung der deutschen Volksgruppe,” *DV*, March 28, 1941, p. 2.

Long live His Majesty the King! Long live the Kingdom of Yugoslavia!<sup>267</sup>

In the March 28 edition of the *Deutsches Volksblatt*, the main Volksdeutsche newspaper in interwar Yugoslavia (published in Novi Sad), Janko also ordered that all activities of the Volksgruppe be suspended for an indefinite period so as to avoid provoking an anti-German reaction.<sup>268</sup> Seemingly straightforward, the concluding lines of the order were more ambiguous: “We have always displayed great discipline and done our duty. This time, too, we will show that we know how to maintain discipline and do our duty.”<sup>269</sup> The emphasis on discipline suggests that Janko was expecting violence against the Volksdeutsche. The emphasis on duty fails to specify duty to whom: Yugoslavia or the Third Reich?

The same ambiguity is evident in an article which appeared in the Munich edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* on April 4, in which an anonymous, supposedly Volksdeutsche author from the Bačka commented: “We [i.e. Yugoslav Volksdeutsche] must find a balance between staatstreu and volkstreu, even when the chips are down. Even if we bear the scars of this effort, we must try again and again until we succeed in striking this balance!”<sup>270</sup> This article suggests that Yugoslav Volksdeutsche were in an

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<sup>267</sup> “Unserem Herrscher, S. M. König Peter II., wünscht an diesem historischen Tage die deutsche Volksgruppe des Königreiches Jugoslawien, erfüllt von Ergebenheit, Anhänglichkeit und Treue, aus der ganzen Tiefe des Herzens eine lange, glückliche und von Frieden getrönte Herrschaft unter Gottes Segen.

“Es lebe S. M. der König! Es lebe das Königreich Jugoslawien!” “Huldigungstelegramm des Volksgruppenführers Dr. Sepp Janko an S. M. König Peter II,” *DV*, March 30, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>268</sup> “Kreisleiter and Ortsgruppenleiter!”, *DV*, March 28, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>269</sup> “Wir haben immer Disziplin gehalten und unsere Pflicht getan, wir wollen auch dismal beweisen, dass wir Disziplin halten und unsere Pflicht tun können.” *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> “Wir müssen den Gleichklang finden zwischen staatstreu und volkstreu, wenn es auch manchmal hart auf hart geht. Und wenn wir Wundmale davontragen, müssen wir immer aufs neue den Gleichklang suchen, und wir werden ihn finden!” “Das Deutschtum in Jugoslawien,” *Völkischer Beobachter* [from now on *VB*], Münchner Ausgabe, April 4, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28874, no page number.

undeservedly difficult position, given their fine record of loyalty to both state and Volk. As in Janko's order to the Volksgruppe, the last statement is more ambiguous: one way of striking the balance between the two would be the elimination of multinational Yugoslavia in favor of a more German-friendly form of government.

This ambiguity did not escape the leader of the new Yugoslav government, General Dušan Simović. The Volksgruppenführung reported, via "Nora," that on March 31 Simović expressed a fervent desire for Sepp Janko to act as a go-between for the new government, and assure Berlin of Yugoslavia's continued loyalty, undiminished by the change of government.<sup>271</sup> Between March 28 and April 5 the new Yugoslav government also sent a string of increasingly frantic (and futile) oral and written messages to the German Embassy in Belgrade in order to stave off a Reich attack on the country.<sup>272</sup> On April 2, in a meeting with Christian Brücker, the Belgrade Kreisleiter (county chief) of the German Volksgruppe, and a Volksdeutsche lawyer, Dr. Moser, Simović was still trying desperately to use any means available to prevent war with Germany, even suggesting that Janko might be persuaded to travel to Berlin in order to present the Yugoslav government's position to Reich authorities.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> "Nora" radio message transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/152.

<sup>272</sup> Heeren to AA, March 28, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 225; Heeren to AA, March 30, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, documents no. 235; Feine to AA, April 3, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, documents no. 252; Feine to AA, April 5, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, documents no. 271; Feine to AA, April 5, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, documents no. 272; Heeren to AA, March 29, 1941, in *Dokumente zum Konflikt mit Jugoslawien und Griechenland* [from now on *Dokumente*], Auswärtiges Amt 1939/41 Nr. 7, Berlin: Deutsches Verlag, 1941, document no. 86.

<sup>273</sup> Feine to AA, April 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,787.

Instead, Janko was summoned to the German Embassy in Belgrade on April 2, and instructed to adopt an evasive attitude in his meeting with Simović,<sup>274</sup> since at that point the attack on Yugoslavia had already been decided on in Berlin. Also on April 2, all German consulates in Yugoslavia received encrypted instructions to prepare for evacuation and recommend the same to the personnel of other Axis countries' embassies.<sup>275</sup> On April 3, most of the staff of the German Embassy in Belgrade took the night train to Budapest,<sup>276</sup> following the departure of Ambassador Viktor von Heeren, who had been summoned urgently by Ribbentrop. Heeren had incurred Ribbentrop's displeasure with his friendly attitude to Yugoslav authorities old and new, and his efforts to dissuade Berlin from making war on Yugoslavia,<sup>277</sup> even at the perceived expense of Yugoslav Volksdeutsche.<sup>278</sup> Leaving the embassy's First Secretary Gerhart Feine in charge,<sup>279</sup> the main line of diplomatic communication between Belgrade and Berlin was thus severed. Even without knowing all of these details, Simović must have realized the

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<sup>274</sup> Feine to AA, April 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,822.

<sup>275</sup> Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Belgrade, April 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,806-808.

<sup>276</sup> Feine to AA, April 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,830.

<sup>277</sup> Heeren to AA, March 27, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1687/E023,715; Heeren to AA, March 27, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1687/E023,718; Heeren to AA, April 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,918-920.

<sup>278</sup> "To my mind, all of the blood spilled [an exaggeration of the damage done to Volksdeutsche during the royal coup] is down to Ambassador [von Heeren]'s incompetence, for he has always seen Volksdeutsche as firstly and only Yugoslav citizens, and not as men of German blood." ("Meiner Ansicht nach gehe alles vergossene Blut auf Kosten der unfähigen Führung des dortigen Herrn Gesandten, der immer nur in den Volksdeutschen in erster Linie jugoslawische Staatsbürger und nicht Männer deutschen Blutes sah.") The absence of trained, even if unarmed, SS-style self-defense units among Yugoslav Volksdeutsche was thus laid at Heeren's door – an unobvious jab from Himmler to the AA, which had ordered Gustav Halwax to cease his activities a few months earlier. Berger to Himmler, March 28, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2724, fiche 1, frame 6.

<sup>279</sup> Ribbentrop to Heeren, March 30, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 236.

likelihood of war<sup>280</sup> and the concomitant *unlikelihood* of the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche influencing Reich policy. His meeting with Janko was a failure: it lasted barely five minutes, during which Simović had only “a few friendly words to say about the Volksgruppe.”<sup>281</sup>

Despite his dismissive attitude toward Janko, Simović did not risk openly antagonizing the Volksdeutsche, since the Reich government made no secret of the fact that attacks on Reichs- or Volksdeutsche would be deemed sufficient excuse for a Reich attack on Yugoslavia.<sup>282</sup> In a display of continuing tensions over jurisdiction, both the VoMi and Ribbentrop instructed their offices to “organize [i.e. fabricate] cries for help” from Yugoslav Volksdeutsche, Croats, Macedonians and Slovenes, which would be reproduced in the Reich press and lend moral justification to the impending invasion.<sup>283</sup> The violent repression of Volksdeutsche was retroactively dated back to the very creation

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<sup>280</sup> “Preparations are underway [in Belgrade], from which one can conclude that [the authorities] are counting on [the likelihood of] German occupation. Administrators will be selected, who will remain in Belgrade if this comes to pass.” (“Hier wurden Vorbereitungen festgestellt, die erkennen lassen, dass man mit deutscher Okkupation rechnet. Es werden Beamte eingeteilt, die in diesem Falle in Belgrad bleiben sollen.”) Feine to AA, April 4, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,861.

<sup>281</sup> “habe nur ein paar freundliche Worte über Volksgruppe gesagt.” Feine to AA, April 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,825.

By contrast, in his postwar memoirs Janko claims to have met with Simović no fewer than three times during the period March 29-April 5, and that Simović always showed Janko the utmost respect and, even, a thinly veiled fear. This account seems to be Janko’s attempt to attribute more importance to himself and the Volksgruppe after the fact. Janko, *Weg*, pp. 74-76, 78.

<sup>282</sup> Already on March 27, Heeren hinted at this ominously in conversation with the new Yugoslav Foreign Minister Momčilo Ninčić (Heeren to Ribbentrop, March 27, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 219). Hitler stated as much while trying to secure Hungarian participation in Operation 25: he cited the royal coup and the “treatment of the Volksdeutsche” as “sufficient grounds for war” (Weizsäcker memo, April 4, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 264).

<sup>283</sup> “Hilferufe . . . zu organisieren.” Berger to Himmler, April 3, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2802, fiche 1, frame 1.

of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918.<sup>284</sup> Reports of the supposed mistreatment of Volksdeutsche in Belgrade, Slovenia, the Banat and even Macedonia were duly supplied, especially by the German Embassy in Bucharest, the Gaugrenzlandamt (Gau Border Land Office) in Graz, and the German Consulate in Slovenia.<sup>285</sup>

These diplomatic reports dutifully listed individual instances of fights, verbal abuse, broken windows, straw set on fire, bodily harm, the harassment of Volksdeutsche women by Četnici and similar incidents. The combined effect of these reports was deeply unsettling for the Volksdeutsche – and made clear the Yugoslav government’s weakness in failing to prevent such outbursts against its own citizens – but hardly fulfilled Serbian nationalist promises-*cum*-threats to “wade knee-high in German blood”<sup>286</sup> during a “second Bromberg.”<sup>287</sup>

The most serious were reports of Volksdeutsche illegally crossing the borders into Romania (a few hundred) and Ostmark (nearly three thousand in total), but even this did not amount to a planned genocidal attack on the Volksdeutsche minority of northern

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<sup>284</sup> “Memorandum als Anlage zur Erklärung der Reichsregierung,” April 6, 1941, in *Dokumente*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>285</sup> German Consulate Laibach [Ljubljana] (Branch Office Marburg) to AA, March 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1687/ E023,744-746; Carstanjen to AA, March 29, 1941, in *Dokumente*, documents no. 87 and 88; Bürkner (for Chef des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht, OKW) to AA, March 30, 1941, in *Dokumente*, document no. 91; Weizsäcker memo, March 31, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.1, document no. 240; Carstanjen to AA, March 31 and April 1, in *Dokumente*, documents no. 93-95; Neubacher (transmitting a report by the German Consul in Timișoara) to AA, April 1, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,741 (this report acknowledges the difficulty of investigating the true extent of the attacks, but does not refrain from reporting the alleged death of several Volksdeutsche); Feine to AA, April 2, 1941, in *Dokumente*, document no. 97; “Meldung des Deutschen Nachrichtenbüros,” April 2, 1941, in *Dokumente*, document no. 98; Neubacher to AA, April 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,805; German Military Attaché in Bucharest to AA, NARA, RG 242, April 4, 1941, T-120/199/152,884.

<sup>286</sup> ““bis zu den Knien durch deutsches Blut waten”” “Meldung des Deutschen Nachrichtenbüros” (1941), in *Dokumente*, document no. 98.

<sup>287</sup> ““zweiten Bromberg”” *Ibid.*

Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, these reports were eagerly picked up by the Reich press and embellished to describe a landscape of burning villages, in which Volksdeutsche were systematically hunted down, assaulted, murdered or forced to flee by Jews and bloodthirsty Četnici backed and equipped by the Yugoslav government.<sup>288</sup>

On the Yugoslav side, the allegations made by the Reich press were roundly denied.<sup>289</sup> The same was done in private meetings between representatives of the Yugoslav government and German Embassy staff.<sup>290</sup> The government press office even organized a tour of the Volksdeutsche areas of settlement for foreign journalists in Yugoslavia in order to counter reports of mistreatment.<sup>291</sup> Moreover, Janko personally denied any major excesses against the Volksdeutsche,<sup>292</sup> but Yugoslavia's fate was never dependent on the treatment meted out to its Volksdeutsche. Although no worse than "some broken *Volksdeutsche* [italics in the original] noses and windows, and only few cases of severe injuries"<sup>293</sup> can be proven, these were sufficient to feed the Reich propaganda machine and provide a convenient excuse for invasion.

The Reich's sudden about-face regarding the living conditions and rumored dangers the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche labored under did not fail to affect the already

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<sup>288</sup> "Chaotische Zustände in Jugoslawien," *Deutsche-Stimmen*, April 5, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28909, p. 18; *Südostdeutsche Zeitung* article, no date, BA Berlin, R 4902 Deutsches Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut, file 10970, p. 2; "Deutsches Dorf von serbischen Demonstranten eingäschert," *VB*, April 1, 1941, BA Berlin, R 8034 II Reichsauslandsbund, Presseauschnittsammlung, volume 2489, p. 2; ""Gott sei Dank, wir sind in Sicherheit"," *VB*, April 1, 1941, BA Berlin, R 8034 II, volume 2489, p. 3; "Serben wollen in deutschem Blut waten. Volksdeutsche Flüchtlinge über das Schreckensregiment in Jugoslawien," *VB*, April 3, 1941, BA Berlin, R 8034 II, volume 2489, p. 5; "Furchtbare Misshandlungen von Volksdeutschen," *Der Grenzbote*, April 8, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/544/5,315,856.

<sup>289</sup> Unsigned telegram to AA, NARA, RG 242, April 1, 1941, T-120/199/152,776.

<sup>290</sup> Feine to AA, April 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,792.

<sup>291</sup> Feine to AA, April 4, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,851.

<sup>292</sup> He was not the only German speaker in Yugoslavia to do so. Brosch, an official of the German Consulate in Ljubljana, did the same (Brosch to AA, March 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1687/E023,753). However, these reports were exceptions.

<sup>293</sup> Janjetović, p. 52.

contentious issue of Volksdeutsche loyalty to Yugoslavia. Whereas in the period December 1940-March 1941 their loyalties had to remain, at least outwardly, with the Yugoslav state so as to dovetail with Reich foreign policy, the general attitude of the Volksdeutsche underwent a final polarization in the days between the royal coup and the start of the April War. It was then that their perceived loyalty to the Reich superseded that to Yugoslavia, its king and institutions. This is nowhere clearer than in the case of the mobilization orders issued by the Yugoslav government and how Volksdeutsche of an age to be called up responded to it.

At the same time as he decided to destroy Yugoslavia, Hitler decreed that, if called up for military service as part of a general mobilization drive, Yugoslav Volksdeutsche ought to avoid responding and go into hiding. This was justified on the pretext that Volksdeutsche recruits might be attacked or even killed by other soldiers.<sup>294</sup> This order was expanded to cover both ongoing and imminent mobilization, and specified that both current and potential Volksdeutsche recruits should try to reach the Reich rather than be drafted into the Yugoslav army, if necessary passing through Hungary on their way to Germany. It is unclear why this matter was not handled by the AA, in accordance with its hard-won supremacy in foreign-political and foreign-national matters. It seems likely that the imminence of war rendered diplomats obsolete in German-Yugoslav relations. In the event, the German Interior Ministry informed the VoMi,<sup>295</sup> and the two then passed the order to the German Ambassadors in Hungary<sup>296</sup> and Romania,<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel (head of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) to AA, March 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,506.

<sup>295</sup> Emil von Rintelen (aide to Ribbentrop, writing on behalf of Weizsäcker) to Lorenz, March 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,815.

<sup>296</sup> Weizsäcker to Erdmansdorff, March 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,761.

<sup>297</sup> Weizsäcker to Killinger, March 29, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,762.

requesting that Volksdeutsche refugees from Yugoslavia be allowed to cross the respective states' borders, given help and protection in their efforts to reach the Reich.

With the deterioration of diplomatic relations between the Reich and Yugoslavia, the question of military service for Volksdeutsche went from one of preference for service in the Waffen-SS if the recruits could leave Yugoslavia in secrecy, without upsetting relations between the two states, to that of absolute rejection of service in the Yugoslav army and, with it, residence in Yugoslavia. (Those who chose to border-jump had no means of knowing how long they might be away, though it is clear that most returned, still civilians, with the Reichsdeutsche troops entering the Banat from Romania,<sup>298</sup> while some may have been inducted into extant Waffen-SS divisions and sent to other theaters of war.)

Ordered by the Reich, such a radical breach with the state of one's birth and residence still required potential recruits to make the mental leap away from the Yugoslav context of their lives and toward an unquestioningly Reich-centric context. In the process, they committed treason against the Yugoslav state. This presented each Volksdeutsche of recruitment age with a dilemma he had to resolve on his own. It gives the lie to the facile interpretation of Volksdeutsche actions in this period as those of a unified – and uniform – treasonous fifth column unperturbed by considerations other than National Socialist ideology, which was the mainstay of postwar Yugoslav historiography.<sup>299</sup> While it remains impossible to estimate how many chose to border

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<sup>298</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 676.

<sup>299</sup> A typical example would be this quote from Đorđe Momčilović (*Zrenjaninske vatre*, p. 133): "Indeed, in this brief period of only nine days, from March 27 until the beginning of the German attack on Yugoslavia, the domestic Germans [i.e. Volksdeutsche] engaged in feverish fifth-column, spy-saboteur activity." ("I odista u kratkom vremenskom intervalu od svega devet dana, od 27. marta do početka nemačkog napada na Jugoslaviju, odigrala se grozničava petokolonaška,

jump, the material record suggests that some chose this option, while others allowed themselves to be drafted, whether out of slowness to react, fear of the unknown or a lingering sense of duty to their host state.

Reports compiled from Volksdeutsche expellees and refugees in West Germany after the war demonstrate the choices Volksdeutsche recruits could, and did, make in these fateful days. Most former Banat residents' reports on the April War stress – possibly with some embellishment after the fact in view of figures reported by the authorities in Romania (see below) – that there was no draft-dodging among their co-nationals.<sup>300</sup> A message transmitted through “Nora” suggested that the order to dodge mobilization had reached the Vojvodina Volksdeutsche too late, at a point when 90% of eligible men were already drafted in the Srem, and 70% in the Banat and the Bačka.<sup>301</sup>

A handful of postwar reports reveal more complex motives behind such a large number of Volksdeutsche men being drafted. Thus, whereas in the village of Kudritz near Werschetz some of those called up were mobilized while others fled to Romania<sup>302</sup> and in Modosch escape across the border supposedly stopped after the district president (sreski načelnik) assured the town's leading Volksdeutsche that their co-nationals had nothing to

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špijunsko-podrivnačka aktivnost domaćih Nemaca.”) At once sweeping and dismissive, Momčilović manages to pass judgment and reject the need for any deeper analysis in a few lines of text.

<sup>300</sup> Such is the unanimous assessment of expellees from as many places as Setschan (testimony of Ludwig Toutenuit (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/3, frame 603), Karlsdorf (testimony of Peter Kurjak (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/4, frame 645), Sakula (testimony of Franz Scheidt (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/6, frame 818), Kubin (testimony of Franz Kneipp (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/6, frame 832), Karlowa (testimony of Josef Lemlein (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 854), Rustendorf (testimony of Adolf Horcher (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 865), Deutsch-Etschka (testimony of Johann Keller (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 956) and Haideschütz (testimony of Berta Sohl (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1005).

<sup>301</sup> “Nora” transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/32.

<sup>302</sup> Testimony of Thomas Welter from Kudritz (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1001.

fear from the non-German population,<sup>303</sup> all save one youth called up in the village of Sankt-Hubert, which is near Grosskikinda and within walking distance of the Romanian border, literally chose the easy way out and border-jumped.<sup>304</sup> One interviewee from the village of Charleville near Modosch claimed that all those called up in his village were duly mobilized, but as he himself chose to border-jump already in February 1941 and trek across Romania, Hungary and Slovakia to Vienna in order to join the Waffen-SS, his testimony is especially dubious.<sup>305</sup> Finally, a woman from Glogau near Pantschowa, reported that there the mobilization was never even carried out as the invasion of the Banat happened too quickly, and Pantschowa being very close to Belgrade was likely deemed unworthy of separate defenses.<sup>306</sup> Clearly the choice whether or not to respond to mobilization orders depended in equal measure on the proximity of the border, an individual's ideological inclination, and the low degree of organization displayed by the Yugoslav Army in the Vojvodina (see below).

Those who chose to do so, border-jumped across the nearest border – into the Romanian Banat. The German Consul in Timișoara estimated the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche in his town at 800 recruits and recruits' family members, whereas the German Volksgruppenführer in Romania suggested that a total of some 2,000 Volksdeutsche had crossed the border from the Serbian Banat into Romania. This bears up the estimate transmitted by “Nora” about the high success rate of mobilization among Vojvodina Volksdeutsche. These official reports failed to provide first-hand reports of

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<sup>303</sup> Deposition of Jovan S. Jurišin (former district president in Modosch) to the Serbian Interior Ministry, no date but likely May 1941, Vojni arhiv, Nedićev arhiv [‘Nedić Archive’], box 20A, folder 1, document 1-25.

<sup>304</sup> Testimony of Peter Schneider from Sankt-Hubert (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 783.

<sup>305</sup> Testimony of Nikolaus Kathrein from Charleville (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frames 787-788.

<sup>306</sup> Testimony of Maria Lehr from Glogau (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 881.

any major outrages committed against the Volksdeutsche in Serbia.<sup>307</sup> These border-jumpers' primary reason for flight seems to have been the desire to avoid serving in the Yugoslav army. Either way, these Volksdeutsche had clearly resolved the problem of divided loyalty by abandoning their duty to the state whose citizens they were. Even though such a choice constituted treason against the Yugoslav state, it hardly made a large contribution to the failure of Yugoslav defenses in the April War. The ethnic German 'fifth column' did not bring about Yugoslavia's military defeat,<sup>308</sup> but those Volksdeutsche who chose to escape to Romania for the duration of the hostilities did make a clear choice between Yugoslavia and the Reich in the days preceding the actual Axis attack on the Balkans.

For the others – the majority of Vojvodina Volksdeutsche who for whatever reason did not choose to border-jump – the period March 27-April 6 was also a time of polarization. Their behavior during the April War was determined in equal parts by the clear imminence of war (and the degree to which they responded to it from a standpoint of Nazi ideology), the attitude of authorities and non-German neighbors, and their geographic location (i.e. whether they lived in the Banat or the Bačka).

In his local history-*cum*-postwar apologia, Josef Beer describes the mood of the Banat Volksdeutsche in the first days of April 1941: "In this hour of peril, all Volksdeutsche recognized their fateful bond [Schicksalsverbundenheit] with the whole German Volk; the plain likelihood of the desire to annihilate them in the near future

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<sup>307</sup> Neubacher to AA, April 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,909.

<sup>308</sup> As suggested by Janjetović (p. 53), Yugoslav Volksdeutsche hardly figured in the Reich's war plans – their disorganized actions during the April War were welcome, but hardly crucial for the Reich's military success.

impelled them into a defensive position. Their sole hope lay in a German victory.”<sup>309</sup> No less clear-cut and sweeping than statements about a Volksdeutsche fifth column made by Yugoslav historians of the postwar period, this assessment after the fact presumes that all Volksdeutsche shared the same level of identification with the Reich and its ideology in April 1941.

Most of the material record for the behavior of Vojvodina Volksdeutsche in the period March 27-April 18, 1941 is not contemporary. Apart from “Nora” transmissions and a handful of others, most documents date from immediately after the April War or from the postwar period. Even so, the image that emerges of Volksdeutsche behavior in this period suggests some ethnic tensions which exploded into serious violence on only one or two occasions, contrary to Reich propaganda. Most Volksdeutsche adopted a wait-and-see attitude, while the Yugoslav Army conducted the war in a generally desultory fashion, creating a power vacuum into which the organizational strengths of the Volksgruppe could step, backed by the armed power of the invading Reich troops.

Expellees’ reports are almost unanimous in stressing that there had been no ethnic conflict, or even tension, between ethnic Germans and non-Germans in the Banat or between the ethnic Germans and the authorities.<sup>310</sup> The exceptions mention Serbian youths’ susceptibility to nationalist authority figures, such as priests (including the Russophile Slovak Lutheran pastor in the village of Haideschütz<sup>311</sup>) and local administrators, who frowned upon “everyone who wouldn’t dance the kolo [Serbian folk

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<sup>309</sup> “In dieser Stunde der Gefahr waren sich wohl alle Volksdeutschen der Schicksalsverbundenheit mit dem ganzen deutschen Volk bewusst; in diese Abwehrfront wurden sich durch den offensichtlich auf sie zukommenden Vernichtungswillen hineingezwungen. Ihre einzige Hoffnung war ein deutscher Sieg.” Josef Beer *et al.*, *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weisskirchen im Banat* (Salzburg: Verein Weisskirchner Ortsgemeinschaft, 1980), p. 169.

<sup>310</sup> LAA, Ost-Dok. 17, *passim*.

<sup>311</sup> Sohl testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1005.

dance].”<sup>312</sup> Even so, the worst outrages mentioned were limited to minor damage to property – broken windows, excrement smeared on door posts and swastikas daubed on walls<sup>313</sup> – the rather haphazard requisitioning of horses, radios, hunting rifles, bicycles, motorcycles and food by the Yugoslav Army and Četnici,<sup>314</sup> and verbal threats, as when a few dozen Serbs drove through Volksdeutsche villages near Grosskikinda on March 27, firing pistols into the air and ‘laying claim’ to German houses for poorly paid Serbian state employees.<sup>315</sup>

As for the Volksgruppenführung, it spent the period from the royal coup until the Yugoslav surrender isolated in its Novi Sad (Bačka) headquarters, Habag-Haus. On March 27, Janko and other members of the Volksgruppenführung were placed under house arrest. However, already on March 29, after Janko issued – in agreement with Novi Sad’s police chief – the telegram congratulating King Petar II on his accession and suspended Kulturbund activities, he was released and, even, assigned plainclothes policemen as a protective escort. A cordon of police was formed around Habag-Haus in order to protect it from attacks by Četnici. Even Volksdeutsche memoirists acknowledge that this police presence averted violence against leading Volksdeutsche.<sup>316</sup> This was clearly another attempt by General Simović’s government to mollify the Reich by treating the Volksgruppenführung with every courtesy, and was recognized as such by

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<sup>312</sup> “Ein jeder, der nicht Kolo tanzen wollte, war schon als Feind betrachtet worden.” Welter testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1001.

<sup>313</sup> Testimony of Michael Havranek from Pavlis (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1043.

<sup>314</sup> Testimony of Hans Stein from Franzfeld in Stefanović, p. 84; testimony of Elisabeth Mojse from Karlsdorf (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/4, frame 651; Toussaint and Feine to AA, April 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,925.

<sup>315</sup> Schneider testimony (Sankt-Hubert, 1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 782.

<sup>316</sup> Beer, “Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frames 670-673.

the German Embassy in Belgrade,<sup>317</sup> contrary to the Reich press' descriptions of police menace and policemen forcing their way into Janko's residence.<sup>318</sup>

Despite the failure of this scheme, it did succeed in keeping the Volksgruppenführung gathered in one place and relatively free to move around, although this did not give it any special organizational advantage. Until April 6, its initiatives were limited to following developments on the radio, sandbagging the building and bringing in a smaller quantity of firearms in case the building was besieged.<sup>319</sup> A general breakdown of communications left the Volksgruppenführung out of the loop regarding troop movements and the Reich's war plans. It demanded to be informed of war plans through "Nora" in order to make preparations, but was ignored and left to coin elaborate – and useless – schemes about using white sheets to mark landing spots for Luftwaffe airplanes and paratroopers.<sup>320</sup> The lack of clear communication also left Volksdeutsche in villages and towns outside Novi Sad to their own devices even before hostilities broke out.

This goes a long way toward explaining the fact that such disparate reactions to Yugoslav mobilization and the dodging thereof are evident in so small a geographic region as the Banat. The most decisive move Janko made in this regard was not to place objections to recruits living near the Romanian border fleeing across it. He was not the only less than efficient German authority figure in the northern Balkans at this time: the Abwehr (German military intelligence) attempted to smuggle weapons to Yugoslav Volksdeutsche starting on April 1, but the personnel in charge was fired upon by

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<sup>317</sup> Feine to AA, April 1, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,755.

<sup>318</sup> "Deutsche Volksgruppenführer unter Polizeiaufsicht," *Pester Lloyd*, April 1, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 28874, no page number.

<sup>319</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frames 674-675.

<sup>320</sup> "Nora" transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/19; Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 676.

Romanian troops and had its weapons caches seized by Hungarian border patrols.<sup>321</sup>

Either way, the lack of communication meant that no uniform order was issued to the Vojvodina Volksdeutsche from Habag-Haus either before or after the April War started, without a formal declaration, by the Luftwaffe's early-morning bombing of Belgrade on Orthodox Easter Sunday, April 6, 1941.<sup>322</sup>

The manner in which the April War began – without announcement beforehand and by the bombing of civilian targets – came as a shock, but not as a surprise. The likelihood of war had become generally accepted since March 27, but its outbreak left the already nervous and temporarily disorganized Volksgruppe groping for a plan of action. None was forthcoming. In Novi Sad, the Volksgruppenführung was limited even more than before April 6 by the police guard still protecting Habag-Haus, and the agreement they reached with the city's police chief that the ethnic Germans and the Serbs shared a cause: their common fear of a Hungarian invasion. Once the police guard and the army abandoned the city on April 10 or 11, blowing up the Danube bridge behind them in order to cut off access to Belgrade, the Volksdeutsche in the city were left to their own devices. They used boats to cross the Danube to the Peterwaradein fortress, where they easily liberated the several hundred Volksdeutsche hostages from all over the Vojvodina (arrested at war's start then abandoned by the Yugoslav Army), and brought them to Habag-Haus.<sup>323</sup>

The withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army from all of the Vojvodina meant that for some 72 hours a power vacuum existed in Novi Sad before the Hungarian army marched

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<sup>321</sup> Summary of "Jupiter" reports from Yugoslavia from March 27-April 12, 1941, BA MA, RW 5, file 497, pp. 132-133; Shimizu, pp. 87-88.

<sup>322</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 675.

<sup>323</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frames 676-679.

into the city on April 13, one week after hostilities broke out. The Volksgruppenführung filled this vacuum by disarming the few remaining Yugoslav soldiers, organizing a citizens' militia to keep the peace, composed of Volksdeutsche, Serbian and ethnic Hungarian civilians as well as a handful remaining gendarmes, and seizing stores of weapons and food in order to feed the released hostages and prevent Serbian or Hungarian nationalists from getting them.<sup>324</sup> Sepp Janko even organized a public celebration of the hoped-for imminent arrival of the Wehrmacht, complete with hastily sewn swastika flags, a Romany orchestra playing the Deutschland-Lied, and the potent living symbol of a single Reichsdeutsche soldier, who had, along with one other, lost his way and been literally seized by the Volksdeutsche of Bačka Palanka after his motorcycle broke down, then brought to Novi Sad against his will to be acclaimed as victor and liberator.<sup>325</sup>

These first acts of the Volksgruppenführung in *de facto*, if not *de jure* power suggest that Janko and his cohorts still relied exclusively on the arrival of Reich armed forces to justify and confirm their actions. All the measures undertaken were of a practical and stop-gap nature, rather than long-term moves intended to secure control of administrative posts and resources such as land or factories. The Volksdeutsche of Novi Sad cannot have been thinking of establishing their own state. If anything, they hoped that with the Wehrmacht's indisputable presence a state might be given to them. The

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<sup>324</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frames 681, 683.

The evidence for similar events in the Banat is very patchy, but at least one postwar deposition describes an amicable handover of executive power in Panchowa on the part of departing Yugoslav administrators, and the successful formation of a Volksdeutsche-ethnic Hungarian militia armed with weapons taken off of retreating Yugoslav soldiers. Solman deposition, December 13, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 670, p. 16.

<sup>325</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frames 679-680; Shimizu, pp. 95-96.

slightly grotesque, even carnivalesque atmosphere of the victory celebration described bears this out: the old order was gone, but instead of establishing a new one, the Volksdeutsche of Novi Sad threw a liberating party, a celebration in limbo. A return to normalcy hinged on the arrival of an outside force in the shape of an invading army.

The Hungarian invasion of the Bačka had a devastating effect on the Volksgruppenführung and the mass of resident Volksdeutsche alike. Partly this was due to the Hungarian soldiers' violent behavior, in contravention of orders, in the course of which they especially targeted ethnic Germans. Besides the usual litany of broken windows, swastika flags torn down and verbal insults, several Volksdeutsche civilians were shot. Honvéd soldiers – inspired by equal parts chauvinism, the euphoria of an easy victory, and nervousness over a handful of snipers concealed in the rooftops<sup>326</sup> – fired indiscriminately, engaged in robbery and inflicted wanton damage on Volksdeutsche property in Bačka villages and Novi Sad, under the pretext that everything there was now Hungarian.<sup>327</sup> More than the loss of life and property, Hungarian occupation had a

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<sup>326</sup> None of the sources identify these snipers by ethnicity, though at the time the Volksgruppenführung guessed these were people driven to desperation by the prospect of returning to Hungarian rule, hence could have been Serbs, ethnic Germans or others. Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 683.

<sup>327</sup> Rintelen to AA, April 22, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100937 Geheime Verschlussachen des Referats Kult A (Jugoslawien), 1941, fiche 2419, frames H297,849-851; Lorenz to OKW, April 16, 1941, PA AA Inland II Geheim, R 100937, fiche 2419, frame H297,859; Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frames 683-685; "Bericht über den Brandschaden der "Jugo-Agrar" A.G. in Neusatz," April 23, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/531/5,299,462-465.

In late April 1941, Regent Horthy ordered an investigation into these shootings of Volksdeutsche civilians. Unlike in the case of the January 1942 'razzia,' during which Hungarian soldiers and civilians indiscriminately murdered Jews in Novi Sad and were then thoroughly investigated and punished by their own side, little was accomplished in *this* investigation. The Hungarian side took refuge in excuses of necessary anti-guerrilla action and platitudes about Hungarian-German friendship. Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Budapest, April 23, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 392; Erdmannsdorff to AA, May 7, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100939 Volksdeutsche: Jugoslawien, Banat und Batschka, 1941-1944, fiche 2423, no frame numbers.

disastrous effect on Volksdeutsche morale. Janko had repeated messages transmitted by “Nora,” expressing the Volksgruppe’s sense of betrayal by the Reich it idealized:

We are disappointed, embittered and outraged. What are the Hungarians doing here? We would rather spend the rest of our lives under the Hottentots, than live one day under the blessings of St. Stephen’s Crown and be delivered to our enemies’ ridicule.<sup>328</sup>

700.000 Volksdeutsche are waiting in vain for an answer why the Reich has left us in the lurch. We call and call for help, but receive not the shadow of a response. It’s enough to drive one to despair.<sup>329</sup>

We urge once again that occupation by German troops [take place], as they have already crossed the Danube into western Bačka.<sup>330</sup>

Send the army urgently, we are in a terrible position. Answer us!<sup>331</sup>

The Volksgruppe despairs because of its delivery to the Asiatics. Our position very critical. Any moment now we expect catastrophe. Send German troops at once.<sup>332</sup>

Despite previous disappointments, such as the negative impression left by Reich personnel engaged in the resettlement of the Bessarabian Volksdeutsche, nothing had previously shaken the average Vojvodina Volksdeutscher’s idealized view of the Reich, its policies and people to such an extent. Hungarian-German rivalry in Southeast Europe aside, the behavior of the invading Hungarians and Berlin’s failure to soothe Bačka

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<sup>328</sup> “Wir sind gleichermassen enttäuscht, erbittert wie empört. Was suchen die Magyaren hier? Lieber zeitlebens unter Hottentoten, als auch nur einen Tag die Segnungen der Idee der heiligen Stephanskronen über sich ergehen lassen und dem Spott unserer Renegaten ausgeliefert sein.” “Nora” transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/62.

<sup>329</sup> “700.000 Volksdeutsche warten vergeblich auf eine Antwort, warum uns das Reich so im Stich lässt. Auf keinen Hilferuf auch nur der Schein einer Antwort. Es ist zum Verzweifeln.” “Nora” transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/65.

<sup>330</sup> “Urgieren nochmals Besetzung durch deutsche Truppen, welche bereits in Westbatschka die Donau überschritten haben.” “Nora” transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/66.

<sup>331</sup> “Dringend Militär entsenden da wir in peinlichster Lage. Antwortet!” “Nora” transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/67.

<sup>332</sup> “Volksgruppe ist wegen Auslieferung an Asiaten verzweifelt. Lage äusserst kritisch. Erwarten jeden Augenblick Katastrophe. Entsendet dringend deutsche Truppen.” “Nora” transcript, no date, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 30/68.

Volksdeutsche pride with a few words of consolation was a very hard come-down from the heady atmosphere of the previous few days.

The April War in the Banat lacked the initial euphoria evident in Novi Sad, but it also lacked the final, crushing disappointment. The most traumatic aspect was the taking of Volksdeutsche hostages by the Yugoslav army and gendarmerie in the first days of the hostilities. Mostly transported to Belgrade or Peterwaradein, these men returned safely, often even before the Yugoslav army demanded an armistice.<sup>333</sup> There is only one documented case of hostages coming to harm: nine men from Pantschowa were taken south of the Danube, abused, stabbed to death and buried in an unmarked grave by a small group of Yugoslav soldiers. The Reich press augmented this into a tale of German heroes dying with ‘Heil Hitler’ as their last words, and the bodies were reburied with great pomp in Pantschowa town square on April 22.<sup>334</sup>

However, this gruesome incident ran counter to several cases in which non-Germans protected their Volksdeutsche neighbors, and were aided in this by hostage-taking clearly being a low priority for the soldiers and gendarmes in the Banat. On several occasions Volksdeutsche hid or escaped to Romania with the (at least tacit) help of their Serbian neighbors.<sup>335</sup> One sergeant in charge of some ninety hostages, clearly

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<sup>333</sup> Testimony of Katharina Schneider from Kubin (1952), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/392, frame 48; Kurjak testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/4, frame 645; Mojse testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/4, frames 650-651; Kathrein testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 787; Horcher testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 865; Lehr testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 881; Keller testimony (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 956; Sohl testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1005.

<sup>334</sup> “Neun Volksdeutsche von serbischer Soldateska verschleppt und gemordet,” *VB*, April 24, 1941, BA Berlin, R 8034 II, volume 2489, p. 61; testimony of Heinrich Köller from Pantschowa in Stefanović, 114; see also Stefanović, pp. 247-248.

<sup>335</sup> Testimony of Jakob Laping from Mastort (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 744; Schneider testimony (Sankt-Hubert, 1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 783; Lehr testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 881; Welter testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1001.

realizing the futility of the endeavor and the overwhelming odds in favor of an Axis victory, made the choice much like that made by Volksdeutsche draft-dodgers and took his charges not to Belgrade, but to an isolated landholding, where they all waited for the Reich troops' arrival together.<sup>336</sup> When a train carrying three hundred hostages from several villages was simply abandoned at the railway station in Deutsch-Zerne near Grosskikinda, the village's Serbian notary, Orthodox priest and head of the village council let the hostages go.<sup>337</sup> In Kubin the priest and several hundred Serbs invoked the precedent set in 1914, when the town's Serbian hostages were released after the outbreak of World War I.<sup>338</sup> And in Modosch the Serbian peasant who was also acting mayor persuaded the gendarmerie sergeant in charge that different ethnicities had lived in peace for hundreds of years, and would need to live together in the future as well: the hostages were released already on April 6.<sup>339</sup>

The most touching example of mutual respect between ethnicities happened in Perlas, where on April 7, one day after the outbreak of war, the most prominent Serbs, ethnic Croats and Volksdeutsche drafted and signed a bilingual statement in which they vouched for each other's loyalty to the state, correct behavior, and safety.<sup>340</sup> Not even presuming to influence the course of the war, this level-headed document remained focused on village matters in the hope of preventing unnecessary destruction and suffering, whatever the outcome of the April War in the Banat. Like most such

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<sup>336</sup> Schneider testimony (Kubin, 1952), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/392, frame 48.

<sup>337</sup> Testimony of Josef Stirbel from Deutsch-Zerne (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 702; testimony of Hans Klein from Heufeld (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 715.

<sup>338</sup> Kneipp testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/6, frame 832.

<sup>339</sup> Testimony of Johann Kunz and Josef Burger from Modosch (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 729.

<sup>340</sup> "Izjava," April 7, 1941, LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/395, frame 18; testimony of Franz Schmidt from Perlas (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/395, frames 183-184.

documents, it was more successful as a moral victory than as an influence on policy in the occupied Banat. The decision taken by several groups of Serbs and other non-Germans to aid their Volksdeutsche neighbors should not be taken as an indication of a general loss of loyalty to Yugoslavia. Rather as the Vojvodina's civilian population was abandoned by the army supposed to protect it in those few April days, the inevitability of foreign occupation narrowed at least some people's focus from the national to the local and personal – and that included safeguarding not only one's family and property, but one's village and all its residents as well.

The actual course of the April War in the Banat was swift and mostly uneventful. The Yugoslav army withdrew, along with most Serbian administrators and notaries, from all the villages and towns of the Banat between April 6 and 11, falling back toward Belgrade, blowing up bridges behind it, as it was doing in the Bačka. The Wehrmacht's Infanterie-Regiment "Grossdeutschland" (Infantry Regiment "Grossdeutschland") and the 2. SS-Panzer-Division "Das Reich" (2<sup>nd</sup> SS Armored Division "Das Reich") succeeded it, sometimes in a matter of hours,<sup>341</sup> arriving mostly on foot because the heavy rains of the previous days and the poor condition of the roads necessitated that tanks be left behind in Romania.<sup>342</sup> The Yugoslav retreat was so quick that there was less opportunity for Banat Volksdeutsche to disarm soldiers, as mostly anecdotal evidence –

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<sup>341</sup> LAA, Ost-Dok. 17, *passim*; Jurišin deposition (no date), Vojni arhiv, Nedićev arhiv, box 20A, folder 1, document 1-25; Vogel, pp. 490, 519.

<sup>342</sup> Anonymous, "Bericht über den Marsch der SS-Division "Reich" von Frankreich nach Rumänien und den Einsatz am 11. und 12.4.41 nördl. Belgrad.", no date, NARA, RG 242, T-354 [Records of the Waffen-SS]/122/3,755,636.

picked up on and augmented in postwar Yugoslav historiography – suggests happened often in the Bačka.<sup>343</sup>

Even so, Operation Jupiter transmissions suggest that Volksdeutsche living in villages along the Romanian border were already partially armed when Jupiter personnel, having failed to smuggle weapons into Yugoslavia in the first days of April, finally managed to deliver weapons caches on April 7-8.<sup>344</sup> These were then used in the villages of Mastort and Heufeld to repel attempts by lone gendarmes to take hostages, and later to repel an attempt at retaliation for the killing of said gendarmes.<sup>345</sup> Records do not, however, mention whether the Volksdeutsche were originally armed with hunting rifles or guns taken from hastily departing Yugoslav soldiers, though the former seems more likely as the villagers took the defense of their village into their own hands before the Yugoslav army was ordered to retreat. In any case, the battle of Heufeld and Mastort is about the most that a Volksdeutsche ‘fifth column’ had the means, opportunity and time to do before Reich forces entered the Serbian Banat.

### Liberation/Occupation

It would be fair to conclude that a large number of Banat Volksdeutsche greeted the occupation of the Banat by German forces as true liberation and virtual union with their ancestral and racial homeland, the Third Reich. Articles in the *Deutsches Volksblatt*,

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<sup>343</sup> Testimony of M. R. from Franzfeld (1957) in Schieder, pp. 65-67; “Das Banat durch deutsche Truppen Besetzt,” *DV*, April 19, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>344</sup> “Jupiter” summary, BA MA, RW 5, file 497, pp. 139-140.

<sup>345</sup> Klein testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frames 715-716.

Unlike the futile calls for aid issuing from Habag-Haus, these Banat villagers had more luck, as a handful of Wehrmacht soldiers responded to their appeals, crossed the border ahead of the scheduled invasion, and helped repel the second wave of attack in the battle of Heufeld and Mastort.

although an example of the controlled press and not entirely reliable – not least due to its being published in Novi Sad in the Bačka (newly occupied by the Hungarian army) and therefore lacking first-hand information from the Banat – nonetheless conveys a clear message of liberation and joy emanating from the Banat Volksdeutsche. They describe a sense of destiny fulfilled, the Banat reclaimed as a truly German land, thus effectively united with the Reich.<sup>346</sup> In a report prepared in 1958, Josef Beer insists that it was a matter of local pride for each Volksdeutsche village in the Banat to feast at least one or two Reichsdeutsche soldiers, “almost drag[ging] them out of their tanks for joy.”<sup>347</sup>

The new Reichsdeutsche military commanders encouraged Volksdeutsche to display the swastika flag.<sup>348</sup> Some of those who responded had never shown Nazi or Erneurer sympathies before,<sup>349</sup> suggesting that for many ordinary Volksdeutsche the path to collaboration was paved by perceived kinship with the German Reich, regardless of ideological conviction or lack thereof. Repeated references in the Volksdeutsche press to this abundance of swastika flags as a visible sign of the Banat’s liberation from Yugoslav rule<sup>350</sup> are confirmed by photographs from the dual celebrations of the Wehrmacht’s arrival and Hitler’s birthday.<sup>351</sup> For the latter occasion and the Mayday celebrations following it, the municipal building in Grossbetschkerek was decorated with a banner

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<sup>346</sup> Unknown *DV* article quoted in a report by Hauptmann Bruno Kremling, liaison officer between the German Volksgruppe in the Bačka and the Honvéd, April 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,880.

<sup>347</sup> “vor Freude fast von ihren Panzern heruntergerissen worden.” Josef Beer, “Interregnum in das Banat” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/163, frame 1247.

<sup>348</sup> Ortskommandantur Alisbrunn, “Standortbefehl Kr. 1.”, April 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-354/130/3,766,925.

<sup>349</sup> M. R. testimony (1957) in Schieder, p. 65.

<sup>350</sup> “Das Banat durch deutsche Truppen Besetzt,” *DV*, April 19, 1941; “Wie Gross-Betschkerek befreit wurde,” *DV*, April 29, 1941, p. 5; “Deutscher Soldat erlebt das Banat,” *DV*, April 30, 1941, p. 5.

<sup>351</sup> *DV*, May 1, 1941, p. 6; *DV*, May 3, 1941, p. 6.

declaring “This land was and remains German,”<sup>352</sup> a pointed gesture directed at Hungarian territorial ambition and the more reticent Volksdeutsche alike.

These celebrations were organized by the Volksgruppe leaders in the Banat, men of Janko’s generation and ideas. As such, these celebrations certainly did not represent the sentiments of all Volksdeutsche, some of whom made postwar statements hinting at a measure of skepticism toward the Reich German presence. An expellee from the village of Franzfeld made the plausible argument that a generation gap dictated reactions to the Wehrmacht’s arrival: whereas the younger members of the Volksdeutsche community greeted the Wehrmacht with enthusiasm, the older generation (whose members had probably supported the older, pre-Janko leadership of the Kulturbund) was more skeptical and advised caution in relations with non-German neighbors, but their voices were drowned out by the euphoria and enthusiasm of the younger Volksdeutsche.<sup>353</sup>

Ideological agreement between the Reich forces occupying the Banat and the nascent Volksdeutsche administration there ensured that the voices of the local Nazified core group were the only ones allowed to speak for the Banat Volksdeutsche community.

In any case, Nazi and non-Nazi Volksdeutsche shared one sentiment: relief at not being occupied by the Hungarians – hated masters in the Habsburg era, whose revisionism remained a sore point in northern Yugoslavia throughout the interwar period, and whose “feudal system” was a bad memory even for ethnic Hungarian peasants<sup>354</sup> – or

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<sup>352</sup> ““Dieses Land war und bleibt deutsch”” Josef Beer, “Der Aufbau der Volksgruppenverwaltung im Banat” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/35, frame 630.

<sup>353</sup> M. R. testimony (1957) in Schieder, pp. 65-67.

<sup>354</sup> “Feudal-System” Jung to AA, August 7, 1940, PA AA Inland II Geheim, R 101097 SD-Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1940, fiche 2831, no frame number.

even by the Romanians. This relief was likely felt not just by the Volksdeutsche, but by other residents of the Banat as well<sup>355</sup> – except, of course, the Banat Jews.

The opposite was true of Volksdeutsche in the Bačka, where in the weeks following the Hungarian invasion the accusations leveled against them revolved around their refusal to accept the need to ‘become Hungarian’ overnight. The Volksdeutsche flaunted Hungarian regulations by displaying swastika flags, calling Hitler rather than Horthy their Führer, insisting on special status or even a separate territory, speaking German in public, etc.<sup>356</sup> Some of this was sheer stubbornness and desperation, but some of it was also a reaction to legitimate concerns shared by Serbs and ethnic Croats who also could not speak Hungarian and suddenly found themselves out of work or unable to attend school in the Bačka. Real ethnic tension was the result, intensifying the Volksgruppenführung’s desire for a separate solution to its problems.

The creation of a separate territorial unit for the Volksdeutsche of the Danube Basin – whether a separate Gau of an expanded Reich or an independent state of the Donauschwaben (Danube Swabians) – tied economically, racially and administratively to Belgrade as a Reich fortress (Reichsfestung), is a mainstay of postwar Yugoslav historiography on the subject. It is premised on notions of plans to Germanize the Danube Basin dating back to the time of Eugene of Savoy, the presence of a highly organized

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<sup>355</sup> In the village of Haideschütz near the Serbo-Romanian border, Volksdeutsche, Serbs and ethnic Slovaks alike greeted the Reichsdeutsche soldiers with food, drink and tobacco, likely relieved at not being occupied by the Romanian army. Sohl testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1006.

<sup>356</sup> Richard Ternes, “Bericht über den Besuch beim Platzkommandanten General-Major Veress, Kommandant der Kavalleriebrigade, in Neusatz am 18.4.1941,” NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,984; Bruno Kremling, “Die ungarische Besatzungsbehörde und ihre Auffassung von der staatlichen Neuregelung in der Batschka und im Banat,” April 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/531/5,299,474-477; Friedrich Hess, “Bericht über das Verhalten der ungarischen Truppen in Batschka Palanka,” April 21, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/531/5,299,478-479; Dr. Adam Naurus, “Bericht über Schulfragen,” April 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/531/5,299,489.

fifth column, its absolute concord and complicity with the Reich, and the Volksgruppenführung's rejection of Yugoslavia as a viable state as early as 1939.<sup>357</sup> Ironically, this interpretation by historians working within a communist interpretative framework echoes exactly ideological tropes about Prince Eugene as the father of a German Banat and the Volksdeutsche peasants' role in purifying and fortifying it, developed by the Volksdeutsche of the Serbian Banat in the period 1941-1944 (see Chapter 6).

In truth, there was some historical precedent for the idea of a Volksdeutsche state in the Vojvodina. At the turn of 1918-1919, in the process of the creation of post-World War I Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Volksdeutsche Nationalräte (national councils) existed briefly in Grossbetschkerek and Timișoara, but came to naught as the Banat was split between the two new states.<sup>358</sup> The Volksdeutsche in the Romanian Banat agitated for the reunification of a German Banat in 1940, to no avail.<sup>359</sup> On the heels of the Reichsdeutsche invasion of the Serbian Banat, Andreas Schmidt, Volksgruppenführer in Romania, drafted his own proposal for a Donauprotektorat comprising all the territories inhabited by Volksdeutsche along the lower Danube (including parts of Hungary and Romania), so as to ensure the "re-

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<sup>357</sup> Nikola Božić and Ratko Mitrović, "Vojvodina i Beograd sa okolinom u planovima Trećeg Rajha," *Zbornik za društvene nauke*, No. 48 (1967), pp. 117, 119-120.

<sup>358</sup> Otto Franz Kern, "Das Deutschtum im ehemaligen Jugoslawien," *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 5, May 1941, p. 160.

<sup>359</sup> Štab komande Dunavske divizijske oblasti to garnizon zemunske garnizonske uprave, October 26, 1940, NARA, RG 242, T-120 Yugoslav Archive/835/no frame number.

Germanization”<sup>360</sup> of these areas and prevent their being “delivered any longer into slavery in less worthy armies with half-Asiatic sergeants.”<sup>361</sup>

Apart from the revelation that Schmidt had clearly had bad experiences serving in the Romanian army, this document aped Heinrich Himmler’s own schemes for the Germanization of the East, and referred the proposed Protectorate directly to securing the flank of the German conquest of the East. Berger passed it to Himmler on April 17, while the future organization of the Danube Basin was being ironed out within the Reich government.

Two meetings took place in Vienna on April 17 and 18, under the chairmanship of the AA representative Karl Ritter and State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart representing the Reich Interior Ministry. Whereas the official AA line remained the territorial division of Yugoslavia as it was at the end of the April War, Ribbentrop’s other representative Helmut Triska (head of the Volkstumsreferat, the AA office for Volkstum issues) – and, at the second meeting, Stuckart himself – objected that this division paid more attention to territory than to the ethnic composition of Yugoslavia. Proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Third Reich’s diplomatic core was as ideological as any other Reich institution, the AA took the stance that Volkstum ought to be the yardstick of the Reich’s territorial policy in Southeast Europe. Both Triska and Stuckart objected to the fact that the extant demarcation lines separated the Vojvodina Volksdeutsche community from that of the Volksdeutsche living in the rest of Danube Basin.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> “Rückgermanisierung” Andreas Schmidt (Volksgruppenführer in Romania) memo, April 15, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2724, fiche 1, frame 42.

<sup>361</sup> “nicht mehr der Sklaverei in minderwertigen Heeren mit halbasiatischen Feldwebeln ausgeliefert sind” *Ibid.*

<sup>362</sup> Triska memo, April 21, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,521-523.

In the spirit of hammering out practical guidelines without abandoning long-term ideological plans, Stuckart accepted the necessity of maintaining extant zones of occupation in Yugoslavia. However, he also proposed four theses on the general treatment of Volksdeutsche living in former Yugoslavia, which show how he reconciled the current territorial settlement with Nazi ideology. These theses were: the creation of autonomous administrative areas everywhere where the Volksdeutsche had a relative or absolute majority (achieved, if need be, through resettlement); full cultural, linguistic, educational, economic and organizational rights for these separate Volksdeutsche communities; the possibility of dual – Reich as well as host-country – citizenship to ensure their long-term protection inside the host countries; and, again, the possibility of resettlement, either of Volksdeutsche to the Reich or of non-Germans from the areas where Volksdeutsche resided.<sup>363</sup> This was rather more grandiose – and nebulous – than Schmidt’s proposal. (It is more likely that Schmidt demonstrated in his document a firm grasp of National Socialism, than that his proposal influenced Himmler, Stuckart and the AA to consider the future possibility of a Volksdeutsche-centric Danube Basin.)

Stuckart’s were general, long-term proposals. In the short run, the Bačka remained under Hungarian occupation, while the Banat was appended to Reichsdeutsche-occupied Serbia proper, in violation of the Volkstum principle but in line with the exigencies of power politics inside the Axis Pact. The Volksdeutsche in the Independent State of Croatia and in partitioned Slovenia<sup>364</sup> were cared for separately. This did not

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<sup>363</sup> State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart (Reich Interior Ministry), “Einzelthesen über die deutschen Volksgruppen im ehemaligen Jugoslawien,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,525.

<sup>364</sup> Wartime Slovenia was divided between the Third Reich, Hungary, Italy, and the Independent State of Croatia.

resolve the issue of leadership: the Vojvodina Volksdeutsche, split now between three zones (the Srem fell to Croatia), only had one Volksgruppenführer, Sepp Janko.

Shortly after the Honvéd occupied Novi Sad, Janko was summoned to attend on Ribbentrop and Himmler in Berlin, and remained there for nearly a month, leaving the Volksgruppe not only territorially divided, but also leaderless. The Volksgruppenführer in Hungary, Franz Basch, arrived in Novi Sad in Janko's absence and peremptorily announced his jurisdiction over the Volksdeutsche living in the Bačka, the Baranja, and even the Banat.<sup>365</sup> The leading Volksdeutsche in the Banat were the only ones of the three who could give the lie to Basch's ambition, since they were not under Hungarian occupation. They had the backing of the regiment "Grossdeutschland," which supported the Banat Volksdeutsche in filling the key administrative positions in railways, communications, local administration and police, left vacant by the fleeing Serbian officials.

This suggests two things: that, even lacking a real Volksgruppenführung of their own, there were enough skilled Volksdeutsche to fill the most necessary posts, and that the main reason why this grassroots initiative succeeded was an absence of Reich directives regarding the territorial disposition of the Banat. This absence of clear orders allowed "Grossdeutschland" officers to play out a fantasy of state-building in miniature in the Banat in mid-April 1941, going so far as to have one of their own accompany two Volksdeutsche administrators on a trip to Novi Sad on April 29. These three met with the Volksgruppenführung (minus Janko), and proposed that the Volksgruppenführung should move to the Banat and help create a Danube German state there.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Beer, "Die Haltung der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 687.

<sup>366</sup> Beer, "Interregnum" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/163, frames 1248-1249.

It may never be known for certain whether the idea of proclaiming a separate German state in the Serbian Banat came from an order-less “Grossdeutschland” officer or from a Banat Volksdeutscher euphoric with relief at not being occupied by the Honvéd, the memory of the 1918-1919 Nationalrat and semi-legendary stories of Prince Eugene of Savoy.<sup>367</sup> The overall picture of the weeks immediately following the April War in the Banat is that of a civilian power vacuum, with some Volksdeutsche trying to preserve a semblance of order by resurrecting day-to-day administration, while others indulged in plunder – especially of Jewish property – and wild political demands. The Reich Germans, meanwhile, had too few men and resources, and absolutely no orders to fall back on.<sup>368</sup>

From a practical standpoint, the Volksgruppenführung was starting to realize that it was hardly going to get a better deal from the Hungarians. They agreed to send Janko’s deputy Josef Beer to the Banat to initiate the process of creating a separate Volksdeutsche state. It is possible that they were spurred on by the desire to get out from under Basch’s thumb even more than faith in the success of a Freistaat Banat. In his 1958 report, Beer

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To be fair, on the eve of the invasion of Yugoslavia Helmut Triska of the AA mentioned the possibility of a Reichsgau Banat in passing, but stresses that the final territorial settlement in the Balkans would not be possible before war’s end either way. He never brought up the issue again. Triska to Under-State Secretary Martin Luther (AA), April 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/152,801.

<sup>367</sup> A contemporary report was circumspect in stating merely that “Grossdeutschland” officers supported the Volksdeutsche’s belief in an imminent declaration of a Freistaat Banat. Harald Turner (head of the Reichsdeutsche civilian administration in occupied Serbia), “1. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” May 26, 1941, Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), RW 40 Territoriale Befehlshaber in Südosteuropa, file 183, p. 4.

In his memoirs, Janko is quick to place all the blame for the abortive attempt on the commander of division “Grossdeutschland,” thus conveniently exculpating the Banat Volksdeutsche. Janko, *Weg*, p. 88.

<sup>368</sup> Zöllner (SS-Untersturmführer in Grossbetschkerek) to Ehlich (SS-Obersturmführer with Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Belgrade), June 2, 1941, Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena [‘Name Registry’], file J-167, pp. 3, 5-6.

states explicitly that the reason he took on the task was so that Janko would not be tainted by possible failure.<sup>369</sup>

The Reich would likely have heard of the preparations for the proclamation of a Freistaat Banat even without local informers, but informers did not fail to materialize. Gustav Halwax contacted Reinhard Heydrich, who ordered the plans to be “nipped in the bud.”<sup>370</sup> Janko was called to task by Ribbentrop for his Volksgruppe’s failure to accept its position as receiver of Reich orders, not initiator of policies.<sup>371</sup> On May 16, 1941 Ribbentrop followed this up by ratifying the decision for Janko and the rest of the Volksgruppenführung to relocate from the Bačka to the Banat. Janko would take over as Volksgruppenführer of a diminished Volksgruppe in the Reich’s zone of occupation in Serbia-Banat, whereas Basch’s authority over the Volksdeutsche in the newly expanded Hungary was confirmed.<sup>372</sup> This decision was passed off to the Volksdeutsche of former Yugoslavia as one made jointly by Janko, Basch and Branimir Altgayer, the new Volksgruppenführer in the Independent State of Croatia,<sup>373</sup> but was very clearly a result of the Reich’s territorial settlement with Hungary in former Yugoslavia.

Accordingly, Janko and the Volksgruppenführung moved to Grossbetschkerek in the second half of May 1941, and were greeted with jubilation by the Nazified strata of the Banat Volksdeutsche.<sup>374</sup> The members of the new Banat Volksgruppenführung did

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<sup>369</sup> Beer, “Interregnum” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/163, frame 1249.

<sup>370</sup> ““Versuch im Keime zu ersticken”” Reinhard Heydrich (RSHA head) quoted in Shimizu, p. 122.

<sup>371</sup> Janko, *Weg*, p. 88.

<sup>372</sup> Rimann to AA, May 16, 1941, T-120/2415/E221,491-492.

<sup>373</sup> “Volksgruppenführer Dr. Franz Basch in der rückgegliederten Batschka,” *DV*, May 23, 1941, p. 2.

<sup>374</sup> “Die Ankunft des Volksgruppenführers Dr. Sepp Janko in Grossbetschkerek,” *DV*, June 15, 1941, p. 5.

not mind much: by moving to the “little Banat”<sup>375</sup> they could act as masters in their own administrative fiefdom, answering to no greater Volksdeutsche authority. The Third Reich alone stood above them, and would determine the policies they enacted.

### Conclusion

In the Third Reich, Volksdeutsche affairs fell within two jurisdictions: that of the diplomatic corps under Joachim von Ribbentrop, and that of the ideological elite under Heinrich Himmler. These two would compete for the right to make major Volkstum-related decisions until the very end of World War II. In January 1941, Ribbentrop temporarily won the upper hand. This merely confirmed a state of affairs current since the war began fifteen months earlier: Reich diplomacy dictated relations between Berlin, various Volksdeutsche communities and the host states in which the Volksdeutsche resided. The Volksdeutsche in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia depended on the balance of power between the Reich, its allies Hungary and Romania, and Yugoslavia as a coveted ally. Hitler’s desire to entice the latter into joining the Axis Pact meant that Yugoslav Volksdeutsche could only be supported in their new, Nazified leadership’s desire for closer ties with the Reich by unofficial or clandestine methods which would not upset the precarious ethnic and political status quo inside Yugoslavia. Once war with Yugoslavia became imminent, the very real need to prevent Hungary and Romania from starting a localized war over territory determined that the Serbian Banat was occupied by Reich forces.

Throughout the last months of 1940 and the first months of 1941, minute shifts of the Reich’s foreign policy in Southeast Europe and the continued challenge Himmler

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<sup>375</sup> “kleine Banat” Beer, “Interregnum” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/163, frame 1253.

posed for mastery of Volksdeutsche affairs meant that the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche leadership received mixed signals from Berlin. To a certain extent, Volksdeutsche leaders used the mercurial nature of their situation to propose policies to the Reich. The Volksgruppe did not have real freedom of action, either in Yugoslavia or later, under Reich occupation. Its status and the extent of its autonomy ultimately depended on external factors. This dependence became crystallized as the issue of whether the Volksdeutsche's primary loyalty should lie with Yugoslavia or with the Reich tipped gradually toward the latter. As demonstrated by such experiences as the clandestine recruitment for the Waffen-SS, the arming of the Volksgruppe, and the opening of German-language schools, the Volksgruppenführung certainly chose the Third Reich over Yugoslavia as early as December 1940-January 1941.

As for individual Volksdeutsche, they expressed a range of opinions based on individual, ideological as well as material reasons. In the period March 27-April 6, 1941 they overwhelmingly came to see the Reich as their protector and savior. This final polarization was also due to external factors, especially the inevitability of a war between the Reich and Yugoslavia. In the period immediately following the end of the April War in 1941, the Volksgruppe leaders in the occupied Banat attempted again to implement policy – a proclamation of a Freistaat Banat – but were foiled by Reich interest. Their dependence on the Reich was merely confirmed when Sepp Janko and other members of the Volksgruppenführung relocated from Hungarian-occupied Bačka to the Banat in May 1941.

This is the point at which focus moves away from Volksdeutsche experiences in interwar Yugoslavia or even in the Vojvodina, and centers on the Serbian Banat. The

relatively unified German Volksgruppe in interwar Yugoslavia was divided into several territorial sections, all of which continued to enjoy the nominal prestige of being ethnically German in Hitler's Europe. Their status was determined even more by the practical exigencies of Reich policy toward the regimes they lived under. The Banat Volksdeutsche failed to secure their own state, but they also escaped living in Hungary or a Greater Banat as envisioned by Romanian Volksdeutsche. The Serbian Banat became a part of Reichsdeutsche-occupied Serbia-Banat. Its Volksdeutsche no longer had to contend with the thorny problem of balancing loyalty expected by the host state with that owed to one's ethnic group, culture and sense of self.

This new arrangement did, however, present a new set of challenges for the diminished Volksgruppe, not the least of which was its continued and, even, increased dependence on the Third Reich for material support and moral and ideological justification. The Volksgruppe also had some strengths: Janko had been confirmed as Volksgruppenführer, ensuring continuity of leadership; Volksdeutsche occupied key positions in the Banat's administration; despite continued Hungarian territorial ambition, the Banat was useful to the Third Reich as a wedge separating Hungary from Romania; finally, the Banat could offer the understaffed German administration in Belgrade, soon to be stretched even thinner by the needs of anti-guerrilla warfare, precious material and human resources.

## CHAPTER III THE DAWN OF THE 'BANAT ERA':

## THE VOLKSDEUTSCHE ADMINISTRATION COMES OF AGE, 1941-1942

The Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) of the Serbian Banat found themselves in a unique position vis-à-vis other ethnic German communities of East and Southeast Europe. Their area of residence was occupied by Nazi Germany in April 1941 due to exigencies of the Third Reich's foreign policy and military plans in the East rather than any burning desire to succor these Volksdeutsche. Yet the fact that Reich diplomacy was never free of the influence of National Socialist ideology laid the groundwork for an unprecedented arrangement: a territory occupied by Reich forces, but administered and predominantly secured<sup>376</sup> by a local Volksdeutsche minority. In no other part of the German sphere of influence was a Volksdeutsche community entrusted with as many administrative tasks, or given as much local power, as the Banat Volksdeutsche. Nevertheless, the elevation in their local standing was due to the Reich's practical needs and concerns more than the Volksdeutsche's recognized value as a racial asset. Several factors had to come together before a Volksdeutsche administration in the Serbian Banat came to seem logical.

The Banat Volksdeutsche's precarious geographic position between Hungary and Romania placed them in constant danger of annexation, and contributed to the Third Reich's decision to have its forces occupy the Banat. Paradoxically, the fact that the Banat – and Southeast Europe in general – were a secondary theater of war in Hitler's worldview, and that occupied Serbia labored under overlapping and mutually competing jurisdictions, created lacunae within which the Volksdeutsche leadership could put forth

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<sup>376</sup> See Chapter 5 for a discussion of Volksdeutsche police and security operations.

the argument that they were best suited to administering the Banat. The Volksdeutsche's reputation for producing massive agricultural surpluses, the basic institutional framework they had developed before the April War, and their abiding sense of belonging to the German Volk gave them practical as well as ideological bargaining chips when their leadership argued in favor of a Volksdeutsche-administered Banat in the spring and summer of 1941.

Nevertheless, the Volksgruppenführung (Volksdeutsche leadership) never managed to wrest more from Berlin or the Reich military administration in Belgrade than these were willing to cede. The process by which the Volksdeutsche of the Serbian Banat achieved partial autonomy and ascendancy in their home region reflected the fundamentally impermanent nature of their position as well as their continued dependence on the Reich. The Reichsdeutsche (Reich German) authorities in Belgrade and Berlin were willing to support the Volksdeutsche's desire for group rights in exchange for the services the Volksdeutsche could render to the chronically understaffed occupation forces. Furthermore, by using the Volksdeutsche administration as a means of repelling Hungarian claims on the Banat, the German military commander in Serbia could indirectly bolster the Third Reich's foothold in Southeast Europe. This reciprocal relationship did not, however, guarantee either the Volksdeutsche's long-term dominance of the Banat or even their continued residence there after the planned German victory in Europe. The Reich was not interested in granting the Banat Volksdeutsche Reich citizenship or in admitting them to the Nazi Party, due to a fundamental suspicion of Volksdeutsche as not quite German enough. Underlying all this was the Reich's desire to

keep these Volksdeutsche in the Reich's debt but without the rights accorded to Reich citizens and Nazi Party members.

The fact that the Volksdeutsche of the Serbian Banat secured for themselves as much autonomy as they did is all the more astonishing, given the distaste for independent Volksdeutsche action displayed by the Reich authorities. This accomplishment had less to do with any special regard in which Berlin may have held the Banat Volksdeutsche, and more with the sequence of events which led to the Reich's occupation of Serbia-Banat in April 1941. As discussed in the previous chapter, the external threat posed by Hungarian and (to a far lesser extent) Romanian ambition to annex the Serbian Banat was a major cause behind the Reich's decision to occupy this region. Especially Hungarian territorial revisionism would go on to be a factor in the legalization of an already extant Volksdeutsche shadow administration in the Banat after the April War. Other significant factors were the chronic shortage of personnel with which the Reichsdeutsche military administration in occupied Serbia-Banat had to cope, especially after the start of the communist uprising in summer 1941, and the concomitant need for reliable collaborators. Such material circumstances made a Volksdeutsche administration in the Serbian Banat expedient for the Reich.

The esteem accorded to Volksdeutsche in National Socialist ideology lent this expediency a gloss of legitimacy, but was not the primary impetus behind it. Instead of possessing special leverage vis-à-vis the Reich, the Banat Volksdeutsche were convenient collaborators by dint of perceived racial affinity with the Reichsdeutsche as well as the material circumstances under which they lived and had been occupied by the Reich.

Josef Beer rather overstated the case in one of his exculpatory postwar works: “Starting in 1941, the Germans in the Western [Serbian] Banat had the unique historic chance to break out of the vicious circle of state paternalism, and to arrange their lives according to their own ideas.”<sup>377</sup> He also called the period 1941-1944 a “Banat era,”<sup>378</sup> overemphasizing the Deutsche Volksgruppe’s (organized ethnic German community) ability to exert leverage on the Reich authorities and determine its destiny independently of external factors like war, occupation and Reich diplomacy. Typically of exculpatory narratives, Beer promptly contradicted himself in describing the Banat as “merely . . . an appendage to defeated Serbia,”<sup>379</sup> thus relieving its Volksdeutsche administration and leadership of any responsibility for wartime events. In fact, it was convenient for the Reich to use the Volksgruppenführung in large part *because* the Volksgruppenführung displayed great ideological verve and enthusiasm for collaboration.

#### Volksdeutsche Administration: Preconditions

The general guidelines for the conduct of Operation 25 (the Axis attack on Yugoslavia) stated: “The military administration will limit itself to military and economic necessities. Systematic administration and exploitation can be taken care of later. It is not the army’s task.”<sup>380</sup> The first of a succession of Reich generals was installed as Military Commander

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<sup>377</sup> “Ab 1941 bot sich für die Deutschen im Westbanat die einmalige geschichtliche Chance, aus dem Teufelkreis staatlicher Bevormundung auszubrechen und ihr Leben nach eigenen Vorstellungen einzurichten.” Josef Beer (former deputy Volksgruppenführer in the Serbian Banat), *Donauschwäbische Zeitgeschichte aus erster Hand* (Munich: Donauschwäbische Kulturstiftung, 1987), p. 145.

<sup>378</sup> ““Banater Ära”” Beer *et al.*, *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weisskirchen im Banat*, p. 171.

<sup>379</sup> “blos . . . ein Anhängel des besiegten Serbiens” Josef Beer’s report on the Erneuerer movement (1958), Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth (LAA), Ost-Dok. 16/13, frame 234.

<sup>380</sup> “Die militärische Verwaltung hat sich auf die notwendigen militärischen und wirtschaftlichen Erfordernisse zu beschränken. Die planmässige Verwaltung und Ausnutzung des Landes kann

in Serbia (Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien<sup>381</sup>) a few days after the conclusion of the April War. He was supposed to be the authority figure with unlimited command powers over Reich troops and all civilians in Serbia.<sup>382</sup> However, his role was complicated by the presence of two parallel Reich German administrations under his command (a civilian one and one in charge of security), as well as the representatives of the Four-Year Plan<sup>383</sup> and the AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry).<sup>384</sup> The latter two were nominally within the jurisdiction of the German commanding general in Serbia, but operated almost independently.<sup>385</sup> In this, occupied Serbia fit perfectly into what historian Stevan K. Pawlovitch termed ‘Hitler’s New Disorder.’<sup>386</sup>

The AA representative Felix Benzler was in an especially good position to undermine the Military Commander’s policymaking prerogative, since Benzler had to be consulted in all matters, including military operations, with potentially “foreign-political

erst eine spätere Sorge sein. Sie ist nicht Aufgabe des Heeres.” Wagner (with Oberkommando des Heeres, OKH), March 31, 1941, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-501 [Records of German Field Commands: Rear Areas, Occupied Territories, and Others]/245/240.

<sup>381</sup> The title was changed in June 1941 to *Befehlshaber Serbien*, and in October 1941 to *Bevollmächtigter kommandierende General und Befehlshaber in Serbien*. In summer 1943 it was expanded to become *Militärbefehlshaber Südost*. I will refer to all either as the Military Commander in Serbia or as the German commanding general in Serbia.

<sup>382</sup> Serbia went through half a dozen Reich commanders until war’s end, five of them in 1941 alone, due to successive generals’ inability to stop the growing communist and Četnik resistance movements. They were: Luftwaffe General Helmut Förster (April 22-early June 1941), Artillery General Ludwig von Schröder (early June-July 18, 1941), Luftwaffe General Heinrich Danckelmann (late July-September 18, 1941), Infantry General Franz Böhme (September 18-December 3, 1941), Artillery General Paul Bader (December 3, 1941-August 1943), and Infantry General Hans Felber (August 29, 1943-fall 1944).

<sup>383</sup> Franz Neuhausen was the General Plenipotentiary for the Economy in occupied Serbia (*Generalbevollmächtigter für die Wirtschaft, GBW*). “Weisungen für den Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/257.

<sup>384</sup> German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, April 17, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/199/153,104; Weizsäcker memo, May 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,205.

<sup>385</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1985), pp. 39-40.

<sup>386</sup> “The Nazi ‘new order’ multiplied overlapping and clashing administrations.” Pawlovitch, p. 50.

repercussions.”<sup>387</sup> This vague phrasing gave Benzler the right to interfere in just about every aspect of the Military Commander’s activities. Since the Ribbentrop-Himmler agreement of March 31, 1941 gave the AA the upper hand in all Volksstum affairs, Benzler was effectively the person to contact regarding Banat Volksdeutsche demands and grievances. He was also the Reich official with arguably greatest clout in determining how the Banat should be administered, since diplomatic concerns regarding Hungary and Romania remained paramount until late 1941 (see below).

The Volksdeutsche in the Serbian Banat had several factors working in their favor: their racial affinity with Reich Germans; their home region’s economic potential and remoteness from the central theater of war; their geographic position between two of the Reich’s most fractious allies; and the Reich occupation forces’ need for reliable collaborators.

The order to create the position of Military Commander explicitly excluded the Italian and Bulgarian occupation zones in Serbia *and the Serbian Banat* from the administrative jurisdiction of the Military Commander.<sup>388</sup> The Banat was therefore occupied by Reich forces, and the AA office in Belgrade was intended to be its main line of communication with Berlin, yet the Banat would not be administered directly by Reich German personnel. There was, as yet, no explicit mention of a Volksdeutsche administration there but, unlike the abortive attempt to create a separate Volksdeutsche state, this remained a viable option.

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<sup>387</sup> “ausenpolitische Rückwirkungen” Ribbentrop to Felix Benzler (AA – Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry – representative in occupied Belgrade), May 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,207.

<sup>388</sup> General Walter von Brauchitsch (Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres), “Befehl für die einrichtung einer Militärverwaltung in Serbien,” April 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/247.

The Reichsdeutsche military in the Banat (Wehrmacht regiment “Grossdeutschland” and SS division “Das Reich”) received its orders from the military commander in Belgrade. His freedom of action was in turn limited by the need to report to Felix Benzler *and* the German commander for the entire occupied Balkan Peninsula, Field Marshall Wilhelm List in Greece.<sup>389</sup> This extended chain of command – in addition to the existence on all levels of the Reichsdeutsche administration of Serbia of rival civilian and military administrative staffs<sup>390</sup> – left the field open to much administrative confusion and delay. It also created a space in which reliable local collaborators could more easily be used for a kind of administration by improvisation. The sheer complexity of the administrative apparatus in occupied Serbia was therefore one of the factors which allowed for the eventual installing of a Volksdeutsche administration in the Banat.

However, overlapping jurisdictions alone do not suffice to account for the establishment of a Volksdeutsche administration in the Serbian Banat. Similar jurisdictional conflict existed in other parts of Hitler’s Europe, yet nowhere else did local Volksdeutsche gain as much influence in local affairs as they did in the occupied Banat. In addition to the fact that the administrative status and future possession of the Serbian Banat was still unresolved in early May 1941, the Banat’s relative standing in the Nazi worldview, the Reich’s economic requirements, its need for reliable collaborators and the respect accorded (at least nominally) to the Banat and its Volksdeutsche in the Nazi worldview set the stage for the Deutsche Volksgruppe to take administrative control of the Banat under Reich auspices.

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<sup>389</sup> Kriegstagebuch, June 21, 1941, Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), RW 40 Territoriale Befehlshaber in Südosteuropa, file 3, p. 8.

<sup>390</sup> “Dienstweisung für den Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” April 17, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/249-250; unsigned and undated report, “Die deutsche Militärverwaltung in Serbien,” likely 1944 or 1945, BA MA, RW 40, file 117, pp. 1-4 of this report.

The German commanding general in Serbia had three main areas of concern: general security (maintaining peace and order among the civilian population); the securing of major transportation and communication lines, including the Danube River; and ensuring the smooth economic exploitation of Serbia's agricultural and mineral resources.<sup>391</sup> In this context, the Banat's roads were explicitly deemed secondary to the major communication line Belgrade-Sofia-Thessaloniki.<sup>392</sup> Its agricultural potential was seen primarily in terms of supplying the Reich troops stationed in Serbia.<sup>393</sup> While these were major local concerns, in the grand scheme of the German occupation of much of Europe they mattered only insofar as they made it possible for a small number of Reich soldiers to control a large section of the Balkans i.e. a flank of the future campaign in the Soviet Union, which was entering its last preparatory stages in late spring 1941, just as the details of the occupation system in Serbia were hammered out.

It is entirely plausible that the fact that the Banat was a part of a secondary theater of war made it easier for the Banat ethnic Germans to gain more power locally, precisely because they and their home region were not viewed by Berlin as central to the greater German war-effort. By contrast, during the campaign in the Soviet Union – which was the crux of Hitler's war plans – the Volksdeutsche in the Zhytomyr region in Ukraine collaborated with and performed administrative tasks for the invading Reichsdeutsche, but never gained any degree of administrative autonomy in their home regions.<sup>394</sup> The closest parallel to the Banat case was that of the Sudet, whose relatively low standing as a

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<sup>391</sup> "Dienstweisung für den Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/250.

<sup>392</sup> Gravenhorst (aide to the German commanding general in Serbia) to all Feldkommandanturen and Ortskommandanturen, May 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/308.

<sup>393</sup> Unsigned memo, May 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/320.

<sup>394</sup> Lower, pp. 425-52, 101-106.

recent and ethnically mixed Gau (administrative unit) of the Third Reich actually allowed the local Volksdeutsche leader Konrad Henlein to wrest some local autonomy for his co-nationals.<sup>395</sup> However, precisely because the Sudet was directly annexed by the Third Reich in 1938 and its ethnic German residents became Reich citizens, their experiences differed crucially from those of ethnic Germans in areas occupied by Reich forces.

Despite its secondary importance as a military conquest or theater of war, the Serbian Banat was of primary importance to a Third Reich chronically short on foodstuffs (see Chapter 4 for more on this). Echoing economic historian Adam Tooze, Stevan K. Pavlowitch suggests that Nazi dominion over Europe made no long-term plans for a victorious postwar future. The Reich's economic unpreparedness for the war it started, combined with the racial deprecation of Slavs, allowed only for wartime economic exploitation without long-term investment or husbanding of resources.<sup>396</sup> While a steady food supply was crucial for a successful campaign, National Socialism with its exaltation of direct aggressive action always placed the actual conquest and reshaping of the East ahead of the necessary prerequisites for said conquest. This did not mean that an area feeding the Reich war machine was left to its own affairs. It did mean that a local group prepared to collaborate actively with the Reich could wrest some local power and influence for itself, if it were well-organized and held a sufficiently high position in the Nazi racial hierarchy.

The Reich's occupation of Serbia-Banat suffered from a lack of manpower. After the successful conclusion of the April War and the setting up of the occupation apparatus, only three Wehrmacht divisions were left to secure all of Serbia-Banat by the end of

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<sup>395</sup> Gebel, pp. 367-368.

<sup>396</sup> Pavlowitch, p. 272.

May.<sup>397</sup> On June 22, 1941 a single Reserve Police Battalion was ordered to transfer from Essen to Serbia,<sup>398</sup> but was hardly sufficient to secure all of rural Serbia against the threat of a communist uprising in reaction to the start of Operation Barbarossa.<sup>399</sup> This lack of manpower – and the correct assumption that many Serbs would be openly or covertly hostile to the occupying forces<sup>400</sup> – necessitated the search for reliable collaborators, who would take on a portion of the administrative and security burden.

Accordingly, Harald Turner, head of civilian administration under the Military Commander in Serbia, was put in charge of ensuring that as few Reich personnel as possible were tied down in this occupied territory. Turner set up a Serbian collaborationist government,<sup>401</sup> first under Milan Aćimović, then (in late August) under former Yugoslav Minister of Army and Navy, General Milan Nedić. This Serbian collaborationist government was officially ‘supervised’<sup>402</sup> i.e. dictated to by the Reich in the person of the Military Commander. It contributed to the multiplicity of jurisdictions

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<sup>397</sup> Vogel, p. 522.

<sup>398</sup> Kriegstagebuch, June 22, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/425; Kriegstagebuch, June 30, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/427.

<sup>399</sup> Kiessel (aide to Harald Turner, Reichsdeutsche civilian administration chief in occupied Serbia) memo, July 23, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/597-600.

<sup>400</sup> In a private note dated June 21, 1941, Weizsäcker remarked: “[I]t seems to me that the Führer and Mr. Ribbentrop have agreed that the New Order in the Balkans . . . will work in such a way that nobody will be able to get along well with their neighbor. . . . My only concern is who will be put in charge of the whole sordid business in this time of war.” (“Im übrigen scheint mir die Neuordnung des Balkans, in Übereinstimmung zwischen dem Führer und Herrn von Ribbentrop . . . so zu erfolgen, dass keener mit seinem Nachbarn sich vertragen kann. . . . Ich frage mich nur, wer diesen Sack voll von Flöhen jetzt im Kriege hüten wird.”) Ernst von Weizsäcker quoted in Sundhausen, *Geschichte Jugoslawiens*, p. 114.

<sup>401</sup> Gerhart Feine (First Secretary of the German Embassy in Belgrade) to AA, April 27, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 414; Christopher R. Browning, “Harald Turner und die Militärverwaltung in Serbien 1941-1942,” in *Verwaltung contra Menschenführung im Staat Hitlers: Studien zum politisch-administrativen System*, ed. Dieter Rebentisch and Karl Teppe (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), pp. 353-354.

<sup>402</sup> The term “supervisory administration” (“Aufsichtsverwaltung”) was used by Harald Turner in a letter to State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart (Reich Interior Ministry), July 8, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-501/266/1264-1265.

in occupied Serbia, although Nedić never gave up on the idea of streamlining the chain of command in a way which would allow him to become an equal partner to the occupying Germans.<sup>403</sup> Despite its subordinate status, the creation of a Serbian collaborationist government set a precedent for the use of other local groups for collaboration. Volksdeutsche were racially even better suited to the role,<sup>404</sup> especially considering

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<sup>403</sup> Browning, "Harald Turner," p. 367; Benzler to AA, September 16, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume III (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), document no. 292; Benzler to AA, September 19, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume III, document no. 296; Ribbentrop to AA, October 9, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume IV (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), document no. 27; Benzler to AA, October 21, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume IV, document no. 77; unsigned memo, May 22, 1943, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Inland II Geheim, R 100686 Personalien, fiche 1737, frames H299,458-460; unsigned and undated memo, "Niederschrift über die Besprechung betreffend den Besuch des serbischen Ministerpräsidenten Nedić [sic]," PA AA, Inland II Geheim, R 100686, fiche 1737, frames H299,465-467; unsigned memo, "Bericht unseres Vertrauensmannes – Die Lage in Serbien," October 5, 1943, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), R 55 Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, file 1042, fiche 4, frames 163-167.

<sup>404</sup> It should be mentioned that Turner differed from most of his colleagues insofar as he saw the Serbs as fit for more than just subordination and exploitation, provided they had leaders sympathetic to the Nazi cause: "The Reich cannot do without Serbia as its main support [Stützpunkt] in the Balkans. It is therefore inevitable that the Reich will have to strengthen Serbia and make it viable." ("Das Reich könne auf Serbien, als Stützpunkt auf dem Balkan, nicht verzichten und damit werde sich zwangsläufig die Notwendigkeit ergeben, es zu stärken und lebensfähig zu machen.") Turner, "1. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," May 26, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 183, p. 3. More common among Nazi functionaries was the opinion shared by Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler and the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht), which contributed to Turner's removal from office in fall 1942 (Browning, "Harald Turner," pp. 371-372). This view of Serbs was summed up by an official of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut, a Reich research institute: "To my mind, the German administration [in Serbia] is far too good. One must deal with the Serbs much more severely, they truly are a nation of Gypsies, and shifty to boot." ("Nach meiner Ansicht ist die deutsche Verwaltung viel zu gut, man müsste viel strenger umgehen mit den Serben, es ist ja ein richtiges Zigeunervolk, sie sind auch sehr hinterlistig.") Franz Will., "Sechswöchentliche Reise durch Kroatien, Ungarn und Serbien," October 25, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81 [Records of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut]/540/5,311,223.

<sup>405</sup> Early signs of the Reich's recognition of Serbian Volksdeutsche as related i.e. superior racial stock were the order to release Volksdeutsche POWs (who had failed to obey Hitler's order to avoid conscription and had been captured by the Wehrmacht while serving in the Yugoslav army during the April War), issued the day before the Yugoslav surrender came into power (Ribbentrop aide Karl Ritter to the German Embassy in Belgrade, April 17, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,101), and the somewhat dubious distinction of having a prison in Belgrade set aside exclusively for Wehrmacht members and Volksdeutsche (Kriegstagebuch, May 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/378-379).

the Serbian government's steadily declining influence in the Banat beginning in summer 1941 (see below).

In addition, the regionalization of occupied Serbia-Banat facilitated partial autonomy for the Banat. As a territory under military occupation, the country was divided into Feldkommandanturen (FKs) containing one or more Ortskommandanturen (OKs). The Banat was a unique case from the start, since it had its own OK (OK I/823 or OK 823), which was directly subsumed to the Military Commander.<sup>406</sup> OK 823 was fully operational, headquartered in the Banat's unofficial capital Grossbetschkerek, by April 28, 1941.<sup>407</sup> Already on April 15, the day Reich German forces entered the town, posters were put up calling the population to maintain order, turn in weapons, and obey the new authorities, proclaiming a German 'protectorate' over the region.<sup>408</sup>

OK 823 was revamped into a Kreiskommandantur (KK 823) in May 1941, remaining directly under the Military Commander.<sup>409</sup> This made all the more sense when the parallel civilian organization of the Serbian territory was also revamped in December 1941 in the direction of even more regionalization. The new administrative organization replaced the old Yugoslav division of Serbia into four administrative units called banovine with fourteen Kreise (counties, Serbian okruzi, sing. okrug), one of which was the Banat.<sup>410</sup> Thus, although the Banat had a degree of autonomy even before December 1941, after this administrative reshuffling its civilian administrative borders coincided

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<sup>406</sup> Kriegstagebuch, April 16, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/264.

<sup>407</sup> Kriegstagebuch, April 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/115.

<sup>408</sup> Shimizu, p. 104.

<sup>409</sup> Kriegstagebuch, May 2, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/302; see also the undated organizational chart of the administration of occupied Serbia-Banat, NARA, RG 242, T-501/266/1039.

<sup>410</sup> Browning, "Harald Turner," pp. 360-361.

with military-administrative ones i.e. the administrative borders of Kreiskommandantur 823, which came directly under the Military Commander.<sup>411</sup>

On the local level, the lack of manpower was especially acute. Ortskommandantur 823 commander, Hauptmann (Captain) Rentsch, complained barely a week after arrival in the Banat that once regiment “Grossdeutschland” departed in short order, he would have less than three dozen men left to secure the entire Serbian Banat.<sup>412</sup> This was compounded by excessive demands placed on the soldiers’ time and energy. In early June Rentsch had to cover for the commander of the neighboring Feldkommandantur 610 (seat in Smederevo), due to the latter’s illness.<sup>413</sup> The need to secure communication lines was left up to the Reich military personnel on the ground, since the occupation forces in Belgrade could spare no men for the upkeep of communication and supply lines.<sup>414</sup> And when the Axis forces invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Ortskommandanturen and Feldkommandanturen in Serbia had to step up security in anticipation of guerrilla activity by Yugoslav communists and their sympathizers.<sup>415</sup>

These relentless demands left the German occupation forces on all levels open to using collaborators. In the Banat, described by Rentsch as a Reich “Protectorate”

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<sup>411</sup> Gravenhorst, “Befehl über die neue Einteilung der Militärverwaltung im Gebiete des Befehlshabers Serbien,” December 4, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/246/726; “Verordnung betreffend Zuständigkeit der Feld-, Kreis- und Ortskommandanturen,” *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, March 21, 1942, p. 218; “Erste Verordnung zur Abänderung der Verordnung über die polizeiliche Strafgewalt vom 19. Februar 1942,” *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, April 6, 1943, p. 317.

<sup>412</sup> Hauptmann Rentsch (Kreiskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek) to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien, April 23, 1941, NARA, RG 238 World War II War Crimes Records, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 274.

<sup>413</sup> Kriegstagebuch, June 3, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/418.

<sup>414</sup> Gravenhorst to all Feldkommandanturen and Ortskommandanturen, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/309. Rentsch remarked on the bad state of Banat roads in his April 23 report (Rentsch to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien (1941), NARA, RG 238, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 276).

<sup>415</sup> Kriegstagebuch, June 22 and 23, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/425.

(“Schutzgebiet”<sup>416</sup>) not unlike that established over the Bohemian lands in 1939, the military administration could rely on the already established Volksdeutsche administrative structure. This inchoate administrative apparatus was bolstered by the move of the Volksgruppenführung (Volksdeutsche leadership under Sepp Janko) from Hungarian-occupied Novi Sad to the Banat in May 1941.

The rise of the ethnic German minority to a leading position in the Banat was concomitant with the decline of the Serbian collaborationist government’s influence there and the continued fear, not limited to Banat Volksdeutsche, of an imminent Hungarian or Romanian takeover of the Serbian Banat. On April 24, 1941, midway through the week separating the creation of a Reichsdeutsche military administrative structure in occupied Serbia from the creation of the Serbian collaborationist government, a meeting was held in Vienna between Adolf Hitler, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano. At this meeting, the Reich representatives informed their Italian counterpart of the territorial disposition of the northern Balkans, confirming both Italy’s inferior status and exclusion from affairs in the region, and the unsettled conditions there. The promise to hand over both the Bačka and the Banat to Hungary was reiterated, as was the decision to keep the latter under Reich occupation for the time being in order to prevent a Romanian-Hungarian clash.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Rentsch to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien (1941), NARA, RG 238, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 275.

<sup>417</sup> Schmidt (aide to Ribbentrop), “Ergebnis der deutsch-italienischen Besprechungen über die Neugestaltung des jugoslawischen Raumes,” April 24, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 398.

A later document reiterated that the territorial settlement in former Yugoslavia was as yet incomplete, due in large part to conflicting and equally justified claims put forth by its neighbors-*cum*-enemies. It ended by confirming the *status quo* which was the German occupation of the Serbian Banat. Werner von Schmieden (AA) circular, May 17, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 534.

Even so, Romanian hopes gained a new lease on life because of the statement that Romania would have to be compensated, although a suitable territory was not available at the moment.<sup>418</sup> From the Romanian perspective, a suitable territory was very much available between the Danube, the Tisa and the Romanian-Serbian border, if only the government of Romanian Minister President Ion Antonescu could persuade the Reich to accept its view. It expended great efforts both before and after the April 24 meeting in Vienna, hoping to persuade the Reich authorities to allow a Romanian annexation of the Serbian Banat.

On April 21, while the Reichsdeutsche military administration in Serbia-Banat was finding its feet, the AA sent the German Embassy in Bucharest a stern reminder not to let its members get dragged into any discussion about Romanian claims on the Serbian Banat. The AA reiterated its official line from before the April War that giving the Serbian half of the Banat to Romania was at present out of the question. Romanian agitation, fed by casual or inadvertent remarks dropped by Reichsdeutsche officials, could only prolong an issue which the Romanian government saw as paramount, but the AA clearly perceived as, at best, a minor irritant.<sup>419</sup> Despite this, the Romanian press

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<sup>418</sup> Schmidt, "Ergebnis der deutsch-italienischen Besprechungen" (1941), in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 398.

<sup>419</sup> Emil von Rintelen (aide to Ribbentrop) to German Embassy in Romania, April 21, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 376.

Demonstrating yet again the lack of intradepartmental communication in the Third Reich, the AA failed to ensure no such casual remarks would be dropped *in Berlin*. The result was a conversation in early May from which the Romanian Ambassador in Berlin Raoul Bossy drew the conclusion that his country *would* receive the Serbian Banat, necessitating clarification which cannot have been to Bossy's liking (Ribbentrop to the German Embassy in Romania, May 9, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 481).

continued to wax hopeful for a favorable outcome to the April 24 meeting,<sup>420</sup> which was really more in the nature of a briefing for Ciano than a consultation between equals.

Finding no encouragement in the German Embassy in Bucharest,<sup>421</sup> the Romanians then attempted a two-pronged diplomatic ‘attac.’ They secured semi-official encouragement from representatives of the Italian armed forces and press, and solicited information from the German Ambassador in Bulgaria on Romania’s chances for getting a piece of the Yugoslav pie. The German Ambassador in Bucharest Manfred von Killinger was quick to identify this encouragement as part of an attempt to strengthen Italy’s weak position in the northern Balkans (Italians in Budapest were apparently also busy agitating) which may not even have had Rome’s official support.<sup>422</sup> Ribbentrop extended his advice not to get involved in discussions about Yugoslav territory to AA personnel in Sofia.<sup>423</sup> Within a matter of days, Antonescu realized that the ally whose support he could not afford to lose was Nazi Germany, and the Italian connection with relation to the question of the Banat was hastily dropped.<sup>424</sup>

At the same time, Antonescu and his subordinates presented a list of political and racial arguments in favor of a union of both halves of the Banat under the Romanian flag. They emphasized the historical and cultural unity and ‘Romanianness’ of the whole

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<sup>420</sup> “Ciano beim Führer in Wien. Truppeneinmarsch ohne Einfluss auf die spätere Grenzziehung – Die Ansprüche Rumäniens,” *Bukarester Tageblatt*, April 23, 1941, BA Berlin, R 4902 Deutsches Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut, file 274, no page number.

<sup>421</sup> German Ambassador in Romania Manfred von Killinger responded to the April 21 communication by assuring the AA of his efforts to prevent any agitation either within Romanian government circles or in the Romanian press. Killinger to AA, April 22, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 382.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>423</sup> Ribbentrop to German Embassy in Sofia, April 24, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/199/153,173.

<sup>424</sup> Killinger to AA, April 28, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 416.

Banat region, as well as the long-term benefits to both Germany and Romania<sup>425</sup> of weakening the Hungarian and Slavic influence in the Balkans.<sup>426</sup> This proposal got shuffled around various Berlin offices for a whole month before being brushed off as ill-suited to the current situation in the northern Balkans in late May.<sup>427</sup> By the time Antonescu got a chance to discuss it with Hitler and Ribbentrop on a visit to Berlin in June, the ratification of a Volksdeutsche administration in the Serbian Banat (see below) – and the continued presence there of Reich forces – had already taken place, rendering Antonescu’s proposal a doubly moot point.<sup>428</sup>

Killinger correctly identified the arguments in favor of a unified Romanian Banat as Antonescu’s attempts to demonstrate his political clout and consolidate his position as leader of the Romanian state.<sup>429</sup> The Serbian Banat was for Antonescu predominantly a means to strengthen his position in domestic politics. As shown in Chapter 2, this association of ownership of the Banat with power in Antonescu’s mind predated the April War, and was bolstered by the fact that the Hungarians were making repeated threats to annex the Serbian Banat. Unlike the Romanians, they were in a fairly good position to do so, since they actually had troops stationed in the Bačka, had been asked to participate in

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<sup>425</sup> This view of relations within the Axis was also embraced by the Romanian Volksdeutsche, who stressed the unity of Germany and Romania against “Jewish-Hungarian circles” during a rally in Timișoara in late May. Weizsäcker memo, May 28, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 564.

<sup>426</sup> Velhagen (SS) to AA, April 23, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 387; Killinger to AA, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 416.

<sup>427</sup> In the intervening weeks, the Romanian press in vain printed hopeful articles declaring that the ethnic Romanians and Volksdeutsche were the majority populations in both halves of the Banat, and should therefore share the administration thereof – unified under Romanian auspices. “Die Rumänen bilden die Mehrheitsbevölkerung des Banates,” translation of an article published in *Curentul*, May 22, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81/544/5,316,550-551.

<sup>428</sup> Ribbentrop to German Embassy in Bucharest, May 25, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XII.2, document no. 551.

<sup>429</sup> Killinger addendum to Velhagen’s telegram to AA (1941), in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 387.

the occupation of Yugoslavia by Nazi Germany, and had been promised the Serbian Banat as part of their war booty.

Hungarian wishes were simple: that a Hungarian military occupation of the Banat should happen as soon as possible – in line with Hitler’s original promise – and be preceded by the introduction of Hungarian administrators into the Banat, ostensibly to ease the transition. Like his Romanian counterpart, in vain did Regent Horthy present Hitler with a none-too-subtle case that both halves of the Banat should be united under Hungarian auspices. Horthy claimed that this would not only rectify the Treaty of Trianon, but would also work in the Volksdeutsche’s best interests.<sup>430</sup> Unlike the Romanians, who could do little but accept the Reich’s evasions, the Reich’s ban on Hungarians crossing the River Tisa into the Banat made Hungarian officialdom impatient, and inspired it to more aggressive attempts at tipping the Reich’s hand.

This impatience manifested itself in three major ways. Firstly, the Hungarians made repeated threats of imminent invasion and annexation of the Banat which, spreading through the Banat as rumors, caused great unrest. The date of the supposed Hungarian takeover was June 2, prompting the displaying of weapons (in contravention of the command passed by the Reich military commander in Grossbetschkerek on April 15<sup>431</sup>) and Hungarian flags by ethnic Hungarians in Neu-Kanischa.<sup>432</sup> Some Volksdeutsche told Reich German soldiers that ethnic Hungarians threatened to “finish

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<sup>430</sup> Lutz Korodi (Volksdeutsche political activist from Transylvania) report on the April 20 meeting between Adolf Hitler and Regent Miklós Horthy, April 25, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/917/387,320-326.

<sup>431</sup> See p. 154.

<sup>432</sup> Kriegstagebuch, May 4, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/289-290.

off<sup>433</sup> the Germans, and stated that, should Reich forces ever withdraw from the Banat, Volksdeutsche would have to accompany them.<sup>434</sup> Kreiskommandantur 823 chief Rentsch reported open clashes between the Volksdeutsche and ethnic Hungarian citizens' militias in late May,<sup>435</sup> leaving Volksgruppenführer (Volksgruppe leader) Sepp Janko and AA representative Felix Benzler to curb passions on both sides.<sup>436</sup>

Secondly, following the departure of the regiment "Grossdeutschland" from the Banat in late May 1941, Hungarian soldiers from the Bačka made a show of independence from Reich policy directives through repeated provocations against the non-Hungarian population of the Banat. Although Hungarian officers were warned against crossing the Tisa as early as April 12,<sup>437</sup> small groups repeatedly visited Banat villages and towns with substantial ethnic Hungarian populations near the river. In the course of these visits, they wore Hungarian uniforms, broke the bans on the carrying of firearms and consumption of alcohol, mistreated civilians, and proclaimed an imminent Hungarian invasion. The Banat ethnic Hungarians responded by displaying Hungarian national colors, flags and Regent Horthy's pictures, visiting the Bačka in their turn, and bringing back "magazines, books and fresh courage."<sup>438</sup> All this prompted at least some Banat Volksdeutsche and Serbs to pack their bags in preparation for flight as a preferable

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<sup>433</sup> "'erledigen'" Rentsch to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien (1941), NARA, RG 238, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 275.

<sup>434</sup> Rentsch to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien (1941), NARA, RG 238, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 274.

<sup>435</sup> Kriegstagebuch, end of May 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/123-124.

<sup>436</sup> Benzler to AA, May 10, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,224.

<sup>437</sup> Weizsäcker memo, April 12, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 321.

<sup>438</sup> "Zeitungen, Bücher und frischen Mut" Wehrmachtverbindungsstelle Belgrad to Amt Ausland/Abwehr, "Verhalten der Ungarn im Banat und in der Bačka," June 10, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/456.

alternative to life under Hungarian occupation.<sup>439</sup> Yet this kind of behavior was all low-scale provocation and macho display by the Hungarians, rather than a show of real preparedness for the inevitable clash with both Germany and Romania in the case of a Hungarian advance across the Tisa without the Reich's permission.<sup>440</sup>

Finally, Benzler reported a list of Hungarian complaints centering on the supposed preferential treatment of Volksdeutsche and Serbs over ethnic Hungarians as administrators, railway workers and police auxiliaries in the Banat. Benzler countered by pointing out the Hungarians' failure to comply with the agreement not to expel Serbs from the Bačka. Under the circumstances, the staff of the Military Commander in Serbia was justifiably angry and resistant to demands for Hungarian administrative personnel to be allowed into the Banat.<sup>441</sup> For once, the military administration and the Reich's diplomatic representative in occupied Serbia were in perfect agreement.

The pattern of Hungarian provocation would continue throughout the rest of 1941, and intermittently even later. For the time being, it rendered the Reich German administration in Serbia especially unwilling to allow any Hungarian interference in Banat affairs. Since Romanian offers of 'assistance' in the Banat were frankly ludicrous, and the Aćimović government had only nominal executive powers even in Serbia proper, this left the Banat Volksdeutsche as the best candidates for the role of Reich's cat's paw in the Serbian Banat.

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<sup>439</sup> "Verhalten der Ungarn im Banat und in der Bačka" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/455-457; "Ungarische Offiziere in Neukanischa," June 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/482-483; Picht (Wehrmacht officer in Serbia), "Tätigkeitsbericht der Abt. Ic" for the period May 25-June 8, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/441.

<sup>440</sup> "Should General Antonescu express fear that Hungary might become hostile toward Rumania, it should be stated that this danger does not exist because Germany would not permit it." Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel (head of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) directive, May 23, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 12, document no. 544.

<sup>441</sup> Benzler to AA, May 17, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,236-237.

### Volksdeutsche Administration: Establishment and Consolidation

After the destruction of Yugoslavia, the dependence of its Volksdeutsche on the exigencies of Reich foreign policy became even stronger than before. No state requiring lip-service paid to its sovereignty interfered between the Reich and the ethnic Germans any longer. Whatever privileges and rights the Volksdeutsche gained after April 1941, they gained at the Reich's discretion. The threat of Hungarian annexation loomed large for them, but for the Reich this prospect remained inconvenient, not so much because it would put out Volksdeutsche. (It would, paradoxically, have united the Bačka and the Banat Volksdeutsche in a vindication of the Volkstum principle.) The Serbian Banat remained under Reich occupation primarily so as to prevent the possibility of a Hungarian-Romanian conflict, which might spread and ignite tensions between these two unlikely allies on the Eastern Front.<sup>442</sup> The presence of a Banat Volksdeutsche administration eased the demands placed on the thinly spread Reich administrative personnel in Serbia-Banat, and had practical uses which just happened to coincide with Nazi racial ideology. There had been no long-term plan to elevate the Banat Volksdeutsche to local leadership, but circumstances accomplished what ideology alone may not have.

The Kulturbund, the Volksdeutsche organization in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, had had a network of administrative facilities providing diverse services to the

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<sup>442</sup> A kind of slow-burn private war went on between the Hungarian and the Romanian troops whenever these were deployed side by side in the Soviet Union. See Killinger to AA, July 2, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1964), document no. 58; Weizsäcker to the German Embassy in Rome, November 7, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13, document no. 457; Schmidt memo, November 28, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13, document no. 513.

Volksdeutsche community already before the April War. Its activities had been suspended after the royal coup of March 27, 1941. Once a large number of Yugoslav officials withdrew before the advancing Reich forces,<sup>443</sup> however, the gap they left in the daily running of the Banat was filled by educated Volksdeutsche (lawyers, notaries, teachers, Kulturbund officials) as provisional administrators. Their activities were authorized on April 24 by Sepp Janko's acting second-in-command Josef Beer,<sup>444</sup> undoubtedly with the knowledge and approval of Ortskommandantur 823. Thus even before the Volksgruppenführung moved permanently to the Banat in May, the Banat Volksdeutsche were in a position to provide the undermanned Reich German administration with invaluable services. At the same time, the Volksdeutsche administrative network had to be integrated into the occupation system's chain of command.<sup>445</sup> Felix Benzler played a crucial role in this integration, in cooperation with the military authorities and the civilian administration under Harald Turner.

After the Volksgruppenführung's arrival in the Banat, the rest of the month of May 1941 was devoted to reining in the independent economic and political ventures of individual Volksdeutsche. Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko proved equal to the challenge, despite a lack of skilled coworkers. Josef Beer and the future chief of Banat

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<sup>443</sup> Deposition of Dušan Kolarević, (former municipal president in Grosskikinda) to the Serbian Interior Ministry, May 14, 1941, Vojni arhiv, Nedićev arhiv [‘Nedić Archive’], box 20A, folder 1, document 1-23; deposition of Jovan S. Jurišin (former district president in Modosch), no date but likely May 1941, Vojni arhiv, Nedićev arhiv, box 20A, folder 1, document 1-25; deposition of Radovan S. Stanković (former municipal president in Kubin) to the Serbian Interior Ministry, May 13, 1941, Vojni arhiv, Nedićev arhiv, box 20A, folder 1, document 1-28; Benzler to AA, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,236.

<sup>444</sup> “An alle Kreis- und Ortsleiter!”, *Deutsches Volksblatt* [German-language newspaper published in Novi Sad (Bačka); from now on *DV*], April 24, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>445</sup> One aspect of this was the official AA ban, passed during the tense early days of May when many Volksdeutsche contemplated leaving the Banat before the rumored Hungarian invasion, on Volksdeutsche moving between zones of occupation in former Yugoslavia. Unsigned memo to AA, May 11, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/249/1030.

administration Sepp Lapp were the most noteworthy exceptions.<sup>446</sup> Janko's situation thus paralleled that of the occupying Reich Germans, and lent sympathy to Janko's future proposals for special rights to be granted to the Volksdeutsche. Janko managed to "take the Volksgruppe in hand again"<sup>447</sup> in barely three weeks' time. This won him the respect of Harald Turner, who labored under a permanent personnel shortage and was on the prowl for reliable collaborators. Turner accordingly instructed Janko to select his best people for the "creation of a solid and firm [civilian] administrative apparatus"<sup>448</sup> in the Banat.

There was no official recruitment of Nazi Party members in the Banat,<sup>449</sup> most likely because this would have posed a dangerous precedent for all kinds of racial 'undesirables' to apply for membership in this and other occupied lands. The Banat Volksgruppenführung stood in for the Nazi Party within the Banat insofar as it was in charge of both ideology and practical affairs. In the first issue of the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*, the Volksgruppe's official administrative publication, the Volksgruppenführung appealed to

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<sup>446</sup> Zöllner (SS-Untersturmführer in Grossbetschkerek) to Ehlich (SS-Obersturmführer with Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Belgrade), June 2, 1941, Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena ['Name Registry'], file J-167, pp. 3, 6.

<sup>447</sup> "die Volksgruppe wieder fest in seine Hand zu bekommen." Zöllner to Ehlich (1941), Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena, file J-167, p. 3.

<sup>448</sup> "die Aufrichtung eines soliden und festen Verwaltungsapparates" Zöllner to Ehlich (1941), Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena, file J-167, pp. 1-2.

<sup>449</sup> A list compiled by the US Military Government in Germany in 1947 suggests that there were some 1500 Nazi Party members who were also citizens of the destroyed Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Most of these joined after the April War, and lived in Slovenia (a part of which was annexed by the Third Reich in 1941), the Independent State of Croatia (which was ruled by Croatian fascists and had very close relations with the Reich) and Belgrade (where the largest community of Serbian Volksdeutsche outside the Banat resided). There are hardly any names from the Banat on this list. Headquarters Berlin Command, Office of Military Government for Germany (US), 7771<sup>st</sup> Document Center, Machine Tabulations Branch, "Foreign N.S.D.A.P. Membership[;] Country: Yugoslavia," August 26, 1947, NARA, RG 242 [paper records], BDC (Berlin Document Center) Materials, NSDAP Foreign Membership, box 11.

its co-nationals to accept their current situation, and show obedience and discipline. Without explicitly referencing the Nazi Party's dual role in the Reich, the Volksgruppenführung stressed the need for continued ideological as well as administrative exertion within the Volksgruppe as its *raison d'être*. It mentioned the fact that in the weeks since the Yugoslav defeat individual Volksdeutsche administrators were often left to their own devices, but emphasized that the future would bring uniform rules and expectations.<sup>450</sup> Strict regimentation and centralization of the administrative apparatus would be the norm in the Banat. This reassured the Reich Germans in Belgrade and Berlin of the Banat Volksgruppe's reliability, and gave the individual administrators in the Banat the impression that their leadership was in full control of their destiny.

The same issue of the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung* carried an official description of the Volksgruppe's administrative structure: a hierarchy of offices under the Volksgruppenführer, which provided for every aspect of a Volksdeutscher's life.<sup>451</sup> It confirmed the extant organization of the Volksgruppe in county and town or village chapters (Kreis- and Ortsgruppen, the latter further divided into 'neighborhoods' and 'companies,' Nachbarschaften and Kameradschaften).<sup>452</sup> It also provided for the

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<sup>450</sup> Anonymous, "Neuen Aufgaben entgegen," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat, Serbien und Ostsyrmien* [after this, its first issue, this publication was renamed the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*; from now on *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*], May 1941, pp. 1-2.

<sup>451</sup> The Landesleitung of the Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien had a main staff office (Stabsamt), an office for the registering of and transactions in land (Landesschatzamt), an administrative main office (Hauptamt für Verwaltung) with subsections for statistics, legal issues, finance, etc., a culture main office (Hauptamt für Kultur) with subsections for schools, press and propaganda, science, etc., a main office for public health and social care (Hauptamt für Volksgesundheit und Volkswohlfahrt), and an economics office (Amt für Volkswirtschaft). Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko, "Organisationsbestimmungen für die Organisation der deutschen Volksgruppe," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, May 1941, p. 3.

<sup>452</sup> "Organisationsbestimmungen für die Organisation der deutschen Volksgruppe," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, May 1941, p. 2.

existence of subordinate organizations for men (Deutsche Mannschaft), women (Deutsche Frauenschaft) and youth (Deutsche Jugend),<sup>453</sup> modeled respectively on the SA, the NS-Frauenschaft and the Hitlerjugend.

This proclamation testified to the Volksgruppenführung's readiness to accept the Banat Volksdeutsche's separation from the Volksdeutsche of other Yugoslav lands and their organization on the social model of the Third Reich. As such, it amounted to a Gleichschaltung (cooptation or coordination) of the Banat Volksgruppe to a degree which had not been possible before the April War. However, it did not mean that all Volksdeutsche automatically fell in with the Volksgruppenführung's decisions.

Moreover, this proclamation had been passed by the Volksgruppenführer, and did not carry the weight of an official proclamation from the Reich. To remedy the situation, a series of laws was passed by the Serbian collaborationist government, acting on orders from the Reich, which provided legal protection and special privileges for the Banat Volksdeutsche. These served a dual purpose: they cemented the Volksgruppenführung's loyalty to and dependence on the Reich, and gave the nervous Banat Volksdeutsche looking across the River Tisa some peace of mind regarding Hungarian threats. These laws also effectively committed ordinary Volksdeutsche to practical and ideological service to the interests of the Third Reich, whatever their private opinions of the Nazi regime.

Not surprisingly, most high-ranking Volksdeutsche had legal training: Sepp Janko, Sepp Lapp, head of the Grossbetschkerek Court of Appeals Wilhelm Neuner, and Banat Police Prefect Franz Reith were all lawyers and laid their faith in legal documents.

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<sup>453</sup> "Organisationsbestimmungen für die Organisation der deutschen Volksgruppe," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, May 1941, p. 3. See Chapters 4, 5 and 7 for more on these.

The first of these – guidelines for the Volksdeutsche administration in the Banat – served a similar role as did the creation of a separate Kreiskommandantur for the Banat. Both were meant to protect Volksdeutsche interests<sup>454</sup> by setting down a legal and administrative framework, which would protect the Volksdeutsche whether the Banat stayed a Reich-occupied territory or was eventually annexed by either Hungary or Romania.<sup>455</sup> In his postwar writings, Josef Beer comments that the Volksdeutsche administrators “made up [their] minds to act as though [they] would forever remain the rulers [of the Banat],” regardless of the future possibility of a Hungarian takeover.<sup>456</sup>

The parameters of the Banat Volksdeutsche administration were set down at a meeting in Belgrade on June 5, 1941, attended by representatives of the Reich German civilian administration (Turner’s staff), the Military Commander in Serbia, Feldkommandantur 610 in Smederevo (which shared the administrative border with the Banat), Banat Volksdeutsche, and the Serbian collaborationist government. The latter were there only *pro forma*, and readily voiced their willingness to meet all Volksdeutsche demands supported by Turner and the Military Commander.<sup>457</sup>

The new Banat administration got its legal framework in the “Verordnung über die innere Verwaltung des Banates” (“Decree on the Inner Administration of the Banat”). Since in June 1941 Serbia was still divided into banovine, Sepp Lapp was named the Banat’s Vizebanus (deputy to the Serbian ban appointed by the Aćimović government). He officially acted as a representative of the Serbian Ministry of the Interior. Likewise,

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<sup>454</sup> Turner to Stuckart (1942), NARA, RG 242, T-501/266/1262.

<sup>455</sup> Zöller to Ehlich (1941), Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena, file J-167, p. 2.

<sup>456</sup> “haben wir uns zur Fiktion durchgerungen, wir handeln so, als wären wir für immer Herren dieses Landes.” Josef Beer, “Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 612.

<sup>457</sup> Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien Verwaltungsstab meeting minutes [first such document], June 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,156.

various Serbian ministries officially employed personnel in charge of protecting their ministries' interests in the Banat,<sup>458</sup> but this personnel consisted of Volksdeutsche recommended to the ministries by Lapp and the Volksgruppenführung.<sup>459</sup>

This went much further than merely confirming the Volksgruppe's organization as delineated in the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*. It meant that, within the Banat, the Volksdeutsche administration acted as a stand-in for the Serbian ministries and Turner by supervising police and legal matters,<sup>460</sup> German schools, postal services, railways, border control and Banat finances.<sup>461</sup> None of these were official separated from the relevant Serbian ministries, but whereas Turner remained in charge in Serbia proper, in the Banat he depended on Lapp's subordinates for the provision of basic services vital for the smooth running of the occupation and the extraction of the Banat's agricultural surplus.

Moreover, this arrangement allowed the military administration to get around the technical superiority of the Aćimović government over the Banat's Volksdeutsche administration by placing the latter directly under Turner and the Military Commander in Serbia. Kreiskommandantur 823 had already been subsumed directly to the Military Commander. With the June 5 agreement, both the military (Reich German) and the civilian (Banat German) chains of command in the Banat led straight to the Military

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<sup>458</sup> Militärbefehlshaber Verwaltungsstab minutes [first document] (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,156-157; Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien Verwaltungsstab meeting minutes [second such document], June 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,158.

<sup>459</sup> "Verordnung über die innere Verwaltung des Banates," no date on this copy, BA MA, RW 40, file 184, pp. 2-4.

<sup>460</sup> The Court of Appeals was moved from Novi Sad to Grossbetschkerek, and Wilhelm Neuner appointed its head by the Serbian Ministry of Justice on Lapp's recommendation. "Verordnung über die innere Verwaltung des Banates," BA MA, RW 40, file 184, p. 3.

<sup>461</sup> Militärbefehlshaber Verwaltungsstab minutes [first document] (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,157; Militärbefehlshaber Verwaltungsstab minutes [second doc] (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,160-161.

Commander. Nevertheless, since jurisdiction over Volksdeutsche affairs was a source of permanent tug-of-war between the AA and Heinrich Himmler, the Banat Volksdeutsche really answered to all three. Because all three were of the Reich, this caused some administrative confusion, but did not amount to a division of Volksdeutsche loyalties, as had been the case before the April War. In 1941 (before Himmler's influence over the Banat Volksdeutsche increased with the idea to use them as Waffen-SS recruits in early 1942), the Military Commander in Serbia and Benzler cooperated fairly well in enabling the Banat administration to find its feet.

While the June 5 agreement gave the Banat Volksdeutsche a degree of power in local affairs without precedent in any other territory occupied by the Third Reich,<sup>462</sup> this did not amount to real autonomy or self-government. In its relations with the Serbian collaborationist government, and especially in comparison to the position of the Volksdeutsche in the Bačka and the Independent State of Croatia, the Banat Volksdeutsche wielded great power over the mixed Banat population. German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler sums it up well in describing the Volksgruppenführung as “in part an executive body of the military administration, in part the bearers of local rule in the Banat, which had received some clear tasks [usually performed by] the state . . . [The Volksgruppenführung] possessed a freedom of action barely restricted by the [Serbian government], derived entirely from wartime circumstance.”<sup>463</sup> Yet the Banat

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<sup>462</sup> With characteristic hyperbole, in his postwar writings Beer likens the heads of various sections of the Banat administration to government ministers. Josef Beer report (1973), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/3, frame 38.

<sup>463</sup> “teils Exekutivorgan der deutschen Militärverwaltung war, teils die Gebiets Herrschaft im Banat ausübte und eindeutig Staatliche Aufgaben übertragen bekam . . . besaßen . . . eine aus den Kriegsbedingungen abgeleitete, von den Serben kaum eingeschränkte Handlungsfreiheit.” Wehler, *Nationalitätenpolitik in Jugoslawien*, p. 49.

Volksdeutsche remained tied to Reich interests by carrying out policies preapproved in the Reich, aiding in the economic exploitation of their home region, later in providing the Reich with soldiers, and playing a subordinate role in the diplomatic battle of wills between the Reich and Hungary.

The continued threat of annexation by Hungary, compounded by the Volksdeutsche's minority status in the Banat and their role as executors of Reich policy rather than policy makers in their own right, meant that the Volksdeutsche administration could never implement the kind of radical population policies the Reich was developing for the East in the summer of 1941. Indeed, since plans for the resettlement of the Banat Germans had been postponed till war's end, the Volksgruppenführung and Reich representatives in Serbia were left with the continued need to placate the Banat's ethnic Hungarians as representatives of the neighboring Kingdom of Hungary. This is illustrated by a proviso of the June 5 agreement, which determined that municipal presidents in the Banat would be recruited depending on the relative size of the three major ethnic groups in each municipality. For example, the municipal representative for Grosskikinda was to be a Volksdeutscher, his first deputy a Serb, and his second deputy an ethnic Hungarian.<sup>464</sup> Of the eleven municipalities<sup>465</sup> and five major towns<sup>466</sup> of the Banat, ten had a Volksdeutscher as municipal president, five had a Serb, and only one an ethnic Hungarian.

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In a rare moment of real insight, Janko confirms this in his memoir, when he describes his wartime administration as enjoying a "temporary supremacy of the Deutsche Volksgruppe, conditioned by the war" ("einem zeitweiligen kriegsbedingten Übergewicht der Deutschen Volksgruppe"). Janko, *Weg*, p. 205.

<sup>464</sup> Militärbefehlshaber Verwaltungsstab minutes [second doc] (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,159.

<sup>465</sup> Alisbrunn, Grossbetschkerek, Grosskikinda, Modosch, Kowatschitza, Kubin, Neu-Betsche, Neu-Kanischa, Pantschowa, Weisskirchen, Werschetz.

<sup>466</sup> Grossbetschkerek, Grosskikinda, Pantschowa, Weisskirchen, Werschetz.

Despite this show of ethnic solidarity, the Volksdeutsche accounted for only one fifth of the Banat population, so the division of administrative power clearly favored ethnic Germans. In addition, the chiefs of police for all five major Banat towns were Volksdeutsche,<sup>467</sup> as were the heads of all of the main Banat administrative offices<sup>468</sup> save one,<sup>469</sup> and by 1943 all five major Banat towns had Volksdeutsche mayors.<sup>470</sup> Local power and authority were *de facto* concentrated in Volksdeutsche hands. At the same time, at least a modicum of local power was ceded to the other ethnic groups.<sup>471</sup> The reason for this was the Reich's continued need for an alliance with Hungary rather than a departure from the Volkstum principle toward true ethnic plurality.

The ethnic Hungarians desired more, and had on their side the continued threat that the Banat would be handed over to Hungary sooner rather than later,<sup>472</sup> although the transfer of the Novi Sad Court of Appeals to Grossbetschkerek alone indicated that the Bačka and the Banat would not be reunited under Axis auspices any time soon. The position of the Reich Germans in Belgrade vis-à-vis the Banat ethnic Hungarians in summer and fall 1941 was not unlike that of the Yugoslav government on the eve of the

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<sup>467</sup> Militärbefehlshaber Verwaltungsstab minutes [second document] (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,159.

<sup>468</sup> "Verordnung über die innere Verwaltung des Banates," BA MA, RW 40, file 184, p. 2.

<sup>469</sup> The Hauptamt für Volksgesundheit und Volkswohlfahrt was headed by an ethnic Hungarian. Völkl, pp. 76-77.

<sup>470</sup> Völkl, p. 79.

<sup>471</sup> Several deputies to municipal and district presidents were Serbs, ethnic Hungarians, ethnic Romanians, and even a single ethnic Slovak. Völkl, p. 78.

<sup>472</sup> Ekkehard Völkl sees in this a trend toward a vindication of the Volkstum principle by the gradual creation of "discrete areas of settlement" ("geschlossener Siedlungsräume") for the different ethnicities in the Banat (Völkl, p. 69). I disagree, since the Banat Volksdeutsche were isolated from the Volksdeutsche of other Yugoslav lands and were clearly given more local power than any other ethnic group. A more plausible scenario following an Axis victory in the war (when the Hungarian alliance would have lost some of its importance) would have more closely resembled the Nazi plan to transform the East into a land where a small number of Germans could lord it over a large non-German population, ethnic Hungarians included. The ultimate fate of all Volksdeutsche would have likely been resettlement to the Germanic East.

April War vis-à-vis the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche. The Reichsdeutsche made small concessions and promises to the Banat ethnic Hungarians, with the ulterior motive of preserving the status quo. In the period immediately following the April War, the status quo meant continued Reich occupation of the Banat and resistance to Hungarian and Romanian demands for it. The ratification of a Banat Volksdeutsche administration was a way of consolidating the Reich's hold on the Serbian Banat.

Despite the June 5 agreement, Hitler's original promise continued to stir up Hungarian revisionism. It, in turn, continued to take the form of small-scale agitation and minor incidents, diplomatic complaints to the AA, and official demands to have the earliest possible date for a Hungarian takeover of the Banat firmly established. Incidents in towns and villages on the east side of the Banat-Bačka border represented by the River Tisa, such as Neu-Betsche, Neu-Kanischa and Torda, were mostly on the order of verbal clashes and fistfights. Volksdeutsche and Serbian border guards fought individual Hungarian soldiers and officers as well as Banat ethnic Hungarians.<sup>473</sup> In the same spirit of petty provocation, the Hungarians in the Bačka restricted Banat peasants' access to land on an island in the River Tisa, claiming that the island lay on the Bačka side of the river.<sup>474</sup>

These incidents were pure provocation, fed by instances of Wehrmacht members crossing into the Bačka and stirring up trouble as payback for Hungarian infractions.<sup>475</sup>

Not only did these incidents undermine combined Reichsdeutsche, Serbian and

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<sup>473</sup> "Verhalten der Ungarn im Banat und in der Bačka" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/455-456; Maier (Geheime Feldpolizei commander in Grossbetschkerek) to Geheime Feldpolizei Gruppe 20, June 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/482-483; Maier to Geheime Feldpolizei Gruppe 20, "Ungarische Volkszugehörige in Neu Kanischa, Übergriffe gegen serbische Grenzschutzorgane," June 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/484-485.

<sup>474</sup> "Meldungen aus dem Reich," August 4, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 163, fiche 1, frame 15.

<sup>475</sup> Gravenhorst to all Feldkommandanturen, June 26, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/498.

Volksdeutsche efforts to preserve peace and order, they also allowed rumors of imminent Hungarian takeover – the supposed date of which had moved to June 20 – to maintain their potential for causing mass unrest.<sup>476</sup> So widespread were these rumors that the Military Commander requested specific information from Berlin regarding their truthfulness.<sup>477</sup> Yet after the Banat Volksdeutsche and the Reichsdeutsche stationed in Serbia got sufficiently riled up by threats of imminent invasion, the worst Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin Döme Sztójay did was to accost the Reich government on June 20 with yet another plea for a final territorial settlement in the Balkans. He received an evasive reply from the exasperated State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker, which boiled down to a message to Budapest to stay out of Banat affairs and trust in Hitler to keep his word in his own good time.<sup>478</sup> As before, revisionism may have been a central element of Hungarian state policy, but it did not warrant open conflict with the Third Reich.

In a combined effort to curb Hungarian agitation during summer 1941, Weizsäcker rebuffed Hungarian representatives in Berlin while the border separating the German from the Hungarian occupation zone in the Vojvodina became more solid. Hungarian army officers who wanted to visit the Banat became required to obtain entrance visas from the German Embassy in Budapest.<sup>479</sup> In addition, a liaison officer of the Hungarian army was assigned to the Reichsdeutsche military staff in Belgrade in late

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<sup>476</sup> And not just among Volksdeutsche: as had been the case in the first days of the April War, the Banat Serbs were at least as worried about the prospect of living under Hungarian rule again. Kriegstagebuch, June 13, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 3, p. 6.

<sup>477</sup> Which illustrates the extent to which the Reich's military failed to communicate with the Reich's diplomatic corps. Benzler to AA, June 12, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,259.

<sup>478</sup> Weizsäcker memo, June 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,263; Weizsäcker memo, July 1, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13, document no. 55.

<sup>479</sup> Kriegstagebuch, July 14, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/529.

July.<sup>480</sup> He was meant to present the conquered populace with a semblance of unity and joint decision-making within the Axis, as well as to quell persistent rumors that the Hungarians planned to overrun the Banat and murder or expel all Serbs living north of the Danube to Serbia proper,<sup>481</sup> in line with their already established practice in the Bačka.<sup>482</sup> The Reich Germans in Serbia feared these rumors not because they believed Hungary would dare make a move without Berlin's assent,<sup>483</sup> but because said rumors "destroyed the morale of the Serbs[,] undermined the will to action and authority of the Government of Commissars [Serbian collaborationist government], and strengthened the exodus into communism"<sup>484</sup> among Serbian refugees. Hungarian revisionism indirectly strengthened the Partisan movement, and made the Axis goal of securing Southeast Europe more difficult.

Hungarian revisionism also had a side-effect the Hungarian authorities were not in a position to exploit sufficiently. This was the continued unsettling effect Hungarian threats had on the Banat Volksdeutsche even after they were officially established as the privileged ethnic group in their home region. "Meldungen aus dem Reich" for early

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<sup>480</sup> Gravenhorst to AOK 12 [Armee-Oberkommando 12 under Field Marshall Wilhelm List], July 25, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/254/243.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*; Weizsäcker memo, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13, document no. 55; Benzler to AA, August 5, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,306.

<sup>482</sup> Helmut Triska (head of AA's Volkstumsreferat) to Weizsäcker, July 31, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,569.

<sup>483</sup> In fact, so secure were the Wehrmacht authorities in Serbia of the strength of their position vis-à-vis Hungarian desires, that they allowed ethnic Hungarians in the Banat to display the Hungarian flag and national symbols on August 20, St. Stephen's Day and a Hungarian national holiday. No swastika flags had to be displayed. Though they presented this decision as a sign of tact and respect for an ally's national traditions, the timing of the decision suggests instead that the Reich was not in the least convinced or worried by Hungarian revisionist rhetoric. Spiller (chief of the Abteilung öffentliche Sicherheit with the Banat Police Prefecture in Grossbetschkerek) to Polizeivorstehung Grossbetschkerek, August 20, 1941, Muzej Vojvodine, document 19736/13.

<sup>484</sup> "Hoffnungslosigkeit der Serben vermehren[,] Aktionswillen und Autorität Kommissariatsregierung untergraben und Abwanderung zum Kommunismus fördern." Benzler to AA, August 8, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,311.

August 1941 commented on the Volksdeutsche's "extremely indifferent attitude" and lack of faith in their ability to be masters of their own destiny, now that both Yugoslav rule and the specter of Hungarian domination were averted.<sup>485</sup> Sepp Lapp's official installation as Vizebanus on July 7 provided an opportunity for Turner to admonish the Volksdeutsche for their dereliction of duty after the devotion so many had showed to Kulturbund activities before the April War.<sup>486</sup> Looking back on the past few months, contributors to the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung* showed a keen understanding of psychology in identifying the sudden removal of external pressure in the form of Yugoslav authorities as the key factor in the Volksdeutsche's lassitude and turning away from communal identity in favor of pursuing material self-interest.<sup>487</sup> They also, somewhat less charitably, accused their co-nationals of a stubborn refusal to obey orders issued by Volksdeutsche administrators, "when earlier any foreign [i.e. Serbian] notary or policeman had only to say the word, and everyone hopped to it."<sup>488</sup>

While for the Reichsdeutsche administration in Serbia and the Volksdeutsche administration in the Banat the summer months of 1941 represented a period of consolidation, for many individual Banat Volksdeutsche it must have been a comedown from the adrenaline-fueled days of April. Once the initial euphoria of Reich occupation-*qua*-liberation had waned, the Volksdeutsche were faced with new, often inexperienced administrators and uncertainty about law, land ownership and the possibility of

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<sup>485</sup> "einer äusserst gleichgültigen Haltung" Being a Reich document, there was no irony in the implication that the Volksdeutsche were masters of their destiny i.e. independent of Reich interests. "Meldungen," August 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 163, fiche 1, frame 11.

<sup>486</sup> "Meldungen," August 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 163, fiche 1, frame 13.

<sup>487</sup> Anonymous, "Stark und einig sein," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, September 1941, p. 1.

<sup>488</sup> "wenn hingegen früher irgendein fremder Notär oder Polizist etwas anbefohlen hat, so ist ein jeder gesprungen." "Stark und einig sein," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, September 1941, p. 2.

Hungarian invasion. It is understandable that many turned away from matters of government and Volk in favor of bringing in the harvest, something tangible and necessary, whatever the future held for the Banat.

This only made the Volksgruppenführung's task of reorganizing the Volksgruppe along explicitly National Socialist lines more difficult. Before the average Volksdeutsche peasant could be enticed to give his time and money to the Volksgruppe again, he had to be offered at least the semblance of long-term security for his family and property. Legal protection for Volksdeutsche in the case of future Banat independence and, even more so, in the case of a Hungarian takeover, was paramount.

Harald Turner welcomed the results of the June 5 meeting in Belgrade, since they officially incorporated the Banat Volksdeutsche administration into the Reichsdeutsche administrative structure in occupied Serbia. They also accorded with the Reich-Hungarian agreement on minority protection.<sup>489</sup> The June 5 agreement did not, however, explicitly guarantee Banat Volksdeutsche rights under future Hungarian rule.<sup>490</sup> For this, an additional law was needed. Since no decision taken by members of the Reich German administration in Serbia could be made without consulting relevant offices in Berlin, this gave State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart, one of the Third Reich's premier legal minds, a chance to weigh in.

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<sup>489</sup> Turner, "2. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," July 10, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 184, p. 1.

<sup>490</sup> So concerned was the Volksgruppenführung regarding the prospect of annexation by Hungary that it submitted a detailed list of demands for the preservation of Volksdeutsche cooperatives and economic enterprises independently of the Hungarian economic system barely ten days after the June 5 meeting, which should have indicated that the Banat would *not* become Hungarian any time soon. Neuhausen to OKW, June 16, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, R 100550 Slowakei, Ungarn, Banat, Kroatien, Rumänien u. Dänemark, Gesetze und Verordnungen, 1939-1944, pp. 303-305.

In a long speculative report dated July 15, 1941, Stuckart laid out his view of Southeast Europe as integral to the reordering of a Germanic East, and the strengthening of Southeast-European Volksdeutsche as central to this long-term project.<sup>491</sup> This was the conventional Nazi view of the connection between ethnic Germans and the East. However, unlike many, who ignored Southeast Europe in favor of waxing lyrical about Russia as the place where the German could prove his mettle as both warrior and worker, Stuckart built on his proposals from the April 17-18 meetings on the division of Yugoslav lands<sup>492</sup> to posit the Southeast as crucial to the Reich's racial regeneration through conquest and the settlement of desirable populations in a fertile landscape.

Though he used the kind of grandiose and unspecific language typical of Nazi utopias,<sup>493</sup> Stuckart remained true to his training as a lawyer, concerned with practicalities and specific details,<sup>494</sup> and proposed a practical solution to the problems of the Banat Volksdeutsche in the face of their likely future under Hungarian rule. He implied a debt of honor owed by the Reich to the Volksdeutsche of the Vojvodina for their "practically proverbial"<sup>495</sup> loyalty to the Reich. He proposed that dual Reich and Hungarian citizenship be given to the entire Banat Volksgruppe, and extended to all Volksdeutsche living in Hungary with its newly gained territories, thus making any Hungarian assault on Volksdeutsche rights a direct attack on the Reich.<sup>496</sup> This proved impractical for three reasons: the Hungarian government would not have agreed to such a

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<sup>491</sup> Stuckart, "Denkschrift über die Lage und das zukünftige Schicksal des Deutschtums im ehemaligen jugoslawischen Staatsgebiet," July 15, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,079-081.

<sup>492</sup> See p. 136.

<sup>493</sup> Dirk-Gerd Erpenbeck, *Serbien 1941. Deutsche Militärverwaltung und serbischer Widerstand* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1976), pp. 11-12; Wehler, "Reichsfestung Belgrad," pp. 78-79.

<sup>494</sup> Stuckart to Ritter, July 15, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,073.

<sup>495</sup> "fast sprichwörtlich" Stuckart, "Denkschrift" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,078.

<sup>496</sup> Stuckart, "Denkschrift" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,091-092.

sweeping move; conferring citizenship on an entire Volksgruppe would have been problematic at a time when the parameters of who could belong to the German Volk were still being hammered out in the course of individual screenings of resettlers as well as in the Banat Volksgruppe itself (see Chapter 4); and it would have set a dangerous precedent for the granting of Reich citizenship, rendering the very category of ‘Volksdeutscher’ – beloved of Nazi plans for a racial paradise in the East – null and void. Stuckart’s proposal, laudable in its ideological justification and intent, was therefore never seriously considered.

Stuckart’s proposal was premised on a future development which was never explicitly stated in the text: the erosion of state borders and of the very concept of sovereignty among the Reich’s Balkan allies. In a postwar Europe united under Nazi auspices, the movement of populations and their legal status would be a pure formality. In the context of wartime realities, however, the Third Reich remained very much hobbled by diplomatic agreements with its allies. This was evident in the Reich’s continued treatment of the simmering Hungarian-Romanian rivalry with kid gloves, and its failure to treat Hungarian Jews the same as Polish or Ukrainian Jews as long as Hungary retained, as a sovereign state, the last word on the treatment of all its citizens. Therefore any decision on a single ethnic group’s legal status, rights and obligations was constrained by the borders within which said group resided.<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> An article in the Reich periodical *Deutsche Arbeit* even identified (though without mentioning the Serbian Banat, since it was not an independent state) the three major trends in the evolution of Volksdeutsche legal status since 1938: the legalization of their internal organization on the Reich model; the legal recognition of their ties to the Reich; and the official anchoring of their position in the legal systems of their host states. Arnold Weingärtner, “Südost-Neuaufbau auf volkischer Grundlage. Die neue Gesetzgebung für die deutschen Volksgruppen in Südosteuropa,” *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 4, April 1942, pp. 107-108.

The ruling on the Banat Volksdeutsche's legal status which did come about, rested on the unspoken assumption that the borders of occupied Serbia-Banat would not change in the foreseeable future. As an occupied zone, Serbia-Banat was not a sovereign state, yet was represented as such, with a (collaborationist) Serbian government and a (nominally) autonomous Banat. Therefore the "Verordnung über die Rechtsstellung der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Serbien" ("Decree on the Legal Status of the German National Group in Serbia") was published in *Službene novine*, the official mouthpiece of the Serbian government, on July 23, 1941. It had all the hallmarks of a legal document passed by a supposedly sovereign government,<sup>498</sup> though it was dictated by Reich interests, and its contents would have been unacceptable to even the most pro-German interwar Yugoslav government.

In many ways, this decree fulfilled all the goals that the Kulturbund had been striving for since Janko's appointment as its leader: the recognition of a special status for the Volksdeutsche in Serbia, the guarantee that they could share the Reich's policy and ideology, and their full equality with Serbs within Serbia-Banat. The defunct Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which had existed in a precarious balance between its multiethnic reality and its self-identification as a South-Slavic state, could not tolerate for any one of its ethnic groups to have its cake and eat it too by being both integrated (equality) and special (separate legal standing), both domestic and 'alien.'

Under Reich occupation and in a Serbian state whose sovereignty existed only on paper, these contradictions were relatively easy to reconcile. The decree gave the

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<sup>498</sup> As Felix Benzler, the AA representative in occupied Belgrade, explained to his superiors in Berlin, appearances had to be upheld by having the Serbian collaborationist government, rather than the Reichsdeutsche military administration, pass this order. Benzler to AA, June 27, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, R 100550, p. 302.

Volksgruppe “full right to be active in politics, culture, economy and social issues,” and defined it as a “legal person of a public-legal character,” a group legal entity called the “Deutsche Volksgruppe in Serbien.”<sup>499</sup> Its interests were represented by the Volksgruppenführer’s appointees on the level of municipality, county and banovina, and its members guaranteed full equality with Serbs.<sup>500</sup> Furthermore, “members of the German Volksgruppe are guaranteed the full protection of their German Volkstum, compliance with the National Socialist view of life, the free development of their natural life as a Volk, and the free creation and maintenance of völkisch and cultural ties to their German mother-Volk.”<sup>501</sup>

Yet this decree did not give the Serbian Volksdeutsche grounds to make any claims which overreached their status in Hitler’s Europe. The text defined the Volksgruppe as comprising “all Germans who live in this area [Serbia-Banat], are not citizens of the German Reich, and are led by the Volksgruppenführer.”<sup>502</sup> While not the clearest definition of Volksdeutsche ever produced, it did confirm that Volksdeutsche were not equal to Reichsdeutsche and that, in addition to their Germanness, they were defined by their area of residence. In calling them the Deutsche Volksgruppe in Serbien, the text denied any special status to the Banat, Volksdeutsche administration

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<sup>499</sup> “puno pravo dejstvovanja na političkom, kulturnom, privrednom i socijalnom polju . . . svojstvo pravnog lica javnopravnog karaktera, pod nazivom “Nemačka narodnosna grupa u Srbiji.”” “Uredba o pravnom položaju nemačke narodnosne grupe u Srbiji,” *Službene novine*, July 23, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> “Članovima nemačke narodnosne grupe garantuje se potpuno čuvanje nemačke narodnosne pripadnosti, uticaj nacionalsocijalističkog pogleda na život, slobodni razvoj njihovog prvobitnog narodnog života i slobodno preuzimanje i čuvanje narodnosnih i kulturnih odnosa sa nemačkim materinskim narodom.” “Uredba o pravnom položaju,” *Službene novine*, July 23, 1941, p. 5.

<sup>502</sup> “Nemačka narodnosna grupa u Srbiji obuhvata sve Nemce, koji žive na ovome području, koji nisu nemački državljani i stoje pod vođstvom Vođe narodnosne grupe.” “Uredba o pravnom položaju,” *Službene novine*, July 23, 1941, p. 4.

notwithstanding. Finally, the Volksdeutsche's individual interests and wishes were subsumed to the interests of the group, as articulated by the Volksgruppenführer. The latter proviso gave a legal basis for the Volksgruppenführung to exhort its co-nationals to greater obedience than it could have done before the April War (see Chapter 4).

The Volksdeutsche of Serbia-Banat retained their Serbian citizenship because it did not make practical sense for the Reich to offer them a separate legal status in any context other than that of their host state any more than it had made sense before the April War. For their daily lives and the administration they had erected in the Banat, however, their ideological and material ties to the Reich carried far more weight. Accordingly it received more attention in the text, effectively proclaiming the Deutsche Volksgruppe in Serbia-Banat to be an extension of the Third Reich in the Balkans. This was bolstered by the decision, suggested by Janko and approved by the Serbian government (and, by extension, the Reich), to make German and Serbian the official languages in the Banat.<sup>503</sup>

Despite Nazi rhetoric which extolled their kinship with the Reichsdeutsche, the Volksdeutsche could only count on special (better) treatment vis-à-vis the non-German residents of Serbia. They could hope for no special accommodation from the Reich, and they knew it. The publication of the “Verordnung über die Rechtsstellung der Deutschen Volksgruppe in Serbien” was greeted within the Volksgruppe by the general criticism that the Volksgruppenführung had not gotten as much freedom for the Banat as it could have, and had “flogged the Banat away to Serbia.”<sup>504</sup> The level of popular discontent within the Volksgruppe prompted Sepp Janko to publish an article in the Banat press, in

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<sup>503</sup> Stille (aide to Benzler) to AA, July 14, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,268.

<sup>504</sup> “Viele glaubten, der Volksgruppenführer habe das Banat an Serbien verschachert.” Editorial comment no. 14, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 180.

which he stressed that the Volksgruppe's local autonomy could not be divorced from its ties to Germany and the Volk, and that neither the Serbian government nor the Volksdeutsche themselves could decide their ultimate destiny – this remained Hitler's prerogative.<sup>505</sup>

Such proclamations proved to his overseers in the Reich and Belgrade that Janko was a good National Socialist. They also proved that, consciously or not, Janko was aware of his dependence on the Reich. As for ordinary Volksdeutsche, whatever personal resentment they may have nursed against their leadership and the Reich in summer 1941, they failed to react to the increasing regimentation of their society by the Volksgruppenführung. This trend is evident already in the proclamation of the Volksgruppe's organization along National Socialist lines (i.e. its effective Gleichschaltung) in May 1941. It became even more pronounced with the granting of a separate legal status to Volksdeutsche *as a group* (a legal body) in July. This solidified the chain of command, and confirmed the Volksgruppenführer's position as sole representative of the Volksgruppe in the relations between ethnic Germans and Reich Germans in Serbia.

Dependence on group identity gave the group's leaders power. In the case of the Banat Volksgruppenführung, the removal of the constraints imposed by the Yugoslav authorities was compounded by the legal establishment of the ethnic Germans *as a group*. Ironically, while this gave the ethnic Germans more power, it also reinforced their dependence on the Third Reich as the agent of their elevation. It was in order to accord

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<sup>505</sup> Janko, "Die deutsche Volksgruppe – Rechtspersönlichkeit," published in *Banater Beobachter* [German-language newspaper published in Grossbetschkerek; from now on *BB*], July 27, 1941, in Janko, *Reden*, pp. 71-72.

with Reich interests that the Volksgruppenführung proceeded to tighten the reins on the Volksgruppe in summer and fall 1941.

A major prerequisite for the successful Gleichschaltung of the Banat Volksdeutsche, without their physically joining the Reich either through resettlement or through annexation, was the guarantee that they would remain an entity separate from both the Serbian collaborationist administration and the Hungarian state. For all that Turner hailed the integration of the Volksdeutsche administration into the Serbian state structure and that the establishment of their legal position stressed their equality with Serbs, the very creation of a legal and administrative framework favoring the Banat Volksdeutsche meant that their integration into occupied Serbia existed primarily on paper.

The specter of Hungarian occupation was a different matter. While fear of it arguably helped close Volksdeutsche ranks and eased their Gleichschaltung, the prospect of a Hungarian Banat also needed legal address. The ostensible reason for the passing of the July law on the Volksdeutsche's legal status had been to guarantee their rights within occupied Serbia. In the case of a Hungarian takeover, it would have been naïve to expect the Hungarians to respect this arrangement.<sup>506</sup> Speaking to Helmut Triska of the AA's Volkstumsreferat on July 31, Turner suggested that the Banat might plausibly become Hungarian around October 1, 1941, provided two preconditions were satisfied: the harvest was secured for the provisioning of Reichsdeutsche troops, and the rights of the

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<sup>506</sup> Fully aware of this, the Volksgruppenführung urged Volksdeutsche to “remain disciplined as always, wait and see” (“verhalten wir uns wie immer diszipliniert und warten ruhig ab”). Anonymous, “Vom Kampf zum Aufbau,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, August 1941, p. 2.

German Volksgruppe in the Banat were protected against the repressive methods already displayed by the Hungarians in the Bačka.<sup>507</sup>

Ostensibly in order to debate this proposal, the AA convened a conference in Budapest on August 6, attended by representatives of the AA, the VoMi (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle), the Reichsdeutsche administration in Belgrade, and Volksdeutsche of the Banat and Hungary. At this meeting, any possibility of handing the Banat over to Hungary was predicated on the Hungarians' willingness to guarantee Volksdeutsche rights.<sup>508</sup> Although the demonstrable cause for this meeting was to discuss the best way to fulfill Hungary's territorial wishes, no representatives of the Hungarian government were included in the deliberations. This not only confirmed Hungary's subordinate position in the Axis Pact, but also suggested that the meeting was mere window dressing intended to fob off the Hungarians yet again.

The participants in the meeting were not shy about expressing their misgivings regarding Hungarian behavior and its likelihood for improvement. Luftwaffe General Heinrich Danckelmann, German military commander in Serbia at the time, requested that his superior Field Marshall List convince Hitler not to allow this transfer of territory to take place at all. Danckelmann's reasons were not ideological, but purely practical, and ones that had been put forth by Reich personnel in Serbia before. Paramount among these was the Hungarian practice of expelling Serbs from their zone of occupation, which would in turn cause a refugee problem for Danckelmann. An influx of refugees would

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<sup>507</sup> Triska memo, July 31, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,935-936.

A representative of the German Red Cross in Serbia also remarked on the need to get the harvest in i.e. not to allow Hungarians into the Banat before October. Wick to General Heinrich Danckelmann (German commanding general in Serbia) and Benzler, September 11, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/249/746.

<sup>508</sup> Danckelmann to Field Marshall Wilhelm List (Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber Südost), August 9, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,599.

make Danckelmann and the Serbian government's efforts to combat the communist resistance all the more difficult, since even the royalist Četnici might unite with the communist Partisans if the Reich allowed yet another part of Serbian territory to fall the Serbs' traditional enemy, the Hungarians.<sup>509</sup>

In addition, the living conditions of Volksdeutsche in the Banat were far better than those in the Bačka. Echoing Stuckart's utopian proposal, it was even suggested that the kind of rights held by the Banat Volksdeutsche should be extended to all the Volksdeutsche in Hungary proper and in the Bačka before a Hungarian takeover of the Banat could succeed.<sup>510</sup> The unlikelihood of this happening in the foreseeable future was not lost on the participants of the Budapest meeting. Racial ideology and the desire to ensure the continued survival of the ethnic German community in the Banat served as a means to a practical end – that of preventing an immediate Hungarian takeover of the Banat and a Hungarian clash with the Romanians in the first, crucial weeks of Operation Barbarossa.

A later, internal AA memo not intended for Hungarian eyes confirmed that the August 6 meeting had not really dealt with the question of a Hungarian takeover of the Banat, rather with the way in which Banat Volksdeutsche would be handled and protected “with regards to a later Hungarian takeover of the Banat.”<sup>511</sup> The distinction is a fine but crucial one: the Banat would be Hungarian eventually, the operative word being ‘eventually.’ In the meantime, Banat Volksdeutsche needed to be protected and bolstered in their Volkstum if they were to remain a valuable racial, ideological as well as

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<sup>509</sup> Danckelmann to List (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,600.

<sup>510</sup> Triska to Ritter and Ernst Woermann (AA), September 9, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,951-952.

<sup>511</sup> “im Hinblick auf eine spätere Rückgabe des Banats an Ungarn” Werner von Schmieden (AA) to Mackeben (AA), August 26, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,974.

practical asset for the Reich. One way to do this was to guarantee their legal rights as a group, which is what the July 23 decree did.

While the August 6 meeting failed to give the Hungarian side the answer it desired, it did confirm a trend established in the interwar period: every Hungarian-related action had an equal or greater Romanian reaction. Hot on the heels of the meeting in Budapest, the Romanian government and Romanian diplomats in Berlin concluded that a Hungarian invasion of the Serbian Banat would ensue on August 16. This sparked yet another flurry of missives to Berlin and the German Embassy in Bucharest, none of which received more than the customary evasive response.<sup>512</sup> Ribbentrop issued (another) unequivocal circular to the effect that German diplomatic representatives in Bucharest and Budapest, as well as officials dealing with the Hungarian and Romanian diplomatic representatives in Berlin, should continue to appear receptive to the concerns of Germany's allies, but remain completely noncommittal until war's end.<sup>513</sup>

Where diplomacy failed, strength of arms could be applied instead, although in the unequal power relationship between Nazi Germany on one side, Hungary and Romania on the other, force of arms was not used this early in the war. This was not for lack of saber-rattling on the Hungary and Romania's part. In early September 1941, the Reich brusquely rejected Romanian suggestions that companies of Romanian soldiers be deployed on the Serbian side of the Danube in order to secure the Iron Gates (Đerdap in Serbian), a section of the river east of Belgrade, where it forms the natural border

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<sup>512</sup> Killinger to Weizsäcker, August 13, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,601; Woermann memo, August 13, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2415/E221,602-603.

<sup>513</sup> Woermann memo, August 14, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,971; Ribbentrop to Killinger, August 21, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XIII.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), document no. 218; Weizsäcker memo, August 26, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H297,973.

between Serbia and Romania and is as vulnerable to attack as it is vital to transportation.<sup>514</sup> Reich occupation forces in Serbia and Romanian troops in Romania remained limited to their respective shores, but were expected to collaborate in securing the river against Partisan and Četnik attack.

Following the system developed for deploying Hungarian and Romanian troops in the Soviet Union, Hungarian, Romanian and Reichsdeutsche river ships divided the task of securing the Serbian stretch of the Danube Basin, with Romanian shipping deployed east of Belgrade,<sup>515</sup> the Hungarian flotilla deployed west of Belgrade along the River Sava (which flows into the Danube at Belgrade),<sup>516</sup> and the single German ship ensuring the two never met.<sup>517</sup> The Hungarians, in turn, seized upon the rumor that Romanian land troops had crossed the Danube into Serbia to demand either a Hungarian military occupation of the Banat or at least the introduction of Hungarian administrators there. Both suggestions were rebuffed in no uncertain terms.<sup>518</sup>

While the Reich kept Hungarian ambition in check by diplomatic means, the Nedić government passed the “Verordnung über die Teilnahme der Ungarn an der Verwaltung des Banats” (“Decree on the [Ethnic] Hungarian Participation in the Banat Administration”<sup>519</sup>) on October 23. This was a peaceful, legal means of neutralizing the

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<sup>514</sup> Kriegstagebuch, September 5, 10 and 16, BA MA, RW 40, file 11, pp. 4, 8 and 13; General Franz Böhme (German commander in Serbia after Danckelmann) to List, September 19, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 11, p. 139.

<sup>515</sup> Kriegstagebuch, September 14 and 21, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 11, pp. 12, 16.

<sup>516</sup> Kriegstagebuch, October 1 and 3, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 12, pp. 3, 5.

<sup>517</sup> Kriegstagebuch, September 14 and 16, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 11, pp. 12-13; OKW memo, September 18, 1941, BA MA, RH 2, file 680, fiche 2, frame 120.

<sup>518</sup> Weizsäcker memo, September 16, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13, document no. 328.

Weizsäcker memo, September 18, 1941, in *DGFP*, Series D, Volume 13, document no. 333.

<sup>519</sup> Völkl erroneously claims that the text of this document has been lost (Völkl, n. 289 on p. 76). It has been preserved in Serbian translation: “Uredba o učešću mađarske narodnosne grupe u upravi Banata,” *Službene novine*, October 28, 1941, p. 2.

ethnic Hungarian element inside the Banat. It provided for the use of Hungarian as third official language in those Banat municipalities where ethnic Hungarians accounted for at least one third of the population, and for the limited participation of ethnic Hungarians in the Banat administration.

Ethnic Hungarians were appointed to chief administrative positions in two districts (Serbian *srez*, a subunit of a municipality)<sup>520</sup> as well as high-ranking positions in several Banat towns with large ethnic Hungarian populations.<sup>521</sup> Ethnic Hungarian public notaries and judges were installed in the very few districts with ethnic Hungarian majorities, and ethnic Hungarian postal workers were appointed “commensurate with their [ethnic Hungarian] numbers.” Ethnic Hungarian teachers would teach separate Hungarian-language classes, but only if a sufficient number of children “proven to belong to the Hungarian people” registered.<sup>522</sup> The phrases used suggest that much was left to the interpretation of individual administrators in charge of different Banat administrative offices, and as these were mostly *Volksdeutsche*, this decree hardly amounted to a fairer division of power. Instead, it effectively isolated Banat ethnic Hungarians in the few districts where they were a substantial presence, demonstrating to the Hungarian government that unfair treatment of minorities was a game two could play.

The last occasion on which the Reich even contemplated a Hungarian armed presence in the Banat occurred in December 1941, when Reich officials in both Berlin and Belgrade tried frantically to devise an efficient means of combating the Partisans in Serbia proper the following spring. In this context, a Hungarian Banat made even less

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<sup>520</sup> Alt-Kanischa and Neu-Betsche (the latter doubled as center of the municipality). *Ibid.*

<sup>521</sup> Deputy commissioners in Grossbetschkerek, Grosskikinda and Kowatschitza, and head of city council in Grosskikinda. *Ibid.*

<sup>522</sup> “u srazmernom broju . . . samo ona deca za koja [error in the original] bude dokazana pripadnost mađarskoj narodnosti.” *Ibid.*

sense than earlier, since Partisan activity in the Banat was minimal (see Chapter 5), and could only increase as anti-Hungarian popular unrest set in. Moreover, Ernst Woermann of the AA pointed out the risk inherent in the Third Reich showing any weakness by “calling for help [from the Hungarians]” instead of making a Hungarian occupation of the Serbian Banat seem like the stronger partner’s concession, a “grand political gesture” on the Reich’s part.<sup>523</sup> As usual when dealing with its Southeast-European allies, the Third Reich erred on the side of acting in a clear but non-committal fashion, which left any and all future territorial settlements possible but closed to debate. For the time being, “Hungarian troops will not be deployed. The current situation in the Banat will not be altered.”<sup>524</sup>

In customary, almost ritualized protest, Antonescu’s government complained that the rumored extension of the Hungarian occupation zone in former Yugoslavia would “hurt the feelings of the Romanian people” at a time when Germany required Romania to make great sacrifices<sup>525</sup> in manpower and resources for the war in the East. Ribbentrop’s response was an exasperated negation of these repetitive rumors.<sup>526</sup> Instead of becoming embroiled in a localized war in the Banat, the Reich authorities found an elegant solution: they ordered that the Bulgarian zone of occupation in south Serbia be extended to include more of central and southeast Serbia,<sup>527</sup> which were hotbeds of resistance activity. This

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<sup>523</sup> “Ich würde es für vollkommen verfehlt halten, die Ungarn ins Banat gewissermassen zur Hilfe zu rufen, statt ihnen die von ihnen seit langem erstrebte Besetzung als eine grosse politische Geste zu gestatten.” Woermann memo, December 18, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,467.

<sup>524</sup> “Ungarische Truppen werden nicht herangezogen. An dem jetzigen Zustande im Banat wird nichts geändert.” Ritter memo, December 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,474.

<sup>525</sup> “die Gefühle des rumänischen Volkes verletzt würden” Killinger to AA, January 6, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), document no. 104.

<sup>526</sup> Ribbentrop to Killinger, January 11, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume I, document no. 111.

<sup>527</sup> Ritter memo, December 23, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,471.

made more sense strategically, since Bulgaria did not participate in the Soviet campaign, and laid no claim to parts of Serbian territory contested by Hungary and Romania.<sup>528</sup>

As before, ownership of the Banat remained a major issue for both Romania and Hungary, a constant irritant for the Reich Germans in Belgrade, but a relatively minor annoyance for Berlin. Unlike earlier occasions, when a Romanian or Hungarian intervention without Reich approval was unlikely but not impossible, in fall 1941 these threats lost all of their persuasive power, since they were thwarted again and again by said countries' unwillingness to challenge the Third Reich openly. As the Axis troops got bogged down on the Eastern Front and the Eastern campaign entered its first Russian winter, the Reich decided *not* to use Hungarian troops to fight the resistance in Yugoslav lands outside the Bačka and the Baranja, not least because it needed those troops in the East more than ever. With these events, the likelihood of a localized conflict between Hungary and Romania diminished exponentially. Even the rumors and mutual accusations of a Hungarian or Romanian takeover fell off sharply after December 1941, and when they did recur they had clearly lost their bite.<sup>529</sup>

Perhaps the most important factor in the waning of the Hungarian threat was the fact that in late summer and fall 1941 the Volksdeutsche administration found its feet,

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<sup>528</sup> Although the argument can be made that the December deliberations about using Hungarian troops to secure the Banat were just for show, intended to soothe Hungarian pride. Hungarian deployment had already been rejected in September. Moreover, in late November or early December records of criminal proceedings were transferred from the former Yugoslav court in Novi Sad to the Banat Court of Appeals in Grossbetschkerek. The German military administration in Belgrade arranged this with the Hungarian government – even allowing for bureaucratic confusion, these arrangements would hardly have taken place were the Banat to be handed over to Hungary within a matter of weeks. Turner, “7. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Befehlshaber in Serbien,” December 6, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/251/910.

<sup>529</sup> E.g. this doozy of a rumor, more ludicrous than scary or convincing, started by an ethnic Serbian member of the Hungarian parliament in fall 1942: he contended that Hitler had approved a Hungarian-Italian-Serbian front against Romania as well as the (contradictory) division of the Serbian Banat between Hungary, Romania and a future independent Serbian principality. Benzler to AA, September 2, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,669.

proved itself competent and capable of enforcing its (and the Reich's) will over the Banat's mixed population. The Volksgruppenführung felt its position to be strong enough to proclaim in September 1941 that, although its administration was officially a part of the Serbian state, the Volksdeutsche were guaranteed supremacy in the Banat.<sup>530</sup> Turner echoed this perception in his monthly reports, though he also pointed out that the Volksgruppe continued to labor under a lack of trained personnel,<sup>531</sup> which caused administrative work to be done very slowly, despite all the good will shown by the administrators.<sup>532</sup> Even so, already in early October Vizebanus Sepp Lapp drew on the June "Verordnung über die innere Verwaltung des Banates" to proclaim that all representatives of the Serbian collaborationist government in the Banat would cease work on October 25,<sup>533</sup> their tasks to be taken over by administrators appointed by Sepp Lapp. Such an order could not have been passed without the approval of the German commander in Belgrade, and suggests that for all its growing pains, the Volksdeutsche administration was rapidly gaining the Reichsdeutsche's trust to be a reliable collaborator. Administrators were learning on the job, and learning fast.

Lapp kept the administrative chain of command unified by reminding his subordinates that all items of business had to pass through the his office, not be passed by subordinate offices directly to the Reich German military authorities in Grossbetschkerek

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<sup>530</sup> Anonymous, "Organisation der Volksgruppe," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, September 1941, p. 2.

<sup>531</sup> Turner, "4. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," September 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 186, p. 10; Turner, "6. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," November 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 188, p. 10; Turner, "7. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," December 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 189, p. 8.

<sup>532</sup> Turner, "6. Lagebericht" (1941), BA MA, RW 40, file 188, p. 10.

<sup>533</sup> Lapp, "Anordnung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, October 3, 1941, p. 1.

or in Belgrade,<sup>534</sup> and that communicating in writing was safer than passing on orders orally.<sup>535</sup> In addition to security measures needed at a time when the communist uprising in Serbia posed a serious threat to all representatives of the Third Reich, the emphasis on written communication helped keep both author and recipient of orders accountable.

It also suggests that, for all the personal prestige in which Sepp Janko was held, his subordinates in the Banat administration no more shared in it than Hitler's subordinates shared in the adulation accorded to the Führer in the Third Reich. Personal contact remained important in a relatively small and tightly knit community like that of the Banat Volksdeutsche, but bureaucratic rationalization ensured that everyday tasks were performed in an orderly and relatively timely fashion. Though peer pressure and personal contact played a large role in ensuring ordinary Volksdeutsche's complicity with their leadership (see Chapters 4, 5 and 7), the Banat administration was far from the "idiosyncratic peasant democracy" of informal networks suggested by Josef Beer in his postwar apologia.<sup>536</sup>

The Reichsdeutsche military administration in Belgrade kept the Banat Volksgruppenführung tied firmly to the Reich's agenda and prevented the development of independent policies which might have led to an inchoate Banat free state.<sup>537</sup> The Volksgruppenführung, in turn, kept a close watch over its members, especially those in

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<sup>534</sup> Lapp, "Runderlass," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, December 17, 1941, p. 4.

<sup>535</sup> Heim (Lapp's chief of cabinet), "Runderlass," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, December 12, 1941, p. 1.

These guidelines were actually issued on November 19, and serve as an example of the fact that the windmills of the Banat administration ground slowly, but they did also grind fairly small.

<sup>536</sup> "eine bäuerliche Demokratie eigener Prägung" Josef Beer, "Der Aufbau der Volksgruppenverwaltung im Banat" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/35, frame 636.

<sup>537</sup> As when it curtly reminded Lapp that all official Banat communication with states occupying parts of former Yugoslavia had to go through Reich offices in Belgrade. Kreisvorsteherung des Banater Kreises, "Mitteilung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, August 6, 1942, p. 1.

official positions. This was especially true after the December 1941 administrative reform made the Banat a separate county (Kreis) within Serbia, with Lapp's title of Vizebanus replaced by that of Kreischef (county chief).<sup>538</sup> The deputy ban becoming Kreis leader was a symbolic sign that the Banat had got about as much autonomy as its Volksdeutsche could hope for – autonomy from the Serbian collaborationist government, that is, not from the Reich and its representatives in Belgrade. In relation to the latter, the December 1941 administrative reform made the Volksgruppenführung “more or less an executive organ of the [Reichsdeutsche] military administration” in Serbia.<sup>539</sup>

Thereafter, the Volksgruppenführung occasionally implemented decisions without waiting for the approval of the Nedić government, yet always with the tacit approval of the Reich Germans in Serbia (and Berlin), especially if these decisions led to even more centralization of power in German hands. Such was the case when Lapp ordered that town councils in the Banat be dissolved on April 15, 1942, their powers of deliberation and decision-making devolving to mayors, who were often Volksdeutsche (certainly in the Banat's major towns<sup>540</sup>) and were directly supervised by the Volksgruppenführung.<sup>541</sup> This decision was ratified after the fact by a proclamation of the Nedić government in June 1942.<sup>542</sup>

Other decisions were, as before, suggested by the Volksgruppenführung, approved by the German commander in Belgrade after consultation with the Reich, then

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<sup>538</sup> Ministerstvo unutrašnjih poslova, “Ernennung,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, January 15, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>539</sup> Karl-Heinz Schlarp, *Wirtschaft und Besatzung in Serbien 1941-1944. Ein Beitrag zur nationalsozialistischen Wirtschaftspolitik in Südosteuropa* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986), p. 341.

<sup>540</sup> See p. 172.

<sup>541</sup> Lapp, “Ordne ich an,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, March 26-April 2, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>542</sup> “Uredba o nadležnosti pretsednika gradskih opština u Okrug banatskom,” *Službene novine*, June 16, 1942, p. 1.

rubberstamped and publicized by the Serbian government. This was the case with the decision to officially change many Serbian place names in the Banat to German ones.<sup>543</sup>

This particular decision was made relatively late, in 1943. The perceived need to make the landscape German by renaming it was not as serious in the Banat,<sup>544</sup> since the Volksdeutsche there identified deeply with the soil they worked and the landscape they inhabited (see Chapter 6), and German place names had been a matter of common usage among German-speakers even before the April War.

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<sup>543</sup> Some were direct translations or even transliterations between the two languages. “Promena imena mesta u Okrug banatskom,” *Službene novine*, March 19, 1943, p. 2, reprinted in *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 31, 1943, p. 4. Thus Kraljevićevo officially became Franzfeld, Hajdučica – Heideschütz, Sečanj – Petersheim, Knićanin – Rudolfsgnad, Šupljaja – Stefansfeld, Hajfeld – Heufeld, Martinica – Sigmundfeld, Katarina – Kathreinfeld, Banatski Despotovac – Ernsthäusen, Nakovo – Nakodorf, Molin – Molidorf, Jaša Tomić – Modosch, Lazarevo – Lasarfeld, Mariolana – Zichydorf, Jabuka – Apfeldorf, Sečenovo – Setschanfeld, Glogonj – Glogau, Velika Greda – Georgshäusen (spelled ‘Georghäusen’ in the Serbian-language text), Ninčičevo – Pardan, Omoljica – Homolitz, Banatski Brestovac – Rustendorf, Sveti Hubert – Sankt Hubert, Gudurica – Kudritz, Bočar – Botschar, Belo Blato – Elisenheim, Begej Sveti Đurađ – Sankt Georgen, and Nemački Elemir – Deutsch Elemer. Three additional villages had their names changed a bit later: Crnja became Deutsch Zerne, Pavlovo – Deutsch Etschka, and Pločice – Blauschütz. “Promena imena mesta,” *Službene novine*, July 27, 1943, p. 1.

The names of the Banat’s major towns were also officially Germanized. Bela Crkva became Weisskirschen, Kikinda – Grosskikinda (also Kikinda), Vršac – Werschetz, and Petrovgrad or Veliki Bečkerek – Grossbetschkerek (also Betschkerek). “Uredba o promeni imena gradova Bele Crkve, Velike Kikinde, Vršca i Petrovgrada u Okrug banatskom,” *Službene novine*, March 30, 1943, p. 2, reprinted in *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, June 19, 1943, p. 9. Pančevo did not officially become Pantschowa, due likely to its proximity to Belgrade and the fact that since June 1941 it served as the seat of Feldkommandantur 610 following an explosion at the munitions depot in Smederevo (Gravenhorst to OKH, June 10, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/450-451; Kriegstagebuch, June 13, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/422; Kriegstagebuch, June 23, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/495). Since Feldkommandantur 610 was in charge of northern Serbia proper, this rendered Pančevo’s status as a purely Banat town tenuous.

<sup>544</sup> The Volksgruppenführung had petitioned the Serbian Interior Ministry to have place names officially changed to German ones already in fall 1941, but the Reichsdeutsche military administration from which the Interior Ministry took its cues clearly did not consider this a pressing matter. Neither did the Serbian Interior Ministry, however pro-German its high echelons. Janko to Christian Brücker (Belgrade Kreisleiter), February 26, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv [‘German Archive’], box 27-A, folder 5, document 40.

For all its shortcomings, Turner could not fault the Volksgruppenführung with lack of zeal.<sup>545</sup> At the turn of 1941-1942 he proclaimed the Volksgruppe completely organized and regimented (i.e. gleichgeschaltet), with 84 town and village chapter (Ortsgruppen) divided among five Serbian counties, the majority located in the Banat.<sup>546</sup> The Volksdeutsche administrators' motives must have ranged from desire for steady employment, to the wish to serve the Volk and the local community, to purely ideological zeal. Be that as it may, even the most apolitical administrator could hardly escape the increasing regimentation of Volksdeutsche life.

Administration and ideology permeated each other in the Banat, as they did in the Third Reich itself. Throughout the second half of 1941, the Volksgruppenführung exhorted its co-nationals to aid their local administrators instead of just criticizing their work,<sup>547</sup> and the administrators to help make the Volksgruppe into an elite organization.<sup>548</sup> At the conclusion of the 1941 harvest, more time and energy was invested into regular and frequent propaganda activities in Ortsgruppen.<sup>549</sup> All Volksdeutsche were urged to participate actively on the grassroots level (in Nachbarschaften and Kameradschaften) in order to strengthen the Volksgemeinschaft by

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<sup>545</sup> Already in April 1941, SS-Untersturmführer Zöller in Grossbetschkerek described the Volksgruppenführung as being led by "its heart more than its reason" ("mehr vom Herzen als vom Verstande"), a somewhat backhanded compliment but one which acknowledged the ideological dedication and enthusiasm of newly minted Volksdeutsche administrators. Zöller to Ehlich (1941), Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena, file J-167, p. 6.

<sup>546</sup> Turner, "8. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," January 6, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 190, p. 10.

<sup>547</sup> Anonymous, "Klar sehen und richtig handeln," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, June 1941, pp. 1-2.

<sup>548</sup> Anonymous, "Vom Kulturbund zur Ausleseorganisation," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, December 1, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>549</sup> Anonymous, "Der Beginn der Winterarbeit," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, November 1, 1941, pp. 1-2; "Arbeitsplan der Ortsgruppen," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, December 1, 1941, p. 2.

literally “envelop[ing] the whole Volksgruppe like a web.”<sup>550</sup> They were also reminded that the Banat was too small to play a leading role in European affairs, so that they should place their faith (and fate) in Hitler’s hands as into those of a benevolent god, who protected the Volksdeutsche, not least from the specter of Hungarian domination.<sup>551</sup>

The image of a helpless creature in need of protection, ensnared, at the mercy of superior forces, reinforced real dependence of the Volksgruppe on the Reich as well as the perceived necessity to keep the Volksgruppe’s ranks closed against both internal and external enemies. While individual Volksdeutsche may have objected to some of their leaders’ policies, or even relished the opportunity to bring a neighbor-turned-administrator down a notch, the continued Hungarian threat and reliance on the Third Reich’s protection, the flurry of decrees granting Volksdeutsche more rights than before, and the new opportunities for enrichment in the second half of 1941 (see Chapters 4 and 5) conspired to prevent most overt expressions of disapproval.

The consolidation of the Volksdeutsche administration meant that some of the pressure was lifted from the Banat Volksdeutsche, leaving them time to pursue individual interests and to object to policies which limited such pursuits. The Volksgruppenführung therefore took it upon itself to secure the Banat Volksgruppe as a unified body, to regenerate it in line with its leaders’ moniker ‘Erneurer’ (Renewers):

Our highest ambition [is] to nourish communal values in our Volk, to strengthen a [völkisch] ethos and, through a process of moral and spiritual renewal [Erneuerung], forge a new, fierce, politically mature Swabian. Yet we must recognize the fact that our Volksgruppe as a whole does not yet think and live in a National Socialist manner. Our mortal enemy, materialism, keeps breaking through. . . . Many arrivistes have tried to exploit the reversal [i.e. Yugoslav

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<sup>550</sup> “wie ein Netz die ganze Volksgruppe umspannen” Anonymous, “Die Nachbarschaften,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, June 1941, p. 6.

<sup>551</sup> Anonymous, “Rückblick und Ausblick,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 1, 1942, p. 1.

defeat and Reich German rule] for personal gain; many petty grumblers can only find things to criticize; many senseless rumors have been fabricated and spread by gullible people. We still have a long way to go to educate our Volk. We already have a good, healthy core [Kern]. But everything that happened recently due to outside pressure or as an idea must be consolidated. Here lies the organization's [i.e. Volksgruppe's] preeminent task.<sup>552</sup>

On the institutional level, the legalization of the Banat Volksdeutsche's group identity meant that the individual member of the Volksgruppe became more liable than before to orders passed by the Volksgruppenführung. The Volksgruppenführung had earlier been a guiding, advisory body. Now its decrees carried the weight and power of the law to ensure compliance from Volksgruppe members. The fact that the Serbian state was no real state, deprived of legitimacy and sovereignty by its status as a Reich German puppet, meant that, with the Reich's backing, the Volksgruppenführung could wield all the more power in the Banat in its dual role as a legally recognized social body and as an administrative structure. Even so, as will be discussed in the following chapter, its ability to coerce its co-nationals into obedience remained limited. Its success depended more on the complicity of ordinary Volksdeutsche than on its coercive power.

Some historians as well as some Volksdeutsche apologists have exaggerated in describing the Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien after April 1941 as

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<sup>552</sup> "Daher gilt unser höchstes Streben: die Gemeinschaftswerte in unserem Volke zu pflegen, die Gesinnung zu festigen und so durch innere sittliche und geistige Erneuerung einen neuen, kämpferischen und politisch reifen Schwaben zu schaffen. Wir müssen uns dabei im klaren sein, dass unsere Volksgruppe in ihrer Gesamtheit noch nicht nationalsozialistisch denkt und lebt, immer wieder bricht sich da oder dort unser Todfeind, der Materialismus durch. . . . Wieviel Konjunkturritter haben versucht diesen Umschwung zu ihrem persönlichen Vorteil auszunützen; wieviel kleinliche Mäckerer sind am Werke Kritik und nur Kritik zu üben; wieviel unsinnige Gerüchte werden erfunden und von leichtgläubigen Menschen weiter tragen. In der Erziehung unseres Volkes haben wir daher noch einen weiten Weg vor uns. Wir haben wohl einen guten gesunden Kern, aber all das, was lediglich durch äusseren Druck oder aus Überlegung in der letzten Zeit dazugekommen ist, muss noch gefestigt werden. Hier liegt die vornehmste Arbeit der Organisation." Anonymous, "Unsere Organisation," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, June 1941, pp. 4-5.

tantamount to a state within the state<sup>553</sup> or as a true “people with its own state [Staatsvolk].”<sup>554</sup> After the administrative reform of December 1941 the Serbian collaborationist government did effectively lose all influence on Banat affairs, as did the specter of Hungarian invasion. By that point, the Volksgruppenführung had a sufficiently firm grip on power relations inside the Banat to prevent any major internal challenges to its authority. However, its Reich German overseers’ ability to exert pressure on the Volksgruppenführung increased in direct proportion to how many legal and material privileges Volksdeutsche were granted inside the Banat. The following chapter will deal with the material privileges Volksdeutsche enjoyed against Banat non-Germans, and the price the Reich expected them to pay.

### Conclusion

Even after the Third Reich decided, for diplomatic and military reasons, to occupy the Serbian Banat in April 1941, the establishment of a Volksdeutsche administration there was not an automatic outcome. The conditions which came together to make such an administration the best option for a Reich gearing for the invasion of the Soviet Union were: the necessity for a peaceful solution to the continued rivalry between Hungary and Romania over ownership of the Serbian Banat; the administrative complexity and overlapping jurisdictions in occupied Serbia, which created a space in which the Volksgruppenführung could present itself and its co-nationals as reliable, efficient collaborators; the Reich’s need for the successful extraction of the Banat’s agricultural

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<sup>553</sup> Schlarp, p. 341.

<sup>554</sup> Josef Volkmar Senz, *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben von 1918 bis 1944*, Volume 2: *Das Schulwesen der Donauschwaben im Königreich Jugoslawien* (Munich: Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks, 1969), p. 131.

surplus; the fact that the Banat was a secondary theater of operations, so the Reich was more open to improvised solutions there than in the coveted prize that was the conquered East; finally, the perceived racial affinity between Reich and ethnic Germans, especially in a multiethnic area where all other ethnicities were deemed by the Nazis as more or less inferior.

Only the fortuitous coming together of all these conditions allowed the Banat Volksdeutsche to attain a degree of administrative control in their home region unparalleled by other Volksdeutsche communities in the German sphere of influence. Nevertheless, as much power as the Volksgruppenführung in the Banat wielded over the ethnically mixed population, it never had true totalitarian control, not least due to its avowed and increased dependence on the Third Reich. The Serbian Banat had a degree of autonomy from Serbia proper and the Serbian collaborationist government, but was never fully independent. The very weakness of the Serbian government meant that the Reich wielded power over the Serbian Banat – and its Volksdeutsche – unchecked by a true sovereign state, as had been the case during the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The Volksdeutsche, in turn, no longer labored under the burden of divided loyalties, as all the institutions they worked with (the AA, the VoMi, the Reich Ministry of the Four-Year Plan, etc.) represented aspects of the Nazi regime.

This dependence on the Reich meant that the Banat Volksdeutsche never really bargained with Berlin. Instead, they offered services and allegiance, and were allowed privileges and perks in exchange. Examples of these privileges were the laws guaranteeing the Volksdeutsche's legal standing and predominance in the Banat administration, which were passed in the second half of 1941. At the same time as they

consolidated the Volksdeutsche's position in their home region, these laws prescribed and limited the Volksgruppenführung's sphere of influence to Southeast Europe by denying Banat Volksdeutsche access to Reich citizenship and Nazi Party membership.

The essential ambivalence of the Volksdeutsche position – German but not quite German enough – remained undiminished even after their administration was consolidated and the immediate threat of Hungarian and Romanian territorial revisionism removed in late 1941. This ambivalence was evident in the Volksgruppenführung's increased, but by no means absolute ability to enforce its decrees, and in the Third Reich's approach to various Volkstum matters in the Banat, including Volksdeutsche economy, education and living standard. The fact that the Reich levied a real material and human cost for the privileges it allowed the Banat Volksdeutsche provides insight into the motivation behind Volksdeutsche leaders' as well as ordinary Volksdeutsche's compliance and collaboration with the Nazi regime.

CHAPTER IV 'SWEETMEATS . . .'<sup>555</sup>:

## VOLKSDEUTSCHE DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES

The establishment of a Banat Volksdeutsche administration separate from the collaborationist government in occupied Serbia proper was the result of the Third Reich's practical, political and military needs more than racial ideology. Hitler's desire to keep as few military and administrative personnel from the Reich tied down in Southeast Europe in the run-up to the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, and to prevent his allies Hungary and Romania from going to war with each other over their mutually exclusive claims on the Serbian Banat, made the establishment of an ethnic German administration in the Banat convenient. The Reich continued to have the last word in all Banat affairs, rendering the Banat Volksgruppenführung (ethnic German leadership) an executive power more in the sense that it executed Berlin's wishes and orders than in the sense that it could implement independent policy. Once the Banat Volksdeutsche administration was established in the Banat, its leadership implemented a range of ideological and material policies which elevated Volksdeutsche over other Banat ethnicities, confirmed extant perceptions of Volksdeutsche cultural and racial superiority, but also increased the Volksdeutsche's dependence on and perceived debts to the Third Reich.

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<sup>555</sup> The titles of this and the following chapter (German for 'the carrot and the stick') are taken from East German historian Jutta Komorowski's description of the methods used by the Banat Volksdeutsche administration to ensure its co-nationals' compliance. Jutta Komorowski, "Die wirtschaftliche Ausbeutung des serbischen Banats zur Zeit der faschistischen deutschen Okkupation 1941-1944 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rolle der deutschen Minderheit," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der UdSSR und der volksdemokratischen Länder Europas*, Volume 31 (1988), p. 216.

As racial desirables, the Volksdeutsche administration as well as individual Volksdeutsche received a range of official and unofficial perks and privileges vis-à-vis the other Banat ethnic groups, such as access to German-language schools and administrative posts, better food rations, and land and other property expropriated (sometimes openly stolen) from Banat Jews and some Serbs. But, as elsewhere in Europe where ethnic Germans lived, the Third Reich benefited from every privilege it accorded to Volksdeutsche by strengthening their economic potential as well as their standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy. Banat Volksdeutsche were expected to make regular and abundant food deliveries for the Wehrmacht, pay high taxes, and serve the Reich as policemen and soldiers. The Reich's practical need for food and recruits met fortuitously with its ideological desire to elevate Volksdeutsche over other ethnic groups in the Balkans. It resulted in a marked change of the Volksdeutsche's living standard under occupation. They were treated far better than non-Germans, but also had greater expectations imposed on them if they wished to prove themselves worthy members of the Volk.

Underlying the promotion of Banat Volksdeutsche in their home region was the Reich's racial ideology. In an occupied territory such as the Banat, the Third Reich could implement its racial hierarchy with impunity. Being officially recognized as a Volksdeutscher became central to an individual ethnic German's daily existence, status in the community, economic viability, military obligations, etc. Belonging to the Volksgruppe (German ethnic group), in turn, solidified and, even, ossified social relations which preceded the April War. Thus minor personal conflicts became insurmountable ethnic (or racial) differences. Even though Heinrich Himmler did not officially decide on

racial criteria for belonging to a Volksdeutsche community until summer 1942,<sup>556</sup> the Banat Volksgruppenführung followed the Reich's established racial policy in deciding who could and should belong to the Volksgruppe already in the second half of 1941 (see below).

However arbitrary Nazi racial categories may have been, once accepted as the guiding principle for ethnic relations they simplified individual people's social identities, became rigid and seemed immutable. Once officially recognized as a member of the Banat Volksgruppe, an individual became embroiled in the Reich's policies because he or she accepted the privileges attendant on being a Volksdeutsche or embraced Nazi ideology, but also because social pressure within the Volksgruppe ensured the Reich received the Volksdeutsche's loyalty, service and material resources. A range of both positive and negative incentives was evident in the Banat Volksgruppe, and conspired to ensure Volksdeutsche compliance with – if not always enthusiasm for – policies passed down from Berlin. As for the Volksgruppenführung, its affinity for National Socialism ensured it collaborated enthusiastically, but not even these Volksdeutsche leaders were exempt from enjoying the material perks of their new position.

While the Volksgruppenführung could not formulate policy independently from Berlin, policies pre-approved by the Reich government were implemented without question in the Banat. It remains highly doubtful that Volksgruppenführer (Volksgruppe leader) Sepp Janko and his closest coworkers wielded much influence in inspiring Reich policy toward occupied Serbia-Banat, but there can be no doubt as to their efficiency and enthusiasm. However much the Volksgruppenführung strove to reshape the Banat in the Reich's image by changing place and street names and making German an official

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<sup>556</sup> See pp. 29-30.

language, the fact of residence in a multiethnic, multilingual environment continued to loom large in Banat affairs until the very end of the Volksdeutsche administration. The Reich's foreign policy required that, while ethnic Hungarians, ethnic Romanians and ethnic Slovaks may not have always prospered in wartime Banat, they certainly did not suffer any great privations. The former even benefitted on occasion from Hitler's continued desire to retain Admiral Horthy's friendship, at least until the Reich occupied Hungary in March 1944.

The situation was considerably worse for Banat Jews, as it was for all Jews in the German sphere of influence, and for those Banat Serbs on whom fell the shadow of suspicion that they participated in or sympathized with the communist resistance. For Serbs free of the communist taint – or clever enough to conceal it – the occupation years may not have been prosperous ones. The period 1941-1944 was punctuated by individual acts of cruelty and rapacity inflicted on Banat Serbs by the Volksdeutsche, but they were not a time of relentless oppression.

Though the Volksgruppenführung talked the talk of racial superiority and ideological struggle, the participation of most other Banat ethnicities in everyday administrative and economic affairs remained very much par for the course. This suggests a somewhat less than complete break with prewar ethnic power relations than the Volksdeutsche leadership would have liked to admit. The same is true of the Volksgruppenführung's relations with Berlin. Before April 1941 as well as after it, the former were junior partners and executors of orders from above, and received perks rather than real promotion, first from the Yugoslav state pressured by Hitler's Germany, and then directly from the latter. One decisive change did take place, however: the

elevation of the Volksdeutsche minority to the leading position within the Banat. In internal Banat matters, the Volksgruppenführung wielded quite a lot of power over the lives of individual Banat residents of all ethnicities, not least its co-nationals, but it lacked the strength and legitimacy required for full totalitarian control.

The Third Reich exerted a mixture of persuasion and coercion in its relations with the Banat Volksgruppenführung. Over time, this uneasy balance tipped increasingly toward coercion, but was never fully lost in civilian Banat affairs. (Military affairs were a different matter entirely, and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7.) Even in the last days of the Banat Volksdeutsche administration in October 1944, the Reich never unleashed its full potential for violence against the Banat Volksdeutsche, partly because of their continued value as a racial, strategic and economic resource, and partly because of their malleability and willingness to collaborate.

The same uneasy balance of persuasion and coercion was evident in relations between the Volksgruppenführung and ordinary Volksdeutsche. For all the dissatisfaction individual Volksdeutsche felt regarding individual policies passed by the Volksgruppenführung, large-scale open resistance or rebellion was no more in evidence in the Banat than in the Third Reich itself. This was due in part to the (real or promised) material recompense Volksdeutsche could expect in exchange for obedience, partly to ideological agreement, partly to apathy, and partly to undesirable alternatives: government by the Serbian Council of Ministers or by Hungary. The social structure of the Volksdeutsche community also affected its members' overall disposition to be obedient, if not always satisfied with their lot. In a relatively small, predominantly rural, tightly knit community whose sense of self was shaped by a historical exposure to a non-

German environment, the Volksgruppenführung ruled more by the skilful use of social and peer pressure than by strength of arms or the unshakable legitimacy of sovereign statehood, both of which it lacked.

### Volksdeutsche among Themselves

Postwar testimonies Banat Volksdeutsche expellees in West Germany gave to the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and Persons Damaged by War vacillated between bold assertions of the Volksgruppenführung's past independence of decision and action, and exculpation after the fact. Thus Janko's deputy Josef Beer made the patently false claim that the Volksgruppenführung used the pretense of obedience to Reich orders as a "necessary lie" to goad reluctant co-nationals into obeying unpopular orders.<sup>557</sup> By contrast, former head of the Pantschowa police's political section Oskar Krewetsch blamed Reichsdeutsche (Reich German) greed, corruption and lack of sympathy for supposedly more moderate Volksdeutsche wishes – their "arrogance, presumption, and impudent vaingloriousness"<sup>558</sup> in Krewetsch's damning yet vague purple prose – for the Banat residents' supposed resistance to orders.

In truth, resistance almost never went beyond the phenomenon of grumbling i.e. complaints without real action, which has been well-documented among vocal but ineffectual 'opponents' of the regime in the Third Reich by historians such as Ian Kershaw. Even these complaints were limited to objecting to individual policies of the

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<sup>557</sup> "Zwecklüge" Josef Beer (former deputy Volksgruppenführer in the Serbian Banat), "Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien" (1958), Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth (LAA), Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 618.

<sup>558</sup> "Die Arroganz, die Überheblichkeit and die schnoddrige Aufgeblasenheit" "Die "Donauschwaben" im jugoslawischen Raum in den Jahren 1919-1941 und im serbischen Raum (Banat) in den Jahren 1941-1945. Eine politische Analyse von Oskar Krewetsch" (1947), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/8, frame 143.

Volksgruppenführung, not to its presence or to the Banat's occupation by Reich forces. In a rare moment of clarity, Beer acknowledged that, lacking the ability to enforce policy, the Volksgruppenführung ruled by persuasion and social pressure,<sup>559</sup> at least over its co-nationals. As will be seen later in this and the following chapter, other ethnicities met with varying degrees of persuasion and coercion, depending on their standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy, and their corresponding value as a diplomatic or security factor.

Tensions between Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche were hardly new, whether they were as obvious as Banat civilians – albeit of unspecified ethnicity, but implied to be so many as to include Volksdeutsche – acting “fresh” to Wehrmacht soldiers in the street,<sup>560</sup> or less tangible yet arguably more rancorous as disputes between the two sets of administrators in occupied Serbia-Banat. As late as July 1943, a Reich report remarked on accusations – leveled by Reichsdeutsche and Banat Volksdeutsche respectively – of enrichment through Aryanized property under the guise of promoting Volk interests and favoring ethnic Hungarians at the expense of Volksdeutsche.<sup>561</sup> This report expressed cautious optimism about ongoing improvement of attitudes and relations,<sup>562</sup> yet the Reichsdeutsche-Volksdeutsche tension remained at a quiet simmer throughout the war years, never flaring into open disagreement or disaffection.

More damaging to stability within the Banat than this low-level conflict of wills between Reichs- and Volksdeutsche were tensions within the Banat Volksgruppe, which

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<sup>559</sup> Beer, “Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 619.

<sup>560</sup> “in frecher Weise” Kreiskommandantur I/823 in Grossbetschkerek, “Bekanntmachung,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, December 17, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>561</sup> Dr. Heinrich Geissler (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, Auslands-Organisation, Ortsgruppe Belgrad), “Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat,” July 1943 [no day given], Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), NS 5 VI Deutsches Arbeitsfront, Arbeitswissenschaftlichesinstitut (Zeitungsausschnittsammlung), file 29277/a, pp. 146-147.

<sup>562</sup> Geissler, “Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat” (1943), BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, pp. 148-149.

revolved primarily around class and generational difference. Already in fall 1941, confidential reports of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA) remarked on the widespread perception of leading Volksdeutsche by their co-nationals as “nouveau riches”<sup>563</sup> more interested in gain through corruption than in administration. That this impression had some grounds in reality is borne out by the small print in official publications, listing new board members for some of the Banat’s most profitable economic enterprises. For example, the edible oil factory in Grossbetschkerek (Erste Banater Ölfabrik) had on its board of directors the head of the Volksgruppe’s economic office (Hauptamt für Volkswirtschaft) Jakob Awender and chief of the Banat administration Sepp Lapp.<sup>564</sup> Likewise, among the directors of the newly founded company Banat-Film, licensed to import and show German films and operate mobile cinemas, were chief of the Volksgruppe’s organization for German schools (Schulstiftung) Adam Maurus, Josef Beer and Grossbetschkerek mayor Josef Gion.<sup>565</sup>

It took Sepp Janko nearly a year after the April War to take official steps toward regulating – really approving after the fact rather than preventing – this private enrichment under the guise of official business and ideological endeavor, at the same time as he was trying to put a stop to ‘wild’ Aryanization (see Chapter 5).<sup>566</sup> By then, the

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<sup>563</sup> ““Emporkömmlinge”” “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” September 11, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58 Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), file 164, fiche 1, frame 82.

<sup>564</sup> “Prva banatska tvornica ulja u Petrovgradu,” *Službene novine*, August 13, 1941, p. 20.

<sup>565</sup> Okružni sud u Petrovgradu, “Oglas,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, March 12, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>566</sup> He did so by stipulating that any member of the Volksdeutsche administration who wished to take on a leading role in an economic enterprise had to get his permission. Such administrators were obliged to keep administrative and economic activities separate so as not to render the Volksgruppenführung liable for any material – and, presumably, moral – debts incurred as part of the latter. (Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko, “Anordnung des Volksgruppenführers über die Genehmigungspflicht für die Ausübung von Wirtschaftsfunktionen durch Amtswalter der Deutschen Volksgruppe,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien* [from now on *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*],

widespread perception of corruption at the highest level of the Volksgruppenführung had already had a negative effect on Volksdeutsche morale.<sup>567</sup> This was made manifest in failure to attend rallies in sufficiently large numbers<sup>568</sup> or the opinion – expressed especially by the older generation of Volksdeutsche, who had experienced life in the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy – that Hungarian occupation could not be any worse than the German one,<sup>569</sup> with its relentless demands for agricultural deliveries and other sacrifices.

Middle-class resentment with more than a hint of trying to wash the Volksdeutsche clean of the Nazi taint is evident in some expellees' postwar testimonies, which railed against “these evil churls of the Volksgruppenführung,”<sup>570</sup> mere “layabouts”<sup>571</sup> who embraced Nazism as a cynical means to personal enrichment and empowerment of the crassest sort. This perception endured despite the fact that the Volksgruppenführung consisted of university-educated, middle-class men.<sup>572</sup>

What really damned the Volksgruppenführung in the eyes of some older Volksdeutsche was its youth and perceived lack of respect for its elders, whose more conservative and traditional political views predated the Nazi period. In August 1942 Sepp Janko issued a circular to the heads of all the major Banat administrative offices

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March 1, 1942, p. 8.) As an attempt to move from a system of rule by personal acquaintance toward a more impersonal, bureaucratic one, this arrangement rather lacked teeth.

<sup>567</sup> It bears noting that Janko does not seem to have lined his own pockets egregiously, whether from an excess of zeal as Volksgruppenführer and representative of the Greater Reich among his co-nationals or because he was more subtle than some of his greedier coworkers.

<sup>568</sup> “Meldungen,” September 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 164, fiche 1, frame 83.

<sup>569</sup> Gemeindeamt Soltur to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, February 9, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84 Sresko načelstvo Kikinda, 1941-1944, box 1, p. 467; Geissler, “Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat” (1943), BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, p. 143.

<sup>570</sup> “diesen üblen Kerlen bei der Volksgruppenführung” Testimony of Wilma Slavik (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 779.

<sup>571</sup> “neradni[ci]” Testimony of Terezija Andrejević from Zichydorf in Radović, Sindelić-Ibrajter and Weiss, p. 183.

<sup>572</sup> See p. 167.

directing them to compile detailed reports of their activities as a way of stopping once and for all the mouths of the older Kulturbund (Volksdeutsche organization in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) members. The latter were fond of claiming that all the hard work of building and consolidating the Volksdeutsche administration had been done by them during the 1930s, allowing the “youths” who came later to reap the fruits of another’s labor and idle away their days in power.<sup>573</sup> Janko’s barely concealed irritation is evidence of the Nazis’ failure to elide preexisting social and generational tensions within an all-embracing Volksgemeinschaft.

Whatever its ideological basis and the corruption of some of its members, there can be no doubt that the Banat Volksdeutsche administration worked very hard to keep its home region’s daily affairs running smoothly despite a constant shortage of trained staff. Though the Volksgruppenführung attempted at first to present the huge demands placed on its administrators as an honor and a duty expected of an ethnic German elite,<sup>574</sup> after Waffen-SS recruitment took the majority of adult men away from the Banat in fall 1942 it was not uncommon for high-ranking administrators to hold two or three positions at once.<sup>575</sup> This constant manpower shortage allowed some much-needed administrators on all levels from the village up, as well as technocrats (economic experts, bankers, court officials and pharmacists) to be released from their Waffen-SS<sup>576</sup> or labor service

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<sup>573</sup> “die “Jungen”” Janko to all Hauptamt chiefs, August 5, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv [‘German Archive’], box 27-A, folder 5, document 81.

<sup>574</sup> Anonymous, “Vom Kulturbund zur Ausleseorganisation,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, December 1, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>575</sup> Heim (stellvertretender Landesführer der Deutschen Mannschaft), “Befehl,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 12, 1944, p. 4.

<sup>576</sup> Reichel (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle economic office) to Felix Benzler (AA representative in occupied Belgrade), December 7, 1942, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Inland II D, file R 100548 Banat – Deutsche Volksgruppe, 1942-1944, p. 82.

duties.<sup>577</sup> Undoubtedly some pulled strings to secure such a release even if they were not really essential personnel. Even so, it quickly became necessary to train Banat Volksdeutsche women to fill some administrative positions and perform lighter tasks in workshops, industry and artisans' shops,<sup>578</sup> as well as to continue to employ non-German administrators, especially in municipalities with few or no Volksdeutsche.<sup>579</sup>

While the Third Reich was no stranger to ideological compromise needed to justify such reliance on perceived racial or gender inferiors, the Banat Volksdeutsche remained essentially narrow-minded in focus. In the words of a Reich commentator writing a few weeks before Italy was invaded by Anglo-American forces and knocked out of the war, the Banat Volksdeutsche's "mood [was] fundamentally shaped by purely local events."<sup>580</sup> However long the hours kept by many Volksdeutsche in administration, the presence alongside them of opportunists, women and non-Germans perpetuated the perception held by at least some older Volksdeutsche of a corrupt, cynical Volksgruppenführung with little regard for gender proprieties or perceived German exclusivity and superiority.

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<sup>577</sup> Josef 'Sepp' Lapp (chief of the Banat Volksdeutsche administration), "Rundschreiben," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, September 17, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>578</sup> "Siebente [in original] Durchführungsverordnung zur Verordnung über die Einführung kriegswirtschaftlicher Massnahmen des Reiches," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, September 24, 1943, p. 1.

Like the male administrators, these women also took on more than one post when necessary. Janko, "Ernennungen," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 12, 1944, p. 8.

<sup>579</sup> Reichel to Benzler (1942), PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100548, p. 82.

<sup>580</sup> "Im wesentlichen war die Stimmung bei den Volksdeutschen durch rein örtliche Vorkommnisse beeinflusst." "Monatsbericht für den Monat Juni 1943," no date, BA Berlin, NS 43 Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, file 202, p. 96.

The same series of reports specified that the Banat Volksdeutsche kept calm and maintained their faith in the Reich's leaders following the first major defeats the Reich suffered in the East in 1943 ("Lagebericht fuer den Monat April 1943," April 30, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 43, file 202, p. 27), but discussed at length the poor treatment and rations received by their co-nationals in the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" ("Stimmungs- und Lagebericht für die Zeit vom 1.5.-11.5.1943," May 11, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 43, file 202, p. 43).

It would be overly simplistic to represent the older generations of Volksdeutsche as resolutely – if ineffectually – opposed to their Nazified leaders. Though some loved to complain of those upstart youngsters, others shared the Volksgruppenführung’s ideological convictions. This is demonstrated by the case of a Volksdeutsche Catholic priest from Stefansfeld, who in 1943 had a swastika removed from the village cemetery, where it was blocking the central chapel’s cross. Ordered to report to the Sicherheitsdienst (SD) office in Modosch, he found out that the swastika had been put up by the mother of a local man killed fighting in the East (most likely in the Waffen-SS). This incident, and the priest’s habit of making thinly veiled references to religion’s preeminence over ideology, led to his arrest, internment in the Banjica concentration camp in Belgrade, and deportation to the Reich. Not even the fact that he was related to the head of the Volksgruppenführung’s office for social care saved him – or possibly his influential cousin preferred to be rid of this ideologically unsuitable family member. The priest left behind a village deeply divided between the more traditional, religious Volksdeutsche – those Himmler’s future representative in Serbia Hermann Behrends meant when he wrote as late as 1944 about the “uptight, anti-Reichsdeutsche, Betschkerek churchy mindset”<sup>581</sup> – and those who had accepted National Socialism and Hitler’s war as their own.<sup>582</sup>

The mother of the fallen soldier from Stefansfeld may have been motivated more by grief than by ideology in her opposition to the village priest. Even so, quite apart from Hitler’s anti-Bolshevik crusade against the Soviet Union – and its Balkan offshoot, the

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<sup>581</sup> “die verkrampfte antireichsdeutsch ausgerichtete Betschkereker Kirchtumshaltung.” Behrends to Himmler, April 28, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 19 Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, file 1728, fiche 3, frame 109.

<sup>582</sup> Testimony of Anton Schmidt from Stefansfeld (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frames 182-188.

struggle with Tito's Partisans – and in spite of all their grumbling, Banat Volksdeutsche of all ages welcomed Reich occupation and the Volksdeutsche administration. What they really objected to in late 1941 and early 1942 was the continued presence of Serbian and ethnic Hungarian administrators on the village level (since at the top Volksdeutsche held all the key positions) and continued ties to Belgrade, however tenuous,<sup>583</sup> *not* to the new administration per se.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, some ethnic tension existed in the Banat before the April War, but only the Reich occupation of the Banat inspired open displays of enmity between the Volksdeutsche and other Banat residents. The Reich occupation made the Nazi racial hierarchy a living reality for the Banat population, elevating the Volksdeutsche and engendering animosity and suspicion between them and others. Yet even after the April War, the racial and ideological warfare in the occupied East had no counterpart in the Serbian Banat. Partly this was due to the relative absence of armed action by resistance movements in the Banat (see Chapter 5), and partly to the fact that Volksdeutsche *as well as* most other Banat ethnic groups received positive as well as negative incentives to accept the Volksdeutsche administration.

It seems that the majority of Banat Volksdeutsche continued to support the Nazified Volksgruppenführung and the Third Reich until war's end. Either a significant decrease of their Nazi sympathies failed to occur as the war turned against Germany or evidence of it is lacking from the admittedly incomplete documentary record. In one of his postwar reports, Josef Beer claimed that anonymous opinion polls, supposedly

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<sup>583</sup> Gemeindeamt Nakodorf to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, November 10, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 398; Gemeindeamt Botschar to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, November 9, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 403; Gemeindeamt Nakodorf to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, December 10, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 427.

conducted by the Volksgruppenführung to assess their co-nationals' affinity for National Socialism, showed an 80% drop in positive response between 1941 and 1944.<sup>584</sup> So huge a drop seems too pat and convenient, especially in a postwar report.

In assessing the wartime evidence, East German historian Jutta Komorowski succinctly identified a blend of positive and negative incentives offered to ordinary Volksdeutsche to conform with, if not to enthusiastically embrace, Nazi policies. The former took the form of ideological blandishments (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion) and practical, material perks. As for the latter, Komorowski emphasized – even overemphasized – official threats to one's physical and material wellbeing in the shape of legal punishment through so-called people's honor courts (Volksehrengerichte).<sup>585</sup>

These courts were created in November 1941 to “settle matters of honor” arising between individual Volksdeutsche and to defend the “honor and prestige of the German Volk or . . . of leading German personages in their public functions” against injury “by word or deed.”<sup>586</sup> They were also intended to prosecute instances of official corruption,<sup>587</sup> and to protect individual Volksdeutsche's standing in the Volksgruppe against injury by false allegation or by sentences passed by a regular state court.<sup>588</sup> Depending on the gravity of the charges, the honor courts could publicize the accusation and sentence in the

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<sup>584</sup> Josef Beer's report on the Erneurer movement (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/13, frame 235.

<sup>585</sup> Komorowski, pp. 217-218.

<sup>586</sup> “Aufgabe dieses Volksehrengerichtes ist, alle zwischen deutschen Volksgenossen auftauchenden Ehrengangelegenheiten beizulegen, sowie über Volksgenossen zu urteilen, die durch Worte oder Handlungen die Ehre und das Ansehen des deutschen Volkes, oder die Ehre und das Ansehen führender deutscher Persönlichkeiten, soweit es sich um ihre öffentliche Tätigkeit handelt, verletzen.” Janko, “Verordnung über die Errichtung von Volksehrengerichten,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, September 1941, p. 4.

<sup>587</sup> Dr. Andreas Röhm (head of the Volksgruppe's newly created Amt für Rechtsfragen), “Die Volksgerichte,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, November 1, 1941, p. 6.

<sup>588</sup> “Die Volksgerichte,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, November 1, 1941, p. 3.

*Amtsblatt für das Banat* or by town crier, and could admonish, reprimand or sentence a Volksdeutscher to anything from loss of official post, property or liberty, to the wearing of a sign stating the person's crime (typical examples being work-shyness, cowardice and being an enemy of the people), to a loss of legal rights and expulsion from the Volksgruppe.<sup>589</sup> The latter would have been the harshest punishment, since the threat of ostracism would have checked undesirable behavior even more effectively than the threat of material suffering.

The honor courts' jurisdiction, so vaguely defined, could extend to nearly anything, and would have kept the courts constantly bogged down investigating private score-settling disguised as ideological probity. In fact, there is almost no explicit mention of the courts' activity either in the *Amtsblatt* or in the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*. Reports of individual Volksdeutsche sentenced for activities which could have easily fallen within the honor courts' purview do not mention the honor courts explicitly. For example, a 1943 report on several village notaries punished with salary cuts and forced labor for irregularities in rationing or dereliction of duty was announced by the Volksdeutsche administration, not by an honor court. This may have been because not all of the accused were Volksdeutsche,<sup>590</sup> hence not all came within the honor courts' jurisdiction, but also suggests that the honor courts were so short-staffed as to barely function.

Moreover, the ostensible purpose of the honor courts – to discourage other Volksdeutsche from undesirable or dissentious behavior – was undermined by a failure to state explicitly crimes deserving of the harshest punishment. Thus when a Volksdeutscher

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<sup>589</sup> “Die Volksgерichte,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, November 1, 1941, p. 5.

<sup>590</sup> “Verlautbarungen der Sektion für die Verwaltung,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, December 3, 1943 pp. 1-2.

from Grosskikinda was excluded forever from the German Volksgemeinschaft and sentenced to death, his crime was described simply as behavior “unworthy of a German.”<sup>591</sup> This and similar euphemisms were used on other occasions when individuals were excluded from the Volksgruppe or its youth organizations,<sup>592</sup> which had the same discretionary right to discipline their members as the honor courts had vis-à-vis the Volksgruppe as a whole.<sup>593</sup>

The honor courts’ ineffectuality was likely due in large part to the fact that service in them was an honorary, unpaid position requiring at least a university degree.<sup>594</sup> In vain did Paul Bader, then German commanding general in Belgrade, consider the honor courts a useful way to instill a healthy dose of fear in Volksdeutsche on the eve of massive mobilization for the Waffen-SS – which he knew would be an unpopular policy – in January 1942.<sup>595</sup> The honor courts barely functioned long before they were finally dissolved in April 1944, their role assumed directly – and probably as ineffectively – by

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<sup>591</sup> “ein Verhalten . . . das eines Deutschen unwürdig ist.” Janko, “Ausschluss aus der Volksgemeinschaft,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, December 1, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>592</sup> E.g. Janko, “Ausschluss aus der Volksgemeinschaft,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, August 15, 1942, p. 3; Janko, “Ausschluss aus dem Arbeitsdienst,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, September 10, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>593</sup> “Dienststrafordnung der “Deutschen Jugend”,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, December 1, 1942, pp. 4-5.

Paradoxically, lesser infractions by members of the Deutsche Jugend and its female wing, the Deutscher Mädelsbund, such as lack of obedience or leaving the Deutscher Arbeitsdienst (see below) without permission, were reported. Janko, “Ausschluss auf Zeit aus der DJ,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, August 15, 1942, p. 3; Landesjugendführung, “Strafweise Enthebung,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, October 15, 1942, p. 3; Landesjugendführung, “Der “Deutschen Jugend” des Banats und Serbien zur Kenntnisnahme,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, October 15, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>594</sup> Janko, “Verordnung über die Disziplinargerichtsbarkeit der deutschen Volksgruppe,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 1, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>595</sup> Benzler to AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry), January 13, 1942, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/200/153,490.

the Volksgruppenführung.<sup>596</sup> Considering the overstretched conditions under which the Volksdeutsche administration labored even before the Waffen-SS mobilization in spring 1942, an excuse not to serve as an honor court judge cannot have been hard to find.

Taking all this into consideration, Komorowski rather overstates the case when she describes these courts as an instrument of the “psychic and moral terror”<sup>597</sup> by which the Volksdeutsche were kept in line. Open terror – physical, psychological or, indeed, moral – was not really needed in a small community where peer pressure and the desire for conformity were powerful social agents. When Sepp Janko decreed that members of the Waffen-SS division “Prinz Eugen” would go from house to house to collect donations for the German Red Cross<sup>598</sup> or the Kreisleiter (Volksgruppe county chief) in Grosskikinda asked for Volksdeutsche police to help collect for the Winter Relief,<sup>599</sup> they were not laying their trust in the ability of men in uniform to scare people into giving donations. They assumed that people would be ashamed not to donate if asked to do so by their neighbors or their neighbors’ sons wearing the Führer’s uniform, demonstrating their willingness to give much more than just money for Hitler and Germandom. Such methods represented coercion only insofar as individual Volksdeutsche internalized the social dynamic at work and chose to obey because their whole social experience led them to conform. The Volksgruppenführung had a sufficiently good grasp of their co-

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<sup>596</sup> Janko, “Verordnung über die Disziplinarstrafen,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 23, 1944, pp. 1-6.

<sup>597</sup> “der psychische und der moralische Terror” Komorowski, p. 219.

<sup>598</sup> “Aufruf zum Winterhilfswerk 1942/43,” published in *Banater Beobachter* [German-language newspaper published in Grossbetschkerek; from now on *BB*] on September 13, 1942, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 136.

<sup>599</sup> Kreisleiter of Kreis “Oberbanat” to Polizeivorsteher Grosskikinda, December 18, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 146.

nationals' psychology to understand that social pressure and informal ways of exercising power went much further within their community than physical violence.

Failure on the part of members of the Volksgruppenführung to live up to what their co-nationals expected from moral and administrative leaders of the Volksdeutsche community resulted on occasion in sharp drops in morale, but almost never in acts of open rebellion. A historical sense of belonging to a beleaguered minority and the not-contradictory conviction of German superiority over other Balkan ethnicities, a sense of abstract duty to an idealized German Reich, the desire for material gain, even apathy were all strong motivating forces for Volksdeutsche of different ages and both genders to fall into line, even if they did not always express quite the level of enthusiasm Berlin and the Volksgruppenführung may have desired. As for the threat of physical punishment, the possibility of ostracism and social exclusion would have carried far more weight in this small, tightly knit, self-consciously exposed community. Personal acquaintance and local prestige – as well as the Volksgruppenführung's role as a stand-in for Hitler and the Reich – were far more important than brute force, especially since the latter was rarely an option for the Volksgruppenführung. Only within the ranks of the Waffen-SS, which was Heinrich Himmler's playing ground, could the punitive power of the Reich fully come to bear on large numbers of the Banat Volksdeutsche. Not so in the Banat's civilian affairs.

This is not to give the right to Josef Beer's claim that within the Banat Volksgruppe the Führerprinzip was really a form of popular consensus not tantamount to dictatorship.<sup>600</sup> It does, however, suggest that Sepp Janko's ability to make (or, rather, announce) unpopular decisions depended on the willingness of the majority of his co-nationals to do no more than grumble against these decisions. While acceptance of the

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<sup>600</sup> Beer, *Donauschwäbische Zeitgeschichte*, p. 153.

Platonic ideal of the dutiful, disciplined Volksdeutscher fostered by Nazi ideology did not make an actual Volksdeutsche person proof against the occasional complaint, it certainly helped ensure widespread obedience, especially when buffered by material incentives.

Not everyone who insulted the honor and prestige of the Volksgruppe, the Volk and the Führer needed to be openly excised from the Volksgruppe. It was sufficient to make an early example of a few for the others to learn to hold their tongues, whatever their personal opinions. This is precisely what happened in June 1941, when more than one hundred members of the Kathreinfeld Ortsgruppe (village chapter of the Volksgruppe) were temporarily excluded for refusal to pay their membership dues. Two other Kathreinfeld Volksdeutsche and another Volksdeutscher from Modosch were fully and permanently expelled from the Volksgruppe for refusing to be recognized as racial Germans.<sup>601</sup> No later mass exclusions are documented, likely because the public shame of the Kathreinfeld Ortsgruppe had the desired effect on other recalcitrants, and partly because it became progressively harder to either join or leave the Volksgruppe.

The lack of trained personnel for administrative, engineering, teaching and other positions requiring higher education and experience meant that it was relatively easy to get permission to reside in the Banat after occupation, even if one was not a Volksdeutscher (see below), as indicated by requests for residence permits submitted to the Banat Police Prefecture in Grossbetsckerek. It was especially easy for Volksdeutsche moving to the Banat from other Yugoslav lands or those who had been born outside of the Banat before 1918, if they were usefully employed<sup>602</sup> or married to an employed<sup>603</sup> or

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<sup>601</sup> Beer, "Mitteilungen und Weisungen der Landesleitung," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, June 1941, pp. 6-7.

<sup>602</sup> Approved requests for residence permits submitted by Dr. Karl Beneth (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128 Prefektura policije za Banat (Polizeipräfektur des Banates) – Betchkerek

mobilized<sup>604</sup> Volksdeutscher, could claim descent from the first German-speaking settlers of the Banat in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>605</sup> or had been born on the Romanian side of the border and moved only recently from resistance-infested southern Serbia but claimed a spiritual affinity with the Serbian Banat.<sup>606</sup> Some overcompensated for their Serbian-sounding names by meticulously filling out their applications in German and signing them with “Heil Hitler!”<sup>607</sup> Others made nervous reference to their deported Jewish spouses.<sup>608</sup> And one elderly hairdresser disarmingly claimed he decided to leave Belgrade for the Banat only in 1944 because the frequent air raid alarms in the city made his hands shake so badly he could not work.<sup>609</sup>

Everyone who could make even a passable claim to Volksdeutsche origin was allowed to reside in the Banat, being accepted as a full member of the Deutsche Volksgruppe was a different matter. This policy drew on the general vagueness of the term ‘Volksdeutscher.’ However, it also demonstrated how a tentative identity could

(Zrenjanin) (1942-1944), 1941-1944, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 144; Josef Müller (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 32; Johann Wurtz (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 131.

<sup>603</sup> Approved request of Katharina Dennert, who moved to the Banat from the Bačka in May 1941 with her husband, who worked for the Volksgruppenführung (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 851.

<sup>604</sup> Approved request of Elsa Werner (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 177.

<sup>605</sup> Approved request of Dr. Ladislaus Weifert (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 291.

<sup>606</sup> Approved request of Franz Ruck (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document without number.

<sup>607</sup> Approved request of Irene Ilitsch (no year given), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document without number.

<sup>608</sup> Julijana Weis moved back to the Banat to live with her family in 1942 after her Jewish husband was taken away in Croatia, where they had lived. Both she and her Mischlinge son were allowed to stay, following the precedent set by other Volksdeutsche married to Jews who were able to protect their non-Aryan family members in August 1941 (see Chapter 5). Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 89.

<sup>609</sup> Approved request of Karl Luks (1944), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 82.

become ossified once embraced by an individual as one's primary identity and officially confirmed as such. Following the admonishment of the Reich military authorities issued in summer 1941,<sup>610</sup> great pains were taken to weed out those who attempted to join without actually being Volksdeutsche, in order to get better rations or other privileged treatment. Again showing that many Volksdeutsche administrators took their practical and ideological duties very seriously is the example of an official in Banater Hof, who was admonished by higher-ups for coming into conflict with his Ortsleiter (local Volksgruppe leader) over the latter's refusal to allow the former's self-confessed ethnic Hungarian foster-daughter into the Volksgruppe.<sup>611</sup>

The Belgrade Ortsgruppe (Volksgruppe chapter)<sup>612</sup> and the small Ortsgruppen in Serbia proper were also admonished to screen new applicants carefully, keeping a wary eye out for evacuated Slovenes who tried to pass themselves off as Slovenian Volksdeutsche.<sup>613</sup> So carefully were the newcomers to the Volksgruppe screened that only in July 1943 did Janko feel sufficiently confident of the results to report to Himmler a tentative division of these newly admitted Volksgruppe members into three racial categories – likely modeled on the Volksliste in occupied Poland – with suggestions for

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<sup>610</sup> See n. 48 on p. 32.

<sup>611</sup> Kreisamtleiter to Ortsberichter in Banater Hof, December 16, 1943, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131 Nemačka narodnosna grupa u Banatu i Srbiji (Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien) – Bečkerek (Zrenjanin) (1941-1944), 1941-1944, folder 1943, document 1273/43.

<sup>612</sup> "Abschrift aus den Mitteilungen für das Deutschtum im Kreise "Prinz Eugen" (Gross-Belgrad)," October 25, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-580 [BDC Materials: Miscellaneous Non-Biographic Materials ("Schumacher Material")]/59/no frame number; Janko, "Anordnung über die Anerkennung der Zugehörigkeit zur Deutschen Volksgruppe," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, October 15, 1942, pp. 1-2.

<sup>613</sup> Janko to VoMi (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle), February 22, 1943; SS-Sturmbannführer Kubitz to Volksgruppenführung, February 8, 1943; SS-Sturmbannführer Brückner to Kubitz, December 7, 1942; SD and Sipo (Sicherheitsdienst and Sicherheitspolizei) chief to RKFDV (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums) and VoMi, June 24, 1942; SD and Sipo chief to RKFDV and VoMi, February 18, 1943 – all NARA, RG 242, T-580/59/no frame numbers; Janko, "Anordnung," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, August 15, 1942, pp. 2-3.

the most Serbianized to be resettled to the Reich lest they should be lost to the Volk entirely.<sup>614</sup> While Himmler had bigger fish to fry than to bring Serbian-speakers into the Reich just then, new ‘ethnic IDs’ (Volkszugehörigkeitsausweise) for approved members of the Belgrade Ortsgruppe were still not issued in February 1944.<sup>615</sup>

As for the Banat, the new applicants for Volksgruppe membership hailed most often from the Bačka or Belgrade, and made for more plausible candidates than Slovenian German-speakers or Serbian-speaking Volksdeutsche settled in Belgrade, Kraljevo or Niš. Paradoxically, the more plausible they were as Volksdeutsche, the more constraining Volksgruppe membership was on them, once they were accepted. In spring 1944 Janko allowed that a mobilized Volksdeutscher married to an ethnic Hungarian did not have to participate in Volksdeutsche activities. Janko flatly refused to allow the man to stop paying his dues or to leave the Volksgruppe, since this would have led to his demanding a discharge from the Waffen-SS.<sup>616</sup>

Once recognized as a Volksdeutscher, it was nearly impossible for an individual to hold multiple identities other than the ethnic-racial one (ambivalent as it was in view of the very existence of the term *Volksdeutsche*) and the one related to one’s home village or town. Even German-speakers of mixed descent or married to non-Germans became simply Volksdeutsche by dint of being members of the Volksgruppe. Once approved to stay in the Volksgruppe, they owed it – and the Reich – both material and spiritual loyalty, but could expect material and ideological benefits as well. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>614</sup> Janko to Heinrich Himmler, “Absiedlung eines Teils der deutschen Volksgruppe ins Reich,” July 3, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 3, frames 104-107.

<sup>615</sup> Janko, “Anordnung über die Ausgabe von zweierlei Ausweisen durch die Kreisleitung “Prinz Eugen”,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, February 15, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>616</sup> Janko to Kreisleitung “Mittelbanat,” April 4, 1944, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder 1944, document 4/944.

balance sheet of Volksdeutsche gains and losses tilted increasingly toward the latter as the war wore on.

### Volksdeutsche Economies

Reich memos from the war years routinely praised the Banat Volksdeutsche's hard work and productivity as well as the efficiency of their agricultural cooperatives.<sup>617</sup> They stressed that these Volksdeutsche inhabited a land "small in area, towering in achievement,"<sup>618</sup> a land whose produce could reach the Reich in a matter of days, not weeks as did the grain from Ukraine.<sup>619</sup> The very first issue of the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung* contained an appeal to the Banat Volksdeutsche peasant from the new official in charge of peasant affairs (Bauernführer), Sepp Zwirner, exhorting them to produce even more than before. Although it was tucked away slyly on the last page of the publication and represented as the ultimate sign of Volksdeutsche gratitude to Adolf Hitler, the man "who liberated us from long years of servitude,"<sup>620</sup> the order underlying the rapturous appeals to the peasant to achieve greatness by an effort of will was stern and clear: the Banat was expected to feed not only itself, but the Reich as well.

In official Volksdeutsche circles, the main complaint leveled against this expectation was that the Reich companies interested in exporting food, founding or

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<sup>617</sup> Dr. Rischka (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft in Vienna), "Bericht über die Reise in das ehemals jugoslawische Gebiet vom Dienstag, den 22. April bis Donnerstag, den 1. Mai 1941," May 2, 1941, BA Berlin, R 63 Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft E.V., Wien, volume 213, pp. 215-216.

<sup>618</sup> "an Umfang so kleine, an Leistungen so überragende" Lothar Heller (VoMi's economic office) memo, December 22, 1943, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 87, p. 220.

<sup>619</sup> VoMi, "Kurzbericht über die Wirtschaftsarbeit der Volksdeutschen im Jahre 1942," PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100533 Wirtschaftliche Lage der deutschen Volksgruppen, 1938-1943, p. 24.

<sup>620</sup> "der uns aus langjähriger Knechtschaft befreit hat" Josef 'Sepp' Zwirner (Banat Bauernführer), "Aufruf. Deutscher Bauer – Deutscher Landarbeiter!", *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, May 1941, p. 7.

leasing economic enterprises in the Banat rarely bothered to consult the Volksgruppe's economic office before doing so.<sup>621</sup> The erstwhile chief of this office, Leopold Egger, commented in his postwar report on the Banat economy that of all the Reich offices he had had to deal with, only the economic planning office of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi) had the right "Volksdeutsche touch."<sup>622</sup> Other state and private companies from the Reich wanted to treat the Banat like they would any other conquered territory, regardless of the presence of a productive Volksdeutsche population whose favor they would have been better advised to court.<sup>623</sup> Egger's predecessor, Jakob Awender, countered this in his own postwar statement to the Ministry for Expellees by accusing Lothar Heller, the VoMi's Plenipotentiary for the Economy, of monopolizing the Banat's agricultural output by assigning his personal acquaintances from the Reich to arrange for the export of food instead of employing experienced Banat Volksdeutsche.<sup>624</sup> This jurisdictional conflict led eventually to Awender's being sent to work in economic offices first in the Reich and then in the General Government.<sup>625</sup> He was replaced in the Banat by the more biddable Egger.<sup>626</sup>

Despite their wartime rivalry, Awender agreed with Egger on the general rapaciousness and disregard for Volksdeutsche interests and sensibilities displayed by Reichsdeutsche economic personnel, epitomized by the General Plenipotentiary for the

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<sup>621</sup> "Meldungen aus dem Reich," March 12, 1942, BA Berlin, R 58, file 170, fiche 2, frame 134.

<sup>622</sup> "gerade die Volksdeutsche Wirtschaftsführung innerhalb der Volksdeutschen Mittelstelle die einzige Abteilung war, die "volksdeutsch fühlte"." Leopold Egger (Banat Volksgruppenführung's economic office chief), "Tätigkeitsbericht des Hauptamtes für Volkswirtschaft und des Landesschatzamt der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat/Serbien" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/97, frame 296.

<sup>623</sup> Egger, "Tätigkeitsbericht" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/97, frame 286.

<sup>624</sup> Transcript of Jakob Awender's (Banat economic office chief before Egger) taped statement (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/4, frame 64.

<sup>625</sup> Transcript of Awender's statement (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/4, frames 66-67.

<sup>626</sup> Transcript of Awender's statement (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/4, frame 68.

Economy (Generalbevollmächtigter für die Wirtschaft, GBW) in Serbia, Franz Neuhausen. In a meeting in January 1942, Neuhausen shrilly asserted: “I and I alone am responsible for all economic activities in Serbia and the Banat!”<sup>627</sup>

Yet Heller wrote that same month that it would be desirable to strengthen the Banat Volksdeutsche’s economic standing with the cooperation of enterprises from the Reich, in view of the Banat’s potential future occupation by Hungary and the precedent set by the Hungarian mistreatment of Volksdeutsche in the Bačka.<sup>628</sup> Heller was responding to the intense debates of the preceding eight months regarding future ownership of the Banat (discussed in Chapter 3), but possibly also to an awareness that the Banat’s economic potential might be better exploited by giving the Volksdeutsche there support and certain privileges. While propaganda disseminated by the Banat Volksgruppenführung extolled the Volksdeutsche peasant as a paragon of virtue and the guardian of Europe’s borders (see Chapter 6), practical measures were taken to encourage the Volksdeutsche peasant to produce more and more food, ultimately serving the interests of a Germany chronically unable to produce enough food for its population without relying on imports.

The most obvious of these measures was the overturning of the interwar Yugoslav land reform, by which land in the Vojvodina which had used to belong to the Hungarian nobility before World War I was distributed mostly to Serbian veterans of that war. This had been a staple complaint of the Yugoslav Volksdeutsche. While initially some

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<sup>627</sup> ““Für die gesamte Wirtschaft in Serbien und im Banat bin ich verantwortlich, allein ich!”” Egger, “Tätigkeitsbericht” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/97, frame 285.

<sup>628</sup> Heller to Reichel, January 15, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615 Allgemeine Lage im Banat, Ariesierungen, Liefer- und Wirtschaftsangelegenheiten, 1941-1944, fiche 5, frame 152.

Volksdeutsche peasants did manage to purchase land affected by the reform,<sup>629</sup> in the late 1930s it became more difficult for them to do so, as concerns grew regarding Volksdeutsche irredenta along Yugoslavia's borders.

The interwar land reform was officially overturned in June 1941. Like the laws guaranteed the Volksdeutsche's legal standing and rights (see Chapter 3), this decree was passed by the Serbian collaborationist government, but inspired and encouraged by the German commanding general in Belgrade and the Reich government. The reform repeal targeted specifically the so-called 'volunteer fields' (Dobrovoljzen-Felder, from the Serbian 'dobrovoljac' = volunteer) i.e. land given to veterans who had volunteered for the Serbian army in World War I. It left all land transactions already on the books open to annulment or alteration at the sole<sup>630</sup> and unappealable<sup>631</sup> discretion of Sepp Lapp in his role as head of the Banat administration.

This decree aimed explicitly to benefit not only Volksdeutsche from the Serbian Banat, but also Romanian citizens of Romanian, Hungarian and German ethnicity, who lost their land in the Serbian Banat due to the breakup of Austria-Hungary and the Yugoslav land reform.<sup>632</sup> The latter decision was a salve to Romanian pride in the face of

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<sup>629</sup> One way for Volksdeutsche peasants to bypass regulations was to purchase land not from the state – which might refuse to sell it to them – but from Serbs who had gotten land in the reform and could not or would not work all of it. By 1938, Volksdeutsche owned a total of 21% of all arable land in the Banat, some of which was bought in the interwar period. Jovica Luković, ““Es ist nicht gerecht, für eine Reform aufkommen zu müssen, die gegen einen selbst gerichtet ist.” Die Agrarreform und das bäuerliche Selbstverständnis der Deutschen im jugoslawischen Banat 1918-1941 – ein Problemaufriss,” in *Kulturraum Banat. Deutsche Kultur in einer europäischen Vielvölkerregion*, ed. Walter Engel (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2007), p. 158.

<sup>630</sup> “Uredba od delimičnom ukidanju mera izvršenih na osnovu zakona o agrarnoj reformi,” *Službene novine*, June 20, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>631</sup> “Uredba o dopuni uredbe o delimičnom ukidanju mera izvršenih na osnovu zakona o agrarnoj reformi od 19 juna 1941 godine,” *Službene novine*, August 20, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>632</sup> “Uredba od delimičnom ukidanju,” *Službene novine*, June 20, 1941, p. 1; Harald Turner (Reichsdeutsche civilian administration chief in occupied Serbia), “2. Lagebericht des

the perceived slight incurred by Hungary having been granted a stronger claim on the Serbian Banat by the Third Reich. Yet there is a tentativeness to the reform-repeal text, inspired largely by foreign-political considerations. At a time of increased tension between Hungary and Romania over any and every issue pertaining to the Serbian Banat, the Reichsdeutsche administration in Belgrade was intensely aware of the need to make the reform repeal *not* seem like a move of the Third Reich against either ally. Hence the stress placed on the fact that the repeal was officially passed by the Serbian collaborationist government, and that each individual land transaction would in principle be examined separately, rather than passing a blanket order benefitting Banat Volksdeutsche over all other local ethnicities.<sup>633</sup>

Such fine distinctions were too fine for the Hungarian government, which made no secret of the fact that it intended to carry out its own land reform once it occupied the Banat, in which latter reform all land transactions occurring after April 6, 1941 would be rendered as null and void as would those which had occurred under the interwar Yugoslav land reform. Despite the German Military Commander's reassurances, Hungarian intentions caused much consternation within the Volksgruppenführung, which justifiably perceived its authority and that of the German commander in Belgrade as being undermined from without.<sup>634</sup> Still desirous of pacifying its Hungarian ally, the

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Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," July 10, 1941, Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), RW 40 Territoriale Befehlshaber in Südosteuropa, file 184, p. 26.

<sup>633</sup> Turner, "2. Lagebericht" (1941), BA MA, RW 40, file 184, p. 26; Turner, "5. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," October 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 187, p. 28.

<sup>634</sup> Franz Hamm (former Kulturbund official in Novi Sad) to Janko, July 21, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614 Bodenbesitzfragen im Banat, 1941-1944, fiche 8, frame 248; Janko to Turner, July 25, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 8, frame 249; Danckelmann (German commanding general in Serbia) to Field Marshall Wilhelm List (Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost), August 3, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 8, frame 241.

Reich proposed to offset Hungarian demands for land in the Banat by expropriating the fertile area in the Pančevački Rit (a drained wetland outside Pantschowa) from the Serbian state as nominal war reparations, settling it with Volksdeutsche, and thus creating a solidly German hinterland to Belgrade in the event of a Hungarian takeover of the Banat.<sup>635</sup>

While the legality of such a move in the face of general Hungarian disregard for extant laws in territories they occupied was being debated,<sup>636</sup> the issue of large-scale land purchases by ethnic Hungarians in the Banat became moot when it became apparent that the Hungarian state lacked the funds to back any large land purchases.<sup>637</sup> The Reichsdeutsche in Belgrade became aware of this fact before the Hungarian government owned up to it. With this rare open acknowledgement of Hungary's weakness vis-à-vis Reich interests, the AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry) and Wehrmacht could afford to pay lip-service to Hungary. These Reich offices jointly prompted the Serbian government to pass a reiteration of the reform repeal in December 1941. This later document officially and explicitly placed expropriated land in Banat municipalities with large ethnic Hungarian populations at the latter's disposal.<sup>638</sup>

Following the established pattern, where ethnic Hungarians won a concession, ethnic Romanians demanded the same. Kreiskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek

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<sup>635</sup> Danckelmann to Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 8, frames 240-241; Helmut Triska (chief of AA's Volkstumsreferat) memo, October 15, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 8, frame 237.

<sup>636</sup> Triska memo, August 19, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100939 Volksdeutsche: Jugoslawien, Banat und Batschka, 1941-1944, fiche 2423, no frame number.

<sup>637</sup> Bede (Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to Benzler, February 13, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 6, frame 174.

<sup>638</sup> "Uredba o ukidanju eksproprijacija izvršenih na osnovu Zakona o agrarnoj reformi u pogledu nekretnina u opštinama Jabuka, Glogonj, Toba, Martinica i Lazarevo," *Službene novine*, February 27, 1942, p. 12.

reported in fall 1943 that it had been compelled by practical concerns to allow members of both ethnic groups to buy at least some of the available Dobrovoljzen-Felder.<sup>639</sup> Even so, these purchases remained always far inferior to purchases allowed to Banat Volksdeutsche. Benzler admitted as much in early 1942,<sup>640</sup> at a time when the Hungarian claim on the Banat remained active, yet without real bite.

Moreover, rather than declaring all Serbian-owned land up for grabs, the June 1941 reform repeal explicitly stated that only land obtained by Serbs through the interwar agrarian reform, which was not being cultivated by its owner, could be expropriated.<sup>641</sup> This indicates an initial hesitance on the part of the Reich Germans in Serbia about mistreating the Serbian population or impinging on its rights without at least a plausible pretext. Even though the reform repeal was announced a mere two days before the start of Operation Barbarossa and the related flaring up of communist resistance in Serbia proper, efforts continued to be made to alleviate at least some of the repeal's impact on the Serbian peasantry in the Banat. Even though many World War I veterans lost everything, an official decree was passed in fall 1942 to provide such extreme cases with at least a

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<sup>639</sup> Hauptmann Rentsch (Kreiskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek) to Franz Neuhausen (Generalbevollmächtigter für die Wirtschaft, GBW), September 9, 1943, NARA, RG 242, T-75 [Records of the General Plenipotentiary for the Serbian Economy]/67/744.

<sup>640</sup> Provided this did not run counter to German interests, ethnic Hungarians could “also be allowed to buy [land], with the caveat that such purchases will be very modest in scope” (“ebenfalls zum Kauf zulassen, wobei wohl davon ausgegangen werden kann, dass dieser Ankauf nur einen sehr geringen Umfang erreichen wird”). Benzler to AA, February 26, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 6, frame 172.

<sup>641</sup> “Uredba od delimičnom ukidanju,” *Službene novine*, June 20, 1941, p. 1.

small piece of land, enough to survive on.<sup>642</sup> Plans were even made to use a part of the Pančevački Rit to settle newly landless Serbian peasants.<sup>643</sup>

While such plans had little practical result, they showed at least a modicum of good will toward the predominantly peasant Serbian population on the part of the Reich authorities. However, this good will was based on practical calculation rather than a sudden improvement of the Serbs' standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy. A 1942 memo from the Reich Ministry of the Four-Year Plan recommended that those World War I veterans in the Banat who had not already been expropriated, not be expropriated at all, in view of the Hungarian practice of expelling Serbs from the Bačka without benefiting the Bačka Volksdeutsche thereby; the Banat Volksgruppe's lack of funds for large land purchases; the thorny legality of overturning the interwar land reform, since the redistributed land was still partly owned by the Serbian state; and especially increased labor needs at a time when Banat Volksdeutsche men would be recruited for the Waffen-SS.<sup>644</sup> All these practical concerns suggested the desirability of a relatively stable Serbian peasantry continuing to live and work in the Banat, available to work the fields of absentee Volksdeutsche (see below).

Even with these reservations, prompted by foreign and economic policy, the net result of the June 1941 reform repeal decree was that Banat Volksdeutsche could and did obtain land more easily, cheaply and in greater quantities than at any other point in the twenty years preceding the occupation. Although the Volksgruppenführung cautioned

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<sup>642</sup> "Uredba o davanju naknade licima oštećenim ukidanjem mera izvršenih na osnovu zakona o agrarnoj reformi," *Službene novine*, October 30, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>643</sup> Benzler to AA, April 13, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969 Fremde Volksgruppen: Ungarische Flüchtlinge im serbischen Banat, 1942-1944, fiche 2497, frames H299,837-838.

<sup>644</sup> Gramsch (Reich Ministry of the Four-Year Plan) memo, March 21, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 5, frame 157.

them in fall 1941 that they bought land at their own risk, in view of the avowed Hungarian disregard for the reform repeal, within the first four months following the repeal almost one eighth of the newly available land was bought up by Volksdeutsche peasants.<sup>645</sup> Even the formal obstacle of needing Neuhausen's permission for land transactions by Volksdeutsche<sup>646</sup> was lifted barely two months after it was imposed.<sup>647</sup> This left Sepp Lapp's permission, easily obtained by Volksdeutsche, as the only firm legal requirement for Volksdeutsche to buy Serbian-owned land. By July 1943, Volksdeutsche owned about 25,9% of the total land (as opposed to 21% in 1938<sup>648</sup>), and cultivated some 30% of the arable land in the Banat.<sup>649</sup>

As was often the case even in such a small area as the Banat, reports differ on the actual form the interwar land reform repeal took. Most testimonies of surviving Volksdeutsche emphasize that they could buy but not simply alienate or seize

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<sup>645</sup> I.e. some 30,000 out of 230,000 Joch available. VoMi to Benzler, October 27, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 7, frame 213.

A Joch is a historical German unit of land, comparable to the amount of land a team of oxen can plow in one day or approximately 0,7 hectare. Anonymous, "Volksdeutsche Wirtschaft in Südosteuropa," *Nation und Staat*, Heft 11/12, August-September 1944, p. 277.

<sup>646</sup> The latter rule was passed only on October 10, 1941, likely as a way to put the reins on land transactions which could endanger steady food deliveries for the Reich, which were Neuhausen's chief concern. Zwirner to Heller, October 31, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 7, frames 206-207.

<sup>647</sup> Janko to VoMi, December 5, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 1, frame 4.

<sup>648</sup> See n. 629 on p. 227.

<sup>649</sup> Benzler to AA, July 22, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380 Deutschtum in Serbien-Banat, Band 2, 1942-1944, p. 95.

The figure of more than 530,000 Joch being cultivated by the Banat Volksdeutsche, published in a *Nation und Staat* article on the eve of the Red Army's advance into the Serbian Banat in 1944, is grossly inflated, since it represents more than 80% of the Serbian Banat's surface. Anonymous, "Volksdeutsche Wirtschaft in Südosteuropa," *Nation und Staat*, Heft 11/12, August-September 1944, p. 277. (The occupied Banat's total surface was 9300 km<sup>2</sup>, which is equal to 930,000 hectares or 651,000 Joch. Chef der Militärverwaltung Südost to OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres), "Abschlussbericht des Chefs der Militärverwaltung Südost," April 10, 1945, NARA, RG 242, T-501 [Records of German Field Commands: Rear Areas, Occupied Territories, and Others]/264/214.)

Dobrovoljzen-Felder.<sup>650</sup> Some even implied that Volksdeutsche refrained from buying such land for fear of engendering bad blood with the local Serbs.<sup>651</sup> On the other hand, some confirmed the worst Nazi anti-Slavic prejudice by complaining after the war that only those Dobrovoljzen-Felder not worked by their Serbian owners could be bought up by Volksdeutsche,<sup>652</sup> and that any property at all stayed in the hands of lazy, tax-dodging Serbs.<sup>653</sup>

Depositions made mostly by the Banat's non-German residents to the postwar Yugoslav State Commission for the Determining of Crimes Committed by Occupiers and Their Helpers (Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača) predictably tell a different story. In this version of events, Volksdeutsche peasants – and the occasional ethnic Hungarian – outright alienated land from their Serbian neighbors<sup>654</sup> or went through the motions of a legal transaction but withheld payment<sup>655</sup> or obtained proof of ownership from the Volksdeutsche administration without the supposed seller even being consulted.<sup>656</sup>

These testimonies as well as those about Volksdeutsche – and, again, the occasional ethnic Hungarian – compelling Serbs to sell them land at ludicrously low

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<sup>650</sup> E.g. testimony of Stefan Rohrbacher from Schurjan (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/3, frame 636; testimony of Josef Stirbel from Deutsch-Zerne (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 703.

<sup>651</sup> Testimony of Elisabeth Mojse from Karlsdorf (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/4, frame 651.

<sup>652</sup> Testimony of Josef Keller from Deutsch-Etschka (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 956.

<sup>653</sup> Testimony of Berta Sohl from Haideschütz (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frames 1006-1007.

<sup>654</sup> Lenka Perkin from Grosskikinda accuses Adam Kremer from Botschar, October 30, 1944, Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore a.k.a. Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fund 110 Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, box 675, p. 130.

<sup>655</sup> Pera Kristić from Perlas accuses Franja Dekoren from Rudolfsgnad, November 30, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 40.

<sup>656</sup> Ilija Stojnov from Tschoka accuses Ferko Ezved from same, November 14, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 50; Zlata Avakumović from Perlas accuses Jozef Maršal from same, October 31, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 220.

prices<sup>657</sup> or to work their fields without payment<sup>658</sup> were likely inspired by a mixture of true grievance and the desire to obtain property (possibly even property legally sold during the occupation) or redress following the occupation's end. These mixed motives were not unlike the blend of greed and sudden empowerment expressed laconically by a Volksdeutscher who, when asked by a Serb why he had not called in an old, mostly invented debt sooner, said simply: "Ja, those were different times!"<sup>659</sup>

The official stance toward Serbian ownership of land in the occupied Banat remained ambivalent, with the Serbian peasant's value as both laborer and producer offset by the desire to improve the overall standing of Volksdeutsche. In practice there was much room for individual Volksdeutsche to abuse their new prominence and the *de facto* (if not always *de jure*) right given them to do so by the Reich authorities in Belgrade and Berlin. Even so, the alienation of Serbian land never became a matter of course as did the alienation of Jewish real estate (see Chapter 5), despite occasional proposals from Volksdeutsche administrators to Lapp and Neuhausen to place large Serbian landholdings under commissarial administration.<sup>660</sup>

Access to land expropriated from Serbs carried with it the expectation that its Volksdeutsche owners would cultivate it and extract the maximum amounts of produce and grain from it. Whether they chose to avail themselves of the legal and extralegal possibilities for increasing their landholdings, Volksdeutsche peasants under Reich occupation no longer produced for a free market. The food supply in occupied Serbia was

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<sup>657</sup> Deposition of Božidar Mijatović from Banatsko Karadorđevo, March 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 663, p. 453.

<sup>658</sup> Stojnov accuses Ezved (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 50

<sup>659</sup> "Ja, ranije su bila druga vremena!" Mijatović deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 663, p. 453.

<sup>660</sup> Landrat Grosskikinda to Kreiswirtschaftsamt Grosskikinda, November 13, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 276.

under as strict a control as Neuhausen and the Wehrmacht could impose – meaning it was at its strictest in the Banat, the most stable area of all the Yugoslav lands under occupation, even if it had the fewest Axis troops occupying it. The Banat’s grain deliveries were not affected by the unsettled conditions and black market in Serbia proper, with its two competing resistance movements and only nominal Reich German control outside of major urban centers.<sup>661</sup> Franz Neuhausen avowed that the Reich Germans in Serbia were fed by the Banat more than by Serbia proper.<sup>662</sup> After the Waffen-SS division “Prinz Eugen” was deployed in the Independent State of Croatia in early 1943, Neuhausen – and specifically the Banat – took on the added burden of feeding the Reichs- and Volksdeutsche and even the Croatian forces in Croatia (the rural areas of which were even more unsettled than rural Serbia proper), as well as the Wehrmacht in Serbia.<sup>663</sup>

To this end, ostensibly the Banat administration – but really Neuhausen’s office in Belgrade – determined yearly quotas of various agricultural produce from the Banat, as well as which peasant should grow what to ensure these quotas were filled.<sup>664</sup>

Agricultural cooperatives dominated by Banat Volksdeutsche bought up food and delivered it to the Reich’s economic representatives in Serbia.<sup>665</sup> Although they were

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<sup>661</sup> Peter Staadlbaur, “Banat – Land des Ackerbaues. Wertvoller Beitrag für die Ernährungssicherung des europäischen Raumes,” *Donauzeitung*, April 18, 1943, BA Berlin, R 8034 II Reichsauslandsbund, Presseauschnittsammlung, volume 4780, p. 13.

<sup>662</sup> Komorowski, p. 225.

<sup>663</sup> Gerhart Feine (aide to Benzler) to AA, January 14, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549 Ungarische Minderheiten, 1942-1943; Rumänische Minderheiten, 1943, p. 69; Feine to AA, February 3, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 68; Heller memo, February 10, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, pp. 66-67.

<sup>664</sup> Lapp, “Aufruf an sämtliche Landwirte im Banat!”, *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, November 26, 1942, pp. 2-3.

<sup>665</sup> The cooperative associations licensed to buy grains off peasants and sell them to the Reich were Agraria and Agraraprodukt in Grossbetschkerek, Uljarica, Donau-Cereal and Cereal-Export

only one fifth of the Banat population, Volksdeutsche were responsible for anywhere between one quarter and nearly one half of the Banat's deliveries of various foodstuffs.<sup>666</sup> Peasants who failed to deliver their predetermined quota could have it requisitioned without payment.<sup>667</sup> This was coercion of a more obvious kind than the social pressures at work within the Volksgruppe. It affected Volksdeutsche and others alike, and was inspired by the Reich's need for food rather than ideology.

Volksdeutsche peasants were as likely not to meet their individual quotas as others. Examples include the villages of Soltur, where the required delivery of pigs for the Wehrmacht was customarily preceded by a few days' arguing back and forth before the locals agreed to hand the porkers over,<sup>668</sup> and Nakodorf, whose Volksdeutsche found themselves in default for more than one half of their expected wheat delivery from the 1942 harvest.<sup>669</sup> The reasons varied from bad weather and flooding,<sup>670</sup> to a scarcity of

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in Belgrade, Akcionarsko društvo za preradu kukuruza in Apfeldorf, and a few Banat mills. "Naredba o prometu kukuruzom u Banatu," *Službene novine*, January 30, 1942, p. 3. Companies and associations dominated by the Banat Volksdeutsche also coordinated the import of raw materials and finished goods from the Reich (Materijal, Kolonijal, Agrar Import, Banater Eisen und Metallwarengrosshandlung), the processing of foodstuffs before export (Erste Banater Ölfabrik, Banater Konserven Fabrik), and the import, production and dissemination of propaganda (Banat-Film, Banatsko štamparsko i izdavačko preduzeće Bruno Kun i Ko). "Spisak [d]ruštvenih firma ubeleženih u trgovačkom registru Okružnog suda u Petrovgradu nakon 6 aprila 1941 godine, a u kojima su Nemci zainteresovani," July 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 674, pp. 32-33.

<sup>666</sup> In 1943, the Volksdeutsche percentages of Banat deliveries were: 25% of corn, 28% of wheat, 30,8% of sugar beets, 33,7% of sunflowers, and 47,5% of fattened pigs. Benzler to AA (1943), PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, p. 95.

<sup>667</sup> "Naredba o isporuci pšenice i suncokretovog semena u Banatu," *Službene novine*, April 7, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>668</sup> Gemeindeamt Soltur to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, December 8, 1941, Istorijски arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 424.

<sup>669</sup> Nakodorf Bürgermeister und Notär, "Verzeichnis der Landwirte, die laut Bestandesaufnahme der Polizei Weizen abzuliefern hatten, aber bisher ihren Verpflichtungen nicht nachgekommen sind," August 6, 1942, Istorijски arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, no page numbers.

<sup>670</sup> Flooding was due to deliberate Romanian failure to use the irrigation on its side of the Banat border to prevent tributaries of the Tisa River from overflowing their banks and flooding a large part of the Serbian Banat. This was quite possibly a passive-aggressive attempt to 'get even' for

draft animals, tools, seed and animal feed for milk cows, to low prices offered for food and cattle delivered.<sup>671</sup> These were all valid reasons, but they could be seen as the Volksdeutsche's ideological and racial failure. One Vojvodina Volksdeutscher who took the Reich's perspective accused his co-nationals of "pettiness"<sup>672</sup> and unjustified grumbling over low prices: "the Banat Swabian's materialism knows no limits."<sup>673</sup>

The lower prices offered to Banat peasants were not without logic: because the risk run by peasants who delivered food for Reich forces was far greater in Serbia proper than in the Banat, the prices fetched by food sold to the Reich and by food sold on the official, controlled market were also higher in Serbia proper.<sup>674</sup> By the same logic, the land tax increased in Serbia proper during the occupation twice as much as in the Banat.

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Romania's failure to secure even a remote possibility of obtaining all of the Banat in the future. See Kullmann (head of the Banat Kreisvorstellung's Technical Section) to Kreiskommandantur I/823, March 31, 1942, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 289, p. 8; Egger to VoMi, March 31, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 4, frames 109-110; VoMi to AA, April 16, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 4, frames 107-108; Kreisvorsteher Kreuzbauer to SOEG (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft in Vienna), May 7, 1942, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 289, p. 3; Brandl (SOEG), "Überschwemmungsschäden im Banat," August 1942, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 284, pp. 35-37; Heinrichsbauer (Hauptgeschäftsführer, SOEG) to Kullmann, September 15, 1942, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 288, p. 55; Dr. Breza, "Zweiter Bericht der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft betreffend wasserwirtschaftliche Bodemeliorationen in südosteuropäischen Ländern," September 16, 1942, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 286, p. 60; Dr. Ulmanky (SOEG), "Aktenvermerk über die Verhandlungen anlässlich der Reise nach Kroatien und Serbien vom 20.9. bis 10.10.1942," October 19, 1942, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 288, p. 35.

<sup>671</sup> Gemeindeamt Mastort to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, November 11, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 395; Gemeindeamt Charleville to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, November 11, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 397; unsigned memo of Amtliche Vieh- und Milchzentrale Expositur für das Banat, Aussenstelle Tschoka, to Landrat Gross-Kikinda, October 23, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, no page number; unsigned and undated memo to Amtliche Vieh- und Milchzentrale Expositur für das Banat, Aussenstelle Tschoka, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, no page number.

<sup>672</sup> "Kleinlichkeit" Friedrich Becker, "Bericht über meine Eindrücke aus dem Banat und Serbien," most likely late August 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81 [Records of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut]/544/5,316,590.

<sup>673</sup> "der Banater Schwabe in seinem Materialismus keine Grenzen kennt." *Ibid.*

<sup>674</sup> "Naredba br. 136 o najvišoj ceni pšeničnom brašnu i hlebu," *Službene novine*, July 9, 1943, pp. 3-4; "Naredba o najvišoj proizvođačkoj ceni kukuruzu i o najvišim cenama i zaradama u trgovini i preradi žitarica, mahunastih plodova, stočne hrane, sena i slame u Srbiji i Banatu za ekonomsku 1944/45 godinu," *Službene novine*, August 18, 1944, pp. 9-10.

This was small consolation since the land tax in the Banat increased by 60%, and in Serbia proper by 120% in 1943,<sup>675</sup> preceded already in 1941-1942 by a 100% increase in general taxation.<sup>676</sup> This was a huge tax hike even taking into account wartime inflation and the relative weakness of the Serbian currency vis-à-vis the Reichsmark. It was due not least to Berlin's expectation that occupied territories should pay for the privilege of being occupied by the Third Reich.<sup>677</sup>

Economic historian Karl-Heinz Schlarp estimates that the Reich did try not to tax the Banat Volksdeutsche's ability to pay taxes too much, mostly through such short-term means as bonds and keeping prices artificially low.<sup>678</sup> Even so, the perception of the vast majority of Volksdeutsche was that it was a strange liberation which brought such a tax burden with it. In this, at least, the Volksgruppenführung and ordinary Volksdeutsche saw eye to eye. The issue around which their resentment revolved was more fundamental than taxation alone: it had to do with the Banat's continuing status as a part of the Serbian state. There were mutual accusations of the Banat's supposed failure to pay its way and the Serbian Finance Ministry's supposed failure to give back a fair share for road upkeep and melioration projects.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters, July [3]1, 1943, BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 35.

<sup>676</sup> Gemeindeamt Soltur to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda (1942), Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 467; Gemeindeamt Heufeld to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, February 7, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 464; Gemeindeamt Heufeld to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, January 9, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, p. 445.

<sup>677</sup> Breyhan (Reich Finance Ministry) to AA, February 19, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 1, frame 17.

<sup>678</sup> Schlarp, pp. 347-348, 352.

<sup>679</sup> Unsigned and undated memo, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 4, frames 99-100; Reichel to VoMi, March 8, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 1, frame 20. It was certainly easier to fudge taxes in Serbia proper than in the Banat, since in the Vojvodina land registries had been kept meticulously since Habsburg times, whereas landownership in Serbia proper was far less well-documented. Geissler, "Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat" (1943), BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, p. 144.

Foreign policy dictated that the Banat should not become a precedent-setting Volksdeutsche state within Hitler's Europe. Hence it also dictated that the Banat Volksdeutsche should get no special preferential tax rate vis-à-vis the ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians<sup>680</sup> or vis-à-vis "their former oppressors in Belgrade."<sup>681</sup> Though the Volksgruppenführung shrewdly pointed out that just such an arrangement had been made with the Volksdeutsche in the Reichskommissariat Ukraine,<sup>682</sup> this had more to do with the Ukraine's importance to Hitler and Himmler's projected Germanic East than with any special qualities the Ukrainian Volksdeutsche had, which the Banat Volksdeutsche had not. Paradoxically, the latter's very efficiency in administration, agriculture and affirming their Deutschtum (Germanness) worked against their best interests in this matter.

Though officially economic matters in the Banat were kept separate from those in Serbia proper,<sup>683</sup> even the Reich had to allow for the mutual dependence of the two. The

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<sup>680</sup> Feine to AA, January 28, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 2, frame 33.

<sup>681</sup> "seine früheren Unterdrücker in Belgrad" Egger to VoMi, September 29, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 2, frame 53; see also Geissler, "Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat" (1943), BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, p. 144.

<sup>682</sup> Breyhan to AA (1943), PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 1, frame 18.

<sup>683</sup> One other important example of this nominal separation was the creation – on Volksdeutsche insistence, approved by Berlin and carried out by the Serbian collaborationist government – of a separate Chamber of Trade, Industry and Artisanry (Handels-, Industrie- und Handwerkskammer) for the Banat in August 1941. Intended to promote and coordinate Volksdeutsche economic activities in the Banat, this chamber of commerce in effect represented an even more effective means for the Reich Ministry of the Four-Year Plan and Neuhausen's office in Belgrade to control the Banat's economic potential, rather than a sign of real economic independence for the occupied Banat. The same was true of new professional associations (Berufsgruppen) created in October 1941, membership in which was obligatory for Volksdeutsche engaged in industry, trade, agriculture and the free professions. On the Banat chamber of commerce see "Verordnung über die Errichtung der Handels-, Industrie- und Handwerkskammer in Petrovgrad (Grossbetschkerek)," August 22, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100550 Slowakei, Ungarn, Banat, Kroatien, Rumänien und Dänemark, Gesetze und Verordnungen, 1939-1944, pp. 300-301; Heller to Rischka, October 1, 1941, BA Berlin, R 63, volume 138, pp. 243-245. On the Berufsgruppen, see "Verordnung über die deutschen Berufsgruppen," October 22, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100550, pp. 266-268.

Banat needed shipments of wood for heating and construction from Serbia, and Serbia needed (occasionally even depended on) food from the Banat.<sup>684</sup> But whereas the Banat Volksdeutsche were not always gracious about supplying the Wehrmacht and other Reichs- and Volksdeutsche in Serbia with food, they positively bridled at feeding the civilian population in Serbia proper.<sup>685</sup>

It was officially forbidden to ‘export’ food from the Banat to markets in Serbia proper<sup>686</sup> or for non-Banat residents to cross the Danube<sup>687</sup> with the intention of buying food on the black market and bringing it from the Banat into Serbia proper without prior authorization.<sup>688</sup> Even so, due to Neuhausen’s miscalculations regarding Serbia-Banat’s

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<sup>684</sup> Geissler, “Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat” (1943), BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, p. 144.

Karl-Heinz Schlarp (pp. 341-342, 345) and Ekkehard Völkl (p. 74) emphasize the degree to which the Banat was separate from Serbia in economic matters *as well as* the seemingly contradictory fact that the two could not be completely separated from each other. Both authors rather overstate the Banat’s economic autonomy. As much economic autonomy as it had vis-à-vis Serbia, the Banat could not be called truly autonomous from the Third Reich’s economic interests, which ultimately dictated economic relations in occupied Serbia-Banat.

<sup>685</sup> “Meldungen,” September 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 164, fiche 1, frame 82; VoMi to AA, January 16, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 5, frame 150.

<sup>686</sup> Neuhausen, “Durchführungsverordnung (Bewirtschaftung von Obst, Obsterzeugnissen, Gemüse u. Kartoffeln),” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, November 12 & 19, 1942, p. 1; Hauptmann Amelung (Kreiskommandantur 823), “Verordnung zur Durchführungsverordnung zur Bewirtschaftungsverordnung (Bewirtschaftung von Obst, Obsterzeugnissen, Gemüse u. Kartoffeln),” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, November 12 & 19, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>687</sup> In general, permission from the Banat Police Prefecture was needed for any Serbian or foreign citizen not registered as residing in the Banat – even Belgrade Volksdeutsche – to cross to the north shore of the Danube. Beer to Leitung des Kreises “Prinz Eugen,” April 3, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 5, document 46; Christian Brücker (Belgrade Kreisleiter) to Janko, July 12, 1943, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 5-III, document 37/II; Janko to Brücker, July 17, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 5, document 70; “Naredba o putovanju u Banat,” *Službene novine*, August 25, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>688</sup> Turner, “15. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Kdr. General und Bfh. in Serbien für September und October 1942,” November 10, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 35, p. 5. The ban on unauthorized ‘export’ of foodstuffs from the Banat into Serbia proper extended also to Reichsdeutsche military, police and civilian personnel, who needed the permission of Neuhausen’s office, Kreiskommandantur 823 or one of the offices in charge of supplying the Reichsdeutsche armed forces. Rentsch to Feldgendarmarie, November 25, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-C, folder 4, document 37.

overall ability to supply the Reich with food and the frequent disruption of communications in Serbia proper, on more than one occasion starting in 1942 Belgrade had to be supplied with basic foodstuffs from the Banat.<sup>689</sup> This confirmed some Volksdeutsche peasants' aggrieved conviction that they had been badly served by the Third Reich.

In order to encourage Banat Volksdeutsche peasants to produce large quantities of food for the Reich's needs – including the shortages caused by Reich representatives' dilatory approach to the occupied Serbian territory – the Volksdeutsche were offered incentives in addition to access to Dobrovoljzen-Felder. Teams of draft horses or oxen belonging to the municipality were placed at the Volksdeutsche's disposal free of charge<sup>690</sup> if they had had their own draft horses confiscated by the Yugoslav army during the April War or, later, for use by German armed forces.<sup>691</sup> In 1943 the Banat administration even offered a monetary bonus to all peasants who sowed the same or a greater amount of land with certain basic crops (wheat, corn, sunflowers) as they had done the previous year.<sup>692</sup> So important was the Banat as a stable food source, and so much more peaceful than Serbia in terms of resistance activity, that even the economically deleterious attempt to thwart resistance activities and increase

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These orders were extended in 1943 to include a ban on members of the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" bringing food and animal fodder into the Independent State of Croatia from the Banat when returning from leave. Battalion Order no. 55/43, "Warenausfuhr aus dem Banat," July 7, 1943, BA MA, RS 3-7 7. SS Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen," p. 43.

<sup>689</sup> Unsigned and undated report, "Die deutsche Militärverwaltung in Serbien," likely 1944 or 1945, BA MA, RW 40, file 117, p. 4 of this report; Turner, "13. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Kdr. General und Befehlshaber in Serbien für Mai und Juni 1942," July 3, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 195, p. 10.

<sup>690</sup> Lapp, "Anordnung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, October 10, 1941, pp. 1-2.

<sup>691</sup> Koch (Geschäftsführer Landesbauernführung) to all Kreis- und Ortsbauernführer, October 16, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder 1942, document 1374/42.

<sup>692</sup> Lapp, "Anordnung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, September 17, 1943, p. 1.

Reichsdeutsche security by clearing a 500m stretch along the sides of roads and railways in Serbia proper of tall crops, trees and bushes, was never applied to the Banat.<sup>693</sup>

In March 1943, most likely inspired by the proclamation of total war in the Reich, the Banat office for peasant affairs (Landesbauernführung) encouraged Volksdeutsche men who had not been drafted into the Waffen-SS to volunteer their advice and help to the wives of mobilized co-nationals. They would become custodians (Hofpaten) to a neighbor's "orphaned estate"<sup>694</sup> so as to ensure the harvest yield remained undiminished despite the absence of a substantial portion of the Banat's land-working population. As incentives went, this appeal to community spirit was not much of a 'carrot.' This unpaid service must have been very unpopular among the already overworked Volksdeutsche peasants. Moreover, most of those still in the Banat in 1943 were too young or elderly or disabled. By year's end the office for peasant affairs managed to muster 883 men to look after 1287 estates,<sup>695</sup> which was not much considering more than 20,000 Volksdeutsche had been mobilized by the Waffen-SS. One can only imagine what the drafted men's wives thought of the advice and low opinion of their abilities proffered by the office for peasant affairs and the assigned Hofpaten.

Since increasing Volksdeutsche landownership and productivity ultimately served not just the ideological goal of elevating Volksdeutsche, but also the interests of the Third

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<sup>693</sup> "Verordnung betreffend den Schutz des Verkehrs auf Fahrstrassen und Eisenbahnlinien," *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, January 30, 1942, pp. 197, 199; Kriegstagebuch April 2, 8, 17 and 26-27, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 28, pp. 2, 6, 9 and 12, respectively; Oberstleutnant Kogard for Befehlshaber Serbien, April 28, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 28, p. 111; Kriegstagebuch June 4, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 30, p. 4; Befehlshaber Serbien memo, June 4, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 30, p. 32.

<sup>694</sup> "verweisten Hofes" Koch to all Kreis- und Ortsbauernführer, March 12, 1943, Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder 1943, document 397/43.

<sup>695</sup> "Aus dem Zeitgeschehen: Banat und Serbien," *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 11/12, November-December 1943, p. 233.

Reich's war machine, a certain amount of coercion was acceptable to the Reichsdeutsche in extracting all they could from the Banat. Thus all Banat peasants – Volksdeutsche included – could have land they could not cultivate themselves or with the use of hired labor taken away and given to others for cultivation.<sup>696</sup> Land could also be expropriated if it was needed for a range of melioration projects the Reich invested in<sup>697</sup> e.g. improvement of the irrigation system and construction of food processing facilities such as dairies.<sup>698</sup> This suggests that while the Reich certainly did exploit the Banat's economic potential, this was not done as heedlessly and without long-term planning as was the case in occupied areas of the Soviet Union. However, since economic extraction from the Banat was inextricably linked to that from Serbia proper, the Banat's economic potential in the war years was more damaged than aided by associated pressures and demands. A portion of melioration investments came from Serbian tax revenue, which in turn derived partly from the Banat. Thus the Third Reich had the Banat pay for its occupation *and* for improvements to its agriculture, of which the Reich was the chief beneficiary.

A final major source of economic pressure on the Volksdeutsche peasantry was the constant labor shortage, which affected agricultural production as acutely as it did the young Volksdeutsche administration. Already in February 1942, before official Waffen-SS mobilization began in the Banat, the VoMi estimated it would result in some 15,000

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<sup>696</sup> "Aufruf an sämtliche Landwirte im Banat!", *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, November 26, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>697</sup> Lapp, "Anordnung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, January 7 & 14, 1943, pp. 2-3.

<sup>698</sup> "Aus dem Zeitgeschehen," *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 11/12, November-December 1943, p. 234; "Die Wirtschaftslage im Bereich des Kommandierenden Generals und Befehlshabers in Serbien. Dritter Gesamtbericht des Generalbevollmächtigten für die Wirtschaft in Serbien," January 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-75/69/166-167; Schlarp, p. 343.

non-German laborers being required to fill in for mobilized Volksdeutsche.<sup>699</sup> The following month, Sepp Janko suggested the number might actually exceed 25,000 laborers.<sup>700</sup> In view of such numbers, relatively few Banat Volksdeutsche obtained official permission to move to the Third Reich for work. The process to obtain such a permission was made deliberately cumbersome.<sup>701</sup> Volksgruppe officials were discouraged from making even flippant remarks about leaving for the Reich<sup>702</sup> so as to prevent invaluable Volksdeutsche personnel from departing in search of better wages or out of a sentimental attachment to the ancestral homeland.

The two years between the deployment of the division “Prinz Eugen” outside the Banat in fall 1942 and the arrival of the Red Army in fall 1944 were certainly the kind of civilian experience Tony Judt has termed typical of World War II in Europe,<sup>703</sup> with women, children and the elderly fending very much for themselves. Following the men’s departure with the Waffen-SS in fall 1942, propaganda praised the exertions of Volksdeutsche women – as caregivers, cultivators of land and givers of life<sup>704</sup> (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of images of women in Banat Volksdeutsche propaganda) –

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<sup>699</sup> Unsigned VoMi memo, February 23, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 4, frame 131.

<sup>700</sup> Feninger (Benzler’s Volkstumsreferent) to AA, March 15, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 4, frame 115.

<sup>701</sup> Volksdeutsche applicants for work in the Reich had to obtain permission from their Ortsleiter (Volksgruppe representative in their village or town of residence) as well as a statement from the Banat employment office that they were non-essential workers. There were very few ‘non-essential’ Volksdeutsche remaining in the Banat after the recruitment for the Waffen-SS division “Prinz Eugen.” Lapp, “Anordnung,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, September 24, 1942, pp. 1-2.

<sup>702</sup> Lapp to Polizeivorsteherung Grosskikinda, December 5, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, no page number.

<sup>703</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2005, pp. 13-14.

<sup>704</sup> Benzler praised the Deutsche Frauenschaft for preventing agricultural production from flagging (with some help from non-German men on labor service), caring for wounded German soldiers, and ‘producing’ 2150 babies in 1941 and another 2812 in 1942. Benzler to AA (1943), PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, p. 94.

and “graybeards.”<sup>705</sup> Propaganda aside, the continued massive agricultural output expected of the Banat would have been impossible without the use of organized labor.

The Volksgruppenführung wed ideology to necessity in the founding of the German Labor Service (Deutscher Arbeitsdienst, DAD) for Volksdeutsche youths of both genders in spring 1942. Coinciding with the start of the recruitment for the division “Prinz Eugen,” both forms of service were heralded as joyful yet voluntary obligations, an “honor service to the German Volk,”<sup>706</sup> which would help forge the Volksdeutsche into a true Volksgemeinschaft. An article in the Reich journal *Nation und Staat* made the connection between the training of youth for service at home and their elders’ service on the front. The youths had “to prove themselves worthy of their fathers and older brothers on the front, and to contribute to German victory through complete dedication in the Heimat [homeland].”<sup>707</sup> Some allowances were made for boys and girls needed to work on their parents’ landholdings, but overall labor service was made concomitant with being a member of the Deutsche Jugend or the Deutscher Mädelbund (the girls’ wing of the Deutsche Jugend), and obligatory for all students of German private schools.<sup>708</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> “Greisen” Anonymous, “Vielvölkergebiet im Südosten,” *VB*, April 14, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, p. 226.

Josef Beer reported after the war that men in their sixties and seventies were pulled out of retirement in order to fill the gaps left in the ranks of the Banat administration by the Waffen-SS mobilization. Beer, “Volksguppe Banat-Serbien” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 621.

<sup>706</sup> “Ehrendienst am deutschen Volke” Janko, “Verordnung über die Errichtung des Deutschen Arbeitsdienstes (DAD),” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 1, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>707</sup> “sich ihrer an der Front stehenden Väter und älteren Brüder würdig zu erweisen und durch restlosen Einsatz in der Heimat zum deutschen Siege beizutragen.” “Die Lage: Serbien,” *Nation und Staat*, Heft 10/11, July-August 1942, p. 389.

<sup>708</sup> Janko, “Verordnung über die Durchführung der Deutschen Arbeitsdienstpflicht für die weibliche Jugend,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, May 1, 1942, p. 2; Mayer-Helmer (Arbeitsdienstführer), “Arbeitspflicht für die weibliche Jugend,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, May 1, 1942, p. 3; “Die Lage: Serbien,” *Nation und Staat*, Heft 10/11, July-August 1942, p. 388.

Aside from its propaganda value in a period of increased regimentations and mobilization of Volksdeutsche civilian life, the DAD's value as a labor source was limited by the necessity to allow most of its young recruits to continue to attend school. Since recruitment for the Waffen-SS in spring 1942 rapidly drained the available pool of adult Volksdeutsche men, the authorities in Belgrade and the Banat turned to the majority non-German population of the latter. Three months after the DAD, the creation of an obligatory labor service for adult Banat non-Germans was also proclaimed. In a display of the Volksgruppenführung acting under the pretense of independence, but really as an extension of the Third Reich in Serbia, this particular order was proclaimed by Lapp on behalf of the Wehrmacht in Serbia. Although its primary beneficiaries were Volksdeutsche households whose men were mobilized, missing, killed in action or POWs,<sup>709</sup> the purpose of the new labor service was to ensure regular deliveries of predetermined quotas of food for the German armed forces in the Balkans.<sup>710 711</sup> Those affected by this obligatory labor service were Banat non-German men of 17-20 years of age.<sup>712</sup>

In principle, the men affected by the labor service could gain exemptions if they were employed or attended school full-time, or if they were the sole breadwinners in their

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<sup>709</sup> Lapp, "Verfügung über die Mobilmachung gewisser Jahrgänge zum Zwecke des Pflichtarbeitsdienstes und der Verwendung der mobilisierten Arbeiter," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>710</sup> With this in mind, non-German households whose men were POWs, missing or killed in action could also apply for auxiliary labor to be assigned to them. Nevertheless, the primary beneficiaries remained Volksdeutsche. Volksdeutsche households were entitled to as many laborers as they had men away at war, but non-German households could only get one laborer per household, regardless of the number of family members absent. Lapp, "Verfügung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>711</sup> The auxiliary labor was to be used for agricultural work, and only exceptionally to help in artisans' shops. Lapp, "Verfügung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 1, 3.

<sup>712</sup> Lapp, "Verfügung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 2.

own households.<sup>713</sup> They were supposed to receive a small wage, room and board, and a clothing and shoe allowance to replace those worn out in labor service.<sup>714</sup> The period of service should have been 45-60 days with regular rotation of laborer contingents.<sup>715</sup> Lip-service was even paid to an inchoate notion of a multiethnic Banat Volksgemeinschaft of sorts, laborers and masters of different ethnicities brought closer together by shared work for a greater cause.<sup>716</sup> By April 1943, less than a year after it was proclaimed, the labor service conscripted some 13,500 men.<sup>717</sup>

In practice, however, proof of having done one's labor service was required in order to attend university, so high-school and university students could not claim an exemption even if they did attend classes full-time.<sup>718</sup> By fall 1943, the labor service duration was extended from two to four and a half, and then to more than six months; the age of the men affected was extended to 17-23 years.<sup>719</sup> There could be little talk of building a classless community when the overwhelming impression left on Volksdeutsche employers and Serbian (the ethnic group most affected by the labor service<sup>720</sup>) laborers alike was that of mutual disappointment and barely concealed resentment. Only one Volksdeutsche interviewed after the war suggested that relations

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<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>714</sup> Lapp, "Verfugung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 3; Lapp, "Bescheid," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, November 5, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>715</sup> Lapp, "Verfugung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>716</sup> Lapp, "Verfugung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>717</sup> Komorowski, p. 239.

<sup>718</sup> Lapp, "Verfugung über die Mobilmachung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 18 & 25, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>719</sup> Lapp, "Anordnung," *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, September 24, 1943, p. 3.

<sup>720</sup> Of the others, the ethnic Hungarians had little compunction about escaping across the Tisa into Hungarian-occupied Bačka in order to avoid their labor service. In the interests of foreign policy and the Banat's labor needs, those who could be persuaded to return received no worse than a reprimand. Benzler to AA, August 3, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2497, frame H299,795.

between employers and laborers had been good enough for the latter to choose to prolong service past the required date.<sup>721</sup> Otherwise, the most charitable assessment laid some of the blame on Volksdeutsche women, whose lack of language skills made communication with the workers very difficult.<sup>722</sup> The Serbian, ethnic Romanian and ethnic Slovak workers were routinely described as fairly useless.<sup>723</sup> They committed the gravest sin in any peasant's book: "they habitually ate more than they earned."<sup>724</sup>

In March 1943, in conjunction with the proclamation of total war in the Third Reich, Sepp Lapp issued a decree that *all* adult Banat residents regardless of ethnicity, who were not already employed, had to report and be assigned to an agricultural or industrial enterprise needing labor. Those who failed to do so could be compelled to do their labor service. This was so especially for those sentenced by a court to forced labor, alcoholics, 'asocial' personalities, the 'work-shy' and Roma.<sup>725</sup> A related order decreed that specifically Reichs- and Volksdeutsche adults in Serbia-Banat could be called up for labor service, yet provided so many exceptions that few were actually called up.<sup>726</sup> Thus not only did the Banat Volksgruppenführung start to apply Nazi social – as well as racial

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<sup>721</sup> Testimony of Nikolaus Kathrein from Charleville (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 788.

<sup>722</sup> Sohl testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1006.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibid.*; testimony of Peter Schneider from Sankt-Hubert (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frames 783-784.

<sup>724</sup> "sie haben gewöhnlich mehr gegessen, als sie verdienen." Testimony of Thomas Welter from Kudritz (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1002.

<sup>725</sup> "Naredba za Banat o upućivanju na obavezan rad. Alkoholičari i asocijalni tipovi obrazuju zasebnu grupu," *Vreme* [weekly magazine published in Belgrade], March 21, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, p. 195.

<sup>726</sup> The exceptions were: full-time peasants, independent medical professionals, priests, high-school and university students, trainees at various professional institutions, pregnant women and mothers of small children, employees of offices in the domain of public law, and all those already called up for service in the army, police or labor service. "Erste Durchführungsverordnung zur Verordnung über die Einführung kriegswirtschaftlicher Massnahmen des Reiches (Verordnung über den Einsatz der Reichs- und Volksdeutschen)," *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, March 26, 1943, p. 311; see also "Verordnung über die Einführung kriegswirtschaftlicher Massnahmen des Reiches," *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, March 26, 1943, pp. 309-310.

– categories to the Banat labor pool, but it ascribed them mostly to non-German laborers, exposing these to physical and verbal abuse even in paid positions.

In the non-German workers' perception, there was very often little or no distinction between labor service and forced labor. Even if they received the token payment promised, non-Germans affected by the labor service cannot have been happy about having to take time away from their own fields in order that Volksdeutsche fields be tilled. Even one Volksdeutsche testimony from the village of Schurjan blurred the distinction by describing young Serbs conscripted for paid labor service for up to two months in duration as "Zwangs-Arbeiter."<sup>727</sup> The distinction was further blurred by the fact that many former conscripted laborers never worked in the fields, as the 1942 labor service decree stipulated they should. Instead they did construction work on roads and the Pantschowa airstrip under Luftwaffe supervision<sup>728</sup> and menial labor such as cleaning and laundry work in barracks, hotels and casinos taken over by the Wehrmacht.<sup>729</sup> They could also be assigned as well as sentenced to spend a few months cutting wood in the work camp on Ostrovačka Ada (an island in the Danube near the Romanian border) where

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<sup>727</sup> Rohrbacher testimony (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/3, frame 637.

<sup>728</sup> Some of the postwar depositions suggest that the Serbs employed in Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe offices or those of the labor service were not always averse to a little crude lording over their conscripted co-nationals. Deposition of Miodrag Putić, May 17, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 26; deposition of Kosta Margan from Pantschowa, February 28, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 64; deposition of Branislav Đonin from Pantschowa, February 28, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 65; deposition of Branislav Đonin, August 23, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 103; deposition of Dejan Sudarski from Pantschowa, August 25, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 105.

<sup>729</sup> Such work was typically done by women. Sometimes they had the good fortune to encounter a left-wing Reichsdeutscher who looked out for them (deposition of Darinka Kupaljev from Pantschowa, August 31, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 106). More often they had to deal with insults to their ethnicity and advances which one former laborer refused saying she was not a "bicycle" for the German army's entertainment [blicika\*-devojka za zabavu nemačke vojske]" (deposition of Vukosava Morvai from Pantschowa, August 31, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 107).

\*Typo in the original, should be "bicikla."

most testimonies agree the worst one had to contend with, apart from the actual work, were a low-fat diet and squadrons of mosquitoes in summer.<sup>730</sup>

In general, enforcing labor rules – whether they referred to forced or paid labor – outside of the Banat’s concentration camps (see Chapter 5) was well-nigh impossible, although to dodge labor service was officially labeled punishable as sabotage.<sup>731</sup> People often failed to show up, and the Volksgruppenführung lacked the policemen to round up errant workers.<sup>732</sup> The Volksgruppenführung exercised its ability to pass decrees which were in the Reich’s and its best interest, and which affected the daily lives of other Banat residents, but it often lacked the executive power to enforce them. Between the lax labor discipline and exemptions made for the ethnic Hungarians and the remaining Volksdeutsche, by late summer 1943 the Banat was in dire need of some 6,000 workers, but there were simply no locals left to be conscripted for labor service.<sup>733</sup> By spring 1944,

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<sup>730</sup> Deposition of Dejan Obradović from Pantschowa, June 5, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 68; deposition of Jakov Dervenski (ethnic Russian and former supervisor in this camp) from Pantschowa, January 26, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 73. Dervenski in particular stressed that the camp population had a high turnover, and consisted of a mixture of teenagers doing their labor service during school holidays under their teachers’ supervision and prisoners sentenced for black marketeering, who were clearly considered a low security- and flight-risk. By contrast, a Rom from Weisskirchen accused the Volksdeutscher in charge of labor needs in the town of responding to the former’s desire to be allowed to move to Serbia proper for work purposes by sending him to two months’ forced labor on Ostrovačka Ada. The deposer described life in camp as marked by “the harshest of conditions” (“[u] najtežim okolnostima”). Sava Jon from Weisskirchen accuses Josef Harlaker from same, December 8, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 673, p. 190.

<sup>731</sup> Kreisvorstehung des Banater Kreises, “Bekanntmachung,” *Amtsblatt für das Banat*, June 11, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>732</sup> Feninger report on his, Aćimović and Turner’s tour of inspection of the Banat between May 31 and June 2, June 4, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615, fiche 3, frame 94; Amelung to Kreisvorstehung des Banater Kreises, September 10, 1943, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 44; Kreisvorstehung des Banater Kreises to Polizeipräfektur des Banates, April 25, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 13; Kreisvorstehung des Banater Kreises to Polizeipräfektur des Banates, June 10, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 11.

<sup>733</sup> Dr. Peter Pentz (Banat administration official) to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, August 27, 1943, Istorijiski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 5, no page numbers; Gemeindeamt Heufeld to

500 Italian POWs had been promised as additional labor but failed to arrive, and the demand for agricultural machinery had not been met. Despite all these setbacks, Banat Volksdeutsche were still described as “dutiful and willing to make sacrifices.”<sup>734</sup> A few months earlier, Franz Neuhausen gave the highest praise a Reich German could to the Banat when he wrote that “it fulfills its duty [as though it were] a German Heimatgau.”<sup>735</sup>

This attitude – a mixture of pride in supposedly German qualities of hard work, thriftiness and dutifulness, a material as well as spiritual (or ideological) interest in the Third Reich’s victory, and the desire to prove Volksdeutsche superior to other Banat ethnicities – should be credited with the Banat Volksdeutsche’s ability to produce as much as they did under conditions of increasing adversity. Though they were not the sole Banat population group to supply the Reich, they were clearly seen – and saw themselves – as the most important one in that regard.<sup>736</sup> While there was almost no actual fighting in the Banat until fall 1944, conditions for agricultural production were nonetheless unfavorable. No sooner had Volksdeutsche been given the opportunity to obtain more cultivable land from expropriated Serbs and Jews than the bulk of their labor force was conscripted into the Waffen-SS, leaving the rest to contend with unreliable non-German laborers, demanding Reichsdeutsche economic officers, a lack of draft animals and machinery, and a disparity between earning power and the tax rate. Whether they personally embraced the ideology broadcast to them from Berlin, Belgrade and

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Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, September 5, 1943, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 5, no page number.

<sup>734</sup> “pflichttreu und opferbereit” VoMi, “Monatsbericht April 1944 über die Lage in den Deutschen Volksgruppen,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/1005/393,494.

<sup>735</sup> “es seine Pflicht genau so erfüllt, wie ein deutscher Heimatgau.” “Die Wirtschaftslage im Bereich des Kommandierenden Generals und Befehlshabers in Serbien” (1944), NARA, RG 242, T-75/69/164.

<sup>736</sup> Schlarp, pp. 338-339.

Grossbetschkerek, Volksdeutsche peasants certainly adopted its main tenet as it related to them: their duty to soldier on in their fields, much as their brothers and sons in the Waffen-SS did in the field.

### Oranges and Schools

In addition to economic measures intended to benefit both the Banat Volksdeutsche and the Third Reich, the latter provided the former with certain other perks which improved the material quality of their lives and elevated them above other Banat ethnic groups. An obviously ideological issue like German education was one arena in which ideology was wedded to material privilege, but so was the less obvious issue of food rationing.

Although officially rations should have been the same for all, in practice a qualitatively better ration was provided for those serving in any Axis armed formation. Thus those who got the better ration were almost all Volksdeutsche (since almost all had male relatives in the Waffen-SS or the Banat police<sup>737</sup>), also the families of some four hundred ethnic Hungarians serving in the Banat police (see Chapter 5), a mere handful of ethnic Romanians,<sup>738</sup> and practically no Serbs.<sup>739</sup> The better basic ration meant 200kg of wheat per person, whereas the second-grade ration consisted of 70kg of wheat and 130kg of corn per person.<sup>740</sup> Most postwar Volksdeutsche testimonies confirm this, though with

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<sup>737</sup> Whereas Volksdeutsche undoubtedly saw their better ration as a reward for their Germanness, the Reich took a different view and stressed that this was a reward for their armed service, not for their ethnicity. This was in line with the jaundiced view of Volksdeutsche's Germanness held by many Reich policymakers. Under-State Secretary Martin Luther (AA) to Benzler, no date, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, pp. 83-84.

<sup>738</sup> The few exceptions were serving in the Romanian army. Feine to AA, December 31, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 80.

<sup>739</sup> Referat D VIII (AA) memo, November 23, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100548, p. 86.

<sup>740</sup> Benzler to AA, November 2, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100548, pp. 87-88.

varying amounts of wheat in the second-rate ration.<sup>741</sup> One asserted that the Volksdeutsche village mayor of Haideschütz enabled even the Serbian villagers to get extra grain, above and beyond their assigned ration, likely in the interests of good neighborly relations.<sup>742</sup>

Volksdeutsche were often the targets of envy over food, especially luxury items such as oranges, which the Volksgruppenführung secured for its members, but not for other Banat residents.<sup>743</sup> Ordinary Volksdeutsche's motifs in this matter were mixed at best. While several reports also mentioned that the Volksdeutsche received a better sugar ration than others,<sup>744</sup> one took the cynical view that women joined the Deutsche Frauenschaft for that express reason.<sup>745</sup> Another maintained that many Volksdeutsche were actually embarrassed by this preferential treatment, and that the informer's own aunt used the extra sugar she received to bake cakes for Serbian POWs in the Reich.<sup>746</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> In Glogau it was 60kg (testimony of Maria Lehr (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 882), whereas in Deutsch Elemer it was 75kg (testimony of Franz Unterreiner (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 986).

<sup>742</sup> Sohl testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1006.

<sup>743</sup> Hilde Isolde Reiter, "Ergänzungsbericht: Die letzte Phase des Krieges" (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/386, frame 16; Feine to AA, February 10, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2498, frame H299,820.

By contrast (likely proving inconsistent application of policies from village to village, rather than a grand design to appease the Banat non-Germans), one informer from Setchan recalled an occasion on which Serbian families with children got apples, whereas childless Volksdeutsche households did not. Testimony of Ludwig Toutenuit from Setschan (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/3, frame 603.

<sup>744</sup> Testimony of Josef Lemlein from Karlowa (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 855; Keller testimony (Deutsch-Etschka, no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 957.

In Glogau non-Germans apparently received no sugar at all (Lehr testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/7, frame 882).

The same is true of textile and shoe rations (Keller testimony (Deutsch-Etschka, no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 957; Unterreiner testimony (Deutsch Elemer, no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 986). The Banat experienced a constant shortage of both.

<sup>745</sup> In Haideschütz, although the benevolent mayor apparently also secured extra sugar for the ill, regardless of ethnicity. Sohl testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1008.

<sup>746</sup> Reiter, "Ergänzungsbericht: Die letzte Phase des Krieges" (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/386, frames 16-17.

Social pressure could work both ways, not only enforcing conformity but also prompting discomfort among those seen to be elevated above others. A slightly less Pollyanna-ish variation found in an official report suggests that some Volksdeutsche women, whether on their own initiative or prompted by the Volksgruppenführung, used their bigger sugar ration to make sweets for German soldiers recovering in field hospitals,<sup>747</sup> including members of the division “Prinz Eugen.” Thus any embarrassment over the sugar ration could be rationalized away as being used in service to the greater German cause as well as a source of joy for the local men serving on the front.

A thornier issue was presented by changes in the education system which, while ostensibly promoting and benefiting Volksdeutsche, caused both material and ideological contention within the Volksgruppe. In view not only of its relative isolation from the German heartland, but of its likely future fate as part of the Hungarian state,<sup>748</sup> the Banat Volksgruppe required ideological consolidation. Therefore the Reichsdeutsche administration in Belgrade prompted the Serbian government to issue a decree in September 1941 placing German-language education in the Banat on a firmer footing.

The “Verordnung über die Schulen der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat” (“Decree on the Schools of the German National Group in the Banat”) built on the precedents set by the opening of a handful of German-language schools by the Yugoslav government in late 1940,<sup>749</sup> the provision under Yugoslav law of German-language

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<sup>747</sup> “Aufzeichnung zur ungarischen Verbalnote vom 16.6.1943 unter Berücksichtigung der Stellungnahme der Dienststelle in Gross-Betschekerek,” July 7, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2497, frame H299,804.

<sup>748</sup> Turner, “6. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” November 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 188, p. 22.

<sup>749</sup> See p. 84.

classes in municipalities with a Volksdeutsche majority or substantial minority,<sup>750</sup> and the consolidation of Volksdeutsche group legal rights in July 1941.<sup>751</sup> The new school law confirmed that only students of German origin – Volks- and Reichsdeutsche alike – could attend German-language schools.<sup>752</sup> It also determined that buildings, rooms and teaching tools required by extant or future German schools or classes in mixed schools in the Banat would be provided, free of charge, by the municipal authorities.<sup>753</sup> In effect, this meant that teaching tools and furniture were requisitioned from property belonging to the Serbian state or private institutions. For example, gym equipment belonging to the Sokol (a Slavophile gymnastic society) and the municipal high school was transferred to the German Gymnasium in Grosskikinda already in late April 1941.<sup>754</sup> The September school law merely ratified such gestures after the fact.

The practical effects of the school law were the creation of a truly separate educational sphere for German-speakers in Serbia-Banat – “complete autonomy [of] upbringing, instruction, administration and school supplies [underlined in the original]”<sup>755</sup> – and the furthering of the Volksgruppenführung’s efforts to make the occupied Banat an extension of the Reich. Yet it also confirmed the impossibility of separating the Banat from Serbia entirely. Though the September 1941 law made German-language schools private institutions nominally separate from state control, their

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<sup>750</sup> Turner, “1. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” May 26, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 183, p. 11.

<sup>751</sup> See pp. 180-182.

<sup>752</sup> “Verordnung über die Schulen der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat,” September 28, 1941, in Rasimus, p. 650.

<sup>753</sup> “Verordnung über die Schulen der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat” (1941) in Rasimus, p. 649.

<sup>754</sup> Deposition of Stevan Gajski from Grosskikinda, August 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 522.

<sup>755</sup> “vollkommene Selbstverwaltung im Hinblick auf Erziehung, Unterricht, Administration und Schulversorgung.” “Meldungen,” September 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 164, fiche 1, frame 83.

employees remained public servants of the Serbian state. Even more importantly, German-language schools depended on a yearly subvention from the Serbian Ministry of Education.<sup>756</sup> In addition to confirming Volksdeutsche dependence on the Reich, the school law confirmed their continued existence in a kind of limbo: members of the German Volk but not quite equal to Reich Germans, residents of an area controlled by an administration of their own, yet a part of an occupied territory.

Much like the Volksdeutsche administration as a whole, the improved status of German-language schools did not always meet with the approval of those it was supposed to benefit the most, for reasons which were sometimes material and sometimes ideological. The part of the school budget not covered by state subsidy derived from an obligatory school tax levied on all Volksdeutsche and all economic enterprises with at least a 50% capital share owned by racial Germans. While it had the sentimental advantage of being a tax which never left the Banat for Serbia proper, and was used entirely for Banat purposes,<sup>757</sup> this was an added financial burden on a peasant community in which higher education was not the highest premium.

Furthermore, despite the quantitative increase in the number of German-language schools and classes in mixed schools,<sup>758</sup> the actual quality of the education cannot have been very high, since the Volksgruppe suffered from a lack of qualified teachers as well

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<sup>756</sup> “Verordnung über die Schulen der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat” (1941) in Rasimus, pp. 649, 651.

<sup>757</sup> Janko, “Verordnung über die Schulsteuer für das Jahr 1942,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, July 1, 1942, p. 1; Janko, “Verordnung über den zu leistenden Pflichtbeitrag für das Jahr 1943 (Pflichtbeitragsverordnung),” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 30, 1943, pp. 1-2; Janko, “Verordnung über den zu leistenden Pflichtbeitrag für das Jahr 1944,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 12, 1944, p. 1.

<sup>758</sup> By April 1942 there were a total of 84 German private schools in the Banat (Turner, “11. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” April 6, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 193, p. 8), and the number continued to grow.

as administrators. A teacher training college (Lehrerbildungsanstalt) was opened in Werschetz to replace the one from Yugoslav times in the Bačka.<sup>759</sup> Even though its employees scrambled to train some three dozen young Volksdeutsche teachers before the start of the 1941-1942 school year, in his December 1941 report Harald Turner (chief of the Reichsdeutsche civilian administration in Belgrade) remarked that the gaps in the ranks of German-speaking teachers were far from closed.<sup>760</sup> Once recruitment for the Waffen-SS started in spring 1942, the situation became more critical.<sup>761</sup> Even Volksdeutsche with a middle- or high-school diploma and a completed training course could be licensed as teaching assistants or honorary teachers.<sup>762</sup>

What is more, the 1941 school law's provision that only persons of German origin could work as teachers in German-language schools was openly bypassed by the employment of non-Germans who had teaching experience *and* could teach classes in German. Postwar Volksdeutsche apologia claimed piously that it was preferable to have Volksdeutsche children taught by less-qualified teachers with a good command of the

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<sup>759</sup> Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, p. 134.

<sup>760</sup> Turner, "7. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," December 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 189, p. 20.

To be fair, efforts were made through the summer of 1944 to send the best trainee teachers to training courses in the Reich, so as to both cement and reward their Germanness. See VoMi to AA, September 17, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, p. 109; Reichel to VoMi, September 22, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, p. 111; Dr. Puls (VoMi) to AA, August 23, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100418 Volksdeutsche Schulsachen im Ausland – Allgemein, 1944, p. 4; Puls to AA, August 23, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100427 Deutsches Schulwesen in Serbien-Banat, 1944, p. 4; Puls to AA, September 11, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100427, p. 6.

<sup>761</sup> Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters (1943), BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 21a.

<sup>762</sup> "Verordnung über die Schulen der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat" (1941) in Rasimus, p. 650; anonymous, "Deutsche Schulen im Banat. Neuregelung durch Verordnung des Ministerrates" in *Deutsche Zeitung in Kroatien*, May 23, 1942, BA Berlin, R 4902 Deutsches Auslandswissenschaftliches Institut, file 7799, p. 3.

This meant that girls and the boys declared unfit for military service frequently became teaching assistants as soon as they graduated, in order to allow German-language schools to function. Turner, "12. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," May 3, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 194, p. 18.

German language than good teachers who did not speak the language.<sup>763</sup> In reality a compromise was established so that quite a few Serbs and ethnic Russians (White Guard émigrés who had escaped the Russian Civil War and settled in Yugoslavia), who had taught in Yugoslav state schools before the April War, now taught Volksdeutsche children in German, and were allowed to reside in the Banat due to the chronic shortage of teachers considered racially German.<sup>764</sup>

Whatever the ethnicity of individual teachers, the content of the lessons taught in the Banat's German-language schools was unabashedly gleichgeschaltet (coordinated with National Socialist ideology), based on textbooks imported from the Third Reich.<sup>765</sup> This meant that especially lessons in German, history, geography and biology were shaped by ideological principles. The younger, openly Nazified school staff saw in National Socialism a "magic charm," which made up for lack of teaching qualifications.<sup>766</sup> The new German-language schools also extended the regimentation of the Volk into the students' lives outside of school. All pupils of German-language schools automatically became members of the Deutsche Jugend, the Banat version of the Hitler-Jugend.<sup>767</sup> Alongside their high-school diploma, they received a völkisch diploma

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<sup>763</sup> Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, p. 134.

<sup>764</sup> For example, already in 1941 the German Gymnasium in Grossbetschkerek employed several fully qualified Volksdeutsche teachers who had taught earlier in Serbian state schools, several Volksdeutsche with only high-school diplomas or about to graduate university, as well as one non-tenured Volksdeutsche professor of Germanic Studies from Belgrade University and two ethnic Russians for mathematics and French. Even so, some of the teachers spoke German poorly, as did many of the students. Johann Keks (former Kulturbund official), "Zur Geschichte des Deutschen Gymnasiums in Betschkerek" (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/72, frame 1986.

<sup>765</sup> "Verordnung über die Schulen der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat" (1941) in Rasimus, p. 650; Keks, "Zur Geschichte des Deutschen Gymnasiums" (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/72, frame 1987.

<sup>766</sup> "Zaubermittel" Keks, "Zur Geschichte des Deutschen Gymnasiums" (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/72, frame 1987.

<sup>767</sup> Franz Germann (Landesjugendführer) and Dr. Adam Maurus (Leiter des Hauptamtes für Kultur), "Abkommen zwischen der Landesjugendführung einerseits und dem Hauptamt für

testifying to the strength and Germanness of their character, and their readiness for future sacrifices for Volk and Führer – namely for mobilization into the Waffen-SS.<sup>768</sup>

These factors made for much tension between the older generation of educators and parents on one side and younger teachers and pupils on the other,<sup>769</sup> along the same lines as the tension between the Volksgruppenführung and the Kulturbund leaders who had preceded them. One postwar work conveyed the following glib view of the issue:

Although the school law did not state that German children had to attend German schools, the longing for an education in the mother tongue, awoken and developed during the [preceding] years of oppression, was so strong that not a single German child was deprived of attendance in a German school.<sup>770</sup>

In actual fact, some Volksdeutsche parents chose to send their children to a Hungarian-language school either out of a lingering Habsburg loyalty or from sheer calculation and in expectation of proximate annexation of the Banat by Hungary. Either way, the near-apoplectic threats of the local Volksdeutsche authorities for parents to either send their children to a German-language school or provide them with private tutoring in German had no effect,<sup>771</sup> and the Reichsdeutsche in Serbia had bigger problems than the number of German-speaking children in various schools.

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Kultur andrerseits [in original], über den völkischen Einsatz der deutschen Schülerschaft,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, November 1, 1941, p. 8.

<sup>768</sup> Turner, “12. Lagebericht” (1942), BA MA, RW 40, file 194, p. 18.

<sup>769</sup> Keks, “Zur Geschichte des Deutschen Gymnasiums” (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/72, frame 1987.

<sup>770</sup> “Wenn in der Schulverordnung auch nirgends stand, dass die deutschen Kinder die deutschen Schulen besuchen müssten, so war das Verlangen nach muttersprachlicher Ausbildung, in den Jahren der Unterdrückung geweckt und entwickelt, so stark, dass kein deutsches Kind dem Besuch deutscher Schulen entzogen wurde.” Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, p. 136.

<sup>771</sup> Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda to Kreisleitung der Deutschen Volksgruppe Grosskikinda, November 2, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 179; Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda to Gemeinde St. Hubert, November 2, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 179; Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda to Alexander Hewald (Grosskikinda), January 8, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 181; Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda to Gemeinde St. Hubert, January 8, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 182.

The high number of people dodging the obligatory labor service demonstrated that the Volksgruppenführung lacked sufficient police and punitive resources to enforce total discipline over non-Germans in the Banat. The issue of attendance in German-language schools highlighted the Volksgruppenführung's limited ability to coerce even Volksdeutsche for such lesser infractions. Only extreme corruption and serious breaches of discipline against a branch of the Volksgruppe like the DAD or the Hitlerjugend could earn a Volksdeutscher real censure and tangible punishment by exclusion from the Volksgruppe, loss of position or imprisonment. For anything less, the Volksgruppenführung had to rely on its co-nationals willingness to comply with its orders.

Most Volksdeutsche were willing, since obedience to the Reich's expectations carried with it material, ideological and social benefits through inclusion into the tightly knit Volksdeutsche community. Once a child was signed up for German-language classes – which required written proof of the parents' racial Germanness – it was impossible to take the child out without the whole family forfeiting its membership in the Volksgruppe.<sup>772</sup> Likely it was a rare Volksdeutscher who weighed the chance to increase his landholding or obtain rare or rationed foodstuffs with relative ease as less valuable than the money saved by not paying the school tax and the gossip incurred by an act which would have prompted the whole family to be expelled from the Volksgruppe. Whether they approved of – or even cared about – the ideological content of their children's education, fundamentally the Volksdeutsche accepted the material and

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<sup>772</sup> This was precisely Janko's ruling in the case of a woman who asked to be allowed to take her son out of a German school. She claimed that, though she and her son were Volksdeutsche, the boy was more used to speaking Serbian, playing with Serbian children and attending Serbian-language classes. Janko to Schulstiftung der Deutschen im Banat, May 16, 1944, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder 1944, document 3/944.

ideological costs of occupation, and justified them as, ultimately, in their own best interest.

Reactions: Ethnic Hungarians, Ethnic Romanians, Serbs

Patterns of official and private behavior established in the second half of 1941 held as true of other Banat ethnicities as they did of Volksdeutsche. Ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians zealously tracked each other's complaints to the authorities in Grossbetschkerek, Belgrade and Berlin in what had started out as genuine competition but descended quickly to the level of petty, ineffectual bickering. Both Hungary and Romania had shown their relative weakness vis-à-vis Germany in the first half of 1941, especially in their inability to wrest more of the conquered Yugoslav territory than Hitler was willing to concede to them. By late 1941 they profoundly implicated in Hitler's war on the Eastern Front. By 1942, neither government made as many or as grandiose demands on behalf of its co-nationals in the Banat as it had been wont to do.

This left the ethnic minority leaders in the Banat itself to make demands, but neither was very successful. In terms of schooling in Hungarian and Romanian, both ethnic groups felt entitled to the same kind of preferential treatment meted out to Volksdeutsche. As in all their demands, they were hampered by their inferior numbers vis-à-vis Volksdeutsche. Felix Benzler, the AA representative in Belgrade, ordered the closing of several Hungarian-language middle schools in late 1942 on the pretext that the Volksdeutsche in the Bačka, far more numerous than the ethnic Hungarians in the Banat, were only allowed three German-language middle schools. The Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin protested that the comparison was inappropriate – despite the fact that the his

side often made similar comparisons in order to prove that ethnic Hungarians in the Banat were being oppressed – but failed to have the same number of schools reopened.<sup>773</sup>

Likewise, the Banat ethnic Hungarians enjoyed only partial success in importing schoolbooks in Hungarian (which called for the restoration of all the lands of St. Stephen's Crown including the Banat) and Levente (the Hungarian youth organization) uniforms masquerading as school uniforms. The textbooks had to be submitted to the Reichsdeutsche censors in Belgrade<sup>774</sup> while the Levente uniforms had to have their distinctive decorations removed and were then distributed to schoolboys as ordinary coats,<sup>775</sup> which was only reasonable in view of the textile shortage. When the ethnic Hungarians demanded that teachers from Hungary be allowed into the Banat to make up the numbers,<sup>776</sup> fewer teachers were allowed than had been requested.<sup>777</sup> Reich foreign

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<sup>773</sup> Unsigned memo likely from the Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin, November 25, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,736-737; unknown to Fleissner, December 22, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,739; Fleissner to State Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker (AA), December 28, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,740.

<sup>774</sup> Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin Döme Sztójay memo, January 19, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2497, frame H299,818; Ernst Woermann (AA) to Sztójay, March 4, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2497, frame H299,827.

<sup>775</sup> Wagner (AA) to AA office in Belgrade, June 7, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 16; Benzler to AA, June 10, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 11; Benzler to AA, June 12, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 8; Reichel to SS-Sturmbannführer Hummitsch (RSHA), June 15, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 23; Hummitsch to AA, June 23, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 18;

<sup>776</sup> Their real objection was to the fact that a handful of Romanian teachers had already been allowed to come to the Serbian Banat and work in Romanian-language schools, though the impression conveyed by reams of Hungarian complaints was that of a positive invasion of Romanian teachers. The fact that any Romanian teachers were allowed into Serbia-Banat at all was likely because the ethnic Romanians in the Banat were far weaker – if scarcely less ambitious – than the ethnic Hungarians. Also, the Reich valued the Romanian state's good will in the continued garrisoning of Transnistria and supplying of the Reich with oil more than the fairly ineffectual Hungarian troops in the East.

<sup>777</sup> Romanian Embassy in Berlin to AA, July 20, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500 Nichtdeutsche Minderheiten in Serbien, 1943-1944, p. 5; unsigned memo from the Hungarian Embassy in Berlin, August 19, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, pp. 60-61; Ringelmann (AA) to Militärbefehlshaber Südost and Chef Sipo und SD (Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst) in Belgrade, September 8, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 89; Benzler to AA, September 13, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 83; unsigned memo,

policy demanded that ethnic Hungarian requests not be rejected out of hand. With regard to their lower standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy, the ethnic Hungarians were never allowed the same level of privilege or expected to make the same kinds of sacrifices as the Banat Volksdeutsche.

Another bone of contention was the issue of better rations for Volksdeutsche, but there the Reichs- and Volksdeutsche had seized the moral high ground by associating better rations with serving the Reich's interests under arms. There was no recruitment for the Hungarian army within the Banat, and barely four hundred ethnic Hungarians served in the police there. The vast majority got the same ration as Serbs and ethnic Romanians, despite much complaint.<sup>778</sup> Playing the numbers game – inflating ethnic Hungarian numbers as a means to wrest more privileges<sup>779</sup> and ease the future Hungarian takeover of the Banat – did no good. The Volksdeutsche administration sedulously denied ethnic Hungarian claims.<sup>780</sup> Berlin was hardly naïve when it came to such unsubtle tactics, having played the numbers game itself with regards to the Volksdeutsche in Poland, Yugoslavia and Russia.

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September 27, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, pp. 75-76; Feninger to AA, November 2, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 101; Feninger to AA, December 16, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 104; Wagner to AA office in Belgrade, December 31, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 105; Ringelmann telegram, January 8, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 108.

<sup>778</sup> Feine to AA (1942), PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, pp. 79-80; Feine to AA, May 18, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 37.

<sup>779</sup> Whereas the 1931 census reported 92,000 ethnic Hungarians in the Banat, the ethnic Hungarian leader Jeszenszky reported 121,000 in 1944, which was highly unconvincing in an area with a low overall birth rate. Gredler (Benzler aide) note, June 1, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 128.

At least some of the ethnic Hungarian community's new members were Serbs, ethnic Croats, ethnic Slovaks and others attracted by old Habsburg loyalties and habits – and by the possibility of obtaining scarce consumer goods through the ethnic Hungarian cooperatives. Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters (1943), BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 22; Benzler to AA, August 3, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2497, frame H299,796.

<sup>780</sup> Egger to Neuhausen, July 30, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101094 Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1943, fiche 2822, no frame number.

For all their suspicion of Volksdeutsche, policymakers in Berlin remained steadfast on the main issues around which Volksdeutsche loyalty revolved. As one 1943 memo put it succinctly, to hand over the Banat to Hungary at that point would have been disastrous for the fighting morale of the division “Prinz Eugen,”<sup>781</sup> the one reliable (if not always very effective) anti-Bolshevik fighting force in occupied Yugoslavia in addition to the Wehrmacht. Foreign policy aside, handing a Volksdeutsche community into which the Reich had invested time and effort to a racially inferior state whose loyalty was increasingly suspect, was fundamentally alien to the National Socialist mindset. After the Third Reich occupied its erstwhile ally Hungary in March 1944, the whole issue of the Banat’s ownership dropped from sight as the ethnic Hungarian community in the Banat descended irreversibly into internal squabbling.<sup>782</sup>

As for the ethnic Romanians, they issued much the same complaints as the ethnic Hungarians – and often in response to complaints by the latter – regarding rations,<sup>783</sup> schooling<sup>784</sup> and the fact that the Levente uniforms had not been sent back to Hungary.<sup>785</sup> If ethnic Hungarian complaints engendered a barely suppressed tone of irritation in AA responses, Benzler and the Banat Volksdeutsche did not even take ethnic Romanian missives seriously.<sup>786</sup> Although Romania’s participation in the economic and military

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<sup>781</sup> Reichel to Wagner, April 15, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969, fiche 2498, frame H299,840.

<sup>782</sup> Hermann Neubacher (Sonderbevollmächtigter des Auswärtigen Amtes für den Südosten) to AA, May 13, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, pp. 118-119; Neubacher to AA, June 5, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, p. 231.

<sup>783</sup> Feine to AA, May 27, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 105.

<sup>784</sup> Benzler to AA, September 7, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,673.

<sup>785</sup> Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters (1943), BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 23.

<sup>786</sup> Amt Ausland/Abwehr memo, June 29, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101093 Berichte und Medungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1942, fiche 2818, frame H296,788; Feninger memo, September 4, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101093, fiche 2818, frame H296,786.

efforts of the Axis carried substantially more weight than Hungary's, Romania offered its co-nationals abroad far less overt support.<sup>787</sup> Thus whatever minor complaint the ethnic Romanian leadership made on behalf of its community in the Banat and the Timok Region fell on completely deaf ears.<sup>788</sup> Bucharest consistently failed to exert any of its considerable leverage with the Reich, apparently satisfied that the Serbian Banat remained out of Hungarian hands. The ethnic Romanian community in the Serbian Banat was riven by internal dissension and abandoned in 1943 by its appointed leader in a futile gesture of protest over the Serbian Banat's continued occupation by German (rather than Romanian) forces.<sup>789</sup> If it had been weak in late 1941, it became completely ineffectual in Banat affairs thereafter.

For all intents and purposes, once a Reich-occupied, Volksdeutsche-administered Banat remained as the only long-term viable option in late 1941, Hungarian, ethnic Hungarian and ethnic Romanian demands lost what little power they had had to compel any real concessions from Berlin. The incessant complaints and mutual accusations leveled thereafter – most consistent in their failure to achieve any major change in ethnic Hungarian or ethnic Romanian standing within the Banat – served only to underscore Hungary and Romania's willing adoption of an inferior position vis-à-vis the Third Reich. For their co-nationals in the Banat, this ineffectuality and their middling standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy translated into an odd mixed blessing. The ethnic Hungarians' and ethnic Romanians' inferior position vis-à-vis Volksdeutsche meant they did not have

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<sup>787</sup> Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters (1943), BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 23.

<sup>788</sup> Butorca (ethnic Romanian leader in Serbia-Banat) to German commanding general in Serbia, February 2, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, pp. 108-123; Feine to AA (1943), PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100549, p. 105.

<sup>789</sup> Gredler for Benzler to AA, August 24, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 10A; Feninger to AA, December 24, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100500, p. 106.

privileged access to land, food and schoolrooms. It also meant that they were not expected to bear the high material and human cost with which Volksdeutsche paid for their privileges.

The ethnic groups which suffered real inferiority vis-à-vis the Volksdeutsche administration were the Serbs and the Jews. The former were protected only nominally by the weak, Reich-dependent collaborationist government in Belgrade. Nobody protected the latter, who met with the same kind of unrestrained degradation and loss of life and property as did Jews elsewhere in Hitler's Europe (see Chapter 5).

The Banat Serbs were in a more complex position: the numerical majority in the Banat and in Serbia-Banat as a whole, the Banat Serbs lacked a Volksgruppe of their own to represent their interests.<sup>790</sup> As Banat residents, they had to deal with the Volksdeutsche administration – rather than directly with the collaborationist Serbian government in Belgrade – which could have been expected to treat them with nothing but contempt and a desire to strip them of all rights. This is certainly the view taken by most historians in postwar Yugoslavia.<sup>791</sup> In fact, though there are many examples of Volksdeutsche robbing and mistreating Serbs, their overall standing did not deteriorate greatly during the war years, provided they fulfilled one all-important criterion: they remained free of association with the communist resistance which flared up in summer 1941.

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<sup>790</sup> Some Banat Serbs did float the idea of creating a Serbian cultural association along Kulturbund lines in 1943, an idea the SD and Volksgruppenführung were not opposed to in principle. Nothing came of it since – as Benzler pointed out – quite apart from the likelihood of Hungarian objection, the idea of a majority population needing a special organization to protect and promote its culture was utterly absurd. Benzler to AA, February 25, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380, pp. 78-79; unsigned memo on Volkstum matters (1943), BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 24.

<sup>791</sup> E.g. Petar Kačavenda, "Zločini nemačke okupacione vojske i folksdojčera nad Srbima u Banatu 1941-1944. godine," *Istorija 20. veka: Časopis Instituta za savremenu istoriju*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (1994), p. 94.

Before organized communist resistance started after June 22, 1941, Banat Serbs found themselves targeted by unsystematic violence committed by Volksdeutsche police and civilians aided and abetted by Reichsdeutsche soldiers and officials. This violence was a result of the euphoria of liberation by Reich forces and the early days when a Freistaat Banat – or at least separation from Serbia – seemed a distinct possibility. Occurring at the same time as the first attacks on the Banat Jews, the most startling example of an assault on Serbian life and safety occurred right after the conclusion of the April War, when physical danger should have been on the wane.

On April 22, 1941 the nine Pantschowa Volksdeutsche men who had been taken hostage at the outbreak of the war between Yugoslavia and the Axis, and murdered en route to Belgrade,<sup>792</sup> were interred in front of the Pantschowa town hall with much pomp and circumstance, in the presence of many Volksdeutsche.<sup>793</sup> That same day, a kangaroo court was held in the town hotel, presided over by Reichsdeutsche officers and attended by several prominent local Volksdeutsche. It tried forty Serbian men from the town, thirty-six of whom were sentenced to death. Eighteen were hanged and another eighteen shot on the Orthodox Christian cemetery. The executioners seem to have been Reichsdeutsche officers as well as some local Volksdeutsche.

The burial of the murdered Volksdeutsche and the execution of men whose involvement in the murders could not be proven by any real legal means were clearly carefully planned and executed. They followed closely on the heels of the celebrations in honor of Hitler's birthday two days earlier. The convicted men were selected from among

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<sup>792</sup> See p. 127.

<sup>793</sup> Testimony of Heinrich Köller from Pantschowa in Stefanović, p. 114.

people arrested (by a haphazardly assembled Volksdeutsche police<sup>794</sup>) in preceding days for the ‘crimes’ of belonging to the Sokol or the Četnik organizations, open expression of pro-Yugoslav, royalist and anti-German sentiment in the prewar period, and especially participation in the March 27 demonstrations against Yugoslavia’s accession to the Axis.<sup>795</sup> (It is striking that none of the surviving witnesses mention communist loyalty as cause for this early arrest and abuse. Under the new, communist Yugoslav authorities, witnesses might have been expected to play up the political angle when giving their statements. But because the Communist Party had been illegal in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, in 1941 its adherents – if any – would have been more circumspect and secretive about their loyalties than the Slavophile Sokoli or the royalist Četnici.)

Some surviving witnesses – including men who had been arrested, but not picked for the April 22 trial – drew the conclusion that the local Volksdeutsche must have drawn up a ‘black list’ of prominent Serbs and Yugoslav patriots for just such retaliatory action.<sup>796</sup> This does not necessarily follow. In a town like Pantschowa, all potential Volksdeutsche informers had to do was keep their eyes open. Just as in later months and years every Volksdeutsche’s adherence to official German proclamations could be observed by neighbors, so before the April War everyone could see which of the townspeople expressed anti-German opinions.

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<sup>794</sup> Just how haphazard – but enthusiastic – the newfangled Volksdeutsche police was, is demonstrated by one survivor’s testimony of being arrested by an armed Volksdeutscher wearing a Yugoslav army uniform, a German cap and a swastika armband. Deposition of Dr. Borislav Patić from Pantschowa, November 29, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 670, p. 3.

<sup>795</sup> Deposition of Kosta Jovanović from Pantschowa, November 4, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 664, p. 67; deposition of Maksa Todorov from Pantschowa, November 30, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 664, p. 77; deposition of Petar Maksin from Pantschowa, December 22, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 670, p. 23; Patić deposition (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 670, p. 3.

<sup>796</sup> Todorov deposition (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 664, p. 77; Patić deposition (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 670, p. 4.

It is unclear whether the idea for the events of April 22 derived from Volks- or Reichsdeutsche. Either way, these events achieved a threefold goal: they demonstrated the abrupt transition from life in a sovereign state to that in an occupied territory; they successfully conveyed the impression of a united front between invading and local Germans (with early alienation of many potential Serbian collaborators an inadvertent consequence); and they burned into the witnesses' memory the accusatory image of local Volksdeutsche in their Sunday best making merry while watching the executions at the Orthodox cemetery.<sup>797</sup>

The transition from an independent, Serbian-dominated land to an occupied, German-dominated one was also marked visibly by the changing of Banat place<sup>798</sup> and street<sup>799</sup> names to German ones, and by the destruction of monuments to Serbian kings and other historical figures. These had been erected in order to mark the Banat as a Serbian landscape following its inclusion in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after World War I. The invading Reich Germans set the tone with the ransacking of Serbian cultural landmarks such as churches and libraries.<sup>800</sup> The dismantling-*cum-*

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<sup>797</sup> Deposition of Petar Ancin from Pantschowa, December 6, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 664, p. 83; deposition of Ilija Rozenberg from Pantschowa, July 17, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 157.

<sup>798</sup> See p. 195.

<sup>799</sup> In Grosskikinda before the April War, streets were named after Serbian and Yugoslav historical and cultural personages and geographical terms. After April 1941, these names were consistently changed to make the Banat town outwardly resemble any small town in the Third Reich. For example, streets named after King Aleksandar Karađorđević (assassinated in 1934), the city of Sarajevo, Stefan Nemanja (a 12<sup>th</sup> century Serbian ruler) and Đura Jakšić (a Serbian Romantic poet) were renamed after Adolf Hitler, Lohengrin, Richard Wagner and Prince Eugene of Savoy, respectively. Ivan Nikolić (retired Member of the Yugoslav Parliament from Grosskikinda), "Nazivi ulica za vreme okupacije," no date, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, box Mape i planovi, no page number.

<sup>800</sup> Depositions of Nevenka Žaradski from Grosskikinda, August 4, 1945 and Kamenko Brančić from Grosskikinda, August 4, 1945 on the ransacking of the Serbian Reading Room and the library of the Serbo-French Club in Grosskikinda, AJ, fund 110, box 676, pp. 513 and 515 respectively; deposition of Todor S. Slankamenac, Orthodox priest in Alisbrunn on his church being turned into a prison, October 16, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 552.

destruction of monuments to King Petar I Karađorđević in Grossbetschkerek,<sup>801</sup> King Aleksandar Karađorđević and poet Đura Jakšić in Deutsch-Zerne,<sup>802</sup> and several monuments to Serbian soldiers in World War I<sup>803</sup> took place over a more protracted period of time, usually at the instigation of local Volksdeutsche and other local administrators trying to curry favor with the new German administration. Alongside the destruction of the Banat synagogues (see Chapter 5), these acts demonstrated in a highly visual manner the decisive shift in the balance of power in favor of the Volksdeutsche as representatives of the Greater German Reich.

The Volksdeutsche's euphoria of liberation and their overnight transformation from a self-consciously beleaguered minority into the ruling elite of the Banat found an outlet also in a rapacious approach to Serbian property, which continued intermittently throughout the years of occupation. While violence by those high in the Nazi racial category toward those low in it was in evidence across the German sphere of influence in World War II, Banat Volksdeutsche stealing the property of Serbs and Roma demonstrated yet again the essential narrow-mindedness of the Banat Volksdeutsche community, its closeness and turning away from grander, global schemes. Even the Volksdeutsche peasants later accused of stealing land from their neighbors did so on a fairly small scale. The real large-scale pilfering took place during the Aryanization of property alienated from the Banat Jews, but even then Reich economic offices

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<sup>801</sup> Deposition of Milorad Vladiv from Grossbetschkerek, July 1, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 564.

<sup>802</sup> Deposition of Aca Grubin from Deutsch Zerne, August 25, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 529.

<sup>803</sup> Deposition of Bogoljub Perić from Klein Kikinda, October 27, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 533; Aradatz municipality accuses Anton Vihnal, ethnic Slovak and erstwhile notary, December 19, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 605.

approached the process more systematically and effectively than did the Volksdeutsche who profited from it (see Chapter 5).

As for movable property – whether it was a nice new car belonging to a Serbian lawyer, requisitioned for use by Police Prefect Franz Reith, Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko and other leading Volksdeutsche<sup>804</sup> or a Rom's horse which the municipal president sold to another Volksdeutscher as his own,<sup>805</sup> a Volksdeutsche seamstress filching sewing supplies and bits and bobs of a Serbian competitor's household over the years,<sup>806</sup> individual Volksdeutsche policemen taking a poorly paid railway man's bicycle<sup>807</sup> or leaving a store with ten pairs of unpaid-for silk stockings<sup>808</sup> – the thieving committed by Volksdeutsche<sup>809</sup> was easy, petty and down-to-earth. It showed how the Nazi occupation brought out the worst in people considered racial kin to the Reich Germans, but also a fundamental lack of imagination and grandiose ambition on the part of the Volksdeutsche. The same is true of furniture and clothes requisitioned by the Volksdeutsche police and the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" for the furnishing of officers' clubs and apartments, and of draft animals, cars, bicycles and radios

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<sup>804</sup> Vojislav Došen from Grossbetschkerek accuses Krištof Beher from same, February 22, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 674, p. 320.

<sup>805</sup> Mihajlo Novaković from Modosch accuses Valter Pirl from same, December 20, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 674, p. 380.

<sup>806</sup> Marija Dimitrov from Neu-Kanischa accuses Hermina Erdeljan, November 8, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 60.

<sup>807</sup> Veljko Momirski from Grossbetschkerek accuses Stefan Korinek from same, October 18, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 110.

<sup>808</sup> Svetozar Zubanov from Mokrin accuses Bela Mencek from same, November 8, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 130.

<sup>809</sup> And at least a few ethnic Hungarians or persons of mixed origin passing themselves off as Volksdeutsche. *Ibid.*; Milan Milosavljević from Ruskodorf accuses Mikloš Lajtner from same of throwing him out of his house on pain of death, January 22, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 675, p. 160.

commandeered by the latter.<sup>810</sup> The behavior of the Volksdeutsche in charge of the requisitioning was one of crass one-upmanship rather than a real sense of righteous superiority, a provincial materialism rather than ideological empowerment.<sup>811</sup>

Despite these individual acts of violence, the most striking impression produced by Volksdeutsche behavior toward Banat Serbs – and the latter’s reactions to the occupation – is that of relative restraint. No blanket effort to expel all Serbs from the Banat or to expropriate all of them ever happened. The contrast with the treatment of Banat Jews or the likelihood of violence and expulsion faced by Serbs living in Hungarian Bačka or in the Independent State of Croatia is striking. The violence Banat Volksdeutsche inflicted on Banat Serbs was haphazard and unsystematic (even the obligatory labor service was relatively easy to dodge for those Serbs who wished to dodge it). This haphazardness did nothing to diminish the resentment of those personally affected, but it never came close to the kind of violence common in Poland and the Soviet Union – or Serbia proper and Bosnia, in all of which the resident Slavs were considered synonymous with racial inferiority, resistance and/or communism.

The Banat Serbs did not hold a privileged position in the Nazi gradation of Slavic peoples. They did, however, feel the proverbial lash considerably less than their co-nationals south of the Danube, in large part because neither the communist nor the royalist resistance movements were very active in the Banat (see Chapter 5). In August

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<sup>810</sup> Bambach (Lapp’s chief of cabinet) to all Landratsämter, Bürgermeisterämter and Polizeivorstehungen, May 1, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-501/266/147-148; Amelung to Turner, May 16, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-501/266/1151.

<sup>811</sup> Depositions of Ljubomir Andrejević, Dr. Borivoj Stojković (or Stojkov, one name in signature, another in text) and Mileša Stefanović, all from Pantschowa, September 28, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 674, p. 39; depositions of Dr. Stevan Smederevac, Velizar Brankovan and Kosta Skanovski, all from Pantschowa, September 29, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 674, p. 40; deposition of Bojana Dragičević from Pantschowa, April 24, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 674, p. 42.

1941, when Tito's Partisans were just gathering steam in Serbia proper, official reports from Serbia-Banat spoke of the Banat Serbs' distaste for the possibility of Hungarian rule. This gave the Banat Serbs common cause with the Volksdeutsche administration even if some did sympathize also with the communist cause as an anti-German one.<sup>812</sup> The Banat Serbs were a mostly peasant population – not a social group predisposed to favor an ideology opposed to the ideal of private property.

Actual experience of violent action by the Partisans led within a month to a sharp rise in tip-offs to the Volksdeutsche police.<sup>813</sup> By year's end the communist threat in the Banat had been almost completely neutralized along with the possibility of Hungarian annexation. Building on a historical sense of cultural and civilizational superiority among the Vojvodina Serbs vis-à-vis the Serbs from Serbia proper,<sup>814</sup> the conditions in late 1941 convinced the vast majority of Banat Serbs of the benefits to be derived from a quiet,

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<sup>812</sup> "Meldungen aus dem Reich," August 4, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 163, fiche 1, frames 12-13.

<sup>813</sup> "Meldungen," September 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 164, frame 85.

<sup>814</sup> Even a 1943 Reich report on conditions in the occupied Banat remarked on this as a cause for the Banat Serbs to make common cause with the Volksdeutsche against the possibility of Hungarian rule (Geissler, "Über die soziale Lage der Volksdeutschen im serbischen Banat" (1943), BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, File 29277/a, p. 145). This sense of Vojvodina Serbs' superiority derived from the fact that until Serbia proper became a fully independent principality in 1878 – and even later – the center of Serbian cultural and literary life and higher learning was in the Habsburg Banat and the Bačka. Whereas Serbia proper was the scene of frequent fighting between Serbs and Ottomans or Serbs and Austrians throughout the 1800s, the old Military Border was fairly peaceful after the end of the Austro-Ottoman conflicts. Its Serbian population enjoyed cultural and linguistic privileges first extended to their ancestors in the late 1600s as an incentive to move north of the Danube and serve the Habsburg Empire as soldiers and settlers on the Habsburg-Ottoman border (much like the ancestors of the Banat Volksdeutsche later). All this created stable conditions for the establishment of Serbian-language schools and printing presses.

orderly German administration,<sup>815</sup> even if some Serbs lost land or other property to it or were treated as second-class subjects.<sup>816</sup>

In addition, there were significant benefits to be derived from active collaboration with the occupying Reichsdeutsche and the Volksdeutsche administration. Serbs did not receive easy access to land, better rations or movable property as did Volksdeutsche and some ethnic Hungarians. However, the chronic lack of trained personnel meant that Serbs continued to be employed in the Banat administration<sup>817</sup> and schools even if officially they were supposed to be replaced by Volksdeutsche. In fact, records of the Police Prefecture for the Banat (Polizeipräfektur des Banates) suggest that Serbs who had been born or resided for any period of time within the Banat before April 6, 1941, as well as those expelled from the Bačka or Croatia, had no trouble getting legal residency in the Banat provided they filled posts in the Banat's schools, technical and administrative offices left vacant by departed Yugoslav officials and ill-trained or conscripted Volksdeutsche.<sup>818</sup>

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<sup>815</sup> "Meldungen aus dem Reich," November 6, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 166, fiche 1, frames 37, 41.

<sup>816</sup> E.g. when Serbs were banned from the public park in Grosskikinda. Landrat Gross-Kikinda to Standortkommandantur Gross-Kikinda of "Prinz Eugen" and Polizeivorsteherung Gross-Kikinda, July 20, 1942, Muzej Vojvodine, document 18785.

<sup>817</sup> E.g. the village of Padej had a mixed Serbian and ethnic Hungarian population in a ratio of about 1:3. In early 1942, two of the five village administrators were ethnic Hungarians. Of the other three, two were Serbs and one was a Volksdeutscher in a clear example of the Banat administration's preference for its co-nationals or even Serbs over ethnic Hungarians. Opštinska uprava Padej to sresko načelstvo Velika Kikinda [Grosskikinda], January 9, 1942, Istorijiski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, p. 432.

<sup>818</sup> Approved requests for residence permits of Jelena Cvejić (unknown year), intermittent resident and essential employee of the Banat employment office, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 76; Pera Erdeljanov (1942), born in Grossbetschkerek, expelled from the Bačka and employed by the Banater Finanzdirektion, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 49; Slobodan Lazić (1943), born in Grossbetschkerek and employed by the Banater Druckerei, described by his employers as absolutely essential for the continued publication of the Banat daily newspaper, the *Banater Beobachter*, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin,

The same held true of ethnic Russians of long residence in Yugoslavia,<sup>819</sup> suggesting that in this case Nazi racial categories were not so much flexible as a blind eye was turned to them when not enough racial Germans were on hand to fill all the positions required for the daily running of the Banat. Residence applications were not usually denied on grounds of ethnicity alone, with the occasional exception like that of an ethnic Hungarian nun from the Bačka living in Grossbetschkerek, whose presence in the Banat as a Hungarian citizen (after April 1941) and teacher in a Hungarian-language school ran up against bureaucratic bloody-mindedness.<sup>820</sup>

A Serb, even one born in the Banat, was most likely not to be allowed to reside there if he or she lacked a steady income and employment, had moved to the Banat after the April War, and was likely to be a burden on local resources by requiring medical attention or a pension earned in Yugoslavia before the April War.<sup>821</sup> In short, though they may not have prospered, most Banat Serbs could count on a reasonably peaceful existence in the Banat provided they were employed in a capacity the Volksgruppe could

fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 19; and Svetozar Pendžić (1942), railway employee expelled from Croatia, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 154.

<sup>819</sup> Approved requests for residence permits of Klaudije Ciganov (1942), engineer employed by the Volksgruppenführung's technical section, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 194; Maria Limar (1944), engineer employed by the Agraria cooperative, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 47; and Fedor M. Kovaljov (1942), teacher expelled from the Bačka, Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 205.

<sup>820</sup> Denied request for residence permit of Mária Lakjó (1943), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 90.

<sup>821</sup> Denied requests for residence permit of Aleksandar Cijuk (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 91; Živojin Demić (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 196; Marija Novaković (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 207; Stevan Narandžić (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 193; and Kosta Kanazarević (1942), Istorijiski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 128, box Molbe za dozvolu boravka od BDOW, 1942-1944, document 208.

not fill with one of its own, did not participate in communist activities or associate with those who did, and were not Jewish.

### Conclusion

One of the benefits for the Third Reich of having its troops occupy the Serbian Banat was the fact that it could implement its racial policies there with only minimal regard for other policy considerations. Since the Hungarian and Romanian claims on the Banat had lost most of their diplomatic power in late 1941, the interests of the Banat ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians could be settled with minimal concessions in education and access to land, food and textiles. By contrast, the Reich's influence over Banat affairs continued to grow exponentially after 1941, as the Reich tied the Banat Volksdeutsche to its policies by a range of material and ideological incentives.

For the Banat Volksdeutsche, being recognized as a member of the Volksgruppe became the prerequisite for enjoying the many material benefits the Reich afforded to Volksdeutsche: easy access to land expropriated from Serbian veterans of World War I, a better grain ration and access to luxury items like sugar and fruit, being assigned auxiliary labor, more administrative jobs and German-language classes than before. Volksdeutsche also enjoyed the prestige of belonging to the very top of the Nazi racial hierarchy, and the predominance it lent them vis-à-vis other Banat residents. Both material and ideological motives inspired ordinary Volksdeutsche as well as their leaders to collaborate with the Reich.

Once accepted into the Volksdeutsche community, it became very difficult for individuals to maintain multiple identities as their loyalties devolved to Reich and Volk

and, to a far lesser extent, their home villages and towns. Likewise, personal conflicts were translated into ethnic conflicts as Volksdeutsche came to embrace the Nazi view of Slavs, Jews and other non-Germans, while the non-Germans in turn blamed all Germans for acts of violence or robbery inflicted by individual Volksdeutsche. This tendency of perceptions to become generalized and universal under the impact of National Socialist ideology was undiminished by generational, class and political tensions within the Volksgruppe.

Volksdeutsche accepted the policies passed by the Volksgruppenführung (with Reich approval) because their own administration was preferable to a Serbian or a Hungarian one. This general compliance enabled the Volksgruppenführung to exercise a degree of coercion only rarely, in matters such as gross dereliction of duty by Volksdeutsche administrators, cultivation of land and mandatory food deliveries for the Reich. Otherwise, cajoling through perks, social pressure and local prestige of Volksgruppenführung members were more effective tools of control than open coercion. The Volksgruppenführung was, at best, a weak dictatorship which depended on both internal (Volksdeutsche) and external (Reich) approval and support for its existence.

The Reich exercised its power over the Volksdeutsche administration to ensure that the Volksdeutsche paid it back for every perk and privilege they received. Access to land and labor were intended to increase Volksdeutsche food deliveries. German-language schools promoted National Socialist ideology. Volksdeutsche taxes helped pay for the occupation of their home region by scant Reich troops. This ambivalent attitude toward the Volksdeutsche – half exploitation, half promotion – drew on the essential ambivalence of the Volksdeutsche position in Hitler's Europe.

It was also evident in the Reich's attitude to Volksdeutsche in relation to the resistance movements and the Holocaust in Southeast Europe. While it allowed for a degree of Serbian collaboration to ensure the smooth running of the Banat, the Third Reich and the Banat Volksgruppenführung alike encouraged ordinary Volksdeutsche to prove their worth as racial Germans by combating the anti-German resistance in Serbia-Banat, and by persecuting the Banat Jews.

CHAPTER V ‘ . . . AND THE LASH’<sup>822</sup>: THE VOLKSDEUTSCHE POLICE,  
ANTI-PARTISAN ACTION, AND THE HOLOCAUST IN THE SERBIAN BANAT

Active collaboration with the Third Reich was not the only way in which the Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) of the Serbian Banat aided the occupation forces. The Volksgruppenführung (ethnic German leadership) shared the Reich’s ideological convictions about natural racial supremacy, and the dangers of racial mixing and communism. So did some ordinary Volksdeutsche. For the vast majority of the Banat Volksdeutsche – including the ardent National Socialists among them – ideological zeal was only one element of their positive attitude to the Nazi regime. As shown in the previous chapter, the Reichsdeutsche (Reich German) occupation regime offered, with Berlin’s agreement, a range of material incentives to Volksdeutsche. It did so in order to achieve a dual objective: bolstering their standing as members of the German Volk in a multiethnic region, but also gaining the Volksdeutsche’s complicity with its policies. However, access to land, German-language education and better food rations were material incentives from which the Reich profited even more than the Volksdeutsche themselves, since it allowed the Reich to exploit the Volksdeutsche’s economic potential while also tying them securely into the Nazi Volksgemeinschaft.

Two additional types of privileges for Volksdeutsche also carried material benefits, but were more overtly ideological: security operations and access to Aryanized property (property confiscated from its previous, Jewish owners). Volksdeutsche participation in border patrols and the Banat police dovetailed with the emphasis placed

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<sup>822</sup> See n. 555 on p. 202 for the source of this chapter’s title.

in propaganda on their heritage as soldiers along the ethnic borders of the Greater Reich (see Chapter 6). It also allowed the Third Reich to utilize the Volksdeutsche as a reliable local resource instead of tying down Reichsdeutsche soldiers after the campaign in the Soviet Union proved not as swift and victorious as Hitler had hoped. Finally, Volksdeutsche policemen actively collaborated with the Reichsdeutsche in Serbia in combating the communist resistance. This embroiled them in Hitler's anti-Bolshevik crusade and, starting in 1942, left them vulnerable to the Reich's growing demand for soldiers, not just policemen and border guards. In 1941, however, the Reich still preferred to cajole rather than coerce the Banat Volksdeutsche. This, and the Volksgruppenführung's relative weakness in enforcing policy among its co-nationals, meant that even service in the Banat police and the Deutsche Mannschaft (DM, the Volksdeutsche militia) was voluntary rather than compulsory. This element of voluntarism meant that Volksdeutsche policemen and concentration camp guards had to actively choose to collaborate.

The Volksdeutsche participation in the Holocaust in Serbia-Banat was more insidious as a means of implicating the Volksdeutsche in the Reich's policies, and had a more widespread effect. Volksdeutsche aided Reichsdeutsche in arresting Jews right after the end of the April War and in August 1941, when the Banat Jews were deported *en masse* to Belgrade. Volksdeutsche also served the Reich as concentration camp and labor camp guards in the Banat, but participated mostly peripherally and sporadically in the actual killings. However, Volksdeutsche were the most obvious benefactors from Aryanization in the Banat, which implicated them in the Reich's racial policies. Even though the Reich drew the greater material benefit by Aryanizing commercial enterprises,

the most visible side of Aryanization in the Banat consisted of the ordinary Volksdeutsche's stealing or purchasing of Jewish furniture, clothes and other movable belongings. Like their participation in the anti-partisan struggle in Southeast Europe, individual Volksdeutsche's participation in Aryanization tainted them irrevocably in the eyes of their non-German neighbors. But while only some Volksdeutsche took part in anti-partisan activities before 1942, very many profited materially from the dispossession and deportation of the Banat Jews.

Postwar Yugoslav historians such as Zdenko Levntal and Đorđe Momčilović embraced the image of a universally Nazified Volksdeutsche community, wrought of a series of individual decisions taken by individual Volksdeutsche in the war year. These historians took the postwar socialist-ideological view which stressed the fascist allegiances of the Volksdeutsche and their greed for Jewish property as the Volksdeutsche's prime motivations.<sup>823</sup> Paradoxically, so did Akiko Shimizu in her highly descriptive – and not-ideological – recent book on the Banat Volksdeutsche under occupation. Shimizu's main complaint was with other German historians such as Ekkehard Völkl, whom she accused of accepting wholesale Volksdeutsche expellees' exculpatory postwar claim that Reichsdeutsche alone committed crimes against the Jews.<sup>824</sup>

All of these authors based their interpretations in part on the postwar testimonies of Volksdeutsche expellees and refugees made to the West German Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and Persons Damaged by War or (in Shimizu's case and) on

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<sup>823</sup> Zdenko Levntal, ed., *The Crimes of the Fascist Occupants and Their Collaborators against Jews in Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Federation of Jewish Communities of the Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia, 1957), p. 10; Momčilović, *Zrenjaninske vatre*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>824</sup> Shimizu, pp. 246-247.

depositions Banat residents (mostly non-Germans, but also some Volksdeutsche) made to the Yugoslav Commission for the Determining of the Crimes Committed by Occupiers and Their Helpers, which amassed proof in preparation for war crimes trials of Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche alike.<sup>825</sup> However, none of these authors have gone sufficiently deep into the material or combined the two sets of postwar testimonies so as to provide as complex a picture as possible of Volksdeutsche actions and motivations in Hitler's war against communism and the Jews. In this chapter, the two sets of materials, analyzed together, offer a nuanced picture of the ever-shifting balance of greed, ideology, apathy, giving in to social trends, and Schadenfreude among Banat Volksdeutsche. Mixed motives led some Volksdeutsche into active collaboration with the Reich's policies. They led the vast majority of Volksdeutsche into at least a tacit complicity with the persecution of their neighbors accused of racial or ideological enmity to the Nazi regime.

### Deutsche Mannschaft

There was practically no fighting in the Serbian Banat between its occupation in April 1941 and the arrival of the Red Army in early October 1944. Unlike in other occupied Yugoslav lands, resistance activity in the Banat was small in scale and never caused more than temporary disruption. However, as in other occupied Yugoslav lands, the measures taken to combat resistance activity were often far out of proportion to the actual achievements of the resistance fighters. Retaliation was shaped by an ideological view of the enemy as an exponent of a Jewish and Slavic Bolshevik conspiracy against Germany. But whereas in Serbia proper anti-partisan fighting was the purview of the Wehrmacht,

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<sup>825</sup> The vast majority of the latter managed to escape Allied justice and made new lives for themselves in West Germany, Austria and the New World (see Appendix II for some prominent examples).

the (mostly Serbian<sup>826</sup>) police and, in fall 1942, the Volksdeutsche Waffen-SS, in the Banat security was almost exclusively a Volksdeutsche matter<sup>827</sup> – even though Volksdeutsche policemen acted on Reichsdeutsche orders.

Since the Wehrmacht's Kreiskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek had very few Reichsdeutsche soldiers attached to it, it became necessary right after the April War to form a Volksdeutsche police force to prevent and investigate crime. Following the start of Operation Barbarossa and the concomitant beginning of the communist resistance in Yugoslav lands, the Volksdeutsche police was also expected to carry out anti-partisan actions in the Banat. Despite the establishment of a Volksdeutsche administration in summer 1941, the Banat Volksdeutsche were not necessarily the logical candidates for the role of policemen and concentration camp guards. The circumstances which gave them this role, and confirmed their predominant position over the other Banat ethnicities, included the reluctance of other Banat residents to take on the burden of security, the disenchantment of the Reichsdeutsche in Belgrade with the possibility of widespread, effective Serbian collaboration, and the willingness of many Volksdeutsche to accept both the power and the responsibility a police officer's position carried. The recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche for police duties also created a precedent which later allowed the Reich to exert ever more coercion over Volksdeutsche reluctant to serve it in another capacity: as soldiers of the Waffen-SS.

In February 1942, Werner Lorenz of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi) compiled a report on the anti-German resistance in occupied Serbia. Writing about the

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<sup>826</sup> Although some Volksdeutsche police were deployed there in 1942, until replaced by the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" in the fall of that year. Kriegstagebuch, August 23, 1942, Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), RW 40 Territoriale Befehlshaber in Südosteuropa, file 32, p. 11.

<sup>827</sup> Shimizu p. 444.

Banat, he stressed the importance of its Volksdeutsche administration for maintaining fairly good relations with the Banat Serbs.<sup>828</sup> The Banat was the direct opposite of Serbia proper, where the competing royalist (Četnik) and communist (Partisan) resistance movements profited from the lack of Reichsdeutsche control outside of the major urban areas. Lorenz ended his report by calling the Banat a place of “absolute peace.”<sup>829</sup> After the war, former deputy Volksgruppenführer (Volksdeutsche leader) Josef Beer took it up a notch, calling the Banat in the war years an “oasis of peace and order in the chaos which was former Yugoslavia.”<sup>830</sup>

The first major safety issue facing the occupation authorities in Serbia-Banat before the outbreak of the Partisan resistance in late June 1941 was securing the borders of Serbia-Banat. The problem was not so much the possibility of attack from outside. Serbia-Banat was surrounded on all sides by states allied with (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia) or occupied by Germany and Italy (Greece, Montenegro, Albania). The main issue was daily traffic across borders and customs control. Although an inchoate Deutsche Mannschaft, the Volksdeutsche paramilitary organization, existed in the Banat already at the time of the April War, it was then neither uniformly nor very well trained or equipped. More importantly, the initial decision made by the Reich military authorities was to use only Serbs as gendarmes and customs agents.

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<sup>828</sup> As shown in Chapter 4, the Banat Serbs suffered some economic and physical violence in the Banat, but those with useful skills, who were also free of the Jewish or communist taint could even find positions within the Volksdeutsche administration.

<sup>829</sup> “absolute Ruhe” Werner Lorenz (head of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle) memo, “Serbische Aufstandsbewegung,” February 23, 1942, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Inland II Geheim, file R 101093 Berichte und Medungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1942, fiche 2817, frame H296,600.

<sup>830</sup> “die Oase des Friedens und der Ordnung im ganzen Chaos des ehemaligen Jugoslawiens” Josef Beer (former deputy Volksgruppenführer in the Serbian Banat), “Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien” (1958), Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth (LAA), Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 617.

Volksdeutsche in the north and ethnic Albanians in the south of occupied Serbia-Banat were discouraged from applying for these positions, and denied if they did apply.<sup>831</sup>

The reasoning behind this decision had to do with the desire to utilize as many native collaborators as possible, so as to release Reichsdeutsche military and administrative personnel for deployment away from the Balkans or for more upper-level tasks in Serbia proper. The Serbian collaborationist government had the support of Harald Turner, chief of the Reichsdeutsche civilian administration in Belgrade. In early June 1941, it seemed a viable option as far as collaborationist governments went. Moreover, the Reichsdeutsche authorities may have suspected Volksdeutsche and ethnic Albanians of trying to establish contact with their co-nationals across Serbia's borders, possibly even making common cause for the creation of a Freistaat Banat (which attempt had just been prevented in May 1941<sup>832</sup>) or a Greater Albania. Both hypothetical states would have alienated the Reich's allies and clashed with Reich interests in Southeast Europe.

The Wehrmacht reached an agreement with the Reich Finance Ministry to replace Wehrmacht soldiers manning border crossings with Serbian officials supervised by a handful of commissars representing the Reich Border and Customs Patrol (Zollgrenzschutz).<sup>833</sup> This proved easier said than done as both the Banat Volksdeutsche<sup>834</sup> and the ethnic Hungarians<sup>835</sup> denied the newly arrived border officials

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<sup>831</sup> Chef des Generalstabes der Armee-Oberkommando 2 to Höheres Kommando LXV, June 12, 1941, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-501 [Records of German Field Commands: Rear Areas, Occupied Territories, and Others]/254/585.

<sup>832</sup> See p. 139.

<sup>833</sup> "Befehl über den Einsatz von Zollgrenzschutz in Serbien," June 10, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 3, p. 31; Kriegstagebuch, June 18, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 3, p. 59.

<sup>834</sup> Beer, "Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 615.

access to their posts, requiring the Volksgruppenführung to intervene and exercise its somewhat shaky authority or even to call Reichsdeutsche soldiers for help. The Serbian border guards were perceived as an extension of the Serbian government in the Banat at a time when the prospect of severing all ties to Belgrade still seemed feasible to the Banat Volksdeutsche and ethnic Hungarians.

In the course of summer 1941, however, the Banat Volksdeutsche administration cemented its position in the Banat precisely by acknowledging and confirming its dependence on the Third Reich's foreign policy. This meant accepting its likely future annexation by Hungary, but also the current reality of Reich German rule. It also meant accepting the fact that a Volksdeutsche state separate from Serbia was impossible for the foreseeable future. Paradoxically, the Volksgruppenführung's tenuous status – a quasi-state within a state which was no real, independent state but an occupied territory – and its dependence on the Third Reich made the long-term deployment of Serbian security officials unacceptable to Volksdeutsche sensibilities.

However, Volksdeutsche sensibilities never ranked as high in Berlin's policymaking as official rhetoric let on. The eventual decision to replace Serbs with Volksdeutsche as agents of the Zollgrenzschutz was less a sign of the Reich's growing trust in Volksdeutsche and more of the developing realities of warfare in the Balkans. In spring 1942, when Volksdeutsche border guards under Reichsdeutsche supervision replaced Serbs on the Banat's borders,<sup>836</sup> the likelihood of a stable and reliable

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<sup>835</sup> Maier (Geheime Feldpolizei commander in Grossbetschkerek) to Geheime Feldpolizei Gruppe 20, "Ungarische Volkszugehörige in Neu Kanischa, Übergriffe gegen serbische Grenzschutzorgane," June 19, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/484-485.

<sup>836</sup> Harald Turner (Reichsdeutsche civilian administration chief in occupied Serbia), "11. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," April 6, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 193, p. 23.

collaborationist Serbia already seemed a foolish prospect. Both the Partisan and the Četnik resistance stepped up their activities, while the Nedić government's ability to control the situation diminished exponentially. Serbian officials lost much of the Reich's good will, and Volksdeutsche rose correspondingly in the military administration's esteem as agents of keeping the peace.

Moreover, in spring 1942 Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Hitler started implementing the systematic recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche for the Waffen-SS, building on previous, unsystematic recruitment for the Deutsche Mannschaft, the Banat police and the border patrol. Recruitment for the Waffen-SS and for the police and border patrol continued side by side throughout 1942 and 1943, to the point where the sheer scope of the recruitment for the Waffen-SS hobbled the Volksgruppenführung's ability to fill the ranks of the police and border security forces from among its ranks. Already in summer 1942 most of the men trained to serve as border guards and customs agents had been taken into the Waffen-SS, and had to be replaced with poorly trained men too old for military service.<sup>837</sup> Few as these were, by May 1943 Volksdeutsche helped guard the borders of Serbia proper as well as the Banat, so low had the Serbian border patrols sunk in Reichsdeutsche eyes.<sup>838</sup>

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<sup>837</sup> Turner, "13. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Kdr. General und Befehlshaber in Serbien für Mai und Juni 1942," July 3, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 195, p. 36.

<sup>838</sup> A total of 374 Volksdeutsche served in the Zollgrenzschutz: 180 in the Banat while 194 aided Serbian border patrols in Serbia proper. General Paul Bader (German commanding general in Serbia) to Oberbefehlshaber Südost, May 17, 1943, BA MA, RW 40, file 41, p. 119. Only three months later, the Waffen-SS demanded that all 374 be transferred to it, prompting the Military Commander in Belgrade to beg that at least 67 be allowed to remain, in view of the advanced age of potential replacements and the unreliability of Serbian border guards. Chef des Generalstabes with Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien, August 18, 1943, NARA, RG 242, T-501/253/136.

As far as the Banat's police force was concerned, the Deutsche Mannschaft never fit comfortably into a specific niche. Most likely in an attempt to downplay the seriousness of Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko and other leading Volksdeutsche's (himself included) ambition to recruit willing Volksdeutsche for the Waffen-SS before the April War,<sup>839</sup> in his postwar testimony Jakob Lichtenberger melded these attempts with the creation of the Deutsche Mannschaft. Before the April War, it was ostensibly an apolitical, völkisch organization for cultural and sports activities by Volksdeutsche men in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>840</sup> Even after the April War, it never became the official Banat police force, much less an inchoate army. Like the SA in the Third Reich,<sup>841</sup> the Deutsche Mannschaft occupied a no man's land halfway between a civilian and a military institution. It aped the military chain of command and dressed its members in the black uniforms which eventually earned it the nickname the 'black police,' but was under the Volksgruppenführung's command.<sup>842</sup> This quasi-military, but really civilian chain of command was due to the fact that, alongside the Deutsche Frauenschaft and the Deutsche Jugend, the Mannschaft was as one of the Gliederungen (organizations based on age and

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<sup>839</sup> See pp. 93-94.

<sup>840</sup> Jakob Lichtenberger's (former Arbeitsdienst and Deutsche Mannschaft official in Yugoslavia, and Landesmannschaftsführer in the Independent State of Croatia) report on the Arbeitsdienst, "Bericht" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/182, frames 1897, 1902-1903.

<sup>841</sup> A comparison made by the Volksdeutsche Wilma Slavik in her 1958 testimony (LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 815), as well as the historian Dirk-Gerd Erpenbeck (pp. 11-12). Mariana Hausleitner, another historian, gives the Deutsche Mannschaft too much credit when she likens it to the SS. Mariana Hausleitner, "Politische Bestrebungen der Schwaben im serbischen und im rumänischen Banat vor 1945," in *Vom Faschismus zum Stalinismus. Deutsche und andere Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1941-1953*, ed. Mariana Hausleitner (Munich: IKGS Verlag, 2008), p. 49.

<sup>842</sup> Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 815.

gender) of the Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien (German National Group in the Banat and Serbia).<sup>843</sup>

Ideologically, the Volksgruppenführung exerted itself to represent service in the Mannschaft as a duty and an honor for every völkisch-conscious male member of the Volksgruppe, and the Mannschaft itself as an ideological and practical school of the Volk. Its duty was officially to “educate all ideologically and racially irreproachable men, regardless of their age and class, for the great tasks before our Volk, and to deploy them in direct service to the Volksgruppe. The DM should be the political instrument of the Volksgruppe’s will and accomplishment.”<sup>844</sup> In later years, service in the Mannschaft was strenuously represented as in no way inferior to that in the Waffen-SS. The comparison did not hold up even in propaganda materials, which stressed that those men who “were not in the position to wear the grey soldier’s tunic [could still] do justice to their duty as soldiers – if only in part.”<sup>845</sup>

The Deutsche Mannschaft was thus something of a neglected stepchild so far as the Volksgruppe’s institutions went. Its position was not aided by the fact that, though it regularly absorbed members of the Deutsche Jugend as these came of age<sup>846</sup> and enforced

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<sup>843</sup> “Regelung des Verhältnisses der Volksorganisation zur Deutsche Mannschaft,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien* [from now on *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*], August 1941, p. 3.

<sup>844</sup> “Die DM hat die Aufgabe, alle weltanschaulich und rassisch einwandfreien Männer ohne Rücksicht auf Alter und Stand für die grossen Aufgaben unseres Volkes zu erziehen und unmittelbar in den Dienst an der Volksgruppe einzusetzen. Die DM soll damit politischer Willensträger und Durchführungsinstrument der Volksgruppe sein.” *Ibid.*

<sup>845</sup> “nicht in der Lage waren, den grauen Waffenrock zu tragen, auf diese Art – wenn auch nur teilweise – doch ihrer soldatischen Pflicht gerecht werden konnten.” *Zwei Jahre Einsatz und Aufbau. Bericht über Kriegseinsatz und Leistungen unserer Heimatfront*, Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien: Grossbetschkerek, 1943, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100380 *Deutschtum in Serbien-Banat*, Band 2, 1942-1944, p. 151.

<sup>846</sup> Franz Germann (Banat Landesjugendführer), “Das Verhältnis zur ‘Deutschen Mannschaft,’” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, November 1, 1941, pp. 8-9.

a quasi-military discipline on its members,<sup>847</sup> service in the Mannschaft was initially not obligatory for all adult Volksdeutsche men. Even the administrators and Volksgruppe officials obliged to hold honorary rank in it were relieved of any actual duties within the Mannschaft.<sup>848</sup> Despite efforts to train it both ideologically and militarily in summer 1941,<sup>849</sup> the Deutsche Mannschaft never overcame its status as an auxiliary institution, a militia force of peasants so ill-trained and -equipped that even Reichsdeutsche customs officials remarked on it in early 1942.<sup>850</sup>

Nevertheless, in fall 1941 the Mannschaft aided the newly formed Banater Hilfspolizei (Banat Auxiliary Police) in combating Partisans inside the Banat, even standing in for the real police on occasion due to a general lack of trained personnel.<sup>851</sup> The same was true of village militias, which did their duties as best they could, but were armed “some with rifles, some with sticks,”<sup>852</sup> and lacked the shoes and coats to patrol

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<sup>847</sup> In fall 1941, eleven members of the Mannschaft and five members of the border patrol were thrown out of their respective organizations for infractions ranging from drunkenness and dereliction of duty, to impersonating a higher rank, stealing and embezzlement, to ideological crimes such as “unworthy behavior” (“Unwürdiges Verhalten”) and being married to a Jewish woman. “Aus der DM wurden ausgeschlossen,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 1, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>848</sup> “Regelung des Verhältnisses der Volksorganisation zur Deutsche Mannschaft,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, August 1941, p. 3; Volksgruppenführer Josef ‘Sepp’ Janko, “Anordnung,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, January 1, 1942, pp. 2-3.

<sup>849</sup> Friedrich Becker, “Bericht über meine Eindrücke aus dem Banat und Serbien,” most likely late August 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-81 [Records of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut]/544/5,316,592.

<sup>850</sup> Janko to Christian Brücker (Belgrade Kreisleiter), March 28, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv [‘German Archive’], box 27-A, folder 5, document 44.

<sup>851</sup> Chief of the Abteilung öffentliche Sicherheit with the Banat Police Prefecture, Dr. Juraj Spiller even praised its exertions and cooperativeness in his postwar memoir. Spiller, “Komanda javne bezbednosti,” completed on February 15, 1948, Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, pp. 98-99, 105; see also Turner, “7. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien,” December 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 189, p. 8.

<sup>852</sup> “delom naoružane puškama, a delom motkama” Spiller memoir (1948), Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, p. 105.

properly in winter.<sup>853</sup> They were the target of much resentment in the more peaceful villages<sup>854</sup> before being gradually disbanded around the turn of 1941-1942.<sup>855</sup> As for the citizens' militia mustered in Pantschowa in 1941, even guarding the airstrip in Smederevo proved beyond its capabilities, prompting the following description of its fighting potential: "[T]hese citizens first [need to be] instill[ed] with some martial spirit. At the moment, they are well and truly useless."<sup>856</sup>

The situation only worsened with the start of the Waffen-SS recruitment in spring 1942, which was not only better organized, but did not allow for voluntarism. So many were the Deutsche Mannschaft members called up by the Waffen-SS that Janko temporarily dissolved the Mannschaft in March 1942 – in the same issue of the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien* in which he called on his co-nationals to volunteer for the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen."<sup>857</sup>

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<sup>853</sup> Gemeindevorsteherung Mokrin to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, November 10, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84 Sresko načelstvo Kikinda, 1941-1944, box 1, p. 394; Opštinka uprava Padej to Sresko načelstvo Velika Kikinda [Grosskikinda], February 8, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, p. 453.

<sup>854</sup> Gemeindeamt Nakodorf to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, December 10, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 427; Gemeindeamt Heufeld to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, February 7, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 464.

<sup>855</sup> Felix Benzler (AA – Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry – representative in occupied Belgrade) report, December 20, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, R 100549 Ungarische Minderheiten, 1942-1943; Rumänische Minderheiten, 1943, p. 46; Gemeindeamt Nakodorf to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, January 9, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, p. 451; Gemeindeamt Heufeld to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda (1942), Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 464; Gemeindeamt Soltur to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, February 9, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 467

<sup>856</sup> "diesen Bürgern mal erst etwas militärischen Geist beibringen wird. Im Augenblick sind sie tatsächlich unbrauchbar." Feldkommandantur 610 to General Franz Böhme (German commanding general in Serbia before Bader), "Beurteilung der Lage im Banat," September 18, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/246/364.

<sup>857</sup> Janko, "Befehl Nr. 1," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 1, 1942, p. 12.

The Deutsche Mannschaft was very low on the list of priorities, both with the Volksgruppe and in Berlin's view of Southeast Europe. In fall 1942 Himmler proclaimed that every racial German residing in the East, who did not already serve in the Waffen-SS, Wehrmacht or the German police could be called up to help combat resistance. Janko and Felix Benzler (the German Foreign Ministry representative in Belgrade) were quick to point out – and the AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry) in Berlin to concur – that the Banat Volksdeutsche men not already in “Prinz Eugen” were too few to be much use for such anti-partisan action in the Banat,<sup>858</sup> apart from poor training and discipline. Even so, the manpower shortage necessitated the resurrection of the Deutsche Mannschaft in December 1942,<sup>859</sup> as well as military training for the boys who would eventually join the Mannschaft, and even for those who were not in the Deutsche Jugend.<sup>860</sup> This latter measure extended still further the regimentation of Volksdeutsche civilian life started in German-language schools – regimentation which laid the groundwork for, and was in turn exacerbated by, recruitment for the Waffen-SS.

Whereas service in the Waffen-SS was obligatory, the Mannschaft proved to be a true arm of the Volksgruppenführung in its inability to enforce full compliance. Membership *was* made obligatory for adult men up to forty years of age after the Mannschaft started up again in late 1942. The Waffen-SS recruits discharged in 1943 on grounds of advanced years felt the full brunt of social pressure to join the Mannschaft as

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<sup>858</sup> Heinrich Himmler memo, no date, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011 Waffen-SS: Serbien, Werbeaktion, 1942-1944, fiche 2606, frame H299,544; Benzler to AA, September 19, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frames H299,548-549; Helmut Triska (head of the AA's Volkstumsreferat) to VoMi (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle), November 30, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frames H299,541-542.

<sup>859</sup> Janko, “Anordnung über die Wiederaufnahme der Tätigkeit der DM,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, December 31, 1942, p. 2.

<sup>860</sup> Janko, “Verordnung über die vormilitärische Ausbildung der Deutschen Jugend,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, October 15, 1942, p. 1.

soon as they returned home,<sup>861</sup> but could not really be compelled to join. In the words of one man who proved stronger than the social mechanisms by which the Volksgruppenführung ruled (see Chapter 4): “At home they tried to get us to join the Deutsche Mannschaft. But we said no! They got us once as volunteers by their refined wiles, but they wouldn’t get us a second time.”<sup>862</sup>

In vain did Janko decide in March 1944 to revamp the Mannschaft into the Deutsche Männergruppe, a broader organization of Volksdeutsche men (what was left of them in the Banat after the Waffen-SS recruitment), of which the Mannschaft would be the armed, (para)military wing.<sup>863</sup> No mere change of title could transform the Mannschaft into an ideological and gender elite like the SS. Far from it: in late summer 1944, the Deutsche Mannschaft’s deployment in aid of the regular Volksdeutsche police pursuing Partisan groups within the Banat resembled a bad comic opera, as Mannschaft members gossiped openly about supposedly secret operations<sup>864</sup> and exchanged friendly fire with the police after getting lost in some tall reeds in broad daylight.<sup>865</sup> The evidence suggests that not even its members took the Mannschaft very seriously, probably because service in it was part-time, and offered little in the way of material and only marginal ideological incentive. The situation was different in the regular Volksdeutsche police.

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<sup>861</sup> Landesführung der Deutschen Mannschaft, “Aufruf,” *Banater Beobachter* [daily newspaper published in Grossbetschkerek], January 14, 1943, p. 5 and January 16, pp. 5-6.

<sup>862</sup> “Zuhause wolte man uns zur Deutschen Manschaft haben. Aber Wir sagten Nein! Einmal hat man uns auf Raffinierte Art und Weise als Freiwillige hingestellt, ein zweitesmal aber kriegt Ihr uns nicht.” Testimony of Franz Unterreiner from Deutsch Elemer (1958), on his experiences after he was discharged from the division “Prinz Eugen” in late 1943 at the age of 51 [*sic*], in Schieder *et al.*, p. 73.

<sup>863</sup> Janko, “Anordnung,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 23, 1944, pp. 19-20.

<sup>864</sup> DM Ortseinheit Perlas Farkaschdin to Landesführung der Deutschen Mannschaft, August 18, 1944, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 6/1.

<sup>865</sup> Stabseinheit der DM Grossbetschkerek report, August 28, 1944, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 1, document 8/1.

### Banater Hilfspolizei

The police system in the Banat replicated that in the Third Reich, with parallel and partially overlapping jurisdictions between the Kommando Öffentliche Sicherheit under Juraj Spiller (Command of Public Safety, equivalent to the political Sicherheitspolizei) and the Kommando der Staatswache under Ernst Pelikan (Command of the State Guard, equivalent to the regular, uniformed Ordnungspolizei). Both were subsumed to the Polizeipräfektur des Banates (Banat Police Prefecture) under Franz Reith. Officially separated from the Volksgruppenführung in early 1942,<sup>866</sup> it answered directly to the newly installed Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer (HSSPF, Higher SS and Police Chief) in Serbia, Austrian SS-Gruppenführer and career policeman August Meyszner.<sup>867</sup> Meyszner represented Himmler and took control of Waffen-SS recruitment completely out of Sepp Janko's hands (see Chapter 7).<sup>868</sup> In addition, there was a Gestapo outpost in Grossbetschkerek, commanded by a succession of Reichsdeutsche officers reporting directly to the Sicherheitspolizei and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) chief in Belgrade, Emanuel Schäfer.<sup>869</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Shimizu, p. 205.

<sup>867</sup> Also spelled Meissner or Meyssner, even in Reich documents.

<sup>868</sup> Ruth Bettina Birn, *Die Höheren SS- und Polizeiführer. Himmlers Vertreter im Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1986), p. 240.

<sup>869</sup> Shimizu, p. 214.

Although its commander was always a Reichsdeutscher, the Gestapo in the Banat employed Volksdeutsche as agents. Deposition of Sava Talpez from Werschetz, June 18, 1945, Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore a.k.a. Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fund 110 Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, box 672, p. 70.

Spiller, Reith and Pelikan were avowed Volksdeutsche,<sup>870</sup> but actual command of all security matters in the Banat rested with the Reichsdeutsche administration in Belgrade. This was where orders issued, but it was left to Spiller and Reith's discretion to plan and coordinate anti-partisan actions. Only a single police battalion from the Reich (Police Battalion 64) and the scant forces of Kreiskommandantur 823 existed as an actual police force in the Banat,<sup>871</sup> the Deutsche Mannschaft had proved not up to ensuring that the communist resistance flaming up in Serbia proper in summer 1941 would not spread to the Banat, and the events surrounding the installation of Serbian border guards showed the extent of the locals' animosity toward Serbian governmental bodies. A real police force had to be created from the Banat civilian population. This left only the Volksdeutsche and, to a lesser extent, the ethnic Hungarians as viable candidates, after Kurt Daluge, chief of the Third Reich's Ordnungspolizei, refused General Heinrich Danckelmann's (German commander in Belgrade) request to have additional police battalions from the Reich sent to Serbia.<sup>872</sup> Instead, Daluge petitioned the Oberkommando des Heeres for permission to create "protective formations" from the Volksdeutsche in occupied Serbia-Banat.<sup>873</sup>

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<sup>870</sup> Spiller's origins were dubious. Born in Zagreb, he was widely gossiped to have Croatian as well as German heritage, suggested by his first name. Nevertheless, he claimed he was a Volksdeutscher, although he composed his long memoir while awaiting trial in Belgrade in Serbo-Croatian with the express purpose of exculpating his wartime actions.

<sup>871</sup> Turner, "5. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," October 6, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 187, p. 25.

<sup>872</sup> Picot (AA) to Kurt Daluge (Reich chief of the Ordnungspolizei), August 11, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100779 Serbien, Tätigkeit des SD, der Abwehr, der Agenten und Polizeiattachés, 1939-1943, fiche 1989, frame 274,777.

<sup>873</sup> "Schutzformationen" Daluge to AA, August 18, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100779, fiche 1989, frame 274,778.

Permission arrived in due course, and a one thousand-strong auxiliary police (Hilfspolizei) composed of Banat Volksdeutsche was planned.<sup>874</sup> Volksdeutsche were at this point a logical choice for the role, since the position of the Volksdeutsche administration in the Banat was sufficiently secure vis-à-vis the Serbian collaborationist government and Hungarian ambitions alike to justify giving it a measure of executive power. However, as indicated, police work was not left solely to the Volksgruppenführung's discretion. As an armed formation with the full force of the law behind it, the Hilfspolizei served the security, political and ideological interests of the Third Reich, as transmitted by Meyszner and Schäfer to the Volksgruppenführung before the creation of the Banat Police Prefecture, later to the Prefecture itself.<sup>875</sup> Coinciding with the recruitment for the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen," the Hilfspolizei's status as an instrument of the Third Reich did not protect it from having its freshly trained ranks depleted by Waffen-SS demands.<sup>876</sup> Nevertheless, it remained a significant factor in the anti-partisan struggle in the Banat.

Both as a police force and as a Volksdeutsche force, the Banat Hilfspolizei was a part of Heinrich Himmler's private empire within the Third Reich's sphere of

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<sup>874</sup> Turner, "5. Lagebericht" (1941), BA MA, RW 40, file 187, p. 25.

<sup>875</sup> The establishment of the Police Prefecture in February 1942 was followed in April by the official ending of Hilfspolizei training and its absorption into the Banat section of the Srpska državna straža (Serbische Staatswache, Serbian State Guard). This was a semi-militarized police force controlled officially by the collaborationist government in Serbia proper, but in the Banat stood under Pelikan's section of the Prefecture. The Reich's control over the Volksdeutsche auxiliary police remained undiminished by this reshuffling. August Meyszner (Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer in Serbia) memo, April 18, 1942 and Franz Reith (Banat Police Prefect) to Befehlshaber der Ordnungspolizei in Belgrade, May 9, 1942, both Muzej Vojvodine, document 3009/23.

<sup>876</sup> Even so, it managed to retain 1552 men by February 1943. Kommandant der Banater Staatswache to Polizeikreisstelle 1 (Grossbetschkerek), February 10, 1943, AJ, fund 110, box 663, p. 79.

influence.<sup>877</sup> It therefore had more power over its members. Unlike the Deutsche Mannschaft, membership in the Hilfspolizei was a paid auxiliary position with the Ordnungspolizei<sup>878</sup> which carried with it certain privileges, not the least of which was a better grain ration for the policemen and their families.<sup>879</sup> This certainly attracted some recruits to its ranks. While the Volksgruppenführung thus cajoled Volksdeutsche to join the Hilfspolizei, with the weight of Himmler's authority behind it, it could also compel them to join it and stay in it.

This was an early indication that the Volksgruppenführung would willingly put the Reich's interest ahead of its co-nationals' interest when recruitment of Volksdeutsche was at stake, removing even the possibility of voluntarism beyond the Volksdeutsche's grasp (see Chapter 7). On the whole, recruitment for the Hilfspolizei was not left up to the good will of individual Volksdeutsche. When summons were issued to groups of men from individual villages, in Franzfeld first the village mayor's son and then all of the men summoned for police duty refused to go. This Volksdeutsche village provided the Volksgruppenführung with an object lesson in dealing with recalcitrants. Chief of the Banat administration Sepp Lapp, himself from Franzfeld, came to the village with a detachment of the Deutsche Mannschaft and arrested not only the men who had refused

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<sup>877</sup> This was merely confirmed when its internal discipline officially came within the jurisdiction of the SS and Police Court in Belgrade in 1944. SS-Obersturmbannführer Reinecke (Chef des Hauptamtes SS-Gericht with Reichsführer-SS, RFSS) to SS-Richter with RFSS und Chef der Deutschen Polizei (RFSSuCdDP), January 22, 1943, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), NS 7 SS- und Polizeigerichtsbarkeit, volume 117, p. 1; SS-Oberstufabf. Dr. Bender (SS-Richter with RFSSuCdDP) to Hauptamt SS-Gericht, May 27, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 117, p. 2; Reinecke to SS-Richter with RFSSuCdDP, June 11, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 117, p. 3; SS-Hauptsturmführer Killing with RFSSuCdDP to Chef des Wehrmichtsrechtwesens im OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht), November 9, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 117, p. 6; OKW to Killing, January 11, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 117, p. 8.

<sup>878</sup> "Richtlinien für die Aufstellung einer Hilfspolizei aus Volksdeutschen in Serbien," no date, BA Berlin, R 19 Chef der Ordnungspolizei (Hauptamt Ordnungspolizei), volume 322, document 172a, p. 2 of this document.

<sup>879</sup> See pp. 252-253.

their summons, but several dozen other Volksdeutsche of both sexes who had protested the summons most loudly. The arrestees were paraded through the village, with a local woman known for her anti-Nazi sentiment forced to wear a sign saying “We are Franzfeld’s shame.”<sup>880</sup> Once this tale spread through the Volksgruppe, it did more than any amount of propaganda to ensure acceptance of the fact that the privileges and perks Volksdeutsche received did not come without a price, as well as compliance with future mobilization summons. By the time Waffen-SS recruitment started a few months later, almost no one in the Banat protested *those* summons too loudly, least of all the residents of Franzfeld, the fight knocked right out of them.

The remarkable thing about this affair was not so much that the Volksgruppenführung openly cracked the proverbial whip against a large number of its co-nationals in a decisive and rare departure from its usual cajoling approach. What is truly remarkable is the precedent set by the events in Franzfeld for future relations between the Volksgruppe and the Reich. Although the crackdown on the rebellious village was performed by representatives of the Volksgruppenführung (fellow Volksdeutsche), the impetus came from Meyszner’s predecessor, erstwhile Sicherheitspolizei and SD chief in Serbia Wilhelm Fuchs, the Reichsdeutsche personnel dispatched to train the Hilfspolizei, and the whole persuasive power of the Reich ranked behind them. It is unclear whether Fuchs actually commanded Lapp to deal with Franzfeld and how. The very fact that a Volksdeutsche police was being formed and that the Reich was willing to employ even the lightest of coercions in the form of summons

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<sup>880</sup> ““Wir sind die Schande von Franzfeld”” Adam Müller, “Sind die Franzfelder freiwillig zur Waffen-SS eingezogen?” (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/170, frames 1329-1330.

for armed duty to ensure its timely creation, was sufficient to prompt the Volksgruppenführung to some coercive action of its own.

With this precedent – that Volksdeutsche could be openly coerced into the Reich’s service, in however roundabout a way – set, the training first of the Hilfspolizei and later of the division “Prinz Eugen” marked the transition into a prolonged period of ever more coercion of the Volksdeutsche by the Third Reich. However, this approach never tipped over into unrelieved coercion, not least because even the resolution of the incident in Franzfeld relied on extant social mechanisms more than outright violence.

Moreover, the ‘lash’ as applied to Volksdeutsche never came without a positive incentive or two. Preferential rations remained *de rigueur* for all Hilfspolizei members, and acted as a powerful incentive to compliance, as did access to Aryanized property, especially in the first months of the occupation (see below). On the other hand, when a group of new Banat policemen tried to wheedle their way out of taking the final, binding oath, the Reichsdeutsche personnel in charge of training them first patiently addressed each complaint. Those who claimed ill health got a check-up and a doctor’s note of approval or discharge, those who claimed economic need were promised a laborer, those with bad eyesight – eyeglasses, and those with flat feet – arch supports. Only then did the officers in charge resort to abusive language. By that point, the Volksdeutsche’s resolve had already been worn out by the Reich representatives’ polite refusal to give in to blatant excuses.<sup>881</sup> The desire not to stand out from the crowd was a powerful social force in the tightly knit Volksgruppe, with its traditional self-perception as an exposed ethnic and cultural minority. The Volksdeutsche on the whole had no more strength of resolve in objecting to individual policies of the Third Reich and the Volksgruppenführung than

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<sup>881</sup> Testimony of Peter Kaip from Ernsthausen (1958) in Schieder, p. 69.

did the Germans in the Reich. One negative example like that of Franzfeld served to render the majority docile, if not enthusiastic.

Contrary to what might be expected, coercion was not always applied more openly against Banat non-Germans. There were roughly four hundred ethnic Hungarian members of the *Hilfspolizei*. Likely attracted by the promise of better rations, they had to brave quite a lot of criticism from their co-nationals, who saw in their becoming policemen for the Reich a betrayal of the Hungarian plans for the Banat.<sup>882</sup> When the four hundred objected strenuously the *Hilfspolizei*'s impending deployment in Serbia proper in summer 1943, most were dishonorably discharged, but do not seem to have suffered any worse consequences.<sup>883</sup> In their refusal to leave the Banat, they had the support of their leader Jeszenszky.<sup>884</sup> They also had the implicit support of the Hungarian government, which may not have had enough diplomatic or military leverage to secure special privileges for their co-nationals in the Banat, but could at least prevent their deployment outside of it. The Third Reich's continued need to keep its allies close dictated that the ethnic Hungarians in the Banat did not suffer even when they damaged Reich interest. Paradoxically, the *Volksdeutsche* could count on no such protection, since their sole protector and master *was* the Third Reich, so that when they refused to serve it they could anticipate treatment like that doled out to the recalcitrant residents of Franzfeld.

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<sup>882</sup> Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters, July [3]1, 1943, BA Berlin, R 58 Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), file 7733, p. 22.

<sup>883</sup> Benzler to Meyszner, May 27, 1943, RG 242, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/5784/ H299,454; Meyszner to Benzler, June 7, 1943, RG 242, T-120/5784/ H299,455-456; Benzler to AA, June 12, 1943, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5784/ H299,451-452; Benzler to AA, August 3, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100969 Fremde Volksgruppen: Ungarische Flüchtlinge im serbischen Banat, 1942-1944, fiche 2497, frames H299,793-795.

<sup>884</sup> Völkl, p. 184.

Banat Slavs had it comparably worse (see Chapter 4). Even the Banat ethnic Croats, though they were co-nationals of the Croats in the Independent State of Croatia, could receive summons for the depleted *Hilfspolizei*. If they refused, as racial Slavs linked to a state which was Germany's satellite (rather than a weaker, but independent government like Hungary), they faced arrest, forced labor and imprisonment. This is what happened to about one hundred ethnic Croats from Startschowa in May 1943.<sup>885</sup> For those Slavs – mostly Serbs – accused of participating in communist activities and sabotage, the prospects were much worse. Although overall treatment of Serbs was not as terrible as that common against Russians or Belarusians, in the Banat as in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union there could be no worse crime than being associated with communist activities or sympathies, or being Jewish.

### Partisans

In summer and fall 1941, as the Partisan movement was taking off in Serbia proper, a real danger existed that it would spread to the Banat.<sup>886</sup> Reichsdeutsche forces were woefully overstretched and faced with an enemy fired by an ideological zeal for an inimical ideology, an enemy made all the more fearsome by association with the Jews and the Slavs: the unholy trinity of Nazi nightmare. As elsewhere in Yugoslav lands, the Partisans' greatest strength were mobility and the ability to blend in and live off the land – in the Banat mostly through the help of relatives and sympathetic civilians. In early fall 1941, the *Deutsche Mannschaft* was not up to the task of fighting this demonic force, the

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<sup>885</sup> Deposition of Franja Jambek from Startschowa, December 28, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 672, p. 54.

<sup>886</sup> Efforts to create a Četnik movement in the Banat comparable to that in Serbia proper remained without success until the war's end. Milošević, pp. 146-148.

Hilfspolizei was in the process of formation and training, and the Reich forces in the Banat were few and ready to deploy in Serbia proper.<sup>887</sup>

Yet despite their fearsome reputation, the Partisans in the Banat before summer 1944 never amounted to more than six organized cells, only two of which were in major urban centers.<sup>888</sup> They had about one hundred active members in all of the Banat.<sup>889</sup> Their efforts at sabotage in summer and early fall 1941 were disjointed and of limited success: setting fire to the odd field, piece of field machinery or agricultural object, cutting telegraph wires, throwing a grenade through the window of a police barracks or the home of a member of the Banat administration, threatening village administrators or opening fire on a policeman or other armed Volksdeutscher on the open road.<sup>890</sup> This was hardly the widespread struggle of freedom-loving Yugoslav peoples, as it would be portrayed in Yugoslav historiography and popular culture after the war.

Also working in the Partisans' disfavor were the general prosperity of the Banat population, so that even the average Serbian peasant was not very open to their ideological arguments; the relatively benign attitude of the Volksdeutsche administration to Serbs (as opposed to the Hungarian habit of expelling Serbs from the Bačka); and the geography. Guerrilla warfare was considerably easier in mountainous central, southern and eastern Serbia, southern Croatia or Bosnia. In the Banat, corn fields provided cover

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<sup>887</sup> "Beurteilung der Lage im Banat" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-501/246/363-366.

<sup>888</sup> In Grossbetschkerek and Grosskikinda; the other four were in the villages of Mokrin, Karlowa, Melenz and Kumane. Reith to Kreiskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek, Janko and chief of Banat Administration Josef 'Sepp' Lapp, January 15, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5785/H299,915.

<sup>889</sup> Reith to Kreiskommandantur 823, Janko and Lapp (1942), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5785/H299,916.

<sup>890</sup> Feldkommandantur 610 memo, July 23, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 1, p. 51; Feldkommandantur 610 memo, July 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/245/206 and T-501/245/208; Kriegstagebuch, November 12, 1941, BA MA, RW 40, file 13, p. 40; Reith to Kreiskommandantur 823, Janko and Lapp (1942), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5785/H299,918-919.

much of the time, leading to such commonsense measures as Lapp's order that fields should be cleared of empty stalks right after the corn harvest.<sup>891</sup> Hiding in the corn fields was such a common evasive maneuver in the flat Banat that anti-partisan warfare was nicknamed the "corn war."<sup>892</sup>

Last but not least, Juraj Spiller's department of the Banat police proved surprisingly effective at investigating, infiltrating and coordinating attacks on Partisan hideaways and villages<sup>893</sup> known as communist strongholds. Even in his exculpatory memoir, composed as evidence for the defense at his trial as a war criminal in postwar Yugoslavia, he could not resist describing just how efficient and conscientious he had been. With a small group of policemen whom he trained especially as the core of an anti-partisan fighting force which never quite materialized, Spiller's great talent was coordination. He successfully pulled together all the limited resources of the Grossbetschkerek Gestapo, the Hilfspolizei, the Deutsche Mannschaft, the Zollgrenzschutz and even the village militias in order to ensure that communist activity was suppressed ruthlessly and effectively.<sup>894</sup>

Like the Gestapo in the Reich,<sup>895</sup> Spiller relied on informers,<sup>896</sup> whether coerced through arrest, paid or anonymous. Included among the latter were quite a few Serbs,<sup>897</sup>

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<sup>891</sup> "Meldungen aus dem Reich," November 6, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 166, fiche 1, frame 37.

<sup>892</sup> "Kukuruzkrieg," from the Serbian word for corn, 'kukuruz.' Secretary Ernst von Weizsäcker (AA) memo, September 16, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XIII.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), document no. 328.

<sup>893</sup> One of which was memorably described by an official of Feldkommandantur 610 in Panschowa as "eternally restless Kumane" ("ewig unruhigen Kumane" "Beurteilung der Lage im Banat" (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-501/246/363).

<sup>894</sup> Spiller memoir (1948), Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, pp. 73-75, 82, 98-99; Shimizu, pp. 214, 216-217.

<sup>895</sup> Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 61-64, 144-157.

<sup>896</sup> Spiller memoir (1948), Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, pp. 51-53.

as well as village notaries and other representatives of the Volksdeutsche administration (not all of whom *were* Volksdeutsche, see Chapter 4), whose motives Spiller described as a sense of duty to their position and/or anti-communist sentiment.<sup>898</sup> By informing on neighbors, individual Banat Volksdeutsche (and other Banat residents) allowed themselves to be drawn by degrees deeper into complicity with the Third Reich.

Spiller behaved like many a career policeman in the Third Reich, for whom the distinction between regular police work and ideological effort became blurred beyond recognition. In his memoir, he twisted this way and that to make it seem that Reith, Pelikan, the Volksgruppenführung and anyone else he could think of had hobbled his efforts, made murderous decisions and acted in ways far worse than he and his small circle of confidants. Nevertheless, he confessed that he had devoted the lion's share of his time to fighting communism in the Banat, because he saw it as the primary enemy of the occupation regime and contrary to his own "national upbringing and anti-communist attitude."<sup>899</sup>

Even before one hundred Serbs (and Jews and Roma) shot in retaliation for each murdered German became the norm in Serbia in October 1941 (see Chapter 7), disproportionate response to the perceived communist threat was common in the Banat. For example, when on July 31, 1941 two Reichsdeutsche soldiers were wounded and one

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<sup>897</sup> Spiller memoir (1948), Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, pp. 238-258; see also Sektion für das SD Gross Betschkerek to all Polizeivorstehungen, Landratsämter and Polizeikommissäre, July 12, 1941, Muzej Vojvodine, document 3009/8, p. 3 (guidelines for the creation of local intelligence networks utilizing Deutsche Mannschaft members, prostitutes, waiters, hotel chambermaids, industrial workers and good-looking women); police chief in Weisskirchen to Spiller, September 18, 1941, Muzej Vojvodine, document 19736/1 (praises two Serbian female informers, one of whom was especially adept at mixing with the town's middle-class intelligentsia, while the other went among working-class people).

<sup>898</sup> Spiller memoir (1948), Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, pp. 54-55.

<sup>899</sup> "i moj raniji nacionalni odgoj i moje antikomunističko ustrojenje." Spiller memoir (1948), Muzej Vojvodine, document 18940, pp. 46-47.

killed fighting Partisans near Grossbetschkerek, the very following day ninety arrestees were executed publicly in town, to serve as a warning to others.<sup>900</sup>

Such sharp retribution was due partly to Spiller's ideological zeal, and partly to the fear and uncertainty felt by the Volksdeutsche rank and file. The Volksdeutsche sense of self had been shaped by two centuries of living in a borderland, among a non-German, frequently hostile (or, at least, perceived as such) population. Following the physical removal of the Banat Jews, the Banat Volksdeutsche's understanding of the enemy boiled down to the Serbian communists, "who hide out in the corn and sunflower fields like wild animals, feeding at the expense of the peasants who work those fields."<sup>901</sup> This is a unique example of a central tenet of National Socialism, which the Banat Volksdeutsche not so much reinterpreted as they adapted it to local conditions and made it their own. The local enemy against which Banat Volksdeutsche were mobilized *en masse* in 1942 superseded the global enemy of Reich and Volk in their concerns. In the Banat Volksdeutsche's worldview, the communist loomed larger even than the Jew (see Chapter 6). Even those Volksdeutsche who considered themselves apolitical were receptive to the avowed need to combat communist guerrillas with great severity.

By early October 1941, thanks to the coordination of various Reichs- and Volksdeutsche armed forces and the fine use of intelligence, the nascent communist movement in the Banat had been all but extirpated. Active Partisans not captured or killed had escaped to the Bačka, and even non-violent activities like communist

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<sup>900</sup> Tagesmeldung des Befehshabers Serbien, July 31, 1941 and Tagesmeldung des Befehshabers Serbien, August 1, 1941, both BA MA, RH 20-12 Armeeoberkommando 12, file 113, volume 2, no page numbers.

<sup>901</sup> "welche sich wie wilde Tiere in den Mais- und Sonnenblumenfelder versteckt halten, sich da durch ernähren dass sie den Bauern welche auf den Feldern arbeiten, die Nahrungsmittel entwenden." Reith to Aussenkommando of Befehlshaber der Sipo und des SD (Sicherheitspolizei und Sicherheitsdienst) in Grossbetschkerek, September 11, 1942, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 75.

propaganda had been rendered impossible by the arrests of several hundred persons suspected of aiding Partisans or being members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (illegal since 1923).<sup>902</sup> Thus the Banat's Volksdeutsche earned for their home region the reputation of a peaceful haven in the chaos of occupied Yugoslavia. This reputation brought the dubious reward of Waffen-SS recruitment for these Volksdeutsche, whose völkisch fighting spirit seemed very strong, because they resided in an area where the resistance was very weak.

The initial victory over the Banat Partisans brought a return to relative peace even for Serbs suspected of communist sympathy. Though family members of known Partisans were arrested as hostages in early October, six weeks later Pelikan went so far as to allow children and nursing mothers to be released.<sup>903</sup> In order to maintain the relative peace of late 1941, in subsequent years – especially after the depletion of its ranks by Waffen-SS recruitment – Spiller's office stepped up its efforts to put down even the slightest hint of resurgent communist activity. In this, Spiller had the support of the Kreiskommandantur in Grossbetschkerek, and of the Wehrmacht and the SS in Serbia proper.

When Žarko Zrenjanin,<sup>904</sup> the leader of the Partisan movement in the Banat in 1941, returned to the area in late 1942, Spiller struck a coup for the Greater German war effort: Zrenjanin was killed in an ambush set up by Spiller and Reith's forces with the aid of "Prinz Eugen."<sup>905</sup> As though to confirm the Banat Serbs' reputation as mostly averse

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<sup>902</sup> Reith to Kreiskommandantur 823, Janko and Lapp (1942), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5785/H299,914-917.

<sup>903</sup> Pelikan to Polizeivorstehung Gross-Kikinda, October 4, 1941 and Pelikan to Polizeivorstehung Gross-Kikinda, November 21, 1941, both Muzej Vojvodine, document 18777.

<sup>904</sup> In his honor, Grossbetschkerek (prewar Petrovgrad or Veliki Bečkerek) was renamed after the war Zrenjanin, a name the town still bears today.

<sup>905</sup> Reith to Meyszner (via Kreiskommandantur 823), November 6, 1942, AJ, fund 110, box 663, pp. 22-23.

to left-wing propaganda, the whole operation was set in motion by a tip-off from a woman whose husband had been executed as a communist. She herself had spent time in prison until she was, by her own admission, “cured of communism.”<sup>906</sup> Not even the Reich Propaganda Ministry could have invented a better example of successful cooperation across departmental boundaries in the struggle against the racial and ideological enemy of all things German, and of the supposed peaceful co-existence of European peoples faithful to the Reich.

In reality, while the Banat was certainly much more peaceful than other occupied Yugoslav lands, periodic mass executions of men as well as women continued to occur. After the Jewish hostage pool was exhausted (see below), the victims were mostly Serbs and Roma who had been arrested and imprisoned in one of the Banat’s concentration camps on suspicion of involvement in communist activities. The pattern which emerges from witnesses’ testimonies, made as potential evidence against Volksdeutsche accused of war crimes in postwar Yugoslavia, involved Spiller’s men rounding up local Roma to dig graves and, sometimes, finish off the victims if the method of execution was hanging; Germans (both Volksdeutsche policemen and Deutsche Mannschaft members, and occasionally Reichsdeutsche soldiers) acting as security and executioners; the bodies being left on display for 24 hours before they were buried. As a deterrent to guerrilla activity, this method proved ineffective, since people were still executed in summer 1944.<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>906</sup> “ozdravila od komunizma” Reith to Meyszner (1942), AJ, fund 110, box 663, p. 22.

<sup>907</sup> Deposition of Radu Misa from Grossbetschkerek, November 28, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 669, pp. 10-11; deposition of Jovan Zlatar from Grossbetschkerek, December 9, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 669, pp. 21-24; deposition of Branislav Subotin from Elemer, December 11, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 29; deposition of Draga Ninin from Grossbetschkerek, December 16, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 669, pp. 33-34; deposition of Slavko Marković from Perlas, January 19, 1945, AJ,

The destruction of suspected communists' homes by the Volksdeutsche police<sup>908</sup> did not help destroy all trace of the communist resistance in the Banat either, nor did the sending of some arrestees to concentration camps in the Reich, far from the Banat<sup>909</sup> or their prolonged incarceration in camps inside the Banat.<sup>910</sup> Of the latter, the major camp for long-term prisoners was in Grossbetschkerek, while the police headquarters in all the major Banat towns served as prisons and interrogation centers. In addition, a camp operated in the Svilara (silk spinnery) in Pantschowa until September 1941, but was closed down following the deportation of the Banat Jews the previous month. There were also three small work camps on Ostrovačka Ada (an island in the Danube near the Romanian border), where prisoners worked in close proximity to civilians – including Volksdeutsche – doing their labor service, and the discipline was comparatively lax. Some prisoners were also sent to work on large landholdings.<sup>911</sup>

While none of these were death camps, they were certainly places where prisoners were routinely beaten, interrogated under torture, degraded, mocked and even killed.<sup>912</sup>

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fund 110, box 669, p. 60; Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien to Kreiskommandantur Gross-Betschkerek, February 24, 1943, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (USHMM), RG 49.008M Selected Records from the Archives of the Military Historical Institute of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Serbia relating to the German Zone of Occupation Yugoslavia, 1941-1944, roll 3, no frame number; Kreiskommandantur 823 announcement, July 16, 1943, AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 84; Militärbefehlshaber Südost to Kreiskommandantur I/823, September 4, 1943, BA MA, RW 40, file 80, p. 61; Kreiskommandantur 823, "Bekanntmachung," August 15, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 97

<sup>908</sup> Jela Kevresan from Vojvoda Stepa accuses Juraj Spiller, February 11, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 380; Emilija Subičin from Melenz accuses Juraj Spiller, February 18, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 390.

<sup>909</sup> Deposition of Milka Maćešić, August 16, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 673, p. 79.

<sup>910</sup> Kačavenda, pp. 96-98.

<sup>911</sup> Deposition of Vojislav Đurđević from Grossbetschkerek, January 2, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 34; deposition of Emil Pavlovic from Werschetz, July 1, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 454.

<sup>912</sup> Deposition of Petar Polinger from Grossbetschkerek, December 18, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 12; Đurđević deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 34; deposition of Laza Lončar

On one occasion on Ostrovačka Ada a group of Bosnian prisoners sent there from the Sajmište on the outskirts of Belgrade were almost literally worked to death before the guards executed them on the tugboat taking them back to Sajmište.<sup>913</sup> The camp commanders and guards were Volksdeutsche and the occasional ethnic Hungarian, members of the Deutsche Mannschaft, the Hilfspolizei or the division “Prinz Eugen.”<sup>914</sup> Many cut their teeth as camp personnel in spring and summer 1941, when the Banat Jews were imprisoned in Pantschowa and Grossbetschkerek, some for months at a time. The physical punishments inflicted on the Jews later became routine treatment for imprisoned communists and their relatives.<sup>915</sup>

#### Holocaust and Aryanization

The deportation of the Banat Jews and the disposition of their property in favor of Volksdeutsche gave the latter yet another incentive to enforce peace and order in their home region at the expense of the non-German population. If the Reichsdeutsche occasionally cracked the whip over the Volksdeutsche, the Volksdeutsche certainly cracked their own whip over the Banat Jews with the aid and approval of the Reichsdeutsche in occupied Serbia. The 1931 Yugoslav census provides the only reliable estimate of Jewish numbers. According to it, there were around 4000 Jews living in the

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from Grossbetschkerek, January 22, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 43; deposition of Danica Stanković from Pantschowa, March 24, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 139.

<sup>913</sup> Deposition of Milan Protić from Grossbetschkerek, December 8, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 5; deposition of Simeon Skolenko, December 12, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 9.

<sup>914</sup> Skolenko deposition (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 9; Polinger deposition (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 12; Đurđević deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 667, p. 34; deposition of Stevan Jel from Startschowa, March 9, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 667, pp. 137-138.

<sup>915</sup> Deposition of Aranka Klajn from Pantschowa, April 14, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 136; deposition of Dragutin Pavlović from Pantschowa, July 5, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 154.

Serbian Banat.<sup>916</sup> Reliable numbers as to how many survived the war are difficult to find, but overall Jewish survival in Yugoslav lands and a few documents from the war and immediate postwar period suggest the vast majority did not (see below).

Several historians of the Holocaust in East Europe have remarked on the fact that, in the Nazi worldview, promoting Volksdeutsche and persecuting Jews went hand in hand. “Nazi racial policy was two-pronged,”<sup>917</sup> in Doris L. Bergen’s succinct phrase. Bergen also links the sharpening of Nazi anti-Semitic practices in conquered territories to the very tenuousness of the term ‘Volksdeutscher.’ Her argument is that for people considered German, yet never quite up to par with the Reich Germans, the easiest way to prove their racial credentials was to commit acts of violence against the Jews, the primary enemy of the German in the Nazi worldview.<sup>918</sup> Götz Aly adds that the desire to exterminate Jews eventually overpowered even the desire to promote and support Volksdeutsche as a priority for the Nazis, but even so the two policies were inextricably linked.<sup>919</sup> This conclusion can be applied more broadly to Nazi policies regarding Volksdeutsche. As demonstrated in Chapter 4’s discussion of the Third Reich’s interest

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<sup>916</sup> Božidar Ivković and Akiko Shimizu give the number as 4113. Ekkehard Völkl gives it as 4012. All three used the 1931 census. Božidar Ivković, “Uništenje Jevreja i pljačka njihove imovine u Banatu 1941-1944,” in *Tokovi revolucije: Zbornik istorijskih radova* (Belgrade, 1967), p. 375; Shimizu, p. 244; Völkl, p. 65.

The biggest Jewish populations lived in Grossbetschkerek (1269 Jews in 1931), Pantschowa (599), Werschetz (570), Grosskikinda (436), Debeljatscha (220), Neu-Betsche (136), Weisskirchen (130), Kubin (57), Tschoka (55) and Neu-Kanischa (55) (Shimizu, p. 245). Another 56 towns and villages with had smaller Jewish populations (Ivković, p. 375).

In the Danube banovina (roughly the Vojvodina) in 1931, 43% of Jews put down Hungarian as their mother tongue, 29% German, and 13% Serbo-Croatian (Shimizu, p. 243).

Some 60% of the Banat Jews worked in trade and credit businesses (Shimizu, p. 244).

<sup>917</sup> Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’,” p. 570.

<sup>918</sup> “[A]spirating ethnic Germans in the east found the easiest way to prove themselves good Germans was to prove themselves good nazis [*sic*]. And the easiest way to establish nazi credentials was by endorsing and actively implementing attacks on Jews. Nazi authorities further encouraged that tendency by fostering an atmosphere of uncertainty around the identification of Volksdeutsche.” Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’,” p. 574.

<sup>919</sup> Aly, *Final Solution*, pp. 5-7; also Bergen, “The ‘Volksdeutschen’ of Eastern Europe,” p. 81.

in the Banat's agricultural output, economic extraction ran parallel to privileges granted to Volksdeutsche peasants. Ultimately, however, the Reich's need came first, and even Volksdeutsche privilege was subsumed to it.

With regards specifically to the destruction of the Jews, Bergen and Aly were writing predominantly about Poland and the Soviet Union, areas in which the Volksdeutsche's preferential position vis-à-vis other ethnicities was a fluid matter, subject to the whims of Reich policy. In the Banat, the existence of the Volksdeutsche administration and its key role in the daily running of the region not only gave the Volksdeutsche there greater responsibility than elsewhere in Hitler's Europe, it also shielded them to a large extent from changeable parameters of what constituted a Volksdeutscher.<sup>920</sup> In terms of the Banat Volksdeutsche's attitude to the Banat Jews, however, there was no difference of opinion between the former and the Reichsdeutsche in Belgrade and Grossbetschkerek, nor was there any doubt on either side that Volksdeutsche should participate in and profit from the persecution of Jews.

It is difficult to gauge how widespread and acute anti-Semitism was among the Banat Volksdeutsche before the April War, or how much of it was based on attachment to Christian belief and how much was racial. The postwar testimonies of both non-German Banat residents and Volksdeutsche expellees in West Germany suggest that some anti-Semitism (based on Christian prejudice but even more on economic competition) existed, and became exacerbated by the euphoria attending the arrival of Reich forces in April 1941. Both sets of testimonies suggest that violence against Jews and their property in the Banat occurred along similar lines to such events in other parts of East and Southeast

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<sup>920</sup> Sepp Janko's attempt to introduce a Volksliste-type gradation for new applicants to the Volksgruppe was not given as much weight as the Reich's endless sifting of Volksdeutsche resettled from the East. See pp. 222-223.

Europe under Reich occupation. Some preexisting prejudice was polarized by the presence and example set by the Nazis, and made the Jews into easy victims. Even Volksdeutsche who may not have disliked the Jews in quite the same way as the Nazis did, saw little reason to refrain from exploiting the Jews' vulnerability. The Reichsdeutsche gave official approval to, sometimes instigated, other times merely abetted violence against Jews committed by Volksdeutsche.

A parallel examination of the two sets of postwar testimonies is all the more convincing on this account. The Yugoslav State Commission on war crimes was compiling eyewitness reports in the immediate postwar period (most date from 1944 and 1945), which would have incriminated Volksdeutsche and other collaborators as war criminals. It had little interest in exculpatory narratives. The Volksdeutsche testimonies to the Federal Ministry for Expellees, on the other hand, were made mostly in the 1950s and aimed to curry sympathy for the expellees. They might be expected to fudge or avoid entirely the topic of how the Banat Jews were treated. Yet while former members of the Volksgruppenführung did exert themselves to whitewash their wartime activities, ordinary Volksdeutsche were, for the most part, refreshingly frank. It must be said that most failed to point the finger at specific Volksdeutsche who profited from the dispossession of the Jews, but so did some surviving Jews in their depositions to the Yugoslav State Commission. Whether this was due to the desire to shield former neighbors or a failure of memory, evidence found in the two sets of testimonies dovetails to a remarkable degree.<sup>921</sup>

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<sup>921</sup> I deliberately steered clear of the few extant narratives of the Holocaust in the Banat (not including Serbia proper) because, whether they were penned by Yugoslav or (West) German historians they tend not to offer a lot of detail or they generalize. I used eyewitness and survivor testimonies reprinted in some of these books as primary documents in addition to the testimonies

These testimonies combined suggest that even before the German commanding general in Belgrade issued an official ruling on the changed status of Jews and Roma in late May 1941, anti-Semitic behavior was *de facto* policy in the Banat. Historians dispute whether the main instigator of such behavior were the invading Reichsdeutsche or the local Volksdeutsche. Yugoslav historians tend on the whole to blame the latter, which gives the Volksgruppenführung's ability to influence Reich policy far too much credit.

There can be no doubt that it was the Reichsdeutsche who arrested the few Jews scattered in Banat villages right after the invasion. They followed the practice already established in Poland of rounding up Jews from rural communities and moving them to urban centers. They sometimes had help from local Volksdeutsche, but the primary instigators were the Reichsdeutsche.<sup>922</sup> In Grossbetschkerek, the Banat's biggest town and administrative center, the same thing happened. In the atmosphere of victory and celebrations for Hitler's birthday, which also inspired the decision to 'honor' the nine dead Volksdeutsche hostages from Panschowa by executing a number of Serbs in that town,<sup>923</sup> the vast majority of the Grossbetschkerek Jews were arrested by the Wehrmacht regiment "Grossdeutschland" on April 21, 1941.<sup>924</sup>

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found in archives in Serbia and Germany. The narrative I offer here is based almost exclusively on first-person testimonies and a handful of relevant wartime administrative documents available. My discussion of Aryanization draws a bit more on secondary literature, but there too my goal was to portray the multiplicity of Volksdeutsche actions and responses. Hence the prevalence of evidence from eyewitness and survivors' testimonies in that section as well, in addition to wartime documents of the various economic offices involved in Aryanization.

<sup>922</sup> This happened during the arrest of the thirteen Jews living in Srpska Crnja, the Serbian part of Zerne (testimony of Josef Stirbel (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 703), the one Jewish family in Mastort (testimony of Jakob Laping (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/5, frame 744), and an old Jewish woman in Sakula, though her daughter was married to a Serb and protected by local Volksdeutsche (testimony of Franz Scheidt (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/6, frame 818).

<sup>923</sup> See p. 267.

<sup>924</sup> Hauptmann Rentsch (Krieskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek) to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien, April 23, 1941, NARA, RG 238 World War II War Crimes Records, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 275.

Although the commander of Kreiskommandantur 823 did not mention whether Volksdeutsche participated in this event in the document he produced only two days later, a Jewish survivor did in his postwar deposition. He testified that a group of Volksdeutsche policemen arrested him, after he had already been robbed by another armed gang led by future chief administrator for peasant affairs Sepp Zwirner.<sup>925</sup> The Kreiskommandantur 823 document from April 1941 did add, almost as an afterthought, the idea that the arrested Jews should be ghettoized and made to wear distinctive markings singling them out as Jews. Whether the Reichsdeutsche Kreiskommandant drew inspiration from the treatment of Jews in Poland or simply threw that in to justify the mass arrest, the fact is that the primary motivation – besides the sheer opportunity to humiliate the merchants, bankers, doctors, men of business and other well-off Jews of the town – was material. The Kreiskommandantur ordered the Grossbetschkerek Jewish community to collect twenty million Serbian dinars in just one day as ransom for the arrestees.<sup>926</sup> The director of the local sugar factory (one of Grossbetschkerek's major economic enterprises) Viktor Elek was released conditionally to try and collect the ransom. Even three days proved not enough time, so many of the arrested Jews remained in custody until deportation in August.<sup>927</sup>

Most Jews still at large in the Banat suffered verbal abuse, random house searches-*cum*-robbery, assault (including sexual assault against women), battery and incarceration between April and August 1941. The perpetrators were Reichsdeutsche

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<sup>925</sup> Deposition of Vilim Herzog, born in Czechoslovakia, resident of Grossbetschkerek, no date, AJ, fund 110, box 746, p. 1125.

<sup>926</sup> *Ibid.*; Hauptmann Rentsch to Militärbefehlshaber Serbien (1941), NARA, RG 238, entry 175, roll 16, document NOKW-1110, frame 275; Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 805.

<sup>927</sup> Herzog testimony (no date), AJ, fund 110, box 746, p. 1125.

soldiers, but mostly (or most noticeably) younger<sup>928</sup> Volksdeutsche. Some took advantage of their new role as policemen. Others – including the child who, likely echoing his parents, called a woman wearing the yellow armband a “[d]irty Jewish sow”<sup>929</sup> – needed not even that pretext.<sup>930</sup>

Elek himself was hanged outside Grossbetschkerek on April 24, 1941 in front of a large crowd of local Volksdeutsche and ethnic Hungarians, many of whom had been his employees and came to gloat at his humiliation and death.<sup>931</sup> Similar scenes occurred in May or June, when other groups of Jews – including one Kon, owner of the town hotel – were publicly executed.<sup>932</sup> The remarkable thing about these eyewitness testimonies is that none of the witnesses state for certain whether the executions were carried out by Reichs- or Volksdeutsche, though they mention executioners were men in uniform (Wehrmacht grey as well as black, which could have been either the SS or the Deutsche Mannschaft). It is certain that Volksdeutsche civilians attended and cheered on the executions, and sometimes even herded prisoners to the execution site.

Almost the same scenario was in evidence in fall 1941, after the Jews had been deported from the Banat to Belgrade. Then, on several occasions prisoners – Jews, Serbs

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<sup>928</sup> As was the case in relation to the establishment of and policies implemented by the Volksdeutsche administration, there was much difference of opinion between the younger, more openly Nazified Volksdeutsche, and the older generation of Kulturbund members. The latter’s voices were drowned out, according to one eyewitness, by the moniker “white kike” (“beli čivut”) hurled at them by the younger Volksdeutsche. Deposition of Dr. Boža Ankić from Sakula, May 15, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 143.

<sup>929</sup> “Prljava jevrejska krmača” Deposition of Dr. Lila Stejić from Pantschowa, May 15, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 142.

<sup>930</sup> *Ibid.*; deposition of Dr. Aladar Debreceni from Pantschowa, March 13, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 124; deposition of Jovan Kaločaji from Pantschowa, April 4, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 131; Klajn deposition (April 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 136; Ankić deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 143.

<sup>931</sup> Ninin deposition (1944), AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 33.

<sup>932</sup> Deposition of Veselin Grujin from Grossbetschkerek, January 25, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 245.

and Roma mixed together – were transported by trucks from Belgrade to a spot on the road outside of the Banat village of Apfeldorf, where the Wehrmacht shot them as part of the retaliatory measures intended to combat the communist resistance.<sup>933</sup> The main difference was in the role played by the Volksdeutsche police. It was in charge of rounding up local Roma to dig graves and of crowd control, but one eyewitness reported after the war that some policemen had also executed prisoners. At least one was apparently settling an old score with a Jewish acquaintance.<sup>934</sup>

These were the only large-scale killings of Jews inside the Banat – though not the only killings *in* the Banat (see above) – and were very well-known in the Banat at the time. Security was very lax and travelers on the Apfeldorf road could see people waiting to be executed and hear gunshots.<sup>935</sup> The open-roofed trucks which had transported people of a morning were seen full of their clothes and shoes in the evening.<sup>936</sup> Overall the Volksdeutsche played an important, yet secondary role in the Holocaust in the Banat. Their role was that of occasional participants and frequent beneficiaries far more than instigators or ringleaders.

Violent as they were, early anti-Semitic acts were random and spur-of-the-moment. The “Verordnung betreffend die Juden und Zigeuner” (“Order Concerning Jews and Gypsies”), passed by the German commanding general in Belgrade on May 30, 1941,

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<sup>933</sup> Oberleutnant Walther of Infanterie-Regiment 734 to 704. Infanterie-Division, November 4, 1941, USHMM, RG 49.007M Selected Records from the Archives of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade, 1941-1953, roll 1, document K.21-2-2/1; deposition of Zlatko Dumitrasku from Panschow, January 22, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 105; deposition of Jovan Sajn, January 22, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 106.

<sup>934</sup> Sajn deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 106.

<sup>935</sup> Deposition of Atanasije Mitić from Panschow, April 2, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 140.

<sup>936</sup> Deposition of Lujza Bukovac from Panschow, March 2, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 116; Oberleutnant Walther to 704. Infanterie-Division (1941), USHMM, RG 49.007M, roll 1, document K.21-2-2/1.

provided a legal basis and a system for anti-Semitic action. It introduced the same parameters for Jewish existence as had already been passed in the Reich and occupied territories other than Serbia-Banat.<sup>937</sup> It also set the legal groundwork for the registering, alienation and transformation of Jewish property into Aryanized property.<sup>938</sup> The Banat Volksdeutsche administration dutifully adopted and implemented these guidelines.<sup>939</sup> Within two months Jews had become completely isolated from the larger Banat society, suffering what historian Marion Kaplan termed “social death”<sup>940</sup> in ways that did not always benefit even the Volksdeutsche. “Meldungen aus dem Reich” for early August 1941 mentioned that the quality of health care in the Banat had deteriorated sharply since Jewish doctors, who used to treat the poor out of compassion, were forbidden to treat Gentiles, and Gentile doctors expected to be paid high fees.<sup>941</sup>

The legal ruling on the Jews in occupied Serbia-Banat followed the same accelerated approach as had already been applied in Poland, with only ghettoization

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<sup>937</sup> According to this decree, a person was considered Jewish if they had at least three Jewish (by race or present or former religious affiliation) grandparents, as were Mischlinge (half- or quarter-Jews) married to Jews as well as Mischlinge with one or two Jewish grandparents if said grandparents practiced Judaism. All Jews had to register, wear a yellow armband with the word ‘Jew’ on it, be fired from positions in the civil service and free professions serving Gentiles, and be banned from various public buildings. “Order Concerning Jews and Gypsies in Serbia,” May 30, 1941, NARA, RG 165 Records of the War Department, entry 77, box 3293, document 3500, pp. 1-3 of this document.

<sup>938</sup> “Order Concerning Jews and Gypsies in Serbia” (1941), NARA, RG 165, entry 77, box 3293, document 3500, pp. 3-6 of this document.

<sup>939</sup> E.g. Gemeindevorsteherung Mokrin to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, June 24, 1941, Istorijски arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, no page number; Bürgermeisteramt Pantschowa, “Verordnung aus dem Verordnungsblatt Nr. 8 des Militärbefehlshabers in Serbien,” June 7, 1941, Muzej Vojvodine, document 19616.

<sup>940</sup> Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>941</sup> “Meldungen aus dem Reich,” August 4, 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 163, fiche 1, frame 13; also Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 779.

skipped over as a stage in the progressive stripping away of Jewish rights.<sup>942</sup> Though this legal ruling was passed and the major role in the extermination by firing squad of most Serbian Jewish men played by the Wehrmacht, the army operated in agreement with the SS, the AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry) and the RSHA (Reichssicherheitshauptamt, the Reich Security Main Office under Heinrich Himmler). This demonstrated the ability of Reich offices vying for power with each other to cooperate in order to achieve the primary objective: the destruction of the perceived Jewish conspiracy against Germany.<sup>943</sup> In the Banat, too, the ability of the Volksgruppenführung to apply coercive methods against the Jews over a period of several months rested on the great interest the Reichsdeutsche in Belgrade and Berlin took in the implementation of anti-Semitic policies. The Banat Volksdeutsche ‘lash’ had the most bite when it had the Reich’s ideological and material interest to back it.

Historians Christopher R. Browning and Walter Manoschek have written extensively on the occasionally belabored process by which the destruction of the Serbian Jews was decided on without deporting them to the death camps in the East. Instead, the men were shot in fall 1941 as nominal retaliation for attacks on Reichs- and Volksdeutsche by the anti-German resistance.<sup>944</sup> The women and children were interned in the concentration camp at Sajmište on the outskirts of Belgrade, before they were

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<sup>942</sup> Walter Manoschek, ““Gehst du mit Juden erschossen?” Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien,” in *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*, ed. Hans Heer and Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), p. 39.

<sup>943</sup> Hans-Jürgen Döscher, *SS und Auswärtiges Amt im Dritten Reich. Diplomatie im Schatten der “Endlösung”* (Frankfurt and Berlin: Zeitgeschichte/Ullstein, 1991), pp. 310-311.

<sup>944</sup> This measure did nothing to staunch the resistance, since the Jewish hostages selected to die in retaliatory shootings were for the most part innocent of any association with Tito’s Partisans, other than the connection which existed in the Nazi mind between the Jew and the communist.

killed by gas van in spring 1942.<sup>945</sup> Serbia had the dubious distinction of becoming only the second country in Hitler's sphere of influence (after Estonia) to be declared 'judenfrei' (free of Jews).<sup>946</sup> The AA's participation in the decision-making process marked the last high-water mark for that institution's involvement in occupied Serbia. Thereafter, although foreign-political considerations continued to matter, military requirements and ideology were dominant and carried even foreign policy with them, as the case of the mobilization of Banat Volksdeutsche into the Waffen-SS would demonstrate (see Chapter 7).

Historian Holm Sundhaussen estimates that of the approximately 17,000 Jews living in Serbia-Banat in 1941 some 10,700 died during the war.<sup>947</sup> As for Banat Jews, no specific numbers are available, but the high death rate is indicated by an AA memo from late October 1941, which indicated that of approximately 2000 Jewish men deported to Belgrade from the Banat in August only 600 were still living.<sup>948</sup> In addition, two Jewish survivors estimated that the 1300- to 1500-strong Grossbetschkerek Jewish community

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<sup>945</sup> See Walter Manoschek, *"Serbien ist judenfrei". Militrische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1993), pp. 185-186, 191; Christopher R. Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland 1940-43* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1978), pp. 56-64; and Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln and Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2004), pp. 334-346, 422-423.

<sup>946</sup> Manoschek, "'Gehst du mit Juden erschossen?'" p. 52.

<sup>947</sup> Holm Sundhaussen, "Jugoslawien," in *Dimension des Vlkermonds. Die Zahl der jdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1991), pp. 313, 330.

The overall percentage of Jews killed in all Yugoslav lands was even higher. Sundhaussen estimates it at 60-65,000 out of a Jewish population of around 72,200 people in 1941 ("Jugoslawien," pp. 311, 330).

<sup>948</sup> Franz Rademacher (head of the AA's Judenreferat) memo, October 25, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XIII.2, document no. 425.

had between 90 and 135 members still living in 1945.<sup>949</sup> The Serbian Banat was certainly ‘judenfrei’ already in August 1941, leaving the field open to the visible erasure of the Jews’ past presence by the destruction, conversion, theft and sale of their property.

Apart from the events on the Apfeldorf road in fall 1941, the participation of Volksdeutsche in the organized killing of Jews was limited to their role as concentration camp guard, interpreters and occasional auxiliaries. Postwar Yugoslav historians rather overstate the case when they insist the deportation of the Banat Jews to Belgrade in August 1941 was undertaken by Reichsdeutsche at Volksdeutsche urging alone.<sup>950</sup> Volksdeutsche in general did not play the role of policymakers, and very rarely that of policy-instigators in Hitler’s Europe. The deportation of the Banat Jews took place in the context of the Reichsdeutsche desire to concentrate the Serbian Jews, as a racially and politically dangerous social element, in Belgrade. Away from the countryside in Serbia proper where resistance was rife, the Jews could more easily be watched and disposed of as necessary.<sup>951</sup>

There can be no doubt, however, that the Volksgruppenführung agreed wholeheartedly with these Reichsdeutsche decisions or that the Banat Volksdeutsche were no longer just cheering on Reichsdeutsche soldiers during the rounding up and deportation of the Banat Jews to their ultimate fate in Belgrade. They participated fully

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<sup>949</sup> Deposition of Dr. Julije Dohanj from Grossbetschkerek, September 15, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 79; Herzog testimony (no date), AJ, fund 110, box 746, p. 1125.

<sup>950</sup> Levntal, p. 13; Ivković, p. 383.

<sup>951</sup> In a rare moment of clarity, former Volksgruppenführung official Johann Wüsch makes the point in one of his exculpatory postwar works that the removal of Jews from society was a central tenet of National Socialism and required no special urging by the Banat Volksdeutsche – although he draws from this the conclusion that the Volksgruppe was completely blameless in the deportation of the Banat Jews. Johann Wüsch, “Bekämpfung der Partisanenbewegung, Ausrottung der Juden im jugoslawischen Banat während der deutschen Besatzung 1941-1944 und Vernichtung der deutschen Zivilbevölkerung nach Beendigung der Kriegshandlungen 1944 bis 1948” (1969), LAA, Ost-Dok. 18/20, p. 19.

and actively in the expropriation and physical removal of their Jewish neighbors from the Banat.

On the night of August 13-14,<sup>952</sup> 1941 all of the Banat Jews still at large were rounded up from their homes in a highly coordinated, joint action by Reichsdeutsche soldiers, the Volksdeutsche police and the Deutsche Mannschaft. They were interned briefly in concentration camps in Grossbetschkerek and Neu-Betsche before being transported to Belgrade by river barge on August 18. The Panschowa Jews were taken from the municipal police building straight to Belgrade.<sup>953</sup> In Belgrade the deportees were quartered temporarily with the Belgrade Jewish community before the men were interned in the camp at Topovske Šupe,<sup>954</sup> from where their ranks were gradually thinned as Jews were killed by Wehrmacht firing squads. The Jewish women and children lived in relative freedom until the Sajmište camp opened in December 1941, by which point the prisoner pool at Topovske Šupe was nearly gone, and the Holocaust in Serbia a foregone conclusion with the decimation of the adult male Jewish population. Heinrich Himmler issued guidelines for the application of the Nuremberg Laws to all Volksdeutsche in Europe in July 1942.<sup>955</sup> By then the physical removal of all German-speaking Jews but a handful of women (see below) from the Banat had been a practical reality for nearly a year. The document ordering the deportation of the Banat Jews to Belgrade in August 1941 has not been found. It must have come from the German commander in Belgrade, relayed by Kreiskommandantur 823 in Grossbetschkerek to the

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<sup>952</sup> This is according to survivors' postwar testimonies to the Yugoslav war crimes commission. Zdenko Levntal has the date as the night of August 14-15, 1941 in his book, also based on survivors' testimonies (Levntal, p. 13).

<sup>953</sup> Levntal, p. 14.

<sup>954</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>955</sup> See pp. 29-30.

Volksgruppenführung, which in turn instructed the newfangled Volksdeutsche security forces to take part in the rounding up of Jews.

Some forty-three<sup>956</sup> Jewish women married to Gentiles – whether Serbs, ethnic Hungarians or Volksdeutsche – were allowed to return to the Banat by special dispensation in late fall 1941.<sup>957</sup> This decision came after much wrangling between some their husbands and the Belgrade SD, which stressed the biological-ideological dimension of Nazi anti-Semitism by compelling one woman to provide medical proof that she was barren, and another woman's spouse to sign an affidavit to the effect that he would not have children with his wife.<sup>958</sup> In 1943, the women who had become widowed in the meantime were arrested and deported again,<sup>959</sup> though even then loopholes could be found. One Jewish woman who had three daughters all married to Aryans and was too old to have more children herself, was allowed to stay.<sup>960</sup>

Once back home, these women were not free of periodic maltreatment in the form of querulous demands that they go on wearing their yellow armbands or summons to present their papers for inspection after they had waited in the hot sun for several hours.<sup>961</sup> The uncertainty of the rules which circumscribed their existence after occupation, coupled in many cases with a lack of support from their Gentile spouses,<sup>962</sup>

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<sup>956</sup> Ivković, p. 387.

<sup>957</sup> Deposition of Dr. Lila Stejić, February 2, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 108; Bukovac deposition (March 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 116; deposition of Vera Veljčin from Pantschowa, March 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 119; deposition of Rozalija Švarcer from Pantschowa, March 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 120.

<sup>958</sup> Deposition of Lila Stejić, August 13, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 235.

<sup>959</sup> Stejić deposition (February 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 108; Bukovac deposition (March 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 116.

<sup>960</sup> Bukovac deposition (March 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 116.

<sup>961</sup> Stejić deposition (August 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 235.

<sup>962</sup> As in the Third Reich itself and other parts of occupied Europe, for every Gentile husband who pleaded for his wife's release notwithstanding the verbal abuse heaped on him for being married to a Jew by the Reichsdeutsche officials in Belgrade (Bukovac deposition (1945), AJ,

had a profoundly dispiriting effect on these women. One survivor explained how dignity prompted her to obey the order to report to the concentration camp in Grossbetschkerek rather than waiting to be rounded up with the others: “I wanted to avoid being escorted [through the town] and mistreated by the guards.”<sup>963</sup>

The most striking details survivors’ testimonies stress about the actual deportation from the Banat were not the random beatings suffered by the Jewish men, the possibility of sexual assault against the women<sup>964</sup> or the general humiliation and the crowded conditions in transit and upon arrival in Belgrade.<sup>965</sup> The most striking are most survivors’ failure to seek a way out before the deportation, though there were exceptions,<sup>966</sup> and especially the wanton greed displayed by Volksdeutsche administrators, guards, policemen and ordinary people toward the Jews’ property.

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fund 110, box 691, p. 116), there seem to have been two husbands who panicked for their own safety and guaranteed their wives would report for deportation (deposition of Gizela Malbaški from Grossbetschkerek, February 16, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 669, p. 238) or accompanied them to ensure they would not escape (Veljčin deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 119).

<sup>963</sup> “Ovo sam ja zato učinila, jer sam htela izbeći sprovođenje od stražara i maltretiranje od istih.” Deposition of Elvira Milovančev from Grossbetschkerek, February 15, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 240.

<sup>964</sup> Testimony of Anuška Knežević from Grosskikinda (April 3, 1945) in Levntal, pp. 13-14.

<sup>965</sup> Testimony of Marija Lončar from Grossbetschkerek in Levntal, p. 14.

<sup>966</sup> Some enterprising families, who still had enough money and valuables on them after the outright robbery they had suffered in the Banat and during the deportation, used the period of relative calm upon arrival in Belgrade to bribe their way onto trucks going to the Bačka, where many survived the war either in hiding or in Hungarian work battalions (deposition of Pavle Ribar from Pantschowa, December 29, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 96; deposition of Aranka Klajn, February 22, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 114; deposition of Jozefa Elizabeta Dajč from Pantschowa, March 5, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 121). Others had left the Banat for the Bačka right after the occupation began (deposition of Mendel Rot from Debeljatscha, April 17, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 137) or went to Serbia proper after the April War, then to the Bačka from there (deposition of Imre Šugar from Debeljatscha, February 19, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 113). A very brave few – mostly men in their late teens and in their twenties – ran away to join the Partisans (deposition of Deneš Najhauz from Pantschowa, February 7, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 111; Klajn deposition (February 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 114).

One Jewish woman from Pantschowa described the experience after she was rounded up for deportation succinctly as “formal weeding,”<sup>967</sup> a complete stripping of the Jews’ remaining property and dignity. Only allowed to bring hand luggage and a limited amount of money and valuables, the Jews had their pockets turned out and their luggage pilfered by the Volksdeutsche guards first while waiting to be processed in the police stations and camps in the Banat, and then again in transit or upon arrival in Belgrade.<sup>968</sup> Some Volksdeutsche rationalized that they were taking valuables for safekeeping only, holding up the illusion of the Jews’ speedy return to the Banat.<sup>969</sup> Others disdained to do even that much: a young secretary with the Pantschowa police flounced into the room where jewelry was piled high on a table and selected some for herself in full view of the assembled Jewish women.<sup>970</sup>

This young woman displayed a teenager’s heedlessness as well as a new-found sense of right in her Germanness, which she must have considered an indisputable quality. In the grander Nazi scheme, too, however tenuous the term ‘Volksdeutscher’ may have been, there is no doubt that Volksdeutsche across East and Southeast Europe profited directly from the expropriation of Jewish property in their host countries.<sup>971</sup> The

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<sup>967</sup> “u policij[i] . . . su me formalno oplevili” Dajč deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 121.

<sup>968</sup> Deposition of Dr. Branislav Matić from Pantschowa, January 9, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 97; Stejić deposition (February 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 108; Klajn deposition (February 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 114; Bukovac deposition (March 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 116.

<sup>969</sup> Dajč deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 121.

At war’s end, some Volksdeutsche still clung to the notion that they were just holding valuables for the Jews until the rightful owners returned. By then, this was the last straw which they hoped might save the Volksdeutsche who did not escape the Banat from their postwar disenfranchisement and imprisonment. Deposition of Rudolf Bergman from Pantschowa, January 10, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 99; deposition of Jozefina Bergman, January 12, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 103.

<sup>970</sup> Bukovac deposition (March 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 116.

<sup>971</sup> Bergen, “The ‘Volksdeutschen’ of Eastern Europe,” pp. 76-77.

“Verordnung betreffend die Juden und Zigeuner” of May 1941 and its addenda<sup>972</sup> laid the legal groundwork for Aryanization, and effectively legalized the unpunished plundering of Jewish property already taking place (‘wild’ Aryanization).<sup>973</sup> They did not specify explicitly that Volksdeutsche should profit from it. The main beneficiary would, naturally, be the Third Reich, but allowing Volksdeutsche a share of the pie was part and parcel of the ideological plan to strengthen their position both as racial Germans and as residents of largely non-German East and Southeast Europe. However, unlike the ulterior motive the Reich had in allowing Banat Volksdeutsche easy access to more arable land, which was that the crops grown on them would feed Reichsdeutsche soldiers, allowing Volksdeutsche to appropriate the Jews’ property seems to have come from a purely ideological impulse, an ideal and, for once, frictionless marriage of ideological righteousness and material greed.

In this respect, the effect of Aryanization in the Serbian Banat mirrored exactly that in the Third Reich. In a recent history of the role of Aryanization in Reich society, Götz Aly argues that, in addition to the profit drawn by large Reich corporations and banks from Jewish real estate and businesses, the vast majority of ordinary Reichsdeutsche benefitted materially from the expropriation of Jews.<sup>974</sup> These material

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<sup>972</sup> “Verordnung zur Ergänzung der Verordnung betreffend die Juden und Zigeuner vom 30. Mai 1941,” *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers Serbien*, July 25, 1941, pp. 137-138.

<sup>973</sup> Ivković, p. 381.

<sup>974</sup> They received food, money and personal items stolen as part of ‘wild’ Aryanization, sent them in care packages by relatives serving in the Wehrmacht, the SS and various occupation administrative posts across Europe. They also enjoyed the social programs the Reich government funded with money gained by passing laws that allowed it to rob the Jews in its sphere of influence. Götz Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), pp. 1-4.

In emphasizing the intertwining of ideological and material benefits ordinary Germans could derive from the Nazi regime, Aly aptly called the Holocaust the “most single-mindedly pursued campaign of murderous larceny in modern history.” Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries*, p. 285.

benefits made it easier for the Nazi regime to make its citizens amenable to its less popular policies. They also meant that many ordinary Germans ignored whatever pangs of conscience they may have suffered about the Jews' fate or, even, embraced National Socialist ideology more enthusiastically. 'Low' material cravings and 'high' ideological aspirations drew nourishment from each other, and conspired to produce a moral myopia among many Reichs- and Volksdeutsche alike.

The same reasoning underlay the decision of the Reichsdeutsche in Belgrade and the Volksgruppenführung in the Banat to turn a blind eye to the theft of movable Jewish property both before and during the deportation.<sup>975</sup> In the Banat, the swift physical removal of the Jews must have made taking or accepting their property easier, as individuals could argue that houses, furniture and other belongings had simply been left behind, masterless and ownerless. The Volksgruppenführung itself profited from this 'wild' Aryanization, as did ordinary Volksdeutsche. In their postwar testimonies, given under very different circumstances, a Jewish survivor and an older Volksdeutsche woman, who expressed disgust at what she perceived as indecent behavior and unseemly greed on the part of lazy upstarts within the Volksgruppe,<sup>976</sup> were in agreement on this. It was common to see the wives of members of the Volksgruppenführung and other prominent Volksdeutsche wearing jewelry which everyone knew had belonged till

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<sup>975</sup> Though this does not detract from his overall analysis, it bears noting that Aly discusses Aryanization in Serbia over several pages, but limits his discussion of Aryanization in the Banat to one sentence. This is perhaps a sign of how little serious attention Volksdeutsche participation in the Nazi war effort continues to receive in the historiography of World War II. In that one sentence, Aly fudges his geography and says, not very informatively, that the local Volksdeutsche "had already taken matters [Aryanization] into their own hands." Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries*, p. 189.

<sup>976</sup> Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frames 779-780.

recently to Jews<sup>977</sup> or taking basketful after basketful of fine china, crystal and linens from empty Jewish homes.<sup>978</sup>

At the same time, Reichsdeutsche soldiers plundered deported Jews' homes for furniture, carpets, clothing materials and other bulkier goods, which were then transported to the Reich.<sup>979</sup> But Franz Neuhausen, the Reich's Plenipotentiary for the Economy in Belgrade, and the Ministry of the Four-Year Plan in Berlin had their eye on a far bigger prize than carpets and suits, fine as those might be: the regulated, legalized Aryanization of Jewish real estate and economic enterprises. Even before the deportation in August 1941, Reichsdeutsche officials, working sometimes in conjunction with representatives of the collaborationist Serbian government, exerted pressure on Banat Jewish business owners to sign over their properties for a minimal price.<sup>980</sup>

After the deportation, the Reichsdeutsche fell upon Jewish real estate without restraint, with frequent help from Volksdeutsche.<sup>981</sup> They destroyed or desecrating the most obviously Jewish objects: synagogues and cemeteries. Thus the lavishly furnished synagogues in Grosskikinda and Werschetz were stripped of all their furnishings and decorations and transformed into, respectively, a laundry<sup>982</sup> and a property of the Reformed Church. (The original intention had been for the Wehrmacht to sell the Werschetz synagogue to a Volksdeutsche butcher for use as storage space or a

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<sup>977</sup> Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frames 817-818.

<sup>978</sup> Stejić deposition (August 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 235.

<sup>979</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>980</sup> Debreceni deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 124.

<sup>981</sup> Possibly more: Shimizu holds the Reichsdeutsche commander in Grossbetschkerek and the town's Volksdeutsche mayor equally responsible for the decision to demolish the synagogue there (p. 249).

<sup>982</sup> Yugoslav War Crimes Commission memo, August 4, most likely 1945; deposition of Matija Frankel from Grosskikinda; deposition of Vojislav Knežević from Grosskikinda – all AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 511.

slaughterhouse,<sup>983</sup> adding the insult of pigs being slaughtered inside to the injury of Jewish deportation and expropriation.) The Pantschowa synagogue became a Wehrmacht storage space for Aryanized movable property.<sup>984</sup> Volksdeutsche broke gravestones and used the town's Jewish cemetery as an open-air toilet.<sup>985</sup> While Aryanization on the whole represented a happy marriage between Nazi ideology and economic exploitation, the treatment of Jewish religious buildings and property was explicitly ideological in purpose, as was the destruction of the most visible monuments raised by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>986</sup> This destruction served to make the Banat landscape more closely resemble the Reich.

Jewish property of explicitly economic value was legally transferred into Reichs- or Volksdeutsche hands i.e. it was Aryanized. At a meeting on May 14, 1941, two weeks before the proclamation on the new status of Jews, Felix Benzler, the AA representative in Belgrade, recommended that "capable Volksdeutsche or reliable Serbs" be appointed commissars for Aryanized property.<sup>987</sup> The AA's position likely stemmed from an awareness of the overstretched Reichsdeutsche resources in Serbia, possibly also from past experience with corruption among Reichsdeutsche in charge of Aryanization. Either way, Aryanization in Serbia-Banat remained within Franz Neuhausen's purview,<sup>988</sup> but in

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<sup>983</sup> The Deutsche Jugend made off with the synagogue's library and archive. Deposition of Zoltan Bekaši, March 26, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 473.

<sup>984</sup> Kaločaji deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 131; deposition of Lujza Bukovac, April 4, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 132.

<sup>985</sup> Deposition of Petar Đorđević from Pantschowa, May 26, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 147.

<sup>986</sup> See pp. 269-270.

<sup>987</sup> "für diese Posten geeignete Volksdeutsche oder zuverlässige Serben" Benzler to General Helmut Förster (German commanding general in Serbia), May 1941, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, no page number.

<sup>988</sup> "Verordnung zur Ergänzung der Verordnung betreffend die Juden und Zigeuner," *Verordnungsblatt des Militärbefehlshabers Serbien*, July 25, 1941, p. 137; "Aktennotiz über eine Besprechung wegen der Erfassung (Verwertung) des Judenvermögens im ehemals serbischen

the Banat Volksdeutsche with a background in bookkeeping, teaching, administration and banking were appointed as his stand-ins to look after and sell off Jewish businesses and homes.<sup>989</sup>

Surviving Volksgruppenführung members after the war contorted the facts to make it seem like Aryanization had, at best, nothing to do with Volksdeutsche and had all been Neuhausen's doing.<sup>990</sup> At worst, the Volksdeutsche supposedly profited from Aryanization as a community (the Volksgruppenführung purchased facilities for the storing and preserving of foodstuffs, as well as office space, space for youth recreation centers, etc.<sup>991</sup>), but not individually.<sup>992</sup> Alternatively, their participation had supposedly been a "logical consequence" of the removal of the Jews – with which the Volksdeutsche had had nothing to do – in order to prevent Volksdeutsche businesses being undercut by Reichsdeutsche ones.<sup>993</sup> In actual fact, the pattern established in the general operation of the Volksdeutsche administration repeated itself: some individuals exerted themselves

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Banat," September 7, 1942, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, p. E422,516.

<sup>989</sup> E.g. the textile factory in Pantschowa got a Volksdeutsche commissar ("Postavljanje komesara Pančevačkoj tekstilnoj industriji," *Službene novine*, August 26, 1941, p. 13); see also depositions of former commissars Vilhelm Prohaska from Pantschowa (June 8, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 148) and Julije Saueresig from Pantschowa (June 11, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 152).

<sup>990</sup> "Die "Donauschwaben" im jugoslawischen Raum in den Jahren 1919-1941 und im serbischen Raum (Banat) in den Jahren 1941-1945. Eine politische Analyse von Oskar Krewetsch" (1947), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/8, frames 143-144; Beer, "Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 621; Wüsch, "Bekämpfung der Partisanenbewegung, Ausrottung der Juden" (1969), LAA, Ost-Dok. 18/20, p. 19.

<sup>991</sup> Leopold Egger (Banat Volksgruppenführung's economic office chief), "Tätigkeitsbericht des Hauptamtes für Volkswirtschaft und des Landesschatzamtes der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat/Serbien" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/97, frame 306.

<sup>992</sup> Transcript of Jakob Awender's (Banat economic office chief before Egger) taped statement (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/4, frame 72; Beer, "Volksgruppe Banat-Serbien" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/34, frame 621; Josef Beer, "Der Aufbau der Volksgruppenverwaltung im Banat" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/35, frame 638; Egger, "Tätigkeitsbericht" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/97, frames 310.

<sup>993</sup> "eine logische Folge" Egger, "Tätigkeitsbericht" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/97, frame 289.

with a zeal born of ideology or an abstract sense of duty, while others cared mostly for personal advancement.

Some commissars saw in their appointment an ideological (though they took pains not to stress this aspect in their postwar testimonies), professional and personal duty. They balked at having to sell off plundered properties *because* they had been plundered, not because they had belonged to deported Jews.<sup>994</sup> Others saw in their appointment a duty only to their own pocketbooks. Postwar testimonies and wartime complaints alike paint a picture of manifold possibilities for corruption and legalized robbery. One woman from Pantschowa described how erstwhile employees or apprentices stole or sold off the inventory of Jewish stores, then applied for liquidation and pocketed the proceeds.<sup>995</sup> A Volksdeutsche butcher from Grossbetschkerek earned the loathing of his co-nationals when, as commissar for a leather goods factory, he consistently failed to provide shoes even to Volksdeutsche with the right ration card, instead using the inventory to curry favor with Reichsdeutsche attached to the Kreiskommandantur.<sup>996</sup> And a man from Deutsch Elemer embraced becoming a

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<sup>994</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>995</sup> Bukovac deposition (April 1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 132.

<sup>996</sup> Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frames 801-802.

This commissar apparently resorted in 1943 to robbing leather goods stores owned by Serbs in order to continue his operation, after his original stock had run low (Borivoj Utvić from Grossbetschkerek accuses Kornelije Harle from same, October 24, 1944, AJ, fund 110, box 676, p. 299).

This blatant failure of community spirit on the part of the commissar rankled especially with other Volksdeutsche, considering that already in the dead of winter in early 1942 the Banat experienced such a dire lack of essential finished products (including shoes) that schoolchildren and even adults resorted to weaving shoes out of corn straw and leaves with wooden soles (Gemeindeamt Heufeld to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda (1942), Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 464). Non-Germans doing their labor service in the fields could only get uncomfortable wooden clogs as their shoe ration because the Wehrmacht controlled the leather supply (testimony of Berta Sohl from Haideschütz (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1006). By 1944 manufactured shoes with wooden soles became a staple sight in Banat shop windows (Hilde

commissar for a wood trade in Melenz as a way to pay off his personal debts and employ his adult children.<sup>997</sup>

Corruption-by-Aryanization was not an uncommon phenomenon in Serbia proper either.<sup>998</sup> So far as the Banat was concerned, several wartime Reichsdeutsche sources praised the Volksgruppenführung and its appointed commissars' overall professional and ideological dedication.<sup>999</sup> Sepp Janko earned special praise for his early efforts to prevent the misappropriation of Aryanized property by some commissars and members of the Volksgruppenführung.<sup>1000</sup> Three Volksdeutsche were arrested for gross plunder during the deportation of the Jews from Pantschowa (though they were released after barely three weeks for lack of evidence).<sup>1001</sup> Official orders for property obtained by 'wild' Aryanization in the Banat to be turned in without punishment apparently met with much positive response within the Volksgruppe.<sup>1002</sup> Finally, starting in spring 1942, the Volksgruppenführung started remedying the fact that real estate was often Aryanized at a fraction of its real value – such as in Pantschowa, where Jewish houses were sold for as

Isolde Reiter, "Ergänzungsbericht: Die letzte Phase des Krieges" (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/386, frame 16).

<sup>997</sup> Gemeindenotär in Melenz to Vizebanusamt in Grossbetschkerek, August 17, 1941, AJ, fund 110, box 663, pp. 38-39.

<sup>998</sup> As suggested by the German commander in Belgrade issuing repeated orders to register all property formerly belonging to Jews, whether it had been obtained legally through the office of the Plenipotentiary for the Economy in Serbia (Generalbevollmächtigter für die Wirtschaft, GBW) Franz Neuhausen or not. "Verordnung betreffend Beherbergung von Juden," *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, December 24, 1941, p. 196; "Verordnung zur Ergänzung der Verordnung betreffend die Juden und Zigeuner," *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, April 10, 1942, pp. 227-230.

<sup>999</sup> Hans Gurski (Neuhausen aide for Jewish property), "Treuhandverwaltung und Judenvermögen," March 23, 1945, NARA, RG 242, T-75 [Records of the General Plenipotentiary for the Serbian Economy]/53/517-518.

<sup>1000</sup> Zöller (SS-Untersturmführer in Grossbetschkerek) to Ehlich (SS-Obersturmführer with Einsatzgruppe der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in Belgrade), June 2, 1941, Arhiv Beograda, Registar imena ['Name Registry'], file J-167, pp. 5-6; BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29277/a, p. 146.

<sup>1001</sup> Deposition of Nada Janković, January 11, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 100; Bergman deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 103.

<sup>1002</sup> "Meldungen," November 1941, BA Berlin, R 58, file 166, fiche 1, frame 38.

little as one quarter (though most went for about one third) of their value<sup>1003</sup> – by making the new owners pay additional dues on the properties.<sup>1004</sup>

Regularized Aryanization was plagued by lack of personnel and imperfect bookkeeping,<sup>1005</sup> but this was no deterrence to Volksdeutsche to keep the upper hand vis-à-vis the other Banat ethnic groups. Ethnic Hungarians especially demanded an equal share of Aryanized real estate. As on other occasions when they made special demands, the AA officially fobbed them off with a promise of one third, in line with their official share of power in municipalities where they had significant numbers.<sup>1006</sup> The ethnic Hungarian community lacked the strength of numbers and Hungarian government support to press their claim. Ethnic Romanians and Serbs had practically no opportunities to obtain Aryanized property at all,<sup>1007</sup> especially not by legal means.

Within the Volksgruppe, there was some resentment caused by the fact that very often well-off people bought Aryanized houses instead of leaving them for poorer Volksdeutsche families.<sup>1008</sup> Nevertheless, whether they took the opportunity to help

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<sup>1003</sup> Feldkommandantur 610 to Kreiskommandantur I/823, March 1, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-75/68/576.

<sup>1004</sup> “Akttenotiz über eine Besprechung wegen der Erfassung (Verwertung) des Judenvermögens” (1942), PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, pp. E422,516-517; Gurski, “Treuhandverwaltung und Judenvermögen” (1945), NARA, RG 242, T-75/53/563-565; Kaločaji deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 131.

<sup>1005</sup> Gramsch (Reich Ministry of the Four-Year Plan) to AA and VoMi, April 6, 1943, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614 Bodenbesitzfragen im Banat, 1941-1944, fiche 1, frame 29; Neuhausen to Gramsch, “Liquidation des jüdischen Vermögens in Serbien,” April 30, 1943, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, pp. E422,522 and E422,527; Gurski, “Treuhandverwaltung und Judenvermögen” (1945), NARA, RG 242, T-75/53/560-561; Debreceni deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 124.

<sup>1006</sup> VoMi to AA, October 30, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 7, frame 210; Turner to Reichel (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle economic office), November 14, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 7, frames 223-224; Reichel to VoMi, November 18, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100614, fiche 7, frame 220.

<sup>1007</sup> Gurski, “Treuhandverwaltung und Judenvermögen” (1945), NARA, RG 242, T-75/53/572.

<sup>1008</sup> Feldkommandantur 610 to Kreiskommandantur I/823 (1942), NARA, RG 242, T-75/68/575.

themselves to Jewish property before or during the deportation<sup>1009</sup> or bought it directly from a Jewish house or at a public auction,<sup>1010</sup> even the poorest Volksdeutsche could, if they wished, obtain movable property which they never would have been able to afford at normal prices. Thus one married couple of modest means – the husband a waiter, the wife a cook – were quite proud of a good deal they got on expensive furniture and clothes which used to belong to a Jewish banker.<sup>1011</sup> They did feel sufficiently ashamed to assure their neighbor, herself a Jew, that they would give it all back if the former owner came back to claim it.<sup>1012</sup>

Whatever their opinion of the Jews and of Nazi ideas about the Jews, for most Banat Volksdeutsche the physical absence of Jews after summer 1941 seems to have produced an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ mentality. While they may not have considered themselves anti-Semites, even the older, more conservative Volksdeutsche accepted Aryanization as a matter of course. Illustrative is the letter written in late 1942 by an elderly Volksdeutscher from Grossbetschkerek, former caretaker of the Jewish cemetery there, demanding compensation for his loss of livelihood, caused by the deportation of the Banat Jews. He considered it only natural to demand compensation from the Aryanized property of the dissolved Jewish Community in Grossbetschkerek.<sup>1013</sup> Though

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<sup>1009</sup> One Volksdeutscher from Deutsch-Elemer bragged to acquaintances that he had amassed so much clothing, shoes and underthings from the deported Jews that his whole family was set for life. Testimony of Franz Unterreiner from Deutsch Elemer (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 985.

<sup>1010</sup> Deposition of Ilija Atanacković from Pantschowa, February 1, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 107; deposition of Dr. Đura Kiš from Pantschowa, February 6, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 110.

<sup>1011</sup> Deposition of Roza Švarcer from Pantschowa, March 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 117; deposition of Milica Kolarović from Pantschowa, March 3, 1945, AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 118.

<sup>1012</sup> Švarcer deposition (1945), AJ, fund 110, box 691, p. 117.

<sup>1013</sup> Peter Kowenz to Kreisamt für Volkswirtschaft, November 30, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-75/18/301.

he did not state it explicitly, his reasoning is clear: he had worked for the Jews his entire adult life, and was not personally responsible for their absence. Even more importantly, all around him he saw people both younger and richer than himself appropriating objects and real estate which had belonged to the Jews with no qualms, and decided to fall in with the Zeitgeist. The Volksgruppenführung gave him the right, and supported his claim.<sup>1014</sup>

One thing no Volksdeutscher who claimed Jewish property could rightly claim after the war was ignorance of what had happened to the Jews,<sup>1015</sup> though some tried.<sup>1016</sup> An expellee from Kudritz admitted as much when he recounted how, while purchasing an Aryanized house in Belgrade, he enquired after the previous owner's signature on the sale agreement, and was told that the previous owner was "certainly no longer living."<sup>1017</sup> Indirect as this admission of mass murder was, between such oblique statements, the sounds of gunfire and the tales of passersby and Romany gravediggers from the Apfeldorf road, and the sight and sounds of the gas van driving through the streets of Belgrade in spring 1942, the Holocaust was a tangible presence for the Volksdeutsche and other residents of Serbia-Banat. The Banat Volksdeutsche were mostly peripheral to

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<sup>1014</sup> Josef 'Sepp' Zwirner (Banat Bauernführer) to Neuhausen, December 2, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-75/18/300.

<sup>1015</sup> Or to their property, since the Banat press reported extensively some instances of Aryanization e.g. a Jewish-owned warehouse was turned into the soldiers' rest home (Soldatenheim) in Pantschowa. "Soldaten planen, gestalten und... ein Soldatenheim entsteht," *Volkswacht. Stimme des schaffenden und kämpfenden Deutschtums im Banat* [regular addition to the Grossbetschkerek daily *Banater Beobachter*], November 15, 1942, pp. 3-4.

<sup>1016</sup> One expellee from Deutsch-Etschka ingenuously claimed that the Jews' fate upon reaching Sajmište "eludes [his] knowledge" ("entzieht sich meinen Kenntnissen"). Testimony of Johann Keller from Deutsch-Etschka (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/8, frame 956.

<sup>1017</sup> "er sicher nicht mehr lebe." Testimony of Thomas Welter from Kudritz (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 17/9, frame 1002.

the physical destruction of the Banat Jews, but they were central to the efforts to erase the memory of a Jewish presence from the Banat's physical and mental landscape.

In late 1941, in the midst of regularized Aryanization, the central role Volksdeutsche played in it was reiterated following a ham-fisted attempt by the Wehrmacht in Serbia to subsume the Banat economy as a whole to itself.<sup>1018</sup> Though the army offered the valid reason that in the Third Reich the economy was a matter of state control – and, for all intents and purposes, the German army *was* the state in occupied Serbia – the AA successfully countered that such a move would set a dangerous precedent for neighboring states to start denying their Volksdeutsche's economic and other rights.<sup>1019</sup>

While deporting, interning and killing Jews was an issue on which the AA and the Wehrmacht were in agreement, the disposition of Jewish property was a more contentious issue. The AA carried the day with a solution which espoused both ideology and practicality. The AA defended both the Volksdeutsche's right to Aryanized property *as Volksdeutsche*, and the German Reich's right to said property by using Volksdeutsche as middlemen. Volksdeutsche were less ambitious and therefore more easily pleased. They bought mostly furniture, personal belongings and houses. The Reich profited from the acquisition of several of the Banat's major economic enterprises which had belonged to Jews, and often been administered by Volksdeutsche commissars.<sup>1020</sup> Both groups of Germans were thus well-served.

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<sup>1018</sup> Feldkommandant von Schlichting (Feldkommandantur 610) to Lapp, November 3, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100550 Slowakei, Ungarn, Banat, Kroatien, Rumänien und Dänemark, Gesetze und Verordnungen, 1939-1944, p. 281.

<sup>1019</sup> AA to OKW, December 20, 1941, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100550, p. 280.

<sup>1020</sup> These included the oil and vinegar factories in Grossbetschkerek, also numerous mills, food-processing factories and shares in the late Viktor Elek's Grossbetschkerek sugar factory, and a

While foreign-political concerns which combined ideology with practical concerns continued to matter in Banat Volksdeutsche civilian affairs till the war's end, the disposition of Aryanized property did not remain untouched by another Reich institution which had in the beginning had only a limited influence on the Banat: Heinrich Himmler's SS and especially its militarized wing, the Waffen-SS, which dealt with practical matters of waging the war but was also an ideological institution *par excellence*.

Starting in 1942, the Volksgruppenführung and Neuhausen expended much effort into securing Aryanized real estate which had not already been acquired by new owners, whether Volks- or Reichsdeutsche. Some of this real estate was to be kept in trust for Volksdeutsche socio-cultural, educational and recreational institutions.<sup>1021</sup> The rest was to be kept – also in trust – for Volksdeutsche veterans following a German victory.<sup>1022</sup> ‘In trust’ was the key phrase. Volksdeutsche economic organizations were supposed to act as “trustees for all the Germans in the Banat.”<sup>1023</sup>

Wartime documents were circumspect about mentioning the fact that, in principle, everything the Volksdeutsche owned, they owned at Hitler's pleasure, and could therefore be expected to give it all up in the future. But as historian Robert L. Koehl pointed out already in the 1950s, at the same time as Volksdeutsche were being settled in

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shipping company and glass factory in Pantschowa. Gurski, “Treuhandverwaltung und Judenvermögen” (1945), NARA, RG 242, T-75/53/591-592.

<sup>1021</sup> Under-State Secretary Martin Luther (AA) to AA office in Belgrade, July 22, 1942, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, no page number; Gurski, “Treuhandverwaltung und Judenvermögen” (1945), NARA, RG 242, T-75/53/568-569.

<sup>1022</sup> Luther to AA office in Belgrade (1942), PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, no page number; “Aktentnotiz über eine Besprechung wegen der Erfassung (Verwertung) des Judenvermögens” (1942), PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 62/6, p. E422,518; Janko to Kreisleitung “Prinz Eugen,” November 2, 1943, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 5-III, document 55/II.

<sup>1023</sup> “Treuhänder aller Deutschen im Banat” Janko, “Anordnung der Volksgruppenführers über die Übertragung von jüdischen Vermögen an Angehörige der Deutschen Volksgruppe,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 1, 1942, p. 8.

the Warthegau and given land ‘in trust,’ Himmler was building up the Waffen-SS as a tool for the increase of his own power and the realization of his ideas about a future Germanic East, settled by peasant soldiers (Wehrbauern), Volksdeutsche veterans of the ongoing war.<sup>1024</sup>

The underlying point with regards to ownership of Aryanized property was clear: in order to enjoy land and security at the expense of other ethnicities, it was not enough for Volksdeutsche to claim kinship with the German Volk. They had to prove their loyalty to the Third Reich and help win the war with weapon in hand, not merely by delivering grain to the Wehrmacht and spreading Nazi ideology through their schools.

If the AA and the Ministry of the Four-Year Plan had ensured the Banat Volksgruppenführung’s complicity by cajoling and offering incentives to offset great material demands, the Waffen-SS used that established complicity as a first stepping stone in its efforts to create a Volksdeutsche anti-Bolshevik fighting force in Southeast Europe. As time passed, the Waffen-SS needed to cajole less and less, and could command and, even, coerce the Volksdeutsche more and more. Profoundly implicated in Reichsdeutsche policies by their acceptance of Dobrovoljzen-Felder and Aryanized property, by the responsibility entrusted in the Volksdeutsche administration and police, by their youth’s rejoicing in the power National Socialism lent them while the elderly failed to protest too loudly, neither the Banat Volksgruppenführung nor ordinary Volksdeutsche were in a position to refuse Hitler and Himmler’s call to arms in spring 1942.

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<sup>1024</sup> Koehl, p. 74.

### Conclusion

Unlike the material privileges the Reich allowed the Banat Volksdeutsche which were discussed in Chapter 4, the opportunity to fight communism at home and to profit from the dispossession of the Banat Jews were purely ideological perks. This did not mean that they were devoid of all material interest. On the contrary, sharing in the Reich's anti-Bolshevik struggle and in its anti-Semitic policies was the perfect opportunity for individual Volksdeutsche to indulge their material impulses and confirm their standing in the Nazi racial hierarchy. By shooting Partisans and abusing the Jews and their legacy, even those Volksdeutsche who may not have labeled themselves as National Socialists became an inextricable part of Hitler's New Order. They may not even have realized how easily they began to share in the Reich's crimes. Minimal force was needed to compel them to serve in the Banat police or the Deutsche Mannschaft, and none to persuade Volksdeutsche to avail themselves of Aryanized property.

Participation in anti-partisan and anti-Semitic measures implicated the Banat Volksdeutsche in the Third Reich's Europe-wide policies and plans to such an extent that the Volksgruppenführung had nothing with which to bargain in spring 1942. This was when the Reich's need for soldiers tipped the scales in favor of mobilizing Volksdeutsche – policemen included – into the Waffen-SS. In the last stage of Reich-Banat relations, coercion became the dominant means for the Reich to get what it wanted from the Volksdeutsche. Even then, it was rarely open coercion. Much more frequently, the Reich used a combination of three factors to ensure Banat Volksdeutsche complicity with Waffen-SS recruitment: the implication that the Volksdeutsche owed it for all the privileges they had received; the personal prestige and power amassed by Heinrich

Himmler in the Nazi sphere of influence in Europe, and the concomitant decline in the importance of Reich diplomacy; and continued reliance on propaganda.

The latter factor requires closer examination. The Volksgruppenführung enthusiastically and successfully tailored National Socialist ideology to fit the Banat Volksdeutsche's more localized, narrow-minded worldview, confirm their ideological affinity with the Reich, and encourage them to serve the Reich as peasant soldiers.

CHAPTER VI 'THE FURTHEST WATCH OF THE REICH'<sup>1025</sup>:

## THE BANAT VOLKSDEUTSCHE'S NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Despite its claims to monolithic consistency, National Socialist ideology provided the Banat Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) with a way of understanding and expressing local themes and concerns. While there are many fine studies of National Socialism in the Reich and the various fascist regimes elsewhere in Europe, practically no attention has so far been given to Volksdeutsche understandings of Nazism in the historiography of the Third Reich and World War II. A closer examination of the specific themes which allowed the Banat Volksdeutsche to adopt National Socialism as the dominant narrative of their historical experience opens the way to a more sophisticated understanding of Nazism's appeal to groups not confined by the borders of the Third Reich. It also demonstrates how the Reich ensured Volksdeutsche complicity with its policies by pairing material incentives with ideological themes which appealed to the Volksdeutsche sense of self.

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<sup>1025</sup> The title of this chapter, and this dissertation, comes from the Nazified version of the "Prinz-Eugen-Lied": "Settlers came to the Southeast/To stand here at their posts/As the furthest watch of the Reich." ("Siedler kamen nach Südosten,/Um zu stehen hier auf Posten/Als des Reiches fernste Wacht.") Nikolaus Britz, "Prinz-Eugen-Lied," reproduced in "Prinz-Eugen-Feier in Grosskikinda," *Banater Beobachter* [German-language newspaper published in Grossbetschkerek; from now on *BB*], August 19, 1942, p. 5.

The notion of the Volksdeutsche as an advance guard of the Greater Reich predates the Nazi period. Already in the Weimar era, Volksdeutsche were portrayed in German literature as living in "far-flung posts . . . in the midst of a foreign land" ("weiter aussenliegenden Posten . . . mitten in fremdes Land hineingewagt" Hans Naviasky, *Gesamtüberblick über das Deutschtum ausserhalb der Reichsgrenzen* (Munich: Verein für das Deutschtum im Auslande, 1922), p. 20). In the Third Reich, specifically Southeast-European Volksdeutsche were called the "Reich's outpost" ("Vorposten des Reiches" Brunner, p. 57), while the Banat was the "Reich's bulwark" ("Schutzwand des Reiches" Herrschaft, p. 64).

See also p. 24.

Volksdeutsche used Nazi ideology to articulate their own understanding of World War II, the meaning of Germanness and their place in Hitler's Europe. Volksdeutsche ideology did not diverge on any major points from the core of National Socialist ideas. The Volksdeutsche embraced the main tenets of Nazism: loyalty unto death to Führer and Volk, emphasis on Volksgemeinschaft (national community), anti-Semitism, perception of Germany as the guardian of European culture and civilization. In addition to these, the Banat Volksgruppenführung (Volksdeutsche leadership) used Nazi ideology and rhetoric to articulate the following issues: a preoccupation with Heimat (homeland) and Deutschtum (Germanness); somewhat forced pride in the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen," which was composed in large part of Banat Volksdeutsche and named after Prince Eugene of Savoy, the Habsburg general who expelled the Ottomans from the Banat and spearheaded German colonization of the region in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century; and a strong animosity toward Slavs (especially Serbs) and communists, which tended to carry more weight *locally* even than anti-Semitism, seen by the Banat Volksdeutsche as a larger, literally a *global* issue.

In one of his self-serving works published in West Germany, former Volksgruppenführung official Johann Wüschl claimed that the ethnic Germans of the Banat adopted only the outer trappings of Nazism, but the content was uniquely theirs.<sup>1026</sup> He failed to specify that that content actually was. Although a clear example of whitewashing after the fact, this statement nonetheless contains a grain of truth insofar as the Banat Volksdeutsche viewed Nazi themes through the prism of their specific, local concerns. Wüschl's former colleague Josef Beer took denial of complicity with the Nazi regime a step further when he claimed that the Banat Volksdeutsche's National Socialism

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<sup>1026</sup> Wüschl, *Ursachen und Hintergründe*, pp. 23-24.

was different, “completely spontaneous, in no way tied to the Nazi Party in the Reich,” really the “so-called völkisch movements of border and ethnic Germans [Grenz- und Volksdeutschen], who in affiliated [i.e. occupied and annexed] areas mostly fell victim to the Nazi Party bureaucracy.”<sup>1027</sup> The clearly implied claim that Nazism as understood by the Banat Volksdeutsche was separate in both origin *and* content from Nazi ideology in the Third Reich is patently false. The degree of complicity between the Banat Volksgruppenführung and Berlin as well as written evidence from the Banat contradict Beer.

The mentality of this ethnic German minority was shaped by territorial separation from its land of origin, enduring efforts to preserve a unique cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity, and a traditional association of Germanness with both the soil (farming) and military service on the political border of the Habsburg Empire. The influence of Nazism, and especially the immediate impact of Yugoslav defeat and Reichsdeutsche (Reich German) occupation, heightened the importance of these already extant themes. It also underscored the ambivalence of the very term ‘Volksdeutsche.’ In their propaganda activities the Banat Volksdeutsche exerted themselves to prove their equality with Reichsdeutsche, their strength of purpose and supposed military might in the face of a hostile, majority Slavic population.

For all his whitewashing, Beer was correct in pinpointing a specific “Reichsromantik,” a strong sentimental attachment to an idealized German homeland among Germans living outside of the Reich. This attachment skewed any evaluation of

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<sup>1027</sup> “vollkommen spontane, in keinerlei Verbindung zur NSDAP im Reich . . . die sogenannten völkischen Bewegungen der Grenz- und Volksdeutschen, die in den angeschlossenen Gebieten zumeist der Parteibürokratie der NSDAP zum Opfer gefallen sind.” Josef Beer’s report on the Erneurer movement (1958), Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth (LAA), Ost-Dok. 16/13, frame 233.

the totality of the German Reich by the Volksdeutsche.<sup>1028</sup> The average Banat Volksdeutscher “does not know the reality of the Reich; he is a peasant, and a peasant does not travel.”<sup>1029</sup> This practical reality enabled the Volksgruppenführung to more easily cast already extant elements of the Volksdeutsche sense of self in a Nazi mould and interpret them in the light of the dominant ideology. Even contact with Reichsdeutsche who failed to live up to this idealized image – as had happened during the Bessarabian resettlement (see Chapter 2) and throughout the years of occupation (see chapters 4, 5 and 7) – failed to destroy the Platonic ideal of the Third Reich as perceived by the Volksdeutsche.

As shown in seminal historical works on the press and propaganda in the Third Reich,<sup>1030</sup> the extent to which the average Reich German believed the constant propaganda directed at him or her is difficult to assess. However, there is no doubt that Reich Germans were exposed to a lot of propaganda, the contents and intention of which can be analyzed. The same is true of the Banat Volksdeutsche. Administrative reports from various Banat villages state explicitly that the Volksdeutsche listened to German-language transmissions from Radio Belgrade and read the *Banater Beobachter*, a daily newspaper published in Grossbetschkerek and modeled on the main Reich daily, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, as well as the Belgrade German-language daily *Donauzeitung*.<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1028</sup> Beer Erneurer report (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/13, frame 226.

<sup>1029</sup> “Die Wirklichkeit des Reiches kennt der Donauschwabe nicht; er ist Bauer, und ein Bauer reist nicht.” Beer Erneurer report (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/13, frame 227.

<sup>1030</sup> E.g. Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth”*; Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>1031</sup> Gemeindeamt Nakodorf to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, November 10, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84 Sresko načelstvo Kikinda, 1941-1944, box 1, p. 398; Gemeindeamt Sankt-Hubert to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, December 9, 1941, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 425; Opštinska uprava Klein Kikinda to sresko načelstvo Gross-Kikinda, January 31, 1942,

Both were published under Volksgruppenführung auspices, with a monetary subsidy from the Reich, transmitted by the Propagandaabteilung Südost (Propaganda Department Southeast).<sup>1032</sup>

With regard to content, as the mouthpiece of the Nazified ethnic German leadership the *Banater Beobachter* offers a view of ethnic German concerns and self-perceptions and of the degree to which they officially embraced National Socialism undistorted by postwar evasions and apologia. The same is true of the 1943 *Kalender der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien*, as well as the few surviving books published in the occupied Banat such as the collection of Volksgruppenführer (Volksdeutsche leader) Sepp Janko's speeches and newspaper articles, *Reden und Aufsätze* (1944), and the edited volume of texts transmitted since 1941 in the popular *Volksdeutsche Stunde* program on Radio Belgrade, *Volksdeutsche Stunde. Eine Auswahl aus Rundfunk-Feierstunden* (1943). Tensions between the Volksdeutsche and their leadership, and between Volksdeutsche and Reichsdeutsche can be inferred from the documentary record. However, the dominant, official discourse in the Banat during World War II blended National Socialism with the traditional Volksdeutsche self-identification as a bastion of German culture and civilization in a savage land.

### Nazification and Implied Tensions

The extent to which the Banat Volksgruppe (Volksdeutsche community) officially embraced National Socialism is clear from the contents of the *Banater Beobachter*,

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Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 3, p. 458; Gemeindeamt Charleville to Landratsamt Gross-Kikinda, February 6, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Kikinda, fund 84, box 1, p. 465.

<sup>1032</sup> Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda memo, December 20, 1943, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), R 55 Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, file 890, fiche 1, frame 17.

especially the regular page devoted to local news under the heading “Aus unserem Banat” (“From Our Banat”).<sup>1033</sup> This page was devoted to announcements of births, marriages, fatalities and funerals, as well as longer articles on issues of local interest such as charity drives and rallies. All emphasized the National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft as a living reality in the Serbian Banat. The regular birth and marriage announcements were given only for Banat Volksdeutsche – despite the fact that they only comprised one fifth of the Banat’s total population – and stressed the men’s belonging to “Prinz Eugen” or the Deutsche Mannschaft, the Volksdeutsche militia. Funeral announcements were given only for fallen soldiers, either “Prinz Eugen” members or Banat Volksdeutsche serving in other Waffen-SS units on the Eastern Front.

The most illuminating are reports of various public festivities, meetings and themed rallies that took place in all the towns and villages of the Banat with substantial Volksdeutsche populations. These were organized for major National Socialist holidays and took place in a thoroughly Nazified atmosphere. Some of the celebrations (Feierstunden) reported in the *Banater Beobachter* were occasioned by the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch (November 9, 1923),<sup>1034</sup> the anniversary of the Battle of Langemarck in World War I,<sup>1035</sup> the memorial for Hitlerjugend member Herbert Norkus

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<sup>1033</sup> Usually on page 5. The first pages of every issue were devoted to general war news directly transmitted from Berlin. War reporting in the Third Reich emphasized German courage and victories as well as the enemy’s material losses and dishonesty. It downplayed or completely ignored German defeats. Good examples were headlines such as: “Der Wille der deutschen Führung diktiert den Verlauf des Krieges. Wunschträume der Alliierten, die sich nie erfüllen,” *BB*, October 12, 1942, p. 1; “Roosevelts Friedenssabotage,” *BB*, January 20, 1943, p. 1; “Deutschland soll zerstückelt werden. Was Juden den Briten als Kriegsziel vorgaukeln,” *BB*, January 25, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>1034</sup> “Feierstunde der Volksgruppe zum 9. November,” *BB*, November 10, 1942, p. 5; “Banat feierte den 9. November,” *BB*, November 13, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>1035</sup> “Gedenkstunde in Grosskikinda,” *BB*, December 7, 1942, p. 5.

as a symbol of youth's National Socialist struggle,<sup>1036</sup> the anniversary of the Nazi 'seizure of power' (January 30, 1933),<sup>1037</sup> and Hitler's birthday (April 20, 1889).<sup>1038</sup> On occasion, these memorials and anniversaries explicitly linked watersheds in the history of the Third Reich to Volksdeutsche history, as when a November 9 gathering in Belgrade was dedicated to both the dead of the Beer Hall Putsch and to fallen comrades from the Volksgruppe.<sup>1039</sup>

Several of the relevant texts provide telling descriptions of the decorations at these celebrations. For example, a November 9 celebration in Pantschowa was decorated thus:

In dark contrast to the blazing swastika flags framing the portrait of the Führer, pylons with the death rune stood in the foreground [of the stage], crowned by the black and silver sign of the Iron Cross, the symbol of courage and unreserved exertion to the last.<sup>1040</sup>

Hitler's birthday celebration in Grossbetschkerek on April 20, 1943 looked thus:

[T]he town was dominated by the brown shirt and the uniforms of individual organizations [Deutsche Mannschaft, Deutsche Jugend, Deutsche Fräienschaft, Deutscher Mädelsbund]. Everywhere large and small national symbols [flags] of

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<sup>1036</sup> "Herbert-Norkus-Feier der DJ," *BB*, January 29, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1037</sup> E.g. "Ortsnachrichten. Grossbetschkerek. Feierstunde zum 30. Januar," *BB*, January 31, 1943, p. 7; "Ortsnachrichten. Stefansfeld. Feier zur 10jährigen Wiederkehr der Machtergreifung Adolf Hitlers," *BB*, February 3, 1943, p. 5; "Eindrucksvolle Feierstunde am 30. Januar in Franzfeld," *BB*, February 4, p. 5; "Im Zeichen des Dankes und der Entschlossenheit. Erhebende Feierstunde zum 30. Januar in Werschetz," *BB*, February 6, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1038</sup> "Feierstunde der OG. Betschkerek am Geburtstag des Führers," *BB*, April 22, 1943, p. 5; "Feierstunden zum Geburtstag des Führers in Kikinda ... In Weisskirchen," *BB*, April 24, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>1039</sup> "Wochenbericht, Südosteuropa," November 4-11, 1943, BA Berlin, R 58 Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), file 124, fiche 2, frame 49.

<sup>1040</sup> "In düsterem Kontrast zu den zu den flammenden Hakenkreuzfahnen, die das Führerbild umrahmten, standen im Vordergrund Pylonen mit der Todesrune, gekrönt vom Schwarz-silbernen Zeichen des Eisernen Kreuzes, dem Sinnbild der Tapferkeit und des rückhaltslosen Einsatzes bis zum letzten." "Banat feierte den 9. November," *BB*, November 13, 1942, p. 3.

the German Reich fluttered from gables, lending the town a festive imprint, a joyous atmosphere.<sup>1041</sup>

In addition, several reports state that meetings and rallies were customarily concluded by a triple Hitler salute.

These examples should not lend credence to Wüsch's claim to the acceptance of Nazi trappings without the associated content. The contents of National Socialist ideology were also accepted by the Volksdeutsche leadership in its role as organizer of these festivities. Thus, on the occasion of the festive closing of a training camp for young women doing their labor service in Franzfeld in 1943, Volksgruppenführer Sepp Janko, arguably the highest authority on National Socialist orthodoxy in the Banat, referred to the joint duty of men and women to work for and defend the Heimat. The former should do so specifically in the context of the division "Prinz Eugen," on the front, while the latter labored at home. The article concludes, quoting Janko:

We must all be able to say: I am making the struggle for life [Lebenskampf] easier. As national comrades [Volksgenossen], we must show that we desire no separate destiny, rather that we are a part of the German Volk charged with the protection of this region. . . . Every national comrade must be included in the protection of the entire Volk, like the links of a chain. . . . [I]n this, the fourth year of the war, each one of us will fulfill his duty.

The Volksgruppenführer concluded the celebration, in which the residents of Franzfeld demonstrated to him their loyalty and readiness for exertion, with the old triple battle cry "Sieg Heil," in which he was joined by the national comrades present.<sup>1042</sup>

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<sup>1041</sup> "beherrschten das Braunhemd und die Uniformen der einzelnen Gliederungen das Stadtbild. Überall flatterten die Hoheitszeichen des Deutschen Reiches von den Giebeln der Häuser, grosse und kleine, und verliehen der Stadt ein festliches Gepräge, eine freudige Stimmung."

"Feierstunde der OG. Betschkerek am Geburtstag des Führers," *BB*, April 22, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1042</sup> "Wir alle müssen sagen können: Ich habe ein Lebenskampf zu erleichtern. Als Volksgenossen müssen wir beweisen, dass wir kein Sonderschicksal wollen, sondern dass wir in Teil des deutschen Volkes sind, der die Aufgabe hat, diesen Raum zu schützen. . . . Jeder Volksgenosse muss zum Schutze des ganzen Volkes eingeschaltet werden als Glied einer Kette. . . . [D]ennoch wird ein jeder von uns in diesem vierten Kriegsjahr seine Pflicht erfüllen."

On other occasions, loyalty to the Führer was stated even more explicitly. Janko concluded a speech delivered on Radio Belgrade on the second anniversary of the April War with:

The future finds us well-prepared and ready for everything. We have the Führer's orders and enter the new year with the motto: **ours is the work and the bread, ours is the sacrifice and the victory** [emphasis in the original]!<sup>1043</sup>

In these two representative speeches, Janko united several tenets of National Socialist ideology: the duty to work, national unity, loyalty unto death to Volk and Führer.

These articles demonstrate how the Banat Volksgruppenführung used National Socialism as an ideology in its own right, but also as a vehicle for their self-assertion. The first article mentions how the Volksdeutsche in Franzfeld pledged their faith both to Janko as a local representative of the German people and (by implication) to Adolf Hitler as all-German leader. The second mentions Janko's emphasis on the April War and the defeat of Yugoslavia as an anniversary even more important for the Volksdeutsche than the traditional New Year.

As suggested in Chapters 5 and 7, at the same time as the Volksgruppenführung exerted itself to present the image of a unified Volksgemeinschaft to its own members, it and the Reich also made great demands on the 'national comrades' in the Banat. The

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“Mit dem alten dreifachen Kampfruf Sieg Heil, in den die anwesenden Volksgenossen geschlossen einstimmten, schloss der Volksgruppenführer diese Feier, bei der die Franzfelder ihre Einsatzbereitschaft und Treue zum Volksgruppenführer bekundeten.” Josef Zich (*BB* editor from Pantschowa), “Der Volksgruppenführer sprach in Franzfeld. Dorfabend zum Abschluss des Lagers der Arbeitsmädchen,” *BB*, February 17, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1043</sup> “Die Zukunft findet uns gewappnet und auf alles vorbereitet. Wir harren der Befehle des Führers, und gehen in das neue Jahr mit der Parole: **unser die Arbeit und unser das Brot, unser die Opfer und unser der Sieg!**” “Die Rede des Volksgruppenführers im Sender Belgrad,” *BB*, April 11, 1943, p. 7.

*Banater Beobachter* abounds in funeral notices and obituaries for members of “Prinz Eugen,” the Deutsche Mannschaft, the Banater Staatswache, the Hilfspolizei and other armed formations killed in combat. These became more numerous during 1943, as the Partisans in particular became better organized and more successful in their guerrilla activities. The daily news of deaths under arms even shocked Janko into briefly abandoning the tone of enforced optimism and cheerful sacrifice while addressing the attendees at a meeting in Franzfeld: “Who knows, the Volksgruppenführer continued, whether the news of a death is not already on its way to some among you.”<sup>1044</sup>

The Volksgruppenführung also organized an endless round of donations and collections<sup>1045</sup> to which the Volksdeutsche were encouraged to contribute in no uncertain terms. Though impossible to determine from the kind of controlled press the *Banater Beobachter* represents, the level of social pressure and the threat of ostracism were tremendous within the Volksgruppe, and aided the Volksgruppenführung in retaining control. It is hardly surprising that the rising cost in both money and lives, and the incessant round of meetings and rallies, compounded by the superior attitude of the Reichsdeutsche military and administrative representatives in the Banat and Belgrade, provoked a certain amount of discontent and complaints among the Volksdeutsche. As discussed in Chapter 4, this discontent took several forms: lack of outward respect for the

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<sup>1044</sup> “Wer weiss es, fuhr der Volksgruppenführer fort, ob unter Ihnen nicht welche sitzen, für die schon eine Todesnachricht auf dem Wege ist.” “Der Volksgruppenführer sprach in Franzfeld,” *BB*, February 17, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1045</sup> In May 1943 the Volksgruppenführung proudly announced that the average amount of contributions gathered through various collection drives – including, but not limited to, those for the German Red Cross, Winter Relief, Police Day, Wehrmacht Day, Eintopfessen (single-dish day) – in the Banat outstripped the average amounts collected in the Reich. “Opferleistungen der Deutschen Volksgruppe. Reichsdurchschnitt stellenweise übertroffen,” *BB*, May 9, 1943, p. 2.

Reich and Reichsdeutsche;<sup>1046</sup> rumor-mongering and ‘grumbling’; individual attempts to officially change one’s ethnicity depending on the benefits and obligations that went with it (as a remedy, old Kulturbund membership cards were to be replaced by ‘nationality IDs,’ *Volkszugehörigkeitsausweise*<sup>1047</sup>); and avoiding labor service and breaking the laws on price control, black marketeering, the smuggling and hoarding of food.<sup>1048</sup>

Possibly the largest problem for community cohesion and morale were those members of the Volksgruppe whom Janko derisively called “also-Germans” (“Auchdeutschen”) in several speeches he gave in late 1941. These he accused of failing to appreciate their rare good fortune in having the protection of the Wehrmacht and Hitler’s concern extended to them, and acting “without discipline and in a high-handed manner.”<sup>1049</sup> These ‘bad Germans’ were further accused of only discovering their Germanness since the Wehrmacht’s arrival, when they realized they could profit materially from belonging to the Deutsche Volksgruppe.<sup>1050</sup> They learned quickly “how

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<sup>1046</sup> Kreiskommandatur Grossbetschkerek issued two official warnings aimed at the entire population of the Banat in June 1942, intended to ensure that German soldiers were given due space and respect in the streets (“Bekanntmachung der Kreiskommandatur I-823,” *BB*, June 19, 1942, p. 6; see also p. 191), and that the hoisting of the German flag in front of the barracks in Grossbetschkerek be acknowledged by all who happened to be passing by. Volksdeutsche were supposed to stand still, face the flag and give the Hitler salute (Oberleutnant Krause (Kreiskommandatur 823), “Anordnung,” *BB*, June 26, 1942, p. 5). If it were only members of other nationalities who engaged in petty acts of disrespect, there would hardly have been any need to publish these warnings in the German language and in the official Volksdeutsche newspaper.

<sup>1047</sup> “Wer gehört zur Deutschen Volksgruppe?,” *BB*, June 4, 1943, p. 4.

<sup>1048</sup> “Volksgenosse! Du vergehst Dich am Kriege!,” *BB*, May 9, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>1049</sup> “disziplinlos und eigenmächtig” “Volksdeutsche Grosskundgebung in Belgrad,” abridged version of this speech published in *BB*, July 6, 1941, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 68.

<sup>1050</sup> “Take into consideration that, first of all, there is a war on, and must be won first and foremost, instead of striving to fully satisfy cousin Franz or cousin Peter, to give him the ‘dobrowljac field’ he wants or make sure he doesn’t get mobilized.” (“Es gilt zu berücksichtigen, dass in erster Linie Krieg ist, und dass in erster Linie der Krieg gewonnen werden muss, und nicht zu trachten, dass der Vetter Franz oder Peter vollkommen zufrieden ist und das erwartete Feld von den Dobrowolzen erhält, oder dass er nicht einrücken muss, um nicht kämpfen zu

to use their elbows”<sup>1051</sup> and to complain because the Volksgruppenführung did not consult their opinion. “Did Adolf Hitler visit every village in the German Reich and there organize a plebiscite before he made his great, far-reaching decisions? Then how can our people insist that their individual opinions be sought?”<sup>1052</sup> asked Janko rhetorically.

In order to “root out”<sup>1053</sup> the ‘Auchdeutschen,’ Janko proposed that – in addition to new personal documents for Volksgruppe members – all Volksdeutsche had to pay fees for membership in the Volksgruppe and for the maintenance of German schools. “Either one is a German and pays up like every other German, or one is an “also-German” and we don’t need his money. In which case he has to say, I am not German.”<sup>1054</sup> Indeed, in June 1941 people were temporarily excluded from the Ortsgruppe (village chapter of the Volksgruppe) in Kathreinfeld precisely for refusing to pay their membership dues.<sup>1055</sup> This is a rare example of a Volksgruppenführung public

müssen.”) “Zur Prinz-Eugen-Feier des Kreises Donau,” speech held in Pančevo on August 15, 1941, in Janko, *Reden*, pp. 79-80.

This situation was not unlike that encountered by German occupation officials in Czechoslovakia when faced with convicted criminals and racial undesirables registering as ethnic Germans in order to obtain higher food rations and other benefits. Chad Bryant, “Either German or Czech: Fixing Nationality in Bohemia and Moravia, 1939-1946,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 683-706; Benjamin Frommer, “Expulsion or Integration: Unmixing Interethnic Marriage in Postwar Czechoslovakia,” *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2000), pp. 381-410.

<sup>1051</sup> “dann haben sie es gut verstanden, ihre Ellbogen zu gebrauchen” “Zur Grosskundgebung des Kreises Hennemann, Werschetz,” speech held on August 10, 1941, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 75.

<sup>1052</sup> “Hat wohl Adolf Hitler vor seinen grossen und weittragenden Entschlüssen jedes Dorf im Deutschen Reich besucht und dort eine Volksabstimmung veranstaltet? Wie können dann unsere Leute verlangen, dass man sie einzeln um ihre Meinung befragt?” *Ibid.*

<sup>1053</sup> “auszurotten” The use of this verb is interesting: when applied in Nazi rhetoric to Jews, it meant physical removal or extermination. When applied to Volksdeutsche by their own leadership, it meant the striking of ‘bad Germans’ from membership in the Volksgruppe, a condition which entailed some loss of face and privilege, but by no means physical annihilation. “Zur Prinz-Eugen-Feier des Kreises Donau” (1941), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 79.

<sup>1054</sup> “Entweder ist er ein Deutscher und zahlt, wie ein jeder andere, oder er ist ein ‘Auchdeutscher’, dann brauchen wir sein Geld nicht. Dann muss er aber sagen, ich bin kein Deutscher.” “Zur Prinz-Eugen-Feier des Kreises Donau” (1941), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 79.

<sup>1055</sup> See p. 220.

announcement which proposed to enforce ideological conformity by influencing not the heart, the head or one's social standing, but the pocketbook.

The significance of these signs of discontent should not be exaggerated: they were caused by demands on free time, manpower and money rather than any fundamental disagreement with National Socialist policy, ideology or the very fact of occupation. Open dissent with the orders of the Volksgruppenführung or those of the German military commander in Belgrade were limited to a few isolated cases.<sup>1056</sup> A major reason why the Banat Volksdeutsche accepted – even if they did not always enthusiastically embrace – National Socialism was that it provided them with a heightened sense of community and helped them articulate common themes in their perception of self and others, their landscape and history.

### Heimat

Much like 'Volk,' the German concept of 'Heimat' implies a strong emotional attachment not captured by the English translation 'homeland.' Heimat was an especially burning issue for the Banat Volksdeutsche due to their historical experience of territorial separation from Germany and their heightened sense of a community separate from – and superior to – their Slavic neighbors.<sup>1057</sup>

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<sup>1056</sup> See pp. 297-298.

<sup>1057</sup> A closer analysis of texts produced by Banat Volksdeutsche before 1945 suggests that they fully internalized the German nationalist idea of themselves as pioneers of long standing on a physical and language border (Sprachgrenze), despite the fact that the lands inhabited by most ethnic German communities of East and Southeast Europe only became true borderlands after 1918. Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 253-254. Paradoxically, it was the existence of state borders after 1918, which separated them from the majority of German-speakers in Europe, that fostered in the Volksdeutsche communities of the Danube Basin a self-image defined by supposedly ethnic markers (language, culture, personal

Heimat signified belonging to a great cultural tradition and a great nation, a Kulturnation. In the words of Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, the Romanian Volksdeutsche poet and novelist of the interwar period whose works were embraced as emblematic by Volksdeutsche throughout Southeast Europe: “Our Heimat is our mother tongue, our German customs and culture, our folk songs and fairy tales, our Heimat is our history, the conscious connection we have with the great German people, [which is] our common mother.”<sup>1058</sup> Heimat meant possession and cultivation of the land on which one lived, literally an earthy attachment. This attachment did not escape reinterpretation through the lens of National Socialist ideology. Speaking in 1941 of his listeners’ ancestors who settled in the Banat in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Sepp Janko articulated a striking image likening people to plants, both of which could only thrive in familiar soil: “People were not resettled out of the Reich; they were simply transplanted [verpflanzt] from one part of the Reich to another.”<sup>1059</sup>

Heimat was thus an ambiguous term,<sup>1060</sup> compassing not only the Banat as the only real home its Volksdeutsche knew, but also – to borrow Benedict Anderson’s phrase

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qualities such as cleanliness projected onto the whole group). Annemarie Röder, *Deutsche, Schwaben, Donauschwaben. Ethnisierungsprozesse einer deutschen Minderheit in Südosteuropa* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1998), p. 54.

<sup>1058</sup> “Unsere Heimat ist unsere Muttersprache, es ist die deutsche Sitte und Kultur, es sind unsere Volkslieder und Märchen, unsere Heimat ist unsere Geschichte, ist der bewusste Zusammenhang mit dem grossen deutschen Muttervolke.” Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn quoted in Wilhlem Albert, ed., *Deutsches Volk auf fremder Erde. Auswahl aus volksdeutschem Schrifttum*, Volume 1: *Deutschtum jenseits der Reichsgrenzen* (Leipzig: Verlag Ernst Wunderlich, 1936), p. 92.

<sup>1059</sup> “Menschen wurden nicht etwa aus dem Reich ausgesiedelt, sondern lediglich aus einem Gebiet des Reiches in ein anderes verpflanzt.” “Volksdeutsche Grosskundgebung in Belgrad” (1941), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 67.

A 1942 article in the Reich journal *Deutsche Arbeit* echoed this image in describing the whole project of Volksdeutsche resettlement as a great transplantation of people. “Umsiedeln heisst umpflanzen,” *Deutsche Arbeit*, Heft 6/7, June-July 1942, p. 158.

<sup>1060</sup> This ambiguity is evident even in a postwar book by a Volksdeutscher exhibiting clear residual National Socialist influence: “Heimat is for us Germans a term which means deep roots in and an almost religious attachment to the soil, which represents for us and our folk ways a

– the imagined community<sup>1061</sup> of all Germans. The border experience of the Banat Volksdeutsche did not require a physical border. A perceived border, a line of separation between ethnicities and languages sufficed to create a sense of separation reinforced by Nazified notions of blood (race) and soil.

In the occupation period, the Volksgruppenführung stressed the traditional pride the Volksdeutsche took in their achievements as peasants and bearers of German Kultur on the ethnic borders of the Greater Reich. It also subsumed this perception under a sense of homecoming to Greater Germany. Johannes L. Schmidt, the editor of the regular broadcast *Volksdeutsche Stunde* on Radio Belgrade during the war years, concisely termed the former as “Heimat in the heart, which distinguishes a true German wherever he might live.”<sup>1062</sup> This Heimat in the narrow sense was the fruit of German community life and exposure to German history and tales, a spiritual inoculation against the pernicious influences of schooling and socializing with non-Germans. But, Schmidt continued, “the knowledge of a greater soil [Boden] should go out of your narrow Heimat, and cross mountains and oceans to the last national comrade on South American farms.”<sup>1063</sup>

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living space in both a physical-natural and a spiritual sense.” (“Heimat ist für uns Deutsche der Begriff tiefer Verwurzelung und fast religiöser Verbundenheit mit dem Boden, der für uns und unser Volkstum Lebensraum im physisch-naturhaften und geistigen Sinne ist.”) Valentin, p. 7.

<sup>1061</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>1062</sup> “eine Heimat in Herzen, und dies macht den wahren Deutschen aus, wo immer er auch lebe.” “Wachse in uns, Heimat!”, in Johannes L. Schmidt, *Volksdeutsche Stunde. Eine Auswahl aus Rundfunk-Feierstunden*, Folge 1 (Betschkerek: Buchreihe der deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien, 1943), p. 85.

<sup>1063</sup> “von deiner engeren Heimat soll das Wissen um den grossen Boden ausgehen und über Berg und Meere ziehen bis zum letzten Volksgenossen auf den Farmen Südamerikas.” “Ein Wort über Ehre, Blut und Boden,” in Schmidt, p. 56.

In his radio speech commemorating the second anniversary of the April War, Janko clarified this point: “In these two fatefully difficult and eventful years, we [ethnic Germans and the Reich] have melted together to such a degree that we have become one.”<sup>1064</sup> As the individual had to become part of the community to be whole – a commonplace in Nazi ideology and rhetoric – so Heimat in the narrow sense had to be integrated in the projected Greater Reich both physically and by being perceived as merely a part of the whole.

This is precisely the theme emphasized in the *Banater Beobachter*'s Christmas 1942 issue, which compared the meaning of Christmas to Germans living outside of the Reich's borders to the homesickness felt by a young man far from home, “the longing for the greater German community.”<sup>1065</sup> With an unconscious mixture of perceived superiority and the provincial narrow-mindedness of people for whom the possession of and group listening to a radio were momentous events, the article described the importance of the yearly radio address broadcasted from the Reich to ethnic Germans worldwide:

We cared not only to hear what was said, far more that the words were meant for us, that we who stand on the outposts of the Reich were remembered. I shall never forget the words of an old peasant, who had lived in the Banat his whole life. Moved by the Christmas address on the radio, he took off his hat and stammered: “Listen to that! Germany is speaking to us!” Then, his eyes glowing with a new light, he added, “I am so happy to have experienced this.”<sup>1066</sup>

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<sup>1064</sup> “Wir sind in diesen zwei schicksalsschweren und ereignisreichen Jahren so ineinander verschmolzen, dass wir eins geworden sind.” “Zum 6. April 1943,” radio speech delivered in *Volksdeutsche Stunde* on April 6, 1943, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 170.

<sup>1065</sup> “die Sehnsucht nach der grossen deutschen Gemeinschaft” Sepp Kucht, “Volksdeutsche Weihnacht,” *BB*, December 25-27, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>1066</sup> “Uns war nicht einmal wichtig, was gesprochen wurde, bestimmend für uns war, dass die Worte uns gegolten haben, dass man sich unser, die wir an den Aussenposten des Reiches standen, erinnerte. Unvergesslich bleiben mir die Worte eines alten Bauern, der zeitlebens im Banat gelebt hat und der nun während der Weihnachtsbotschaft im Run[d]funk, die Mütze

The importance of proving that the Volksdeutsche and their areas of settlement were as much a part of the Greater Reich as Germany itself was very strong year round. It tapped into the Volksdeutsche's visceral awareness of the fact that the Reichsdeutsche continued to see them as second-class Germans, not quite German enough. An editorial occasioned by the 500<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Banater Beobachter* expressed the Volksdeutsche desire for full acceptance as members of the Volk forcefully, yet with familiar ambiguity: "We wish to work in close cooperation and tight discipline . . . [for] our home newspaper, which represents the interests and wishes of the Banat Swabians in their narrow area of settlement [Siedlungsgebiet] as well as in their ancestral homeland [Urheimat], the Reich."<sup>1067</sup>

This profound identification with the Reich as an imagined community of all Germans, more a spiritual entity than the physical reality of the Third Reich, did not mean that the ethnic Germans claim to full equality with Reich Germans was ever a matter of course. On the contrary, tension was evident between Volksdeutsche and Reichsdeutsche perceptions throughout the Third Reich's existence. In an article occasioned by the publication of the collection of *Volksdeutsche Stunde* texts, Georg Peierle, head of the Volksgruppe's culture office, wrote about the program's editor Johannes L. Schmidt:

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abnehmend, ergriffen stammelte: "Hört ihr es, Deutschland spricht zu uns", und dann, während ein Leuchten in seine Augen kam, "ich bin so glücklich, dass ich es erlebt habe".<sup>1067</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>1067</sup> "In fester Zusammenarbeit und straffer Disziplin wollen wir nun ans Werk gehen . . . unseres Heimatblattes, das die Interessen und Wünsche des Banater Schwaben in seinem engeren Siedlungsgebiet und auch in seiner Urheimat, im Reich, vertritt." "500," *BB*, November 24, 1942, p. 3.

Schmidt is from the Bačka. We see the publication of his first book in the Banat as a good sign! Where is the Reich? Wherever Germans are! Borders can no longer cleave apart the great spiritual and cultural community of our Volk!<sup>1068</sup>

Peierle takes a clear stand: the Volksdeutsche were as German as the Reichsdeutsche. He went on to point out that since the unification of all Germans under National Socialist auspices and the Reich's territorial expansion, the term 'Volksdeutsche' no longer meant second-class Germans, as it had until then. Schmidt added: "we ought to be proud of the fact that we are "just" "Volks-"Deutsche – for it was not given to everyone to be such a one."<sup>1069</sup> He even implied that Volksdeutsche achievements – "protection of the race, strength of the blood"<sup>1070</sup> – were even greater than such achievements in the Reich, for the settlers did not have German state borders, law and culture to preserve them over the centuries.<sup>1071</sup> Schmidt did not actually say this, for such a statement would have meant a division of the Volk into 'better' and 'worse' Germans, a perception the Volksgruppenführung was trying to extirpate once and for all.

Yet Peierle and Schmidt protest too much. These dogged assertions of Volksdeutsche equality, if not superiority, sound defensive. For all their assertiveness, the Volksdeutsche leadership was not unaware of the differences between the self-perception

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<sup>1068</sup> "Schmidt ist Batschkaer [in the original]. Dass sein erstes Buch im Banat erschienen ist, wollen wir als gutes Zeichen betrachten! Wo ist das Reich? Wo Deutsche sind! Grenzen vermögen die grosse geistige und kulturelle Gemeinschaft unseres Volkes nicht mehr zu trennen!" Georg Peierle, "Johannes L. Schmidt: "Volksdeutsche Stunde",<sup>1069</sup> *BB*, August 29-30, 1943, p. 3.

<sup>1069</sup> "dass wir "nur" "Volks"-Deutsche sind, darauf wollen wir stolz sein – denn dies ist nicht jedem gegeben." "Lob des Deutschtums im Südosten," in Schmidt, p. 20.

<sup>1070</sup> "Bewährung der Rasse, Kraft des Blutes" "Lob des Deutschtums im Südosten," in Schmidt, p. 16.

<sup>1071</sup> Schmidt quickly made up for this daring suggestion by stating that it was not the Reichsdeutsche's fault that Volksdeutsche did not 'become German' sooner. He blames non-German peoples who physically separated the settlers from the Reich, imposed non-German names on them and made them seem not quite German. "Lob des Deutschtums im Südosten," in Schmidt, pp. 17-18.

of the Banat Volksdeutsche and how Reichsdeutsche perceived them.<sup>1072</sup> The Volksdeutsche considered themselves fully German. Texts in the *Banater Beobachter* usually described their readers as Germans (Deutsche), Swabians (Schwabern) or simply ‘us’ (uns). Even so, they distinguished clearly between their readers and Reichsdeutsche,<sup>1073</sup> indicating that the Banat Volksdeutsche felt a profound attachment to the Banat as their creation, and were aware of the contempt in which they were held by many Reichsdeutsche as not quite German enough.

An article from the official SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps*, reprinted in the *Banater Beobachter* at a time when the formation and training of the Waffen-SS division “Prinz Eugen” was in full swing, demonstrated these strong prejudices against Germans from outside the Reich. The crux of the matter was the average Polish or Soviet Volksdeutscher’s at best imperfect, at worst nonexistent knowledge of the German language, which earned them nicknames such as “ethnic Polacks” and “comrade Katschmarek.”<sup>1074</sup> Lack of linguistic ability was taken as a certain sign of racial pollution and inferior Germanness. The Volksdeutsche of Southeast Europe, despite their relatively

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<sup>1072</sup> In the same text, Schmidt admitted that Volksdeutsche traditionally relished as well as feared visits from the Reich – the former because it enhanced the sense of community across state borders, the latter because their way of life and manner of speech might be perceived as not up to Reich standards. “Lob des Deutschtums im Südosten,” in Schmidt, pp. 13-14.

<sup>1073</sup> In his introduction to the collection of Schmidt’s radio texts, Belgrade Kreisleiter (Volksgruppe county leader) Christian Brücker wrote: “Every word is written under the auspices [of Auslandsdeutschtum]. Even expressions and sentences, which may appear at first glance common, come from the standpoint of Germandom living outside of the Reich’s borders, which therefore possesses its own, unconditionally Volk-related attitude to all völkisch and human questions[.]” (“Einmal ist hier die Bestimmung des Auslandsdeutschtums immer vor Augen zu halten. Jedes Wort ist unter dieser Bestimmung geschrieben worden. Selbst Wendungen und Sätze, die auf den ersten Blick allgemein anmuten, kommen aus dem Blickfeld jenes Deutschtums, das ausserhalb der Reichsgrenzen lebt und so zu allen Fragen völkischer und menschlicher Art seine eigene, bedingungslos volkhafte Einstellung besitzt.”) Christian Brücker, “Zur Einführung,” in Schmidt, p. 9.

<sup>1074</sup> ““Volkspolacken” . . . Kamerad Katschmarek” “Volksdeutsche durch Bewährung. Der unsterbliche Piefke,” *BB*, August 23, 1942, p. 5.

good command of German, did not escape derogatory nicknames either. A special one was given them: “Piefke,”<sup>1075</sup> indicative of their insularity, tendency to think in terms of geographical rather than racial boundaries, and their lack of knowledge about Volk and Reich. Volksdeutsche efforts at preserving a unique ethnic and linguistic identity were thus turned on their head, and failed to earn the Volksdeutsche the praise they believed they deserved as German pioneers in a foreign land. The *Schwartze Korps* article did extol the courage and combat readiness of Volksdeutsche recruits in the Waffen-SS as signs of true Germanness far more reliable than the mere knowledge of the German language, but it remained suspicious of the ‘Piefke.’<sup>1076</sup>

Despite its ambiguous tone, this article was reprinted in the *Banater Beobachter* because it pandered to the overall Volksdeutsche sense of self. In its emphasis on a soldier’s honor as the primary parameter of Germanness, this article dovetailed with a major theme that preoccupied the Banat Volksdeutsche: military service with the division “Prinz Eugen.” Moreover, it supported Peierle and Schmidt’s claim that the Volksdeutsche were no longer second-class Germans, regardless of the scorn heaped on ‘Piefke’ types.

While not averse to claiming the Banat as a primordial Germanic area,<sup>1077</sup> the Banat Volksdeutsche emphasized their documented historical presence in the area as the

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<sup>1075</sup> In modern usage, ‘Piefke’ is a derogatory term for a person from northern Germany.

<sup>1076</sup> The *Schwartze Korps* article concluded: “Decades of building stand before us – one can well learn German in that time, but whoever is not German can never become it. These are the times when it will always be shown whether one is a “Katschmarek” or a “Piefke.” We prefer the Katschmareks...” (“Wir haben Jahrzehnte des Aufbaus vor uns, und in dieser Zeit kann man sehr wohl Deutsch lernen, nicht aber Deutscher werden, wenn man keiner ist. In dieser Zeit wird es sich immer erweisen, ob einer “Katschmarek” oder “Piefke” ist. Die Katschmareks wären uns lieber...”) “Volksdeutsche durch Bewährung,” *BB*, August 23, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1077</sup> The pride of the Werschetz Heimatmuseum’s (today Gradski muzej Vršac, founded by Volksdeutsche man of science Felix Milleker) collection was a Bronze Age statue of a bird-

basis of their identity. Their ancestors arrived as part of the official Habsburg settlement (colonization) drive in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The German-speaking settlers' efforts to make a depopulated, pestilential land livable and prosperous became the core of a romantic historical myth of the Volksdeutsche experience epitomized in the proverb "For the first [generation] – death, for the second – poverty, for the third [grandchildren] only – bread."<sup>1078</sup>

Typically of colonial projects, the area settled by German-speaking peasants was seen as a *tabula rasa* waiting to be imprinted with a specific national or racial character, an "unknown, unpopulated, unnamed"<sup>1079</sup> land. The Volksdeutsche identified as "Kulturpionier" and "Kolonisator" creating a "Lebensraum" for their children.<sup>1080</sup>

Distinguished by their courage and diligence, they made their settlements German soil because it soaked up the colonists' blood and sweat,<sup>1081</sup> "in fulfillment of the settler's

headed idol in a chariot found near the village of Duplaja. The fact that it is decorated with swastikas was seen as proof of the existence of a great ancient "Germanic space" ("germanischen Raum"). "Das Hakenkreuz im Banat vor 3000 Jahren," *Volkswacht. Stimme des schaffenden und kämpfenden Deutschtums im Banat* [regular addition to *BB*], October 18, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1078</sup> "Für die ersten der Tod, für die zweiten die Not und erst für die Enkel das Brot!"

Referenced in "Prinz-Eugen-Feier in Grosskikinda," *BB*, August 19, 1942, p. 5; "Das Banat," *VB*, March 28, 1944, BA Berlin, R 8034 II Reichsauslandsbund, Presseauschnittsammlung, volume 4780, p. 38; and Otto Kumm, "Vorwärts Prinz Eugen!" *Geschichte der 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Division "Prinz Eugen"* (Osnabrück: Munin-Verlag, 1978), p. 18.

Another proverb makes the point about the hard work, sacrifices and toughness demanded of the early German settlers more graphically: "This is the Banat,/it's too late to regret you came./Whoever can't work like a hack,/eat like a pig,/bark like a dog,/will never make it in the Banat." ("Hier ist das Banat,/den es reut, ist zu spät./Wer nicht arbeiten kann wie ein Gaul,/fressen wie eine Sau,/bellen wie ein Hund,/der wird im Banat nit gesund.") Proverb quoted in Hans Diplich and Hans Wolfram Hockl, ed., *Wir Donauschwaben* (Salzburg: Akademischer Gemeinschaftsverlag, 1950), p. 36.

<sup>1079</sup> "In ein Land, ein unbekanntes,/Menschenloses, unbenanntes" Britz, "Prinz-Eugen-Lied," reproduced in "Prinz-Eugen-Feier in Grosskikinda," *BB*, August 19, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1080</sup> "Der fleissige Schwabe," *BB*, August 14, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1081</sup> This theme – land made German through suffering and sacrifice – was also used by General Franz Böhme when he invoked the "streams of German blood" ("Ströme deutschen Blutes") which flowed in Serbia during World War I to steel his soldiers' resolve for retaliatory actions against Serbian and Jewish civilians. Manoschek, "Serbien ist judenfrei," p. 12.

eternal destiny” of laboring for the Reich.<sup>1082</sup> They did their duty as Kulturpioniere both by setting a high standard of living, diligence and cleanliness to their non-German neighbors, and by making the Banat “blessed” and “fruitful,” a “corn-producing area of inestimable value for our Reich.”<sup>1083</sup> The idealization of the Volksdeutsche past thus became a “mark of cultural distinction,”<sup>1084</sup> a way of confirming their perceived ties to their ancestral homeland as well as their separation from the other ethnic groups in their surroundings.

Material prosperity through hard work was not represented in propaganda texts directed at the Banat Volksdeutsche peasantry as a completed project. On the contrary, the constant refrain in such texts was the continued need for hard work in service to the Reich. “It is not necessary to speak to my Volk on the land of work, for work is my Volk’s first prayer, an inerasable sign on the forehead of every German in this region,”<sup>1085</sup> stated one of Schmidt’s radio broadcasts directed at the Banat peasantry. Such exhortations were intended to urge Banat Volksdeutsche to produce ever more food for the Reich (see Chapter 4). The quasi-religious tone likening the duty to work with an obverse Mark of Cain, a self-evident positive trait of the Volksdeutsche, appealed to the more conservative, traditional elements of the Volksgruppe. It lent a peasant’s accustomed identification with manual labor an aura of the sacred, likening it to a God-given duty.

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<sup>1082</sup> “in Erfüllung ewigen Siedlerschicksals” Hans Rasimus, “Sieg der Arbeit. Deutscher Kolonistenfleiss im Südosten,” *BB*, May 1-2, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>1083</sup> “diesem gesegten Land . . . das fruchtbare Land . . . ein Korngebiet von unschätzbarem Wert für unser Reich” Sepp Wildner (the Volksgruppe’s Propaganda Amt), “Das deutsche Gesicht,” *BB*, July 30, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1084</sup> “kulturellen Distinktionsmerkmal” Luković, p. 160.

<sup>1085</sup> “es müssig ist, meinem Volk auf dem Lande von der Arbeit zu reden, denn meines Volkes erstes Gebet ist die Arbeit, sie ist jedem Deutschen in diesem Raum als unverwischbares Mal auf die Stirn geschrieben” “Unser täglich Werk gib uns heute,” in Schmidt, p. 73.

Lest the point be lost on younger, more Nazified members of the community, purely ideological texts were produced as well, which tied the ideal of a healthy, hard-working and prosperous peasantry to the racial ideal articulated by the SS. The SS's ultimate objective was to win by force of arms and then colonize living space (Lebensraum) in the East, in order to ensure that German blood remained "firmly anchored in the soil."<sup>1086</sup> The peasant as a social bulwark against the evils of liberalism and socialism was an ideal propagated by the Banat Volksgruppenführung.<sup>1087</sup> It told the Volksdeutsche peasants what they wanted to hear, linking Reich views on the peasant's role in the New Order with the local peasantry's largely conservative outlook and inflated sense of self-importance, which drew on the traditional identification of German-speaking peasants with a civilizing influence in the land.<sup>1088</sup>

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<sup>1086</sup> "fest im Boden verankert" Anonymous, "Blut und Boden," in Sepp Janko, ed., *Kalender der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien für das Jahr 1943* (Grossbetschkerek: Banater Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt Bruno Kuhn und Komp, 1943), p. 34.

<sup>1087</sup> It was not accidental that in the official Volksgruppe calendar for 1943, the page for the month of October, the month of plowing and sowing in preparation for future harvests, was topped with the following quote from Adolf Hitler "A strong stratum of peasant small- and middle-holders has always been the best protection against the illnesses of society." ("Ein fester Stock kleiner und mittlerer Bauern war noch zu allen Zeiten der beste Schutz gegen soziale Erkrankungen.") Adolf Hitler quoted in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 14.

The Volksgruppenführung was not averse to telling Volksdeutsche peasants that they were the backbone of all real (i.e. ideologically sound) social order even during Yugoslavia's existence. A speech given at a rally in Tschestereg in November 1940 stated: "The peasantry is evidence of a way of life, the scaffolding which holds up the Volksgemeinschaft. It was from this peasant worldview with its unspoiled, blood-bound rootedness in the Volk that National Socialism derived so many of its ideas. Therefore is the peasantry the foundation, the ancestral source, and the bearer of the German people's new way of life." ("Bauerntum ist Bekenntnis zu einer Lebenshaltung, es ist das Traggerüst der Volksgemeinschaft, ja aus dieser bäuerlichen Weltanschauung mit ihren unverdorbenen, blutsverbundenen Verwurzelungen im Volke hat der Nationalsozialismus so manche Idee geschöpft und so ist das Bauerntum Fundament, Urquell und Träger der neuen Lebenshaltung des deutschen Volkes geworden.") Leopold Egger, "Grosskundgebung des Banater deutschen Bauerntums in Tschestereg," *Deutsches Volksblatt* [German-language newspaper published in Novi Sad (Bačka)], November 13, 1940, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI Deutsches Arbeitsfront, Arbeitswissenschaftlichesinstitut (Zeitungsausschnittsammlung), file 28873, p. 6.

<sup>1088</sup> A Banat German folk song posits the peasant as the root of all social and, even, divine order: "It's been heard and written and read of:/The first man became a peasant./Everything stems from

A large part of National Socialism's appeal to the Volksdeutsche peasant was its romanticization of the rural existence as one of rewarding hard work, virtue and pastoral simplicity.<sup>1089</sup> But, as indicated by the association of peasant life with the combative SS ideal, the historical myth of the Banat Volksdeutsche was not solely that of a prosperous, peaceful peasantry. It was also one of constant watchfulness and combat against the ethnically and racially foreign elements which surrounded them. Such a worldview created an almost siege mentality, and enforced the need for Volksdeutsche community. The ideal Volksdeutscher was thus not merely a peasant (Bauer), but a peasant-soldier (Bauer-Soldat or Wehrbauer).<sup>1090</sup>

This tradition harked back to the Volksdeutsche role on the Habsburg Military Border. Especially resonant was the example set by the Prince Eugene of Savoy, routinely described as the "noble knight" and the "father of our homeland,"<sup>1091</sup> who "stands at the beginning of our history,"<sup>1092</sup> an "emblem" of the working and fighting Banat Volksdeutsche.<sup>1093</sup> The Banat Volksdeutsche's sentimental attachment to Prince

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the peasant./Even the judge and the hardest lord." ("Und wie man hört und schreibt und lest:/Der erste Mann ein Bauer ist g'west./Vom Bauer stammt ja alles her./Der Richter und der strengste Herr.") Folk song in Konrad Scheierling, ed., *Donauschwäbisches Liederbuch* (Straubing: Donauschwäbisches Archiv, 1985), p. 113.

<sup>1089</sup> For an official Reich example of the glorification of a Nazified peasantry as a pioneer of the future and the builder of an Eastern Eden, rather than a backward figure and the butt of jokes, see Lühr Oldigs (director of Bauernschule Schwanen in the Warthegau), "Dem Bauern gehört die Zukunft," *Sonntag. Unterhaltungsblatt der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat* [regular addition to *BB*], February 7, 1943, p. 3.

<sup>1090</sup> The SS wed the idea of racial regeneration in the East to the ideal of a healthy, militarized peasantry in the Schwert und Pflug (Sword and Plow) policy, developed in 1940-1941 as a part of the preparations for Operation Barbarossa. Jürgen Förster, "Die weltanschauliche Erziehung in der Waffen-SS: "Kein totes Wissen, sondern lebendiger Nationalsozialismus," in *Ausbildungsziel Judenmord: "Weltanschauliche Erziehung" von SS, Polizei und Waffen-SS im Rahmen der "Endlösung*," ed. Jürgen Matthäus et al. (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003), p. 96.

<sup>1091</sup> "der edle Ritter . . . der Vater unserer Heimat" "Prinz Eugenius der edle Ritter," *Volkswacht*, August 16, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>1092</sup> "steht er am Beginn unserer Geschichte" *Ibid*.

<sup>1093</sup> "Wahrzeichen" Anonymous, "Die SS," in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 38.

Eugene predated National Socialism. In their folk tales, the Habsburg general figures as a Messianic figure bringing liberty and the promise of salvation to a land overrun by Turkish heathens; Moses-like he opens springs of fresh water in a parched landscape; his armies slaughter the enemy by the thousands.<sup>1094</sup>

In the period of Reichsdeutsche occupation, the emotional attachment of the Banat Volksdeutsche to Prince Eugene gained an added dimension. Sepp Janko produced the following account of the founding of the Military Border:

Prince Eugene was the one who realized that one of the most dangerous portals for invasion out of the East must be closed once and for all in this very area, in order to preserve the Reich from further attacks. Therefore he strove to have peasants settled here, peasants who knew how to use both plow and sword. . . . He knew that only German peasants could be settled in such a polluted region, menaced by enemies from within as well as without, the very peasants who made this land into what it is today – the granary of Europe.<sup>1095</sup>

The ‘noble knight’ of mythologized history thus became an early precursor of the Nazi project to unite all racial Germans in one Greater Reich – a patently anachronistic understanding of a man whose primary loyalties were dynastic and religious, not nationalist or racial. By extension, the Banat Volksdeutsche could consider themselves trailblazers. Their self-identification with an idealized community of peasants and soldiers – or peasant-soldiers – was represented as the ideal for all Germans:

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<sup>1094</sup> Folk tales “Prinz Eugen bei Zenta,” “Prinz Eugen, der Streiter des Herrn” and “Der Prinz-Eugen-Brunnen,” in Hans Diplich and Alfred Karasek, ed., *Donauschwäbische Sagen, Märchen und Legenden* (Munich: Verlag Christ Unterwegs, 1952), pp. 23-24.

<sup>1095</sup> “Prinz Eugen war es, der erkannte, dass in diesem Gebiet eines der gefährlichsten Einfallstore des Ostens ein für alle Mal geschlossen werden musste, um das Reich vor weiteren Angriffen zu bewahren. Und darum trachtete er, hier Bauern anzusiedeln, einen Bauern, der nicht nur den Pflug, sondern zugleich auch das Schwert zu führen verstand. . . . Er wusste, dass in eine so verpestete Gegend, die Feinde von innen und aussen hatte, nur ein deutscher Bauer angesiedelt werden konnte, jener Bauer, der den Boden zu dem gemacht hat, was er heute ist – zur Kornkammer Europas.” “Zur Prinz-Eugen-Feier des Kreises Donau” (1941), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 77.

[T]he idea of soldier-peasantry was born in the SS. Men of the Waffen-SS, who know their way equally well around a weapon and a plow, will be settled on the Reich's borders. They will create the best bulwark against penetration by foreign peoples or foreign ideologies. The soldier-peasantry will form the safest foundation for the racial build-up and the future of the German Volk.<sup>1096</sup>

With liberation-*cum*-occupation at the hands of the Wehrmacht, the local cult of personality built around Eugene of Savoy really took off in Serbia-Banat. The 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eugene's final expulsion of the Ottomans from south Hungary, which culminated in his capture of Belgrade, and was also the "birthday of the German Banat" (1717), was celebrated with great pomp in 1942.<sup>1097</sup> A play about the Habsburg general's Balkan operations was written by a member of the division "Prinz Eugen" and performed at the National Theater in Belgrade<sup>1098</sup> by a Volksdeutsche cast on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Deutsche Ortsgruppe Belgrad.<sup>1099</sup>

Furthermore, the walls of the soldiers' rest home (Soldatenheim) in Pantschowa were painted with scenes from the romanticized version of Volksdeutsche history: from Prince Eugene's triumphant campaign, through the arrival of the first settlers, to the unification of the roles of peasant and soldier during the Military Border's existence. The last mural showed three generations of a Volksdeutsche family on a freshly plowed field: an old man, his adult son eagerly saluting a recruitment officer, and the little grandson

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<sup>1096</sup> "Deshalb ist in der SS der Gedanke des Wehrbauerntums entstanden. Männer der Waffen-SS werden an den Grenzen des Reiches angesiedelt werden, die gleich gut Waffe und Pflug zu führen verstehen. So wird der sicherste Wall gegen das Eindringen fremden Volkstums oder fremder Anschauungen geschaffen. Dieses Wehrbauerntum wird die sicherste Grundlage für den rassistischen Aufbau und für die Zukunft des deutschen Volkes werden." "Blut und Boden," in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 36.

<sup>1097</sup> "Das Jahr 1717 was der Geburtstag des deutschen Banates" "Prinz-Eugen-Feier in Grosskikinda," *BB*, August 19, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1098</sup> In reference to its Volksdeutsche community – the biggest in Serbia outside of the Banat – Belgrade itself was referred to as Kreis "Prinz Eugen."

<sup>1099</sup> Erich Queissner, "'Prinz Eugen in Belgrad.'" Eine Uraufführung im Belgrader National-Theater," *BB*, March 3, 1943, p. 5.

saluting like his father. The painting harked back to the proverb about the three generations needed to transform a pestilential wasteland into a fertile, cultivated landscape (Landschaft), drawing a parallel between the continuity of the seasons in a peasant's life and the continuity between generations. Overlooking all was a portrait of Hitler, symbolically bringing the Volksdeutsche full circle, back to the Reich.<sup>1100</sup>

Hitler alone could compete with the adulation accorded to the memory of Prince Eugene.<sup>1101</sup> On the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nazi 'seizure of power,' the *Banater Beobachter* article on the celebration in the village of Franzfeld stated explicitly: "The residents of Franzfeld have shown yet again . . . **how great their love is for the man who was and is our rescuer and liberator, who determinedly and securely guides the fortunes of the German people, and guides us all into a new and better future.**"<sup>1102</sup>

Eugene of Savoy and Adolf Hitler were seen as the shapers of local historical continuity, from original settlement of German-speakers in the Banat to their political and military triumph under Nazism. An example of this invented historical continuity was a series of Banat-wide charitt drives for the Reich in 1943, headed by the motto "Die Front kämpft – Die Heimat schafft" ("The Front Fights – the Heimat Accomplishes"). This charity drive was characterized as a debt owed by all Germans to Hitler after he

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<sup>1100</sup> Josef Beer (then Stabsleiter of the political section – Abteilung VI – of the division "Prinz Eugen"), "Aus dem Soldatenheim in Pantschowa. Bilder, die zu uns sprechen," *Volkswacht*, November 1, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>1101</sup> K. A. Wilke, the author of the aforementioned murals, was photographed one year later working on a larger-than-life portrait of Hitler, also commissioned by the soldiers' rest home in Pantschowa. *Volkswacht*, September 12-13, 1943, p. 2.

<sup>1102</sup> "Auch dismal bewiesen die Franzfelder . . . **wie gross ihre Liebe zu dem Manne ist, der unser Erretter und Befreier war und ist und der die Geschicke des deutschen Volkes festentschlossen und sicher leitet und uns alle in eine neue, bessere Zukunft führt.**" "Eindrucksvolle Feierstunde am 30. Januar in Franzfeld," *BB*, February 4, 1943, p. 5.

overcame the dominance of corrupt Jewish businessmen as well as the Banat Volksdeutsche's "unique declaration of loyalty to the Führer and the German people."<sup>1103</sup>

Volksdeutsche were supposed to feel an especially strong connection to Hitler,<sup>1104</sup> who had himself lived outside of the Reich's borders, and was therefore meant to understand the issues faced by Volksdeutsche better than anyone. Not daring to go so far as to claim Hitler for the ranks of the Volksdeutsche, Janko nonetheless asserted that Hitler's being at the Reich's helm meant even more to ethnic than to Reich Germans, since the former's need of him was implied to be greater.<sup>1105</sup> The advent of Nazism was thus consciously recognized as the high point of Volksdeutsche historical development. In moments of boldness, it was even deemed a response to Volksdeutsche's unique position and problems.

Reichsdeutsche also made the connection between the Banat's place in Hitler's Europe and Eugene of Savoy's imperial colonization project, which they reinterpreted as an early attempt at consolidating the Volk. An AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry) memo of November 1942 stated the point explicitly: "[T]he importance of the former 'Austrian Military Border' . . . cannot be overlooked in the politics of the Reich. Following the rebuilding of the Greater German Reich, the

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<sup>1103</sup> "ein einzigartiges Treuebekenntnis der Banater auf den Führer und ihr Deutsches Volkstum." "Die Front kämpft – Die Heimat schafft. Die Versammlungswelle ein einziges Treuebekenntnis der Banater," *BB*, June 4, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1104</sup> Valdis O. Lumans tentatively suggested in his study of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi) that before 1933 National Socialism may have even appealed to Volksdeutsche more than to Reichsdeutsche, since it united several themes especially close to the Volksdeutsche heart: völkisch nationalism, prejudice against Slavs, Jews and communists, a sense of exposure to a hostile environment, cultural and ethnic separation from this environment, economic corporatism and the idealization of the peasant experience. Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, p. 29.

<sup>1105</sup> "Rede zum Geburtstag des Führers," April 20, 1942, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 120.

historical political means used by Reich Marshall Prince Eugene regarding the incorporation of Southeast Europe into Greater Central Europe gain more credibility.”<sup>1106</sup>

This was never clearer than in the choice of Eugene’s name for the Waffen-SS division composed primarily of Banat Volksdeutsche men. The mythologized history of the ‘father of the German Banat’ was used repeatedly to lend credibility to the division “Prinz Eugen,” and to encourage acceptance of its toll on manpower and lives. Three themes predominated: the importance of volunteering for military duty in the Waffen-SS as a sign of true belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft; continuity with the original German settlers as peasants and border soldiers (Grenzer) defending their own villages as the ‘furthest watch of the Reich’; and the defense of the Heimat in both its narrow (Banat) and its broad sense (Greater Reich) from a familiar, proverbially savage and numerically superior enemy.

### Unsere Soldaten

Throughout the available print run of the *Banater Beobachter*, and in Sepp Janko’s speeches and other available Volksdeutsche sources, the word ‘volunteer’ (‘Freiwillige’) was used to describe members of the 7<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Mountain Division “Prinz Eugen” (7. SS-Freiwillige-Gebirgs-Division “Prinz Eugen”). This held true even after March 1, 1942, when Sepp Janko issued an official announcement of obligatory military service for the duration of the hostilities, which affected all able-bodied Volksdeutsche men

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<sup>1106</sup> “die Bedeutung der ehemaligen ‘Österreichischen Militärgrenze,’ [...] kann in der Reichspolitik nicht übersehen werden. Nach der Wiederbildung des Grossdeutschen Reiches gewinnen die historischen politischen Massnahmen des Reichsmarschalls Prinz Eugen in Hinblick auf die Einordnung des Südosteuropäischen Raumes in den Mitteleuropäischen Grossraum an Aktualität.” Abteilung Deutschland (AA) to German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, November 5, 1942, quoted in Manoschek, “*Serbien ist judenfrei*,” p. 27.

between the ages of 17 and 50 (see Chapter 7 for more “Prinz Eugen”). In spite of this state of affairs, which was very well known inside the Volksdeutsche community, the official emphasis on volunteering remained. Aside from the regular use of the term ‘volunteers’ in texts referring to members of the division “Prinz Eugen” and its combat performance, volunteering was a constant refrain used to encourage the Volksdeutsche left at home to give their all for the Reich. Speaking in March 1942, Sepp Janko elaborated on the forms sacrifice for the common cause of all Germans would take: “Now is the time for us to prove our will to live and our life strength. This means not only material sacrifice, such as grain deliveries, donations for the German Red Cross, collection of furs and other such drives, but also our readiness to aid the Reich in achieving final victory by standing by it with weapon in hand.”<sup>1107</sup>

In one of his wartime articles published in the *Donauzeitung*, Josef Beer explicitly – and paradoxically – linked volunteering with duty: “The principle of volunteering became a blood obligation and debt of honor for the Volksdeutsche.”<sup>1108</sup> The notion that Volksdeutsche owed a debt of honor to the Reich for the protection it extended them in the form of Wehrmacht units occupying Serbia since April 1941 was tied to the idea of the shared, unbreakable racial bond between all Germans. It opened the way to a related

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<sup>1107</sup> ““Heute stehen wir da, um unseren Lebenswillen und unsere Lebenskraft unter Beweis zu stellen. Nicht nur durch die materielle Opfer, wie es die Getreidelieferung, die Spenden für das Deutsche Rote Kreuz, die Pelzwarensammlung oder andere Spenden sind, sondern auch dadurch, dass wir mit der Waffe in der Hand an der Seite des Reiches den Endsieg zu erringen mithelfen.” “Einsatzbereitschaft im Banat. Schulungslager der Kreis- und Ortsbauernführer,” *Donauzeitung*, March 12, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>1108</sup> “Die Freiwilligkeit war den Volksdeutschen des Banats zur Bluts- und Ehrenpflicht geworden.” Josef Beer, “Aus dem Banater Boden gestumpft. Die Aufstellung und Ausbildung der SS-Division “Prinz Eugen”. Eine traditionsgebundene Kampfgemeinschaft und ihr General,” *Donauzeitung* [daily newspaper published by the Deutsche Volksgruppe of Kreis “Prinz Eugen” i.e. Belgrade], May 1-2, 1942, Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), N 756 Sammlung Wolfgang Vopersal Bundesvorstand der ehemaligen Waffen-SS e.V., file 149b, no page number.

notion: that of military service to the Reich as proof of one's manly virtue and, by extension, one's German credentials. "It is not only up to the Reich, but to us as well, to win the war. . . . **Whoever evades his task [in this] is a coward. And no German is a coward.**"<sup>1109</sup>

This avowed determination to show how "deadly in earnest"<sup>1110</sup> Banat Volksdeutsche were in their demonstration of Germanness through military service in the Waffen-SS was melded with an ideal of masculine virtue even before the division "Prinz Eugen" was created. An article in the May 1941 issue of the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat, Serbien und Ostsyrmien* (renamed after this, its first issue the *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien*) praised the Volksdeutsche participation in the April War: "We proved ourselves worthy of this great historical hour, and bore great self-sacrifice in a manly way."<sup>1111</sup> The Banat Volksdeutscher was represented not only as hard-working, thrifty, the exponent of a superior culture, and the descendant of brave soldiers, but as a soldier in his own right, steadfast and loyal, a stereotypical man's man.<sup>1112</sup> Coupled with equally rigid notions of womanhood, this masculine ideal was

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<sup>1109</sup> "Der Krieg ist nicht nur fürs Reich, sondern auch für uns zu gewinnen. . . . **Wer sich seiner Aufgabe entzieht, ist feige. Und feige darf kein Deutscher sein.**" "Zur Volkskundgebung in Weisskirchen," speech held on November 16, 1941, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 99.

<sup>1110</sup> "blutig ernst" Sepp Janko, "Zumgeleit," in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 19.

<sup>1111</sup> "Wir haben uns dieser grossen geschichtlichen Stunde wuerdig erwiesen und waren mannhaft zum grossen Opfergang angetreten." Anonymous, "Neuen Aufgaben entgegen," *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat, Serbien und Ostsyrmien*, May 1941, p. 1.

<sup>1112</sup> Writing in his self-serving history-*cum*-memoir long after the war, Sepp Janko continuef this theme when he wrote about the possibility for Volksdeutsche to have changed sides once the tide of war turned against Germany: "A respectable German does not change sides as soon as the situation becomes dangerous. That is when he stands most firmly on [the side he chose], supporting the good cause he believes in." ("Ein anständiger Deutscher wechselt nicht die Front, wenn as anfängt, gefährlich zu werden. Er steht dann erst recht zu den Seinen und zu seiner guten Sache, an die er glaubt.") Janko, *Weg*, p. 301.

contrasted by views of the enemy as corrupt in race, politics *and* gender (see segment “Banditen” below).

Official appeals to volunteer for armed service drew on the Volksdeutsche identification with three conduits of tradition: family, community and the historical memory of the Grenzer on the Habsburg Military Border. Announcements of deaths in the *Banater Beobachter* frequently emphasized that the deceased had been a volunteer or the parent of volunteers.<sup>1113</sup> The Volksdeutsche parents’ duty to raise soldiers willing to give their lives for the Reich was stressed at rallies as well as in death notices. For example, a collection drive organized by the Volksgruppe’s propaganda office bore the motto “Sieg des Waffens – Sieg des Kindes” (“Victory of the Weapon – Victory of the Child”).<sup>1114</sup>

Lest these articles gained too grim an aspect by associating military service exclusively with death, Janko sent a memo to all Volksgruppe leaders on the village level exhorting them to submit suitably uplifting articles for publication. He even proposed suitable topics, such as fathers of grown sons, preferably World War I veterans, presenting themselves as well as several of their children for service in “Prinz Eugen” or mothers of many children, their husbands away at war, bringing in the harvest with the help of neighbors. The articles were meant to be upbeat and stress joy in active service to the Volk, self-sacrifice, faith in National Socialism, and the militarized uprightness of the

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<sup>1113</sup> E.g. a victim of drowning from Tschestereg and the three living sons of a man killed in a road accident in Deutsch-Etschka were both described as volunteers. “Aus dem Banat. Tschestereg. Soldatenbegräbnis in Tschestereg” and “Aus dem Banat. Deutsch-Etschka. Todesfall,” both *BB*, July 2, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1114</sup> “Tausende Volksgenossen hören unsere Redner. Grosser Erfolg der Versammlungswelle “Sieg der Waffen – Sieg des Kindes,” *BB*, July 9, 1942, p. 5.

Volksdeutsche civilians.<sup>1115</sup> Janko encouraged the myth of a joyful Banat community rushing to volunteer to such an extent that it was falsely put about he had been among the first to volunteer for “Prinz Eugen.”<sup>1116</sup>

Some members of a farming population might have liked their adult sons to become soldiers for an ideology, but many would certainly object to any loss of manpower needed for work on the land. Janko’s circular suggests that the general population’s attitude to recruitment for the Waffen-SS was somewhat less than enthusiastic. If upbeat articles were needed, this was not due only to the practice common in the Reich press of making any event seem like a German victory. The readership in the Banat clearly needed some convincing, as well.

In addition to the dutiful invocation of the “fatefully connected community of all Germans, whether Reichsdeutsche or Volksdeutsche,”<sup>1117</sup> an effort was made to render the emphasis on volunteering for the Reich more acceptable to the Banat Volksdeutsche by placing it in a context evoking both National Socialism and their local identification as peasant-soldiers guarding the ethnic borders of the Greater Reich. The participation of “Prinz Eugen” in the German war effort was represented not as a purely local concern, but as part of a continuity of German struggle.<sup>1118</sup> This struggle was seen to stretch across

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<sup>1115</sup> Janko to Ortsleiter, September 25, 1942, Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131 Nemačka narodnosna grupa u Banatu i Srbiji (Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien) – Bečkerek (Zrenjanin) (1941-1944), 1941-1944, folder 1942, document 1161/42.

<sup>1116</sup> Beer, “Aus dem Banater Boden gestumpft” (1942), BA MA, N 756, file 149b, no page number.

<sup>1117</sup> “Die schicksalsverbundene Gemeinschaft aller Deutschen, or Reichs- oder Volksdeutsche,” invoked by Josef Zich in his article on the Nazified Christmas celebration in 1942, “Gemeinsame Feierstunde im Zeichen der SS,” *BB*, December 25-27, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>1118</sup> The purpose of placing the participation of the Volksdeutsche in the Waffen-SS within the context of a broader ideological and racial struggle – in the East especially – was served also by the occasional column “Was SS-Kriegsberichter sehen und schreiben.” See examples in *BB*, April 23, 1943, p. 4 and May 14, 1943, p. 4.

time (from the Wars of Liberation, through World War I and the Nazi struggle for power, to the millions who died for Germany in the ongoing war<sup>1119</sup>) and space (the struggle against Communist Partisans in the Balkans was related to the warfare in the East, especially to the example set by the German army at Stalingrad<sup>1120</sup>).

The Volksdeutsche soldiers' model was Prince Eugene of Savoy himself, who had fought in the Battle of Vienna (1683) as a young volunteer.<sup>1121</sup> Serving in the armies of the German Reich was therefore a part of the Volksdeutsche heritage, a true "heart's desire,"<sup>1122</sup> which many had concealed for decades out of fear of their hostile surroundings.<sup>1123</sup> With the coming of National Socialism, the Volksdeutsche were seen to have come of age, and accepted the German soldier's uniform.<sup>1124</sup> The Nazified version of "Prinz-Eugen-Lied" contained the following stanza: "Adolf Hitler, our oath of loyalty/Accept today once again/As from Prince Eugene's soldier."<sup>1125</sup> This view of the continuity of the German Grenzer tradition from Prince Eugene to Hitler reinforced the ideal of the brave volunteer as a true member of the Volksgemeinschaft.

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<sup>1119</sup> From a speech by SS-Ostufaf. Burghardt, commander of a part of "Prinz Eugen" stationed in Panschow, included in "Heldengedenkfeier in Panschow. Rekrutenvereidigung des SS-Geb.-Jäger-Btl. "Prinz Eugen"," *BB*, March 24, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1120</sup> "Die deutschen Volksgruppen und der totale Krieg," *BB*, February 7, 1943, quoted in "Aus Zeitschriften und Zeitungen," *Nation und Staat*, Heft 6, March 1943, pp. 210-211; Sepp Wildner speaking in Werschetz, cited in "Grosskundgebungen im Zeichen des Siegeswillens," *BB*, March 14, 1943, pp. 2, 6.

<sup>1121</sup> Kumm, p. 13.

<sup>1122</sup> "Herzenswunsch" Beer, "Aus dem Banater Boden gestumpft" (1942), BA MA, N 756, file 149b, no page number.

<sup>1123</sup> "Wir stehen für den Krieg," New Year's Day speech delivered on Radio Belgrade on January 1, 1943, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 139.

<sup>1124</sup> "Kriegsweihnacht 1942," article appeared in *Schaffende Jugend*, Christmas 1942 edition, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 137.

<sup>1125</sup> "Adolf Hitler, unsre Treue/Schwoeren wir Dir heut aufs neue/Als Soldat von Prinz Eugen!" Britz, "Prinz-Eugen-Lied," reproduced in "Prinz-Eugen-Feier in Grosskikinda," *BB*, August 19, 1942, p. 5.

The Grenzer tradition thus lent the introduction of obligatory military duty for Banat Volksdeutsche an air of historical justification and, even, inevitability. Otto Kumm, the Reichsdeutsche SS-Brigadeführer who took command of “Prinz Eugen” in July 1943, concluded his self-serving history of the division with the following remark: “The division . . . did its best, and its brave Swabians and Saxons were truly worthy descendents of the men from the old border regiments.”<sup>1126</sup> In the same vein, the division’s original commander, Romanian Volksdeutsche SS-Obergruppenführer Arthur Phleps was touted as a prime example of the German settlers’ racial and spiritual integrity, their ethos of hard work and faith in the Greater Reich.<sup>1127</sup> Phleps identified himself as “stemming from the oldest German border line of the Southeast.”<sup>1128</sup> He stood for the Volksdeutsche serving under him, and bolstered Volksdeutsche claims to equality with Reichsdeutsche: “The Führer can rest easy. Whatever task we Germans from the Southeast tackle will be accomplished.”<sup>1129</sup>

The sense of participating in a struggle greater than the fighting in the Balkans was especially important on the home front (Heimatfront). National Socialist ideology emphasized its importance as the backbone of the armed forces, due to the ‘stab in the back’ legend regarding Germany’s defeat in World War I.<sup>1130</sup> More importantly, the home front bore the brunt of industrial and – in the Banat especially – agricultural

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<sup>1126</sup> “Die Division . . . hat ihr Bestes gegeben, die braven Schwaben und Sachsen waren fürwahr würdige Nachfahren der alten Grenzer-Regimenter.” Kumm, p. 402.

<sup>1127</sup> “Der General des Südostdeutschtums,” *Volkswacht*, July 25-26, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>1128</sup> “dem ältesten deutschen Grenzstamm des Südostens entstammend” “Worte des Kommandeurs der SS-Freiw. Division “Prinz Eugen”,” *Volkswacht*, May 24, 1942, BA MA, N 756, File 149b, no page number.

<sup>1129</sup> “Der Führer kann beruhigt sein. Wo wir Südostdeutsche anfassen, da wird ganze Arbeit geleistet!” “Worte des Kommandeurs der SS-Freiw. Division “Prinz Eugen”” (1942), BA MA, N 756, File 149b, no page number.

<sup>1130</sup> E.g. “Was im Reich gilt, hat auch für uns Bedeutung. Rücksichtslose Ausmerzungen der Volksschädlinge,” *BB*, December 4, 1942, p. 5.

production for the war. In the Banat this meant the equation of the peasants' hard work at home with the risks taken by soldiers on the front: "For this [final victory] fights not only the soldier, but also the Heimat. For this, not only the soldier puts up with need and hardship, but also the Heimat."<sup>1131</sup>

A steadfast home front was crucial for German victory, but not enough in and of itself. In a rare moment of graphic honesty as to what awaited those who fulfilled their full debt of honor to the Reich, Janko wrote: "There are different kinds of sacrifice: we are not scared off by the sacrifice of one's own body and blood."<sup>1132</sup> Such honesty was an exception: in portraying the relations between the home front and the front lines, the Banat Volksgruppenführung took a page from the Reich's book and emphasized that, while bound by unbreakable bonds of blood and a mutual obligation,<sup>1133</sup> the two were very different.

The home front was seen as a natural extension of – yet separate from – the front lines. The pictures adorning the 1943 *Kalender* reinforced this illusion of undisturbed domesticity and an uninterrupted farming tradition, the cycle of seasons and succeeding generations. Where explicitly Nazi symbols appeared, they were placed in a civilian context: a Nazi party rally, a May Day celebration, a solstice ritual. Even the month of

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<sup>1131</sup> "Darum kämpft nicht nur der Soldat allein, es kämpft auch die Heimat. Darum trägt nicht nur der Soldat Not und Entbehrung allein, es trägt sie auch die Heimat." "Aufruf zum Winterhilfswerk 1942/43," in Janko, *Reden*, p. 136.

<sup>1132</sup> "Es gibt verschiedene Opfer: wir schrecken nicht zurück vor den Opfern des eigenen Körpers, des eigenen Blutes." "Zur Prinz-Eugen-Feier des Kreises Donau" (1941), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 81.

<sup>1133</sup> The soldiers on the front who took up the Volksgruppe's *Kalender* or a copy of the *Banater Beobachter* could breathe easy in the knowledge "that the Heimat will not let them down, and will take care of their future and of their families at home, just as they who are on the front take care of the Heimat." ("dass die Heimat sie nicht im Stiche last und für ihre Zukunft und ihre Angehörigen zu Hause sorgt; so, wie sie an der Front für die Heimat sorgen.") Janko, "Zumgeleit," in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 19.

March, the month when the appeal to volunteer for “Prinz Eugen” had been issued one year earlier, bore the stylized image of a triumphant soldier disconnected from any representation or hint of actual fighting.<sup>1134</sup> The need to portray the Heimat as a peaceful refuge<sup>1135</sup> fatefully tied to, yet unaffected by actual fighting was as strong in the Banat as in the Reich, if not stronger in view of the Banat Volksdeutsche’s more intense understanding of the dangers menacing them (see segment “Banditen” below).

One way for the Volksgruppenführung to downplay the violent nature of warfare was the regular *Banater Beobachter* column “Front und Heimat” in which family members at home could send greetings to their men fighting with “Prinz Eugen” and vice-versa. Another were photo stories which presented the life of a soldier as an extended holiday in nature,<sup>1136</sup> struggle against an invisible and, by implication, cowardly enemy<sup>1137</sup> or effortless military triumph.<sup>1138</sup>

Another strong incentive for Volksdeutsche to give all for the Reich was the emphasis on “Prinz Eugen” defending the borders of Europe, not only because their ancestors had done so, but to prevent the arrival of warfare into the peaceful, idyllic Banat. In principle, this goal was supposed to make the sacrifice of soldiers’ lives bearable and worthwhile. It was coupled with the celebration of youth and death at funerals, reported on with increasing frequency as the war progressed and clashes between “Prinz Eugen” and Yugoslav guerrillas became more common.

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<sup>1134</sup> Janko, *Kalender*, pp. 5-16.

<sup>1135</sup> See p. 284.

<sup>1136</sup> *Volkswacht*, June 14, 1942, pp. 3-4 and November 8, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>1137</sup> Photographs from the fighting in Bosnia – though no fighting was ever shown – were published in *BB*, March 15, 1943, p. 2; March 16, 1943, p. 1; March 17, 1943, p. 1; March 24, 1943, p. 1; March 25, 1943, p. 1; April 5, 1943, p. 1; and April 14, 1943, p. 1. These are rare examples of reporting on the war in the Balkans on the front page of *BB*, which was usually devoted to reports from other theaters of war.

<sup>1138</sup> “Vorwärts “Prinz Eugen”!”, *Volkswacht*, July 25-26, 1943, p. 4.

The emphasis on the sacrifice of life as a supreme service to the Volk, the ultimate proof of the deceased Volksdeutsche soldier's Germanness, could only go so far as a propaganda tool. Newspaper articles and radio programs might well claim that there was no such thing as the dead or the yet unborn in the Volksgemeinschaft, but only the unity of the Volk in an eternal present, the cycle of seasons and generations.<sup>1139</sup> The creation of the division "Prinz Eugen" could be claimed as the point at which "the Banat came alive."<sup>1140</sup> Memorials for fallen comrades could be staged as something other than celebrations of the dead (Totenfeier),<sup>1141</sup> but for all these efforts, the deaths of Volksdeutsche men in Reich uniform could not be put in an unequivocally positive light.

Far more effective was the attempt to show a silver lining, as in a purported letter from the father of a fallen soldier to Sepp Janko: "Deeply affected by the loss of my youngest as I am, I am just as deeply proud of him, for he died a hero's death so that our Volk and the eternal Greater Germany can live."<sup>1142</sup> Speaking at the funeral of two youths from the village of Boka, one of whom was killed fighting in the East, the other in Montenegro, Josef Beer made the same connection between the death of the individual and the survival of the Volk as well as belief in a Greater Reich born in struggle and sacrifice: "Every little bit of land where German heroes lie at peace in eternal sleep will

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<sup>1139</sup> "Gedenken der grossen Söhne," in Schmidt, pp. 45-46.

<sup>1140</sup> "Damit kam Leben in das Banat." Beer, "Aus dem Banater Boden gestumpft" (1942), BA MA, N 756, file 149b, no page number.

<sup>1141</sup> Landesführung der Deutschen Mannschaft to all Ortseinheiten der Deutschen Mannschaft, February 16, 1944, Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder "Stabseinheit der Deutschen Mannschaft," document 31.

<sup>1142</sup> "In tiefer Ergriffenheit über den Verlust meines Jüngsten muss ich eben so stolz auf ihn sein, weil er den Heldentod starb, damit unser Volk und das ewige Grossdeutschland lebe."

"Heldengedenktag," speech held on March 21, 1943, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 163.

Toeing the ideological line set down by Janko's proposal for suitably uplifting newspaper submissions, the purported author of this letter also claimed that his two surviving sons were still in uniform and "at their posts." "Heldengedenktag" (1943), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 163.

be our homeland [Heimatland], the soil which drank German blood will become our living space [Lebensraum].”<sup>1143</sup>

This imagery built directly on that of a savage, depopulated Banat landscape made fertile, civilized and, above all, *German* by the labor and sacrifices borne by generations of peasants. This idea of the transformative nature of agricultural work birthed the image of “our blood [which] has mixed with the blood of our comrades from the Reich on the soil of war . . . this is the eternal chain, which will never let us go our lonesome way again.”<sup>1144</sup> Soil became sacred – became, in fact, Heimat – through the sacrifice of lives, blood which made a unified Volk shed for the Volk.

The image of a bulwark of soldiers’ graves which surrounded Germany and was watched over by living soldiers<sup>1145</sup> was a graphic representation of the siege mentality engendered in ethnic Germans by their long territorial separation from the Reich and their imagined (mental) separation from their host society. Such gruesome images were cold comfort for the grieving. Therefore the imagery turned full circle back to agricultural metaphor, to which a farming population would be most receptive. Soldiers’ graves became the “field and seed”<sup>1146</sup> of eternal victory, Germany itself – a wreath of flowers

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<sup>1143</sup> ““Jedes Stückchen Land, wo deutsche Helden zum ewigen Schläfe ruhen, wird uns zum Heimatland, der mit dem deutschen Blut getränkte Boden wird uns zum Lebensraum.”” Josef Beer quoted in “Totenehrung in Boka,” *BB*, July 22, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1144</sup> “unser Blut [hat sich] mit dem Blut der Kameraden des Reiches auf dem Boden des Krieges vermengt . . . dies die ewige Kette ist, die uns nie wieder einsame Wege gehen lässt” L. Schmidt, “Frontbrief eines Schwabensohnes,” in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 70.

<sup>1145</sup> “Heldengedenktag” (1943), in Janko, *Reden*, pp. 159-160.

In this speech (p. 160), Janko gave a tip of the hat – but not much more – to the fact that death as the ultimate meaning of sacrifice was only conceivable by those mourning a “dead hero in the family” (“einen toten Helden aus seiner Familie”).

<sup>1146</sup> “Acker und Saaten,” from a poem by Herbert Böhme suggested as suitable reading at the heroes’ memorial day (Heldengedenktag). Landesführung der Deuthen Mannschaft to all Ortseinheiten der Deutschen Mannschaft (1944), Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder “Stabseinheit der Deutschen Manschaft,” document 31.

left on those graves.<sup>1147</sup> The individual literally joined the soil worked by his ancestors, which would be worked in the future by his descendants, ensuring that the soil of Heimat would bloom and live on.

The enemy who threatened to destroy Heimat and Volk was the majority Slavic population of the Balkans. Described occasionally as “sub-human,”<sup>1148</sup> but most frequently as ‘bandits’ (‘Banditen’), the Slavic enemy was embodied especially in the communist Partisans. Despite the racial and cultural superiority which the Volksdeutsche felt, they were nonetheless acutely aware of their condition as a numerical minority whose actions in the occupation years attracted the animosity of the majority population. Their fear of retribution was refracted through National Socialist anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic ideology.

This mixed feeling of pride and fear was heightened after “Prinz Eugen” left the Banat in fall 1942. Thereafter, the importance of maintaining the steadfastness of the home front and keeping the actual fighting away from the Heimat (both the Banat and the Greater Reich) gained in importance. Speaking to the new recruits assigned to the Enlightenment Section (Aufklärungsabteilung) of “Prinz Eugen,” its commander, SS-Hauptsturmführer Köhler painted a terrifying image of the wasteland that the Banat would become if overrun by the dreaded Slavic-Bolshevik-Jewish hordes:

The storm flood of the Jewish-Bolshevik plague would cover our homeland, followed by death and annihilation [Vernichtung] in its most terrifying forms. My comrades from the Banat, Croatia, Slovakia, Siebenbürgen [Transylvania] and the Reich, where your towns, villages and farms flourish today, smoking piles of

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<sup>1147</sup> From a poem by W. Flex suggested as suitable reading at the heroes’ memorial day (Heldengedenktage). Landesführung der Deutschen Mannschaft to all Ortseinheiten der Deutschen Mannschaft (1944), Istorijski arhiv Zrenjanin, fund 131, folder “Stabseinheit der Deutschen Mannschaft,” document 31.

<sup>1148</sup> “Untermenschen” Adam Paull, “Unserem toten Kameraden. Einst kommt der Tag der Rache...”, *BB*, February 27, 1943, p. 2.

rubble would stand. Death would look out of the window from which your wives and sweethearts greet you with joy. The threshold over which your siblings and children tripped, coming to greet your homecoming with laughing eyes, would no longer be there. Your weeping mother could no longer embrace you, for she would have already embraced death. All these people and everything you hold dear would lie annihilated, mutilated and dishonored beneath the rubble of what you call house and homeland.<sup>1149</sup>

The war was as much an apocalyptic battle between races and ideologies for the Banat Volksdeutsche as it was for the Reichsdeutsche. However, for the former the perceived threat was rendered even greater by their long experience of living next to a despised Slavic majority. For all their hysterical delusions about the power of world Jewry and the Slavic ‘hordes,’ most Reich Germans had no comparable experience. The siege mentality of the Volksdeutsche of East and Southeast Europe was based on their real experiences as a minority, heightened by their acceptance of Nazi ideology.

### Banditen

The Axis invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 was the crucial event which completed the fusing of images of the enemy already extant in the National Socialist worldview. The Jew, the Bolshevik and the Slav melded into the face of a single global conspiracy against Germany, an extension and radicalization of the “Muscovite-Asiatic

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<sup>1149</sup> “Die Sturmflut der jüdisch-bolschewistischen Pest hätte sich über unsere Heimat ergossen, und der Tod und die Vernichtung in ihren schrecklichsten Formen wären ihrer Spur gefolgt. Dort, meine Kameraden aus dem Banat, Kroatien, der Slowakei, Siebenbürgen und aus dem Reich, wo heute eure Städte, Dörfer und Höfe blühen, würden rauchende Trümmerhaufen sein, aus jenen Fenstern, aus denen Euch freundlich Eure Frauen und Mädchen grüssen, würde der Tod sehen, keine Türschwelle würde mehr da sein, über die Euch Eure Geschwister und Kinder entgegenstürzen würden, um mit lachenden Augen Eure Heimkehr zu begrüßen, und keine Mutter würde Euch vor Glück weinend in die Arme schliessen, weil sie schon der Tod in die Arme geschlossen hätte. All diese Menschen und alles, was Euch lieb ist, das läge vernichtet, verstümmelt und geschändet unter den Trümmern dessen, was Ihr Euer Haus und Eure Heimat nanntet.” “Soldaten des Führers. Feierliche Vereidigung von Rekruten am Adolf-Hitler-Platz in Betschkerek,” *BB*, June 8, 1943, p. 5.

flood” threatening to destroy European i.e. German civilization.<sup>1150</sup> This final creation of the compound enemy in the Nazi worldview contributed to the pronounced savagery of the warfare on the Eastern Front and to the Holocaust.

In the Banat, however, the acceptance of the compound Jewish-Slavic-communist enemy was modified by the Volksdeutsche’s special attachment to their Banat Heimat and their historical experience of living among a majority Slavic population. Although the Banat was also inhabited by ethnic Romanians, ethnic Hungarians and others, the Slavs (Serbs) were a majority and were singled out by the Volksdeutsche as *the* enemy.<sup>1151</sup> While the Banat Volksdeutsche accepted the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy threatening the Greater Reich, their concern for local safety specifically targeted the Serbs and especially the Partisans, most of whom were of Serbian and Montenegrin descent. The Slavic-communist enemy was sometimes represented as an agent of Jewish and Russian Bolshevism, but the derogatory language and images used in depictions of South Slavs emphasized their specific Balkan backwardness and primitiveness. In the words of Arthur Phleps: “The armies of Eastern fiends are still standing, descended from those savage hordes which ravaged our realm centuries ago.”<sup>1152</sup>

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<sup>1150</sup> “die moskowitzisch-asiatische Überschwemmung” Förster, pp. 99-100.

<sup>1151</sup> “Images of the enemy different from those in the Reich predominated among the Banat Volksdeutsche.” (“Unter den Volksdeutschen im Banat herrschten andere Feindbilder als im Reich.”) Shimizu, p. 5.

<sup>1152</sup> “Noch stehen Armeen der östlichen Unholde, Nachkommen jener wilden Horden, die vor Jahrhunderten unsere Gefilde verwüstend durchschritten.” Arthur Phleps continued: “But they will be annihilated, for the Führer – that peerless soldier – stands at the head of our warriors and increases our strength tenfold.” (“Sie werden aber vernichtet werden, den vor unseren Streitern steht der Führer, – unerreicht auch als Soldat, – und verzehnfacht unsere Kräfte.”) “Worte des Kommandeurs der SS-Freiw. Division “Prinz Eugen”” (1942), BA MA, N 756, File 149b, no page number.

What made this enemy especially threatening was the fact that, despite their sense of superiority and attachment to the Reich, the Volksdeutsche remained acutely aware of their minority status. Johann Wüsch took the unreconstructed Nazi line in his postwar exculpatory writings, in which he described the expulsion of the Banat Volksdeutsche after the war as part of the great struggle between the Germanic West and the Slavic East, represented most clearly in Slavic population pressure caused by the fact that Slavs “bred” much faster than Germans.<sup>1153</sup> Relative rates of procreation aside, the Slavic population of the Balkans was certainly more numerous than the ethnic German one, though any willfully ill-natured Slavic racial intention existed only in the imagination of the local Nazis.

The Banat Jews were deported to Belgrade in August 1941 (see Chapter 5). The physical presence absence of Jews seems to have been the main factor in the relatively equivocal stance the Banat Volksdeutsche took regarding the so-called Jewish Question. Nazi racial policy in Germany’s Eastern conquests saw the true obverse of the Jew as not just the German but as the *ethnic* German, since it was the latter who profited most directly from the dispossession and murdering of Jews.<sup>1154</sup> In the Banat, the establishment of a Volksdeutsche administration, the physical absence of Jews there so early into the occupation, and the fact that Jewish property was speedily Aryanized, combined to

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<sup>1153</sup> “vermehrten sich” Wüsch, *Ursachen und Hintergründe*, p. 14.

Janko chimed in in the same vein: “It is not that *I* wanted to do something which then led to disaster, but that those *others*, long hostile to us, decided on and planned this disaster – our annihilation – long before [the war]. . . . Our ultimate defeat was not due to the supposed “ill nature of our cause,” but to the overwhelming number of our enemies.” (“Nicht *ich* hatte irgend etwas gewollt, das dann in eine Katastrophe geführt hat, sondern die *anderen*, die uns seit langem angefeindet haben, hatten die Katastrophe, unsere Vernichtung, längst vorher geplant und beschlossen. . . . Dass wir schliesslich doch unterlegen sind, lag nicht an einer vielleicht “schlechten Sache”, sondern an der Überzahl der Gegner.”) Janko, *Weg*, p. 301.

<sup>1154</sup> Bergen, “The Nazi Concept of ‘Volksdeutsche’,” pp. 570-571.

produce a highly localized sense of superiority over the ‘Jewish enemy.’ Anomalous as it may seem, given the centrality of anti-Semitism in the Nazi worldview, anti-Semitism was most prominent in the *Banater Beobachter* in articles taken from the Reich press.<sup>1155</sup>

Rarely did anti-Semitism feature as the central theme of texts written by the *Banater Beobachter*’s local contributors. This is not to say that the paper was not anti-Semitic.<sup>1156</sup> It was, but it tended to subsume Nazi anti-Semitism to (or at least combine it with) more pressing local concerns: negative racial attitudes to the majority Slavic population and growing fears of communist success. The fact that the Banat Volksgruppenführung lacked the material means to oppress the Banat’s Slavic population as thoroughly as some Volksdeutsche may have liked<sup>1157</sup> only added to this sense of threat.

A clear change of tone over time is discernible in newspaper texts dealing with the Balkans, Serbs and (South) Slavs. During “Prinz Eugen”’s training and first deployment in southern Serbia and Montenegro in 1942, the tone was one of easy superiority and mockery. News from Serbia proper consisted of brief articles intended to illustrate the backward, primitive nature of Balkan lifestyles. These stories represented the average Serbian peasant smallholder as dishonest (diluting milk with water,<sup>1158</sup>

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<sup>1155</sup> E.g. Prof. Dr. Johann von Leers, “Um das Blut der Nichtjuden. Der Bolschewismus ist ein einziger Ritualmord der Juden” (taken from *VB*), *BB*, May 12, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>1156</sup> A rare example of a locally produced text centered entirely around rabid anti-Semitism would be H. H. (member of “Prinz Eugen”), “Weltpest Juda,” *Volkswacht*, June 27-28, 1943, p. 5. Though penned for local consumption, its tone – and the design of the title, which includes the Star of David and snakes forming the word ‘Juda’ – differs in no way from texts filling the pages of the Reich press.

<sup>1157</sup> See pp. 230-233.

<sup>1158</sup> “Nachrichten aus Serbien. Ueberschlaun [in original] Milchpantscher,” *BB*, August 18, 1942, p. 6.

making food deliveries to major cities difficult or selling food at exorbitant prices<sup>1159</sup>), superstitious and naïve,<sup>1160</sup> prone to criminality and violence,<sup>1161</sup> and incapable of a normal family life (the titles say it all: “Man Murdered by His Eighth Wife,”<sup>1162</sup> “Niece Breastfeeds Her Own Uncle”<sup>1163</sup>). It is highly indicative of Volksdeutsche attitudes towards the non-German inhabitants of the Banat that the *Banater Beobachter* only ever mentions the latter in relation to crime and labor duty. Even those qualities which the German valued in himself – devotion to tradition, a vital folk art, resourcefulness in an unforgiving landscape – became in the Serb signs not of a close connection with the soil but of hereditary laziness.<sup>1164</sup>

For those Volksdeutsche who did not take the *Banater Beobachter*, the point was reiterated on the radio: ethnic Germans differed from their non-German neighbors in countenance, stature, bearing, manner of thought, speech, music, funerary customs.<sup>1165</sup> These differences were the fruit of racial distinction and of German work in the Southeast, biology as well as willed human action. “Your ancestors’ work in the German

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<sup>1159</sup> Peter Staadlbaur, “Banat – Land des Ackerbaues. Wertvoller Beitrag für die Ernährungssicherung des europäischen Raumes,” *Donauzeitung*, April 18, 1943, BA Berlin, R 8034 II, volume 4780, p. 13.

<sup>1160</sup> E.g. alleged reports of an old man from the provinces duped and robbed while on a visit to Belgrade (“Nachrichten aus Serbien. Abenteuer eines Greises,” *BB*, August 1, 1942, p. 6), and of a man duped by self-professed white witches and a stranger invited to act as godfather for the man’s newborn child (“Nachrichten aus Serbien. Der Taufpate war nicht abergläubich,” *BB*, August 14, 1942, p. 6).

<sup>1161</sup> E.g. a lurid tale of implied lesbian jealousy, “Mordversuch an der Freundin,” *BB*, August 22, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>1162</sup> “Ein Mann von seiner achten Frau ermordet,” *BB*, September 3, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>1163</sup> “Nichte säugt den eigenen Onkel,” *BB*, November 8, 1942, p. 6.

<sup>1164</sup> E.g. SS-Schtz. Sepp Kucht (member of “Prinz Eugen”), “Opanken,” *Volkswacht*, November 15, 1942, p. 5. The article deals with traditional Serbian peasant footwear (sing. opanak, pl. opanci) as a prime example of Serbian folk art and sense of tradition. The ironic tone of the article lampoons these qualities as stubborn resistance to change. Lest the point be lost on the reader, the text ends with the assertion that Balkan influences in the ‘German’ Banat reach only as far as one can find people wearing opanci.

<sup>1165</sup> “Ein Wort über Ehre, Blut und Boden,” in Schmidt, p. 54.

Danube region is a major achievement of German blood . . . we do not scoff at foreign peoples, we have simply never underestimated our enemies and have always faced them like true knights.”<sup>1166</sup> The enemy, it was implied, was and remained rather less than knightly.

For the Banat Volksdeutsche the true antithesis of the orderly, hard-working German was not so much the crafty Jew as the lazy, dirty, dishonest Slav. The Banat was seen as purely German soil, part of the greater Germanic Lebensraum, whereas everything south of the River Danube supposedly remained as savage as it had been at the beginning of German settlement. Special contempt was reserved for major cities, particularly the Serbian capital Belgrade, and for mountainous Bosnia, a “land of terror,”<sup>1167</sup> the very antithesis of the flat, fertile Banat.

Belgrade was seen with the provincial’s mixture of awe and contempt towards a big city. Well might Eugene of Savoy have wanted to strengthen Belgrade as the “extreme border town and bulwark of Christendom”<sup>1168</sup> in the Southeast. By the early 1940s, a German eye found little to support Eugene’s noble intentions. One text purporting to be a private letter described Belgrade as a place where a cacophony of noises reigned supreme as early as 7 AM and drove the inhabitants to drink, where a streetcars did not so much run as “rattle along like a lightly damaged armored train,”<sup>1169</sup> and “like everywhere in the Balkans, even the smallest work assignment is accompanied

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<sup>1166</sup> “Das Werk deiner Ahnen im donauischen Raum ist eine Hochtat deutsches Blutes . . . wir verachten fremde Völker nicht, selbst unsere Feinde haben wir nie unterschätzt und sind ihnen immer ritterlich gegenübergetreten” “Ein Wort über Ehre, Blut und Boden,” in Schmidt, p. 55.

<sup>1167</sup> “Schreckensland” Kriegsberichter Dr. Karl Bier, “Deutsche Kulturträger in den bosnischen Bergen. Unbedankte Kulturarbeit seit sechs Jahrzehnten,” *BB*, December 2, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>1168</sup> “dem äussersten Grenzort und Vormauer der ganzen Christenheit” Eugene of Savoy quoted in Franz Thierfelder, “Peterwardein,” in Janko, *Kalender*, p. 44.

<sup>1169</sup> “Sie rasselt daher wie ein leicht havariertes Panzerzug.” “Brief aus Belgrad,” *Volkswacht*, August 30, 1942, p. 5.

by a lot of fuss and noise.”<sup>1170</sup> Another text stated explicitly the reason behind this chaos: Belgrade was a “human mill between East and West,”<sup>1171</sup> a second Babel of constant construction lacking any pattern or reason, in which languages and ethnicities mixed and none but Germans managed to preserve their racial and national identity. Wehrmacht soldiers’ letters from Serbia and the Banat indicate that in 1941 the local Jewish population could not be visibly distinguished from the Slavs i.e. the Jews of Serbia were not ‘racial Jews’ (‘Rassejuden’). If the Jews could not be clearly and easily distinguished, then all of Southeast Europe was ‘Jewified.’<sup>1172</sup> Belgrade was Southeast Europe in a nutshell, overlaid by the dislike of urban centers so prominent in Nazi rhetoric, with its horror of racial mixing.

On the other hand, descriptions of the Bosnian landscape and population blended contempt of all things Balkan with the mentality of a Volksgruppe engaged in ideological warfare. They represented a localized exacerbation of racial attitudes and became especially prominent as the division “Prinz Eugen” saw action in Bosnia and Croatia proper in 1943-1944. The notion that Banat Volksdeutsche would be especially well endowed for this kind of anti-partisan warfare because they knew their enemy was patently untrue. Their supposed intimate knowledge consisted of ethnic and cultural prejudices compounded by a lack of prewar exposure to any region of Yugoslavia other than the Banat. Added to this were wartime racial stereotypes employed to motivate Waffen-SS soldiers and the civilians left behind on the home front.

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<sup>1170</sup> “Wie überall auf dem Balkan wird auch hier die kleinste Arbeitsleistung mit erheblichen Umständen und Geräuschen verbunden.” *Ibid.*

<sup>1171</sup> Franz Thaler, “Aus dem Leben des Donauschwaben. Belgrad – die Menschenmühle zwischen Orient und Okzident,” *BB*, January 16, 1943, p. 5.

<sup>1172</sup> Walter Manoschek, ed., “*Es gibt nur eines für das Judentum: Vernichtung*”: *Das Judenbild in deutschen Soldatenbriefen 1939-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), pp. 26-27, 48.

If Belgrade was the urban antithesis of the German Banat, Bosnia was the city's rural counterpart:

Who here [in Bosnia] does not think of our clean villages and hard-working people in the Banat? What could we do with these godforsaken lairs, where people are so lazy they go to seed in filth and vermin, while fertile fields yield only a meager harvest? Germans could make a cultured landscape [Kulturlandschaft] even out of this space.<sup>1173</sup>

Here the Banat Volksdeutsche animosity was compounded by the very real awareness that the Partisans would not be easily defeated. The moniker 'Banditen' was prescribed by Hitler himself<sup>1174</sup> and applied regularly to all resistance movements in Yugoslav lands and the Soviet Union. It reveals the frustration caused by an enemy who preferred guerrilla tactics to open warfare, and did not shy away from huge losses of civilian and military life in order to inflict damage on the Axis forces.

The Banat press also called the royalist Četnici 'bandits.' When their leader, Dragoljub 'Draža' Mihajlović, left many of his men to be captured in Montenegro in June 1943, this was seen as proof positive of his untrustworthiness and lack of honor.<sup>1175</sup> Treachery was perceived as a tradition of the Serbian and Yugoslav army, stretching back from Mihajlović to the military coup against the pro-Axis Yugoslav government in 1941

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<sup>1173</sup> "Wer denkt da nicht an unsere saubere Dörfer im Banat und an seine fleissigen Menschen. Was würden wir aus diesen gottverlassenen Nestern, wo Menschen wegen ihrer Faulheit im Dreck und Ungeziefer verkommen und fruchtbare Felder eine kärgliche Ernte abwerfen, machen. Deutsche Menschen wären imstande, auch diesen Raum zu einer Kulturlandschaft zu formen." Josef Beer, "Biwak in den Bergen," *BB*, October 9, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1174</sup> See pp. 431-432.

<sup>1175</sup> "Feige Flucht Drascha Mihailowitsch' nach Einkesselung seiner Truppen," official war report from Berlin in *BB*, June 26, 1943, p.1.

and to 1903, when a “clique of corrupt, sick officers with gambling debts [*sic*]” plotted against and assassinated Serbia’s King Aleksandar Obrenović.<sup>1176</sup>

Nevertheless, since they were the more successful resistance movement, ‘bandits’ most often meant the Partisans. Texts which passed for war reporting in the *Banater Beobachter* tended to emphasize how the ‘bandits’ held the local civilian population in a state of constant fear. Considering their practice of living off the land and their equivocal stance on civilian casualties, not to mention enmity between the two resistance movements, this claim is not without some truth. These texts did not purport to analyze the military situation in the Balkans, but to emphasize the local population’s preference for German rule over that of the communists.<sup>1177</sup> The result was a depiction of the ‘bandits’ as excessively cruel, treacherous and sly. These qualities, considered typical of the Balkans, became concentrated in the image of the semi-human raider in the night.

There is a clear element of barely suppressed fear in this characterization, evident also in ever more frequent appeals to both the fighting front and the home front not to falter in their efforts, lest warfare should destroy the Banat. The use of photographs and sketches was especially effective in conveying the impression of a primitive, cruel and

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<sup>1176</sup> “Clique spielverschuldeter, korrupter und krankhafter Offiziere” “Am Rande der Belgrader Blutmacht,” *BB*, June 13, 1942, p. 5.

<sup>1177</sup> Two texts by SS-Unterscharführer Hans Jakob Hein (member of “Prinz Eugen” and *Volkswacht* correspondent): ““Es war ein grosser König,”” *Volkswacht*, June 27-28, 1943, p. 1 and ““Er musste gehen...,”” *Volkswacht*, July 4, 1943, pp. 1-2. The first text describes an encounter with an old Bosnian Muslim fondly remembering the time when Bosnia was an Austrian province, and he served under German (Austrian) officers in World War I. The second is an old woman’s supposed account of how her son had to join a (presumably Četnik) guerrilla after the Partisans robbed their smallholding.

The same holds true of a local news article from Grossbetschkerek occasioned by the murder – after a long shooting match caused by the victim’s cowardly refusal to come out of hiding – in this town of a single suspected Partisan by the Volksdeutsche police. The article emphasized that the deceased had brought nothing but shame on his country and its government (the collaborationist Serbian government), and that the Serbian population of the Banat would be grateful to the Germans for ridding them of such a dangerous presence. “Ortsnachrichten Grossbetschkerek. Berüchtigter Kommunist erledigt,” *BB*, January 8, 1943, p. 5.

highly dangerous enemy, sufficiently depraved to use women and children as combatants.

Photographs purporting to represent captured Partisans were accompanied by the

following caption:

These creatures have shown how corrupt they are. Notions of manliness and womanliness, which took centuries to develop, lose in them all meaning: they are a drab, soulless bunch dreaming the crazy dream of taking the leadership of Europe into their hands. This sinister specter must be swept away, lest our continent be dragged down to the lowest depths.<sup>1178</sup>

The view of ‘bandits’ as barely human creatures in whom the sexes have become hopelessly mixed up and lost their distinguishing features, underscores the gender dimension to National Socialist notions of racial purity. Volksdeutsche women in the Banat were seen as more than capable of fighting and guarding the home front,<sup>1179</sup> but their fight was not the literal struggle of the female Partisans or Red Army soldiers, not armed service as part of the Reich’s furthest watch. The women’s fight was the struggle to maintain high agricultural productivity in the absence of men and, more importantly, to bear and raise racially healthy children (presumably also in the men’s absence) as the surest way of defeating the racial enemy.<sup>1180</sup>

A Banat Volksdeutsche man was a hard worker and a soldier, a man’s man, but a woman was primarily a care giver and mother: “The man guards our Volk from external

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<sup>1178</sup> “Dies sind Geschöpfe, die ihr Laster gezeichnet hat. Bei ihnen verlieren alle durch Jahrhunderte entstandenen Begriffe von Männlichkeit und Fraulichkeit ihren Sinn: eine graue, seelenlose Masse, die den wahnwitzigen Traum träumt, einst die Führung Europas in die Hände gelegt zu bekommen. Dieser finstere Spuk muss weggefegt werden, wenn die Geschichte unseres Kontinents nicht um ihren tiefsten Wert betrogen werden soll.” “Banditentypen aus Bosnien,” *BB*, August 17, 1943, p. 3.

See also the caricatures by SS-UScha. M. R. v. Cwitkowic depicting a wizened old Muslim with a turban and a demented-looking man in Serbian peasant costume in *Volkswacht*, July 4, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>1179</sup> “Erntedank,” speech held in Grossbetschkerek on October 25, 1942, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 134.

<sup>1180</sup> “Zur Eröffnung der Landfrauenschule in Weisskirchen,” speech held on November 16, 1941, in Janko, *Reden*, p. 93.

enemies, the mother protects it from internal decay.”<sup>1181</sup> A supposed soldier’s letter to his mother read on Radio Belgrade said:

When you write to your soldiers that the fruit trees in the garden are bearing well, that the harvest will be good or that you have hung a small picture of the front above your bed, then your soldiers know that you are keeping the Heimat safe and clean. This is what makes you the great mother of our Volk.<sup>1182</sup>

A clear separation of gender roles would ensure racial purity, political and ideological integrity, and the endurance of the Volksgemeinschaft and Heimat.

By contrast, the ‘bandits’ knew nothing of this separation of the spheres. For them, all was gender, racial and political confusion. Captions accompanying another photo story in the *Banater Beobachter* described the captured Partisans in no uncertain terms as “criminal types, Soviet hirelings.”<sup>1183</sup> The Volksdeutsche perception of non-German inhabitants of the Balkans dovetailed with their acceptance of National Socialism. The Partisans were seen as exponents of a particularly Balkan type of cruelty and savagery,<sup>1184</sup> but also as part of a greater anti-German conspiracy including the Soviet Union and ‘world Jewry.’ The caption beneath yet another photograph of a captured ‘bandit’ states the connection explicitly: “Such a Jew...”<sup>1185</sup>

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<sup>1181</sup> “Der Mann schützt unser Volk von äusseren Feinden, die Mutter bewahrt es vor dem inneren Zerfall.” “Zur Volkskundgebung in Weisskirchen” (1941), in Janko, *Reden*, p. 96.

<sup>1182</sup> “Wenn du deinen Soldaten schreibst, die Obstbäume im Garten haben reiche Früchte getragen, um die Ernte stehe es gut oder du habest ein kleines Bild von der Front über deinem Bett hängen, dann wissen deine Soldaten, dass du die Heimat bewahrst und rein hältst. Und dies ist es, was dich zur grossen Mutter unseres Volkes macht.” “Nach dem Krieg, Mutter,” in Schmidt, pp. 61-62.

<sup>1183</sup> “Verbrechertypen, Söldlinge der Sowjets.” “Stur zerlumpt verhungert,” *Volkswacht*, July 4, 1943, p. 3.

<sup>1184</sup> As Wüsch put it with unrepentant aplomb – in relation to the Croatian Ustaše, obviously judged more Balkan than fascist – “[they] reacted, as one might say, with a “cruelty typical of the Balkans”” (“reagierten, wie es heisst, mit “balkanüblicher Grausamkeit”). Johann Wüsch, *Jugoslawien und das Dritte Reich. Eine dokumentierte Geschichte der deutsch-jugoslawischen Beziehungen von 1933 bis 1945* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1969), p. 277.

<sup>1185</sup> “So ein Jude...” *Volkswacht*, September 12-13, 1943, p. 1.

Nevertheless, the appearance of such an explicit reference to the ‘Jewish enemy’ by a local contributor to the *Banater Beobachter* was the exception rather than the rule. The interpretation of Nazi ideology particular to the Banat by no means excluded anti-Semitism and belief in a global Jewish conspiracy. If the Reichsdeutsche’s limited practical experience and contact with Jews and Slavs fed the hysteria regarding the insidious racial enemy in their ranks,<sup>1186</sup> the Banat Volksdeutsche had a different experience. As a self-consciously unique, closed group on the Greater Reich’s ethnic and linguistic border, they accepted the Nazi idea of a global Jewish conspiracy. But the awareness that the majority Slavic population regarded them with animosity in both their old role as settlers and their new one as collaborators with the invading Reich forces, hit much closer to home. The Volksdeutsche did not need to imagine a ‘Slavic enemy’: the ‘bandits’ were really there.

### Conclusion

The contents of the wartime Volksdeutsche press and speeches delivered by members of the Volksgruppenführung reveal that the Banat Volksgruppenführung fully embraced National Socialist ideology. A controlled press, of which the *Banater Beobachter* is an example, did not give voice to a multiplicity of opinions or to any dissent individual Volksdeutsche may have expressed. Nevertheless, their attitude seems to have been similar to that of most people in the Third Reich. While they may have objected to individual policies or demands made by the leadership on their time and resources, they did not reject National Socialism as such.

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<sup>1186</sup> Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*, *passim*.

The appeal of Nazism to the ethnic German communities of Europe should not be taken for granted. The case of the Banat Volksdeutsche community suggests they used Nazism's tenets to articulate and make sense of local themes which preoccupied them. National Socialism among the Volksdeutsche tapped into already extant themes and concerns, molded them into a relatively consistent system of thought, and exacerbated them.

The Banat Volksdeutsche tried, not entirely successfully, to reconcile their strong attachment to Heimat in the narrow sense (Banat) with their sense of belonging to a Greater Reich, the Volksgemeinschaft of all Germans. The disparity between the two concepts of Heimat was compounded by the Volksdeutsche's pride in their achievements as settlers and soldiers on the old Military Border, and their awareness of the fact that many Reichsdeutsche held them in barely disguised contempt as, at best, second-class Germans. Thus National Socialism as expressed by Banat Volksdeutsche confirmed the ambivalence of their position in the Nazi racial hierarchy and in the Reichsdeutsche worldview.

The Banat Volksdeutsche's anti-Slavic sentiment was intensified by Nazi anti-Semitism. The communist Partisans were seen as exponents of a typically Balkan cruelty, but also of a great Jewish-Bolshevik-Slavic conspiracy against the German Volk. In the Banat Volksdeutsche's essentially narrow-minded worldview, the 'Slavic enemy' posed a far more serious threat than the 'Jewish enemy.'

Attachment to the Banat Heimat, the Volksdeutsche claim to be as German as the Reichsdeutsche, and their growing fear of the majority Slavic population of Southeast Europe came together in public pronouncements regarding the Waffen-SS division "Prinz

Eugen.” Volunteering for military service with this division was represented to the Volksdeutsche community as proof positive of their German credentials and as a continuation of their historical traditions. The Waffen-SS forged a historical connection between the Banat Volksdeutsche’s ancestral tradition and present experience. Thus a whole host of ideological incentives was deployed to encourage Banat Volksdeutsche participation in the Waffen-SS, but military service was not left solely to their good will. The Third Reich needed the Banat Volksdeutsche in order to secure the occupied Balkan territories because most of the Reich’s armed forces were needed on the Eastern Front.

CHAPTER VII 'MY LIFE FOR PRINCE EUGENE'<sup>1187</sup>:

## THE WAFFEN-SS DIVISION "PRINZ EUGEN"

## AND THE END OF THE 'BANAT ERA'

As its name indicates, the Waffen-SS was conceived as the armed wing of the SS. It was also a paramilitary instrument for the extension of Heinrich Himmler's personal power within the Reich's sphere of influence. Despite its exponential growth during the war years,<sup>1188</sup> it never quite challenged the Wehrmacht for the position of the Third Reich's primary armed force, not least because of its heterogeneity<sup>1189</sup> and the varied fighting quality of its recruits. Arguably its greatest success was the thoroughness with which it reconciled ideological education with military training for its rank and file. The Waffen-SS proved crucial for ideological warfare, especially in anti-partisan actions in East and Southeast Europe.

The Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" was created in spring 1942 with the express purpose of harnessing the Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) of the Serbian Banat and Southeast Europe in general as soldiers for the Reich. At first glance, this ran counter to the policies of promoting Volksdeutsche materially and ideologically. As soldiers, they were bound to die and not be able to produce food or racially healthy children for the

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<sup>1187</sup> The chapter title is borrowed from the title of a 1941 history of German settlement in Southeast Europe: Wilhelm Kreuz, *Mein Leben für Prinz Eugen. Deutsche Bauern siedeln im Banat*, ed. Dr. Walter Schreiber (Berlin: Steiniger Verlage, 1941).

<sup>1188</sup> Thomas Casagrande estimates its growth from 18,000 members in 1939 to 910,000 members in 1944 (p. 19).

<sup>1189</sup> By war's end, in addition to Reich Germans, the Waffen-SS had in its ranks ethnic German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Flemish, Bosnian Muslim, Albanian, French, Latvian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Hungarian and other soldiers.

Reich. In the context of wartime realities, however, Volksdeutsche armed service was an invaluable resource for the Nazi regime, which could not and would not separate ideological from military matters. In terms of their racial suitability and their ideological reliability, the Reich could wish for no better soldiers than Volksdeutsche. Their recruitment marked the final eclipse of Reich diplomacy in the latter part of the war by Hitler and Himmler's views on the war as a conflict of ideologies and races. Himmler also proved capable of gaining by fair means or foul the support of institutions such as the Wehrmacht and the German Foreign Ministry, which fought turf wars with the SS but shared a common ideological purpose. In the war of races and ideologies, Volksdeutsche were not only expected to serve the Reich, which had been their protector and champion – they *had* to serve it if they wished to prove themselves, once and for all, good Germans. In terms of Volksdeutsche responses, most realized that they indeed owed the Reich a material debt as well as a debt of honor, and served without resistance. In the course of the latter thirty months of the war, the Banat Volksdeutsche in the Waffen-SS participated in anti-partisan actions of escalating brutality and diminishing effectiveness.

The history of the division “Prinz Eugen” has been told in passing, and from an institutional perspective, in several histories of the Waffen-SS (see below). The only monograph on it, by Thomas Casagrande, inexplicably frames the division's history in a socio-psychological context. In terms of historical analysis, it is somewhat superficial. In this chapter, the goal is therefore to place this division within the context of Hitler's racial war as it played out in Southeast Europe, and to examine the European as well as the local developments which brought about its creation and the massive recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche for it. “Prinz Eugen” was far from a crack military unit in terms of

efficiency, but it was peerless as a propaganda coup for the Reich. It gave the Waffen-SS over 20,000 recruits, a sixth of the Banat Volksgruppe (ethnic German community) and the second largest recruit contingent, percentage-wise, of all the Volksdeutsche communities in Southeast Europe.

It was also highly successful as a means of tying the Banat Volksdeutsche finally and irrevocably to Reich policy – and its ultimate fate. When the Serbian Banat came under attack by Partisans and the Red Army in fall 1944, “Prinz Eugen” was fighting for the Reich far from its Banat home. This left mostly women, children, the elderly and the Volksgruppenführung (ethnic German leadership) to face the enemy onslaught. The period starting in fall 1944 and continuing into the late 1940s has been given a disproportionate amount of attention in the historiography and memoir literature on the Volksdeutsche of Southeast Europe. It has been a way for Volksdeutsche settled in West Germany and elsewhere to shift attention away from their wartime actions and onto the immediate postwar period, when they were dispossessed, expelled from or incarcerated by the new, communist regimes in their host states. This chapter will purposefully stop at the arrival of the Red Army and the Partisans in the Banat in early October 1944. Using Volksdeutsche postwar depositions with a beady eye to the more exculpatory among them, it will examine how the habits of thought formed in the war years, and the wartime relations between the Volksgruppe (ethnic German community) and the Third Reich, shaped Volksdeutsche perceptions in those last days of the Banat Volksdeutsche administration.

### Volksdeutsche Peasants into Soldiers

Historians differ as to the relative balance of ideology and sheer militarism in the Waffen-SS.<sup>1190</sup> Relative consensus does exist that the Waffen-SS was a more openly and specifically ideological fighting force even than the Wehrmacht, whose postwar reputation as a purely professional military institution has been dismantled by historians such as Omer Bartov.<sup>1191</sup> Consensus also exists regarding the trajectory the Waffen-SS described, going from a self-professed elite (in line with its origin in the Allgemeine SS, the Reich's racial and ideological elite) to a more pragmatic institution as its ranks expanded rapidly starting in the second half of 1942 to include soldiers whose belonging to the German Volk was tenuous or non-existent.<sup>1192</sup> Of the former, the Volksdeutsche of East and Southeast Europe were an obvious choice for recruitment, though not the first choice. The first Germanic<sup>1193</sup> divisions of the Waffen-SS were formed in 1940,<sup>1194</sup> whereas the systematic recruitment of Volksdeutsche did not begin until after Operation Barbarossa.

The Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" was created specifically in the context of the outbreak of communist resistance movements in Southeast Europe (Greece and partitioned Yugoslavia). These movements were ideologically and strategically related to, yet enjoyed much tactical independence from the state-sponsored resistance in the Soviet

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<sup>1190</sup> E. g. Jürgen Förster stresses the centrality of ideology in the training of Waffen-SS recruits (Förster, pp. 89-91), whereas Bernd Wegner sees ideological education as instrumental and secondary to their military training (Bernd Wegner, *The Waffen-SS: Organization, Ideology and Function*, trans. Ronald Webster (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 218-220).

<sup>1191</sup> Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and the War in the Third Reich* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>1192</sup> Stein, p. 171; Wegner, p. 313.

<sup>1193</sup> I.e. consisting of recruits the Nazis saw as racial kin, but who were not German by race or citizenship: Norwegians, Danes, the Dutch and the Flemish.

<sup>1194</sup> Förster, p. 95.

Union. They created a manpower problem for the Third Reich, which was already pouring ever more soldiers into the Eastern Front. It could not spare too many Reichsdeutsche (Reich Germans) for the anti-communist struggle in the Balkans.<sup>1195</sup> A solution was found in the roughly 1.5 million Volksdeutsche living in the Reich's allies Romania and Hungary and in the occupied Yugoslav lands. Assumed to be reliable recruits for the Reich based on racial affinity, they were nevertheless not seen as prime soldiering material. Hence the idea to form them into separate, Volksdeutsche units (rather than integrating them either into the Wehrmacht or into their host states' armies), and deploy them only on their home turf, against a Slavic, communist enemy they were expected to know and to distrust.<sup>1196</sup>

The shift in the Third Reich's attitude toward Volksdeutsche with regard to Waffen-SS recruitment is striking. Before Operation Barbarossa, Volksdeutsche in general were seen as valuable additions to the Volk but also as fairly benighted, in need of the Reich's tutelage and protection. After the invasion of the Soviet Union failed to become the quick and decisive victory Hitler had hoped for, the Reich's racial policies in general became more radical, as demonstrated by the transition from the mass executions of Jews by the Einsatzgruppen in the Soviet Union in summer and fall 1941, to the construction of the death camps in winter 1941-1942 and spring 1942. Parallel to this, the paternalistic attitude of the Reich to Volksdeutsche morphed into a more demanding, less cajoling version of its former self. The Reich never unleashed the full force of its coercive and destructive potential on its 'racial comrades' in other states, but in the

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<sup>1195</sup> Olshausen, p. 309.

<sup>1196</sup> Robert Herzog, *Die Volksdeutschen in der Waffen-SS* (Tübingen: Institut für Besatzungsfragen, 1955), p. 6; Casagrande, pp. 183-184.

course of trying to win an increasingly desperate ideological war, even those it considered its ideological kin could no longer be treated with kid gloves alone.

This was problematic for the Reich. For all the violence inherent in its system of rule, the Nazi regime liked to present a plausible legalistic façade for its actions, punctiliously interpreting or passing laws which allowed, for example, for the disenfranchisement and expropriation of Jews. As for the Waffen-SS, a 1935 law which limited the Wehrmacht to recruiting among Reich citizens was crucial. The SS interpreted this law more loosely so as to allow itself access to racial Germans (i.e. Volksdeutsche) from other states, *provided they were volunteers*.<sup>1197</sup> Writing about the Volksdeutsche of Northern Schleswig in terms which applied to Volksdeutsche in general, in early 1942 Werner Lorenz of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi) informed his superior Heinrich Himmler that the Reich had to be nurturing and welcoming if it wished to attract Volksdeutsche volunteers into the Waffen-SS. The Reich also had to accept the fact that, while Nazification may not have progressed quite as far among them as it had in the Reich, this in no way diminished the Volksdeutsche soldier's willingness to fight and sacrifice himself for the Reich.<sup>1198</sup> From the Volksdeutsche perspective, volunteering for the Waffen-SS served as the ultimate proof of their loyalty to Führer, Reich and Volk.

But the Volksdeutsche's good will and volunteering alone would not fill the Reich's depleted ranks. The Reich had to recruit able-bodied Volksdeutsche men while maintaining the illusion of voluntarism on the recruits' part. This was especially true if

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<sup>1197</sup> Valdis O. Lumans, "The Military Obligation of the Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe towards the Third Reich," *East European Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Fall 1989), pp. 305-307.

<sup>1198</sup> Werner Lorenz (head of Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, VoMi) to Heinrich Himmler, February 7, 1942, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA Berlin), NS 19 Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, file 2386, fiche 1, frames 1-2.

the state in which they resided, and of which they were citizens, opposed the Reich recruiting its citizens openly. Such was the case in Romania and Hungary. They were junior partners in the Axis but had strong points of leverage to ensure they got some of their own way, even against Reich interest. In satellite states like wartime Croatia, the recruitment of Volksdeutsche was easier. Even then the formalities attendant on dealing with a nominally independent government had to be honored. This left territories the Reich occupied directly – such as Serbia-Banat – in which recruitment of Volksdeutsche for the Waffen-SS was easiest.

To recruit Volksdeutsche in countries with governments of their own, however questionable their legitimacy, the Waffen-SS needed the consent of the AA (Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry).<sup>1199</sup> Like all institutions of the Third Reich, both of these rested ultimately on a solid, shared ideological foundation. Even though in early 1941 the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop temporarily won the upper hand in matters in Volksdeutsche affairs, by the end of that year he and Himmler were intensely aware of their common cause: winning the war against the Soviet Union. Therefore, the AA proved amenable to Himmler's proposal to put the idea of recruiting Volksdeutsche into the Waffen-SS before the governments of Hungary, Romania and Croatia (also Slovakia and Denmark).<sup>1200</sup> By consenting to this, the AA's influence over Volksdeutsche matters became gradually eclipsed by Heinrich Himmler's grandiose

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<sup>1199</sup> Herzog, pp. 3-4.

<sup>1200</sup> Under-State Secretary Martin Luther (AA – Auswärtiges Amt, the German Foreign Ministry) memo, December 31, 1941, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA AA), Inland II Geheim, file R 100981 Waffen-SS, Allgemeiner Dienst, Führeranordnung, Zuständigkeit, Heranziehung deutscher Volksgruppen und ausländischer Menschenreserven, 1937-1944, fiche 2534, no frame numbers; German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to German Embassies in Zagreb, Bratislava, Bucharest and Copenhagen, January 17, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101093 Berichte und Medungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1942, fiche 2817, frames H298,010-011.

vision of an ethnic German army conquering and holding the savage miles of East and Southeast Europe for Führer, Reich – and himself.

Gradually, as the Banat Volksdeutsche were trained and deployed first in Serbia and then in Croatia, they became a part of the murderous policies by which the Third Reich ruled territories riven by resistance. Volksdeutsche motives were mixed, but a significant element in the process by which peasants and artisans became capable of shooting civilians was the ideological education they received in the Waffen-SS. It taught them to see the enemy as a racial and criminal category, an abstract notion. Whether willingly or with a mere absence of objection, the Volksdeutsche became no longer just peasant soldiers, border guards, racial and cultural warriors for the Reich, but also trained killers for its cause.

In the Serbian Banat, the prior complicity and compliance of the Volksgruppenführung with other Reich policies – especially the elevation of Volksdeutsche to a leading position in their home region and their profiting from Aryanization in the second half of 1941 – played into Himmler's hands. His reasoning was clear: since the Reich had given Banat Volksdeutsche security, riches and a little power, it was only fair that they repay the Reich with loyal service under arms for the greater German cause. Thus when Himmler demanded that Banat Volksdeutsche join the Waffen-SS, the Volksgruppenführung had no leverage with which to deny him. The Waffen-SS sweetened this bitter pill somewhat by adjusting the rhetoric directed at its Volksdeutsche recruits so as to fit them into its ranks and to fit itself into their worldview (see Chapter 6). Other than that, it did not even need the compliance of the AA. In an occupied territory administered by the Wehrmacht, the German army's permission alone

sufficed.<sup>1201</sup> Himmler secured it almost as easily as he had Ribbentrop's agreement for Waffen-SS recruitment in countries bordering occupied Serbia.

### This Land is Too Big for Us

Harald Turner, head of the Reichsdeutsche administration in occupied Serbia, had hoped to defeat the Partisan and Četnik movements with the help of the Serbian police and collaborationist government.<sup>1202</sup> As soon as the latter proved ill-suited to the task in late summer 1941, Wilhelm List (Wehrmacht commander for all of Southeast Europe), Himmler<sup>1203</sup> and the AA agreed on the undesirability of lending credence to voices calling for a more independent, pro-Axis Serbia by encouraging the Četnici as an anti-Bolshevik, Serbian fighting force. Instead, the AA representative in Belgrade, Felix Benzler, put the matter in a nutshell: "The resistance movement can only be defeated with German forces."<sup>1204</sup> The request General Heinrich Danckelmann, the Military Commander in Belgrade, had sent already the previous month for more forces to be sent to Serbia from the Reich<sup>1205</sup> could not be granted.<sup>1206</sup> Every available Reichsdeutsche soldier was already needed in the East as the invasion of the Soviet Union started to run out of steam without capturing Moscow.

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<sup>1201</sup> Luther memo (1941), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100981, fiche 2534, second frame of this document.

<sup>1202</sup> Browning, "Harald Turner," pp. 356-357, 367.

<sup>1203</sup> Browning, "Harald Turner," pp. 356-357, 368, 372.

<sup>1204</sup> "Aufstandsbewegung allein mit deutschen Kräften niederzuschlagen." Felix Benzler (AA representative in occupied Belgrade) to AA, September 12, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XIII.1, document no. 303.

<sup>1205</sup> Benzler to AA, August 12, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XIII.1, document no. 195.

<sup>1206</sup> Benzler to AA, August 29, 1941, in *Akten*, Serie D, Volume XIII.1, document no. 257.

Even when General Franz Böhme replaced Danckelmann in late September 1941 and brought another division with him,<sup>1207</sup> the situation continued to deteriorate. Serbs expelled from Hungarian-occupied Bačka, the Independent State of Croatia and the Bulgarian zone of occupation in southern Serbia were brutalized by the loss of homes and loved ones. There was an estimated 161,500 of them newly arrived in Serbia in the five months after the end of the April War alone.<sup>1208</sup> Many flocked to the two resistance movements.

Exacerbating the situation further was the general attitude of Reich personnel to Serbs as a people. The occupation administration's official line remained that the Reichsdeutsche soldier was the best friend a new and improved (i.e. pro-Axis) Serbia could have.<sup>1209</sup> In truth even the relatively sympathetic Turner referred to "specific "Balkan relationships",," such as lack of value for life (whether one's own or that of others) and the habit of carrying weapons, which made anti-German resistance in the Balkans that much more difficult to combat.<sup>1210</sup> In addition, General Böhme and about

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<sup>1207</sup> Browning, "Harald Turner," pp. 357-358.

<sup>1208</sup> Harald Turner (Reichsdeutsche civilian administration chief in occupied Serbia), "5. Lagebericht des Verwaltungsstabes beim Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien," October 6, 1941, Bundesarchiv Freiburg i.B., Militärarchiv (BA MA), RW 40 Territoriale Befehlshaber in Südosteuropa, file 187, p. 4.

<sup>1209</sup> "Really, the man in the German uniform is the sole guarantor that Serbia will make all the necessary connections in the new Europe, despite this unfortunate war." ("Der Mann im deutschen Soldatenrock ist in Wahrheit der einzige Garant dafür, dass Serbien in diesem neuen Europa trotz des unglücklichen Krieges die notwendigen Beziehungen erhält.") Dr. Leonard Oberascher, "Unfreiheit durch Freiwirtschaft. Der Irrweg des serbischen Volkes," *Donauzeitung*, December 21, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI Deutsches Arbeitsfront, Arbeitswissenschaftlichesinstitut (Zeitungsausschnittsammlung), file 29266/a, p. 2.

In a November 1943 interview with the Belgrade German-language newspaper *Donauzeitung*, Hermann Neubacher (Sonderbevollmächtigter des Auswärtigen Amtes für den Südosten) expressed the same sentiments in greater detail. "236. Wochenbericht, Südosteuropa," November 4-11, 1943, BA Berlin, R 58 Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), file 124, fiche 1, frame 12.

<sup>1210</sup> "Die besonderen "Balkanverhältnisse"" Turner, "5. Lagebericht" (1941), BA MA, RW 40, file 187, p. 4.

one third of all Reich troops stationed in Serbia were Austrian, and held traditional, Habsburg-era anti-Serb prejudices compounded by racial ideology (see below).<sup>1211</sup>

Himmler and OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) chief Wilhelm Keitel were not Austrians, but neither were they circumspect in their views of Slavs and resistance fighters. Himmler saw the Serbs as a nation steeped in, even hereditarily disposed to rebellion and disobedience.<sup>1212</sup> Keitel approved the routine execution of 50 to 100 communists for every Reichsdeutsche soldier killed in Serbia, so as to cow the restive civilian population into submission.<sup>1213</sup>

Böhme translated this into his October 10, 1941 order that for every Reichs- or Volksdeutsche person of any age and either sex killed in Serbia, one hundred civilians should be executed. Fifty civilians executed was the norm for every wounded Reichs- or Volksdeutscher.<sup>1214</sup> By ordering that every municipality keep a ready pool of communists, Jews and other undesirables on hand, from which the retaliation quota could be filled, Böhme set the stage for the Wehrmacht to become an instrument of the Holocaust in Serbia. He also failed to staunch either resistance movement – if anything, the disproportionate numbers of people shot by Wehrmacht firing squads only inflamed them – leading to his own replacement already in December 1941. His successor, General

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<sup>1211</sup> Manoschek, “*Serbien ist judenfrei*,” p. 12.

<sup>1212</sup> Heinrich Himmler quoted in Browning, “Harald Turner,” p. 269.

<sup>1213</sup> Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel (head of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, OKW) order, September 16, 1941, National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland (NARA), RG 242 Captured German Records, T-120 [Records of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA)]/1298/482,443.

<sup>1214</sup> General Franz Böhme (German commanding general in Serbia) order, October 10, 1941, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (USHMM), RG-49.002\*01 Records Relating to the Occupation of Yugoslavia during World War II – Records Relating to Crimes of the German Occupying Forces against the Yugoslav Peoples during the Holocaust (originally obtained from the Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije), 1941-1945, fiche 7, frame 650.

Paul Bader, encapsulated the problem in a missive of piercing desperation sent to Berlin already in August 1941: “The spaces [in Serbia] are too big! [paragraph break] The deployed troops too weak!”<sup>1215</sup>

Keitel had little sympathy for such complaints. He was devising a way to transfer a part of the already sparse Wehrmacht forces stationed in Southeast Europe to the truly vast spaces of the Eastern Front.<sup>1216</sup> His proposed solution was to utilize Italian and Bulgarian soldiers. The Bulgarian zone in southeastern Serbia was extended at the turn of 1941-1942.<sup>1217</sup> The AA echoed Keitel in a peevisish statement that it was not the Reichsdeutsche soldiers’ job to police Serbia, however restive it might be.<sup>1218</sup>

The Wehrmacht in Southeast Europe followed this with the proposal to form SS brigades out of Serbian Volksdeutsche, so as to allow a part of the Wehrmacht forces to transfer out of Serbia. This proposal rested on the assumption that said SS units would be subsumed under the Wehrmacht’s tactical control in the field.<sup>1219</sup>

This proposal wed a stern approach to combating the Slavic-Bolshevik enemy in the Balkans with the desire to use allied and collaborationist forces to free up Reichsdeutsche soldiers for the great showdown against the Slavic-Bolshevik-Jewish enemy in the East. Himmler and Hitler approved the proposal, but as it played out the

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<sup>1215</sup> “Die Räume sind zu gross!

“Die eingesetzte Truppe zu schwach!” General Paul Bader (German commanding general in Serbia after Böhme) to Field Marshall Wilhelm List (Wehrmachtsbefehlshaber Südost), August 29, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501 [Records of German Field Commands: Rear Areas, Occupied Territories, and Others]/246/3.

<sup>1216</sup> Keitel memo, December 15, 1941, BA MA, RW 4 Oberkommando der Wehrmacht/Wehrmachtsführungsstab (OKW/WFSt), file 757, fiche 1, frame 1.

<sup>1217</sup> Ribbentrop aide Karl Ritter to Benzler, January 4, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume I, document no. 88; Benzler to AA, January 30, 1942, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume I, document no. 185.

<sup>1218</sup> Ritter to Benzler (1942), in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume I, document no. 88.

<sup>1219</sup> List to Bader, OKW and OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres), January 10, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 26, p. 60.

Wehrmacht would not be the undisputed master of military operations in Southeast Europe any more than in other areas where Himmler's Waffen-SS played a significant role.

### “Prinz Eugen” (Re)Born

Mark Mazower pinpoints the resistance in the Yugoslav lands as the ongoing event which allowed Heinrich Himmler to eclipse several of his rivals in the internal power-struggle in the top echelons of the Third Reich.<sup>1220</sup> In her study of the office of the Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer (HSSPF) in the Reich's sphere of influence, Ruth Bettina Birn implicitly confirms Mazower's point by stating that Himmler saw the Reich's desperate security situation in Serbia at the turn of 1941-1942 as the prime opportunity to install a HSSPF there. The HSSPF would both coordinate the anti-partisan forces in Serbia and act as Himmler's personal representative in dealing with the Wehrmacht and AA offices in Serbia.<sup>1221</sup> The man Himmler chose, August Meyszner, was the ideal candidate for the job. He had the police training, the SS career and the typical Austrian view of Serbs. A Reich observer reported Meyszner's well-known personal motto, “I prefer a dead Serb to a live one.”<sup>1222</sup>

The process by which Banat Volksdeutsche became Waffen-SS recruits deserves closer attention than it has so far received. It was not a matter of course simply because

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<sup>1220</sup> Although Mazower gets the point across somewhat melodramatically, and in a way which suggests that Himmler even eclipsed Hitler, which never came to pass. He calls the resistance in Yugoslav lands “Himmler[’s] his first chance of taking over Europe.” Mazower, p. 239.

<sup>1221</sup> Birn, p. 240.

<sup>1222</sup> ““Ein toter Serbe ist mir lieber als ein lebendiger”” August Meyszner (Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer in Serbia) quoted in Oberstleutnant d. G. Boehncke, “Bericht über die Reise im Bereich Ob. Südost,” July 13, 1943, BA MA, RH 2 Oberkommando des Heeres/Generalstab des Heeres, file 685, fiche 1, frame 42.

Volksdeutsche were considered racial Germans and therefore good soldier material. It involved legal and military precedents, and built on the foundation of Volksdeutsche complicity with the Reich built up in the first year of the occupation.

The systematic recruitment of Volksdeutsche in Serbia-Banat for the Waffen-SS did not happen overnight, nor was Meyszner's appointment its main impetus. A precedent had been set shortly after the conclusion of the April War, when Waffen-SS chief of staff and chief of the SS main office (SS-Hauptamt) Gottlob Berger decided that the Volksdeutsche taken prisoner-of-war while serving in the Yugoslav Army made prime candidates for Waffen-SS recruitment.<sup>1223</sup> While this idea did not pan out, the SS division "Das Reich," which had participated in the occupation of the Serbian Banat, did recruit an estimated six hundred men.<sup>1224</sup> Even though it was not supposed to take in Volksdeutsche, the Wehrmacht, too, took in around seven hundred volunteers from the Banat. It did so first with the AA and VoMi's permission, later in 1942 without it.<sup>1225</sup> In October 1942 Himmler forbade any more of these Volksdeutsche to go to the Wehrmacht. Though he intended to have them transferred to the Waffen-SS,<sup>1226</sup> 602 of these men were still with the Wehrmacht in December 1943.<sup>1227</sup>

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<sup>1223</sup> Gottlob Berger (Waffen-SS chief of staff) to Himmler, April 26, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2725, fiche 1, frame 1.

<sup>1224</sup> Schieder, p. 65E; Stein, p. 169; Berger to Himmler, April 26, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 3517, fiche 2, frame 68.

<sup>1225</sup> Lorenz to Himmler, March 31, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 2, frame 44. Of these 700, some 198 came from the middle Banat (Grossbetschkerek and environs) alone. Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat, Kreisleitung "Mittelbanat," Abt. Propaganda, "Verzeichnis der zur Wehrmacht eingerückten des Kreises "Mittelbanat"," February 15, 1942, Muzej Vojvodine, box K-3013, document K-3013/4.

<sup>1226</sup> Benzler to AA, October 23, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011 Waffen-SS: Serbien, Werbeaktion, 1942-1944, fiche 2606, frame H299,529.

<sup>1227</sup> Unsigned memo, "Volksdeutsche in der Waffen-SS," December 12, 1943, NARA, RG 238 World War II War Crimes Records, entry 174, box 2, document NO-2015, p. 3.

Since there was, as yet, no blanket order on recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche by any of the Reich's armed formations, these early recruits were true volunteers.<sup>1228</sup> This had been the case also with the Volksdeutsche who joined the Waffen-SS clandestinely during and after the resettlement of the Bessarabian Volksdeutsche in late 1940.<sup>1229</sup> The 1941 volunteers were mostly young – almost all who joined the Waffen-SS were in their late teens or early twenties, as were three quarters of those who joined the Wehrmacht<sup>1230</sup> – and fired by ideology and the euphoria of liberation by Reich forces. They also kept their Serbian (formerly Yugoslav) citizenship, which would matter in later years.

In addition to the avowed willingness of some Volksdeutsche to fight in Hitler's war, the Volksgruppenführung surrendered what little power it had to object to Waffen-SS recruitment among its co-nationals. Volksgruppenführer (Volksdeutsche leader) Sepp Janko and his cohorts did so first indirectly by acknowledging that their administration, set up in spring and summer 1941, was completely dependent on the Reich's power, military backing and ideological legitimation. When the idea to form a Freikorps-type organization to fight communism in the Balkans was put to him in summer 1941, Janko not only did not object, but could not have objected had he wanted to.

The idea originated with Berger already in the last days of the April War. Then, its context had been the desire to pacify Romanian clamoring for a piece of Yugoslav territory, possibly by forming a Volksdeutsche paramilitary formation for self-protection

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<sup>1228</sup> Herzog, p. 12.

<sup>1229</sup> See pp. 94-95.

<sup>1230</sup> Deutsche Volksgruppe im Banat, Kreisleitung "Mittelbanat," Abt. Propaganda, "Verzeichnis der SS-und Waffen-SS Eingerückten des Kreises "Mittelbanat"," February 15, 1942, Muzej Vojvodine, box K-3013, document K-3013/4; "Verzeichnis der zur Wehrmacht eingerückten des Kreises "Mittelbanat"" (1942), Muzej Vojvodine, box K-3013, document K-3013/4.

(Selbstschutz) out of Volksdeutsche from both halves of the Banat.<sup>1231</sup> Eventually the idea was put to Janko both by VoMi personnel and by the Wehrmacht in Serbia,<sup>1232</sup> possibly working at cross-purposes, each hoping that it could seize full control of the projected Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz for itself. Benzler objected strenuously, dreading Hungary's reaction and the possibility of Volksdeutsche soldiers trained by Reichsdeutsche personnel becoming a part of the Hungarian army following Hungary's future takeover of the Banat.<sup>1233</sup>

To alleviate these fears and following the outbreak of communist resistance, in July the AA proposed and in August Ribbentrop approved the proposal that the formation might be presented to Hungary as a Volksdeutsche volunteer corps for the struggle against Bolshevism, thus placing it in the broader context of Hitler's ideological war.<sup>1234</sup> Ribbentrop's final approval placed the future Selbstschutz under the command of the German commanding general in Serbia. However, the net effect of his capitulation was that already in August 1941 the AA ceded control of Volksdeutsche recruitment to the armed forces, first to the Wehrmacht and then, with Keitel and Hitler's approval,<sup>1235</sup> to the Waffen-SS in December 1941.

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<sup>1231</sup> Berger to Himmler, April 17, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2724, fiche 1, frame 38.

<sup>1232</sup> Benzler to AA, July 22, 1941, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100939 Volksdeutsche: Jugoslawien, Banat und Batschka, 1941-1944, fiche 2423, frame H298,119.

<sup>1233</sup> Benzler to AA (July 1941), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100939, fiche 2423, frames H298,119-120; see also Luther to Ribbentrop, July 28, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,117-118.

<sup>1234</sup> Luther to Ribbentrop (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,117; Luther to Helmut Triska (head of the AA's Volkstumsreferat), August 21, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2424/E226,999.

Benzler had originally suggested that Russia alone be designated as its opponent. Benzler to AA (July 1941), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100939, fiche 2423, frame H298,120.

<sup>1235</sup> Keitel to Himmler, December 30, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 3519, fiche 5, frame 197.

Hitler confirmed the SS's jurisdiction over the planned Banat Volksdeutsche units that same month.<sup>1236</sup> All recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche by the Wehrmacht officially stopped in mid-January.<sup>1237</sup> On January 22, 1942 Meyszner was appointed to his new position. Hitler's order regarding Meyszner not only confirmed Himmler's undisputed jurisdiction over Volksdeutsche affairs, but did away with any future nonsense about Freikorpses and Selbstschutzes: "The Higher SS and Police Chief is charged with the establishment of Waffen-SS volunteer units out of the locally available Volksdeutsche."<sup>1238</sup>

Himmler and the SS might reassure nervous Volksdeutsche by calling it something other than 'Waffen-SS,' something less threatening and final, more local. Nevertheless, the Banat Volksdeutsche now fell squarely within Himmler's purview, and could be disposed of and deployed as he saw fit. No mention of a need for AA approval exists in the text of Hitler's order on Meyszner's appointment. Already the July 1941 proposals for the formation of Volksdeutsche units mentioned that, barring the annexation of the Banat by Hungary, said units would almost certainly be deployed outside of the Banat, explicitly in Serbia proper.<sup>1239</sup>

Serbia-Banat was one occupied territory, so moving a Volksdeutsche unit from one to the other was not explicitly a diplomatic issue. But in both Reichs- and Volksdeutsche perceptions, the two halves of Serbia-Banat were distinct entities. One was a turbulent region the Reich needed to subjugate. The other was a peaceful, fruitful

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<sup>1236</sup> Keitel memo, December 30, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1464, fiche 1, frame 1.

<sup>1237</sup> Berger to Himmler, January 16, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2878, fiche 1, frame 2.

<sup>1238</sup> "Der Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer hat den Auftrag, aus den dort vorhandenen Volksdeutschen Freiwilligenverbände der Waffen-SS aufzustellen." Hitler order, January 22, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-501/264/438.

<sup>1239</sup> Benzler to AA (July 1941), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100939, fiche 2423, frames H298,119-120; Luther to Ribbentrop (1941), NARA, RG 242, T-120/5782/H298,118.

and essentially vulnerable area, in Benzler's words, "for all intents and purposes a Volksdeutsche reservation."<sup>1240</sup> The Reich had expended time and resources to shore up its beleaguered, exposed Volksdeutsche community. If the Reich chose to make Volksdeutsche into soldiers, that changed how they were perceived. Once the precedent was set to deploy Banat Volksdeutsche out of their home region, even just to Serbia proper, they could be deployed in other areas riven by resistance activity as well.

In early 1941, both before and after the April War, the Volksgruppe's status depended largely on the Third Reich's foreign policy. After the indefinite delay placed on a Hungarian takeover of the Serbian Banat in summer and fall 1941 and the concomitant bolstering of the Volksdeutsche administration's position, the influence of the Reich's concatenation of ideological and martial thought started to grow. By 1942, it eclipsed the AA. Meyszner – and through him Himmler – effectively tied the Volksgruppe to himself, although he still had to report to the German commanding general in Belgrade.<sup>1241</sup> That relationship was rarely smooth, but never so divisive as to detract from the overall conduct of the war in the Balkans.

With Meyszner's arrival in Belgrade, the AA's input became limited to suggesting that the Volksgruppenführung should be the one to announce the formation of what was then deceptively termed a Volksdeutsche home army (Heimwehr). The idea was to give the impression of Volksdeutsche voluntarism and local deployment only,<sup>1242</sup> in line with the official emphasis on their volunteering for the Waffen-SS. As a ploy to

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<sup>1240</sup> "praktisch volksdeutsches Reservat" Benzler to Dan[c]kelmann (German commanding general in Serbia before Böhme), September 20, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-501/249/844.

<sup>1241</sup> Birn, pp. 240-241.

<sup>1242</sup> Benzler to AA, January 17, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,492; Luther to Triska, February 11, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100695 Geheime Reichssachen, 1941-1942, fiche 1767, frame 129,689.

impress Hungary with how well Hitler intended to keep his promise to eventually hand over the Serbian Banat with all its material and human resources intact, this was effective. Yet the tone of the AA memos from early 1942 reveals that this tactic fooled no one in the Reich's diplomatic corps. If anything, it only confirmed the Volksdeutsche's overall dependence on the Reich's pleasure – and its need for soldiers.

Sepp Janko's actions in relation to the proclamation of this new development to his co-nationals suggest that he was consumed by a desire to have his Volksgruppe do even more for Führer and Reich than was at first expected of it. Not only did Janko not object to the initial idea, but he proposed in February 1942, even before Meyszner's appointment, that he (Janko) should proclaim, via the Banat Volksdeutsche press, leaflets and posters, compulsory military service for all Volksdeutsche men between 17 and 50 years of age, the duration of which he would determine later.<sup>1243</sup> He also proposed sweetening the pill by promising financial support for the families of the men affected by this order, and the possibility of applying for individual exemptions.<sup>1244</sup>

As had happened in the period before the April War, when Janko's ideas about smuggling in weapons for his co-nationals would have upset relations between the Reich and Yugoslavia,<sup>1245</sup> in early 1942 it was not in the Reich's best interest for the Banat Volksdeutsche to set an example for too much forwardness and independent thinking to Volksdeutsche communities in other states. Having the Volksgruppenführer, rather than the Reich, proclaim obligatory military service for them would have set just such an example. It would also have disrupted the illusion that non-Reich nationals in the

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<sup>1243</sup> Benzler to AA, February 16, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frames H299,614-615.

<sup>1244</sup> Benzler to AA (February 1942), PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,615.

<sup>1245</sup> See pp. 97-98.

Waffen-SS were all volunteers. A little ideological zeal could go a long way with a Volksdeutscher in Janko's position: influential among his co-nationals and other residents of his home region, utterly dependent on the Reich.

On these points, Ribbentrop and Himmler were in agreement.<sup>1246</sup> They agreed that Janko should issue a proclamation to his co-nationals calling on them to volunteer for armed service as part of the greater German anti-Bolshevik struggle. However, they emphasized the Grenzer (border soldiers) tradition of the Volksdeutsche's ancestors and service against the Bolshevik enemy in their own home region. Himmler himself drafted the text,<sup>1247</sup> which Lorenz then passed to Janko around the time that Meyszner arrived in Serbia, ready to start mustering Volksdeutsche 'volunteers.'<sup>1248</sup>

At this point, Janko made one of his only two attempts at asserting even partial independence from Berlin since becoming Volksgruppenführer in the occupied Banat (the other happened in late 1944, see below). In line with the general trend of his relations with Berlin, the attempt contained within it the seed of its own failure. Janko tweaked the text sent to him from Himmler, and jumped the gun by having it published earlier than had been intended.

In altering several details of the text, Janko showed himself a better connoisseur of his co-nationals' mentality than Himmler. Himmler had written the text in the second person plural, stressed the suffering from which the Wehrmacht had delivered the Banat Volksdeutsche ("redeemed from the foreign yoke") and their debt of honor to Reich and

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<sup>1246</sup> Luther memo, February 17, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frames H299,608-609.

<sup>1247</sup> "Aufruf der Reichsführers-SS an die Volksdeutschen in Serbien und im Banat zur Bildung eines bewaffneten Selbstschutzes," January 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 1, frame 10.

<sup>1248</sup> Himmler to Lorenz, January 24, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-175 [Records of the Reichsführer-SS]/72/2,590,101.

Führer, but without acknowledging the Volksdeutsche claim on either.<sup>1249</sup> Janko omitted the references to Reich and Führer. Instead, he stressed the all-European struggle against Bolshevism as a broader context into which the Volksdeutsche could fit. He also referred to them as “German Volksgenossen” who had played an equal part in repelling communist attacks within the Banat in 1941 as had the Reichsdeutsche. Finally, he put the text into the first person plural, thus implicitly including himself and the Volksgruppenführung into the common Volksdeutsche debt of honor.<sup>1250</sup>

These changes did not alter the gist of Himmler’s text, but they did agree better with the Volksdeutsche sense of self and with the images of their martial ancestry the Volksgruppenführung stressed in its propaganda (see Chapter 6). Janko confirmed and, even, overemphasized his fundamental agreement with Himmler by altering the maximum age for recruitment from 45 to 50, and sneaking in a reference to the proximate calling up of men born in specific years (although the original text merely emphatically encouraged Volksdeutsche to volunteer).<sup>1251</sup> Last but not least, Janko followed this text with a portion of the one the AA and VoMi had expressly forbidden him from publishing. In it, he discussed financial care for the families of the men called up for armed service.<sup>1252</sup> Defying orders, Janko thus invoked obligatory military service for Volksdeutsche *twice* on the front page of the March 1, 1942 issue of the

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<sup>1249</sup> “vom fremden Joch erlöst” “Aufruf der Reichsführers-SS,” (1942) BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 1, frame 10.

<sup>1250</sup> Volksgruppenführer Josef ‘Sepp’ Janko, “Aufruf des Volksgruppenführers,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien* [from now on *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*], March 1, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>1251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1252</sup> Janko, “Ergänzungsbestimmungen zum Aufruf zwecks Wehrdienstleistung,” *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, March 1, 1942, p. 1.

*Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien.*

Martin Luther of the AA sputtered in outrage: “[I]n future there can be no question of [Janko] passing such decrees of his own volition, without getting the permission of the Auswärtiges Amt first.”<sup>1253</sup> This was more in the nature of a quibble about bureaucratic chains of command, and a display of the AA’s relative impotence vis-à-vis Himmler. In truth, Janko’s ideological zeal had played right into Himmler’s hands. Had Janko followed the line of seeming moderation and voluntarism invoked by Himmler and the AA, he still would not have been able to prevent his co-nationals being mobilized *en masse* at a later date. With his two proclamations, he made clear his desire to see his Volksgruppe do its ideological and völkisch duty to its full capacity. He also made a mockery of all the many subsequent invocations of Banat Volksdeutsche only volunteering for the Waffen-SS.

This left the Waffen-SS free to send a recruiting commission to the Banat, while the Volksgruppenführung rubberstamped their demands and attempted to ease the recruits’ wrenching mental transition from a newly enriched and empowered peasantry to second-class soldiers (see below).<sup>1254</sup> While the VoMi had accepted the Volksgruppe’s conservative estimate of about 10,000 men being available for inclusion in the new units in February 1942, Meyszner optimistically expected training to take no longer than four

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<sup>1253</sup> “in Zukunft nicht hingenommen werden könnte, wenn er derartige Verfügungen von sich aus erlasse, ohne dass die Zustimmung des Auswärtigen Amts hierzu eingeholt worden sei.” Luther to Benzler’s office, March 5, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,589; see also Luther to VoMi, March 5, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,590.

<sup>1254</sup> In his exculpatory postwar book, Janko naturally stressed how he had attempted to prevent mass recruitment as well as the deployment of the division, but had had control of the situation wrenched from him by the Reichsdeutsche in occupied Serbia. Janko, *Weg*, pp. 215-218, 221-222.

months and suggested filling the prescribed quota of 24,000-25,000 recruits by bringing in 15,000 Bačka Volksdeutsche.<sup>1255</sup> In practice, the training alone would take nearly six months due to repeated delays necessitated by the drilling of soldierly ways into peasant recruits. As for numbers, in a memo dated on the first anniversary of the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, Luther reported that the 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division “Prinz Eugen” (7<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Mountain Division “Prinz Eugen” of the Waffen-SS), named after Prince Eugene of Savoy on April 1, 1942,<sup>1256</sup> could already boast 10,000-15,000 recruits. Recruitment was far from over.<sup>1257</sup> In fact, it did not officially begin till later in April 1942,<sup>1258</sup> suggesting that Luther may have been writing more with a reasonable hope in the Reich getting its way than based on current fact.

The projected officer corps for the new division consisted of a mixture of Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche, especially of Romanian origin. The latter were career officers in the Romanian army before they defected to the Waffen-SS.<sup>1259</sup> One of these became division commander. Arthur Phleps acted as something of a poster child for what a Volksdeutscher with the willpower and dedication of a true German could become. He had first seen action in World War I and participated in the overthrow of the Béla Kun regime.<sup>1260</sup> He attained the rank of Lieutenant-General in the Romanian army,<sup>1261</sup> then

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<sup>1255</sup> Benzler to AA, February 16, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,603-604.

<sup>1256</sup> Casagrande, p. 213.

<sup>1257</sup> Luther memo, April 6, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,583.

<sup>1258</sup> Bambach (head of Banat administration Josef ‘Sepp’ Lapp’s chief of cabinet) to all Landratsämter and Bürgermeisterämter, April 17, 1942, Muzej Vojvodine, document 19715.

<sup>1259</sup> Albedyll (Generalstab des Heeres) to OKW/Ausland, May 4, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-175/40/2,550,814; Himmler to Romanian Minister President Ion Antonescu, May 1942 [no day given], NARA, RG 242, T-175/40/2,550,815; Berger to Himmler, April 28, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-175/40/2,550,818.

<sup>1260</sup> “Ehrungen und Gedenktage: Arthur Phleps SS-Obergruppenführer,” *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 5/6, May-June 1943, p. 119.

moved to the Waffen-SS in 1941 and applied for service in the division “Das Reich” already in early April that year, while that division was stationed in Timișoara in preparation for the invasion of the Serbian Banat.<sup>1262</sup> Instead, Phleps rounded out his völkisch and anti-Bolshevik credentials by commanding a Waffen-SS regiment on the Eastern Front<sup>1263</sup> before Himmler handpicked him for the leadership of the Banat Volksdeutsche division. Phleps served as a kind of living training aid, a model Volksdeutsche soldier, and was certainly remembered as a kind and proudly völkisch commander in postwar journal articles and memoirs penned by his former subordinates.<sup>1264</sup>

For some of the Reichsdeutsche officers, serving in “Prinz Eugen” was an education for the future of the Volk in a German-dominated, but still multiethnic East.<sup>1265</sup> For others, however, it was at best a fool’s errand. Hauptmann Amelung, commander of the Kreiskommandantur in Grossbetschkerek, was not shy about publicly expressing a very Wehrmacht-centric view of the new Waffen-SS division. He criticized its officers as incompetent and its recruits as “little men,” “degenerate” and unfit for military service.<sup>1266</sup> Though such incidents had more to do with the friction between the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS, even some of the new division’s officers voiced the

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<sup>1261</sup> Wegner, n. 135 on p. 328.

<sup>1262</sup> Berger to SS-Führungshauptamt, April 10, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2724, fiche 1, frame 20.

<sup>1263</sup> “Ehrungen und Gedenktage,” *Deutschtum im Ausland*, Heft 5/6, May-June 1943, p. 119.

<sup>1264</sup> E.g. A soldier in “Prinz Eugen,” “General Arthur Phleps: Der letzte “Grenzer” des Südostens. Eine Erinnerung an den grossen Soldaten der Siebenbürger-Sachsen,” *Der Freiwillige*, March 1956, BA MA, N 756 Sammlung Wolfgang Vopersal Bundesvorstand der ehemaligen Waffen-SS e.V., file 149b, no page numbers; Kumm, pp. 23-27.

<sup>1265</sup> Viktor Brack (an officer in “Prinz Eugen”) to Himmler, July 6, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2526, fiche 1, frame 2.

<sup>1266</sup> “Männlein . . . degeneriert” Meyszner to Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien, May 8, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-501/266/1149.

Reichsdeutsche ambivalence toward Volksdeutsche in general, and toward their fighting potential in particular. The ever outspoken Franz Unterreiner, himself a World War I veteran conscripted by “Prinz Eugen,” remembered with lingering bitterness the youthful officers’ lack of respect for many recruits’ advanced age and supposedly insufficient Germanness. The officers called them, “Banat devourers of bacon, corn peasants, old flour sacks, night watchmen, etc.”<sup>1267</sup> Even one former “Prinz Eugen” officer from the Danube region reminisced after the war that only because he was a Volksdeutscher himself did he dare to describe the initial state of the recruits as a “parcel of pigs.”<sup>1268</sup> He hastened to add that, against all odds, a functioning division did come into being.

This achievement can be credited in large part to the recruits’ willingness to learn and drill and prove themselves good (Volks)deutsche. Few Volksdeutsche who gave postwar testimonies criticized the recruitment as openly as Franz Unterreiner, who wondered rhetorically why people received written summons<sup>1269</sup> to report for duty if they were all supposed to be volunteers.<sup>1270</sup> The vinegary Wilma Slavik gave the Volksgruppenführung too much credit when she saw the persecution of the Banat Jews and the creation of “Prinz Eugen” as their ideas alone, meant to secure for Janko and his cohorts the position of Hitler’s “favorite child.”<sup>1271</sup> Remarkably, even the surviving

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<sup>1267</sup> “Banater Spekfresser, Kukurutz [Kukurutz, from the Serbian ‘kukuruz’] Bauern, Alte Mehlsäke, Nachtwächter und ähnliches” Testimony of Franz Unterreiner from Deutsch Elemer (1958) in Schieder *et al.*, p. 71.

<sup>1268</sup> “Sauhaufen” Former SS-Uscha. Stefan Helleis quoted in Kumm, p. 39.

<sup>1269</sup> The summons were co-signed by Sepp Janko and Johann Keks (appointed head of the Volksgruppe’s recruitment office) in a symbolic union of the older and younger generations of Volksdeutsche leaders. Example of an “Einberufung zum Wehrdienst” issued to a person from Apfeldorf to report to Weisskirchen, April 3, 1942, in Schieder, p. 177E.

<sup>1270</sup> Unterreiner testimony (1958) in Schieder, p. 71.

<sup>1271</sup> ““Liebkind”” Testimony of Wilma Slavik (1958), Lastenausgleichsarchiv Bayreuth (LAA), Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 780.

members of the Volksgruppenführung and former division officers tended to admit in their exculpatory works of history that few of the recruits were real volunteers, but hastened to stress that all were glad to fight in defense of their Heimat.<sup>1272</sup>

Perhaps closest to the truth – though the least garrulous on the topic – are the postwar testimonies of ordinary Volksdeutsche. These mention that some, especially young Volksdeutsche did volunteer. As far as the majority of recruits were concerned, many grumbled yet almost none resisted, refused their summons or absconded.<sup>1273</sup>

Whether their primary motive was ideology and the desire to participate in a victorious war, or acceptance of the idea that they owed their armed service to the Reich as their protector, or fear of punishment<sup>1274</sup> (and its more insidious sisters, peer pressure and the fear of ostracism), or a not-explicitly ideological but certainly blinkered devotion to what they saw as their duty as Germans,<sup>1275</sup> or a *plus ça change* resignation (especially among

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Slavik also went out of her way to defend her cousin, Johann Keks, from any suggestion he was personally implicated in the mobilization of the Volksdeutsche (frames 788-790), although he had been head of the office in charge of recruitment!

<sup>1272</sup> Beer, *Donauschwäbische Zeitgeschichte*, pp. 180-181; Kumm, pp. 38-39.

<sup>1273</sup> LAA, Ost-Dok. 17, *passim*.

<sup>1274</sup> Even the SS and Police Court in Belgrade acknowledged that the threat of punishment had been used to ensure Volksdeutsche compliance. SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr. Brausse (with Hauptamt SS-Gericht of RFSS) memo, November 18, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 7 SS- und Polizeigerichtsbarkeit, volume 91, p. 18; see also Unterreiner testimony (1958) in Schieder, p. 71. However, on at least one occasion the punishment was not nearly as terrible as what the Third Reich was capable of. About 35 Volksdeutsche of the Nazarene faith refused their mobilization orders on religious grounds, were remanded to the labor-service camp in Grossbetschkerek and then assigned to non-combatant positions such as sanitation or the veterinarian service. SS-Richter Dr. Bender to Hauptamt SS-Gericht, August 11, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 16.

<sup>1275</sup> Again from the indomitable Ms. Slavik: “[O]ur German men were too conscious of their duty and too respectable to try to evade their military duty.” (“unsere deutschen Männer viel zu pflichtbewusst und anständig waren, als dass sie sich ihren Verpflichtungen hätten entziehen wollen.”) She hastened to add that they fought for Germanness, not for the Nazis. Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frames 792-793.

the men who had already been mobilized once or twice before),<sup>1276</sup> the mobilized men accepted this last sacrifice the Reich they idealized required of them. The efficient mobilization as carried out by the Waffen-SS in cooperation with the Volksgruppenführung yielded within a year of the division's creation some 20,000 men.<sup>1277</sup> It proved, in the same months as the destruction of the Serbian Jews was being completed, that the Third Reich's various offices could cooperate very well in order to achieve its intertwined priorities: the destruction of the ideological enemy and victory in the war of ideologies.

In relation to these priorities, the Volksdeutsche's value to the Reich became increasingly instrumental. Promoting them by means of access to Aryanized property became a mere side effect of the Holocaust in Serbia-Banat. Their military service was subsumed to the needs of Hitler and Himmler's anti-Bolshevik campaigns. The Volksdeutsche never lost their ideological value to the Reich, but that did not mean they were excused from soldiering for their supper, as it were.

Specifically in the case of the Banat Volksdeutsche, the escalating conflict of personalities and jurisdictions between Harald Turner as Wehrmacht-bureaucratic representative in Serbia and Himmler's man August Meyszner resulted in Turner's being

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<sup>1276</sup> "It's the same today as it was then. Do you want to go to the army? – nobody asked you that..." ("Isto kao što je i sad, tako je bilo i onda. Hoćeš li da ideš u vojsku?- to te niko nije pitao...") Testimony of Terezija Andrejević from Zichydorf in Radović, Sindelić-Ibrajter and Weiss, p. 183.

So prominent was the mobilization of peasants in their late forties, who had already seen frontline service in the Habsburg armies in World War I, that the new Waffen-SS division was known in the Banat – with tongue planted firmly in cheek – as the "Kukuruz-und Kraut-Div." or "K.u.K.Div." "Beitrag zum Stimmungs- und Lagebericht für den Zeit v. 26.6-10.7.", no date, BA Berlin, NS 43 Aussenpolitisches Amt der NSDAP, file 202, p. 68.

<sup>1277</sup> 20,624 to be exact. Benzler to AA, April 29, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100981, fiche 2535, frame H299,408.

sent home in fall 1942.<sup>1278</sup> Thereafter Himmler's power became well and truly entrenched in Serbia-Banat so far as Volksdeutsche matters and, especially, their military deployment were concerned. This was confirmed in August 1942, as the training of the division "Prinz Eugen" was drawing to an end. Himmler then decided that the Volksgruppe in the Serbian Banat would be subject to a *de facto* obligatory military service, although this decision was not made public knowledge because it would have caused an uproar in independent European states with substantial Volksdeutsche populations.<sup>1279</sup>

In doing so, Himmler was merely approving the state of affairs after the mobilization of Banat Volksdeutsche was already a done deal. He also confirmed what Janko had been all too eager to announce already in March. This time, Janko actually objected. He may have been suffering pangs of conscience at how cheaply he had sold his Volksgruppe and resenting the fact that Phleps had shown up the mockery of his presumed authority in Volksdeutsche matters. (In Berger's uncharitable phrase, Phleps had "upended [Janko's] throne."<sup>1280</sup>) Or maybe Janko was motivated more by dread of running the Banat with most of his trained male personnel gone. Himmler responded that he was in charge of Volksdeutsche in the whole world, let alone the Banat, and that it was "impossible that Germans somewhere in Europe play at pacifism and sit around, while

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<sup>1278</sup> Turner to Meyszner, August 29, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1672, fiche 1, frames 10-16; Turner to Himmler, August 30, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1672, fiche 1, frames 17-20; Meyszner to Himmler, September 4, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1672, fiche 1, frames 36-38 and fiche 2, frames 39-40; Chef des SS-Personalhauptamtes to Himmler, October 12, 1942, Berlin, NS 19, file 1672, fiche 2, frames 49-50; Waffen-SS general Schmitt to Himmler, October 8, 1942, Berlin, NS 19, file 1672, fiche 2, frame 51; Browning, "Harald Turner," p. 271.

<sup>1279</sup> Himmler to Lorenz, August 10, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 10.

<sup>1280</sup> "Dr. Janko seinen Thron stürzen sah" Berger to Rudolf Brandt (Himmler aide), June 16, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 28.

our battalions protect them.”<sup>1281</sup> Janko’s continued unease about the division’s deployment outside of the Banat earned him almost a literal slap on the wrist. Himmler instructed Lorenz to “grab Janko by the necktie”<sup>1282</sup> and remind him of the chain of command – really of whom Janko had to thank for his position as Volksgruppenführer.

Himmler’s standpoint remained unaltered till the war’s end: willy-nilly, Volksdeutsche had to serve the Reich under arms. He did acknowledge the need to cooperate with the AA by not declaring an actual obligatory military duty for *all* Volksdeutsche, regardless of citizenship.<sup>1283</sup> He also modified the size of the Volksdeutsche levies depending on their state of residence. Only Volksdeutsche living in occupied territories – such as Serbia-Banat, Ukraine, later also Hungary – could be mobilized more or less openly. In countries not occupied by the Reich, they could be encouraged-*cum*-pressured to volunteer<sup>1284</sup> or have their national military service transferred to the Reich by their host states, as happened later in the war in Slovakia and Hungary (see below).

Even with this proviso, in 1943 Berger presented the mobilization of the Banat Volksdeutsche as having been based on an obscure 1872 General Levy Act for the

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<sup>1281</sup> “Es ist unmöglich, das Deutsche in Europa irgendwo als Pazifisten herumhocken und sich von unseren Bataillonen beschützen lassen...” Himmler to Lorenz (1942), BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 10.

<sup>1282</sup> “Ich halte es aber für richtig, wenn Sie Janko einmal ganz gehörig beim Schlips nehmen würden” Himmler to Lorenz, October 25, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 292, fiche 1, frame 5.

<sup>1283</sup> Dr. Reinecke (SS-Standartenführer und Chef des Hauptamtes SS-Gericht) to SS-Hauptamt, “Völkische Wehrdienstpflicht von Volksdeutschen ausländischer Staatsangehörigkeit,” July 12, 1943, NARA, RG 238, entry 174, document NO-1649, no page number [only page of this document].

<sup>1284</sup> Horst Bender (SS legal office) to Hauptamt SS-Gericht, June 19, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 29.

Berger reiterated this point with regard to the suggestion that an obligatory military service be proclaimed for the Volksdeutsche in (occupied) Serbia and (nominally independent) Croatia. Berger to Brandt (1943), BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 28.

mobilization of the militia (Landsturm) in the Tyrol.<sup>1285</sup> While some historians see this as evidence of Himmler and the SS's legalistic bent,<sup>1286</sup> it seems more like justification of the 1942 mobilization after the fact, a sop to legalistic sentiment more than real devotion to it. It was hardly the first or the last time even the SS, the self-proclaimed ideological elite of the Third Reich, bent its own rules to accommodate Himmler's desire for power. Though he went out of his way to mention how Volksdeutsche had to be treated with kid gloves much more than Reichsdeutsche, Berger inadvertently came close to expressing the real sentiment of the SS leadership. He remarked that Serbia-Banat was, for all intents and purposes, sovereign German territory (Hoheitsgebiet) by dint of being occupied by Reich forces, and that "nobody really minds what we do with our Volksdeutsche down there."<sup>1287</sup>

Himmler also never removed the word (and ideal) of volunteering from the name of the division "Prinz Eugen." He thus both extended a conciliatory gesture to the AA from his position of power and saved ideological face by presenting the division as a mini Volksgemeinschaft of happy and eager ethnic German soldiers. As already indicated, the motivations which spurred Volksdeutsche to comply with mobilization orders were mixed. Some pulled strings to be released from military service or to have relatives released.<sup>1288</sup> The overall mood in the Banat was one of passionate pride in their soldiers,

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<sup>1285</sup> Berger to Brandt (1943), BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 27.

<sup>1286</sup> E.g. Stein, pp. 171-172.

<sup>1287</sup> "dass sich ja kein Mensch darum kümmert, was wir unten mit unseren Volksdeutschen tun." Berger to Brandt (1943), BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 91, p. 27.

<sup>1288</sup> Testimony of Marija Šibul from Grosskikinda in Četković and Sindelić-Ibrajter, p. 102.

prompting general mistrust of any able-bodied Volksdeutsche man who did not wear the Waffen-SS uniform.<sup>1289</sup>

Pride or not, the Volksgruppenführung's daily operation and the continued exporting of agricultural surpluses from the Reich were in danger of grinding to a halt. This, in turn, led to the introduction of the compulsory labor service, the Hofpatenschaft, and the employment of women and non-Germans in the Banat administration (see Chapter 4). By August 1942 the Volksgruppenführung was clamoring for six hundred essential administrative, economic and pedagogical personnel (Janko himself included) to be released from active Waffen-SS duty,<sup>1290</sup> following such a release secured for Banat administration chief Sepp Lapp and his staff.<sup>1291</sup> This request was approved in early September 1942.<sup>1292</sup> It earned the "brave Volksgruppenführer" the scorn of at least some less enthusiastic, older members of the Volksgruppe, who accused him of "settl[ing] into his comfortable office . . . claiming to be indispensable"<sup>1293</sup> and "stay[ing] at home, where no bullets whistle past."<sup>1294</sup> These older Volksdeutsche also heaped scorn on younger<sup>1295</sup> or richer<sup>1296</sup> Volksdeutsche who pulled strings in order to be discharged.

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<sup>1289</sup> Meyszner to Himmler's Persönlicher Stab, January 2, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 3798, fiche 2, frame 60.

<sup>1290</sup> Triska to VoMi, August 1942 [no day given], PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frames H299,568 and H299,571.

<sup>1291</sup> Lapp to Janko, July 28, 1942, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv ['German Archive'], box 27-A, folder 5, document 77.

<sup>1292</sup> SS-Führungshauptamt to "Prinz Eugen," September 3, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,563.

<sup>1293</sup> "der tapfere Volksgruppenführer . . . setzte sich in seine gemütliche Kanzlei . . . mit der Begründung, dass er hier unabhkömmlich sei." Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 791.

<sup>1294</sup> "er bleibt zu Hause, denn dort pfeifen ja keine Kugeln." Letter of Nikolaus Unterwiener of Mokrin to his wife Anna, April 11, 1944, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 2, document 51.

<sup>1295</sup> Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 784.

Despite Berlin's decision on the essential personnel, nearly a third of the six hundred were still with "Prinz Eugen" in November 1942,<sup>1297</sup> and required an AA intervention on the Volksgruppe's behalf.<sup>1298</sup> Even so, the final decision rested with the Waffen-SS.<sup>1299</sup> This suggests that even before the Axis defeat at Stalingrad and the announcement of total war in the Third Reich, mobilizing all available manpower for active deployment in the war took precedence over building the Nazi New Order or developing a long-term plan for economic extraction to feed the Reich's war machine. The destruction of the enemy in the field and the destruction of the racial enemy in the territories already under Reich control were two halves of one goal. Other, ideological as well as tangible benefits the Reich could extract from the Volksdeutsche were subordinated to this goal.

#### "Prinz Eugen" in the Field

Even in its planning stages, the new Waffen-SS division was not meant to stay in the Banat indefinitely. The inclusion of the word 'mountain' in its name alone implied that it was not intended for deployment in the Banat lowlands, which were not plagued by the

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<sup>1296</sup> Letter of Barbara Franz from Karlsdorf to her husband Josef [served with "Prinz Eugen"], July 29, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7 "7. SS Freiwilligen-Gebirgs-Division "Prinz Eugen"," file 14, p. 190.

<sup>1297</sup> Benzler to AA, November 17, 1942, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100615 Allgemeine Lage im Banat, Ariesierungen, Liefer- und Wirtschaftsangelegenheiten, 1941-1944, fiche 2 frame 57; Luther to Jüttner (Chef des SS-Führungshauptamts und Kommandoamts der Waffen-SS), November 19, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,534.

<sup>1298</sup> The AA later claimed that the successful recruitment and training of the division "Prinz Eugen" had been due to its efforts far more than Himmler's, and that it was only thanks to the AA's intervention that the essential Volksdeutsche personnel was eventually released from active duty. Luther to Triska, January 7, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100896 Volksdeutsche (Allgemeines), Volkstumsfragen, 1938-1944, fiche 2294, frame 267,536.

<sup>1299</sup> Triska to Jüttner, December 18, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,533; Jüttner to Benzler, December 31, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,531.

resistance as were other, mountainous Yugoslav lands. Despite Benzler's hesitation, borne of his position's focus on Serbian affairs, Ribbentrop acknowledged already in February 1942 that the proposed Volksdeutsche units might completely replace Reichsdeutsche units in Serbia-Banat, and release the latter for the anti-Bolshevik struggle elsewhere.<sup>1300</sup> Despite official propaganda which stressed "Prinz Eugen"'s role in defending its Banat Heimat (see Chapter 6), ultimately Benzler's idea that the Volksdeutsche units might supplement and aid, but not supplant Reichsdeutsche ones completely,<sup>1301</sup> carried the day. This was not because of any special regard for Benzler's views, but because the military decision-makers in Berlin were ideologically incapable of trusting a motley crowd of Volksdeutsche, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Albanians to keep the Balkans pacified on their own, without Reich supervision. "Prinz Eugen" was fully integrated into the Nazi war effort. It had some Reichsdeutsche officers, received its marching orders from Berlin, and cooperated in the field with the Wehrmacht and other pro-Axis forces.

The Reich's urgent need for more reliable, non-Reichsdeutsche soldiers in the Balkans was clear already in summer 1942, in the repeated announcements and delays of the date when "Prinz Eugen" could be deployed. In June it was late August,<sup>1302</sup> in mid-August it was September 10,<sup>1303</sup> finally in early September the date for "Prinz Eugen" to deploy outside of the Banat was set for October 1, 1942.<sup>1304</sup> Wehrmacht,<sup>1305</sup> SS<sup>1306</sup> and

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<sup>1300</sup> Ribbentrop to AA representatives in Budapest and Belgrade, February 4, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,508.

<sup>1301</sup> Benzler to AA, February 4, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,510.

<sup>1302</sup> Gerhart Feine (aide to Benzler) to AA, June 30, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,630.

<sup>1303</sup> Kriegstagebuch, August 14, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 32, p. 8.

<sup>1304</sup> Kriegstagebuch, September 9, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 33, p. 6.

<sup>1305</sup> Befehlshaber in Serbien to Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost, September 5, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 33, p. 34.

Waffen-SS<sup>1307</sup> representatives were unified, for once, in their high hopes for the division's success in the field.

Several historians have judged "Prinz Eugen" and other ethnic divisions of the Waffen-SS as both cause and example of the decline of that institution's elite status and combat effectiveness.<sup>1308</sup> While "Prinz Eugen"'s efficiency was certainly greatest in defensive fighting,<sup>1309</sup> such was ultimately its purpose. As an explicitly anti-partisan fighting force, "Prinz Eugen" was a responsive and defensive force, especially during its initial deployment in Serbia proper from October 1942 till January 1943. It combined police duties with regular security, patrols and anti-partisan action.<sup>1310</sup>

In this period, Himmler confirmed his supreme position in Volksdeutsche matters by reiterating his ban on Southeast-European Volksdeutsche being drafted by the Wehrmacht. He stressed that only in the ranks of the Waffen-SS could Volksdeutsche receive the ideological and military training they needed.<sup>1311</sup> Despite these repeated assertions of Himmler's authority, the Wehrmacht remained in charge of anti-partisan activities in Serbia, and had the power to command even the Waffen-SS as one of the

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<sup>1306</sup> Berger to Himmler, March 31, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 3896, fiche 1, frame 3.

<sup>1307</sup> Brack to Berger, September 5, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 292, fiche 1, frame 3.

<sup>1308</sup> Wegner, pp. 330-331; Stein, pp. 191-193.

<sup>1309</sup> Stein, p. 221.

<sup>1310</sup> Bader memo, December 6, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 36, p. 142.

<sup>1311</sup> Himmler to OKW, October 13, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1672, fiche 2, frames 60-61.

In order to boost division morale, Himmler paid a one-day visit to it in October 1942, while it was stationed in the area of Kraljevo in central Serbia (Benzler to AA, October 17, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,699; Benzler to AA, October 20, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/200/153,700; Picot (AA) to Luther, October 19, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5783/ H298,609). This was quite an honor considering the Nazi leadership was not prone to touring its newly acquired Lebensraum extensively, especially since Himmler had planned to use the rumor of his impending visit to speed up the division's training, without actually making the visit (Picot to Luther, August 31, 1942, NARA, RG 242, T-120/5783/ H298,606).

anti-partisan forces there.<sup>1312</sup> It was not until “Prinz Eugen” was deployed in the Independent State of Croatia in January 1943 that it was removed from Meyszner’s – and the German commanding general in Serbia’s – jurisdiction.<sup>1313</sup> Although from then on its actions in the field were coordinated with those of the Wehrmacht in Croatia, the Croatian army, the Ustaša militia and, later, the Bosnian Muslim Waffen-SS division “Handschar,” this removal of the Reich’s occupation infrastructure in Serbia from the jurisdictional melee surrounding the division<sup>1314</sup> cemented Himmler’s personal influence over “Prinz Eugen.”

In the course of their deployment, the men of the division “Prinz Eugen” were treated to a steady round of propaganda lectures and evening gatherings intended to instill in them a sense of belonging to a greater, racial and fighting community of Germans, as was common for all Waffen-SS units.<sup>1315</sup> The central element in this martial-ideological education, which Himmler had vaunted as essential and only to be given the Volksdeutsche within Waffen-SS ranks, was the notion that the enemy was not what he appeared to be. Although they drew on the central tenet of National Socialism – that at

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<sup>1312</sup> Kriegstagebuch, September 8, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 33, p. 5; Bader to Meyszner, September 10, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 33, p. 62.

General Bader inadvertently helped Himmler’s marginalization of the AA’s influence in Southeast Europe when he remarked that he could not be expected to run every operational decision he made past Benzler, just in case it had foreign-political significance. Bader to OKW, October 14, 1942, BA MA, RW 40, file 34, pp. 107-108.

<sup>1313</sup> Reinecke to Berger, January 7, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 7, volume 131, p. 7.

<sup>1314</sup> The AA objected to this removal of the “main factor of German power” (deutscher militärischer Hauptmachtfaktor”) in the Balkans and the concomitant extension of the Bulgarian zone of occupation in Serbia, but was overruled by military imperative. Feine to AA, December 25, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frame H299,538. The military as well as the foreign-political imperative of curbing Hungarian ambition did win the AA the small victory of blocking Keitel’s idea to have Hungarian troops occupy a part of Serbia, thus freeing up some Reichsdeutsche troops for anti-partisan action in Greece. Von Grote (AA) memo, March 5, 1943, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume V (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), document no. 178.

<sup>1315</sup> Förster, pp. 110-112.

the root of all the forces opposed to the Third Reich, be they communist or capitalist, was the Jewish people – the anti-Semitic aspect was not stressed in proclamations directed at Banat Volksdeutsche recruits. Much like Banat Volksdeutsche propaganda, the propaganda and the very phrasing of orders directed at the division “Prinz Eugen” did not discount the threat the Jews were seen to pose to the New Order. However, they stressed instead the perceived savagery, slyness and numerical superiority of the Slavic, and especially the communist, enemy. This was the enemy that the Volksdeutsche recruits were supposed to know<sup>1316</sup> and fear. The Third Reich played on and built up that fear.

The October 10, 1941 order issued by then-commanding general in Serbia Franz Böhme set the stage by establishing the punitive shooting of civilians – Serbs and Jews – as the norm for German anti-partisan action in Southeast Europe. It was inspired by National Socialism’s ideological platform, and especially the view of Serbs as fundamentally untrustworthy.<sup>1317</sup> Much as the Commissar Order (Kommissarbefehl) did in the occupied Soviet Union, this order normalized punitive action by German armed forces against civilians perceived as racial inferiors and enemies in Southeast Europe.

A training document for the division “Prinz Eugen,” prepared for it by its newly appointed commander Arthur Phleps, confirmed the expected mode and rate of retaliation: either one hundred Partisans or one hundred civilians from the vicinity for every dead division member, fifty for every wounded comrade in arms.<sup>1318</sup> The document went on to describe what it was like to be surrounded by enemies on all sides, a perspective typical of both the Reich’s view of its position in the ongoing conflict and the

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<sup>1316</sup> Casagrande, pp. 19-20; Wegner, p. 311.

<sup>1317</sup> See n. 404 on p. 153.

<sup>1318</sup> “Prinz Eugen” commander Arthur Phleps, “Taktische Grundsätze für die Führung des Kleinkrieges,” April 27, 1942, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 15, p. 152.

Banat Volksdeutsche historical sense of self.<sup>1319</sup> It also substantiated the Reich's prevalent view that the "fanatically fighting enemy can only be opposed by an even more fanatical and more effective combatant."<sup>1320</sup> It did so by offering a more specific context for the need for utmost brutality in the field: the Serbian people's habitual perception of all kindness as weakness, and its pugnacious fanaticism.

The population must be so impressed [underlined in the original] by the actions of our battalions and the behavior of every one of us that the mere appearance of a single man with the Odal rune on his collar and the national emblem [the Reich eagle and swastika] on his arm would cause them to show respect, and nip all enmity in the bud.<sup>1321</sup>

In view of such an attitude displayed by Reichs- and Volksdeutsche officers alike to the civilians in Serbia proper, Phleps' appeal to the selfsame civilians to cooperate and aid the German armed forces in eradicating the communist "plague"<sup>1322</sup> from their midst rang decidedly hollow. In vain did Phleps seek to assure his Serbian audience that "a law-abiding population can live in peace and prosperity under the protection of the German sword."<sup>1323</sup> The operating principle of the division "Prinz Eugen" in the field – seconded by the Wehrmacht and the AA<sup>1324</sup> – was expressed by Himmler with his idiosyncratic

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<sup>1319</sup> Phleps, "Taktische Grundsätze für die Führung des Kleinkrieges" (1942), BA MA, RS 3-7, file 15, p. 133.

<sup>1320</sup> "Dem fanatisch kämpfenden Feind muss ein noch fanatischerer und besser kämpfender Streiter entgegentreten." *Ibid.*

<sup>1321</sup> "Die Bevölkerung muss derart durch die Aktionen unserer Abteilungen und durch das Auftreten jedes Einzelnen beeindruckt sein, dass bereits das Erscheinen eines einzelnen Mannes, der die Odalsrune am Spiegel und das Hoheitszeichen am Arme trägt, Respekt einflösst und jede feindselige Regung erstickt." Phleps, "Taktische Grundsätze für die Führung des Kleinkrieges" (1942), BA MA, RS 3-7, file 15, p. 151.

<sup>1322</sup> "Pest" Phleps, "Aufruf an die Bevölkerung!", no date but probably October 1942, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 61/10, p. 2 of this document.

<sup>1323</sup> "eine sich den Gesetzen fügende Bevölkerung unter dem Schutz des deutschen Schwertes in Ruhe und gut leben [kann]" Phleps, "Taktische Grundsätze für die Führung des Kleinkrieges" (1942), BA MA, RS 3-7, file 15, p. 151.

<sup>1324</sup> "We are leading a war in the Balkans in order to annihilate the Serbian trouble spot once and for all. It is not in our interest to allow a reawakening of Greater Serbian thought." ("Der Krieg

turn of phrase: “the Homo Balkanicus cannot bear a gentle hand. He must feel the lash.”<sup>1325</sup>

The Banat Volksdeutsche recruits must have been very receptive to such a view of the enemy, considering the images of the Slavic communist propagated by their press. It also corresponded to the perception of historical exposure to an inimical and foreign human environment, which was central to their sense of self. The dehumanization of the enemy was furthered by Reich leaders’ decisions about official terminology in 1942. First Himmler banned the use in German documents of the word ‘partisans’ as used by the communist resistance in the Soviet Union and elsewhere to refer to its members. This word lent said resistance members an aura of martial glory where Himmler wanted German soldiers to see only “bandits, franc tireurs and criminal thugs” to be annihilated.<sup>1326</sup> This decision resonated especially in Yugoslav lands, where the actual name of the resistance led by Josip Broz Tito was partizani.<sup>1327</sup> The Yugoslav Partisans were not seen as partisans, but as mere criminals deserving of punishment.

On top of this, later in 1942 Hitler decreed that the resistance in the East and Southeast could not be put down without considering every civilian, women and children included, as a potential ‘bandit.’ Hitler gave legal right to every one of his soldiers to

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auf dem Balkan wurde von uns geführt, um den serbischen Unruheherd ein für allemal zu vernichten. Wir haben daher keinerlei Interesse daran, den grossserbischen Gedanken wieder wach werden zu lassen.”) Ribbentrop to Neubacher, January 29, 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-120/775/368,734.

<sup>1325</sup> “der Balkanmensch die milde Hand nicht verträgt. Er muss die Peitsche fühlen.” Phleps to Himmler, July 10, 1944, quoted in Karl Schmieder, “Auf Umwegen zum Vernichtungskrieg? Der Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien, 1941-1944,” in *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), p. 918.

<sup>1326</sup> “Banditen, Franktireure und kriminelle Verbrecher” Himmler’s July 31, 1942 order quoted in memo to Generalmajor Wedel (Chef der Propagandatruppen), August 9, 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-175/74/2,591,687.

<sup>1327</sup> The full name was Narodnooslobodilačka vojska i partizanski odredi Jugoslavije – the People's Liberation Army and Partisan Units of Yugoslavia.

abuse or kill any civilian, regardless of age or gender, who was so much as suspected of being a communist or aiding the communist cause.<sup>1328</sup> This order declared, in effect, open season in East and Southeast Europe on anyone who could not prove they were an Axis supporter with impeccable political and ideological credentials. For the division “Prinz Eugen,” the atmosphere of paranoia and violence engendered by such guidelines became heightened when it was moved out of the jurisdictional boundaries still incumbent on it during its deployment in Serbia, and into the Independent State of Croatia in January 1943.

This move came about as a result of the movement of the majority of Tito’s forces into Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was a part of the Independent State of Croatia. There the Partisans proceeded to attract supporters from among the ethnic Serbs, but also the Croats and Muslims disenchanted with the narrow ideological platforms offered by the Ustaše, the Reich *and* the Četnici.<sup>1329</sup> Attendant on this was the general weakness of the Ustaša government and its inability to police its own provincial areas, as well as Himmler’s continued ambition to muster Croatian and, if possible, Hungarian Volksdeutsche and unite them in “Prinz Eugen” as a solid Volksdeutsche fighting bloc in Southeast Europe.<sup>1330</sup>

It was in this new arena of operations that the Volksdeutsche division started going on the offensive, though never independently of larger operations against resistance strongholds such as Operations Weiss (January-March 1943) and Schwartz (May-June 1943). In fall 1943 it moved on to operations in Dalmatia. It was also in Croatia that the guidelines for anti-partisan action issued in 1942 came to the fore, especially after the

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<sup>1328</sup> Keitel order, December 16, 1942, USHMM, RG-49.002\*01, fiche 16, document 238.

<sup>1329</sup> Pavlowitch, pp. 210-213.

<sup>1330</sup> Pavlowitch, p. 273; Casagrande pp. 237-239.

whole territory of the Independent State of Croatia was declared a German Bandenkampfgebiet (Anti-Partisan Combat Area) in mid-1943, regardless of its legal independence.<sup>1331</sup> This gave German forces in Croatia maximum power and discretion in the course of anti-partisan actions. In summer 1943 the German commanding general in Croatia and the commander of all German forces in Southeast Europe still contradicted each other, but in a way which increased the discretionary power of commanders in the field. It was the ultimate oxymoron of ideological warfare: all harshness should be used in putting down the resistance,<sup>1332</sup> but preferably not against friendly civilians,<sup>1333</sup> disregarding the fact that the two were often indistinguishable in guerrilla warfare.

In this period, there was also some difference of opinion inside the division “Prinz Eugen” on such issues as whether anyone below the rank of battalion commander could order the shooting of civilians, and whether women and children should be shot.<sup>1334</sup> Some of the older residents of Bosnia-Herzegovina had fond memories of their lives during the Austrian occupation of Bosnia before World War I and initially looked on all German-speakers as the inheritors of that noble imperial tradition (see Chapter 6). Or at least they saw the Germans as a welcome change from the fighting between the Ustaše and the Partisans.<sup>1335</sup> This rosy image could not last. In vain did Phleps’ replacement as division commander, Karl von Oberkamp, appeal to field commanders’ common sense in

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<sup>1331</sup> Birn, p. 271.

<sup>1332</sup> Befehlshaber der deutschen Truppen in Kroatien, “Grundsätze und Durchführungsbestimmungen für Säuberungsunternehmen im Operationsgebiet,” July 10, 1943, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 5, p. 158.

<sup>1333</sup> Oberbefehlshaber Südost, “Befehl für Abwehr- und Vergeltungsmassnahmen gegen die fdl. Bevölkerung,” July 14, 1943, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 3, p. 505.

<sup>1334</sup> “Prinz Eugen” commander (after Phleps) Karl von Oberkamp to “Prinz Eugen,” July 20, 1943, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 5, p. 160.

<sup>1335</sup> Kühn (liaison officer of the AA representative in Zagreb with the German commanding general in Zagreb), “Reisebericht,” February 2, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101094 Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1943, fiche 2821, frame H298,638.

assessing whether killing the families of men absent because away fighting either with the Partisans or with the Četnici might not drive even more civilians into the arms of the resistance: “on such grounds one could, and would even have to, flatten substantial portions of the Croatian state with the ground. Anything else would be a useless half-effort.”<sup>1336</sup>

By late 1943, however, the situation had deteriorated beyond salvaging. Italy had departed the war, the Ustaša state was very weak, overstretched Axis forces could not control the Croatian and Bosnian countryside, and a state of *de facto* civil war existed between the Četnici and the Partisans, in which civilians of all ethnicities and religions made for all too easy targets for occupier and resistance member alike. In October 1943, Hermann Neubacher was dispatched to act officially as the AA liaison for all of Southeast Europe, really to help coordinate all of the Axis armed forces there in a desperate effort to wrest back control of what had become a free-for-all melee.<sup>1337</sup>

In typical Reich fashion, this attempt was made by means of driving the already established approach to anti-partisan warfare to its furthest logical extent. Starting in late 1943, territorial commanders could, with the approval of the Oberbefehlshaber Südost (Supreme Army Commander in the Southeast), order retaliatory action including shooting, hanging, arrest and destruction of homesteads of ‘bandits’ and their helpers, but not just anyone who lived in the vicinity. There was a fatal loophole: all those, women and children included, for whom a reasonable conclusion of guilt or accompliceship

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<sup>1336</sup> “man mit einer solchen Begründung wesentliche Teile des Staates Kroatien überhaupt dem Erdboden gleichmachen könnte und sogar müsste, da alles andere nur nutzlose halbe Arbeit wäre.” Oberkamp to “Prinz Eugen” (1943), BA MA, RS 3-7, file 5, p. 161.

<sup>1337</sup> Hitler order, “Die einheitliche Führung des Kampfes gegen den Kommunismus im Südosten,” October 29, 1943, NARA, RG 242, T-120/775/368,657.

could be established, were as subject to these retaliatory actions as proven communists or resistance fighters.<sup>1338</sup>

In practical terms, this gradual exacerbation of Reich policies, shaped from the outset by an extremely negative ideological view of the enemy, meant that whereas in Serbia proper in late 1942 the division “Prinz Eugen” participated in several large-scale massacres of civilians, such action became standard and routine practice in the Independent State of Croatia in 1943.<sup>1339</sup> The division gained such a reputation for indiscriminate trigger-happiness that the Reichsdeutsche in Croatia actually lodged a complaint in 1943 after members of “Prinz Eugen” killed a number of Muslims (including several members of the 13. SS-Gebirgs-Division “Handschar”) in eastern Bosnia.<sup>1340</sup> The Ustaša authorities lodged a complaint of their own in early 1944 when, to all appearances, Četnici collaborating with Axis forces<sup>1341</sup> and wearing “Prinz Eugen” uniforms slaughtered Croatian civilians in the Dalmatian hinterland.<sup>1342</sup>

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<sup>1338</sup> Generaloberst Alexander Löhr (Oberbefehlshaber Südost), “Sühnemassnahmen,” December 22, 1943, BA MA, RW 40, file 89, pp. 1-4 of this document.

<sup>1339</sup> Testimony of captured “Prinz Eugen” member Jakob Cajger, August 12, 1947, Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 77, folder 7, document 4, pp. 2-3; Schmieder, pp. 910-911.

<sup>1340</sup> Sicherheitspolizei in Sarajevo to Einsatzgruppe E in Zagreb, July 7, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1434, fiche 1, frames 2-4.

<sup>1341</sup> Alongside the occasional exchange of prisoners with the Partisans (General Rendulin with the 2. Panzerarmee to Oberbefehlshaber der 2. Panzerarmee, February 18, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 85), this was yet another sign of how thinly stretched and desperate for collaborators from any anti-Bolshevik quarter the Reich had become by late 1943 (transcript of the conversation between SS-Staf. Schmidhuber and Herzegovina Četnik leader Tozo Perović, September 26, 1943, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 6, pp. 91-94; Ribbentrop to Neubacher, January 29, 1944, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume VII (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), document no. 191; “Prinz Eugen” to Phleps as commander of the V. SS-Gebirgs-Korps, February 25, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 16, pp. 160-161).

The strategy of pitting Četnici against Partisans in the hope that they would destroy each other failed, not least because the Četnici were by far the weaker resistance movement by early 1944.

<sup>1342</sup> Siegfried Kasche (AA representative in Zagreb) to AA, April 9, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101095 Berichte und Meldungen zur Lage in und über Jugoslawien, 1944, fiche 2824, frames H298,881-882; Croatian Embassy in Berlin memo, April 11, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101095, fiche 2824, frame H298,872; German Ambassador in Budapest Otto

“Prinz Eugen” was given the right on both occasions. Its field commanders had merely taken the leeway given them by the general guidelines on anti-partisan warfare.<sup>1343</sup> This wanton approach to warfare was compounded by the fact that, unlike in Serbia proper, where the division members’ supposed intimate knowledge of the enemy was already hampered by differences in living standard and language, in Bosnia and Dalmatia the men of “Prinz Eugen” really could not have been said to have known their enemy at all. Certainly they could not have always told Muslim from Croat from Serb, even had they had the good will to try to do so.<sup>1344</sup> Were effectiveness in killing civilians a measure of military prowess, then the division “Prinz Eugen” would have acquitted itself well. Instead, it was a division of middling success in anti-partisan activity, complete with the massacres of civilians this entailed. Its efforts were undone by poor coordination between the different Axis forces and the wartime Reich’s perennial problem: lack of said forces.

For the Waffen-SS as an institution, this meant an increased intake of Volksdeutsche. By June 1944, some 200,000 Volksdeutsche were under arms in the Waffen-SS and the German police.<sup>1345</sup> The 1942 recruitment in the Serbian Banat was only a part of this enterprise. Already in early summer 1942, while “Prinz Eugen” was solely a *Banat* Volksdeutsche division, Himmler was considering levying Romanian,

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von Erdmannsdorff memo, April 12, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101095, fiche 2824, frame H298,874; Kasche to AA, April 14, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101095, fiche 2824, frame H298,879.

<sup>1343</sup> Phleps to Himmler, September 7, 1943, NS 19, file 1434, fiche 1, frame 15; Kasche to AA, April 16, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101095, fiche 2824, frame H298,876.

<sup>1344</sup> Phleps to Himmler (1943), NS 19, file 1434, fiche 1, frame 15.

<sup>1345</sup> SS-Obersturmbannführer Klumm to Himmler, June 10, 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-175/22/2,527,535.

Mark Mazower is correct in stating that, in spite of all the Reich’s efforts, relatively few Volksdeutsche were mobilized (p. 354), if by war’s end a couple hundred thousand served out of a European Volksdeutsche population of 10-12 million.

Hungarian and Croatian Volksdeutsche to add to its ranks, with a racial thinker's disregard for state borders.<sup>1346</sup> Following the defeat at Stalingrad, he increased pressure on other Axis states to transfer their Volksdeutsche's military obligation to the Reich. This would have allowed the Waffen-SS to recruit Croatian, Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian Volksdeutsche under the continued pretense of volunteering.<sup>1347</sup>

Individual states' bargaining power vis-à-vis the Reich continued to matter. Occupied Serbia-Banat and Croatia, which was occupied in all but name, came in second and a very close third of all Southeast European states, percentage-wise, in terms of their Volksdeutsche serving in the Waffen-SS. The only state to outstrip them was as-yet unoccupied Hungary in a display of its declining foreign-political clout in the later part of the war.<sup>1348</sup>

Some of these non-Banat recruits were included in the division "Prinz Eugen," since the Banat Volksgruppe had been largely drained in 1942.<sup>1349</sup> Thereafter, it had to send more men to its division by cutting into its meager border-patrol and police manpower pool. By early 1944, just over half of "Prinz Eugen" still consisted of Banat Volksdeutsche. The rest were a mixture of Romanian, Hungarian, Slovak and Croatian

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<sup>1346</sup> Luther memo, June 4, 1942, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101011, fiche 2606, frames H299,579-580.

<sup>1347</sup> Lumans, "The Military Obligation of the Volksdeutsche," pp. 317-320.

<sup>1348</sup> In December 1943, some 14,7% of the Banat Volksgruppe served the Reich in the Waffen-SS, Wehrmacht or the police, as did some 14,4% of Croatian Volksdeutsche, inclusive of those serving in the Croatian army. For other states, the percentages were as follows, not inclusive of the Volksdeutsche working in the Reich or doing völkische labor service at home, but inclusive of those serving in their host states' armies: 5,57% from Slovakia, 11,7% from Romania, and 23,73% from Hungary (the report I derived these numbers from states the Hungarian percentage erroneously as under 4,74% despite providing all the numbers needed for the calculation!). "Volksdeutsche in der Waffen-SS" (1943), NARA, RG 238, entry 174, box 2, document NO-2015, p. 3.

<sup>1349</sup> Though Feine overstated the case when he claimed there could not be more than two hundred able-bodied men left in the Banat in April 1943. Feine to AA, April 8, 1943, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100981, fiche 2535, frame H299,410.

Volksdeutsche as well as Reichsdeutsche.<sup>1350</sup> Even so, the division remained anchored in the image of a hardy community of Volksdeutsche frontiersmen specifically from the Serbian Banat, its point of origin and ideological identifier. This association was its claim to fame inside the Banat as well as inside the Waffen-SS, but it was also its greatest obstacle on the road to military-ideological greatness.

The division's problems, apart from the availability of manpower, boiled down to the unresolved ambivalence in the Reichsdeutsche's attitude toward Volksdeutsche, exacerbated in the field by the fact that the former tended to be officers commanding the latter. Paying lip-service to the Volksdeutsche's racial and ideological steadfastness was all very well. At bottom, most of the Reichsdeutsche officers could not see past the Balkan landscape they were deployed in, and associated its Volksdeutsche with every detail in which Southeast Europe failed to be the German heartland. Instead, it seemed to them a "pig land."<sup>1351</sup>

Some of the officers praised their men for becoming true fighters.<sup>1352</sup> When "Prinz Eugen" elicited outside praise, however, its successes were usually credited to Phleps's efforts to whip "completely Serbianized, mostly too old" recruits into shape.<sup>1353</sup> Or the compliments were backhanded at best, suggesting that the division had not done

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<sup>1350</sup> The Reichsdeutsche accounted for 8,27% of the division's numbers. The Volksdeutsche were from Serbia-Banat (53,20%), Romania (22,02%), Croatia (10,65%), Slovakia (3,07%), Hungary (2,69%) and elsewhere (0,10%). SS-Ersatzinspektion Südostraum memo, April 3, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 17, p. 115.

<sup>1351</sup> "Sauland" SS-Standartenführer Requard on Croatia quoted in Kasche to AA, April 18, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 101095, fiche 2824, frame H298,888.

<sup>1352</sup> "Prinz Eugen"'s Gebirgs-Artillerie-Regiment to "Prinz Eugen"'s Abteilung Ia, July 22, 1943, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 7, p. 33.

<sup>1353</sup> "völlig serbisierten, zum grossen Teil überalterten" Brack memo, March 23, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 938, fiche 1, frame 8.

too shabbily for a bunch of Volksdeutsche.<sup>1354</sup> More commonly, as often happened also to Germanic recruits in other divisions,<sup>1355</sup> “Prinz Eugen” officers expected men of advanced years to perform feats of physical endurance such as an uphill march, in July, while carrying full gear.<sup>1356</sup> They also continued to heap verbal abuse on the Volksdeutsche.<sup>1357</sup> At the same time, the ever *petit bourgeois* Himmler decided to root out the “Balkan custom” of cursing someone’s mother in an argument by having a division member executed for breaching his (Himmler’s) ban on such language.<sup>1358</sup>

For their part, many Volksdeutsche seem to have become quickly disenchanted with the life of a soldier for Hitler. Already in 1942, Phleps (who had, as division commander, embraced the Reich’s worldview as his own) castigated the men for writing anonymous letters to Janko, Meyszner and other occupation officials in Serbia, complaining of poor treatment, food and general conditions.<sup>1359</sup> By 1944 the Volksdeutsche were voicing the same complaints in their regular letters home, possibly in a passive-aggressive attempt to get the censors’ attention.<sup>1360</sup> However, none of the small

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<sup>1354</sup> SS-Hauptsturmführer und Kommandeur Lohr, “Erfahrungsbericht über den Einsatz der SS-Geb.Nachr.Abt.7 beim Unternehmen “Weiss” in der Zeit vom 20.1.43-12.2.43 in Kroatien,” February 15, 1943, BA MA, N 756, file 149a, p. 158.

<sup>1355</sup> Jüttner to all Kommandeure der Ersatzeinheiten, February 3, 1943, NARA, RG 242, T-175/175/2,710,406-412.

<sup>1356</sup> Eventually a Wehrmacht officer came across the dwindling column, inquired after the officer in charge of the elderly recruits, and addressed him thus: “Herr Hauptmann, are you insane, what are you doing to these people? Look at the road [behind you], it is dotted with your men lying down, keep at it for another few kilometers and you will be [marching] all alone.” (““Herr Hauptmann, ja sind Sie Wahnsinnig, was treiben Sie mit den Leuten? Sehen Sie sich die Strasse an, die liegt voller Männer von Ihnen, wenn Sie noch einige km so weiter machen, bleiben Sie allein.””) Unterreiner testimony (1958) in Schieder, p. 72.

<sup>1357</sup> Himmler to Phleps, October 27, 1943, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 319, fiche 4, frame 148.

<sup>1358</sup> “die Balkan-Sitte” “Btl. Tagesbefehl Nr. 11/44,” March 8, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 1, p. 173.

<sup>1359</sup> Phleps, “Divisions-Sonderbefehl,” December 2, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 292, fiche 1, frames 9-11.

<sup>1360</sup> Letter of Thaddäus Liebgott from Rustendorf to his mother Anna, July 16, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 192; letter of Josef Bojes from Werschetz to his wife Hermine, July 21, 1944, BA

sample of preserved excerpts from these letters reveals that their authors felt morally conflicted or even disgusted with what anti-partisan warfare entailed. Instead, they pleaded for early release for their surviving sons, after others had already died in service with “Prinz Eugen”<sup>1361</sup> or they tried to pass the blame at that late juncture by verbally abusing the Croats.<sup>1362</sup> The more pro-active few attempted to desert by dressing up as Ustaše,<sup>1363</sup> hiding with relatives after failing to return from leave<sup>1364</sup> or resorting to the classic as old as gunpowder: shooting oneself in the foot.<sup>1365</sup>

Not even being granted Reich citizenship could alleviate the Banat Volksdeutsche’s disenchantment. By Hitler’s order of May 19, 1943, all Volksdeutsche, defined as having at least two grandparents of German origin or being members of the organized Deutsche Volksgruppe in their host state, who were also members of the Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS, the German police or Organisation Todt, received Reich citizenship (Staatsangehörigkeit).<sup>1366</sup> Wilhelm Stuckart of the Reich Interior Ministry had suggested a similar move, unsuccessfully, as early as July 1941.<sup>1367</sup> At that time, the AA had had enough clout in Volksdeutsche affairs to block such a move. The 1943 decision built on Himmler’s general usurpation of all Volksdeutsche affairs as his personal

MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 193; letter of Peter Hass from St. Hubert to his wife Katharina, July 21, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 195; letter of Karl Hassler from Mokrin to his wife, July 26, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 199.

<sup>1361</sup> Letter of Georg Ulmer from Pantschowa to his company commander, July 25, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 194.

<sup>1362</sup> Unterwiener letter (1944), Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 2, document 51.

<sup>1363</sup> SS-Gebirgsjäger Regiment 14 memo, March 29, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 15, p. 178.

<sup>1364</sup> Letter of Anna Stuprich from Pardan to her husband Anton, July 20, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 14, p. 196.

<sup>1365</sup> SS-Obersturmführer und SS-Richter Netzling to “Prinz Eugen”’s court, January 29, 1944, BA MA, RS 4 Brigaden, Kampftruppen und Einheiten der Feldformationen der Waffen-SS, file 1132, p. 15.

<sup>1366</sup> “Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit durch deutschstämmige Angehörige der Wehrmacht, der Waffen-SS, der Polizei und der Organisation Todt,” no date, BA Berlin, R 69 Einwandererzentralstelle Litzmannstadt, file 557, fiche 1, frame 7.

<sup>1367</sup> See p. 178.

purview. More specifically, it built on the precedent set by granting Reich citizenship to the Volksdeutsche in annexed territories<sup>1368</sup> as well as opening the possibility of applying for it to the Volksdeutsche resettled into the Reich, who were also in the Waffen-SS.<sup>1369</sup> It also built on Stuckart's January 1942 decision to make the "frugal" granting of Reich citizenship theoretically easier for mobilized Volksdeutsche from territories under the Reich's military administration, which were also German Hoheitsgebieten,<sup>1370</sup> such as Serbia-Banat.

The timing of this blanket order suggests that Hitler and Himmler were spurred on by the likelihood in May 1943 of a future weakening of the Axis by the removal of Italy from the war. They likely also saw in it the last, possibly the biggest privilege (more a perk than a real act of empowerment) for Volksdeutsche soldiers pushed to the limits of their personal and their Volksgruppen's capacity for sacrifice on behalf of the Reich. In the Banat the announcement was accompanied by some trepidation that Reich citizenship would resurrect the dreaded prospect of resettlement to the Reich.<sup>1371</sup> It also caused anger because it failed to provide for Volksdeutsche serving in the Banat police or in offices which were *de jure* a part of the Serbian state apparatus. This was so because the granting of Reich citizenship did not erase the Volksdeutsche's earlier citizenship. Instead, it left them with dual citizenship.<sup>1372</sup>

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<sup>1368</sup> Herzog, p. 2.

<sup>1369</sup> Berger memo, June 25, 1941, NARA, RG 242, T-175/160/2,692,691-692.

<sup>1370</sup> "sparsam" State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart (Reich Interior Ministry) to administration chiefs in all occupied areas, "Verordnung zur Regelung von Staatsangehörigkeitsfragen vom 20. Januar 1942," April 28, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 45, fiche 1, frame 13.

<sup>1371</sup> Lorenz to Himmler, August 15, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 45, fiche 1, frames 2-3; Himmler to Turner, August 27, 1942, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 45, fiche 1, frame 4; "Lagebericht für den Monat Mai 1943," no date, BA Berlin, NS 43, file 202, p. 78.

<sup>1372</sup> Unsigned memo on Volkstum matters, July [3]1, 1943, BA Berlin, R 58, file 7733, p. 21.

Overall, the citizenship decree failed to make much of an impact on the Banat Volksdeutsche because of a clause specifying that the blanket granting of citizenship did *not* extend to the Volksdeutsche soldiers' wives and children. That issue was deferred till the war's end,<sup>1373</sup> most likely due to the Reich policymakers' desire to continue to keep the Volksdeutsche on a very tight leash and ensure all of their fighting potential was realized before such a radical and sweeping change in their status could be accomplished. Berlin also wanted to keep many Volksdeutsche soldiers' non-German wives at arm's length.<sup>1374</sup> Even for the new Reich citizens in the ranks of the Waffen-SS, the gain did not mean much since they were not at liberty to decamp to the Reich for the duration of the hostilities.

So minor was the actual value of the citizenship-granting decision, and so rich and varied the speculation surrounding it, that the Volksgruppenführung felt obliged to remind its co-nationals of their real legal position. The Nedić government therefore reissued the July 1941 decree on the Volksgruppe's legal standing<sup>1375</sup> in August 1943. Its title was changed slightly to "Verordnung über die Rechtsstellung der deutschen Volksgruppe *im Banat und in Serbien*" ("Decree on the Legal Status of the German National Group *in the Banat and Serbia*," my emphasis),<sup>1376</sup> to remind the Banat Volksdeutsche where and under what circumstances they lived. The new text reiterated all the points made in the original text, and added to them the content of the March 1942

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<sup>1373</sup> "Erwerb der deutschen Staatsangehörigkeit" (no date), BA Berlin, R 69 Einwandererzentralstelle Litzmannstadt, file 557, fiche 1, frame 7.

<sup>1374</sup> SS-Pflegstellen (including Referat des Pflegestellereferenten der SS-Sippenpflegestelle 151 "Prinz Eugen" in Pantschowa/Banat) memo, no date, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 3886, fiche 1, frames 10-11, 13.

<sup>1375</sup> See pp. 180-182.

<sup>1376</sup> "Verordnung über die Rechtsstellung der deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und in Serbien" (August 6, 1943), *Verordnungsblatt der Volksgruppenführung*, September 10, 1943, p. 1.

“Verordnung über die Disziplinargerichtsbarkeit der deutschen Volksgruppe” (“Decree on the Disciplinary Jurisdiction of the German National Group”).<sup>1377</sup> It thus stressed that nothing had really changed. For the foreseeable future, the Volksdeutsche civilians in the Banat went on harvesting crops to feed their men and other German soldiers, and the Volksdeutsche soldiers remained with the Waffen-SS at Himmler’s pleasure.

By early 1944, Phleps<sup>1378</sup> reported that the Partisans had become a formidable army whose hallmarks included mobility, tactical shrewdness, the willingness to take huge casualties in battle, and the ability to survive and fight in the most primitive conditions.<sup>1379</sup> The Axis forces in the Independent State of Croatia he assessed as ranging from inferior (“Prinz Eugen”) to completely useless except for terrorizing the ethnic Serbian population (Ustaše).<sup>1380</sup>

The division “Prinz Eugen” found itself in a position similar to the one General Bader had complained of in occupied Serbia in 1941. The distances it was expected to cover were simply too large and the terrain too difficult. In early 1944 it was in charge of covering all of the rugged Dalmatian and Montenegrin coast between Šibenik (Dalmatia) and Shkodër (Albania), in anticipation of an Allied landing there. It also had to secure the communication and transportation lines leading into mountainous Bosnia.<sup>1381</sup>

Once an Allied landing on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea ceased to be a likelihood, “Prinz Eugen” joined the long, slow slog of the rear-guard battle fought by

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<sup>1377</sup> See p. 217.

<sup>1378</sup> He left “Prinz Eugen” to command “Handschar” before advancing to the position of commander of all operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and south Dalmatia in October 1943. Phleps to Himmler, July 10, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 2154, fiche 1, frame 5.

<sup>1379</sup> Phleps memo, January 25, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 6, pp. 114-115.

<sup>1380</sup> Phleps memo (1944), BA MA, RS 3-7, file 6, pp. 116-117.

<sup>1381</sup> Kumm (“Prinz Eugen” commander after Oberkamp) to “Prinz Eugen,” March 21, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 4, p. 123.

German forces retreating toward the Reich. It went first through Bosnia to southern Serbia, where it protected the retreat of the Wehrmacht's Army Group E (Heeresgruppe E) from Greece.<sup>1382</sup> Propaganda was stepped up throughout this period. Its content reveals a growing fatalism as the reality of defeat sank in, despite the use of long-established tropes about sacrifice and unity. For example, Otto Kumm (division commander after Oberkamp) issued the following statement to the division, occasioned by the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life:

Even more than before, duty calls us to [to fight] till our last breath [with] unceasing loyalty in battle for the future of the Reich. We must toss the last indifference, the last inhibition and softness overboard. There is no going back for us anymore. The only choices for the German Volk now are victory or death!<sup>1383</sup>

The final gasp of this desperate effort to keep up troop morale was Hitler's decision to award Volksdeutsche from Southeast Europe, who had fought for Germany or Austria in World War I and also fought in the German armed forces in the ongoing war, the Cross of Honor. He made this decision on October 20, 1944. This was two weeks after it had become impossible for Volksdeutsche civilians to leave the Serbian Banat before the onslaught of the Red Army from the west and the Partisans from the south (see below).<sup>1384</sup>

Driven by despair and ideology combined into one indistinguishable whole, the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" spent its last days as a handmaiden of the Third

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<sup>1382</sup> "Einsatzdaten aller SS-Divisionen 1939-1945 (Schlacht- und Gefechtskalender)," no date, BA MA, RS 1 Führungsstellen und Oberkommandos der Waffen-SS, file 2, p. 12.

<sup>1383</sup> "Noch mehr aber als bisher ruft uns die Pflicht, uns bis zum letzten Atemzug in unwandelbarer Treue im Kampf um die Zukunft des Reiches einzusetzen. Auch die letzte Gleichgültigkeit, auch die letzte Hemmung und Weichheit müssen wir über Bord werfen. Für uns gibt es kein Zurück mehr. Das deutsche Volk hat nur die Wahl: Sieg oder Tod!" Kumm to "Prinz Eugen," July 21, 1944, BA MA, RS 3-7, file 13, p. 33.

<sup>1384</sup> "Verleihung des Ehrenkreuzes der Weltkrieges," October 20, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 3 SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt, file 488, fiche 1, frame 1.

Reich's war effort. Its soldiers were deemed good enough to fight 'bandits' and kill civilians, but not to have their retreat or lives protected by Reichsdeutsche troops. In October 1944 it started the final leg of its retreat as protection for Heeresgruppe E, back through Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia, into Slovenia, where it was finally captured by Partisan forces in May 1945.<sup>1385</sup> Or its remnants were: a report from late November 1944 stated its status laconically: "[in the] Balkans[,] heavy casualties."<sup>1386</sup>

### To Evacuate or Not to Evacuate

Back on the home front, much administrative reshuffling took place in the occupation system of Serbia-Banat in the last eighteen months of the war. Felix Benzler was replaced by Hermann Neubacher as the AA representative for all the Yugoslav lands and Greece in 1943. The German civilian administration was officially unified with the office of the Plenipotentiary for the Economy in early 1944.<sup>1387</sup> The jurisdiction of Meyszner's successor in the role of Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer, Hermann Behrends, was extended over the Sandžak (southwestern Serbia) and Montenegro in May,<sup>1388</sup> and over the Banat

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<sup>1385</sup> "Einsatzdaten aller SS-Divisionen 1939-1945" (no date), BA MA, RS 1, file 2, p. 12; Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 761.

<sup>1386</sup> "Balkan gr. Verluste" Juhlin-Dannfelt (Oberst und Militär-Attache in Berlin) to Chef der Auslandsabteilung des Verteidigungsstabes, December 8, 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-175/466/2,985,633.

In his multivolume magnum opus on the Volksdeutsche expellees from East and Southeast Europe, Theodor Schieder reported a total of 917 casualties out of the approximately 22,000 Banat Volksdeutsche serving in the Waffen-SS, the Wehrmacht and various police formations. This comes to over 4% of all the Volksgruppe men under arms. Schieder, p. 67E.

<sup>1387</sup> "Verordnung über den Übergang der Rechte und Zuständigkeiten des Generalbevollmächtigten für die Wirtschaft in Serbien auf den Chef der Militärverwaltung beim Militärbefehlshaber Südost," *Verordnungsblatt des Befehlshabers Serbien*, December 23, 1943, p. 379; Chef der Militärverwaltung Südost to OKH, "Bericht über die Militärverwaltung Südost," April 10, 1945, BA MA, RW 40, file 115, p. 2.

<sup>1388</sup> Himmler memo, May 16, 1944, BA Berlin, R 59 Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, file 65, fiche 4, frame 152.

in August 1944.<sup>1389</sup> All this was done in an effort to make economic extraction and anti-partisan warfare more efficient. Without more personnel assigned to Southeast Europe, the repeated revamping of the occupation system yielded little improvement.

It certainly had little effect on daily life in the Banat. Behrends had grandiose ideas about regimenting and mobilizing to their full capacity the Banat's already thinly stretched human and economic resources.<sup>1390</sup> However, in the last two months of the Reichsdeutsche occupation of Serbia-Banat he did not manage to accomplish any great improvement in the Banat's position as a supposed bulwark of the Reich against the advancing Red Army.<sup>1391</sup>

What did make a difference was the actuality of war, which made itself more and more noticeable starting in spring 1944, with the Allied air raids against Reichsdeutsche installations in Belgrade,<sup>1392</sup> the radio tower in Zemun<sup>1393</sup> and other targets.<sup>1394</sup> Air raids continued through the summer, and extended their scope to include targets in Novi Sad (Bačka) and Alisbrunn (Banat) in August.<sup>1395</sup> Sepp Janko wasted no time in delivering a

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<sup>1389</sup> SS-Hauptsturmführer A. Heine to Hermann Behrends (Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer in Serbia after Meyszner), August 5, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 4, frame 117.

<sup>1390</sup> Behrends to Himmler, August 3, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 1728, fiche 4, frames 115-116.

<sup>1391</sup> Birn, p. 249; Völkl, p. 81.

<sup>1392</sup> Junker (with AA in Belgrade) to AA, April 17, 1944, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 64/11, no page number; Junker to AA, April 18, 1944, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 64/11, no page number; Junker to AA, June 6, 1944, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 64/11, no page number.

<sup>1393</sup> Junker to AA, August 3, 1944, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 64/11, no page number.

<sup>1394</sup> Although the original document mentions Smederevo, reference to a hit on the oil refinery leads me to suspect the author may have mixed up Pantschowa (which had a refinery) and Smederevo (which did not). Junker to AA, June 12, 1944, PA AA, Deutsche Gesandtschaft Belgrad, file Belgrad 64/11, no page number.

<sup>1395</sup> Hilde Isolde Reiter, "Ergänzungsbericht: Die letzte Phase des Krieges" (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/386, frame 17.

rousing and reassuring speech. Despite some initial consternation the VoMi described the mood of the Volksgruppe in April as “dutiful and prepared [to make] sacrifices.”<sup>1396</sup>

Nevertheless, the standard rhetoric was starting to ring decidedly hollow. In spring 1944 Wehrmacht soldiers and Italian POWs under their command dug up and burned the bodies buried by the Apfeldorf road.<sup>1397</sup> German forces were doing the same with the bodies of the Nazis’ victims in all areas of East Europe likely to find themselves between the Red Army and Berlin. The Banat Volksdeutsche could not have known of the larger implications of this massive operation intended to clean up and conceal all traces of the systematic slaughter which had occurred over the past three years. They could not fail to infer the truth of retreat-*cum*-defeat when Organisation Todt workers evacuated from Ukraine in summer 1944 scoffed at the Banat Volksdeutsche’s faithfulness to the German cause: “The Germans here in the Banat act as though Hitler were a tin god; not so with us in the Reich,” and told children offering them the Hitler salute, “Soon you’ll be giving a different salute.”<sup>1398</sup>

Even so, the Romanian declaration of war to the Third Reich on August 23, 1944 came as a shock to the Banat Volksdeutsche. They had prided themselves on the relative peace of their home region, and found themselves overnight living practically on the front lines.<sup>1399</sup> Especially disturbing was the seemingly intensified Partisan activity in the

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<sup>1396</sup> “pflichttreu und opferbereit” VoMi, “Monatsbericht April 1944 über die Lage in den Deutschen Volksgruppen,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1005/393,494.

<sup>1397</sup> Deposition of Atanasije Mitić from Pantschowa, April 2, 1945, Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore a.k.a. Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), fund 110 Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, box 691, p. 140.

<sup>1398</sup> ““Die Deutschen hier im Banat tun so, als ob Hitler ein Abgott wäre, bei uns im Reich ist das nicht so! . . . Du wirst auch bald anders grüssen”.” VoMi, “Monatsbericht Juli 1944,” no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1005/393,335.

<sup>1399</sup> Behrends, “Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat August 1944,” no date, BA Berlin, R 58, file 8102, p. 6.

Banat since July 1944, but this may have been more perception than reality.<sup>1400</sup> The expellees' postwar reports are unanimously silent on any major Partisan activity in the six weeks between August 23 and the Red Army's entrance into the Banat in the first days of October.

In September 1944, Behrends mustered members of the Deutsche Mannschaft and Volksdeutsche teenagers, and sent them to fight the Red Army in the Romanian Banat. They were quickly pushed back from the vicinity of Timișoara.<sup>1401</sup> While Behrends indulged in fantasies of defeating the Red Army under his own steam and the Volksgruppenführung ensured an article condemning the new government in Romania appeared in the *Banater Beobachter*,<sup>1402</sup> the AA reached an agreement with the Wehrmacht to quietly evacuate Reichsdeutsche women, children and non-essential personnel from Serbia in early September.<sup>1403</sup>

A short while later, the Reich displayed its different frequent offices' inability to agree on basic policy which did not revolve around National Socialism's major ideological goal: defeat of the Bolshevik-Jewish global conspiracy against Germany. Ribbentrop informed AA offices across Europe that the Wehrmacht would not be involved in the evacuation of Volksdeutsche from any part of Europe. He asserted that, as

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<sup>1400</sup> Behrends likely overstated the case when he estimated Partisan numbers within the Banat in August 1944 at 800-1000 fighters, with another 3000-5000 ready to cross into the Banat from the Srem. Behrends, "Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat August 1944," BA Berlin, R 58, file 8102, p. 12; also see VoMi, "Monatsbericht Juli 1944," NARA, RG 242, T-120/1005/393,335.

<sup>1401</sup> Testimony of Franz Schmidt from Perlas (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/395, frame 192; Josef Beer (former deputy Volksgruppenführer), "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frames 691-692; Hausleitner, p. 58.

<sup>1402</sup> "Deutschstämmige Verräter," *Banater Beobachter* [German-language newspaper published in Grossbetschkerek], September 9, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100381 Deutschtum in Serbien-Banat, 1944, pp. 17-19.

<sup>1403</sup> Neubacher to AA, August 30, 1944, PA AA, Inland II C, file R 100384 Deutschtum in Serbien, 1944-1945, p. 52; Behrends, "Lage- und Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat August 1944," BA Berlin, R 58, file 8102, p. 6.

a matter of Volk-politics as well as foreign policy, evacuation would be handled, when and if necessary, by the VoMi and the AA alone.<sup>1404</sup> In doing so, Ribbentrop merely reiterated his relative weakness vis-à-vis Himmler. Since spring 1942 and the creation of the division “Prinz Eugen,” Himmler’s influence in specifically *Banat* Volksdeutsche matters had risen considerably. In fall 1944 Behrends, Himmler’s representative in Serbia, had the final say, not Ribbentrop’s representative Neubacher.

With the decision to induct Volksdeutsche into the Waffen-SS, the Banat Volksdeutsche proved ultimately of less worth to the Reich as civilians – even as grain-producers – than as soldiers. Since the Reich’s loss of control over much of Southeast Europe became a moot point with Romania’s defection and the advance northwards of Tito’s Partisans, even the grain deliveries from the Banat could be counted as lost. The Volksdeutsche’s long-term ideological value as good racial stock, too, paled in comparison with immediate military realities. Since before the April War, the Banat Volksdeutsche’s status was determined by an uneasy balance between the Reich’s foreign-political and military need, and ideology. Whereas ideology provided the solid weft of their privileged status vis-à-vis non-Germans, more practical concerns tended to determine their actual position in Hitler’s Europe. As the southeastern flank of the Eastern Front crumbled rapidly in late summer and early fall 1944, Banat Volksdeutsche civilians had little to recommend them to the Reich as a priority.

Behrends expressly forbade Sepp Janko to organize an evacuation on September 10, stressing that ordinary Volksdeutsche should not be told of this order.<sup>1405</sup> In addition

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<sup>1404</sup> Ribbentrop memo, September 16, 1944, PA AA, Inland II Geheim, file R 100896, fiche 2295, frame H299,179.

<sup>1405</sup> Behrends to Janko, September 10, 1944, quoted in Beer *et al.*, *Heimatbuch der Stadt Weisskirchen im Banat*, p. 206.

to the general reasoning behind such a decision outlined above, Behrends (and Himmler and Hitler as the originators of this order) also had several immediate reasons of an extremely practical nature. He wished to prevent a panic, which would have resulted in the congestion of roads needed for the evacuation of the Wehrmacht from Southeast Europe<sup>1406</sup> and the Volksdeutsche from Romania, who were in immediate danger from the Red Army. For its part, the Banat Volksgruppenführung made its second, belated and ultimately failed show of initiative and independence from the Reich's wishes by preparing an evacuation plan despite Behrends' order.

The surviving undated drafts of this plan and the postwar testimonies of Volksgruppenführung members suggest that the plan was based on the idea that mothers with small children, pregnant women, the elderly and the infirm should be evacuated first by train. They would be followed by adults marching on foot with hand luggage. Groups from different villages would fall in with the main column as it approached the River Tisa, their orderly retreat protected by units of the Deutsche Mannschaft.<sup>1407</sup> The plan was elegant, comprehensive, and so dependent on precise timing, uncongested roads and an absence of panic as to be utterly unworkable.

Moreover, Behrends consistently thwarted attempts to put its initial phase – the evacuation of children and the infirm – into action, though he did little more than issue

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<sup>1406</sup> Testimony of Jakob Sohl-Daxer from Wojlowitz in Stefanović, p. 104.

<sup>1407</sup> Unsigned and undated "Verzeichnis," Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 2, document 6; undated and unsigned document, "Grundsätzliche Verteidigungsbefehl für die Deutsche Mannschaft," Vojni arhiv, Nemački arhiv, box 27-A, folder 2, document 3; Jakob Awender (former Banat economic office chief), "Über die Evakuierung der Deutschen Volksgruppe im Banat und Serbien" (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/174, frames 1387-1389; Beer, "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frame 690.

threats over the phone from his office in Belgrade.<sup>1408</sup> Even at this last juncture, when the situation was truly desperate and the Reich could not spare the soldiers or police to compel it to compliance, the Volksgruppenführung failed to establish itself as an agent independent of the Reich's wishes. The long habit of dependence on the Reich's support and approval took its toll in the form of the Volksgruppenführung's month-long vacillation. Janko issued a proclamation to his co-nationals, in which he prevaricated between assuring them that Hitler would not allow any of them to come to harm and warning them that it might prove necessary to evacuate for a short while, until the Reich could send more troops to take the Banat back from the communists.<sup>1409</sup>

The Volksgruppenführung cannot bear all of the blame, however, since it did issue an evacuation order on September 8 or 9, but then had to rescind it following Behrends' September 10 missive to Janko. This alone caused much confusion. Expellees' testimonies reveal a wide range of false hopes and rationalizations individual Volksdeutsche clung to for comfort. These rationalizations were refined in many a tense conversation with neighbors, while the thundering echo of Russian artillery could be heard clearly from the direction of Timișoara.

Many felt themselves personally blameless of any crimes or iniquities committed by the Reich and its soldiers during the war.<sup>1410</sup> A few clung to their Serbian neighbors' promises of protection or the hope that "Prinz Eugen" would be transferred to the

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<sup>1408</sup> Awender, "Über die Evakuierung der Deutschen Volksgruppe" (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/174, frame 1390; Beer, "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frame 693.

<sup>1409</sup> Janko memo, no date, LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/37, frame 688.

In addition, the *Banater Beobachter* published an inspiring article with the title "Wir bleiben hier!" on September 4, 1944, which earned Janko a lot of criticism from fellow expellees after the war. Janko, *Weg*, pp. 247-248.

<sup>1410</sup> Šibul testimony in Četković and Sindelić-Ibrajter, pp. 104, 111; testimony of Peter Flanjak from Apfeldorf in Senz, *Die Donauschwaben*, p. 227.

Banat.<sup>1411</sup> Others, especially World War I veterans who had spent time as POWs in Imperial Russia, lay their faith in the Volksdeutsche's and the Russians' common humanity.<sup>1412</sup> Most saw in this war's end a repetition of the last war's end: governments and states would change, but the peasant's situation would not.<sup>1413</sup> One expellee's father shrewdly concluded that those who had the most to fear from the Russians were Reichsdeutsche, and that refugees newly arrived into the Reich would be especially vulnerable to deportation to the Soviet Union as laborers, human war reparations.<sup>1414</sup> Underlying all these hopeful rationalizations and denial was the fact that it was harvest time, and the harvest would wait for neither Stalin nor Hitler.<sup>1415</sup> In the words of one expellee from Stefansfeld, although aware of the danger, the Volksdeutsche did not wish to "leave their beautiful Heimat and go forth into the unknown."<sup>1416</sup> One of his neighbors declared that "it wouldn't be so bad, he would stay in his house, whatever happened."<sup>1417</sup>

Rather than proving that ordinary Volksdeutsche never accepted the ideological view of the enemy propagated by the Reich and their own leaders, these attempts to think

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<sup>1411</sup> Testimony of Stefan Rohrbacher from Schurjan (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frame 335; Oskar Krewetsch (former head of the Panschowa police's political section), "Das letzte Telefongespräch mit Karlsdorf 2. Oktober 1944" (1961), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/171, frame 1335.

<sup>1412</sup> Testimony of Katharina Schneider from Kubin (1952), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/392, frame 49. Volksdeutsche were not the only ones who misunderstood the ideological and practical impact of the Red Army's arrival. One Volksdeutsche woman reported her Serbian neighbor looking forward to everyone becoming rich and having their yards asphalted over under Russian rule. Testimony of Barbara Stuber from Rustendorf (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/393, frame 24.

<sup>1413</sup> Stuber testimony (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/393, frame 24.

<sup>1414</sup> Testimony of Hans Sonnleitner from Karlsdorf (1959), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/388, frames 92-93.

<sup>1415</sup> "Whoever knows the peasant mentality, can understand . . . War and ruin could not stop the Danube Swabian from bringing in the harvest safely." ("Wer die Mentalität des Bauern kennt, hat Verständnis . . . Krieg und Zusammenbruch können den Donauschwaben nicht davon abhalten, zunächst seine Ernte in Sicherheit zu bringen.") Beer, "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frame 696; see also VoMi, "Monatsbericht September 1944," no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1146/449,418.

<sup>1416</sup> "Niemand wollte die schöne Heimat verlassen und in die unbekannte Welt hinaus wandern." Testimony of Anton Schmidt from Stefansfeld (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frame 118.

<sup>1417</sup> "er würde nicht so schlimm werden und er bliebe in seinem Haus, wie und was auch kommen möge." *Ibid.*

away the cannons heard just over the horizon suggest the extent to which Volksdeutsche in the Banat had accepted the idea of an undefeatable German Reich which would always protect them. Paired with the peasant's habitual narrow-mindedness revolving around the desire to bring in the crops unmolested and a fatal lack of imagination, this persuaded the vast majority of the Banat Volksdeutsche civilians to stay where they were as the September days wore on. Very few were as enterprising as a woman from Rustendorf, who credited her habit of listening in secret to enemy radio stations with the decision not to listen to her neighbors' fond hopes and the Pantschowa Kreisleiter's assurances, but to pack and make her way to Vienna well before October 1, 1944.<sup>1418</sup>

Behrends finally rescinded his ban on organized evacuation on October 1 – the same day the first Russian units entered the Serbian Banat. They consisted mostly of POWs newly released from Romanian prisons. They came “[w]ith a howl and a roar, only every fifth had a weapon, barefoot, a savage pack.”<sup>1419</sup> The Volksgruppenführung could not reach all villages by phone, leaving individual village notaries and Volksgruppe representatives very much to their own devices.<sup>1420</sup> The former mayor of Kubin gave Janko credit for telling him to get his people out even before Behrends finally rescinded his original order, although the mayor had had to initiate the conversation. He then promptly ran up against the refusal of the local Deutsche Mannschaft commander to break Behrends' standing orders.<sup>1421</sup>

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<sup>1418</sup> Stuber testimony (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/393, frames 24-25.

<sup>1419</sup> “Mit einem Geheul und Gebrüll, jeder Fünfte hatte nu rein Gewehr, barfuss, eine wilde Meute” Adam Müller, “Der Umbruch 1944/45 in Franzfeld” (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/393, frame 175.

<sup>1420</sup> Beer, “Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung” (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frame 704.

<sup>1421</sup> Testimony of Franz Kneipp from Kubin (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/392, frames 27-28.

An organized, but haphazard and incomplete evacuation of children and the infirm did take place. The evacuees had to jostle for a place on the trains with other refugees, including stragglers from Romania.<sup>1422</sup> On October 3 the Luftwaffe airlifted some four hundred people from Franzfeld, which had an airstrip nearby. About five thousand were left behind when Russian heavy artillery made further landings impossible.<sup>1423</sup> On the same day, Neubacher reported to the AA in Berlin that the Red Army was closing in on Belgrade from the north and east, while Partisans approached from the south and west.<sup>1424</sup> Further evacuation was a practical impossibility from October 4.<sup>1425</sup>

The places that saw anything resembling a large-scale evacuation were Grossbetschkerek and the villages closest to the Tisa<sup>1426</sup> and to the section of the Danube closest to Belgrade. Even from there people escaped with only the clothes on their backs,<sup>1427</sup> rushing to get on a river boat in Pantschowa<sup>1428</sup> or jostling with Wehrmacht transports to cross the Tisa before all the bridges across it were blown up. Despite Behrends' strict orders, the Volksgruppenführung's technical section prepared a pontoon

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<sup>1422</sup> Janko and Dr. Adam Maurus (Leiter des Hauptamtes für Kultur), "Aufruf der Schulstiftung der Deutschen im Banat, Gross-Betschkerek, zur Evakuierung der deutschen Schulen," September 25, 1944, in Senz, *Das Schulwesen*, p. 259; Beer, "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frames 698-699; testimony of Dr. Michael Müller from Stefansfeld (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frames 109-111; Sonnleitner testimony (1959), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/388, frame 93.

<sup>1423</sup> Testimony of Hans Stein from Franzfeld in Stefanović, pp. 85-86.

<sup>1424</sup> Neubacher to AA, October 3, 1944, in *Akten*, Serie E, Volume VIII (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), document no. 259.

<sup>1425</sup> Behrends to Himmler, October 8, 1944, BA Berlin, NS 19, file 777, fiche 1, frame 2.

<sup>1426</sup> Reichel (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle economic office) memo, October 10, 1944, NARA RG 242, T-120/5784/no frame number.

<sup>1427</sup> Ilse Keiser, "Zielsetzung und Leistungen der Deutschen Frauenschaft in Jugoslawien" (1957), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/23, frame 449.

<sup>1428</sup> Kneipp testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/392, frame 29.

bridge at some point in September, which allowed many to cross into the Bačka.<sup>1429</sup>

Among the latter were Sepp Janko, Josef Beer and other Volksgruppenführung members,<sup>1430</sup> though their staying in Grossbetschkerek until Russian shells started falling in the city earned them little gratitude from many Volksdeutsche who gave their testimonies after the war. They described with lingering bitterness how the Volksgruppenführung's vacillation translated into the failure of the many to run while the running was good.<sup>1431</sup>

Care of the evacuees remained the VoMi's responsibility, in line with Ribbentrop's earlier announcement. On October 14, Hitler approved what was by then an unspooling reality: the imminent arrival of over 200,000 Volksdeutsche from all over Southeast Europe into the Reich.<sup>1432</sup> Of these, the VoMi's initial estimate pegged the number of Banat evacuees at 35,000.<sup>1433</sup> By November 1, that number had dropped to 20,000.<sup>1434</sup> Out of a population of about 127,000, with about 21,000 men under arms, this means that less than one fifth of the Volksdeutsche still in the Banat in fall 1944 got

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<sup>1429</sup> Michael Müller testimony (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frame 112; Beer, "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frame 690; Awender, "Über die Evakuierung der Deutschen Volksgruppe" (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/174, frame 1388.

<sup>1430</sup> Awender, "Über die Evakuierung der Deutschen Volksgruppe" (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/174, frame 1391; Beer, "Die letzten Tage der Volksgruppenführung" (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/38, frame 709.

<sup>1431</sup> Several mayors *did* slip away without care for those left behind. Krewetsch, "Das letzte Telefongespräch mit Karlsdorf" (1961), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/171, frame 1336; testimony of Heinrich Köller from Pantschowa in Stefanović, p. 115.

Wilma Slavik, ever ready to castigate the Volksgruppenführung in hindsight, went so far as to accuse its members of planning far enough ahead to save not only themselves and their families, but also their furniture and other possessions. Slavik testimony (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/153, frame 786.

<sup>1432</sup> Ritter to Oberbefehlshaber Südost, Heeresgruppe Süd, German commanding generals in Hungary and Croatia, VoMi and the Reich Interior Ministry, October 14, 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-120/2955/E470,202.

<sup>1433</sup> Rimann (AA) memo, October 18, 1944, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100540 Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, 1944, p. 7.

<sup>1434</sup> VoMi, "Monatsbericht Oktober 1944," no date, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1042/416,546.

out.<sup>1435</sup> Those that did took up to a month to reach Reich territory by train or on foot. They were quartered in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia until their final, more orderly evacuation into the Reich proper in spring 1945.<sup>1436</sup>

The first impressions of those left behind are best encapsulated by the opening pages of a memoir written by the Austrian artist Robert Hammerstiel more than five decades after the events he describes. In October 1944 he was eleven years old, his family one of the few Volksdeutsche families residing in the Serbian quarter of Werschetz, near the Romanian border. His father had been mobilized and was away fighting, most likely with the division “Prinz Eugen.” Hammerstiel’s memoir, which focuses on life in the internment camps for Volksdeutsche in postwar Yugoslavia, is written from a child’s perspective and sometimes unclear on the details. This does not diminish the emotional clarity of his remembered childhood self’s perception. Hammerstiel depicts a deceptively quiet morning following the sounds of weapons fire and then of loud celebrations in the town center:

The milk-sellers do not pass by, our neighbor does not sing, as she is wont to do of a morning, nor does she take her baskets to market. Instead she comes into our kitchen and screams and screams and weeps loudly. In the grey morning of that dark October day, she cries that people are being shot in the German quarter, she has seen it. My mother lays her hand on the door so as not to fall down. Her nails dig into the doorframe like the claws of a wild animal.<sup>1437</sup>

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<sup>1435</sup> Rimann memo (1944), PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100540, p. 7.

By comparison, the evacuation of the Volksdeutsche from neighboring Croatia was far more efficient, and resulted in about 90,000 people out of a Volksgruppe of 150,000 members escaping successfully. Wagner (AA) to Ribbentrop, November 11, 1944, NARA, RG 242, T-120/1025/405,301.

<sup>1436</sup> Reichel memo, October 17, 1944, PA AA, Inland II D, file R 100548 Banat – Deutsche Volksgruppe, 1942-1944, p. 5; Awender, “Über die Evakuierung der Deutschen Volksgruppe” (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/174, frame 1392.

<sup>1437</sup> “Keine Milchfrauen gehen vorbei, die Nachbarin singt kein Morgenlied, und sie trägt auch keine Körbe zum Markt. Stattdessen kommt sie in unsere Küche und schreit und schreit und weint laut. Sie schreit in den grauen Morgen des dunklen Oktobertages, dass man die Leute im deutschen Viertel erschiesse, sie habe alles gesehen. Meine Mutter setzt ihre Hand auf die Tür, um nicht zu fallen. Wie ein waldes Tier seine Krallen gräbt sie ihre Fingernägel in den Türstock.”

Like Hammerstiel's family, most Volksdeutsche from the Banat villages and towns close to the Romanian border were too far from the escape routes to get out in time. In several villages, commanders of the Deutsche Mannschaft or the Deutscher Arbeitsdienst, clearly having learned nothing from Behrends' expedition into Romania a few weeks earlier, tried to mount an armed resistance to the Russians. They managed to enrage the Russians and get their own boy-soldiers killed.<sup>1438</sup> There ensued scenes of rapine and rape replicated across East Europe behind Red Army lines.<sup>1439</sup> These events coincided with or were followed shortly by the arrival of Partisan forces, some composed of men who had

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Robert Hammerstiel, *Von Ikonen und Ratten. Eine Banater Kindheit 1939-1949* (Vienna and Munich: Verlag Christian Brandstätter, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>1438</sup> Testimony of Anton Weber from Modosch (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/390, frames 291-292; Schmidt testimony (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frames 121-124.

<sup>1439</sup> Rape and the threat of rape loom especially large in the testimonies of Volksdeutsche women e.g. testimony of Barbara Schotter from Karlsdorf (1951), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/388, frames 106-107; testimony of Franz Günther, Frau Fischer and Magdalene Günther, all from St. Hubert (1946), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/391, frame 64; testimony of Elisabeth Flassak from Ernsthäusen (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/395, frame 9; testimony of Terezija Simić from Grosskikinda in Četković and Sindelić-Ibrajter, pp. 48-49; Šibul testimony in Četković and Sindelić-Ibrajter, p. 105. Some of these, however, described the first wave of Russians – the POWs newly released from Romanian prisons – as the worst, whereas the regular Soviet troops who followed on their heels were much better: “The Russians occupied Karlsdorf on October 3, 1944. We really couldn't complain about them. We had Russians quartered in our house, and they ate at the table with us. But on October 6 the Partisans arrived from the forests, and then began our unspeakable suffering.” (“Die Russen besetzten Karlsdorf am 3. Oktober 1944. Gegen die Russen können wir nicht klagen. Sie waren bei uns einquartiert und haben mit uns am Tisch zusammen gegessen. Am 6. Oktober kamen aber die Partisanen aus den Wäldern und da begann unser unsägliches Leid.” Anna Pumple from Karlsdorf quoted in a third party testimony (1952), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/388, frame 87)

Another woman testified that a Russian had advised her to take down the picture of Hitler she had in her home, because the Partisans would kill her if they saw it (testimony of Katharina Sartschefo from Ernsthäusen (1952), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/395, frame 44). It is unclear whether these women and any others like them were lucky exceptions, or they compared Russian behavior favorably with what came after, or they were surprised that Russians ate at table like regular people.

By contrast, rape figures almost not at all in most men's testimonies, suggesting that memory could be, and was, heavily gendered. The most egregious example can be found in a Volksdeutsche man's assessment of Russian behavior as moderate, since they ‘only’ raped and robbed, but did not kill Volksdeutsche (testimony of Michael Kristof from Grossbetschkerek (1951), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/397, frames 79-80).

become Partisans rather late in the day: “Young men who had worked in factories or in the fields till the previous week put the five-pointed star on their hats overnight, and started calling themselves Partisans and front-line fighters [prvoborci], shouting communist slogans and writing [them] on walls.”<sup>1440</sup> In this respect, at least, the expectation of many Volksdeutsche that not much would change with the new regime proved true. Just as some Volksdeutsche embraced Nazism around the time of the April War as a means to enrichment and better self-esteem, so at war’s end some Serbs adopted communism as an equally profitable wave of the future, which was even compatible with Slavophilism.

In its pursuit of the retreating Wehrmacht, the Red Army did not linger in the Banat. The Partisans spent the first weeks of their rule divvying up Volksdeutsche property as war booty, killing, attacking and arresting Volksdeutsche at random.<sup>1441</sup> Whatever their memories of the Russians, the Volksdeutsche survivors, who were eventually allowed to emigrate starting in 1948, remembered the Partisans with special bitterness. In the words of a Volksdeutscher from the village of Franzfeld, “It didn’t hurt so much to have the Russians take [our best horse], at least it did not fall to one of those [Partisans] from [neighboring] Crepaja to enjoy.”<sup>1442</sup> The Volksdeutsche had habitually seen Serbs and Serbian (Yugoslav) communists as more viscerally dangerous than even the Russians (or the Jews). There was also a decided element of Schadenfreude in the

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<sup>1440</sup> “Mladići koji su do prošle nedelje radili u fabrikama ili na zemlji preko noći su stavili petokrake na kape i govorili das u partizani i prvoborci, uzvikivali su komunističke parole i pisali po zidovima.” Sohl-Daxer testimony in Stefanović, p. 105.

<sup>1441</sup> Schneider testimony (1952), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/392, frame 50; Rohrbacher testimony (no date), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/387, frame 335; testimony of Lorenz Baron from Rudolfsgnad in Stefanović, p. 93.

<sup>1442</sup> “Lakše nam je palo kad su ga Rusi uzeli, barem da ovi iz Crepaje nemaju koristi.” Stein testimony in Stefanović, p. 86.

Partisans' first depredations, especially those committed by Banat Serbian peasants enjoying their own euphoria of liberation and empowerment.<sup>1443</sup>

An early sign of this last abrupt shift in the mental and physical landscape occurred when the bodies of the nine Volksdeutsche killed during the April War and interred with much pomp in Pantschowa in 1941 were dug up in October 1944 and replaced by the bodies of Soviet officers killed in the fighting around the town.<sup>1444</sup> In late November 1944 the new Yugoslav government proclaimed a law expropriating all “persons of the German nationality” and other “war criminals and their helpers.”<sup>1445</sup> Unless they could prove that they had actively aided the communist resistance or were citizens of neutral states, this law meant the loss of all property rights held by Yugoslav Volksdeutsche still on Yugoslav territory. It was accompanied by the opening of internment camps in which Volksdeutsche were subject to unsystematic but effective maltreatment for the next four years and, in July 1945, a law taking away their citizenship rights and leaving them in legal limbo.<sup>1446</sup> Those events fall outside the scope of this dissertation. The events of early October 1944 decisively closed not only the era of

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<sup>1443</sup> Though there were exceptions. The former village notary in ethnically mixed Perlas described after the war how the commander of the first Partisans in his village allowed him to take the five hundred Volksdeutsche residents safely out (Schmidt testimony (1953), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/395, frame 193). In Deutsch-Zerne, a Serb who had joined the Partisans in 1942 protected his Volksdeutsche sweetheart's family from the Russians and the Partisans alike (testimony of Eva Spitz from Deutsch-Zerne (1946), LAA, Ost-Dok. 2/389, frame 98).

<sup>1444</sup> Köller testimony in Stefanović, p. 114.

<sup>1445</sup> “lica nemačke narodnosti . . . ratn[i] zločin[ci] i njihov[i] pomagač[i]” “Odluka o prelazu u državnu svojinu neprijateljske imovine; O državnoj upravi nad imovinom neprisutnih lica i o sekvestru nad imovinom koju su okupatorske vlasti prisilno otuđile,” published in *Borba* [official Communist Party newspaper in postwar Yugoslavia], November 22, 1944, in *Ausgewählte Dokumente zur neuesten Geschichte der Südostdeutschen Volksgruppen. Staatsbürgerschafts-, Ausweisungs- und Beschlagnahmebestimmungen* [from now on *Ausgewählte Dokumente*] (Munich: Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerks, 1956), p. 5.

<sup>1446</sup> “Zakon o potvrđi i izmenama zakona o državljanstvu Demokratske Federativne Jugoslavije od 23. VIII. 1945 god. – gubitak državljanstva,” published in *Službeni list*, July 5, 1946, in *Ausgewählte Dokumente*, pp. 11-12.

Volksdeutsche dominance in the Serbian Banat, but of large-scale, organized Volksdeutsche minority life in East and Southeast Europe.

### Conclusion

The participation of Banat Volksdeutsche in the Third Reich's war effort culminated in their recruitment for the Waffen-SS in spring 1942. This event built on propaganda extolling the Volksdeutsche tradition of serving as border guards and soldiers for the Habsburg Empire; the earlier, sporadic recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche for the police and border patrols in their home region; and especially on the perception held by Berlin and the Banat Volksgruppenführung alike that the Banat Germans owed the Reich for all the material and ideological privileges the Reich had allowed them. Both the ordinary Banat Volksdeutsche and their leaders had allowed themselves to become implicated gradually into the Third Reich's policies by accepting Aryanized property, serving as policemen, delivering food to the Reich and administering their home region on its behalf. In spring 1942, they therefore had neither the material nor the moral leverage to refuse compulsory service in the Waffen-SS. The use of the word 'volunteer' to describe the Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" was spurious, but that did not mean that Banat Volksdeutsche objected to being recruited for it. Mixed motives including ideology, a sense of duty and vulnerability, and material indebtedness conspired to ensure that minimal coercion was necessary to ensure Volksdeutsche recruits' compliance.

In the field, "Prinz Eugen" participated in Axis anti-partisan activities in Southeast Europe between fall 1942 and spring 1945. In the course of these activities, it perpetrated alone or took part in several massacres of civilian populations suspected of

collusion with the Partisans or the Četnici. These events confirmed the association formed in the minds of non-German Yugoslavs between the crimes of the Nazi regime and ordinary Volksdeutsche. The massacres committed by the division “Prinz Eugen” guaranteed that even non-combatant Banat Volksdeutsche shared in the retribution meted out to Volksdeutsche across East and Southeast Europe after the war. The last days of the Banat Volksdeutsche administration replicated the trends established earlier in the war. The Reichsdeutsche in Belgrade and Berlin placed Reich interest first and blocked proposals to evacuate the Banat Volksdeutsche so as to ensure an orderly Wehrmacht retreat from Southeast Europe. The failure of Volksdeutsche to try to leave as soon as the Russian arrival became apparent was wrought of mental habits established in the preceding years, not least an overreliance on the Reich’s protection and a fundamental narrow-mindedness, the inability to perceive the meaning of defeat in a war of ideologies. Because this aspect of the Volksdeutsche experience of World War II has been overemphasized in the memoir literature produced by Volksdeutsche expellees after the war, this account closes with the arrival of the Red Army and the Partisans into the Serbian Banat in early October 1944.

## CONCLUSION

The story of Banat Volksdeutsche's collaboration with Nazi Germany in World War II is a story of choices. Reich Germans often saw the Volksdeutsche as passive human material to be disposed of according to Hitler's will. Much of the postwar memoir literature produced by Volksdeutsche expellees rests on the same implicit assumption of Volksdeutsche passivity-*cum*-blamelessness for Nazi crimes. However, it would be too easy to take the opposite approach of postwar Yugoslav historiography, and lay a blanket accusation against all Volksdeutsche as being dyed-in-the-wool Nazis, thoroughly complicit from the start with the Third Reich's discriminatory, murderous policies. Such a blanket accusation obviates the need for analysis or explanation of Volksdeutsche complicity. The real issue is not whether Banat Volksdeutsche were Nazis or not. The issue is the complex mixture of reasons and motivations which prompted them to choose ever deeper complicity with the Reich, which also meant becoming embroiled in the Nazi regime's policies and crimes.

The very term 'Volksdeutsche' was fraught with complexity. In National Socialist propaganda, Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) were extolled as champions of Germanness, their communities as physical, biological and cultural bastions of superior civilization in foreign lands. They were also a useful diplomatic ploy for the Reich to exert pressure on the Volksdeutsche's host states. Such had been the case with the Volksdeutsche residing in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the late 1930s and early 1941. At the same time, Reichsdeutsche policymakers could not break free of a way of thought

shaped by the idea of a *kleindeutsch* German state. They saw ethnic Germans who had never resided in the Reich proper as at best in need of Reich paternalistic guidance, advice and protection, at worst as racially and culturally far inferior to Reichsdeutsche. Volksdeutsche, by contrast, extolled their legacy of hardy pioneering work on the Reich's far-flung ethnic and linguistic borders, but also their close inner connections to the German Volk. The Nazi racial hierarchy was rife with internal contradictions, which were never resolved. It went back to the fundamental disparity between National Socialism's elevation of the German Volk above all others and the Third Reich's need to find common ground with other regimes and ethnicities in its continued search for ideological, political and military allies.

In Yugoslavia before the April War, Volksdeutsche were useful to the Third Reich as a pressure point to help entice Yugoslavia into joining the Axis Pact. At the same time, their new (since 1939), Nazified leaders' ideas about enhancing their co-nationals' position would have disrupted the stability of the Yugoslav state, and were roundly suppressed by the Reich. In this period, Reich diplomacy was even more important than purely ideological policymaking. In early 1941, a temporary agreement between the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Hitler's fellow ideological mastermind Heinrich Himmler gave the former the upper hand in Volksdeutsche affairs. When the April War in 1941 resulted in the destruction of Yugoslavia as a sovereign state, Reich diplomacy more than ideology dictated that the Serbian Banat be occupied by Reich forces. However, in a totalitarian regime like Nazi Germany, not even the diplomatic corps was free of ideological influence. The Reichsdeutsche occupation of the Serbian Banat was itself due to a mixture of military

(keeping Hungary and Romania from fighting each other in the run-up to Operation Barbarossa), diplomatic (*ditto*), economic (the Reich's need for food imports and the Banat's agricultural potential), and political-ideological reasons. The presence of the Volksdeutsche minority in the Serbian Banat was both one of the reasons and the justification for the region's occupation by Reich forces.

Exigencies of Reich diplomacy alone could not have produced the dramatic shift in Volksdeutsche loyalties evident in late 1940 and throughout 1941. The Volksdeutsche's communal sense of self was shaped by their historical residence in a majority non-German environment, their engagement in agriculture, and preservation of their ancestors' linguistic, cultural and sentimental attachment to German-speaking Central Europe. This led the Nazified leadership under Josef 'Sepp' Janko to focus in its ideological and propaganda pronouncements on themes of Heimat (homeland as both the Banat and the idealized Greater Reich), the connection between working the soil and the military tradition of Grenzer (Volksdeutsche soldiers on the old Military Border), and the Volksdeutsche's supposed endangerment by the hostile majority Slavic population. The Volksdeutsche leadership tapped into preexisting themes in order to make National Socialism more acceptable and attractive to their co-nationals, as did the leaders of other fascist movements in Europe. Volksdeutsche propaganda never broke from the core of National Socialist ideas. In fact, it shared them to such an extent that it even replicated the Reich's ambivalent attitude to Volksdeutsche, as indicated not least by the dual meaning of the term 'Heimat' to Volksdeutsche.

In the months preceding the April War, some Yugoslav Volksdeutsche actively turned away from the loyalty they owed to their host state and threw in their lot with the

Reich's promises of protection. This was most evident in the decision taken by several thousand Volksdeutsche, who had been called up to serve in the Yugoslav Army on the eve of the April War, to dodge the draft. In less overtly political ways, the Yugoslav state actually undermined its claim on Volksdeutsche loyalties, for example by giving in to Reich pressure to open private German-language schools in which the curriculum was Nazified already in late 1940. The vacillations of Yugoslav minority policy, the Reich's apparent diplomatic and military invincibility in early 1941, and Volksdeutsche perception of their relationships with the Reich and with Southeast Europe conspired to ensure that when the Reich forces entered the Banat in April 1941, they received an enthusiastic reception from the Banat Germans.

The shift in Volksdeutsche loyalties did not end then. The very fact of occupation did not immediately secure the Serbian Banat as a German territory. Until the end of 1941, Reich diplomacy continued to play a leading role in balancing Volksdeutsche demands against those of Hungary, Romania and the collaborationist government in Belgrade. The establishment of a Volksdeutsche administration in the Banat and the bolstering of the Volksdeutsche position through a series of laws on their legal standing, education and administrative prerogative came out of this delicate diplomatic maneuvering. It also played into Hitler's desire to use reliable local collaborators in Southeast Europe so as to release most Wehrmacht personnel stationed there for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

The confirmation of the Banat's occupation by Reich forces and of the Volksdeutsche's predominance over other Banat residents was also a confirmation of the Volksdeutsche dependence on the Third Reich. However, in internal, civilian matters the

Volksdeutsche leadership seemed to most ordinary Volksdeutsche to be the undisputed authority. This successful assumption of some of the Reich's prestige by Sepp Janko and his cohorts was coupled with the rapid elevation of Banat Volksdeutsche in administration and education, and the corresponding waning of the threat of Hungarian annexation. It produced an atmosphere in which Volksdeutsche who harbored anti-Nazi sentiments or belonged to an older generation whose views were more conservative, traditional, shaped by long residence in the Dual Monarchy and the Yugoslav Kingdom, did not dare raise their objections too vocally.

Their reluctance to do so was due to social and peer pressure more than any overt threat or use of violence. The single case of a group of Volksdeutsche called up for police service in the village of Franzfeld, who were physically punished for refusing those orders, sufficed to set an example to other Volksdeutsche. Even so, the physical punishment suffered by the recalcitrant villagers was arguably less influential than the power wielded in the small, tightly knit, self-consciously vulnerable Volksdeutsche community by rumor, informal networks and the appearance of respectability (or the lack thereof).

These social mechanisms had even more impact than usual because they coincided with a range of material perks the Reich government offered to Volksdeutsche in the occupied Banat, unimpeded by the need to appease an independent host state. Ordinary Volksdeutsche did not only respond to their leaders' and the Reich's propaganda because it pandered to their view of themselves as superior in culture, work habits, living standard and, even, biology to their non-German neighbors. Access to arable land, many more German-language schools, rare or controlled foodstuffs, and

property which had used to belong to the Banat Jews tempted even the most reluctant Volksdeutsche. As they chose to accept one perk or another, they gradually but inexorably lost their already limited ability to say no to their leaders or to the Reich. It should be stressed that the Third Reich never bargained with Banat Volksdeutsche: it offered privileges and then made the Volksdeutsche pay for them many times over. Nevertheless, the Volksdeutsche failure to object strenuously even to individual Reich policies highlights the issue of the choice they made to comply with the Nazi regime.

The policymakers in Berlin and occupied Belgrade successively ordered the Banat Volksdeutsche to export large amounts of food for Reich needs, conscript their co-nationals and other Banat residents as laborers, recruit some Volksdeutsche as policemen and border guards, and the latter to aid in the rounding up and deportation of the Banat Jews to Belgrade. The Volksdeutsche leadership agreed because it shared completely in Hitler's worldview and subsumed their community's interests to those of the Reich. Ordinary Volksdeutsche complied – albeit somewhat less graciously in matters which took resources and manpower away from agriculture – out of a mixture of ideological agreement, moral and material indebtedness, and the underlying understanding that the German Banat could not survive without the German Reich behind it.

It would be as simplistic and reductive to say that the Reich bought Volksdeutsche loyalties as it would be to say all Volksdeutsche were ardent Nazis. The Reich pandered to Volksdeutsche material acquisitiveness *as well as* to their view of the world. This successful blend of 'high' and 'low' motives was the key to the Reich's success at home and abroad. Its successful balancing of diplomacy and military might even at the height of its wartime successes is also a sign of this. Moreover, external

factors such as the diminished Hungarian threat, the Reich's concentration on the East, the weakness of the Serbian collaborationist government, and even the Volksdeutsche leaders' successful projection of a unified, racially sound, ideologically reliable ethnic German community came together to create a situation in which Volksdeutsche in the occupied Banat had more local prestige and power than anywhere else in Hitler's Europe. This complex set of conditions made it easier for them to accept Reich policies as their own, and made the Reich amenable to using willing Volksdeutsche collaborators.

The ambiguities of the seemingly clear-cut Nazi racial hierarchy came to the fore in relation to the recruitment of Banat Volksdeutsche for the Waffen-SS. Although they were valuable racial stock as well as practically useful to the Third Reich as peasants, administrators and policemen, the greatest service Volksdeutsche could render the Reich turned out to be military service. With this development in early 1942, Himmler reasserted himself as the ultimate authority on all Volksdeutsche questions as the Reich's military-ideological need and ambition eclipsed Nazi diplomacy.

Despite the loss of manpower and disenchantment with the soldier's life it entailed, the creation of the Volksdeutsche Waffen-SS division "Prinz Eugen" had the effect of tying Banat Volksdeutsche irrevocably to the Reich's actions and fate. It also confirmed in the Volksdeutsche worldview their perceived standing as dependent on the Reich for everything, even their physical existence. Service with the Waffen-SS cemented ideological affinity between the Reichs- and Volksdeutsche as the latter embraced fully the former's view of their enemy as inferior, violent Slavs and Jewish hirelings, mercy against whom would be a crime against the German Volk. "Prinz Eugen"'s participation in the massacres of civilians did little to help the Axis anti-

partisan struggle in Southeast Europe. If anything, it exacerbated matters by driving more people into the resistance movements. The ossifying of ethnic stereotypes in the Volksdeutsche worldview under the impact of National Socialism and Waffen-SS service also had the inadvertent effect of identifying all Volksdeutsche with Waffen-SS and Nazi crimes in the minds of Yugoslavia's postwar leaders and many non-German Yugoslavs.

These rigid perceptions, in turn, caused the dispossession, incarceration and suffering of Volksdeutsche who did not escape the Banat before the Red Army and the Yugoslav Partisans occupied it in early October 1944. Volksdeutsche suffering in the immediate postwar period has been given a disproportionate amount of attention, especially in West German historiography as well as memoir literature by Volksdeutsche who escaped, were expelled or emigrated out of East and Southeast Europe in the mid-to-late 1940s. Paradoxically, these works (some more valuable as historical analysis than others) of Volksdeutsche exculpation make a spurious claim on the moral high ground, *and* have the same effect as postwar Yugoslav historiography of World War II. The latter also claimed moral superiority for its side by painting all Volksdeutsche as enthusiastic Nazis, without examining what motivated them to collaborate. Combined, these two groups of works reduced the Volksdeutsche and their chapter of World War II to a two-dimensional sketch. Some German-language works have started to redress this balance with monographs and articles on the various Volksdeutsche communities during the war.

Despite a wealth of historical literature on collaboration, Volksdeutsche in World War II in general and the case of the Banat Germans in particular remain under-researched in English-language historiography on World War II. One of the goals of this dissertation was to help redress the balance and contribute to the evolving literature on

collaboration and the shifting balance between ideology, diplomacy and militarism in Hitler's Europe. The finest works on collaboration stress precisely the multiplicity of motives which inspired those who collaborated openly and enthusiastically as well as those who cooperated to an extent or found a way of accommodating the Nazis and other fascist regimes. Using archival materials which have not been used before or have been used only superficially, I have attempted an analysis of the complex motivation behind the Banat Volksdeutsche collaboration with the Nazi regime. Parallel to this, I examined external factors which influenced the wartime Banat and its Volksdeutsche.

The Banat Volksdeutsche – leaders as well as individuals – had limited scope for choice. They chose to collaborate with the Third Reich in line with their communal and cultural identity, their perception of other Southeast-European ethnic groups, the narrowed political and military circumstances wrought by war and the Nazi domination of Europe, the perception of Nazi omnipotence, and the privileges they received as well as the sense of indebtedness these privileges produced. Even with all these factors limiting their options, choose to collaborate they did. A close examination of Volksdeutsche reasons and motivations provides more insight into the manner in which an occupation-*cum*-collaborationist regime operates than either a conclusive blanket accusation of unreconstructed Nazism or the backhanded compliment of assuming Volksdeutsche were innocent of any association with National Socialism simply because of their suffering in the postwar period.

APPENDIX I  
GUIDE TO PLACE NAMES

Often the German name was interchangeable with the Serbo-Croatian one, even in original German-language documents. Also, spellings vary in both languages. This table provides only the most common variations. Most of these villages and towns also had Hungarian and/or Romanian names, but I only offer those for the major geographic terms.

S = Serbian/Serbo-Croatian name

SP = Serbian postwar/communist-era name, if different from prewar/wartime name

H = Hungarian name

R = Romanian name

GERMAN NAME	OTHER NAME
	Banatsko Karađorđevo*
	Vojvoda Stepa*
Abthausen or Apatin	Apatin (S) – in the Bačka
Agram	Zagreb (S) – in Croatia
Alisbrunn	Alibunar (S)
Alt-Kanischa	Stara Kanjiža (S), Kanjiža (SP)**
Apfeldorf	Jabuka (S)
Arad	Arad (R, H, S) – in Romania
Aradatz	Andrejevac or Aradac (S), Aradac (SP)
Aranka	Aranca (R, H) River, Zlatica (S) – in Romanian and Serbian Banat
Aratsch	Vranjevo (S)
Banat	Banat (S) region
Banater Hof	Banatski Dvor (S)
Banjica	Banjica (S) – suburb of Belgrade, location of Banjica concentration camp

Baranya	Baranja (S) region
Batschka	Bačka (S), Bácska (H) region
Belgrad	Beograd (S) i.e. Belgrade, capital city of Serbia and Yugoslavia
Beodra (also H)	Novo Miloševo (SP)***
Betschkerek, Grossbetschkerek or Gross-Betschkerek	Petrovgrad or Veliki Bečkerek (S), Zrenjanin (SP)
Blauschütz	Pločice (S), Pločica (SP)
Boka	Boka (S)
Botschar	Bočar (S)
Brestowatz or Rustendorf	Banatski Brestovac (S)
Charleville	Šarlevil (S), part of Banatsko Veliko Selo (SP)***
Crepaja	Crepaja (S)
Debeljatscha	Debeljača (S)
Deutsch Elemer or Elemer	Nemački Elemir or Elemir or Srpski Elemir (S), Elemir (SP)†
Deutsch Etschka or Deutsch-Etschka	Ečka or Pavlovo (S), Ečka (SP)
Deutsch Zerne	Crnja or Nemačka Crnja/Srpska Crnja (S), Srpska Crnja (SP)†
Duplaja	Dupljaja (S)
Elisenheim	Belo Blato (S)
Ernsthausen	Banatski Despotovac (S)
Farkaschdin	Farkaždin (S)
Franzfeld	Kraljevićevo or Kačarevo (S), Kačarevo (SP)
Georgshausen	Velika Greda (S)
Glogau	Glogonj (S)
Gottschee	Kočevje (S) – region in Slovenia
Grosskikinda, Gross-Kikinda or Kikinda	Kikinda or Velika Kikinda (S), Kikinda (SP)
Heideschütz	Hajdučica (S)
Heufeld	Hajfeld (S), Novi Kozarci (SP)***
Homolitz	Omoljica
Inseldorf or Sakula	Sakule (S)
Karlowa	Dragutinovo (S), Novo Miloševo (SP)***
Karlsdorf	Banatski Karlovac (S/SP)
Kathreinfeld	Katarina (S), Ravni Topolovac (SP)
Klausenburg	Cluj (R) – in Romania
Klein Kikinda	Bašaid (S)
Kowatschitza	Kovačica (S)
Kubin	Kovin (S)
Kudritz	Gudurica (S)
Kuman or Kumane	Kumane (S)
Laibach	Ljubljana (S) – in Slovenia

Lasarfeld	Lazarevo (S)
Marburg	Maribor (S) – in Slovenia
Marosch or Muresch	Mureş (R) River – in Romania
Mastort	Novi Kozarci (SP)***
Melenz	Melenci (S)
Modosch	Jaša Tomić (S)
Mokrin	Mokrin (S)
Molidorf	Molin (S)
Nakodorf	Nakovo (S)
Neu-Betsche	Novi Bečej (S)
Neuhatzfeld or Tschestereg	Čestereg (S)
Neukanischa or Neu-Kanischa	Nova Kanjiža (S), Novi Kneževac (SP)**
Neusatz	Novi Sad (S), Újvidék (H) – in the Bačka
Neu-Vrbas, Neu-Werbass or Werbass	Novi Vrbas (S), Titov Vrbas (SP)
Padej	Padej (S, H)
Palanka or Plankenburg	Bačka Palanka (S) – in the Bačka
Pantschowa	Pančevo (S)
Pardan	Ninčičevo or Srpski Pardanj (S), Međa (SP)
Pavlis	Pavliš
Perlas	Perlez (S)
Petersheim or Setschan	Sečanj (S)
Peterwaradein or Peterwardein	Petrovaradin (S) – in the Bačka
Rudolfsnad	Knićanin (S)
Ruskodorf	Rusko Selo (S)
Sajmište	Sajmište – concentration camp on the outskirts of Belgrade††
Sankt Georgen	Begej Sveti Đurađ (S), Žitište (SP)
Sankt Hubert	Sveti Hubert (S), part of Banatsko Veliko Selo (SP)***
Schurjan	Šurjan (S)
Semlin	Zemun (S) – in the Srem
Setschanfeld	Sečenovo (S)
Sigmundfeld	Martinica (S)
Soltur	Soltur (S), part of Banatsko Veliko Selo (SP)***
Startschowa	Starčevo (S)
Stefansfeld	Šupljaja (S)
Syrmien	Srem (S) region
Temeschburg or Temeschwar	Timișoara (R), Temesvár (H) – in Romania
Theiss	Tisa (S) River, Tisza (H)
Timok	Timok (S) River, Timoc (R) – in eastern Serbia
Toba	Toba (S, H)
Torda	Torda (S, H), Vujićevo (S), Torda (SP)

Tschoka	Čoka (S)
Verbitza	Vrbica (S)
Weisskirchen	Bela Crkva (S)
Werschetz or (more rarely) Hennemannstadt	Vršac (S)
Woiwodina or Wojwodina	Vojvodina (S) region
Wojlowitz	Vojlovica (S) – today a part of Pančevo
Zichydorf	Mariolana (S), Banatsko Plandište (SP)

\* To the best of my ability, I have not been able to find German names for these villages, which were founded in the early 1920s and populated mostly by World War I veterans.

\*\* Two towns (or two halves of one town) separated by the river Tisa, officially separated after World War II.

\*\*\* Two or more neighboring villages were combined into one after World War II.

Charleville, Soltur and Sankt Hubert became Banatsko Veliko Selo, Heufeld and Mastort became Novi Kozarci, and Beodra and Karlowa/Dragutinovo became Novo Miloševo.

† Until October 1944, all three original names were used, because the village had a Serbian as well as an ethnic German quarter, which were sometimes considered to be twin towns, named either separately or together.

†† Sajmiše was the location of the concentration camp for Jews and communists on the left bank of the Sava River. It is referred to sometimes by its German name, Semlin, but since this is also the German name for the Zemun municipality, also on the left bank of Sava, and which was the location of another camp – a transit camp for Volksdeutsche

resettled from Bessarabia in late 1940 – I will use the Serbian name to refer to the wartime concentration camp so as to avoid confusion.

## APPENDIX II

## POSTWAR FATES OF SOME MAJOR PERSONAGES

The most remarkable fact about the postwar careers of the leading Banat Volksdeutsche is the ease with which most of them evaded any legal consequences of their wartime involvement. They were so successful in leaving their wartime past behind that information on their postwar activities is not always readily available. Probably this was due in no small part to the fact that, as Volksdeutsche, they were less obvious targets for Allies prosecution than their more famous – and infamous – Reichsdeutsche counterparts. By subterfuge or escape, almost all managed to avoid trial in Yugoslavia, which did have a great vested interest in making examples of them.

- Sepp Janko (Volksgruppenführer) was interned in Carinthia, but escaped in order to avoid being extradited to Yugoslavia as a war criminal. After hiding out in Württemberg and the Ruhr, he finally emigrated to Argentina.<sup>1447</sup> His exculpatory history-cum-memoir *Weg und Ende der deutschen Volksgruppe in Jugoslawien* came out in Germany and Austria in 1982. He died in 2001.
- Sepp Lapp (head of the Banat administration) lived in Hamburg and worked as chief of the Southeast-European section of the German Red Cross' service helping to find people who became separated from family members in the war.<sup>1448</sup>
- Josef Beer (deputy Volksgruppenführer) worked in the Restitution Office (Landesausgleichsamt) in Stuttgart,<sup>1449</sup> and was probably the most prolific author

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<sup>1447</sup> Testimony of Richard Lackner (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/39, frames 722-723.

<sup>1448</sup> LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/191, frame 609.

of exculpatory books and depositions to the Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte of all the former members of the Volksgruppenführung.

- Juraj Spiller (in charge of security operations) was interned by the Americans in Dachau, extradited to Yugoslavia, sentenced to death and executed in 1948.<sup>1450</sup>
- Arthur Phleps (first “Prinz Eugen” commander) was killed in action in Romania in fall 1944.
- Gustav Halwax (first, clandestine Waffen-SS recruiter from among his co-nationals in the Banat) was killed in action while serving with the Waffen-SS in Ukraine in 1941.<sup>1451</sup>

As already mentioned, Reichsdeutsche represented visible and obvious targets for Allied justice, which was nevertheless notoriously fickle:

- Adolf Hitler committed suicide as the Red Army waged the Battle of Berlin in 1945.
- Heinrich Himmler (SS and RSHA chief) committed suicide in 1945 while awaiting trial at Nuremberg.
- Joachim von Ribbentrop (German Foreign Minister) and Wilhelm Keitel (OKW chief) were sentenced to death at Nuremberg and executed in 1946.
- August Meyszner (HSSPF in Serbia) was sentenced to death by a Yugoslav court and executed in 1947.

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<sup>1449</sup> LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/191, frame 644.

<sup>1450</sup> Testimony of Oskar Krewetsch (1958), LAA, Ost-Dok. 16/149, frame 678.

<sup>1451</sup> “Gustav Hallwax. Er fiel fuer Fuehrer und Volk,” *Donauzeitung*, October 25, 1941, BA Berlin, NS 5 VI, file 29266/a, p. 23.

- Hermann Behrends (Meyszner's successor) was interned by the British before being extradited to Yugoslavia, sentenced to death and executed in 1948.
- Otto Kumm (Phleps' second successor as "Prinz Eugen" commander) founded and presided over HIAG, the Waffen-SS veterans' association in West Germany. His exculpatory history of the division "Prinz Eugen" came out in 1978. He died in 2004.
- Heinrich Danckelmann (German commanding general in Serbia in 1941) retired from active duty, but was extradited to Yugoslavia, tried as a war criminal and executed in 1947.
- Franz Böhme (Danckelmann's successor in fall 1941) was captured in Norway and tried in the second round of the Nuremberg Trials for war crimes committed during his tenure in Serbia. He committed suicide in 1947.
- Paul Bader (Böhme's successor till summer 1943) retired in 1944. In later years he denied any knowledge of the shooting of civilians in Serbia by the Wehrmacht during his tenure. He died in 1971.
- Hermann Neubacher (AA representative for all of Southeastern Europe) was arrested by the Americans and extradited to Yugoslavia. Sentenced to twenty years hard labor by a Yugoslav court in 1951, he was released in 1952 for reasons of health.<sup>1452</sup> He died in 1960.

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<sup>1452</sup> Auswärtiges Amt – Historischer Dienst (ed), *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes, 1871-1945*, Volume 3 (Paderborn and Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008), pp. 350-351.

- Felix Benzler (AA representative in Belgrade) retired from the diplomatic service in 1944.<sup>1453</sup> Despite being interrogated in the late 1960s, he was never brought to trial. He died in 1977.
- Otto von Erdmannsdorff (German ambassador in Hungary) was tried in the Wilhelmstrasse Process and cleared of all charges in 1949.<sup>1454</sup> He died in 1978.
- Manfred von Killinger (German ambassador in Romania) committed suicide after the Red Army took possession of Bucharest in 1944.<sup>1455</sup>

The postwar ideological shift is perhaps most evident in the careers and fates of the main Yugoslav (non-German) personages:

- Dragiša Cvetković (Yugoslav Minister President until March 27, 1941) refused to collaborate and was arrested and interned by the Reichsdeutsche in Serbia on two occasions. In 1944 he left the country permanently. The postwar Yugoslav authorities declared him an enemy of the people. He died in 1969.
- King Petar II Karađorđević left Yugoslavia for England in 1941, where a Government in Exile formed around him. More inclined to the Četnici than to the Partisans, his influence on Yugoslav affairs in the last stages of the war was minimal. Although the monarchy was abolished in Yugoslavia in 1945, he refused to formally renounce his title. He died in 1970.

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<sup>1453</sup> Auswärtiges Amt – Historischer Dienst (ed), *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes, 1871-1945*, Volume 1 (Paderborn and Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2000), pp. 108-109.

<sup>1454</sup> *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes, 1871-1945*, Volume 1, pp. 518-519.

<sup>1455</sup> Auswärtiges Amt – Historischer Dienst (ed), *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes, 1871-1945*, Volume 2 (Paderborn and Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005), p. 552.

- Dušan Simović (army general and head of the March 27, 1941 Yugoslav government) became head of the London Government in Exile, but after a falling out threw in his lot with the Partisans. He returned to Belgrade and testified against Mihajlović at the latter's trial. He died in 1962.
- Dragoljub 'Draža' Mihajlović (Četnik leader) was captured in Bosnia in 1946, tried in a Yugoslav court, and executed in 1946.
- Milan Nedić (head of the Council of Ministers) fled to Austria in 1944, was extradited by the British to Yugoslavia in 1946, and officially committed suicide while in custody awaiting trial for high treason.
- Milan Aćimović (Nedić's predecessor and then Interior Minister in the Nedić government) was killed in battle with the Partisans while withdrawing through Herzegovina with the Četnici in 1945.
- Josip Broz Tito (Partisan leader) broke with Stalin and the Communist Bloc in 1948, established a separate form of 'national communism' in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, whose president and commander-in-chief he remained until his death in 1980.

## GLOSSARY

Abwehr	German military intelligence organization
Allgemeine SS	General SS, major branch of the SS
Aryanization	the process of transferring ownership of property from Jews to non-Jews ('Aryans')
Auslandsdeutsche	persons of German origin residing outside Germany, largely synonymous with Volksdeutsche
Auswärtiges Amt (AA)	German Ministry of Foreign Affairs
ban	head of a banovina
Banater Hilfspolizei (Hipo)	Banat auxiliary police
banovina (pl. banovine)	Yugoslav administrative unit in the period 1929-1941
Bauernführer	official in charge of peasant affairs
Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte	West German Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and Persons Damaged by the War
Četnici (sing. Četnik)	Serbian royalist-nationalist resistance
Deutsche Frauenschaft (DF)	Banat Volksdeutsche women's organization

Deutsche Jugend (DJ)	Banat Volksdeutsche youth organization
Deutsche Mannschaft (DM)	Banat Volksdeutsche militia
Deutscher Arbeitsdienst (DAD)	German Labor Service
Deutscher Mädelbund (DMB)	the girls' wing of the Deutsche Jugend
Deutschtum	Germanness or Germandom, German Volkstum (see below)
Dobrovoljzen-Felder	volunteer fields, land given to Serbian World War I veterans in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
Donauprotektorat	proposed separate protectorate or state of the Danube Swabians under Nazi auspices
Donauschwaben	Danube Swabians, group moniker for Volksdeutsche inhabiting the Danube Basin (Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia)
Einsatzgruppe	task force or strike force, SS squads charged with the mass killing of Jews and political enemies of the Reich in newly conquered Eastern territories
Erneurer	Renewers, younger generation of Kulturbund leaders in the period of Nazi ascendancy
Feldkommandantur (FK)	field command, subdivision of a commanding German army general's jurisdiction in an occupied territory

Freikorps	Free Corps, Right-wing paramilitary units
Freistaat	free state
Führer	leader, when used alone title refers to Adolf Hitler
Führerprinzip	the leader principle, the Nazi principle of government, by which the Führer was the ultimate source of both authority and legitimacy
Gau	administrative unit in the Third Reich
Gaugrenzlandamt	Gau Border Land Office, an office in charge of land lying along the edges of border Gaue
Geheime Staatspolizei (Gestapo)	Secret State Police, Nazi secret police
Gemeinschaft	community, also togetherness, collective, association
Generalbevollmächtigter für die Wirtschaft (GBW)	General Plenipotentiary for the Economy in occupied Serbia-Banat
gleichgeschaltet	the result of Gleichschaltung
Gleichschaltung	the 'coordination' of society in line with National Socialist principles
Gliederungen	age- and gender-based organizations within the Volksgruppe

Grenzer	border soldiers, associated especially with the Habsburg Military Border
Grossraumwirtschaft	the economy of large areas, the Nazi view of European economies as needing to be subordinated to Germany's requirements
Gymnasium (also Realgymnasium)	secondary school emphasizing academic preparation for university
Habag-Haus	headquarters of the Kulturbund in Novi Sad until the end of the April War
Heimat	homeland
Hitlerjugend	Hitler Youth, the Nazi youth organization
Hofpatenschaft	practice of assigning Volksdeutsche peasants to act as custodians for the land of other Volksdeutsche peasants mobilized by the Waffen-SS
Hoheitsgebiet	sovereign territory
Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer (HSSPF)	Higher SS and Police Chief, officer in charge of security and police matters in an occupied territory
Honvéd	Hungarian army
judenfrei	Nazi term for an area or country made 'free of Jews'
Kameradschaft	company, subdivision of an Ortsgruppe

Kommando der Staatswache	Command of the State Guard
Kommando Öffentliche Sicherheit	Command of Public Safety
Kreis	county (administrative unit)
Kreisgruppe (KG)	subdivision of the Volksgruppe, consists of one or more Ortsgruppen
Kreiskommandantur (KK)	subdivision of a Feldkommandantur, originally called an Ortskommandantur (OK)
Kreisleiter	county chief, head of a Kreisgruppe
Kultur	culture seen as Volk-specific and embracing all of a Volk's spiritual tendencies and achievements
Kulturbund (Schwäbisch-Deutscher Kulturbund in full)	organization of the Volksdeutsche in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia
Kulturgrenze	a perceived border between different Kulturen
Kulturnation	cultural nation, nation defined by its inherent cultural traditions
Lebensraum	living space, territories perceived as belonging to the German Volk by dint of racial superiority
Lehrerbildungsanstalt (LBA)	teacher-training college

Levente	Hungarian youth organization
Luftwaffe	German air force
Magyar	ethnically Hungarian, even if not always of the Hungarian state; from the Hungarian word for 'Hungarian'
Meldungen aus dem Reich	Reports from the Reich, monthly summary of Reich and Volksdeutsche affairs compiled by the RSHA
Militärbefehlshaber in Serbien <sup>1456</sup>	German military commander in occupied Serbia
Mischlinge	in Nazi terminology, a person of partial Jewish heritage, a person of mixed Jewish and Aryan blood
Nachbarschaft	neighborhood, subdivision of an Ortsgruppe
Nationalrat	national council
Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP)	National Socialist German Workers' Party
NS-Frauenschaft	Nazi women's organization
Oberbefehlshaber Südost	Supreme Army Commander in the Southeast
Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)	German Army High Command

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<sup>1456</sup> The title was changed in June 1941 to Befehlshaber Serbien, and in October 1941 to Bevollmächtigte kommandierende General und Befehlshaber in Serbien; expanded in summer 1943 to become Militärbefehlshaber Südost.

Oberkommando des Heeres (OKH)	German High Command of the Land Forces
Ordnungspolizei (Orpo)	Order Police, regular uniformed police in the Third Reich
Organisation Todt	Nazi engineering organization
Ortsgruppe (OG)	subdivision of the Volksgruppe on the local (village or town) level
Ortsleiter	village or town chief, head of an Ortgruppe
Partisans (orig. partizani, sing. partizan)	here, communist resistance in occupied Yugoslav lands
Partei der Deutschen in Jugoslawien	political party of the Volksdeutsche in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, active 1922-1929
Polizeipräfektur des Banates	Police Prefecture for the Banat
Rassenpolitisches Amt	the NSDAP's Office of Racial Policy
Realpolitik	politics based on considerations of power and material resources rather than ideology
Reichsdeutsche	persons of German origin who were also citizens of the Third Reich
Reichsführer-SS (RFSS)	Himmler's main title, Reich SS Leader
Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums (RKFDV)	Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of Germandom, one of Heinrich Himmler's titles

Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)	Reich Security Main Office, under Heinrich Himmler
Schulstiftung der Deutschen im Banat	Banat Volksdeutsche organization for German-language schools
Selbstschutz	self-protection, paramilitary Volksdeutsche units
Sicherheitsdienst (SD)	SS intelligence service
Sicherheitspolizei (Sipo)	Security Police
Sokol	Slavophile gymnastic society
sreski načelnik	district president
srez	district, subunit of a municipality in Serbia
Srpska Državna Straža (Serbische Staatswache)	Serbian State Guard
staatstreu und volkstreu	loyal to the state and to the Volk, slogan of the Partei der Deutschen in Jugoslawien
Sturmabteilung (SA)	paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party
Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (SOFG)	Society for the Research of German [Life] in the Southeast, a Nazi scholarly institute located in Vienna
Ustaše (sing. Ustaša)	Croatian fascists

Vizebanus	deputy to a ban
Volk	an ethnic or national group inclusive of its culture, language and other perceived intrinsic biological qualities, which define it and all its members
völkisch	of the Volk, adjective describes qualities seen as biologically determined and intrinsic to a specific nation or ethnicity
Volksdeutsche	ethnic Germans, persons of German origin who were not citizens of the Third Reich
Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VoMi)	main Reich office for dealings with Volksdeutsche, under the jurisdiction of the RSHA
Volksehrengericht	people's honor court
Volksgemeinschaft	the national community or the people's community, term implied the organic and unbreakable unity of the Volk
Volksgenosse	national comrade, a (fellow) member of the Volk
Volksgruppe	a Volk-based, organized ethnic minority; here refers specifically to the ethnic German community in the Serbian Banat
Volksgruppenführer	leader of a Volksgruppe; here specifically Sepp Janko
Volksgruppenführung	leadership of a Volksgruppe; here

	specifically of the ethnic German community in the Serbian Banat
Volkliste (Deutsche Volkliste in full)	system of classifying inhabitants of territories occupied by Nazi Germany according to their ascribed racial desirability
Volkstum	folklore in the broader sense of including all of a people's (Volk) ethnic, spiritual and cultural achievements, seen as intrinsic to it and inseparable from it
Volkstumsarbeit	organized ideological efforts to consolidate Volkstum
Volkszugehörige	persons of German ethnic origin, members of the German Volk
Volkszugehörigkeitsausweis	ethnic ID
Waffen-SS	armed wing of the SS
Wehrbauer	peasant soldier, armed peasant
Wehrmacht	German army in World War II
Weltanschauung	worldview, especially an ideological one
Winterhilfswerk	Winter Relief, a Nazi charity
Zollgrenzschutz	Border and Customs Patrol

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