# MEMORY WITH "NO CLEAR ANSWERS:" VOLKSTRAUERTAG, OPFER DES FASCHISMUS, AND THE POLITICS OF PUBLICLY MOURNING THE WAR DEAD IN GERMANY, 1945-1972

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## ABSTRACT

James Franklin Williamson: Memory with "no clear answers:"
Volkstrauertag, Opfer des Faschismus, and the Politics
of Publicly Mourning the War Dead in Germany, 1945-1972
(Under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

Germans' hesitance to completely remember the Nazi past after 1945 is well documented. Yet there also exists much evidence of German society's wide-ranging political and cultural reform across these decades, with the peaceful reunification of the two German states in 1990 and the nation's strong preference for diplomacy over military engagement representing two recent examples. When considered together, this history of Germans' success in building democracy across the post-war decades appears to complicate the other history of Germans' silence and forgetting of their fascist past.

This dissertation presents a history of public holidays dedicated to mourning the war dead in West- and East Germany, in an attempt to reexamine the apparent tension between limited memories of the Nazi past and nearly complete recovery from that past. Official remembrance ceremonies on Volkstrauertag in Bonn and the Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus in East Berlin suggested to audiences how they should understand and remember the lives and deaths of the victims of the war, yet these interpretations were neither static nor unconditionally accepted. Situating official commemorations of the dead within the context of Germans revising their attitudes toward warfare sheds new light on Germans' collective memory of the Second World War and the Nazi regime.

While the history of public mourning holidays in post-war Germany does not dispute the conclusion that Germans only slowly and haltingly confronted their Nazi history, it does suggest that Germans rather quickly adopted a skepticism toward warfare and military institutions. Despite some exceptions, German leaders presented the war and the experience of wartime death to their audiences as negative, undesirable events. To be sure, the shift away from remembering soldiers as models of patriotism and selfless sacrifices took place unevenly. Yet the overall history indicates that by the early 1970s, Germans generally agreed that peace was preferable to war. Germans had derived this conclusion partly from the pain of suffering so many dead casualties in the last war and partly from their certainty that another war would only bring the same fate.

For Bethany and Rebecca

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despite having her own career and professional goals to meet as well. She has only grown more supportive of me the longer it took to complete. I cannot thank her enough.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| CDU | Christlich-Demokratische Union [Christian Democratic Party (of West Germany)] |
| EKD | Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland [Protestant Church in Germany] |
| FRG | Federal Republic of Germany [West Germany] |
| GDR | German Democratic Republic [East Germany] |
| NDPD | National Demokratische Partei Deutschlands [National Democratic Party of (East) Germany] |
| NVA | Nationale Volksarmee [National People's Army (of East Germany)] |
| OdF | Opfer des Faschismus [Victims of Fascism] |
| SED | Sozialistische Einheitspartei [Socialist Unity Party; East German Communist Party] |
| SPD | Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party (of West Germany)] |
| VDK | Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge [German War Graves Commission] |

# INTRODUCTION

On November 15, 2009, barricades lined the famous Berlin promenade, *Unter den Linden*, frustrating the efforts by pedestrians out for a stroll to easily take in the sights if the city. Middle-aged Germans wondered aloud what could cause such a disruption, answered only by more elderly Germans' imperatives to be silent and respectful: it was *Volkstrauertag*, the holiday to remember "those who fell in war." Earlier incarnations of this holiday following the First World War had featured parades, mass crowds, and aggressive calls for Germany's return to great power status. Berliners' apparent ambivalence toward remembering dead soldiers in 2009 presented quite a contrast to the history of Germans publicly mourning their war dead in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the Second World War's enormous impact in human lives, material destruction, and political division only two generations earlier, the contemporary German public seemed only half-aware of the attention their leaders were still directing at publicly mourning the dead. In short, German people today think differently than their grandparents did about the experience of war.

This is a dissertation about Germans remembering their history of war and dictatorship, remembering the dead victims of that history, and drawing lessons for the future from those memories. Beyond the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust and the five million Slavic peoples killed through a racial war of annihilation in Eastern Europe, four million German soldiers had also been killed in battle, one million German civilians had perished on the home front and two million more had died fleeing or being expelled from the eastern territories. Thus,

beyond the violence deployed by German and German-allied forces, the war also affected German families in a very personal way, with the absences in German society spanning regional, social, and political boundaries. The Cold War and division of Germany meant that Germans mourned their dead victims and remembered the Nazi dictatorship while the threat of a new war with even deadlier implications loomed over them. For West Germans and East Germans, remembering the Second World War's dead ultimately meant revising their understandings of "war" and "war dead," so that while soldiers' suffering continued to rank highly, so too did the deaths of the manifold other categories of war victims also warrant collective remembrance and mourning.

Although these processes did not occur evenly between the two Germanys, official holidays dedicated to publicly mourning the dead and remembering the war comprised one part of the larger process of reforming German society in the wake of the early twentieth century's violence and extremism. This dissertation will study the official ceremonies and practices informing *Volkstrauertag* ["National day of Mourning"] and the *Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus* ["Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism"], the state-designated holidays for , publicly mourning the war dead in the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, respectively. The histories of these holidays and the many parties involved with them will serve as a mechanism for uncovering the changes and continuities in the ways German elites and their audiences understood wartime death and the experience of war, while also illustrating how these actors applied their understandings of the past to their contemporary post-War lives. Four main questions will guide this research: *Firstly*, how did official German public mourning ceremonies define or categorize the war dead after 1945 and whom did these ceremonies instruct audiences to mourn and remember? *Secondly*, to what degree did the categories of dead victims invoked at

official mourning ceremonies change over time and how? *Thirdly*, why did official mourning ceremonies revise their understandings of these different groups of dead over time and to what degree did the reasons for such revisions change or remain the same? *Fourthly*, what do these changes in official practices of memory and public mourning imply about German culture in the decades that followed the Second World War?

**Histories of Memory, Success, and Failure**

The history of public mourning holidays in modern Germany has attracted scholars' attention only infrequently and, until the recently, a major focus of research into the history behind *Volkstrauertag* and other similar holidays was the question of how such collective memory exercises factored into the rise of Nazism or served as remnants of its demise. While not addressing the post-1945 period directly, Fritz Schellack's study offered a wealth of information illuminating the difficulties German leaders encountered during the *Kaiserreich* as they attempted to create a single national day of remembrance for a regionally and culturally diverse society then only recently united into one.[1] George Mosse's influential work argued that during the Weimar Republic, *Volkstrauertag* was one of many instances where German society remembered the First World War positively and viewed its soldiers as heroes, helping prepare the way for the rise of the Nazis and thus setting into place a toxic precedent which critics after the war were loath to repeat.[2] Thomas Petersen's history presented the first comprehensive survey of *Volkstrauertag* from its earliest beginnings in the 1920s to the post-Reunification

[1] Fritz Schellack, *Nationalfeiertage in Deutschland von 1871 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990).

[2] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World War* (New York, 1990). Alexandra Kaiser (discussed below) also points out the very concept of a nation-wide *Volkstrauertag* only came about because the Nazis took control of the holiday away from the VDK and transformed it into an element of nation-wide propaganda, allowing uniformity in message and style over all of Germany. Alexandra Kaiser, *Von Helden und Opfern. Eine Geschichte des Volkstrauertages* (Frankfurt/New York, 2010), 406.

present, though his is chiefly a history of legal decisions and institutional changes, with glimpses of actual memories or reactions to history and its memory largely absent.[3] While Petersen and Schellack are helpful in establishing the legal and administrative background to *Volkstrauertag*, each of these authors unfortunately largely ignores the public mourning and collective memory content that populated the official ceremonies from year to year after 1945. This study aims to fill this gap by contributing a description and critical analysis of the messages broadcasted through these official moments of public mourning, as well as a consideration of how they may have changed over time.

More recently, other historians have turned their attention to Germans' public mourning activity in the post-1945 era. Axel Kapust examined the complicated and twisting relationship between the Protestant Church in Germany and the *Volkstrauertag* holiday from the Weimar Republic to the present. While not denying that the institutional church had before 1939 enthusiastically supported a memorial day to praise the dead, Kapust also argued that, by insisting after 1945 that *Volkstrauertag* no longer exclude civilian victims of war from national remembrance, the Protestant Church rebuilt its political credibility and answered cultural conservatives' desires for political celebration of the dead with a more somber and severe pastoral comfort for the bereaved.[4] Kapust's study is therefore somewhat rare in arguing for successful changes in one element of West German society that prove a turn away from the militarist and fascist past, while simultaneously noting other evidence of the maintenance of older ideas. Even less attention has been devoted to East German public mourning, whether official or not. Peter Monteath offered a brief study of the *Gedenktag für die Opfer des*

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[3] Thomas Peter Petersen, *Der Volkstrauertag: Seine Geschichte und Entwicklung* (Bad Kleinen, 1998).

[4] Axel Kapust, *Der Beitrag der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum Volkstrauertag* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 109-110, 143-144.

*Faschismus* in the German Democratic Republic, demonstrating that while this holiday began as an attempt to mourn those persecuted and killed by the Nazis, the East German Communist Party increasingly restricted the categories of victims to be so mourned and remembered.[5] Gilad Margalit's history of public mourning in Germany after 1945 also took up this question of Germans' discussions of death and the dead, finding that official German mourning efforts in both East and West had directed categorically insufficient attention to explaining the uncomfortable history of the Nazi dictatorship. For Margalit, "the issue of German guilt and responsibility" was crucial, leading him to criticize Germans for only minimally mourning the dead racial victims of the Third Reich and placing much more weight instead on Germans' own dead.[6] While he was correct in his characterization of German memory of the Nazi past as generally too uncritical and too selective, Margalit's interests did not really include addressing how Germans' remembered the events of the war, leaving open the question of how these German survivors regarded military combat (even if it became clear that they did not want to discuss the fascist dictatorship). Indeed, the aspect of Germans discussing the role of the military in their society, while they remembered the military dead of the most recent war, is under examined in these works but ranks as a major interest of this dissertation.

Alexandra Kaiser most recently and perhaps most comprehensively took up the history of public mourning holidays in Germany and her dissertation treated *Volkstrauertag* from its Weimar-era beginnings to its continued place in re-Unified Germany. Kaiser, like Kapust, identified the holiday as a site of conflict over the remembrance of the past and, like Margalit,

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[5] Peter Monteath, "A Day To Remember: East Germany's Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism," *German History* 26, 2 (2008):195-218.

[6] Gilad Margalit. *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory. Germany Remembers its Dead of World War II*, Trans. Haim Watzman (Bloomington, 2010) 4-5, 292.

Kaiser came to a highly critical evaluation of these efforts to mourn over time. She did find that the elite national organizers of the holiday gradually adjusted the verbal content of the official memorial ceremonies to reflect more critical attention towards the Nazi regime and not just the Germans' own anguishing experience of the war. Yet Kaiser also argued that the symbols and ritual aspects performed at the annual Bonn ceremony, and also often at local *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies, continued to impress upon audiences "older moral concepts, such as the bravery, honor and heroic acts of the soldier," which clearly drove West Germans to continue to praise their military dead in a way that the civilian dead (least of all, the racial victims) could not be praised and celebrated. Indeed, as much as West Germans added new classes of victims of the war or violence to their formulaic *Totenehrung*, this amounted to a "levelling off of the dead," which served as "a strategy to allow the continued remembrance of the dead German soldiers."[7] Ultimately, Kaiser interpreted the history of *Volkstrauertag* as a story of small changes but larger continuities in Germans' actions remembering their dead soldiers, with ceremonies in the present still too closely resembling those from the problematic past.

Taken together Kaiser and Margalit present the most complete point of departure for this dissertation. These two authors largely agree on a characterization of *Volkstrauertag* as a holiday that has seen some small successes in encouraging the remembrance of victims of German violence alongside Germany's own victims of war. Yet these limited successes here and there have been fleeting, in their opinions, and overshadowed by the larger failures of remembrance and mourning ceremonies organized on *Volkstrauertag* to force Germans to confront their misdeeds thoroughly enough. While this dissertation will not completely refute

[7] Alexandra Kaiser, *Von Helden und Opfern. Eine Geschichte des Volkstrauertages* (Frankfurt/New York, 2010), 407-408.

these findings, Kaiser and Margalit's conclusions differ from those of the present study because of the very questions that each one asks of the past. Whereas Kaiser and Margalit ask, 'why were not more civilian victims or racial victims of the regime not featured more prominently at *Volkstrauertag*,' this dissertation begins by asking simply, 'who was included and how and why did this change over time.' Thus, this dissertation will work to complete the picture sketched out by Kaiser and Margalit, by prioritizing those topics that Germans actually discussed each year at official remembrance ceremonies on *Volkstrauertag*, rather than only looking for what was absent.

In addition to the historiography of German public mourning holidays, several other literatures help frame this dissertation and the questions it asks. One is a body of research detailing transformation within West German culture and its relationship to military institutions. In particular, a number of historians have demonstrated post-1945 discontinuities with the past, whether in the diminished role of veterans in politics, an increased public skepticism towards war and military service, an increased willingness by civilians to criticize the military, or an increased willingness to understand male war veterans primarily as civilians (and not warriors).[8] These examples together represent a larger direction in the literature that posits a break in post-1945 West Germany with the heretofore powerful and unrestrained political, social and cultural presence of the army. West Germany's army was instead under civilian control and West German society saw its men as civilians, not soldiers. While this large of a cultural shift was

[8] James M. Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, 1993); David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996), 8-9; Alaric Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society, and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959* (West Port, CT, 2003), 186-187, 189, 194-196, 281-282, 284); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001), 89, 121; Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, 2006) 5-6.

likely the result of multiple factors operating at once, this change was taking place alongside, and perhaps in relationship with, some of the large changes characterizing public mourning for the wartime dead.

Equally important as this literature on Germans' shifting attitude towards the military is the consensus that Germans developed a steady and multifaceted commitment to democracy, as a response to the experience with dictatorship. Historians have found numerous lenses through which to view and describe this transformation, from an awakened sense of political engagement within elements of German society such as the Protestant Churches, which had long been characterized by their deference to the state.[9] Other historians have pointed to increasing acceptance of ethnic minority and emigrant populations in West German society or to the commitment of intellectuals to support democracy in ways they had not done so before 1933.[10] Still others have argued that the phenomenon of the generational rebellion of the 1960s and the turn by young West Germans to a much more critical sensibility toward politics and a vigilant stance toward political involvement were measures aimed to ensure Germany would not repeat its fascist past.[11] Particularly influential on this dissertation is the argument that this intersection of cultural change and political transformation crucially began under the tutelage of the Western Occupiers but then continued as West Germans (and later East Germans, too) on their own learned to move away from a militaristic, illiberal society into a freer, more open and democratic

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[9] Frederic Spotts, *The Churches and Politics in Germany* (Middletown, CT, 1973), 353; Benjamin Carl Pearson, "Faith and Democracy: Political Transformations at the German Protestant Kirchentag, 1949-1969." PhD Diss. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2007, 12.

[10] Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (New York, 2007), 7-11; Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (New York, 2007), 5-6.

[11] Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds. *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980* (New York, 2006).

society that placed high values on peace, democracy, human rights and free and peaceful association of its members.[12]

While the new-found changes or lingering continuities in German history since the Nazi regime have long occupied historians, the history of Germans' own memories of the Nazi regime and Second World War have received sustained attention really only in the past decade or so. For most of these investigations, the central concern has been whether the German people discussed the Holocaust or not, and whether these indisputable victims of German aggression weighed on Germans' consciousness. This literature has fallen largely into two groups, one group that has presented memory broadly construed, as a force that consciously or unconsciously affected Germans' daily lives and decisions about politics, medicine, art, gender roles, and even sexuality.[13] A second group of research has followed memory more purposefully, studying Germans' remembrance of the Nazi past as explicit and purposefully shaped narratives that were revised over time. One of the most influential works in this field established the consensus interpretation that West Germans chose systematically to embrace their own wartime suffering at the expense of remembering the suffering of the victims of German violence, and that this tendency characterized West German collective memory of the war throughout the late 1940s

[12] Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995,* trans. Brandon Hunziker (New York, 2006), 269-274.

[13] Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration,* Translated by Joel Golb (New York, 2002); Linda F. Hogle, *Recovering the Nation's Body: Cultural Memory, Medicine, and the Politics of Redemption* (New Brunswick, 1999); James E. Young, "Against Redemption: The Arts of Countermemory in Germany Today" in Peter Homans, ed., *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Charlottesville, 2000); Elizabeth Heinemann, "Gender, Public Policy, and Memory: Writing Wives and War Widows in the Postwar Germanys" in Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, eds., *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana, 2002); Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, 2005).

and across the 1950s.[14] Another highly-influential book explained that the absence of public memory of the Holocaust in the GDR and the only slow turn to publically remembering the Holocaust in the FRG was a result of the experiences under which those governing elites in East and West experienced the war themselves, as well as the political and international pressures of the post-War moment.[15] Other more recent historians have focused on the fluidity and processes of change in what Germans at different times and places remembered about the Nazi past and why.[16] Still other historians have taken a slightly different tack and explored the limitations and problems associated with Germans remembering the criminal actions of the Wehrmacht (instead of the criminal actions of the Nazi regime proper), attacking the "clean Wehrmacht myth" as just as great a failure of Germans memory as the slowness to discuss the Holocaust.[17]

Each of these bodies of literature described above serve as important frameworks for this dissertation. This study will situate the histories of official remembrance ceremonies organized on *Volkstrauertag* in the West and the *Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus* in the East within contexts of a society becoming more civilian and more democratic but one that is touched throughout by the stigma or shadow of the Nazi regime's crimes. By placing the focus on public mourning holidays and their organized ceremonies, this study aims not for a history of emotions

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[14] Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001) 2-3.

[15] Jeffery Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, 1997) 1-2.

[16] Klaus Neumann, *Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany* (Ann Arbor, 2000) 2; Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949* (Chicago, 2005) 3-4, 332.

[17] Michael Th. Greven and Oliver von Wrochem, eds. *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit: Der Zweite Weltkrieg im Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik* (Opladen, 2000); Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, Trans. By Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: 2006).

but rather hopes to find to what extent successes that are consistent with the efforts to reform German society might have been concealed by histories solely concerned with Germans' limited remembrance of the Nazi past and its crimes. In short, this dissertation seeks to reconcile the tension between Germans' limited memories of the Nazi regime and the war and the far-reaching ways the memory of this past positively informed their post-war lives in the present.

*Construction and deconstruction of memory*

Historians of memory agree broadly on the constructedness and fluidity of humans' memories of history. Particularly informative for this dissertation is Alon Confino's definition of collective memory as a "symbolic representation of tradition and of the past embedded in the context of social action," which results from "collective negotiation and exchange between the many memories that existed in the nation." Confino's interest was in "how people construct[ed] a past in which they did not take part individually, but which they share[d] with other members of their group as a formative sense of cultural knowledge, tradition, and singularity" in a very specific historical context. Important to Confino's definition was not only "the representation of the past, but also its rejection and reception."[18] Confino's conception offers a method for identifying the boundaries of acceptable remembrance versus taboo topics, suggesting what facets of the past were still too sensitive for wide public discussion at a given moment in time. At the same time, the presence of conflict over memory can also point to moments when

[18] Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 11, 7, 8, 11.

Germans considered drastic revisions or reconsiderations of the past they had been taking for granted.[19]

In addition to the importance of conflict, manifestations of congruence or coexistence among different strands of memory is another revealing phenomenon in collective memory formation, one that is also important for this dissertation's findings. Konrad Jarausch described collective memory as a process of sharing and stylizing memories across three roughly distinct levels. The first level is the village- or community level where neighbors would have told their stories to each other, forming a memory through this exchange that is distinct to that locality. The second level would witness these local memories exchanged regionally or more widely, where they would be stylized and altered to share tropes and common events with other local memories. Finally, a third level – a national level – would emerge out of this continued exchange at higher and higher levels.[20] Attention to change and similarities across these levels are instructive in thinking about the constant re-ification or revision to memory that Germans undertook at their annual memorial ceremonies. At the same time, thinking about levels possessing only a degree of fluidity suggests as well the importance of noting the boundary between what elements of the remembered past (or the remembered dead) were thought generally applicable and what was too specific to be carried on to the next level.[21]

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[19] Confino is not the only historian to point to the importance of conflict and negotiation over collective memory. For two recent accounts of the French experience after the First and Second World Wars, see, respectively, Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago, 1999), and Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley, 1999).

[20] Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Identities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 317-341.

[21] Kaiser also discusses the phenomenon of collective memory operating at different "levels," but she posits the greater potential for results that diverge, rather than converge, over time, meaning slow reform and revision of memory and mourning in a more inclusive or objective direction at the top me remain divorced from any such reform at the local level. Kaiser, 407.

Both of these above examples can be categorized as collective memory that is primarily communicative, based on ways of narrating the past. Yet many scholars specializing in memory point also to the importance of cultural memory, or memory that is preserved through symbols, ritual practices, or even the lived environment of the people who are remembering. While evidence of a memory that preserved and archived through fragments and artifacts that colors the present day is not promises fruitful revelations, this study restricts itself primarily, though not exclusively, to the narrated past.[22] Both methods for understanding memory formation and reception, cultural and communicative, can point historians to moments of conflict, where actors negotiate over how to properly remember the past and interpret its meaning. It is these such moments of conflict, made inevitable by a memory that impels people to take "social action," that can reveal changes or continuities over time in how Germans remembered their wartime dead.

Searching out conflicts over memory is one way to answer what is perhaps the most obvious criticism lodged against studies of collective memory – the problem of how to derive explanatory power from these cultural phenomena that are almost always describable but not tangible phenomena. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche proposed a very powerful answer, suggesting historians of memory undertake interpretations that trace the real, demonstrable actions taken by individuals back to the memory which these actions invoke or articulate – the "social action" that results from collective memory.[23] That is, the refashioning of narratives or

[22] The best example of this sort of cultural memory is Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses,* 3rd Ed. (Munich, 2006); Kaiser's study of *Volkstrauertag* makes very insightful use of this methodology.

[23] Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, eds., *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana, 2002) 3-4.

reinterpretation of cultural traces need not necessarily happen in memoirs or private interviews, but can take the public form of "social action," whether as protests, angry letters, or efforts to propose counter-narratives to 'correct' the memory under scrutiny. This process of "social action" arising from remembrance can also be fruitfully extended to the phenomenon of individuals and groups publicly mourning their dead.[24]

Throughout this dissertation, I will make use of the term, "public mourning," to describe official memorial ceremonies held on *Volkstrauertag* and the OdF memorial day, both in terms of the discussions planning and programming the ceremonies and the actual content and messages broadcast in them. While this term is admittedly vague, it represents a fruitful synthesis of some of the more important methodological contributions outlined above. On one hand, the term "public mourning" embraces the role of government or civil-society officials in sanctioning ceremonies to remember the past and the dead in a manner understood by their designers and their audiences to be representative of the national, state, or local population's experience. Alternatively, the term "public mourning" could be employed to categorize any mourning activity that is simply carried out in the public sphere, whether it is intended to meet with widespread affirmation or to provoke controversy. I understand this term to describe activities creating communicative memory that combine the processes of the "three levels" and the "social action." That is, "public mourning" moves beyond memory formation, toward a point where people exchange their specific individual and group memories in public, using the

[24] At the risk of overstating the obvious, "mourning" is not necessarily the same as "remembering." Liz Stanley defined "local mourning" as "the expression of grief about the deaths of people known, loved and remembered," providing one definition to differentiate "mourning" the dead from remembering the history of why those dead died. See Liz Stanley, "A 'secret history' of local mourning: the South African War and state commemoration," *Society in Transition* 33, 1 (2002):1-25, 2.

Because of the intense emotions involved, I use the term "mourning" when describing conversations about the individual and collective dead victims of the war, while reserving the term "memory" to describe efforts to narrate the history of why they died.

resultant collective memories to both interpret the past but also understand the present and the future.

This dissertation will prioritize national remembrance ceremonies, and therefore national "public mourning" events. Because the planning and execution of these memorial activities involve political leaders and civil society elites, political concerns abound. This was the case not least because of the visible participation and sanction by the post-fascist governments in actions to remember and explain the events and outcome of that fascist past. Given that a national model of remembrance ceremonies involves the deployment of a hegemonic narrative by the elite, the problem of whether this elite memory is representative of the population is unavoidable. After all, the function of national remembrance ceremonies on public mourning holidays was largely a process of elites' ideas about memory exercising direction on or shaping the audience's notions of whom to mourn and how. Yet because pronouncements about the dead soldiers, German civilian victims of the war, or racial victims of Nazi violence were all politically sensitive, it is possible to gain a sense of the extents and limits of what comprised acceptable discourse about remembrance of the past, based on the contours of when and why moments of conflict and revision arose. While this description is apt for West Germany, in considering East Germany I use the term, "publicly-visible mourning," to acknowledge the restricted possibilities available to collective and individual audiences living under a dictatorship, who faced their own version of remembering and explaining the past, present and future. Yet as this dissertation will show, there were indeed moments when German audiences in West and in the East made clear their acceptance, rejection, or modified revision of the memory suggested by their leaders.

**Sources of memory**

The *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (German War Graves Commission) created the *Volkstrauertag* holiday after the First World War and managed the planning and carrying-out of the holiday, including the national remembrance ceremony in Bonn, after 1945. Because the history of *Volkstrauertag* forms the backbone of this history of official public mourning practices in Germany, the archive of the *Volksbund* serves as the chief provider of primary sources. From the *Volksbund's* collections, this dissertation draws speeches delivered at the annual national commemorative ceremony, as well as descriptions of the participants and of the musical or dramatic elements of the ceremony each year. The archive also preserves the actual texts of the dramatic readings and plays that the official ceremonies featured in certain years. These records of are also augmented by an uneven range of press clippings that can occasionally hint at the popular reception of the national ceremony from year to year. Thus the VDK archive is the first source throughout this dissertation, because the actual national ceremonies staged and memories discussed are most often available there.

Beyond the final product in each case, the archive holds extensive files documenting the behind-the-scenes side of these national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies. Memoranda and drafts from the planning stages, in some cases years in advance, of each annual *Volkstrauertag* memorial ceremony make it is possible to analyze and interpret both the messages conveyed in each year's ceremony as well as the intentions of the *Volksbund* officials planning the event. This added dimension of intent is even more revealing when the *Volksbund* officials themselves disagreed about whether their collective memory needed to be reformed or whether "social action" was necessary to reform the public's memory. Even more telling are the occasional instances when a particular speech, dramatic performance, musical debut, or other element of the national

ceremony proved so moving to individual audience members that they wrote to the *Volksbund* to register their approval (or in some cases, disapproval). Although these are exceptional cases by nature, they do provide textured lens, however imperfect, through which to gauge public reception when they do occur. In addition to the national ceremony, the *Volksbund* archive also preserves some uneven holdings of records (including planning documents and speeches) for *Volkstrauertag* programs carried out by state-level and local-level VDK chapters. These in turn are augmented by a range of local press clippings that present coverage of state- and local-level *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies that sometimes departed quite dramatically from the national one. While a comprehensive view of *Volkstrauertag* from the national down to the local is not always possible from these records, a far-reaching picture of the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony's history from year to year, along with the ideas of those shaping it and their hopes for reception, provide the chief source base for this study.

The second major group of source materials for this dissertation comes from several archives of the Protestant Church in Germany. The national and state-level leaders of the Protestant Church played a major role in the development of the *Volkstrauertag* holiday before the Second World War and confronted the question of how to resurrect it after the war as well. Letters from local pastors to their superiors attest to congregations' earnest need to mourn in the wake of the war but also demonstrate the conflicted nature of the Church towards this tradition. On the one hand, the church had participated in what had become a very militant, nationalist exercise but now, undergoing its own anti-conservative reform, the church was hesitant to allow *Volkstrauertag* to resume without at least some measures to dampen the military-centric aspects. The resulting documentary record of memoranda, letters asking for guidance, in records of internal deliberations among senior church leaders illustrates the role these leaders sought to

influence the new *Volkstrauertag* and push it to become an institution that reflected the civilian war experience alongside the military one.

Besides communications within the Church, there exist also records of the Church's dealings with the *Volksbund* and government officials, whereby the Church worked to use its presence in local communities, local cemeteries, and its role as a chief source for parishioners seeking comfort from bereavement all to reshape *Volkstrauertag* into new directions that were less politically suspect. Thus, these records reveal much about how church leaders viewed the issue of mourning for the dead soldiers, versus mourning for the dead German civilian victims or dead racial victims of the regime, and what these leaders hoped their congregations would learn from a change in practice. While these sources do tend toward national voices and fewer local voices from different contexts, it is possible to detect changing attitudes within different elements of the Church toward the issue of defining the victims mourned on *Volkstrauertag*. In a surprising revelation, there is a small scattering of sources from the East German side of the Protestant Church that also reveal a very limited glimpse at national and local leaders there re-thinking the question of victims to be mourned. Of course, in East Germany there was both a different collective memory being preached by the government and a stricter context of censorship and political sensitivity towards naming the victims of the war.

Preserved within the archives of the *Volksbund* and the Protestant Church are documents depicting a continual dialog between each of these parties and the government of the Federal Republic. Most often, these are memoranda or transcripts from conversations or formal meetings, nearly always reflecting the desire of federal ministers to exercise some influence or even take a direct role in re-shaping or re-directing West Germans' impulses to mourn their dead and remember the war. Especially in the early years following the war, this desire by the

government resulted from the dual sensitivity of even discussing the Nazi past in front of domestic audience versus being seen by international observers not to be discussing the Nazi past and thereby being thought suspect. While the government's degree of censorship, objection, or encouragement varied at different moments, these documents also reveal instances where the VDK pushed back against such censorship, which the VDK felt was at some times too progressive and at other times too conservative. The push-and-pull between government censors or crafty politicians and *Volkstrauertag* ceremony planners was not a constant but these records do preserve a sense of the high political and emotional stakes that informed ceremony planning, at least in the first two decades or so following the war.

Of course, the role of the government and the *Volksbund* were completely different in East Germany. For the GDR's *Opfer des Faschismus* holiday, this study relies primarily on SED Politburo records and *Neues Deutschland* clippings to access the content of speeches and other party projects involving public mourning for the dead anti-fascist fighters. Naturally, the censorship of the SED did not allow any third party uninhibited access to the public sphere and the *Volksbund* and *Volkstrauertag* were out of the question. Still, records from both the German Federal Archives collections of East German political party files do reveal occasional confrontations between East German Protestant Church leaders and the SED over questions of military service or remembrance of the war dead. More precisely, SED records detail intense efforts to exalt new East German soldiers after a decade or so of ignoring dead Wehrmacht soldiers from memorial ceremonies. At the same time, church records indicate efforts at a local, even underground level, to circumvent official propaganda and organize publicly-visible mourning ceremonies for East German communities that embrace the memories of their dead soldiers and civilian victims of the Second World War.

Thus while historians eternally face the question of how representative or exception a source may be compared to its context, the picture of East German public mourning on the OdF memorial day and outside of is are more opaque. It is possible to detect the preferred collective memory that the SED hoped East Germans would adopt, which was informed by the choice of which victims could be publicly mourning on official holidays. Yet the absence of large-scale public response in opposition to this narrative, coupled with the apparent popularity of OdF memorial day in Berlin cannot be understood as simple markers of East Germans' approval. On the subject of public mourning in the East, this dissertation will try to assemble a picture of the overall context of how the SED framed both the old Wehrmacht and its new East German army in the public sphere. The regime's limited support for Wehrmacht dead in favor of unremitting praise for both anti-fascist fighters and the new NVA provide a basis for comparison with the unorthodox memory of the Second World War seen in the fragmentary evidence we have of more independent, organic expressions of mourning and collective remembrance

**Organizing the answers**

The chapter organization will attempt to both direct attention to a diachronic change-over-time analysis but also give special attention to specific problems along the war. The following central questions will guide the presentation: (1) How did Germans mourn their wartime dead before 1945? (2) How did Germans decide how to mourn in the initial years after 1945? (3) How did Germans balance war, the dead victims, and the threat of renewed conflict? (4) To what extent did official East German memory become re-militarized across the 1950s and 1960s, and what responses are discernable from the East German people towards this memory? (5) What effects did larger changes in the West German memory landscape (i.e. new attention to

the Holocaust and the Nazi regime) have on annual public mourning ceremonies in West Germany across the 1960s? (6) How did West Germans arrive at a fixed but flexible memorial day that was ultimately acceptable to all parties, one that remains in place to the present day?

## CHAPTER ONE: TRADITIONS OF WAR AND MEMORY

On *Volkstrauertag* [National Day of Mourning] 1931, a Berlin newspaper wrote that collectively mourning the fallen soldiers from the First World War should reinforce a "complete national Germanness [*gesamtes deutsches Volkstum*] for which the two million devoted their lives."[25] In other words, German civilians of all stripes ought to look to the heroic, masculine, soldierly ideal of their military as a guide for their recovery from war and economic hardship. This suggestion reflected a longer tradition in Germany according to which military service and the military dead were supposed to capture the public's imagination. Yet after 1945, the notion that all of civilian society should model itself on the military's values had been discredited beyond repair. Indeed, some Germans had already begun questioning the proper relationship of the military to the rest of society.

In order to fully understand how Germans' public mourning of the wartime dead differed after 1945 from practices and assumptions of the Third Reich, the Weimar Republic and before, this chapter will examine the history of Germans' attitudes towards their military and soldiers up to and including the Second World War. Examining military-civilian relations and the normative assumptions about war and soldiers, this chapter will seek answers to the following questions: (1) How did Germans before 1914 imagine the place, role and status of the soldier? What political, cultural and religious traditions informed this understanding? (2) Departing from defeat in 1918, how did Germans discuss and remember the First World War and its dead during

[25] D. Ludwig Kaas, „Den Toten des Krieges." *Germania.* March 1, 1931.

the Weimar Republic? How were the subjects of mourning understood in light of the increased violence of this war over those of the nineteenth century? (3) During the Third Reich and the Second World War, how did the experience of renewed, intensified and ultimately unsuccessful warfare shape Germans' thinking about soldiers and death? What traditions and assumptions from this era would be important references points for post-1945 Germans who desired to resume or reform public mourning practices?

**A civilian society with a military: 1806-1918**

The much celebrated and revered German armies of the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries stem institutionally from the Prussian army of the eighteenth century, a respectable fighting force but one that enjoyed little popular esteem among civilians.[26] However, Prussians did not imagine their army as a nationally representative institution, to which they all equally owed loyalty and support until they had first experienced a national crisis. In 1806, French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte defeated Prussia's troops with a mass army of revolutionary conscripts. In response, reformist army officers and civil servants set about to "arouse a moral, religious and patriotic spirit in the nation" by creating their own new revolutionary Prussian army, conscripted from the whole nation, even though widespread popular support of general conscription had no historical precedent in Prussia.[27] Nonetheless, this army's battlefield performance would quickly win the public's confidence.

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[26] Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des „Militarismus" in Deutschland. Erster Band: Die altpreußische Tradition (1740-1890),* 3rd Edition (Munich, 1965), 28-30, Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (London, 1964), 1-3, 12-13, Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription, and Civil Society*, Trans. by Andrew Boreham with Daniel Brückenhaus (Oxford, 2004), 10-22.

[27] Matthew Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806-1848* (Oxford, 2000), 1, 3, 6, 14, Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, "Introduction" in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, eds., *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the*

When they mourned their wartime dead, Prussians organized public memory and commemoration through the lens of German Protestant Christianity. In 1816 the king ordered a general day of mourning to remember all who had died in the wars against Napoleon and many of the provincial Protestant churches outside of Prussia also adopted this new *Totensonntag* [Sunday of the Dead], too.[28] This new *Totensonntag* enjoyed both temporal and spiritual support, each of which "gave official sanction to the linkage between the cult of the fallen and Christian piety."[29] Yet the traditional religious spirit of this holiday was stronger than the civic, with remembrance appearing as or being informed by religious practices, especially worship services and laying of memorial wreaths.[30] The public memory of the war dead on Sundays also reflected a growing religious dimension to Prussian identity whereby Protestant German pastors believed in a "chosen-people model," and drew from it "metaphors….that served to give meaning to individual suffering, sacrifice, and loss,"[31] to "justify the Wars of Liberation," and "to disguise the reality of war."[32] At the same time, the Prussian public gradually accepted

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*Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2009), 1-2, 3, Craig, 37-38, 40, Freiherr vom Stein, quoted in Craig, 40, Frevert, 22-30, 32, 34-35, 39, Karin Baumgartner, "Valorous Masculinities and Patriotism in the Texts of Early Nineteenth-Century Germany Women Writers," *German Studies Review* 31, 2 (May 2008), 325-327, Craig, 41-43, 44-45, 47, 48, Karen Hagemann, „Der ‚Bürger' als ‚Nationalkrieger:' Entwürfe von Militär, Nation und Männlichkeit in der Zeit der Freiheitskriege" in Karen Hagemann, Ralf Pröve, eds. *Landesknechte, Soldatenfrauen und Nationalkrieger: Militär, Krieg und Geschlechterordnung im historischen Wandel* (Frankfurt, 1998), 75.

[28] Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, *Das Kirchenjahr. Feste, Gedenk- und Feiertage in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1986), 159-160.

[29] George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, 1990), 50.

[30] Hans Hattenhauer, *Deutsche Nationalsymbole: Zeichen und Bedeutung* (Munich, 1984), 105.

[31] Hartmut Lehmann, "The Germans as a Chosen People: Old Testament Themes in German Nationalism," *German Studies Review*, 14, 2 (May, 1991), 262-263.

[32] Mosse, 27-28, 34-36. This change represents a larger transition in European memorial culture of the nineteenth century, whereby monuments made "inner-worldly claims" about the value of soldiers' deaths in this world. Reinhart Koselleck, "War Memorials: Identity formations of the Survivors," in Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Pressner (Stanford, 2002), 291

conscription based on a discourse that framed military service positively, "not purely as a civic duty, but … a means of social integration and cultural socialization," and as "an honor," giving rise to the expectation that (male) citizens had a "moral duty" to serve the nation by fighting its enemies while "contribut[ing] to the furtherance of humanity."[33] Mourning the dead and remembering their actions, then, served both to express the public's grief for the fallen and gratitude for their actions while simultaneously creating justification for future generations to do the same.

The 1848 Revolution further redefined the ways Prussians (and later Germans) thought about their military. The very idea of an armed citizenry was central to the 1848 revolution and yet the concept of a "*Bürgerwehr*" [citizen's militia] was gendered masculine and classed *bourgeois*.[34] These militias both served as security details, protecting the property of the liberal middle class from agitated democratic revolutionaries and general looters, while simultaneously serving as "the armed wing of the [liberals'] Revolution" and as a check on the power of the king's standing army.[35] The defeat of the 1848-1849 Revolution, however, allowed the army to clamp down on any democratic challenge to a closed, professional military institution, thus by the middle of the nineteenth century, Prussians conceived of bearing arms as the task not of

[33] Frevert, 47, 50-51, 54-55, 59-60. Frevert understands this process of delineating who could and could not serve in the army as actually defining who was and was not included in the nation. René Schilling, "Die soziale Konstruktion heroischer Männlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert: Das Beispiel Theodor Körner" in Karen Hagemann, Ralf Pröve, eds. *Landesknechte, Soldatenfrauen und Nationalkrieger: Militär, Krieg und Geschlechterordnung im historischen Wandel* (Frankfurt, 1998), 122, 124.

[34] Ralf Pröve, „ ‚Der Mann des Mannes:' ‚Civile' Ordnungsformationen, Staatsbürgerschaft und Männlichkeit im Vormärz" in Karen Hagemann, Ralf Pröve, eds. *Landesknechte, Soldatenfrauen und Nationalkrieger: Militär, Krieg und Geschlechterordnung im historischen Wandel* (Frankfurt, 1998), 104; Frevert, 113-118, 124-125, 127-128. On the 1848-1849 Revolution in general, see Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849* (Princeton, 1991).

[35] Pröve, 104-105; Sperber, 170-171.

civilian patriots, but as the work solely of professional soldiers, the legitimate defenders of the nation.[36]

The army's status and reputation in Prussian society was greatly enhanced by German Unification following the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871, which had allowed Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to force the political unification of the German lands under Prussian leadership in 1871.[37] Through victory over Prussia's archrival and the ensuing national unification, the army and soldiery enjoyed even greater public appreciation and esteem.[38] These successes settled any question of army policy, conscription, and limitations on the military establishment once and for all, allowing the army to "now actively [seek] to use this influence and leave its mark on society."[39] The mechanism through which the politically conservative army could most easily shape individual Germans' lives was the system of officer commissions for the army reserve. These soldiers in middle-class clothes served as a constant crutch for the state and carried the mentalities, prejudices and politics in which they were socialized as young men back into their civilian lives.[40] The hiring preference for civil service positions and the prestige of a closer relationship with the Emperor elevated the soldier above the civilian, which corresponded with the army's expanded role as an instrument of social control and social order.[41]

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[36] Pröve, 116; Craig, 107, 127.

[37] Wehler, 28.

[38] Craig, 180-181, 193, Frevert, 156-157, Wehler, 28.

[39] Frevert, 149; Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, 2005), 103-104; Craig, 217.

[40] Wehler, 156-157; Hull, 102-103; Eckart Kehr, "The Genesis of the Royal Prussian Reserve Officer" in Eckart Kehr, *Economic Interest, Militarism, and Foreign Policy: Essays on German History, Edited and with an Introduction by Gordon A. Craig*, Translated by Grete Heinz (Berkeley, 1977), 100-101.

[41] Hull, 104, Wehler, 157-158, 160-161, 163, Kehr, "Reserve Officer," 105-107. Kehr admits that this "alliance" between army, monarchy, and bourgeoisie one "cannot find anywhere in recorded form," but maintains that this agreement let the state make concessions to the military. Frevert, 204. Frevert disagrees, however, and says that,

Beyond gendered and social expectations, Protestants' faith continued to bolster the primacy of the warrior, as the Prussian-German victory was seen as nothing less than divine intervention.[42] Historians have unendingly debated the degree to which the German army influenced the state and society, or the other way around, yet the role of the institutional military and the place of the soldier within Imperial Germany were undeniably important.

To commemorate the victory at the Battle of Sedan on September 2, 1870, which led to the French surrender and German unification, national liberals created a new holiday, *Sedantag* [Sedan Day], that all Germans could celebrate and that would bolster those newly-incorporated non-Prussians into the Prussian-dominated German Empire.[43] This holiday became an occasion for honoring the dead soldiers, too, but did not meet universal acceptance.[44] These celebrations placed commemorating the new nation-state within longer German traditions of celebration using local monuments, statues, processions, speeches and (in Protestant regions) the Church, all putting national significance into the locality and which by 1874 were less of reminders of the battle itself and really pedagogic projects for educating children and youth about the greatness of German unification and German traditions.[45] Dissent among Catholics and democrats meant that *Sedantag* became a political campaign extension for nationalist liberals, and thus meaningless to

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while the army institutionally hated the SPD, individual veterans and SPD members could reconcile their differences. Nicholas Stargardt, *The German idea of militarism: Radical and socialist critics, 1866-1914* (Cambridge, 1994), 150.

[42] Lehman, 265-266.

[43] Fritz Schellack, *Nationalfeiertage in Deutschland von 1871 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 69, 70, 73; Hattenhauser, 108.

[44] Schellack, 73-74, Alon Confino, *The Nation As A Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 27-28, 30-31; Hattenhauser, 108, 111. The Kaiser preferred a national celebration on 18 January, which observed the 18th January 1701, the day Frederick William I was crowned King of Prussia, Hattenhauser, 108-109.

[45] Confino, 33-34, 42-46, 46-50, 69-72; Schellack, 69, 102, 104.

other political- and social groups, since the celebration had no consensus of public support outside of Protestant Prussia.[46] Still, the military was present in German culture in many ways at once, as the army enjoyed special constitutional privileges and the soldiers possessed a celebrated status in popular imagination.[47]

The First World War brought tremendous violence to the lives of soldiers and civilians in Germany.[48] While the German government had anticipated a war (albeit short) and made plans for the deployment of its troops, planners had made few preparations for a sustained conflict that would require the long-term production of war materials. Nor had they considered how to correct for shortages of raw materials, food, or manpower.[49] This war demanded not only a mobilized, modernly-equipped and technologically proficient military but also a politically and industrially mobilized society, organized for rational production, and agreeable to overcome their internal social and political divisions through a temporary domestic truce [*Burgfrieden*].[50] Over

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[46] Confino, 73, 79-81, 83, 87, 90-91. This is, in fact, Confino's major argument about *Sedantag*: that it did not convince non-Protestant Prussians to feel *German*. Instead, building the identity of new Imperial Germans proceeded through an intense fascination with the *Heimat.*

The ensuing *Kulturkampf* [culture war] persecuted primarily Catholics and Socialists, both of whom were seen as "unpatriotic" because of their loyalties to international movements. See Michael B. Gross, "Kulturkampf and Unification: German Liberalism and the War Against the Jesuits," *Central European History*, 30, 4 (1997), and Frank J. Gordon, "Protestantism and Socialism in the Weimar Republic," *German Studies Review*, 11, 3 (October 1988).

[47] Eckart Kehr, "The German Fleet in the Eighteen Nineties and the Politico-Military Dualism in the Empire" in Eckart Kehr, *Economic Interest, Militarism, and Foreign Policy: Essays on German History, Edited and with an Introduction by Gordon A. Craig,* Translated by Grete Heinz (Berkeley, 1977), 5, 12, 16-19, Hull, 105-106, Craig, 218, 237, 252, Frevert, 212-218, 221-223.

[48] Michael Geyer, "How the Germans Learned to Wage War: On the Question of Killing in the First and Second World Wars" in Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann, eds. *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth Century Germany* (New York, 2008), 25, See Ute Daniels, *The War From Within: German Working Class Women in the First World War,* trans. Margaret Ries, (New York: Berg, 1997), Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning : Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 2000), Gerald Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany, 1914-1918* (Princeton, 1966).

[49] Wehler, 203-205; Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, Second Edition (Cambridge, 2004), 30-31.

[50] Feldman, 3.

the course of the war, the military command took increasing control away from the parliament, despite the efforts of the civilian government to mediate between the demands of the army, the industrialists running the factories, and labor leaders directing workers to not strike but to supporting the war.[51]

Despite the initial appearance of popular support for the war, the German public grew increasingly splintered from 1914 to 1918.[52] German Protestants had seen greeted the war "almost as a blessing," and made "ringing calls to battle and impassioned identifications of the German cause with that of Christ."[53] Yet Protestant war enthusiasm was not universal and other groups, such as Catholics and Social Democrats, did not welcome the conflict.[54] Ultimately, the stalemate of the military fronts, compounded by Germany's dwindling economic, industrial and population resources forced an armistice in 1918. This produced revolutions by civilians and mutinies by sailors and marines, who effectively surrendered any further bargaining position the military command might have held. With the revolutions, the abdication of the Emperor and the proclamation of a republic, the defeated army quickly turned on its erstwhile partner throughout this mechanized, industrialized, total war: workers (male and female) who had produced the war materials with which the army had failed to win the decisive victory. The legend of how Germany's soldiers were "stabbed in the back" by workers and communists on the home front

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[51] James Franklin Williamson, „Soldier Citizens? A Study of Labor Relations in Germany and in Great Britain during World War I" (B.A. Thesis, University of Georgia, 2004); Feldman, 3, 5-8, 20, Craig, 299, 300, 307-309, 327, 330, Wehler, 206-209.

[52] Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000), 131, 136, 137.

[53] Lehman, 268, Gordon, "Liberal German," 40, 41.

[54] Gordon, "Liberal German," 41, 49-51, 52-53, 55-56; Lehman, 268, Verhey, 7-8, 112-114, Stargardt, 155-156.

who surrendered in the face of victory would sharply color the ways Germans after 1918 thought about their military and their military dead.

Before 1918, it was not self-evident that Germans would decide to embrace the institution of the army and celebrate it. Rather, specific circumstances of Prussian history had led the population to embrace its army. The events of 1813 and 1871 both provided strong precedents for a united German approach to remembering the military dead: praising the soldiers, praising the causes for which they died. To be sure, this popular affection for soldiers was not universal, but the general tendency was for Germans to mourn and remember dead war victims through the prism of fighting and dying in the service of the state, leaving little room for the wider civilian population to publically remember their non-military experiences.

## Civilians with a militarized society: 1918-1932

### *Searching for order*

The end of the war was chaotic for most and terrifying for many Germans. Under the impression that they were winning the war, the German people were shocked by the demand for an armistice, yet a peace movement enjoying large public support quickly gathered steam.[55] The peace coincided with revolution in Germany, which was not a "centrally planned campaign of subversive actions by revolutionary elements, but a spontaneous outbreak by the war-weary peoples, who hoped in this way to force their rulers to make peace."[56] With the abdication of the emperor, German politicians now had their chance to experiment with democratic government.

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[55] Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, trans. P.S. Falla (London, 2004), 5; Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, 2007), 3, 9 ,11, 17-18.

[56] Kolb, 7; Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York, 1993), 29, 28, 28-33, 33-35.

Suddenly finding itself running the government, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) had to navigate between right-wing parties who rejected the Weimar Republic or were at least hesitant to support the democratic system, as well as hard-left parties who wanted to continue the revolution and pursue a republic of workers' councils, along the Bolshevik model. Feeling more threatened by their more radical and progressive cousins, leading Social Democratic leaders to tried to "maintain order and solve day-to-day problems."[57] Yet the "Weimar Compromise" between the more moderate center-left, who had, after all, supported the war effort, and the center-right (and increasingly far-right) parties, did little to secure deep support for the German republic among all groups of society.[58]

In many ways, the war did not end in 1918. Disillusionment over defeat in light of the trench experience myth, anger over the Stab-in-the-Back legend, and indignation resulting from the Versailles Treaty (specifically the "guilt clause" and the reparations demanded because of it) all contributed to conservatives' *a priori* resentment toward the Weimar Republic.[59] The initial chaos of 1918-1923 gave way to a relatively stable period of the middle 1920s, as Germany renegotiated reparations payments to a much more manageable level, convincing the French to withdraw from the Ruhr region in 1925.[60] Yet this stability was fragile, since the political parties (besides the SPD) were constantly "in a state of tension" with each other, making for an unstable parliament.[61] Despite domestic displeasure, internationally, Germany's government reassured

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[57] Kolb, 11-12, 13-14, 16; Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 74.

[58] Kolb, 16-17, 17-18, 18-19, 19, 20-21; Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 42; Weitz, 19, 21-32, 28.

[59] Kolb, 35, 38, 37-38, 44-45; Weitz, 38-39; Verhey, 17.

[60] Kolb, 51, 52-53, 54, 57, 58, 60; Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 53-54, 54-55, 61; Weitz, 145.

[61] Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 4; Kolb, 67, 71, 82.

the international community by signing treaties affirming its western borders and entering the League of Nations in 1925 and 1926.[62] Following the death of German President Friederich Ebert (SPD) in 1925, the election of the former general and war hero (and "silent dictator") Paul von Hindenburg as president began a process of political power shifting away from the parliament towards the executive.[63]

By the late 1920s, even the center-right political parties had begun shifting further to the right, making it progressively harder for the SPD to form governing coalitions.[64] The indecisive elections in 1930 forced the creation of a grand coalition that itself produced little results and saw the SPD retreat from power, back into opposition, making it easier for other parties at the table who were more hostile to the Republic to engineer its failure.[65] The political crisis intensified with the onset of the worldwide economic crisis of 1929, making economic policy negotiations more difficult and made the realization of broad-ranging welfare state provisions promised by the government impossible, contributing further to public disenchantment with the new Republic.[66]

*Organizing the mourning*

The Weimar Republic faced a challenge in deciding which symbols and mnemonic traditions to jettison and which to keep. In the matter of a new national day of remembrance to

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[62] Kolb, 61-62.

[63] Ibid., 73-74.

[64] Ibid., 77-78.

[65] Ibid., 82, 96.

[66] Ibid., 96, Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 124, 129, 140, 145.

mourn the dead, the older 1871 constitution had left commemorations in the regional *Land* governments' hands, offering little precedent for a united, nationally orchestrated and uniformly observed holiday. This precedent would prove perhaps the largest impediment to finding agreement on a new commemoration. Despite Weimar Germany's reputation for new forms of art and expression, as well as experiments with other forms of cultural production, Germans' memories of the First World War did not break new aesthetic boundaries, but clung to older traditional (usually Christian) modes of mourning.[67] The dividing line for Weimar Germans, instead, lay largely along the political divide of the left, who generally took a more pacifist stance towards explaining the war and shaping its remembrance in the public sphere, and the right, who praised the devotion and heroism of soldiers and validated their deaths through a largely positive presentation and memory of the war.[68] Arguments over the proper observance of any holiday became the rule through the Weimar era.[69]

The *Volksbund deutscher Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (VDK) was created on December 16, 1919 by eight charter members "as a private but state-supported war graves commission to take over the maintenance of the German war cemeteries."[70] One of the founding members, Dr. Siegfried Emmo Eulen had studied folklore and written a dissertation on ancient German folk songs at the University of Freiburg, where he had been a member of the *Burschenschaft*

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[67] Kolb, 82, 90, 94, 95; Weitz, 298, 302, 308, 325, 327; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Sixth ed. (Cambridge, 2005), 223.

[68] Verhey, 206-207, 207, 207-208, 208, 208-209, 210, 211.

[69] Fritz Schellack, *Nationalfeiertage in Deustchland von 1871 bis 1945* (Frankfurt, 1990), 133-134; Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 5; This is also Thomas Peter Petersen's central argument, See Thomas Peter Petersen, *Der Volkstrauertag: Seine Geschichte und Entwicklung* (Bad Kleinen, 1998).

[70] Petersen, 11; Gerd Knischewski, "An Awkward Sense of Grief: German War Remembrance and the Role of the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*" in Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer, eds. *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945* (New York, 2008), 102.

*Teutonia*.[71] Fighting as an infantryman in WWI, Eulen fell ill in 1915 but rejoined the Prussian War Ministry as a military cemetery organization officer, setting up cemeteries in Poland, Turkey, and in Odessa. In founding the *Volksbund*, Eulen and the others sought to better organize the maintenance and recognition of military cemeteries in foreign lands, continuing the level of effort and degree of dedication from the wartime Prussian ministry into the (defeated) Weimar Republican atmosphere. This "centre-right nationalist organization" was "primarily backed by war veterans, the military and conservatives who longed for a bygone era" but it still "held a wider appeal for the general public" and was instrumental in organizing *Volkstrauertag* nationally and locally, through member chapters, and believed a united, national effort to mourn and remember the dead soldiers was essential.[72] V*olkstrauertag* offered a memory of the heroic sacrifices of Germany's soldiers, a memory that held up these soldiers' dedication and loyalty to the state in the face of certain death as a model of citizenship.

Early discussions within the national government over a day set aside for remembrance circled around using either May 1 or November 9. The Social Democrats preferred May 1 because it served as a common point of celebration for their political tradition and the German people could celebrate the dead and the workers' struggle. The political right was less enthusiastic about May 1, but November 9 was an unpalatable choice too because this would have placed Germans' national celebration into association with 1918 Revolution and surrender.[73] The VDK sought, beginning in 1919, to organize its own, apolitical memorial

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[71] The *Bursenschaften* were male student fraternities in German universities. These bodies and other German student organizations underwent a large shift to the right in the 1880s and 1890s, becoming increasingly conservative and imperialist in their politics. See Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Rise of Academic Illiberalism* (Princeton, 1982), 345-366.

[72] Knischewski, 102; Petersen, 11.

[73] Schellack, 136-141.

celebration of the dead German soldiers. Realizing *Volkstrauertag* as a national German event did not happen until 1925, but the VDK negotiated tirelessly with the federal and state governments to organize and carry out its holiday, with the disagreements over the date for the planned ceremonies a continual bone of contention.[74] While the old *Totensonntag* holiday, arising out of the Wars of Liberation in the early nineteenth century, offered a precedent for mourning the battlefield dead, the *Volksbund* most often favored a Sunday in the springtime, usually before Easter.[75]

The process of Germans honoring their dead soldiers in 1918 engendered an acceptance and legitimating of violence, warranting another war to fight and die for the dead soldiers' cause and transforming their sacrifice, not their service, into a paramount virtue.[76] The experience of such large-scale death led WWI veterans to look for a "new meaning [*Neudeutung*] of death in war" as a way of separating themselves from civilians without the combat experience, giving rise to a hierarchy of the dead. Veterans placed the deaths of those with front experience more highly than all others, and within this hierarchy, those who died fighting to protect other soldiers ranked highest.[77] Toward the end of the 1920s, this cult of the dead developed "into a phenomenon of the whole society," as nationalist political groups invoked the dead who had died "for Germany," and used the dead's symbolic weight to guide discussions of treaty revision and foreign policy.[78]

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[74] There is some disagreement over whether 1922 or 1925 was the first "national" observance of Volkstrauertag. The VDK organized the holiday as such in 1922 but did not enjoy official state sanction in doing so until 1925. See Alois Friedel, *Deutsche Staatssymbole. Herkunft und Bedeutung der politischen Symbolik in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a/M, 1968), 90; Knischewski, 102-103; Petersen, 11, 12, 14.

[75] Petersen, 11.

[76] Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythos, Riten und Symbole 1923-1945* (Vierow bei Greifswald, 1996), 74, 76.

[77] Ibid., 152, 155.

[78] Ibid., 156, 158.

Yet this highly selective public mourning did not crystallize immediately and without opposition during the Weimar Republic.

*Commemorating different memories*

Press accounts of public mourning during the Weimar Republic illustrate the dynamism of Germans remembering the dead, as well as the diversity of audiences and narrative tropes. In November 1920, one Berlin newspaper published an article discussing a ceremony commissioning the first 5,000-man militia in Weimar-era Bavaria. This article presented a palpable criticism of the political left while praising the militia as a "reminder of old Bavarian custom" and a representation of Bavarians' "hardened resolve against popular unrest and disturbances of the peace."[79] The captain of this militia remarked that the reception his unit received assured him that Germany was "on the right path, "working our way up from this deep ignominy [of Versailles]" and that, "only the energetic coming together of the orderly elements of society can lead to recovery" for Germany.[80] Disgust towards the Revolution of 1918 and the Versailles Treaty's restrictions were evident in these Bavarians' words, as well as call for national recovery in the wake of the defeat and the deaths of so many German soldiers.[81]

The same day another story reported that the *Reich* Economic Assistance Association for Active and Former Professional Soldiers had celebrated its two-year anniversary with an

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[79] "Weihe der ersten beyerlichen Einwohnerfahne," *Germania*. November 15, 1920, Evening edition. Germania was the news organ of the center-right Catholic Center Party.

[80] Ibid.

[81] The treaty limited Germany to having a 100,000-man army, limited its weapons procurements, prescribed reparations payments to its enemies, and gave those enemies the right to occupy the Rhineland until 1934. See Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 42-46.

extraordinarily well attended assembly.[82] The assembled soldiers had listened to a speech arguing that "the individual soldier of the German Republic would never ever be allowed to perform a single subservient act for the sake of economic desires or out of spiritual backwardness." Several other speakers argued that, the "new" German soldier would be neither conservative nor liberal, but only committed to renewing Germany.[83] Although in November 1920, there was not yet an organized *Volkstrauertag*, gathered veterans and soldiers sometimes demonstrated that their interest in criticizing the left outweighed their concern for mourning the dead.

Another story appearing later that week continued casting political blame instead of honoring the dead. Discussing the upcoming Parliamentary debates regarding the new Reichswehr's[84] formation and organization, this story bemoaned the "sorrowful fact that our army is opposed by the Social Democrats with such mistrust," while the military reorganization required by the Versailles Treaty was "being implemented by a fundamentally Socialist Minister."[85] Reflecting on the Kapp Putsch in March of 1920, and addressing the long-standing opposition from the Left against the military, this article attacked the SPD as an "Agitation Party" who had set the stage for uncertainty on the military question now and possibly stronger opposition from the more radical left parties in the future, without addressing the dead soldiers who were supposedly stabbed in the back.[86]

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[82] "Das neue Deutschland und seine Wehrmacht," *Germania*. November 15, 1920, evening edition.

[83] Ibid.

[84] The new, restrained military authorized by the Versailles Treaty.

[85] "Reichswehr oder Polizeitruppe?" *Germania.* November 19, 1920, evening edition.

[86] Ibid., The Kapp Putsch was an anti-democratic coup led by military and paramilitary officers against the Reich government, in response to that government's attempts to disarm them. See Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 66-70.

Criticizing the left was not the only concern aired by veterans and mourners in November 1920. An article published on Totensonntag, 1920, reported that the German ambassador to France had laid a wreath at a memorial in Paris for German soldiers buried there.[87] In his speech, the ambassador asked both domestic German and the international French audience that "the memory of the fallen be celebrated honorably," demonstrating a concern for the upkeep and proper care of German war graves, even when the graves were located abroad. The geography of World War I meant that many German soldiers were buried outside of Germany, so marking and maintaining their battlefield graves were the only ways to make possible visits later by loved ones to mourn over the body's resting place.[88] After this ambassador's wreath laying, his wife also laid a wreath, "[f]or the German mothers and wives," as an act of remembrance for the emotional suffering and trauma of German families, particularly mothers and wives of soldiers killed in battle.[89] This second wreath strikingly revealed that mourning the dead and remembering for First World War did not carry an exclusive emphasis on the soldiers' experiences, at least in 1920. A wider category of victims, combined with some German mourners' concern for the conditions of the graves and interest in international cooperative

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[87] "An deutschen Heldengräbern in fremder Erde." *Germania*. November 22, 1920, evening edition.

[88] Reinhart Koselleck discusses the importance to mourning families in the identification of the loved one's remains, which can sometimes be the only element of the dead's memory that remains constant over time. See Reinhart Koselleck "War Memorials: Identity formations of the Survivors," in Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Pressner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

After the First World War, belligerent nations in some instances organized tours to battlefields, both for the spectator aspect of seeing where history unfolded, but also to provide mourning families a chance to pay their respects to their loved one's remains. See Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory*, and Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago, 1999).

[89] "An deutschen Heldengräbern in fremder Erde." *Germania*. November 22, 1920, evening edition.

agreements to care for them, brings into question the notion that *Volkstrauertag* was ever only an occasion for conservative, nationalist rhetorical and political fuming.

Germans' concern for proper care of war graves was prominently featured in an article extending gratitude to the *Volksbund deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* and its founder, Dr. Siegfried Emmo Eulen for its *Totensonntag*[90] memorial observance. The article relayed that the VDK had been successfully organizing the care of cemeteries and securing agreements with foreign governments to carry out such work in former belligerent lands. In particular, the VDK was at this moment arranging a special agreement with the French government, under which the French government would place evergreen wreaths on German graves on *Totensonntag* each year.[91]

VDK leader Eulen gave a speech at this remembrance ceremony, concluding that caring for the maintenance of German graves was "a particular duty of the German people" but also said of this duty, "hopefully this collective work of piously honoring the dead will develop into a closer relationship for us with the peoples of other lands and develop into a final peace."[92] In addition to the overriding concern for care of graves and growing support for international cooperation in mourning, Germans also continued their conversation about defining the category of "victim of war" into 1921. That year, the German ambassador to France laid another wreath at a Parisian cemetery, on behalf of all German soldiers buried in France. While "all of Germany remembers in deep mourning but also in unspeakable thankfulness and admiration" these fallen

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[90] "Deutsche Kriegsgräber." *Germania*, November 24, 1920, morning edition. *Totensonntag* is the Final Sunday of the German Protestant Church Calendar. At this time Totensonntag was a day for congregations to remember those of their community who had died over the past year. See above.

[91] Ibid., Wilfried Wettstedt, ed. *Die Kehrseite der Medaille. Dokumentation über den Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, e.V. zusammengestellt und kommentiert von Wilfried Wettstedt* (Berlin, 1972), 10.

[92] "Deutsche Kriegsgräber." *Germania*, November 24, 1920, morning edition.

soldiers, the Ambassador's wife again laid a wreath dedicated to the German soldiers' mothers and wives, too.[93]

Once more, concern for the conditions of graves and the hopefulness and faith in international cooperative agreements to secure it, even on the part of the VDK, presented an alternative form for the still-nascent military-centric *Volkstrauertag*. The resort to celebrating the dead soldiers on a Sunday demanded that the *Volksbund* obtain at least tacit support of religious leaders for augmenting the spiritual concerns of the liturgical calendar with temporal matters and by 1922, the Catholics, Evangelicals, and Jewish religious leadership all supported the *Volkstrauertag*, even if the exact nature of this day of public mourning and remembrance was not yet agreed upon.[94] The willingness of these religious groups to take part and try to shape the public's memory is testament to the as-yet-undefined nature of Volkstrauertag. Protestants had supported German nationalism almost without exception since the mid-nineteenth century, while Catholics and Jews had been traditionally outsiders in German political and cultural life since unification. Although there was a small splinter of liberal Protestants who supported the Weimar Republic, most politically conservative Protestants were reserved, if not hostile, to German democracy, and their political beliefs eventually became visible in their discourses of mourning.[95] These remembrances were not canonized yet, and did not necessarily have to become episodes for nationalist, militarist ceremony. Instead, a peaceful, cooperative memory that did not applaud war itself, only the fallen heroic warriors, could also exist.

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[93] "Die Kriegsgräber in Frankreich." *Germania*. November 27, 1920, evening edition.

[94] Petersen, 15, 12.

[95] Gordon, "Liberal," 57, 58-59, 60, 61, 62.

*More Mourners, Less Victims: Volkstrauertag 1925-1926*

*Volkstrauertag* was still coalescing through the VDK and other institutions' contributions in 1925. Organizers had gradually turned to using a church celebration day onto which to graft a day of mourning so that Germans could attend ceremonies regardless of work schedules but finding one Sunday suitable to all the federal States proved most challenging in this process. In November 1922, broad support for using *Sontag Invokavit* (the 7th Sunday before Easter) had crystallized among the state governments. Since this day had no special importance politically or religiously and it did not interfere or compete with any pre-existing church mourning day, church services and bells could be instrumentalized for the observance, providing mourners comfort and space for meditation.[96] Those who did participate in *Volkstrauertag* did so with prayer services and the ringing of bells.[97] In 1925, the VDK set *Volkstrauertag* on *Sonntag Invokavit* but the Protestant Churches in the different federal states did not uniformly accept this decision, giving excuses to not participate and calling instead for a *Volkstrauertag* on *Totensonntag*.[98]

Germans supporting *Volkstrauertag* were acutely afraid that people in different parts of Germany would not celebrate the holiday the same way. Any concerns over popular reluctance to remember the dead disappeared when the German President Friedrich Ebert (SPD) died on the eve of *Volkstrauertag* in 1925. The next day, special articles ran in the press, praising Ebert for his commitment to orderliness and grounding of a new Germany on the rule of law, as well as for

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[96] Schellack., 151-152, 155.

[97] Petersen, 15.

[98] Axel Kapust, *Der Beitrag der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum Volkstrauertag (*Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 95-96.

being able to rise above politics and "at last initiate the way to [a national] resurgence."[99] Because of the wave of emotion and mobilization of mourning and memorializing, Ebert's passing created not only a turning point for the Weimar Republic, but also in the practice of remembering the World War I dead.[100]

The day after Ebert's death, *Volkstrauertag* 1925, articles ran in the press referencing Germany's fallen soldiers of World War I, "whose marked and unmarked graves are scattered over half of Europe and part of Asia [and] to whom this day [was] dedicated."[101] The same article called for national unity, complaining that "Germany, for whose future two million of its best sons fell, [had been] torn apart inside." This national division, said the author, was the result of a "hatred, which the dead … would not understand" because they "did not die for a party, but for Germany." Making a claim for remembering the dead "as Germans" first and not as members of this or that element of German society, this article advocated national unity, which could arise only from remembering the dead in a uniform manner everywhere at the same, while it also contributed to the conversation about victims of war, expanding the category of "victims of the war," from exclusively the "dead of the war" to include "the maimed, the widows and orphans," even "in particular aspects, the entire nation [*Volk*]." Returning to the theme of national unity and uniform memorial practice, this article challenged Germans to learn from all those dead to unite Germany into a truly unified people.[102]

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[99] Dr. Luther, et al., „ Ein Nachruf der Reichsregierung." *Germania*, March 1, 1925, morning edition.

[100] Peukert writes that Ebert's succession by Hindenburg was "undoubtedly a severe setback for the cause of democracy in the Republic," as the new president was a hero and symbol of the Wilhelmine Reich and his ministers began to undermine the Parliament and make the Presidency rival center of power. See Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 214-215.

[101] Räu., „Der Gedenktag." *Germania*, March 1, 1925, morning edition.

[102] Ibid.

A second 1925 *Volkstrauertag* article continued calling for a nationally united day of remembrance, framing *Volkstrauertag* as "a Memorial Day for our fallen heroes" and "a day to honor all the victims of the war." This act of remembering should, according to this author, "erase" for one day "all political, confessional, and class differences." The soldiers "gave their lives in protection of their beloved *Heimat*" and so all Germans should be thankful. "It was out of love [for the *Heimat*] that they went to their deaths and in the hopes that the Fatherland would prove itself to be *one* land in the face of the horrors of war" [emphasis added]. In the end, this article called on Germans to reach over their divisions and dedicate themselves to the same goal: "reestablishing Germany's greatness in peaceful tenacious work."[103] For this author, achieving the long- awaited but ever-elusive nationally united day of remembering the "victims" of the war is a prerequisite for Germany's rebuilding itself in the wake of defeat and only this unity of mourning could heal the political and social fractures that prevented Germany's recovery.

The official celebration of *Volkstrauertag* for 1925 offered more definition to the question of victims, while also underscoring the continued desire of supporters and organizers to have the entire nation observe *Volkstrauertag* together.[104] It was in 1925 that *Volkstrauertag* was first celebrated nationally, with at least nominal church and state support.[105] Press coverage of the celebration reported that Germans were still mourning *Reichspräsident* Ebert but also pointed out the VDK had sought "already for several years" the opportunity "to honor Germany's heroic sons" through a nationally organized *Volkstrauertag,* with the support of the state and the churches. Underscoring the united mourning aspect of 1925's *Volkstrauertag,* one

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[103] „Volkstrauertag." *Germania,* March 1, 1925, morning edition.

[104] "Aus der Reichshauptstadt. Der Gedenktag der Gefallenen" *Germania,* March 2, 1925, evening edition.

[105] Kapust, 98-99.

reporter wrote in passing that there were individual remembrance services "in all boroughs of greater Berlin." In the Reichstag itself, the national political leaders were present as well as Ordained Bishop Dr. Deitmer, representing the Catholics and Dr. Kappler representing the Protestants, with Rabbi Dr. Blumenthal present for the Jewish community, too.[106]

The inclusion of the Jewish community reveals that in 1925 the "victims of war" included Christian or Jewish soldiers,[107] even if it did not include women on the home front. These dead, together, were invoked to challenge the living to continue to serve and support their nation: "the memorial day should be a symbol for the spirit with which our fallen brothers were filled, for the spirit in which they died: that of a Great Germany." Tying the charge to be loyal and patriotic to a united day of remembering the dead, one article closed by saying that "similar ceremonies" were held too in the in other public venues across Berlin.[108]

Press coverage surrounding *Volkstrauertag* in 1926 continued to feature both discussions about the category of "victim" and calls for national unity. An article published about a proposed tax hike did not deal directly with *Volkstrauertag* or the fallen, but made clear that the author believed that such a tax increase should not harm those disabled by the war.[109] While expressing gratitude to the veterans who were injured for their wartime service, this article revealingly did *not* use the terms "heroes" or "victims" to refer to those badly injured or disabled

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[106] "Aus der Reichshauptstadt. Der Gedenktag der Gefallenen" *Germania*, March 2, 1925, evening edition.

[107] Tim Grady maintains that Jewish communities remembered their dead alongside other Germans in the immediate post-war years, only being challenged in the middle 1920s. See Tim Grady, "A Common Experience of Death: Commemorating the German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War, 1914-1923" in Alon Confino, Paul Betts and Dirk Schumann, eds. *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York, 2008), 191-192.

[108] "Aus der Reichshaupstadt. Der Gedenktag der Gefallenen" *Germania.* March 2, 1925, evening edition.

[109] "Kriegsbeschädigte und die Steuern." *Germania.* February 21, 1926, morning edition.

by the war. Instead, an alternate category of "war-disabled" was applied to veterans in this category, even though remembrance ceremonies did not routinely use this term.[110] Besides a further narrowing of the category of victims, reports on the 1926 official *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Berlin offered proud commentary over Germans' ability to overcome party differences and act united in their public lives and in remembrance of the dead.[111]

For 1926, *Volkstrauertag* was moved back one week, to *Reminiscere*, the fifth Sunday before Easter, although some Protestant Church officials were uncomfortable with the apparent overlap between the functions of *Totensonntag* and this new *Volkstrauertag*, while others opposed the inclusion of secular mourning for soldiers in the Passion season.[112] In 1926, the church moved to actually expand *Totensonntag* to look more like *Volkstrauertag* and allow all Germans to feel a part of *Totensonntag*, remembering all the war's dead and not just the veterans.[113] At this point, there was still contestation and lack of a unified, long-standing position on when to celebrate *Volkstrauertag* and how exactly to do so.[114] Even though the dates were changed and individual states did not always celebrate a unified holiday, the central location and prime celebration of *Volkstrauertag* from 1926 to 1932 was the assembly hall of the

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[110] On organizations for wounded veterans, see James M. Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, 1993).

[111] "Deutscher Volkstrauertag." *Germania*. February 28, 1926, morning edition.

[112] Kapust, 96, 99, 100.

Latin for „remember," „Reminiscere" is the name of the second Sunday in Lent in the German Protestant Church's calendar. The name references Psalm 25:6, which urges remembrance of God's love and mercy, but makes no reference to death. Karl-Heinrich Bieritz, *Das Kirchenjahr. Feste, Gedenke- und Feiertage in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Union Verlag, 1986), 98-9; Ps 25:6.

[113] Kapust, 101.

[114] Ibid., 101-109.

*Reichstag*, where "high-ranking leaders of the *Volksbund*, leading politicians, and leading churchmen "directed the mourning.[115]

By 1925-1926, mourning Germans placed less priority on political criticisms one way or the other, instead calling for "unity" or non-political mourning to unite all Germans together in remembering their dead. This still-pressing concern for a united remembrance did not include the concern for graves' conditions or international cooperation, but was tied to a conversation about who the "victims" of war were. In 1926, it was still not clear whether or not women were victims as much as men were, but if the category of victims was shrinking, then the category of mourners was expanding.

*Remembering collectively and religiously: Volkstrauertag 1929-1932*

From 1926 to 1930, the discussions among the states, the Churches, the VDK and the national government made placing *Volkstrauertag* a yearly contest. The states entered into renewed in discussions 1930 over *Volkstrauertag*, unhappy with the federally approved and organized arrangement, with some cancelling the holiday or moving it to a different religious observance day. While the memorial day was moved to March 16 in 1930, the national government was concerned because different political fractions were instrumentalizing *Volkstrauertag* for their own Party purposes. The next year, 1931, the States again found no agreement on the date. Prussia suggested moving *Volkstrauertag* to the fall where precedent existed to honor the war dead on *Totensonntag*. A conference of representatives from the states met in January 1932 with the majority wanting to use *Totensonntag*, and hoping the churches

[115] Petersen, 16.

would go along. Despite the near unanimity on *Volkstrauertag*, Prussia now stubbornly held remembrances on *Reminiscere.*[116] While *Volkstrauertag* organizers believed a uniform observance was essential, orchestrating such agreement between the national government and its states was never an easy task.

From 1929 to 1932, *Volkstrauertag* commemorations and the press surrounding them still carried some concern for the condition of German graves abroad but without the patience for international governments whose care of those German graves was deemed poor. Gone at this stage was any faith in international cooperation arising from nations mourning their dead and assisting their former enemies in the same. *Volkstrauertag* at the end of the 1920s was also still an opportunity to critique the SPD and other leftist parties in Germany based on their perceived hostility towards the military and alleged guilt for surrendering in 1918. The category of war victims became narrower during this time and the most prevalent themes surrounding *Volkstrauertag* commemorations from 1929-1932 were the continued desire for a nationally unified memorial observance and an increasing religious element. Interestingly, however, was the persistence of at least a few critical voices raised against *Volkstrauertag* as the VDK interpreted it.

In February 1929, articles ran presenting concern for the graves of German soldiers in foreign lands and their upkeep, expressing worries about graveyards without the confidence in international cooperation that had been common years before. Informing readers about battlefield cemeteries in Poland, Serbia and Rumania, the article expressed appreciation for the VDK's work replacing "the old rotting wooden crosses" with "lovely grave stones." No matter

[116] Schellack, 267, 269, 270, 273-276.

how well these Germans could care for graves, though, the "approximately 5,000 German heroes' cemeteries" in Poland were in a "quite different" situation. The author bemoaned the sluggishness with which the Polish government had attempted to fulfill the Versailles Treaty obligations to care for the (German) dead on its soil.[117] By 1929, the patience with foreign governments to care for graves was gone, replaced with a fear for the German graves that criticized foreign nations' poor care.

Just as the concern over graves and criticism against other nations' poor care of them was more acute in 1929, so too was political criticism against the German left. Another *Volkstrauertag* 1929 story recounted the German military's retreat from the Black Sea at the end of World War I, describing the soldiers' entrance to Berlin, two months after the November 1918 revolution, where the they heard "Hail Liebknecht, down with the officers!" shouted in the streets and "reflect[ed] with particular bitterness on the revolution, which was the true reason for our fate and the collapse of our Fatherland."[118] For this author, remembering the end of the war and the soldiers who died meant also remembering the socialists who fomented a revolution that cost Germany the war.

One newspaper published details of the upcoming official 1929 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in the *Reichstag* the day beforehand, noting that the speech to be delivered by the President of the VDK would be broadcast by radio and concluding that, "[i]t is earnestly hoped for, that on

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[117] H. Eisermann, "An den Ruhestätten deutscher Helden." *Neue Preussische Zeitung*. February 19, 1929, evening edition. The *Neue Preussische Zeitung* was published in Berlin, leaning to the right politically. The mast head featured a prominent Iron Cross, front and center encircled with the motto, "Forward with God for the King and Fatherland!" This indicates the paper is a Prussian-nationalist paper, dating back before the 1871 unification, as the title indicates loyalty to the "king," not the "emperor."

[118] "Vizeadmiral a.D. Wieling, "Von der Krim durch Sowietrussland in die Heimat (Schluß)." *Neue Preussische Zeitung*. February19, 1929, evening edition.

*Volkstrauertag* as many buildings as possible would lower their flags to half-mast."[119] This desire for flag lowering represents another call for a nationally united remembrance of the fallen soldiers, this time in the visual form of half-mast flags across the country. This desire for a nationally unified remembrance was also emphasized by Berlin pastor D. Richter. Pastor Richter wrote that, "[j]ust as remembering the dead in the wake of the Wars of Liberation a hundred years ago, where the entire healthy people were united," again the German people had united on this Sunday *Reminiscere* into a "community of memory."[120] He added, "[a] people who endure such hardship without breaking must be called to greatness by the Lord of history" and concluding that the true "sense of the Memorial day for the Fallen" called "all German Christians to come under the Cross,"[121] revealing a new, growing religious dimension of *Volkstrauertag*.

The increasing religious dimension of *Volkstrauertag* in 1929 corresponded with the beginning of a turn to more nationalist, exclusionary celebration of the dead, as well as a swell in conservative political parties' support.[122] The intersection of increasing hostility towards the Republic and praise for the soldiers who had died for the Empire lay in nationalist German Protestants. The relationship between German Protestants and the then-governing Social Democratic Party was "characterized by continuing mutual hostility, with provocations coming *at least* as much from the socialist as from the Protestant camp," primarily over the issue of religious instruction in German public school. [123] The SPD upon coming to power in 1918 had

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[119] "Der Volkstrauertag." *Neue Preussische Zeitung*. February 23, 1929, morning edition.

[120] Domprediger D. Richter, „Per aspera." *Neue Preussische Zeitung*. Feb 24, 1929.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Kolb, 77, 77-78, 82.

[123] Gordon, "Protestantism and Socialism," 429, 430, 432, emphasis original.

been initially quite zealous in purging religion from public education, but had warmed somewhat in its ideological opposition to religion in public life in the mid-1920s, largely as a tactic of building coalitions with the Catholic Center Party.[124] Socialists still believed that religious schooling was a roadblock to their goal "of emancipated human beings in a secularized society," while Protestants and Catholics believed Christianity to be a fundamental part of Germanness, and that "Germany could remain a Christian country only if its children continued to receive the traditional religious instruction in school."[125] This increasing religious aspect was layered amid the hope for uniform remembrances and critiques against those who did not support *Volkstrauertag* for political reasons or those who did not show the proper respect and care for graves of the fallen.

Calls for a nationally united memorial observance were at center stage in the press commentary of *Volkstrauertag* 1929. Describing how an "entire nation mourned" one moment and "an entire people were in mourning" in another, one article characterized *Volkstrauertag* as an already-united effort to remember the dead, with "numerous and huge … were the celebrations in Berlin." While tying "our [German] dead and their heroic suffering" to the painful past of a lost war and revolution at home, the article encouraged Germans to find their "hope for the future" from "the experience of these heroes," asserting that out of such a properly united national remembrance could come a national renewal.[126]

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[124] Ibid., 429, 430.

[125] Ibid., 432.

[126] „Volkstrauertag." *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeituing*. February 25, 1929, evening edition. On 25 February 1929, the *Neue Preuessische Zeitung* changed its name to the *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung.*

Another newspaper published a surprisingly different article covering *Volkstrauertag* 1929, uniquely assuming that the World War One fallen soldiers may have died for a number of different reasons: some may have fought and died out of "religious motivation," while others died amid fatalism and doubts about their survival, with a third portion meeting death "under a curse," resigning themselves to believing that "if they die[d], it [was] 'as the law had commanded.'"[127] Separating these different possible motivations for the fallen, this author supposed that different memories of World War One were possible, ranging from "victorious," to "profitable" or "comforting." Having questioned the grounds for using dead soldiers as a model of sacrifice and selfless loyalty to the nation, this dissenting author resolved that Christians should look toward a future without an obsession with war, but should carry inside them "a strong will to peace," derived from and supported by their religious beliefs.[128] In this instance, a new religious dynamic to *Volkstrauertag* did not uphold the war as an act of God's Will, but instead questioned the complacency with war and death that *Volkstrauertag* often reflected.

A critical examination was also partly visible in commentary offered by a Bishop Dr. Paul Wilhelm von Keppler for *Volkstrauertag* 1929. Keppler wrote about pain and suffering, characterizing war in a negative or perhaps more realistic manner and hinting that the *Volkstrauertag* memory holding soldiers and their deaths in central importance might be challenged. However, Keppler employed this dim picture of war to suggest that everyone must participate and not shirk their duty to endure the sufferings of warfare and threatening times, repeating in slightly different form a more standard invocation of the dead soldiers as a model to

[127] „Wie das Gesetz es befahl. Der Volkstrauertag." *Germania*. February,24, 1929, morning edition.

[128] Ibid.

civilian survivors for their proper dedication to the national good. Keppler did adopt another less-common argument, suggesting that, because suffering visits all during time of war, it "ma[de] everything and everyone equal" and the only "classes" that matter in a wartime society were "those who suffer correctly and those who suffer incorrectly," going further to say that there were those who embraced these challenges, the "heroes of suffering" and those who shirked from it, the "cowards of suffering."[129] Challenging the German people to not be "cowards," ultimately Keppler indicated that civilians were responsible for enduring suffering and hardship at home just as much as soldiers are expected to suffer in the field. Such a conclusion appears to partly undermine the distinction between the front and the home front, though Keppler did not comment on how this arrangement might affect *Volkstrauertag* and remembering Victims of War.

Other reporting on the 1929 national remembrance ceremony in the *Reichstag* did not clarify this issue of suffering and victim status any further.[130] The keynote speaker that year invoked the "spirit of Loyalty," "spirit of devotion" and the "spirit of the Victims" side by side, returning to the use of the dead as a model to the living and alluding to a national renewal that could result from a united memory of the dead. The article further encouraged Germans to think about mourning as one nation together, characterizing Germany as a "community of fate and emergency," and calling upon their readers to be "strong in their unity and love." The author admonished the audience to "believe in the future of Germany," and to "believe in [the German] people's resurrection."[131] These much desired goals of resurrection and a bright future for

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[129] Ibid.

[130] „Berlins Volkstrauertag. Die Feier im Reichstag." *Germania*. February 25, 1929, evening edition.

[131] Ibid., Wettstedt, 11.

Germany recovering from defeat could each only come about if the German people overcome their political and social differences, which might be possible through a united structure through which to mourn the war dead on *Volkstrauertag*.

The next year, for *Volkstrauertag* 1930, another Berlin pastor published an article echoing the 1929 official ceremony's concentration on national renewal through a united memory of the dead soldiers. Speaking to the importance of presenting the German people with their history, which included German heroes and those heroes' deaths, this author complained that the German population either did not fully appreciate "the memory of the heroic ones anymore," or regretfully resisted this memory. He directed harsh words to this latter group, from whom he frequently heard "the sound of disarmament" or speeches made without regard for "the deepness and seriousness of the heroic memory by which they got their rights [to make such speeches]."[132] Calling for a better education on Germany's historic heroes, while not the same as calling for a united national remembrance observance, was still consistent with this larger goal of *Volkstrauertag* supporters. Also consistent with other *Volkstrauertag* remembrances was this author's somewhat opaque political critique.

To his call for better education on Germany's heroes, this pastor further complained that, while the Allied powers that had fought against Germany had their own heroes and celebrate them, Germany could not do so [i.e. Germany lost the war and its wartime government]. He betrayed deep frustration at the fact that "against the heroes by their actions and the heroes by their endurance [i.e. the German soldiers] stand the heroes by their gossiping [i.e. German women who worked and endured hardship while remaining on the home front during the

[132] D. Richter,„Heldentum. Zum Volkstrauertag." *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung*. March 16, 1930, First Sunday edition.

war].”[133] Following his rationale that Germans needed a better education in their history and their heroes from that history, the pastor thus advocated a much-restricted category of “victims” of the war who should be mourned on *Volkstrauertag*: only the soldiers were the proper heroes whose past ought to be represented.

Beyond unfamiliarity with German history and confusion over the heroes who ought to be mourned, this Berlin pastor finally turned to the “the last reason” why Germans were “morally confused” about heroes. Demonstrating an increasing religious dimension for *Volkstrauertag*, he wrote that the German people had lost their faith in and dependence on God. Linking God’s Will, fate, and human history, the author concluded that celebrating the German history of fallen heroes on *Volkstrauertag* must be an occasion combining submission to God with submission to the nation.[134] Taken together, this pastor’s extensive contribution to informing Berliners’ memories on *Volkstrauertag* exemplified both the increasingly narrow category of “victims” to be mourned and the increasing religious dynamic evident in the late Weimar years. While evidencing little concern for a united national memorial observance, a revised history of German heroes and German history meant to correct contemporary Germans’ unfamiliarity with their national past would have been consistent with the VDK’s long-running preference for a truly nation-wide, uniform memorial day.

This overwhelming concern for a nationally united memorial observance was also strangely absent from a notice in 1930 amidst preparations for *Volkstrauertag*. This article

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[133] Ibid;

For women’s work and survival on the home front during World War I, see Ute Daniel, *The War From Within: German Working Class Women in the First World War* (trans by Margaret Ries) (New York, 1997) and Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

[134] D. Richter,„Heldentum. Zum Volkstrauertag.“ *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung*. March 16, 1930, First Sunday edition.

actually mounted another challenge to *Volkstrauertag*, reporting that the national government was planning to hold a demonstration commemorating its defeat of Kapp Putsch on 16 March of 1930, the same day when the VDK was also planning to hold *Volkstrauertag*. This author believed that the "republican" demonstration (the defeat of the Kapp Putsch) would be more important, if only because the *Volkstrauertag* duplicated the mourning function of the Protestant Church's *Totensonntag* and the Catholic Church's *Allerseelen*, which were already sufficient to mourn the fallen soldiers.[135] If this author's complaint was rooted in a conviction that Germans had one too many memorial days, this article nonetheless criticized the *Volkstrauertag* holiday supported in Berlin by the Prussian State government that posed a challenge to the national government's Kapp Putsch demonstration.[136] This critic believed that the states should yield to the federal government in these matters. However, in posing such a critique, this author actually agreed that *Volkstrauertag* should be nationally unified and organized memorial observance, orchestrated by the federal government. This objection to *Volkstrauertag* appeared aimed at Prussia (and the VDK, implicitly) for attempting to hold regionally particular memorials that might conflict with the national government's policies.

That lone critique of *Volkstrauertag* was short lived, with another brief story on the same day taking the form of a very simple sermon that remembered the dead soldiers who never returned home.[137] To this memory of the dead soldiers the author added a religious element by

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[135] „Was schiert die Preussenregiereung der Volkstrauertag. Ihr ist eine republikanische Demonstration wichtiger." *Neue Preussishe Kreuz Zeitung*. March 16, 1930, First Sunday edition.

[136] By 1930, Germany had fallen victim to the World Economic Crisis and the Reich government was experiencing a crisis of legitimacy, hurt both by its inability to deal with the crisis and its inability to govern the country. This may help explain why the *Volksbund* felt it could mount a pro-military challenge against the government's anti-military demonstration. See Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 249-255.

[137] „Am Volkstrauertag" *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung*. March 16 1930, First Sunday edition.

citing 1 John 2:17, "[o]nly those who perform the Will of God remain in eternity" and explaining that this Will of God included not only spreading the gospel of salvation through Christ's death, but just as much "all a person does to glorify his [Christ's] life in order to share in the Kingdom of God," including the German soldiers waging war to defend their nation. Casting the fallen soldiers in a religious light enabled this article to lob a new criticism at the leftist parties in Germany: Germans should have observed threats to their devotion and carrying-out of God's work in "the barbarians of Russia, who have abolished Sunday and the Christian festivals and made the Christian Churches into Communist clubhouses and persecuted the Christians as enemies of the Empire." Similarly, Germans ought to have shuddered at "those who amongst us subscribe to secularism, who secularize the schools and who want to socialize the economy;" in other words, the SPD.

That a religious element of *Volkstrauertag* was becoming more evident in 1930 was confirmed by a brief story announcing that, on *Volkstrauertag* this year, the Protestant churches would also participate with services remembering the fallen. In particular, the Berlin churches' worship services would pay attention to the "the particular character of this day" as the Consistory of the Old Prussian United Church had issued guidance for "the participation of pastors also in the non-churchly ceremonies such as the ringing of the church bells on Sunday at 1:00pm." The High Church Council had "arranged for a general collection to be taken," "whose return [would] be used for 'the easement of personal emergencies'" arising from the experience of the war as well as "the care of the war graves."[138] In 1930 the Protestant church "attach[ed] itself" to the VDK in a desire for "*vaterländischen*" [patriotic] *Volkstrauertag*: the call for a "day

[138] "Kirchlicher Feiern am Volkstrauertag." *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung*. March 16, 1930, First Sunday edition.

of Memory" instead of a "day of sadness."[139] By this move the Protestant churches abstained from observing the "moment of sadness" to unite the German people and instead set up the dead soldiery as political ideal, to unite people in their deference to the "authority" of the Fallen.[140] At this moment, never before had high church officials wanted to so cleanly differentiate *Volkstrauertag* from *Totensonntag* in form and content, and had the full backing of Provincial Protestant Churches to do so.[141]

*Volkstrauertag* in 1931 saw more attention focused on the goal of a nation-wide remembrance on the same day to underline the unity in Germany for which the dead soldiers were supposed to have died. In one article, this concern appeared via the question of whether or not to lower flags to half-mast as the VDK had requested. The half-mast question was to be "the subject of a discussion today at a meeting of the *Reic*h Cabinet" and the paper reported that it was decided that they would continue the policy, which they had already been following up to this year, whereby the federal offices and the state offices together flew their flags half-mast. The author also reported that the *Reichswehr* would continue to lower its flags to half-mast as it had done in previous years and that the German President, "as commander in chief of the Armed Forces, [would] simultaneously set his personal flag to half-mast." To make these questions simpler in the future, the article concluded that the national government would in the future "bring about a legal ruling over this question of the arrangement and spirit of a Memorial Day for the Victims of the World War."[142] This article illustrated the still-uncertain aspects of

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[139] Kapust, 109-110.

[140] Ibid., 110-111.

[141] Ibid., 111.

[142] "Halbmast am Volkstrauertag." *Germania*. March 1, 1931, A edition.

*Volkstrauertag*, even in 1931: the absence of a complete set of regulations by the national government indicates lingering doubts about how the federal and individual state governments should cooperate in national ceremonies. At the same time, the VDK was advocating for practices it believed were in due order to promote a sense of national unity, while such policies had no legal basis.

Another story on the same day, very self-consciously discussed the lack of a German national holiday. Addressing the importance of such a holiday, this author interpreted the Germans' situation as a result of a "reaction against the excesses and formalities of the old regime" and "the pluralism of [Germany's] historical development, in the disunity and division of the German people."[143] The author voiced desire for a nationally unified memory of the dead by calling for a "*Volkstrauertag*" that "should in this sense become a complete symbol for the renewed unity and national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*] arising out of the graves of out fallen." Coupled to this desire for a nationally united remembrance was also an invocation of the dead to call for Germans to rise above their political divisions. These dead did "not fight for party ideas," and they "did not die for party goals," so *Volkstrauertag* should reinforce a "complete national Germanness [*gesamtes deutsches Volkstum*] for which the two million devoted their lives."[144]

Reports of the official *Reichstag* celebration of *Volkstrauertag* in 1931 combined this desire for a nationally unified remembrance with invoking the dead as a model for loyally serving the state. One article reported that the ceremony's speaker argued that the German soldiers' suffering should remind the audience of the devotion of "those who died so that

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[143] D. Ludwig Kaas, „Den Toten des Krieges." *Germania*. March 1, 1931.

[144] Ibid.

Germany lives." This speaker ended his speech with the reassurance that "[n]ever again will the Reich be destroyed, if all of you remain united and loyal!"[145] The story concluded by also reporting that many other ceremonies were held throughout Berlin, giving the reader a sense that not only elites were remembering the dead soldiers, but that all Germans felt moved and paused to mourn the dead and remember their struggle.

*Volkstrauertag* in 1932 was still plagued by lingering discord over how best to organize the memorial day. One report announced that the "long-unresolved question of the date arrangement of a Memorial Day for the Victims of the World War is to be henceforth definitively answered. General understanding exists, that such a Memorial Day is a matter for the entire German people and, to that end, can only be arranged in a unified manner." The story reported that, although the federal government and the states were still deciding on which day to hold such a ceremony, the VDK had already made "extensive preparations for a Memorial ceremony for Sunday, February 21," and that the federal government had ordered all flags at its office buildings to be flown at half-mast in Prussia and in the other states, and the Prussian State government has ordered its buildings to do likewise, assuming that the national government would issue a decision soon asking all of the states to do so, in order to create a unified holiday observance. The article closed reassuring that "[f]or the avoidance of misunderstandings it [would] be noted that official guidelines for the limitations for public organized events on the day being decided upon [by the national government] [were] not being considered, that for this reason no legal guidelines exist[ed]. A corresponding general declaration [*Runderlass*] [would] be published soon."[146] From the bureaucratic confusion, it appeared that the *Volksbund* was able

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[145] „Den Gefallenen zum Gedenken. Die Feier um Reichstag." *Germania*. March 2, 1931, A edition.

[146] "Gedenkt der Toten des Weltkrieges. Einheitlicher Erinnerungstag am 21. Februar." *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung*. February 14, 1932, A edition.

to decide when to hold *Volkstrauertag* and then pressure the federal and state governments into allowing it.

In 1932, the conservative Berlin pastor of previous years continued to interpret *Volkstrauertag* within a broadened religious program, writing that God had assigned Germany its destiny, not to make it suffer, but because of his own purposes. Echoing his *Volkstrauertag* articles in previous years, the pastor described serving the nation as a way of serving God, ameliorating the trauma of this memorial day and the painfulness of remembering the dead by recognizing that God's higher purposes were served somehow through all of the graves and all of the dead. This author saw *Volkstrauertag* 1932 as a chance to use the pain and "common fate of [the German] people," as a vehicle for observing and comprehending that God was at work controlling the fate of Germany.[147] Gone in 1932 were his remarks about who the victims were or what German history should teach future generations, leaving the religious dimension of *Volkstrauertag* to give mourners comfort while they pondered their losses.

Descriptions of the official 1932 *Reichstag Volkstrauertag* ceremony indicated that the staging and ceremony did, however, indicate reflect a further narrowing of the category of "victims" of the war who could be mourned. Five crosses, "symbols for all Germans" represented a backdrop for the ceremony in 1932, rendering the victims worthy of discussion only those Christian soldiers who died, ignoring the deaths of Jewish soldiers from the First World War. At the same time, this story identified mourning Germans "in all districts of the country and in German communities across the borders" extending the category of "Germans" who should mourn while simultaneously restricting who should be mourned. The keynote

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[147] Domprediger D. Richter,„Das Deutsche Kreuz. Zum Gefallenen Sonntag" *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung*.. February 21, 1932, A edition.

address in 1932 both emphasized the sacrificial deaths of the soldiers and characterized the First World War as a time when "truly German history experienced a moment in which the Germans without reservation were united." The article reassured that such a loss of life promised "a holy future," "a holy renewal in the deeper German soul."[148] The 1932 remembrance both helped complete the definition of "victims" of the war and illustrated, through the extensive preparations and legal planning, the desire of many in the government and the VDK to unite all German-speakers in remembering their dead soldiers at one time and in one organized memorial apparatus. Parallel to these continued trends, the 1932 ceremony also saw the continued publishing of accounts surrounding *Volkstrauertag* with religious or pseudo-religious aspects.

*Volkstrauertag* observances from 1929-1932 shared an overarching concern for a nationally-unified memorial remembrance, which would see all Germans put aside their political, social or even religious differences and mourn together for the fallen soldiers. Also prevalent was a growing religious dimension associated with the holiday, whether espoused by official church organs or indirectly by individual pastors and authors. Some concerns for the graves abroad and lingering criticism for the left remained while the process of narrowing down the categories of victims of war continued further. Despite the near agreement on the obligation to mourn and the mechanisms through which to do so, lingering doubts and dissent from over *Volkstrauertag* offered different visions of how the war and the dead might have been remembered.

Multiple memories of the First World War and the dead circulated in 1918 and none of them necessarily had to lead to a militant, nationalist set of practices aimed at making heroes out of the soldiers and making theirs the paramount wartime experience. Memory of the First World

[148] „Trauer um die Helden des Weltkrieges. Eindruckzvolle Kundgebungen in der Reichtsahauptstadt.—Flaggen auf Halbmast. *Neue Preussische Kreuz Zeitung.* February 22, 1932, A edition.

War in Weimar Germany is an important piece in explaining the rise of the Nazis and the Second World War, but by far not the only piece. These ways of remembering and mourning the dead from World War I could indicate a readiness by some to welcome a new military rearmament and support a new war, but they do in fact reveal a willingness to weight soldiers' deaths and military service more heavily than others' wartime experiences that were just as dangerous, important, and deserving of recognition.

## A society of violence: 1933-1945

### *The normalization of violence*

Contextualized within the trajectory of the Weimar Republic, public mourning follows the path of reeling from defeat, to stability and level headedness, to economic stress and descent into class warfare, leaving room for a conservative nationalism and a radical conservatism to oust an equally fractured left. The end of the Weimar Republic is best understood not as the "fall" of a government along the lines of 1918, but rather the "disintegration of the political system."[149] The SPD continually faced electoral pressure from the radical right and left while the moderate right was never strong enough or completely supportive enough of the Republic to govern it, all of which allowed the Nazis to garner votes from the right and middle, "undermin[ing] the pro-republican centre from within."[150] Thus, the rise of the Nazis was "by no means predestined," but made possible only through the political assistance given by President Hindenburg, the army, right- and center bourgeoisie, industry and agriculture groups as well as

[149] Kolb, 110.

[150] Peukert, *Weimar Republic*, 208-209, 209-211; Kolb, 110.

conservative intellectuals.[151] The Nazis' rise to power was not simple, and they incorporated a great deal of violence directed at political opponents to assure that the German public would accept and support the Nazi Party.[152] Besides the political left and German Jewish population, some German Protestants withheld support for the Nazi Party, although most German Protestants embraced the regime, which seemed to offer a program for the revitalization, re-Christianization, and return to international prestige for the German people.[153] Once in power, the Nazis undertook the forced "coordination" [*Gleichschaltung*] of all organized elements of civil society, to ensure the elimination of all areas of the public sphere critical of the Party and its programs.[154] This process included the Nazis' appropriation of the VDK and its *Volkstrauertag* holiday.

*From soldiers to heroes*

After the Enabling Act of March 24, 1933 gave Hitler the powers of the legislature to augment his powers as chancellor, the states lost their control over observances of *Volkstrauertag*.[155] VDK founder Emmo Eulen became a member of the Nazi Party and eagerly tried to use Hitler's interest in *Volkstrauertag* to secure the holiday's solid legal footing on *Reminiscere* Sunday.[156] *Volkstrauertag* soon became a day for the Nazis to publicize their

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[151] Kolb, 110, 111, 112-113.

[152] William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town 1922-1945* (Revised Edition), (Danbury, CT, 1984), 50-52, 84, 125-126, 140, 142, 187-189; Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, Trans. by Richard Deveson (New Haven, 1987), 197-198, 207, 247-248; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems & Perspectives of Interpretation*, Fourth Edition (New York, 2000)., 58-59.

[153] Lehman, 268, 269.

[154] Allen, 222, 232.

[155] Petersen, 17.

[156] Ibid., 19, 20, 21; Behrenbeck, 292-293.

authority and dedication to the German people via their memorialization of the fallen soldiers, as they first flew the black-white-red imperial colors and swastika over government buildings, instead of the black-red-gold republican colors, on *Volkstrauertag* 1933.[157] The following year, the Nazis changed the name of the holiday, from "*Volkstrauertag*" to "*Heldengedenktag*" [Heroes' Memorial Day], as a reflection of how they conceptualized these dead soldiers and how the German public should remember them.[158]

The VDK did not want to hand over control of the holiday to the Nazis, but rather asked the Nazis to let the *Volksbund* participate in the planning and carrying-out of the holiday, too, preferring still a springtime date that would be free of pre-existing religious festivals of mourning in the fall, as well as the taint of the 1918 Revolution.[159] On February 27, 1934, *Heldengedenktag* was received official designation as the 5th Sunday before Easter (*Reminiscere*).[160] The Nazis tried to use the name "*Volkstrauertag"* for a new, second memorial day in November, centering on the "fallen" Nazi Party members but this suggestion encountered stiff resistance from the VDK.[161] In 1939, Hitler changed the date of *Heldengedenktag* from *Sonntag Reminiscere* (which would change from year to year, depending upon when Easter fell) to a fixed holiday falling on March 16, further removing the holiday from the *Volksbund's* control and intentions.[162] Increasingly, the Nazis used *Heldengedenktag* as a platform for not

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[157] Friedel, 38; Kapust, 119; Schellack, 284.

[158] Schellack, 284; Petersen, 22.

[159] Schellack, 298-300.

[160] Behrenbeck, 293.

[161] Kapust, 120-121.

[162] Petersen, 21.

only demonstrating their dedication to mourning the soldiers' deaths, but also as a blatant platform for political theater, announcing the resumption of universal military service in 1935, the reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936, the *Anschluss* with Austria in 1938, and the "Day of the freedom to self-defense" in 1939, all on *Heldengedenktag*.[163]

As it became more of a Nazi Party event, *Heldengedenktag* took on the additional purpose of celebrating the deaths of dead Nazi Storm Troopers [*Sturmabteilung*; SA] street fighters and the new *Wehrmacht*, in addition to the First World War dead.[164] The Nazi and VDK planners mobilized the emotion of the German people through the heroificaion of their dead soldiers in order to build party support[165] and worked to not just praise the "heroes'" virtues of selflessness and commitment to the greater good of their society, but too their deaths in furtherance of a cause. This cause (Germany's international defense and power) became the "sacramental" aspect of the front soldiers' deaths and of the deaths of those heroes who fell victim to the "enemies" of the Party.[166] In the Nazis' eyes, the hero was ready to sacrifice his life for the good of Germany, thus if that good requires him to kill another, such action would have been clearly justified.[167]

In carrying out *Heldengedenktag*, the Nazis used the party, the state and many other Nazi Party-affiliated organizations, eventually giving control of local festivities and observances to military garrisons and Party leaders in localities, removing the *Volksbund's* remaining control

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[163] Ibid., 25; Schellack, 302, 303; Behrenbeck, 293.

[164] Schellack, 303, 304, 305; Behrenbeck, 17-18, 160.

[165] Schellack, 304.

[166] Behrenbeck, 71.

[167] Ibid., 185.

over the interpretation of the holiday.[168] As *Heldengedenktag* ceremonies were molded into military celebrations, they resembled less and less the model of mourning prayer services of remembrance that characterized the early Weimar Republican *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies.[169] The Nazis' worldview saw emergency all about and permitted any action by party operatives that were consistent with party needs or desires.[170] Thus, the lives and well-being of all individuals were subservient to the Party's need to violently change society.[171] Making virtues out of victory and pursuit of it, even to the point of death, the Nazis considered it virtuous to have bravely suffered for the movement and grieving family members ought (said the Nazis) to be proud.[172] Because aggression and relentless, selfless pursuit of victory was so praised, *Heldengedenktag* left no room for sadness or sorrow.[173] Instead, the bombastic, celebratory military character of *Heldengedenktag* meant that Germans were supposed to take pride in having someone to mourn.[174]

Aside from monopolizing and redefining the older *Volkstrauertag* into their own re-imagined *Heldengedenktag*, the Nazis were divided over how best to commemorate their own dead Party members from the years of struggle before 1933. In addition to invoking these dead SA fighters on *Heldengedenktag*, the Nazis also commemorated their deaths, apart from any

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[168] Petersen, 23, 24.

[169] Ibid., 27.

[170] Behrenbeck, 184.

[171] Ibid., 184.

[172] Ibid., 294.

[173] Ibid., 294; Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington, 1990), xi.

[174] Behrenbeck, 295.

association with the First World War or the tradition of national military service, on November 9, the anniversary of the March on the *Feldherrnhalle* in 1923, in Munich.[175] This event and its failure to instigate a revolt in Munich had long been the "cornerstone of National Socialist martyrology," as the Party venerated the sixteen "Immortal" heroes who died for a (supposedly) new Germany.[176] Compared to the public spectacle, parades, and speeches on *Heldengedenktag*, the November 9 ceremony was less of a public festival and more of a mysterious, religious, rite to honor those "fallen" Nazi fighters and heroes, incorporating the motif of the crucifixion of Christ (represented as Germany in 1918), for a later resurrection to greatness.[177]

When the Nazi-controlled government fixed the date of *Heldengedenktag* on *Reminiscere* in 1934, the Protestant and Catholic churches were reduced to officially mourning primarily on their own *Totensonntag* and *Allerseelen* Sundays, respectively, with only minimal roles for the churches to play in the party-directed *Heldengedenktag*.[178] The decision to permanently set *Heldengedenktag* on March 16 further restricted the churches' participation, as the holiday now had no relationship to the liturgical calendar, although celebrations were still held on Sundays, but only because people were not at work.[179] Yet this separation of party-directed mourning for soldiers and church-directed mourning for Christians more generally was consistent with the Protestant Churches' wishes to keep *Totensonntag* a purely religious observance.[180]

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[175] Schellack, 286, 293, 294, 299.

[176] Baird, 41, 54.

[177] Behrenbeck, 299-300, 301-313, 316-317; Baird, 53-54

[178] Kapust, 122, 124.

[179] Ibid., 124-126.

[180] Ibid., 124-126.

That otherwise patriotic and nationalist Protestants would willingly forego official participation in *Heldengedenktag* seems surprising, but from the earliest discussions of the idea for *Volkstrauertag* in 1921, the Protestant Church as a whole had been uninterested in creating another celebration or memory day for the dead. They thought *Totensonntag* was enough, and were willing to extend its theological scope for all of Germany (not just the Protestant portion). National-level Protestant Church leaders had only been willing to accept the new *Volkstrauertag* of the 1920s if it encompassed all victims of the First World War (not just soldiers) or if it celebrated the memory of soldiers, rather than glorification of the deeds of soldiers. Both requirements had been unacceptable to the VDK at the time, thus some Protestant Churches withdrew their support for *Volkstrauertag*, although they were not above directing attention to dead veterans on *Totensonntag*.[181]

Each year since seizing power, the Nazi Party had made use of *Volkstrauertag-cum-Heldengedenktag* for the purpose showcasing the regime's commitment to reinvigorating Germany's military traditions and great power status. While military parades, nationalistic speeches, and silent wreath-layings promoted the Party's profile as worthy caretakers of proud traditions, at the same time these spectacles maintained the adulation for military service and readiness for battle that earlier ceremonies in the Weimar Republic had also expressed. Equally important to the events staged in Berlin was the recording and broadcasting of these activities across Germany, either via radio or, more powerfully, via newsreels shown in movie theaters in the weeks following *Heldengedenktag*. The events in Berlin, taking place before a selected audience and heavily managed before the cameras, could still be moving experiences for a

[181] Ibid., 130-131.

national audience, vicariously attending them via the newsreel.[182] With the arrival of the Second World War, however, a national ceremony for publicly mourning the dead became problematic for both the Party and the people.

After the impressive victories over Poland, Denmark, Norway and France in relatively quick succession, there remained nevertheless dead and wounded Wehrmacht soldiers, whom the springtime 1940 and 1941 *Heldengedenktag* ceremonies had to incorporate. Not only did Hitler's yearly meetings with disabled military veterans in conjunction with national mourning now include freshly deployed and wounded soldiers, *Heldengedenktag* now took on "a completely new meaning." At the same time Nazi Germany remembered and mourned its past military (and Nazi Party) dead, they "had to mobilize a preparedness for fighting and dying in the present-day war," leaving speeches and propaganda to do more than just grieving for "lost comrades, but instead extracting [*gewinnen*] from their sacrificial death [*Opfertod*] the will and the power" to accept the same mission "in the struggle now forced upon us."[183] During the Second World War, with the return of massive levels of violence and the ultimately enhanced toll of death and destruction, found the Nazis encouraging Germans to see *Heldengedenktag* "not [as] an organized mourning event but instead a celebration of proud rising up" to meet Germans' new challenge.[184]

Despite the Germans' initial successes, as the overall tempo of the war slowed down by early 1941, with the Battle of Britain deterring any attempt to invade the U.K., the Nazi war

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[182] Kaiser, 187-189, 197-207.

[183] Kaiser, PP 191, 186; Kaiser is quoting an article in the Nazi Party's official new organ, the *Völkische Beobachter*, titled "Heroischer Trauer des Soldaten," from 9 March 1940.

[184] Kaiser 186, quoting a *Reichverfügungsblatw* with instructions regarding *Heldengedenktag*, printed 24 February 1942.

machine appeared to be settling on for a much longer war than it had hoped. The effect on mourning ceremonies was not immediate but the once "the euphoria of the early successes wore off," German soldiers and their families at home now "faced…the prospect of an endless struggle, [which] strip[ed] the war of its heroic appear."[185] This suspicion was borne out once Hitler ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941 but also owing to the Japanese bringing the United States into the conflict that December. With the case of the war against the Soviet Union, territory or weapons systems no longer drove the strategy (if they ever did), leaving the conduct of the war to revolve around ethnic cleansing and racist colonization of the East, and "blurring the any real distinction between combatants and civilians."[186] The winter of 1942-1943 saw the German VI. Army surrounded and forced to surrender after vicious fighting at Stalingrad, more impatiently begging the question of whether these and other German soldiers' deaths could be mourned in such a way that understood each life lost as a necessary – if painful – means to Germany's inevitable victory. After all, "Russian and German commanders fought more aggressively, often with wanton disregard for the human costs" than did American, British or French generals. This characteristic inclination to absorb more casualties in pursuit of perhaps smaller victories was itself a manifestation of the nature of Stalin and Hitler's regimes that "were willing and able to demand more from their citizens and soldiers than any civilian society," and which increased the bloodletting as the war ground toward a turning point.[187]

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[185] Jarausch, *Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front* (Princeton, 2011), 141.

[186] Jarausch, *Reluctant Accomplice*, 239. On the issue of war strategy and imperial aims, see Doris L. Bergen, War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust (2009). For two recent studies of the involvement of the Wehrmacht (not just the SS) in war crimes and the Holocaust, see Waitman Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 23, 2 (Fall 2009): 185-213 and Hannes Heer, "Killing Fields: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belorussia, 1941-1942," trans. Carol Sherer, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11, 1 (Spring 1997): 79-101.

[187] James Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone*?, 133.

As the prospects for an easy or even decisive German victory appeared to wane, so too did the efforts of the Nazi regime to continue publicly mourning its increasing numbers of soldiers killed in action. In the decade following his assuming the post of Chancellor in 1933, Hitler had always been the featured memorial speaker at the national *Volkstrauertag*/ *Heldengedenktag* ceremony in Berlin. Yet beginning in 1943, his role as the national face of mourning and gratitude for the sacrifices of the dead was much reduced. Tellingly, instead of referring to the actual memorial wakes for dead soldiers as "Celebrations honoring Heroes" [*Heldenehrungsfeier*], the Nazis now changed the word to "Celebrations honoring the Fallen" [*Gefallenenehrungsfeiern*]" and between 1943 and 1944, officially-sanctioned memorial ceremonies nearly ceased altogether.[188] When grieving Germans could not find solace in the Party, they returned to the church, where, by 1940, Protestants and Catholics were holding increasing numbers of memorial services and masses for dead soldiers, which were decidedly not in a spirit of thankfulness for those giving their lives.[189] While those German families who mourned in churches particularly appreciated the spiritual and pastoral care at a personal level, Nazi celebrations continued to pursue different goals – not comfort and support but to rally the population's willingness to keep up the war and the sacrifices.[190]

That year (1943) he did not speak at the ceremony and even the following year, before the Allied Landings at Normandy in June, the March 1944 *Heldengedenktag* ceremony was held "without the participation of the citizenry," on Hitler's order. This was apparently a "reaction to the increasingly unbelievability of a ceremony honoring the heroes [*Heldenverehrungsfeier*] in

[188] Ibid., 499; Schellack, 343, 344-345; Petersen, 23, 27-28.

[189] Ibid., 493; Petersen, 26; Schellack, 340, 341.

[190] Ibid., 497, 498.

the symbols of the "Final Victory."[191] This retreat left those Germans still interested in publicly mourning their dead soldiers with the much-less-impressive chance to hear Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, Commanding Officer of the German Navy, deliver a memorial speech "in the setting of a ceremonial hour via German Radio," with Dönitz also laying the Führer's wreath at the Neue Wache, too.[192] Unsurprisingly, the following March of 1945, amid rapidly encircling of the German armies and their daily bombardment from the aid, Hitler also shunned the chance to stand before his people and declare the deaths of their sons, brothers and fathers as an honorable, worthy and laudable sacrifice. Having ordered Göring to stand in his place, it is questionable whether the Führer's absence from national public mourning inspired further lack of confidence in the war effort or further denied grieving families the comfort they sought.[193]

This is because the pattern of mourning dead soldiers amid an increasingly total war, one that witnessed violence and death being directed against military and civilian targets, made problematic the notion that the soldiers' deaths were more valuable to Germany than the civilian ones. Because the German Army had essentially been retreating since the fall of Stalingrad in the East and the invasion of Normandy in the West, it was difficult to make the argument that the deaths of soldiers killed in battle had still somehow delivered great benefits to Germany. Moreover, military deaths due to disease, exposure to harsh terrain and weather conditions, lack of access to medicines, or other causes in rear-echelon areas unrelated to combat also seemed to fall outside the heavily-propagandized notion of battlefield sacrifice fighting for Germany's rebirth. Instead, soldiers who died in less glamorous, but no less painful circumstances, still left

[191] Kaiser, 192.

[192] Kaiser, 193.

[193] Kaiser 193.

behind "stunned survivors [who] attempted to imbue this senseless death with a higher purpose," often with little option but to "resor[t] to tired clichés" of Christian faith, professional conduct, loyalty to comrades, or dedication to the national goal.[194] Even in the case of traditional soldiers "falling" in combat, the final months of the war saw over 1 Million German battlefield deaths, which amounted to 'almost quarter of the total battlefield deaths."[195] Thus the longer the war went on, the less there was in the way of comfort or political meaning to be found in *Heldengedenktag*.

This problem existed doubly for the civilians who were killed due to aerial bombing or other manifestations of violence, because they were now at once both the audience for mourning ceremonies but also increasingly participating in the dying or witnessing death close by. That is, if the "fallen" soldiers had not all "fallen" in battle, why did it make sense to separate their deaths from civilians who had also lost their lives but not been ostensibly engaged in the military mission? Deaths not arising from combat operations on the front lines are just as permanent and just as painful as battlefield death, so it was undoubtedly difficult to sustain the illusion that "the fallen" were "sacrificing" for Germany' gain. Furthermore, if Weimar-era *Volkstrauertag* and Nazi-era *Heldengedenktag* were meant to foster public appreciation and support for war and willingness to suffer war deaths, these goals had become impossible in May of 1945 (if they had not lost meaning earlier), because the unconditional surrender, occupation, and demilitarization of German armed forces meant there were no more "soldiers," only veterans, victims and other survivors of the war. Furthermore, public mourning could now only comfort survivors and grieve for the dead, since in May 1945, it was impossible to seriously imagine the carrying-on of

[194] Jarausch, *Reluctant Accomplice*, 34.

[195] Sheehan, 133.

German military traditions. What appeared more necessary was a rethinking of these military-centered mourning practices to somehow recognize that changed circumstances of the unsuccessful Second World War and the fallen Third Reich.

**Conclusion: a tradition broken beyond repair?**

Despite the catastrophic violence of the Second World War that prompted Germans to begin questioning the value in soldiers' deaths, in the time before 1945, specific historical circumstances had appeared to validate the military's contributions to Germany's growth from disunited confederation into a world power. At the same time, this process was not one dimensional, nor were these cultural values felt universally across German society. If we return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter about German attitudes towards their military and their dead soldiers, a few conclusions seem apparent.

*Firstly*, in the period spanning from the early nineteenth century to 1914, Germans did have ample reason to evaluate their soldiers positively. While "German" in 1806 meant many things, the German Army in 1914 traced its early history back the Prussian Army and it was this force that had demonstrated its loyalty and selfless service to the state in rescuing Prussia and the rest of the German lands from Napoleon. Despite the army's role in quashing the democratic revolutions in 1848, the military victories over external enemies that led up to Unification in 1871 meant that soldiers had accomplished what politicians had not: the deliverance of a German nation-state, the arrival of which greatly enhanced the German public's esteem for their soldiers. At the same time, in 1914 this modern, industrialized army had not suffered a major defeat in almost a century.

*Secondly*, the defeat in 1918 shook the foundations of this monument that was the German soldier standing over his nation. Even before the armistice, revolutions, and surrender, it had become clear to the German people that modern industrialized war was not solely the domain of the professional soldier (or even the civilianized reserve soldier). The First World War had brought civilian casualties largely in the form of starvation due to the blockade, and even the many more who did not perish felt the effects of the war, either materially via the blockade or emotionally via their dead, wounded or missing soldiers. Public mourning efforts to deal with the history and memory of the war did attempt to recognize this new type of war experience but could never really break away from practice of defining loss, suffering, and even the experience of the war in military terms and indeed used the military deaths to call for national unity in the wake of the defeat. Yet at the same time, while mourning efforts placed a premium on the political, social or even cultural unity of the German people, seemingly ignoring fissures and cracks that were festering during the 1920s, the dead whose loss and remembrance demanded this very unity were increasingly defined as a smaller and smaller group.

*Thirdly*, the increased level of violence, coupled with the defeat and fall of the Nazi regime at the end of the Second World War, made even more meaningless the boisterous celebrating of the dead that had become characteristic of the late years of the Weimar Republic but even more so of the Third Reich. Nearly twice the number of military casualties in 1945, coupled with correspondingly higher civilian casualties had made the human cost of war much more apparent while the gains derived from war, political or otherwise, shrank away into non-existence. For civilians, the Second World War had been an even longer and more harrowing experience, via the aerial bombing campaign that delivered a much more threatening daily encounter with the enemy than did the blockade in 1918. The inescapability of death and

suffering for Germans – even aside from any consideration of Germans' victims – made the regime's promises of victory and greatness ridiculously over-promised, while the totality of the defeat meant it was more difficult to find any redeeming positive value in individuals' deaths. Added to these challenges was the burden of shame and considerations of guilt that accompanied discovery of the Holocaust and war crimes in the East. Thus in 1945, there was little-to-nothing that grieving Germans could say to frame their soldiers' deaths as beneficial and deserving of special respect. If anything, Germans were no longer required *respect* their old assumptions about dead soldiers but rather to *suspect* them.

## CHAPTER TWO:

## "The turning away from soldiers:" Rethinking public mourning in Germany, 1945-1952

On a cold Sunday morning in November 1945, Pastor Gerhard Gülzow took to the pulpit before his Lutheran congregation in the Baltic port of Lübeck. It was the annual German Protestant Sunday in remembrance of the dead -- *Totensonntag* -- but, unlike the customary observance of this holiday reaching back over a century, 1945 was different. This year, Pastor Gülzow insisted, had "a different appearance and weight" in Germans' lives, because "death ha[d] become like a monstrous power" that had "indiscriminately taken away tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions and millions." Today, this congregation in Lübeck, like the rest of their Protestant brethren all over occupied Germany, remembered both the "soldiers of our courageous Wehrmacht" who had "given their lives as sacrifices for us" as well as the "many innocent victims" who died as a result of "the madness of the Terror Bombing of our cities," the many German civilians who fled from the East and those under Soviet occupation.[196]

Germans experienced the Second World War and the Nazi dictatorship in many and more complex ways than a simple soldier/civilian dichotomy can express. Unlike 1918, survivors in 1945 could not credibly deny or ignore the deaths of many categories of German- and non-German civilians. Supporters of the secular, state-sponsored *Volkstrauertag* during the Weimar Republic (and its twin, *Heldengedenktag* during the Third Reich) had perpetuated and

[196] Gerhard Gülzow, Totensonntag 1945, Sermon, EZAB 607/11.

participated in the holiday out of the belief that the German public had an obligation to mourn its dead soldiers. Beyond allowing surviving family members to publicly express grief and receive words of comfort, solace and reassurance, these holidays also served a public function in establishing for German society that these dead soldiers were examples of courage, loyalty, responsibility and selflessness whose deeds in death ought to be matched by subsequent generations. Put another way, the dead soldiers' military service to the Empire had been the reason for the public day of mourning.

After the Second World War, Germans did not immediately move to reinstate the public mourning tradition of *Volkstrauertag*, despite the manifold increase in casualties and exponential magnification of violence compared to earlier conflicts. Rather, this time Germans struggled to answer the question of whether to mourn at all and, if so, whom to mourn and how to do it. Just as Germans encountered a complex mix of facts, circumstances, emotion and denial when sorting through their own memories of the war, so too did they find the puzzle of public mourning a challenge that bore no answers. In order to understand the solutions Germans found to this problem, we should begin by unpacking the same questions Germans faced in 1945: (1) How did German survivors conceptualize the war and their role(s) in it? How did this memory inform their choices regarding mourning? (2) How did Germans' political leaders understand the history of the war and the "lessons" it implied for the next generation? What limitations or possibilities did this create for state-led mourning efforts? (3) What did Germans see as the point of public mourning in 1945? How had this changed from 1918? Did Germans resort to the same tradition of mourning soldiers as before?

**Parallel memories**

Germans remembered the Second World War through the lenses of their own experiences, whether as soldiers, families of soldiers, expellees, and so forth. Aside from the uniqueness of each individual's circumstances, enough similarities overlapped, as people shared and revised their stories over time, to create large groups who felt that certain stereotypical episodes were representative of "their" war.[197] Besides coloring how they talked about the war, different parallel memories of the war also drove how Germans thought about mourning the war dead: namely, which dead, and what to say about them? Two parties central to conversations about public memory, the Protestant Church in Germany and the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, had two different memories of the war that led them to different conclusions about public memory.

*An anxious church*

German Protestant Church leaders were unsure of how to proceed with public mourning. They had witnessed (and in some measure supported) the *Volkstrauertag* holiday after 1918. More objectionable than Protestants' participation in ceremonies to celebrate and heroify soldiers was their compliance with the Nazi regime after 1933, which had many implications far beyond public mourning. Yet, the specter of repeating *Heldengedenktag* and the Nazis' rampant propaganda (worshipping "fighters" and "heroes") meant that churchmen were anxious about resurrecting any form of public holiday devoted to military dead.

[197] Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Identities* (Princeton, 2003), Chapter 11.

Openness to change

Confronted with families whose connection to the war was primarily through a soldier son or father, local Protestant pastors and their superiors had difficulty refusing to recognize the *Volkstrauertag* tradition of mourning and honoring the military dead. "In general," wrote a deacon to his provincial church superiors, "if the Sunday *Reminiscere* was meant to be celebrated," it should be done "not as *Heldengedenktag*, but instead as *Volkstrauertag*," following the original model.[198] This deacon acknowledged that some might prefer abolishing *Volkstrauertag* altogether but to his mind, the dead soldiers deserved their own specific public memorial day, apart from any other civic or religious celebration. For this churchman and many others, the dead Wehrmacht soldiers were little different from their own fathers who had fought for the *Kaiser*. For those Germans who observed and understood the Second World War as a conventional conflict, along the lines of any nineteenth-century altercation, dead soldiers represented a laudable devotion to duty and sacrifice to the nation whose deaths were to be honored.

Yet the openness to change apparent in this local church official's appeal for guidance from above reflects a larger process at work within German Protestantism at this moment. Like the rest of German society, the Protestant Church in Germany was in a period of transition and, unlike the rest of the fallen Third Reich, the Protestant Church largely evaded the scrutiny of Allies' denazification efforts. These churchmen did not sit idly, however. Besides reconsidering their own embrace of *Volkstrauertag* and *Heldengedenktag*, which had whet the public's appetite for war, the Protestant Church was in 1945 aware of its own role in supporting conservative

[198] Kreispfarrer Drüner to the Landeskirchenamt, bezh. Den Herrn Bishof in Kassel, 9 February 1946, regarding Feier des Sonntags Reminiscere als Volkstrauertag, letter, EKKW C/1038.

politics and assisting the Nazis, about which it felt some shame. Protestant clergy had shared an "antidemocratic conservative German nationalist or *völkisch* inclination" without exception before the war. Even though the Confessing Church had been a center of opposition to Hitler, it was not necessarily a democratic one but rather concerned with materialism and secularization, as well as older conservative-patriarchal class interests.[199] For all of these reasons, the pre-1945 old German Protestant Church "was clearly a grave embarrassment to Protestants and too tainted a foundation upon which to rebuild an ecclesiastical structure."[200]

The Protestant Church of Germany was formally re-established as a new entity in July of 1948 and even before settling upon the new institutional order, in October 1945 Church leaders issued the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt. This public announcement that the Church and the German people were at fault for failing to oppose the Nazis met with hostile public reception.[201] Nevertheless, in 1945 the churches "fill[ed] the void left by the disappearance of German governmental authority" and were "de facto leadership of the nation," since "most Germans would look to the churches rather than to the military government for guidance." This early confrontation between reform-minded Protestant clergy and the German people illustrates the churches' desire in 1945 to "assum[e] responsibility for the broad social interests of the German people," a testament to "the moral strength" that the Protestant churches now exerted.[202]

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[199] Werner Jochman, "Evangelischer Kirche und politische Neuorientierung in Deutschland 1945" in Imanuel Geiss and Bernd Jürgen Wendt, eds. *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, Unter Mitarbeit von Peter-Christian* Witt (Düsseldorf: Verlagsgruppe Bertelsmann GmbH: 1973), 545-7.

[200] Frederick Spotts, *The Churches and Politics in Germany* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) 10. Spotts uses the English adjective "Evangelical" while I use "Protestant" to refer to the same "Evangelisch" confession, because "evangelical" has assumed a fundamentalist meaning in the United States not shared by the German equivalent.

[201] Spotts 10-12; Jochman, 557, 558-9; Text of Stuttgart Confession quoted in Spotts, 11.

[202] Spotts, 51, 88. See also Clemens Vollnhals, *Evangelische Kirche und Entzazifizierung 1945-1949: Die Last der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1989) 281-2.

The Protestant Church's privileged moral position in Occupied Germany extended to directing the public's efforts to mourn their dead. The organization that created *Volkstrauertag* in the 1920s, the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, did not receive permission to resume its operations until 1946 and only in the American and British Zone at that.[203] Thus, while the *Volksbund* was still trying to reorganize, the national Chancellery of the Protestant Church was consulting with its provincial member churches on the holiday question. Just as prominent Protestant leaders were beginning to rethink the church's relationship to secular society and to the state, churchmen concerned about public mourning reexamined the assumptions behind such holidays and the dead soldiers traditionally remembered.

Questioning the assumptions

The new, more self-critical attitude that led Protestant leaders to consider questions of guilt and responsibility for the rise of the Nazi regime also stoked a new energy committed to the question of recourse to war and the position of the military in civilian society. An influential position paper by Bishop Dr. Dr. Stählin, a member of the High Church Council [*Oberkirchenrat*] of the provincial Protestant Church of Oldenburg, quickly established a hard line against *Volkstrauertag.* "[T[he border between the 'fallen soldiers' [*Gefallenen*] and the others who lost their lives has become fluid," wrote Stählin. Since there was little reason to single out soldiers, Stählin recommended establishing a new "Memorial Day for the Eternally Resting [*ein Tag dem Gedächtnis der Entschlafenen*]," which could encompass the First- and Second World War's dead but which would deny any special attention to soldiers at the expense

[203] Gerd Knischewski, "An Awkward Sense of Grief: German War Remembrance and the Role of the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*" in Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer, eds. *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 104.

of non-combatants who died, too. In an effort to make this newly-proposed memorial day more representative of the national experience, Stählin further suggested not placing the new holiday at the end of the church year, where *Totensonntag* had always been scheduled, but instead observing the new holiday early in November, to coincide with the Catholic Church's All Saints' Day, making a new memorial event accessible to all Germans.[204] Bishop Stählin's proposal, to submerge the memory of the dead soldiers into the more generic and less-inspiring remembrance of all who died, reflects the ideas of those within the churches who adopted a more historically authentic understanding of the Second World War. Much like the First World War, the more recent conflict had been a "total war," involving not just armed soldiers but also unarmed civilians. If the soldiers had no monopoly over the experience of violence, so this thinking went, then those soldiers could no longer claim a monopoly of public memorial attention.

This bishop's critical attitude towards mourning the dead and minimizing the public attention devoted to soldiers, though, was not shared by all German Protestants. While pastors in local churches may have been sympathetic to the (more politically liberal) view of Stählin and others who argued for the end of *Volkstrauertag*, such local pastors also had to face their own congregations each Sunday morning. For the everyday Germans who survived the war but who mourned for their lost loved ones as soldiers, the local parish church was where they expected to find comfort and understanding from their pastors. Thus, to these families accustomed to *Volkstrauertag* and *Heldengedenktag* of decades past, there seemed little reason to discontinue such ceremonies.[205] These varying early responses to the problem of how to mourn illustrate the

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[204] Copy of Bischof D Dr. Stählin to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche in Deutschland, 2 December 1946, letter, EZAB 7/3090. This copy was sent as an attachment to a letter from Dr. Merzyn in the Chancellery of the Protestant Church in Germany to the provincial church governments dated 8 December 1946. It is not entirely clear whether Stählin intended this new "Memorial Day for the Eternally Resting" to supplement or supplant *Totensonntag*.

[205] Pfarrer Seidenschwanz to the Landeskirchenamt Kassel, 28 Ferbuary 1946, regarding Gefallenengedenkfeiern, letter, EKKW C/1038.

lack of unanimous opinions within the Protestant Church on the question of how to remember their dead. What followed was a protracted discussion of whom precisely to mourn and what sort of holiday to adopt.

An uncomfortable middle ground

In the spring of 1946, leaders at all levels of the Protestant Churches were uneasy with the prospect of reinstituting *Volkstrauertag* or *Heldengedenktag* and, at the same time, uncomfortable denying this rite or tradition to their congregations who wanted to publicly commemorate their dead through the only customs they knew. Faced with the choice between what the German people wanted and what (the Protestant leadership believed) they needed, churchmen erred on the side of caution. In February 1946 the Hanoverian Provincial Church instructed its pastors to proceed with special memorial ceremonies to remember the "victims of the war," however vague, and "specifically…the fallen" on *Reminiscere* Sunday.[206] In an effort to prevent supporters of the traditional mourning holiday from getting the wrong impression, these leaders also declared that, in the coming years, this sort of remembrance of the fallen soldiers should be incorporated into the *Totensonntag* service at the end of the church year, instead of continuing on its own course.[207]

In this initial, hesitant, yes-and-no answer to the question of mourning, the Protestant Church demonstrated two assumptions that would remain nearly constant among church leaders over the long discussions over the holidays that would follow into the 1950s. First, the Churches

[206] Ev.-luth. Landeskirche Hannovers, Das Landeskirchenamt to alle Pfarrämter der Landeskirche durch die Herren Superintendenten, 27 February 1946, letter, EZAB 7/3090.

[207] Copy of clipping from the *Verordnunds- und Nachrichtenblatt. Amtlichen Organ der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland,* March 1946, EZAB 7/3090. This notice was transcribed and then copied without a headline or page number.

more often than not insisted that the "fallen" be remembered along with other "war victims." "Fallen" [*Gefallenen]* is a term that ostensibly refers to soldiers, or other military personnel, who "fell" while in the undertaking of their official duties (here, fighting). While supporters of the *Volkstrauertag* holiday sometimes conflated "the fallen" military dead with the civilian victims of the war, use of "the fallen" freezes the audience's understanding of the dead people in question in the moment of their death. Thus, labeling the dead as "the fallen" allows mourners to express grief and remembrance about the dead without having to confront the reason for which they "fell," namely, the Nazi regime. Nonetheless, "fallen" almost always implied soldiers, and betrayed a determination to ignore or minimize civilian victims of the war.

At the same time, "victims" or more precisely "victims of the War" [*Opfer des Krieges* or *Kriegsopfer*] was the term used by both critics of *Volkstrauertag* and sometime by proponents of the ritual, too. In her study of the *Heldengedenktag* and other Nazi Party rituals, Sabine Behrenbeck discusses the ambiguity of the German word, "*Opfer*."[208] That is, "*Opfer"* can mean both "victim" and "sacrifice," thus one can "sacrifice" [*sich opfern*] one's life for one's country or one can be "victimized" [*opfern worden*] by a criminal. The murkiness of this term makes it more difficult to tease out the meaning of those German family members whose deaths were being mourned. Were German soldiers "victims" of the war, or the regime who sent them to their deaths? Or did they willingly "sacrifice" their lives for their families and their nation? In both cases, "*Opfer*" makes deaths appear to be blameless: either they were innocent victims of the dictatorship or they were merely defending their homeland. Moreover, "*Opfer*" does not

[208] Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythos, Riten und Symbole 1923-1945* (Vierow bei Greifswald, 1996), 70-74.

convey the aggressive and racialized nature of the Second World War (much less acknowledge the Army's participation in the Holocaust).[209]

Besides the difficulty of explaining "the fallen" and "the victims," the second problem facing Protestants was also one that presented itself over and over again – the question of how to define civilian victims of the Second World War. Civilians were usually implied in the very choice of phrase, "*Opfer des Krieges*" and rarely did Germans choose the formulation that would more closely approximate the English equivalent, "*Zivilopfern*." For discussing civilian victims, the controversy circled around *which* civilian victims were included in this label. "*Opfer des Krieges*" became shorthand for German civilian victims of aerial bombing, of flight and expulsion, and of combat in their streets. Yet victims of the Holocaust were often *not* included in the same category, at least in the early post-war years. Thus, "*Opfern des Krieges*" suffers from a similar interpretive weakness as does "*Gefallenen*," in that the *why* behind the deaths of these "victims" is not explained or brought into question. Similarly, the possibility that these German "victims" had themselves contributed (or not) to the victimization of non-Germans was also often missing.

<u>One group among many</u>

Notwithstanding the problematic terms of debate, Protestant Church leaders would eventually agree by early 1947 on their preference for publicly mourning all the war dead, in

[209] For the participation of non-Nazi Germans in the Holocaust, see Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992). For the participation of soldiers in the racial war of annihilation, see Omer Bartov, "Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich," *The Journal of Modern History*, 63, 1 (March 1991):44-61 and Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, Trans. By Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: 2006).

their various named and unnamed categories, on *Totensonntag* at the end of the Church Year.[210] In advocating this move, though, Church leaders undercut the special place many in the public wanted to award to dead soldiers. This is because, if all the war dead were mourned at the same time and place, then the soldiers would be just one group among many who either passively died a victim or who actively gave their life. However tempting it was for Protestant leaders to dictate what the German people should or should not do, public sentiment in favor of the old form of *Volkstrauertag* was not something these churchmen could ignore.[211] By early 1947, the weight of opinion within the ranks of the Protestant Church's leadership was turning against *Volkstrauertag* in its traditional form.[212] In the end, by deciding to push all public mourning onto *Totensonntag*, Protestant officials demonstrated their inability to simply ignore the dead soldiers while at the same time betraying their uncertainty over exactly how to go about mourning the soldiers with a November holiday.

The churches' role in exerting moral leadership and also pastoral care put them into this position that demanded some compromise. While pushing the German people to critically re-examine their ideas about the war and about death, Protestant ministers also faced family

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[210] This was the subject of an extended train of correspondence. Several examples include: Schaumburg-Lippisches Landeskirchenamt to the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 12 December 1946, regarding Gedenkgottesdienste für Gefallene, letter, EZAB 2/650. Lippisches Landeskirhcenamt to the Kanzlei der Evangl. Kirch in Deutschland, 30 December 1946, letter, EZAB 2/650. Die Leitung der Evangelischen Kirche der Rheinprovinz to the Kanzlei der Evgl. Kirche in Deutschland, 7 January 1947, regarding Gefallenengedenktage, letter, EZAB 2/650. Ev. Landeskirche in Hessen, Landeskirchenamt to the Kanzlei der Ev. Kirche in Deutschland, 9 January 1947, regarding Gefallenengedenktag, letter, EZAB 2/650. Ev.-ref. Landeskirchenrat [Aurion] to the Kanzlei der E.K.D., 16 January 1947, letter, EZAB 2/650.

[211] Landeskirchenamt [Kassel] to the Herren Dekane der Evang. Landeskirche vo Kurhessen-Waldeck, 1 March 1946, regarding Volkstrauertag am 17. März 1946 (Sonntag Reminiscere), letter, EKKW C/1038, Braunschweigische ev.-luth. Landekirche, Das Landeskirchenamt to the Kanzlei der Evangl. Kirche in Deutschland, 3 December 1946, letter, EZAB 2/650.

[212] Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche in Deutschland to the Landeskirchenleitungen, 12 February 1947, letter, EZAB 7/3090.

members who wanted to still grieve for soldiers whom they loved. Many times, churches who wanted to end the tradition of mourning soldiers on *Volkstrauertag* were afraid of doing so, fearing that moving this tradition to *Totensonntag* where it would not receive as much exclusive attention, would deeply anger their congregations.[213] In other instances, churches felt compelled to single out the soldiers by name, even if they were to be mourned in combination with civilian bombing victims.[214] The opposite side of preserving room for families to unquestioningly grieve their dead soldiers alongside the dead civilians was a non-engagement with the question of war crimes, the Holocaust, and those beloved soldiers' possible participation. Scarcely more than a year after the end of the war, Germans in east and in west were not of one mind about how to mourn their dead. Questions such as which dead to mourn, when, and what precedent to follow all found only partial answers and at painstakingly slow pace.

*A confident VDK*

While German Protestants slowly found consensus in mourning (nearly) all the victims of a "total war," the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* emerged from the Second World War with few new ideas about mourning the dead. Rather than soul-searching over its own political activity during the Weimar Republic and Third Reich, the *Volksbund* started in 1945 from the same conviction it had held before the war: that Germans ought to mourn their dead soldiers without exception. What was new after this war was the open question of whether to also urge German audiences on the traditional *Volkstrauertag* to mourn dead civilian victims,

[213] Landeskirche Nassau-Hessen, Landeskirchenamt to the Kanzlei der Ev. Kirche in Deutschland, 6 January 1947, regarding Gefallenen-Gedenktage, letter, EZAB 2/650.

[214] Evang.-Luth. Landeskirchenrat [München] to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirch in Deutschland, 30 January 1947, regarding Gefallenen-Gedenktag, letter, EZAB 2/650.

too. Yet civilians remained, for the present moment, a secondary concern to the *Volksbund*, and only intermittently at that. This early debate over redefining mourning within the VDK was inconsequential because the leadership continued to understand and remember the Second World War as a conventional war fought according to conventional rules, between two conventional armies. Thus, it was the military dead alone who warranted the German public's undivided attention. The "thousands of battlefield graves [*Feldgräber*]" that "still needed to be transferred into cemeteries," was symbolic of the "holy obligation of the German people" to preserve the memory of their fallen soldiers.[215]

Soldiers beyond reproach

In the narrative propagated by the VDK, the soldiers who died had merely done their duty, fought honorably, and sacrificed for their nation. The military experience of so many men was the unifying factor that explained the war for all German families and, therefore, the military dead were the most important dead to remember. More than caring for graves and mourning these soldiers as a service to their families, the *Volksbund* understood its work to "serve…the preservation and safe-guarding of peace."[216] That is, focusing public attention on the tangible results of war (namely massive numbers of casualties) would minimize the German public's appetite for another armed conflict. Yet this simple calculation – reminding the public that war means lives lost – reveals much more about the *Volksbund* and its leaders. At the same time, the rhetorical tactic of war-equals-dead-soldiers, while true to a large degree, grossly simplifies the

[215] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Landesverband_____. Gräber mahnen! Membership drive broschure attached to Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V, Bundeszentrale to all Landesverbände, 20 March 1947, Rundschreiben Nr. 6, letter, VDK A.10-9.

[216] *Ibid*.

German experience of the Second World War, because it implies the argument that Germans went to war because they did not appreciate what the cost of doing so would be in German soldiers' lives. Thus, the Nazi dictatorship, the military's eagerness to launch an aggressive war for territory and racial annihilation, as well as complicity in the Holocaust, all remain unexplained. Rather, the VDK saw German soldiers as morally unimpeachable individuals who served their nation and sacrificed their lives.

The *Volksbund* acknowledged the Nazi era only indirectly. Because of the *Volksbund*'s political history during the Weimar era, as well as its compromised past under the Nazi *Gleichschaltung*, the appearance of Nazi ties was always a nagging concern for VDK national leaders.[217] Besides instructing local chapters to use the *Kameradlied* only in *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies in "small village communities" but not in "large cities" or even "smaller cities," the VDK anticipated that critics would be skeptical. Those who feared the return to *Volkstrauertag* would point to *Heldengedenktag* as a perfect example of what could go wrong with a public memorial day for soldiers, and the *Volksbund* acknowledged that "the German people have often incorrectly understood their dead." By confronting the problem head-on (as they saw it), VDK leaders acknowledged the Nazi legacy of German history to be a problem only insofar as it related to memorial ceremonies.

[217] The Volksbund was, like all other civil society organizations, forced to adopt its organization and activities tob e compliant with the NSDAP, or cease to exist. For the VDK in particular, there are few sources. See: Gerd Knischewski, „An Awkward Sense of Grief: German War Remembrance and the Role of the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*" in Monica Riera and Gavin Schaffer, eds. *The Lasting War: Society and Identity in Britain, France and Germany after 1945* (New York, 2008), 103. Fritz Schellack, *Nationalfeiertage in Deustchland von 1871 bis 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), 300-303. For good treatments of the Gleichschaltung in general, see: William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945*, Revised Edition, (New Tork, 1984) and Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven, 1989).

By making the German peoples' misunderstanding of dead military heroes (because of the Nazis' propaganda) the central obstacle to renewing *Volkstrauertag*, this line of argument then pointed to a deceptively simple solution. Granted that "the language of Romanticism is [among Germans] quite prevalent," the *Volksbund*'s leaders argued that grieving families were wrong to speak of "heroism and heroes' glory." Rather, grieving survivors needed to soberly realize that their soldiers had died so that their families could survive, while acknowledging that "the path to the life which led over the graves [of the soldiers] is far from hatred, the search for retaliation and rage." In order to truly and properly mourn the dead, these living survivors had to devote themselves to peace.[218] Indeed, other membership materials warn Germans not to "incorrectly hear" the "voices of the dead," betraying a fear on the part of the VDK that ordinary Germans would "hear" the dead soldiers as calling survivors to seek "vengeance" on their former enemies, perhaps as they had done after 1918.[219] In this call to avoid vengeance, the *Volksbund* implies that the desire to retaliate on the part of an aggrieved innocent party might be a legitimate emotional response to the war, only not the best one for Germans to pursue at this moment. Yet even to construe the Germans as an innocent, aggrieved party in 1939 would be to misunderstand the causes and course of the Nazi dictatorship and the war itself.[220]

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[218] So schmücken wir die Gräber. Vom Mahnen unserer Toten. Attached to Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bundeszentrale to all Landes- und Bezirksverbände, 10 August 1947, Rundschreiben Nr. 12/1947 regarding Werbematerial, letter, VDK A.10-9.

[219] So lasst uns denn stille werden. Was unsere Gefallenen uns sagen. Attached to Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bundeszentrale to all Landes- und Bezirksverbände, 10 August 1947, Rundschreiben Nr. 12/1947 regarding Werbematerial, letter, VDK A.10-9.

[220] On the day-to-day operations of the Nazi regime on the lives of average Germans, see Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*. For an overview of the connections between the regime and the Holocaust, see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, The Germans, and the Final Solution*, Fourth Edition, (New Haven, 2008). On the regime and its decision for war see Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York, 2008).

In overly simplifying how they remembered the history of the dictatorship and its war, the *Volksbund* rejected the possibility out of hand that there were war criminals or Holocaust perpetrators among the selfless soldiers. Instead, they maintain, the soldiers "performed [their] duty, just as all of our heretofore opponents have done." Here the *Volksbund* relied on the "clean Wehrmacht" myth in its earliest form to deny any dishonorable behavior on the part of the soldiers.[221] In doing so, the *Volksbund* was merely following the lead of the senior German generals, who maintained this myth publicly in their memoirs, as well as in later negotiations over rearming to join NATO.[222] This myth corresponded with the interpretation of the dead soldiers that the *Volksbund* wanted to convey – that they were faultless and beyond reproach: "the death of our fallen [soldiers]…had nothing to do with guilt and sin."[223] In this instance, the *Volksbund* latched onto a powerful current in western German society, whereby the public was increasingly less and less likely to critically question the conduct of the war.[224]

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[221] For a general treatment of the army's participation in war crimes see Wette, *Wehrmacht: History, Myth and Reality*. For the propagation and eventual shattering of the "clean Wehrmacht" myth, see Oliver von Wrochem, "Keine Helden mehr. Die Wehrmachtselite in der öffentlichen Auseinandersetzung" and Peter Reichel, "Helden und Opfer. Zwischen Pietät und Politik: Die Toten der Krieg und der Gewaltherrschaft in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert" in Michael Th. Greven and Oliver von Wrochem, eds. *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit: Der Zweite Weltkrieg im Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik* (Opladen, 2000), as well as James A Wood. "Captive Historians, Captivated Audience: The German Military History Program, 1945-1961" *The Journal of Military History* 69 (January 2005): 123-47. For the best overview of Germans' collective memories of the war in the immediate post-war decades, see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, 1997) and Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, (Berkeley, 2001).

[222] Some of the best examples include: Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, edited and translated by Anthony G. Powell (Chicago, 1958), Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, translated by Constantine Fitzgibbon. (Washington, DC, 1979), Albrecht Kesselring, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring*, translated by William Kimber (Novato, CA, 1989) and Karl Dönitz, *Memoirs: Ten Years and Twenty Days*, trans. R.H. Stevens (Annapolis, MD, 1990).

[223] Aussprache für dörfliche Gemeinden. Attached to Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bundeszentrale to all Landes- und Bezirksverbände, 2 March 1948, Rundschreiben Nr. 6/48 regarding Material für Feierstunden, letter, VDK A 10-9.

[224] This is, in fact, Moeller's central argument: that Germans in the immediate aftermath of the war opted to remember their own suffering and victimization while choosing not to remember the Holocaust and aggressive war of conquest. Moeller, *War Stories.*

A "necessary remembrance"

The *Volksbund*'s understanding of German soldiers as models of selfless sacrifice, besides anchoring a denial of Nazi sympathies or crimes, also put the VDK into square opposition with Protestants who wanted to relocate *Volkstrauertag* from its traditional spring date to the fall, usually to correspond with *Totensonntag*. Protestant Church leaders hesitant to agree to support a new *Volkstrauertag* suggested this move, putting the remembrance of the dead soldiers on par with the remembrance of all other victims of the war (indeed, all dead Germans). The *Volksbund* found this proposition unacceptable, because subsuming the soldiers into a general pool of dead members of society deserving attention would detract from the qualities that made these military dead special.

For the *Volksbund*, *Totensonntag* obscured the unifying experience of the families who suffered and survived the war while simultaneously ignoring the special sacrifice of the lives of fallen soldiers. If the German people were to simply add these special categories of dead to the "ordinary" dead commemorated on *Totensonntag*, they ran the risk that "the necessary remembrance of the war dead would veer off into the general dead." Such a diluting of the attention devoted to the war dead would thereby obscure the special lessons that the German people must learn, such as "the duty of confessing to the fallen", the German people had learned "the duty of loyalty, which is an integral part of the challenge of proving one's own worth in this life."[225] These lofty words and soaring rhetoric, while directed at explaining why a separate memorial day for the dead soldiers and other war victims was necessary, reinforced the simplistic, one-dimensional image of soldiers and all other possible German war victims: that

[225] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bundeszentrale to alle Mitarbeiter in Stadt und Land, 26 November 1947, Rundbrief Nr 2, letter, VDK A.10-9.

they had honorably and justly done their duties, or were innocent victims of violence which was not of their own doing.

*Two memories, two extremes*

If the VDK was guilty of subscribing to a very one-dimensional memory of the war, so too were their Protestant critics. The *Volksbund* believed that remembering the war meant remembering selfless soldiers who fought and died honorably for the nation and whom society ought to publicly mourn without reservation. At the same time, those Protestant leaders most critical of *Volkstrauertag* furthered a memory of the war that heaped fault solely on patriotic veterans and those who would celebrate them. Such alarmist fears were not universal within the church, as some more moderate voices would be satisfied with a softened *Volkstrauertag*, one that occurred in the fall and included civilian victims while still gesturing toward military dead.

Yet the extreme voices in the Church made exaggerations and generalization just as wanton as the most ardent supporters of the old *Volkstrauertag*. Wrote the Oldenburg provincial church officials to their superiors in the national Protestant church: "we regard it as no longer sensible, after the events of recent years, to separate the memory of the 'victims of the war' from a general memory of those eternally resting."[226] Not only "has the border between fallen [soldiers] and other victims of war become fluid in a total war," but "the danger is great that by such a Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers [*Gefallenen-Gedächtnistag*] the clear separation from

[226] Evang.-luth. Oberkirchenrat Oldenburg to the Kanzlei der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, to the vorläufige Leitung der vereinigten Evang.-luth. Kirchen in Deutschlands, to the Evang.-luth. Landeskirchenamt Hannover, to the Evng.-luth. Landeskirchenamt in Wolfenbüttel, 10 December 1948, regarding Wiedereinführung eines Gedenktages für die Opfer des Krieges, letter, EZAB 2/650.

unclear nationalistic thoughts will not be maintained."[227] If *Volkstrauertag* and soldier-worship had given rise to dictatorship and war once, wondered these concerned churchmen, how could the same outcome not transpire again?

*Two memories to inform mourning*

Whether naïve, exaggerated, or seeking a realistic in-between view, German Protestant leaders, *Volksbund* officials, their congregations and member chapters did not all remember the same wartime experience. Yet how these populations did remember the war and its causes and effects directly shaped whom these groups felt ought to be publicly mourned. *Volkstrauertag* enacted along its old pattern was the answer to parties who understood the Second World War as a conventional 19th-century conflict. Some sort of modified holiday was necessary to others who saw the war as having affected civilian populations in great numbers. What both sides in this dispute ignored was the experience of victims of German-directed violence, in large part, which explains the absence in their arguments of the Holocaust and the War of Annihilation. For both the VDK and the church, mourning was concerned with the victims each side saw when they imagined the war.

**Mourning as a relationship to the Nazi past**

Above and beyond groups of Germans sorting through their individual memories and finding common ground, East- and West German political leaders made influential determinations over which dead victims each state would mourn and what memory of the Nazi

[227] Der Landesbishof, Der vereinigten Evang. Protestant. Landeskirche Badens to the Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschlands z.H. der Kirchenkanzlei, 23 December 1948, regarding Gedenktag für die Opfer des Krieges, letter, EZAB 2/650.

past this mourning would support. These politicians' choices over public mourning, in turn, framed the possibilities and limitations of ceremony, rhetoric, celebration and "lessons learned" for Germans on each side of the border. Unsurprisingly, the choices for East Germans were fewer and the consequences for overstepping the boundaries greater. Yet each Germany created a public mourning tradition that departed from pre-1945 precedent and which served to help define its state's relationship to the Nazi past.

*Censored mourning in East Germany*

While the Protestant Churches and the *Volksbund* wrestled over the question of how best to mourn the war's dead, the political realities of the post-war present exercised increasing influence over these discussions about memory and ceremony. Neither institution wanted to appear to harbor unreconstructed Nazi sympathies before the Occupation authorities. While the churches enjoyed considerable independence amid denazification efforts, the *Volksbund* emerged again only in the western Zones, with the Soviet Occupation officials hesitant to see *Volksbund* continue its work. Even though the Protestant administrators and these influential civil society leaders differed in degree, they did fundamentally see a need for Germans to publicly mourn their dead soldiers, along with other victims of the war. Still in conflict over the exact formulations, calendar, and terms of the debate in the western zones, the VDK and the Protestant Church together sought a form of public mourning that would hold meaning for the majority of the German people in the eastern zone.[228] While each case was different, nearly every family

[228] Copy of Kirchenleitung der Kirchenprovinz Sachsen to the Kanzlei der Evangelischen Kirche in Schwäbisch Gmünd in Deutschland, 15 January 1947, regarding Gefallenen-Gedenktag, letter, EZAB 7/3090, Evang. Konsistorium der. Kirchenprovinz Sachsen to the Herren Superintendenten unseres Aufsichtsbezirkes, 20 February 1946, regarding Heldengedenktag, letter, EZAB 7/3090. Evangelisches Konsistorium Pommern to the Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat Berlin-Charlottenburg, 8 March 1947, letter, EZAB 7/3090.

had been impacted by the war, and the commonly-invoked tropes of soldier, civilian bombing victim, expellee or refugee, all spoke to one (or more) of nearly every family's war experience. For the Christians in question, setting aside a day within the space of the church to mourn the dead soldiers in the Soviet-Occupied Zone may have had different connotations than their brethren in the West.

In the Soviet Zone, and on a smaller scale in some of the western Zones, Communists and other political groups who had been targeted by the Nazis before and during the war began mobilizing to compel the German public to recognize their particular (and singular) form of war experience.[229] The *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes* [Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime – VVN] emerged out of a merging of Committees of "Victims of Fascism" which had formed in and around Berlin in 1945.[230] Active mostly in the eastern Zone, the VVN organized its own memorial day, the *Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus* [Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism], which embraced and recognized as legitimate only the wartime suffering (and in many cases, deaths) of political opponents who mounted organized, armed resistance against the Nazi regime.[231] In most cases, armed political opposition came from the German Communist Party (KPD), and the VVN was almost exclusively a Communist

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[229] For good overviews of the Soviet occupation and the subsequent GDR, respectively, see Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, MA, 1995) and Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, 2005). For the general contours of East German public memory see Herf, *Divided Memory*. On the beginnings of public commemoration and public mourning, see Peter Monteath, "A Day to Remember: East Germany's Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism," *German History* 26, 2 (2008): 195-218 and Gilad Margalit. *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory. Germany Remembers its Dead of World War II,* Trans. Haim Watzman (Bloomington, 2010).

[230] Monteath, 195-197.

[231] The VVN formed in 1945 originally to commemorate the suffering and deaths of German Commuists who remained in Germany, often in Concentration Camps. In 1948, the SED, led by cadres of German Communists who had emigrated to the USSR and who now returned to head a pro-Soviet regime, coopted the "Opfer des Fascismus" holiday and discourse to promote a pro-Soviet agenda. See Monteath, 195-198 and Margalit, 122, 125-127.

organization. As the Soviet Zone authorities began putting their own trusted cadres of German Communist operatives in place to run the future GDR, the *Opfer des Faschismus* became the only recognized celebration and memorial for the war dead for East Germans, though the message proffered by the German Communists hardly conformed to most East Germans' war experience.[232] While it was true that only Social Democrats and Communists could claim to have worked to stop Hitler's rise to power, and that Communists across Europe could claim to have fought against the rise of fascism, this form of self-righteous back-slapping and finger-waving offered little in the way of comfort to families who would never be whole again.

"Heroic resistance fighters" – an unrepresentative memory

At a very basic level, the VVN (and later the SED) used a discourse of death and remembrance that served similar ends to that employed by the Protestant Church and the *Volksbund* in West Germany. Whereas the *Volksbund* wanted Germans to mourn the dead soldiers, admire their sacrifice, and dedicate the new Germany to peace and international reconciliation and the Protestant Church sought to remind Germans of all the various categories of equally tragic and equally dead family members, also to serve the end of peace, East German public mourning stressed the desirability of peace, too. The SED's official organ, *Neues Deutschland*, proclaimed that "all friends of peace remember on this day [the Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism] particularly the heroic resistance fighters, who gave their lives in the struggle for peace and the freedom of Germany." Yet unlike the *Volkstrauertag* and *Totensonntag* traditions, the East German memorial day called attention to the suffering and

[232] The SED dissolved the VVN permanently and assumed direct control over the "Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism" in 1953. Margalit, 127

selfless example of only a small section of the population, who were active Communist organizers and who took up arms against the Nazi regime.

The unrepresentativeness of the OdF narrative is made clear by the reliance on armed intervention from the Red Army. As the official rhetoric explained it, these resistance fighters "from all strata of the German people, from all political camps" were in the end, "insufficient to destroy the enemy in its own country." Ultimately, the resistance fighters who were most worthy of praise and emulation were soldiers of the Red Army, who fought the "heroic struggle rich with sacrifices" to destroy Hitler's Reich.[233] The German people, for better or for worse, had not widely embraced the Communists before 1933 (and they could only exist underground thereafter) while the Red Army's approach had terrified Germans, fearful of pillage and rape on unprecedented scale at war's end. Thus, the East German publicly directed mourning apparatus offered only unpalatable, insulting and meaningless vignettes and rhetoric to most of the East German population. If the goal of spurring German survivors to value peace more highly than war overlapped with the West German traditions, the means for arguing this point were quite different.

Another difference between the East German and West German public memorial days was the politicization in which each side engaged. Neither the Protestant Church, the *Volksbund*, the East German officials nor the eventual West German government was above political posturing on days of mourning. Yet they most commonly engaged in Cold War rhetoric, such as the SED spooking their readers into fearing that "still is there no peace as peace does not fit well with the American armaments factories, with the kings of finance from Wall Street." The lesson

[233] „Für das Leben unserer Kinder! Aufruf des Parteivorstandes der SED. Opfer sollen nicht umsonst gewesen sein." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands.* Volume 4, Number 212. Berlin, Saturday 10 September 1949. Edition B.

to be learned from both the experience of the resistance fighters during the war and the present Cold War tensions surrounding them in 1949, was that peace could only come if they, East Germans, "in the hour of danger for the existence of our nation" come together "regardless from which political or philosophical camp" to support the National Front.[234] Political engagement in support of the East German state (alone) was the way that "the legacy of our precious dead is fulfilled."[235]

One aspect of the war experience that the GDR more happily discussed than the FRG was the Concentration Camps. Yet even here, the mourning was directed at victims framed as "antifascist resistance fighters," without acknowledgment of the other groups of German society targeted for persecution by the Nazi regime. When survivors of the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp held a reunion in 1949, they appeared publicized as "each individual a fighter [*Kämpferin*], each a heroine who, despite unheard of terror never lost their belief in the victory of humanity."[236] The West Germans were slower to introduce Concentration Camps to the discourse of mourning but were nudged into doing so by critical West Germans who felt the necessity of confronting the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews in particular. Yet there were "antifascist" agitators and organizations in West Germany, too, who wanted to uncover the complete truth of the "victims of the Nazi regime." A chapter of the VVN even organized its

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[234] The National Front was "an umbrella group of mass organizations and movements from all sectors of the public that would support the SED's pro-Soviet policies throughout Germany," harnessing lingering (historically anti-Slavic and anti-Bolshevik) nationalism among East Germans to build support for the leftist, pro-Soviet regime. Margalit, 84.

[235] „Für das Leben unserer Kinder! Aufruf des Parteivorstandes der SED. Opfer sollen nicht umsonst gewesen sein." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands.* Volume 4, Number 212. Berlin, Saturday 10 September 1949. Edition B.

[236] „ ‚Wir ehren Euch—unvergessliche Kameraden.' Internationalen Friedenstreffen der ehemaligen weiblichen KZ-Häftlinge." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*. Volume 4, Number 213, Berlin, Sunday, 11 September , 1949. Edition B.

own Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism in Bremen.[237] While such demonstrations drew the ire of conservative West German officials, the German public was overall more likely to empathize with the approximately four million dead soldiers or half million or so dead German civilian victims of the war than the "many thousands of Germans" who counted "among the victims of fascism."[238]

Remembrance as resistance?

For East Germans in the SBZ and later in the GDR, the choice in this matter was not between the OdF-memorial day or nothing. Just as they would demonstrate in other moments across the history of divided Germany, East Germans so moved by their dedication to mourning their war dead or caring for the remains of others organized to carry out the types of activities underground that their fellows in the West could do openly.[239] The Protestant leaders overseeing the increasingly isolated eastern Germany saw in the *Volksbund* less of a protégé than another organization being targeted by the Communist Party officials and who had a common interest in working to resist the new regime. The Communist cadres returning from Moscow had little interest in reminding East Germans of the massive numbers of casualties their (German) soldiers had borne on the Eastern Front.[240] As the same time, expellees' and refugees' harrowing tales of escape from the Red Army or new Communist regimes in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East

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[237] „Gräber von Widerstandskämpfern geschändet. Empörung über unwürdige Handlungsweise. Urnenhain eingeweiht." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*. Volume 4, Number 213. Berlin, Sunday, 11 September 1949. Edition B.

[238] ‚Sie Starben für Uns—Wir Kämpfen für den Frieden." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*. Volume 4, Number 213. Berlin, Sunday, 11 September 1949. Edition B.

[239] Pastor Ernst Teichmann, 8 October 1947, letter to VDK general secretary Otto Margraf, VDK A.10-2.

[240] Herf, 13, 22-37.

Prussia (which had been excised and given to Poland) did not reinforce the popular legitimacy of the Socialist Unity Party and its claims to represent a vision of a new, democratic Germany.

In January 1949, Protestant officials in the Church Chancellery-East in (West-)Berlin began planning how to arrange a partnership with the *Volksbund* to care for war graves in the Eastern Zone. Besides shutting out the VDK, Soviet Authorities had given permission to the church to undertake the work of caring for military graves, "under two prerequisites: (1) that the word *war* grave maintenance [be] minimized and instead grave maintenance [be] said, and (2) that every organizational form [be] minimized." Hesitant to suspend their operations but eager to see their projects carried out, the *Volksbund* officials agreed to confine their presence in eastern Germany to its West Berlin offices and would agree to finance the activities of a special *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* within the East Berlin Church offices, with the understanding that, as soon as permissible, the VDK would re-enter the SBZ and personally resume its work.[241]

The risks inherent in the Church's secret partnership to undertake war graves maintenance in the East were justified in the Church leaders' minds, because of their conviction that they were performing both a service to their congregations and also an act of resistance against communism. More dangerous, though, then being discovered in partnership with the *Volksbund*, whose politics and view on mourning were not identical to the church, was being discovered by East German officials. One careless slip-up in the VDK's communication with the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* "would be a red flag" to the Stasi. War graves maintenance had to appear "a purely churchly affair" in order to be tolerated. Yet these Protestants saw the danger as worth it, because, while "the struggle against the churches belongs to the program of the

[241] Vermerk über eine Besprechung mit Herrn Oberkirchenrat Zimmermann von der Kanzlei der Evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands – Berliner Stelle – in Bethel am Mittwoch, 12. Januar 1919 [sic 1949], 18 January 1949, summary report, VDK A.10-21.

Communists, care of graves stands out as the ominous calling," as a "churchly and therefore patriotic and anti-communistic affair."[242] Thus, caring for war graves was another way disaffected or independent-minded (or secretly conservative and nationalist) East Germans could act against the wishes of the regime. For the church, such attendance to graves, in order to allow a more complete mourning for the dead, was "also pastoral care for the German people."[243] The Churches in Berlin-Brandenburg also reached out to care for Jewish graves, a further protest against the exclusivity of OdF, while private East German citizens wrote letters to the VDK in West Germany, asking for photographs of their loved ones' gravesites.[244]

Nonetheless, the Protestant Church's decision to partner with the *Volksbund* in the east while obstructing it in the west makes sense only after consideration of the memory and public commemoration being offered by the Communists, which was enough to draw the ire of both. The official agreement between the VDK and the Church was made effective on July 1, 1949.[245] Now with a foot in each Germany, the problem of reproaching the German people for their nationalism-through-mourning of the past while leaving enough room to still comfort them for

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[242] Kirchenkanzlei Berliner Stelle Abteilung Gräberfürsorge to the Bundesgeschäftsstelle z. Hdn. Herrn Margraf, 18 August 1950, letter, VDK A.10-21.

[243] Kirchenkanzlei-Ost Abteilung Gräberfürsorge to all Konsistorien in Berlin und der Ostzone, regarding Erfassung und Betreuung der deutschen Kriegsgräber, no date, preliminary draft of a letter from the office of Bishop Dibelius, VDK A.10-21.

[244] Evangelische Kirchenleitung Berlin-Brandenburg to the Herren Vorsitzenden der Gemeindekirchennräte von Berlin und Brandenburg, 21 June 1950, regarding in Obhutnahme unbetreuter jüdischer Friedhöfe und Pflege der Soldatengräber in den einzelnen Gemeinden, letter, EZAB 2/2559. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bundesgeschäftsstelle to all Landes- und Bezirksverbände, 18 August 1950, Rundscreiben Nr. 54/50, letter, VDK A.10-46.

[245] W. Ahlhorn, President of the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. and Gisevius, representing the Kirchenkanzlei-Berliner Stelle, 20 May 1949 and 14 Juli 1949, contract between the VDK and the Berlin office of the Protestant Church creating the Abteilung Gräberfürsorge and transferring ownership[ of VDK property and resources to this office, VDK A.10-21.

their losses (and not risk alienating parishioners) became more complicated and more urgent, especially in the GDR.

*Mourning for all people?*

Conscious of the GDR's decision to officially commemorate only a small, unrepresentative sample of the war generation's experience, West German government officials shied away from a similar option. Instead, leaders within the Federal Republic concluded, the remembrance of the war implied by public mourning had to encompass more people. Yet *Volkstrauertag* in West Germany was not a foregone conclusion. Although the VDK had gotten *Volkstrauertag* off the ground, even while losing the official support of the Protestant Churches, the new West German government did not embrace the holiday at first.[246] *Volksbund* leaders had much work to do in garnering full support across all of German society for its vision of public mourning, especially when they presented flowering praise of "the German soldier" who performed "his soldierly duty in good faith" while evading a serious discussion of the ramifications of German Army's actions and those of the Nazi regime.

Searching for unity amid division

One important step in securing wide popular support and participation in *Volkstrauertag* was ensuring Germans in different areas of the Federal Republic marked the holiday on the same day. Such uniformity of both purpose and execution was highly prized and greatly sought after by VDK leaders in the post-war years. Only after the new provincial and federal governments

[246] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bundesgeschäfststelle to all Landes- und Bezirksverbände, 31 January 1950, Rundschreiben Nr. 3/50 regarding Volkstrauertag und Kriegsgefangenengedenktag, letter, VDK A.10-46, Ki.K. to the Evangelischen Pressedienst, 13 February 1950, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, EZAB 2/4416, LKA to Herrn Pfarrer Lic. Nobiling, 22 February 1950, letter, EKKW C/1038.

were erected could the VDK approach legislators with requests for writing their holiday into law. Securing legal designations and protections would then minimize the distraction of the Protestant Churches, who at this point were still abstaining from the *Volkstrauertag* in favor of their own *Totensonntag* remembrances.

Yet these legal protections and codifications did not always result in clear explanations of what sort of memory the new states or the *Volksbund* wanted the public to keep in mind. The Hessian legislature declared *Reminiscere* Sunday to be the day for remembrance of soldiers as well as those "who gave their lives for the greater good of humanity," and "those who died simply fulfilling their everyday duties."[247] It seems clear enough that Hessians were to mourn their soldiers but perhaps anti-fascists resistors and the Confessing Church, too, along with anyone else unlucky enough to have been killed during the war. Still murky, though, is whether or not "fulfilling their everyday duties" included Concentration Camp inmates, war crimes victims, or other groups persecuted by the regime during the war. Though politicians in many of the states may have felt sympathetic to the impulses behind *Volkstrauertag*, as the Hessian Minister of the Interior explained, the collected interior ministers of all the West German states were being asked to coordinate legislation in each state on the "Memorial Day for the Dead of the War" (perhaps *Volkstrauertag* but this is unclear), as well as the "Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism" and a "National Memorial Day" all at the same time.[248] At this moment,

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[247] Dekanat des Kirchenkeises Kirchhain to the Landeskirchenamt in Kassel durch die Hd. des Herrn Propstes in Marburg, 20 January1951, regarding Sunday Reminiscere, letter, EKKW C/1038.

[248] Dr. Adolf Flecken, Innenminister [Nordrhein Westfalen] to the Volksbund Deutsche Krietgsgräberfürsorge e.V., z.Hd. d. Herrn Präsidenten Landeshauptmann i.R. Dr. h.c. Hagemann, 21 January 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter forwarded via Volksbund Deutsche Krietgsgräberfürsorge, e.V. to the Volksbund Deutsche Krietgsgräberfürsorge Landesverband Nordrhein-Westfalen, 26 January 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-137, Staatsministerium [Württemberg-Baden] to the Herrn Präsidenten des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 29 January 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-137, Der Hessische Minister des Innern to the Herrn Präsidenten des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 31 January 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-137.

when the still-new state- and federal governments were constructing their ministries and crafting their laws, the possibility of uneven memorial ceremonies and ill-defined public memory was but one issue of many demanding their attention.

Amazingly, despite the legal, administrative and political roadblocks for creating a uniform set of *Volkstrauertag* practices that would guide celebrations in all West German states, the *Volksbund* persuaded the President of the West German Parliament, Hermann Ehlers, to deliver the keynote address at the 1951 national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn. Sensitive to the spotlight and lingering international attention on the new Federal Republic, Ehlers minced few words, criticizing the "devilish game" that past generations had played at *Heldengedenktag*, "which in no small part served to prepare the way for the next time [Germans] took up arms." Yet at the same time, Ehlers insisted that opting not to mourn the dead would be as big a mistake, insisting that Germans were not "prepared to allow remembering the dead to be denied to us through political actions." From Ehlers' words arise the basic problem for public leaders of all stripes in West Germany: allowing West Germans to mourn their dead was critical but it was a process that required close management and oversight.[249] Therefore, it is unsurprising that, scarcely a month after Ehlers' address, the Federal Minister of the Interior Dr. Lehr intervened in the *Volksbund*'s efforts to secure legal sanction in each individual state on its own, declaring that, "the question of resolving the regulations for *Volkstrauertag"* was "basically a Federal issue."[250]

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[249] Hermann Ehlers, Ansprache des Präsidenten des Deutschen Bundestages Dr. Hermann Ehlers am 18. Februar 1951 in der Gedenkstundes des Volkbundes Deutsche Kreigsgräberfürsorge im Bundeshaus zu Bonn, speech, VDK A.100-15.

[250] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Bezirksverband Wüttemberg-Hohenzollern to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 15 February1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter forwarded via Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Landesverband Oberrhein, 15 March 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-137.

Mourning out of "political considerations"

Once *Volkstrauertag* became "a federal issue," events quickly slipped out of the *Volksbund*'s control. At stake was not merely choice of date and time or even key words used to encode the ceremony's content. Instead, the entire collective memory that West Germans would have told to them, year after year, hung in the balance and determined the details of victims, coded words, tropes and implicit assumptions that became part of the broadcast and reception of *Volkstrauertag*. Federal Interior Minister Lehr himself already believed that *Totensonntag* would be a more suitable date for the holiday (which would break with the *Heldengedenktag* association) but put the question to the conference of Interior Ministries of the collected states on April 4, 1951.[251] No final decision would come from this conference and another meeting would be scheduled for April 30, to which the VDK, the Protestant Church, the Catholic Church, and Organization of Persecuted Social Democrats as well as Federal and State ministers, would be invited.[252] The most notable results of this preliminary discussion on April 4 was the agreement among state-level Interior Ministers that "a united memorial day for the war victims would be absolutely necessary" and that such a memorial day "should also extend to the victims of the Nazi regime."

[251] Ibid, OKR Ranke toHerrn Oberkirchenrat von Hartling, 30 March 1951, regarding Feiertagsrecht, letter, EZAB 2/4416. Copy of Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfursorge e.V. to the Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen Herrn Dr. Adolf Flecken, 30 March 1951, letter, VDK A.100-137.

[252] Copy of Der Bundesminister des Innern, Niederschrift uber die Besprechung am 30.4.1951 im Regierungspräsidium Koblenz wegen der Bestimmung eines Gedenktages für die Opfer des Kriegs, 10 May 1951, transcript forwarded via Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland to the Leitungen der deutschen evangelischen Landeskirchen in Westdeutschland, 6 February 1952, regarding Volkstrauertag: Sonntag Reminiscere, letter, EKKW C/1038.

In this resolution, these West German politicians backed away from both perpetuating a memory that embraced solely soldiers as well as the Communist version that held up only antifascist fighters. Blending all component memories together would result in none of the extreme variations achieving prominence. This determination affected equally the choice of dates as it did the victimology. These ministers agreed that their proposed memorial day "when possible fall in the 'peaceful time' of the year, that is, in the fall," rather than either the springtime (which was too closely associated with the Nazi rituals) or the beginning of September (alternately too close to the VVN-sponsored holiday in East Germany). Ultimately, these provincial ministers resolved to summon the VDK, the VVN and the churches, as well as inviting the Federal Minister of the Interior to collaborate on a final decision.[253]

These cautious (or politically savvy) ministers were not alone in their appreciation for the subtle and powerful messaging conveyed in public memorial days. At the next conference, held on April 30, 1951, the *Volksbund* found itself isolated, with no support from either state governments, the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, or the organization of persecuted Social Democrats, (the VVN did not send a representative). Among those present, only the *Volksbund* still supported using *Reminiscere* for a nation-wide memorial day for the war dead, thus freezing public memory into a soldier/civilian dichotomy and plainly rewarding soldiers' deaths more highly. The Protestant Church's staunch declaration that it would boycott any *Reminiscere*-holiday (while the Catholic Church was simultaneously uninterested in debating "worldly affairs"), struck the Federal Interior Minister as considerable roadblock. Aside from

[253] Von Lutzen, Verhandlungen über die behördliche Festsetzung eines für das gesamte Bundesgebiet einheitlichen Gedenktages für die Toten des Krieges, 15 May 1951, transcript forwarded via Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräbewrfürsorge e.V. Bundesgeschäftsstelle to the Herren Vorsitzenden der Landesverbände des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgr:aberfürsorge, 15 May 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-141.

objections to the continued use of the spring holiday grounded in liturgical arguments, the Federal Interior Minister also believed that "doubtless in wide-ranging counties" there was "opposition to the Sunday *Reminiscere* out of political considerations," given that the *Volksbund*'s proposal was "burdened after the Falsification of *Heldengedenktag."* Whatever their determination to hold onto this spring holiday, the *Volksbund* agreed with the other parties to move *Volkstrauertag* to the fall but not to grafting it onto any other Sunday already recognized as a holiday.[254] With final details left undecided, it was at least clear at this point that West Germans' public mourning and the collective memory if would carry would expand beyond the pre-1945 confines of a military holiday.

Remembrance through political muscle

In winnowing down the final details of the reformed *Volkstrauertag*, the Protestant Church used its influence and personal connections to both the *Volksbund* and the political class to exert decisive influence in resolving the *Volkstrauertag* question in its favor. While the Catholic Church agreed that moving *Volkstrauertag* to November was a good idea, the chief Catholic Archbishop in West Germany, Cardinal Frings, believed that any Sunday in November, whether they conflicted with *Allerseelen*, *Totensonntag*, or neither, would be acceptable.[255] The Protestant Church's West German leadership, however, was not content to take such a "hands

[254] Ibid, Präsident, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. to the Bundesministerium des Innern, 24 May 1951, letter, VDK A.100-141. According to other records, the BVN was involved in these discussions in West Germany (and also were in agreement with the Protestant Church, the persecuted Social Democrats, and the government ministers in rejecting *Reminiscere*). Referat III [Osterloh] to Herrn Präsident D. Brünotte, 22 May 1951, regarding Ratssitzung – Volkstrauertag, letter, EZAB 2/4416. The *Bund Verfolgten des Naziregimes* (BVN) was the West German, non-Communist and thus non-SED-aligned organization of leftists persecuted by the Nazis who split with the VVN in 1948. For the BVN-VVN split, see Margalit, 128-129.

[255] Copy of Der Erzbischof von Köln to the Bundesminister des Innern, Herrn Minister Dr. Lehr, 11 July 1951, regarding Ihr Schreiben vom 14. Juni 1951, letter, EZAB 2/4416.

off" stance. The national Protestant Church's government liaison officer in Bonn, *Oberkirchenrat* Ranke, repeatedly urged federal officials to summon VDK President Hagemann (who was also a senior official in the provincial Protestant Church of Lower Saxony), to a personal meeting so that the government could "read him the riot act [*ihm den Marsch zu blasen*]." Ranke also urged Edo Osterloh, the national Protestant Church's Special Representative for *Volkstrauertag* [*Sachbearbeiter für Volkstrauertag*] to get in touch with Hermann Ehlers, President of the West German Parliament, who had recently delivered the *Volkstrauertag* address in February 1951, and "whom at this time is in good standing with the *Volksbund*," to make sure that Ehlers "does not step out of line again in the coming year [*aus der Reihe tanzt*]."[256] These strong-arm tactics by the Protestant leadership on the question of public mourning reveal both the commitment of a new generation of churchmen to assert their influence in important matters of state and the public's interest (as they saw it). These bold suggestions that the government bully a private civic group into acquiescence might have felt eerily familiar except that, in this case, Protestant and center-right political leaders felt a common fear over allowing the older style of martial public mourning for soldiers to return. If the Nazis had used fundamentally similar tactics, though admittedly much more brutally and directed at a much more sinister goal, this irony was lost on all parties.

The Protestant Church's aggressive tactics did not end here. Scarcely a month after Ranke laid out his plan of action for muscling the *Volksbund* into submission, he met with VDK President Hagemann in person, arguing that "in his capacity as a former member of the [provincial church of Lower Saxony's] council," Hagemann should, according to Ranke, "personally engage himself so that the conflict between the Protestant Church and the *Volksbund*

[256] OKR Ranke to Herrn Oberkirchenrat Edo Osterloh, 4 August 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, EZAB 2/4416.

on account of the Sunday *Reminiscere* would be ended." Ranke made clear that this was a fight about more than a calendar date, reaching to the fundamental assumptions behind *Volkstrauertag*. The Church felt obligated to ensure "that beside the war dead, the dead in the home front and in the Concentration Camps also would be remembered." This suggestion of a wider palette of victims than simply dead soldiers "was strikingly [*erschütterndeweise*] new to Dr. Hagemann." In a final thrust to convince Hagemann, and the entire *Volksbund* by extension, to relent, Ranke threatened that "the *Volksbund* may not, from a financial standpoint, possess the room to maneuver for a showdown with the Protestant Church."[257] The Church's rough tactics did not go unnoticed, as the Hermann Ehlers, President of the West German Parliament, wrote to Protestant Church Councilor Osterloh out of concern that the outward appearance of the Church seeking "to torpedo the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*" could diminish the justification of Church's argument for wanting a new date for the holiday.[258]

Turning away from tradition?

With the *Volksbund* isolated but obstinately holding out to at least keep *Volkstrauertag* as a special Sunday apart from other religious holidays, the debate slowed into stagnation.[259] Desperate for political support to bolster its position, the VDK wrote again to the Federal Minister of the Interior but to both the Federal Chancellor and the Federal President this time also, arguing the lamentable situation of Germans in different places holding memorial

[257] OKR Ranke to Herrn Oberkichenrat Edo Osterloh, 13 September 1951, letter, EZAB 2/4416.

[258] Dr. H. Ehlers, Präsident des Deutschen Bundestages to Herrn Oberkirchenrat Osterloh, 18 October 1951, letter, EZAB 2/4416. Interestingly, Ehlers also cautioned that, as *Totensonntag* was originally a Prussian holiday, it may not have been an obvious choice for those provinces that were not part of old Prussia to replace *Reminiscere*.

[259] 6466 to the Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau, 20 November 1951, regarding Gedenkfeier für die Opfer des Faschismus und des 2. Weltkrieges, letter, EZAB 2/4416. The author of this document is unclear.

ceremonies for their dead at different times and in different manners.[260] To these pleas for consideration, both President Heuss and Chancellor Adenauer replied that memorial days were a matter for the Interior Minister alone to decide.[261] The Federal Interior Minister stood in agreement with his earlier conviction that using *Reminiscere* was a mistake, because "it will conclude in itself the exact same dangers as we already have had."[262] On January 30, 1952, the Minister wrote a letter to the *Volksbund* outlining his decision. Noting the near-universal support for moving *Volkstrauertag* to November, he reproached the VDK, saying that the re-initiation of the *Reminiscere* observances were also precluded by other "weighty political considerations" and that the VDK were aware of these reservations. Rejecting any reason or support from historical examples to support the March holiday and noting that elections scheduled on that particular Sunday in Württemberg and Baden could not be moved earlier or later, Minister Lehr concluded that the remembrance observance must be held in November.[263]

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[260] Geschäftsführender Präsident to Herrn Bundesinnenminister Dr. Lehr, 20 November 1951, letter forwarded via Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Generalsekretär to Herrn Konstantin von Beguelin, 22 November 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-141. Geschäftsführender Präsident to Herrn Bundekanzler Dr. Konrad Adenauer, 20 November 1951, letter forwarded via Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Generalsekretär to Herrn Konstantin von Beguelin, 22 November 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-141. Geschäftsführender Präsident to the Herrn Bundespräsident Prof. Dr. Theodor Heuss, 19 November 1951, letter forwarded via Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Generalsekretär to Herrn Konstantin von Beguelin, 22 November 1951, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter, VDK A.100-141.

[261] Der Staatssekretär des Bundeskanzleramtes to the Herrn Stellvertretenden Präsidenten des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 17 December 1951, letter forwarded via Bundespräsidialamt to Herrn Dr. Mattheisen, Geschäftsführender Präsident des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 7 January 1952, letter, VDK A.100-141. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V. Generalsekretär to the Beauftragten des Volksbundes am Sitz der Bundesregierung Herrn Konstantin von Béguelin, 2 January 1952, letter, VDK A.100-141.

[262] 110.III to Herrn Oberkirchenrat Prof. Dr. Mahrenholz, 12 January 1952, regarding Sonntag Reminiscere, EZAB 2/4416. The author of this document is unclear but it consists mostly of a lengthy quotation of the parliamentary president, Hermann Ehlers.

[263] Copy of Der Bundesminister des Innern to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V., 30 January 1952, regarding Volkstrauertag, letter forwarded via Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Kirchenkanzlei to the Leitungen der deutschen evangelischen Landeskirchen in Westdeutschland, 6 February 1952, regarding Volkstrauertag: Sonntag Reminiscere, letter, EZAB 7/3090.

While Lehr left the door open for the *Volksbund* to suggest when in November they would like to schedule *Volkstrauertag*, the *Volksbund* leaders realized that they were not likely to win their campaign to preserve the *Reminiscere* Sunday date. In one last surge of protest, the *Volksbund* sought to muster politically supportive organizations of German war victims to levy pressure on parliamentary representatives and government ministers to save *Reminiscere* as *Volkstrauertag*'s date.[264] Oblivious to the worst fears of their critics (that a springtime *Reminiscere* would give the impression that the Federal Republic was a continuation of the previous regime in terms of where public sympathies and memory were directed), the *Volksbund* made the strategic mistake of making public appeals to support the old-style *Volkstrauertag* from civil society organizations who tended to lean right politically. Those included organized groups of veterans, wounded veterans, survivors of wounded- or killed veterans, veteran paratroopers, as well as civilian refugees from the German lands lost to Poland or Czechoslovakia as a result of the war (*Landsmannschaften*).[265] These organizations did not have enough sway in political life to change the tides of public mourning.

The *Volksbund* was correct in perceiving that there was a political element to this debate over public mourning but they misunderstood it. Whether Germans dedicated their attention to mourning on *Reminiscere* or some Sunday in November was not a fight over whether they voted CDU and SPD. Rather, the politics here was in relationship to the Nazi past, a fight over nearness to versus distance from all things associated with the Third Reich. Organizations who represented veterans, dead soldiers' families, wounded soldiers' families and people made

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[264] Unknown, Betr.: Stellungnahme zum Memorandum: Volkstrauertag, 6 February 1952, report, VDK A.100-141. The author of this document is unclear.

[265] Unknown, Aufstellung von Verbänden und Organisationen, die zur Unterschrift der Resolution vorgesehen sind, 6 February 1952, spreadsheet, VDK A.100-141. The author of this document is unclear.

landless by shifting positions of the armies all established a means of remembering the Second World War that centered on the front lines, the army's experience, and the bodies that were shipped home in coffins. What these would-be visual reminders of the need to mourn on *Reminiscere* were missing was a tangible recognition that the war did not stop at the front but continued into cities and small towns, both inside and outside of the German borders. The old *Volkstrauertag* could not represent the reality of the Second World War that the critical Protestant Church and cautious conservative government knew was true.[266]

On February 20, 1952, *Oberkirchenrat* Osterloh received a series of telephone calls from the Federal Minister of the Interior's office, informing him that the VDK and the Minister had abruptly agreed on the suitability of the second-to-last Sunday of the church year for *Volkstrauertag* 1952. While this was not quite the result the Protestant leadership was hoping for, they were willing to accept the decision as better than the continued use of *Reminiscere*.[267] Now it seemed that the West German state would decisively turn away from the old martial traditions of its past, though not quite in the same fashion as its East German sibling.

*One past, two memories*

Besides Germans individually, or in civil society, political leaders' understandings of the war enabled or limited choices for public mourning. While the SED limited it to only "victims of fascism," the Federal Republic allowed *Volkstrauertag* but forced it to assume a shape quite

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[266] Even within the VDK, consensus over *Reminiscere* was eroding, with the provincial chapters in Bavaria and Oberrhein both expressing their opposition to *Reminiscere*, or at least their realization that it was an unrealistic goal. Copy of Braun, 1. Vorsitzender and Biersack, 1. Schatzmeister, Stellungnahme des Landesverbandes Bayern zum Termin des Volkstrauertages, no date, letter, VDK A.100-141. Copy of Der Vors. Des LV. Oberrhein, Stellungnahme zur Frage des Volkstrauertages, 7 February 1952, letter, VDK A.100-141.

[267] Gg. Referat III [Osterloh], 20 February 1952, Aktenvermerk regarding Sonntag Reminiscere, report, EZAB 2/4417.

different from Nazi practices, as well as content much broader. In the process of setting the boundaries, East- and West German political leaders framed their states' relationship to the (common) Nazi past. At the same time, public memory ritual acted as "teachable moments," where leaders acted to show the public what needed to be "learned" from the dead. In this less formal but still important pedagogical function, East German- and West German public mourning helped define the German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany, respectively, as two "imagined communities" of common purpose – avoiding a return to Nazism.[268]

**Evolving conceptions of mourning**

In 1918 and continuing throughout the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, officially-sanctioned German public mourning served to direct attention only to German soldiers and later to Nazi paramilitary "fighters." However, in 1945 the subject of officially sanctioned mourning was not as simple. Competing versions of remembered history, as well as contemporary political concerns within each of the dueling Nazi successor states, pushed public memory in many new directions at the same time.

*Soldiers as a "completely different type" of dead*

The bitter emotions and restless energies poured into this controversy over mourning points to the importance of mourning the right people, to support the correct memory of the past, in the eyes of the belligerents. That the different parties represented different understandings of

[268] This concept comes, of course, from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London, 2006).

the same history is evident from responses to the settlement, too. Wrote one former Marine chaplain from Cuxhaven, "I am quite concerned" at the news of the changed holiday.[269] Such rearranging and reimagining of an old, military-centric tradition would, he feared, would "knock everything over and cause confusion."[270] Another supporter of the old *Reminiscere* holiday from Braunschweig wrote that moving *Volkstrauertag* to November, "the time of darkness, of dying-off of all earthly things [*Absterbens alles Vergänglichen*]," was a clear mistake. Better to keep public mourning firmly in "the time of nature's re-awakening, of spring," thought this critic.[271] "Dissatisfaction reigns," wrote an individual from Bogholxhausen, because families could no longer mourn for their dead sons and husbands as they used to. Nonetheless, "in a few localities," small groups of faithful will observe their own *Volkstrauertag* on *Reminiscere*.[272]

Not only were supporters of the old holiday disappointed at losing their tradition, they resented being told that their memory of the war was wrong. If *Volkstrauertag* could no longer serve as a day only for soldiers, it meant that these dead might not receive the attention their families felt they deserved. One woman who lost her father, brother, father-in-law and brother-in-law in the First World War and who then lost her husband in the Second World War summed up the view of these supporters of the traditional springtime *Volkstrauertag* well: "[t]hrough this that the church would so engage itself for a repositioning of *Volkstrauertag*," the Protestant

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[269] On German military chaplains' contribution to the Nazi war effort, see Doris L. Bergen, "German Military Chaplains in World War II and the Dilemmas of Legitimacy" *Church History*, 70, 2 (June 2001):232-247.

[270] Marineoberpfarrer a.D. A.P. to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 1 March 1952, letter, VDK A.100-137.

[271] Copy of A.M. to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 2 March 1952, letter, VDK A.100-141.

[272] Copy of S. to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 5 March 1952, letter, **VDK A.100-137**. Cp to Copy of Kreisverband Waldeck to the Landesverband Hessen des VDK, 7 March 1952, regarding Gedenkfeiern am 9.3.1952, letter, VDK A.100-137.

Church, which had for so long pushed for *Reminiscere's* elimination as a memorial day, was party to a "turning away from soldiers [*der Abkehr vom Soldaten*]."[273] Concerned about the long-term prospects for public participation in *Volkstrauertag*, the General-Secretary of the VDK, Otto Margraf, wrote that *Volkstrauertag* must one day return to a spring-time date, because "the memory of the dead of the war" is "a completely different type from that of any other dead, who in the normal course of life go on to eternity."[274] For the VDK and its sympathizers, the military dead were truly the point of memory and of mourning.

*War as "unbounded suffering"*

For those who carried a memory of the war that recognized more than simply the affairs of soldiers, their memories of the war consequently varied considerably. The East German state, for one, privileged German communists' unique experience of the war as armed resistors fighting against the Nazis. The communist memory, thus, supported a vision of the past where only anti-fascist fighters stood for what was right and whose deaths alone deserved memorial attention and honor, as an example for future generations. Though diametrically opposed, politically speaking, to the old German nationalism that characterized the old *Volkstrauertag*, the "Memorial Day for the Victims of Fascism" was nearly as selective and exclusive.

There were also critical responses to the old *Volkstrauertag* from some Protestant leaders who felt that allowing a special day to mourn the war dead at all was a mistake. For these

[273] „Noch einmal Volkstrauertag." *Lübercker Nachrichten.* 14. April 1952, VDK A.100-140. The author of this article was responding to letters received following an article originally written on 14 March in this paper. Richter describes one woman's response, a woman who lost he father, brother, father-in-law and brother-in-law in WWI and who then lost her husband in WWII and who is now upset at the decision to alter the *Volkstrauertag* public mourning ritual.

[274] Otto Margraf, Generalsekretär, Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit Oberkirchenrat Osterloh bei der Kanzlei der evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, in Hannover, am 11.7.1952, transcript dated 15 July 1952, VDK A.100-140.

churchmen, all the dead were equal before God, thus none required special attention. After all, the war had killed soldiers and civilians alike, all of whom were equally dead, without any expectation of distinction in the afterlife (as Christians understood it). If all were equally sinners in the eyes of God, a holiday like *Volkstrauertag* seemed to suggest that soldiers were more worthy or more deserving, which threatened the Church's doctrinal message for *Totensonntag*.[275] If the point of mourning was to realize the equal imperfection of all sinners before God (or at least, the non-distinction between soldiers and sinners), this then required grieving for simply all the dead, implying the need to merge *Volkstrauertag* with *Totensonntag* once and for all.[276]

The West German government, along with more moderate Protestant leaders, embraced a middle ground between the unpalatable trifecta of embracing soldiers exclusively, rejecting any distinction among the dead at all, and embracing the communist resistors as being worthy opposites of soldiers. In his keynote address at the 1952 November *Volkstrauertag*, President Heuss navigated a fine line between acknowledging all the victims and still distancing himself from the fallen Nazi regime. Heuss insisted that "the time is past for heroification; here is simply unbounded suffering" [*da ist es vorbei mit dem Heroisieren; da ist einfach grenzenloses Leid*]." Germans could truthfully no longer view their dead soldiers on a pedestal and ignore the other peoples who died, since "the victims are a thousand more," extending from bombing victims, to

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[275] Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, Das Landeskirchenamt to the An die Kirchenkanzleii der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, 31 March 1952, regarding Volkstrauertag- Sonntag Reminiscere, letter, EZAB 2/4417.

[275] Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat [Stuttgart] to the Ev. Kirche in Deutschland, Kirchenkanzlei, 5 April 1952, regarding Termin des Volkstrauertags, letter, EZAB 2/4417. Evangelisch-lutherischer Oberkirchenrat [Oldenburg] to the Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, 17 April 1952, letter, EZAB 2/4417. Gg. Referat III, Dienstreisebericht, 22 April 1952, report of travel and conversation on 18 April 1952, EZAB 2/4417. The author of this document is unclear.

[276] Otto Margraf, Generalsekretär, Aktenvermerk über eine Besprechung mit Oberkirchenrat Osterloh bei der Kanzlei der evangelische Kirche Deutschlands, in Hannover, am 11.7.1952, transcript dated 15 July 1952, VDK A.100-140.

Concentration Camps, "and to the Jewish cemeteries." They were all killed because of a criminal regime whose nature must be acknowledged by Germans trying to rebuild their lives. Heuss spoke directly to the soldiers, imploring them to take a more self-critical view of their own experience while at the same time congratulating them for having done their duty: "He, the soldier, carried the most difficult burden, that he not only had to protect the German homeland – which he did happily" but that he was doing so at a time when that homeland saw "the driving out of honesty and law through cynicism and crude violence," which in turn "eroded the inner sense of a "just war," which seeks only to protect humanity."[277] Heuss demonstrates the precise nature of *Volkstrauertag* in the post-1945 context: a compromise between completely ignoring the singular experience of German soldiers and lauding those soldiers' determination and deaths to the exclusion of all other experiences of the war.

*A tradition now open to change?*

While each of these critical reactions to *Volkstrauertag* were slightly different, they demonstrate together the resonance of alternative traditions of public mourning that moved beyond a sample fascination with soldiers. Though the Communist narrative bore little resemblance to the eventual newly reformed *Volkstrauertag* for West Germany, they prove that Germans had several viable and resonant models for public mourning in this new context. More importantly, these alternatives demonstrate that the conversation over public mourning was one evolving and open to change.

[277] Deutscher Volkstrauertag. Ansprache des Herrn Bundespräsidenten Professor Dr. Theodor Heuss gehalten in einer Feierstunde aus Anlass den Volkstrauertages am 16. November 1952 im Plenarsaal des Bundeshauses in Bonn, booklet, VDK A.100-16.

**Conclusion: The end of a tradition?**

May 8, 1945 was a decisive moment in German history, marked by contradictions of radical changes but also a degree of continuity, all in the same event. Despite the division of the fallen Third Reich, Germans all showed the common challenge of mourning for lost loved ones amid uncertain present circumstances. Collectively, Germans' reactions to grieve for the dead while simultaneously struggling to explain why those dead had lost their lives added up to a decisive departure from the public memory tradition of 1918.

*Firstly*, Germans did not all remember the same war. Those who understood the war as a traditional conflict in the pattern of 19th century Great Power struggles structured their memories accordingly – seeing an event that only involved soldiers. If only soldiers had been involved, so this thinking ran, then only soldiers were the subject of public mourning. Yet other survivors of the war saw the deaths of antifascist fighters, of civilian aerial bombing victims, of expellees and even (in a very few cases) Jews. These critics of the old *Volkstrauertag* envisioned a different class of victims as the subject of mourning, based on their different memory of the war itself. The common element across the disagreements on victims and mourning was that all agreed to the deaths of millions. Beyond the loss felt by all, the details had to be negotiated.

*Secondly*, Germans' political leaders similarly made choices about publicly remembering the war and mourning the dead according to how these leaders understood the victims. Yet these leaders at the same time saw a role for public mourning and public memory recitation in defining how the East- and West German states defined their relationship to the Nazi period. Thus, it was crucial to these leaders to set the boundaries of acceptable discourse in such a way as to prevent any appearance of Nazi sympathy. These boundaries then framed the possibilities for individuals to publicly mourn their own dead and the dead of their nation.

*Thirdly*, the object of public mourning in 1945 was far more open to question then it had been in 1918. Given the difference in popular perceptions of the war, along with politicians' goals in defining mourning practices, this is perhaps unsurprising. Yet this meant that 1945 marked a moment when Germans were pushed by their own memories or by their leaders into lowering the social prestige and exclusivity of the soldier back to an even level with the rest of German society. To be sure, public discourse was not inflexible and individuals were still free to make up their own minds on the matter. However, in the public sphere, at least, "the time for heroization" of soldiers had ended.

## CHAPTER THREE:
## "Prioritizing the human and personal aspects:"
## Rethinking war and death in Germany, 1952-1961

Ten years after American artillery had encamped there to repel the *Wehrmacht*'s Ardennes Offensive, Luxembourgers had ample reason to gaze wearily across the Mosel River. Twice in the previous generation, German troops had brought destruction and now the Federal Republic of Germany was creating a new military force. In February 1955, leaders of the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* happily concluded that, "the political atmosphere … has largely relaxed," to the point where they could build a Germany military cemetery near Luxembourg City. Keen to manage their public image, these leaders explained that "[i]f possible, we would like to prevent a storm of German spectators" from flooding across the border to visit, which might have alarmed or at least offended the locals.[278] Even though West Germans had by 1952 agreed that older mourning traditions would not be statically preserved into the future, any public mourning event still trod a fine line between acceptance and scandal, a tension summed up in the planning for the Luxembourg cemetery.

Public mourning for the war dead in each Germany was made more challenging by the contemporary post-1945 context. By the mid-1950s, each Germany was building its own new military and moving to ally that new military with NATO in the west and the Warsaw Pact in the East. Besides the call to take up arms only a decade after the German army's defeat, the new context of the Cold War giving rise to actual violence (as in Korea in 1950) made the prospect of

[278] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Bundesgeschäftsstelle to alle Landes- und Bezirksverbände, 8 February 1955, memorandum, VDK A.10-51.

rearmamnent more troubling. Furthermore, the possession and readiness to deploy nuclear weapons on both the part of the US and the USSR gave Germans fear that the next war would leave only a charred stretch of land between the superpowers.

These concerns over the nearness of the next war and the greatly increased death toll that would likely follow it corresponded with Germans' efforts to re-think the ways they had understood and remembered the human costs of war. The Second World War, like the First, had been a total war, delivering violence already against civilian populations beyond the front lines. The fact that the Second World War, with the key role played there by aerial bombing, had been far deadlier for civilian populations was all the more reason to fear a dynamic toward ever more casualties from war and decreasing prospects that foreign policy objectives could be settled cleanly via military violence. That is, both East and West Germans began to realize that, wherever the next conflict might take place, the war would inevitably reach back home and its effects would be inescapable.

In order to more completely characterize the nature and content of Germans' collective memory of the Second World War, this chapter will examine the content of public mourning in each Germany but also place these events into their 1950s and early 1960s political, military and cultural contexts. Four questions will guide this chapter: *Firstly,* how did West Germans divide their attention between collectively remembering the experience of war on one hand and the history of the Nazi dictatorship on the other? *Secondly,* how did *Volkstrauertag* designers present the Second World War emotionally or aesthetically? *Thirdly,* to what extent did East Germans, at a state-level and below at a more local level, imagine and re-imagine the Second World War and its "lessons" for future generations? *Fourthly,* to what extent were public

mourning ceremonies in West Germany products of political concerns relating to the present democratic moment, rather than simply reactions to the discredited fascist past?

**Contemplating war in the Federal Republic, 1952-1956**

In order to publicly mourn the war dead, West Germans had to collectively remember the war, which meant somehow also publicly discussing the Nazi dictatorship. Unsurprisingly, it was easier for West German civil society- and political leaders to speak with authority about the hardship of war than to credibly claim to have worked to stop the Nazis. While the mid- and late 1950s did not see a protracted and self-critical engagement with Germans' support for (or at least, passive compliance with) the racist and aggressive policies of the Nazis, [279] this period *did* see a conscious effort to re-imagine "war" and the value German society had ascribed to wars and warriors over the past century-and-a-half. The monumental celebration of conflicts across the nineteenth-century and through the First World War had largely emphasized "the dead" as "fallen soldiers," who were understood as the primary (if not sole) element of the population harmed by war.[280] Yet in what was one of many "learning processes"[281] enforced upon and then encouraged among West Germans at this time, *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies increasingly took

[279] On Germans' largely passive attitude toward the Nazi Dictatorship and its crimes during the Third Reich, see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (New Haven, 2008), Detlev J. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life,* trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven, 1989).

[280] On memorialization of dead soldiers after the First World War, see Reinhart Koselleck, "War Memorials: Identity formations of the Survivors," in Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Pressner (Stanford, 2002), George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, 1990) and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Sixth Edition (Cambridge, 2005).

[281] Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker ( New York, 2006).

measures to include a wider set of non-combatant deaths, as well as non-German deaths, which could no longer be excluded from a meaningful and serious effort to understand and explain war.

*Civilians and non-civilians*

The West German parliament took a large step in this process of re-conceptualizing war when they enacted the "Law for the Maintenance of War Graves (War Graves Law)" in the spring of 1952. This War Graves Law provided federal funding for the construction of cemeteries for "the war dead" who were buried inside of (West) German territory, plus the costs of the actual burials, as well as a lump sum for upkeep and maintenance of these graves, with the VDK being assigned as the sole contractor for carrying out these designs.[282] This 1952 law expanded upon a similar 1922 measure but, beyond members of regular the armed forces, the 1952 law defined "war graves" as also extending to individuals who died performing "paramilitary services."[283] Whether "paramilitary" was meant to include Wehrmacht Auxiliaries, German Red Cross, or even SS members, is not clear.[284] Nonetheless, the designation of "war dead," and thus how the West German public ought to understand the effects of war on their population, now included the battlefield dead, those who died as a result of injuries received in the course of their duties beyond the battlefield, those who died in POW

[282] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Bundesgeschäftsstelle to alle Landesverbände, Circular Memorandum Number 37/52, 19 December 1952, VDK A.10-48.

[283] Entwurf eines Gesetzes über die Sorge für die Kriegsgräber (Kriegsgräergesetz), BR-Drucks. Nr. 94/52, 1 March, 1952, draft of legislation forwarded with the letter from the Sekretariat of the Bundesrat to the Vertretungen der Länder, 1 March 1952, EZAB 2/2559.

[284] The *Waffen-SS* ("Armed SS") constituted an armed paramilitary branch as part of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, "security force"), itself formally a wing of the NSDAP. Althought SS soldiers did fight in campaigns with regular *Wehrmacht* troops, the SS were all volunteers and explicit members of the Party. Thus SS veterans and families had a different, much more problematic task of explanation and coming to terms with death than regular soldiers.

camps, on the return journey home from POW camps, or shortly after their arrival in West Germany after their release form POW camps.[285] Thus, West Germans' legal understanding of the phrase, "war dead," had by 1952 grown to encompass the larger variety of military- or military-related experiences of war, keeping the military aspect of remembering the Second World War foremost in the public's mind but simultaneously minimizing the attention given understanding the rise of the Third Reich who launched the war.

The Nazi regime was not entirely absent from the War Graves Law but, when it did appear, it was as an external force that simply enacted suffering on its victims. That is, most legislators (and their constituents) preferred to keep discussion of the Nazi era at arms' length, with as little critical inquiry or interrogation as possible. This is evident in Section 6 of the law, where the Federal Republic explained its obligation to finance the care of graves of "victims of National Socialism, who on the basis of political, racial, or religious reasons were brought into medical- or detention centers" and subsequently died.[286] While a fairly clear reference to Nazi racial, political, and other ideological persecution, this extension of Federal recognition may have been more symbolic that anything, since at least as many major concentration camps were located *outside* of the 1949 borders of the Federal Republic as those located within, meaning those remains beyond the Oder-Neisse Line or even the Elbe River would have been ineligible for West German recognition and benefits.[287] Indeed, the Law went on to enumerate other

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[285] Entwurf eines Gesetzes über die Sorge für die Kriegsgräber (Kriegsgräergesetz), BR-Drucks. Nr. 94/52, 1 March, 1952, draft of legislation forwarded with the letter from the Sekretariat of the Bundesrat to the Vertretungen der Länder, 1 March 1952, EZAB 2/2559.

[286] Ibid.

[287] US Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Liberation of major Nazi camps, 1944-1945*, map, no date, http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?MediaId=381 (accessed November 9, 2012). The Oder-Neisse Line was determined by the Allies to be Germany's new eastern border with Poland as part of the negotiations in May 1945. The Elbe River formed the inner-German border between West Germany and East Germany.

victims of the war also due "war grave" status, who were more likely to be inside of the Federal Republic: "German- and ethnic German resettlers and expellees," "civilian internnees," "transported Germans," "foreign workers…conscripted into then-current borders of the Reich to work," and "foreigners cared for by internationally recognized refugee organizations who died in collection camps."[288] So while the West Germans did not completely ignore the Nazi past when it came to public mourning and collective memory, Nazi crimes and violence were largely emphasized only so far as they related to a conceptualization of war as an event encompassing many victims beyond the battlefield.

Whatever the blind sports and silences present in West German collective memory and public mourning, the documentary record *does* prove that West German leaders were beginning to recognize that, "as opposed to the understanding of the concept of war graves up to now, stemming from the First World War," the reality of the Second World War, especially the increased scope and intensity of the violence from 1939-1945, meant that the understanding of "war" and its victims must likewise be widened. "War graves are," in light of these considerations, "in the future also [to be considered] the graves of civilian victims of the aerial bombing campaign," too.[289] More than that, "the graves of war participants of foreign nations who died as POWs or fell in the Second World War," as well as "the graves of Germans and foreign civilian persons, who lost their lives through direct consequences of the Second World War" were now designated as "war graves" and considered worthy of state-led public

[288] Entwurf eines Gesetzes über die Sorge für die Kriegsgräber (Kriegsgräergesetz), BR-Drucks. Nr. 94/52, 1 March, 1952, draft of legislation forwarded with the letter from the Sekretariat of the Bundesrat to the Vertretungen der Länder, 1 March 1952, EZAB 2/2559.

[289] Entwurf eines Gesetzes über die Sorge für die Kriegsgräber (Kriegsgräbergesetz), an earlier draft of legislation forwarded as Drucksache Nr. 2667 from the office of Der Bundeskanzler, Budnesrepublik Deutschland to the Herrn Präsidenten des Deutschen Bundesrates, 9 October 1951, EZAB 2/2559.

mourning.[290] The sum of the regulations contained in this law, then, meant that the primary lens through which "war" was presented to the public via gravesites was no longer solely a military or combat-related role. Instead, West Germans were told, at least on the basis of gravesites, that war affected civilians and non-civilians alike.

*Tragedy beyond control*

The national *Volkstrauertag* programs in Bonn shared these conclusions about how to understand war's impact on society. The 1953 national public mourning ceremony featured classical music interspersed with numerous text readings, nearly all of which presented the story of the Second World War through the eyes of survivors grieving for their dead loved ones, rather than by uncritically presenting these combat deaths as evidence of soldiers' patriotic service and sacrifice. Titles such as, "To the Fallen Soldier," "Over a Death Notice," "Dresden 1945," "Farewell in a POW Camp," and "Letter of the Greek Bishop Nikolai of Ochrida to a Mother Who Could Not Finder Her Son's Grave" all suggested that the West German audience was meant to understand war as a sorrowful tragedy, rather than a praiseworthy and enviable experience,[291] and that this audience was encouraged to consider the war's effects on the home front to be just as real and important as the battle front.[292]

The new emphasis on warfare as a negative experience, as well as the centrality of civilians' suffering alongside military deaths, was noted by many members of the audience in 1953. "The effect," wrote one civil servant, "at finding a new approach [*Stil*]" for organized

[290] Entwurf eines Gesetzes über die Sorge für die Kriegsgräber (Kriegsgräergesetz), BR-Drucks. Nr. 94/52, 1 March, 1952, draft of legislation forwarded with the letter from the Sekretariat of the Bundesrat to the Vertretungen der Länder, 1 March 1952, EZAB 2/2559.

[291] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Auszug aus der Niederschrift über die Vorstandsitzung vom 22.8.1953, transcript, 10 September 1953, VDK A.100-17.

ceremonies like *Volkstrauertag* "is thoroughly to be welcomed."[293] Not everyone appreciated the diminished role of the soldiers, however, with some critics complaining about a program that "had morphed into a pure civilian – artificial – spirit."[294] Still others believed that the everyman aspect of having no single, prominent political speech made the 1953 *Volkstrauertag* message more relatable to average listeners, who could reach out and grasp the words from Dresden, from the Hospital Ship on the Baltic, and the long-awaited return from POW camps.[295] This turn away from mourning only soldiers, as a way of demonstrating Germans' priorities when considering war, toward a more pluralistic understanding of death and victims, made *Volkstrauertag* in 1953 something different, a chance to "buil[d] a bridge between painful remembrance and warning admonition to the present-day."[296] Quite far removed from the Weimar- and Third Reich-era official mourning holidays, 1953's *Volkstrauertag* presented death as *un*desirable, *un*glorious, and hopefully something that future generations would *not* be forced to suffer for pursuit of national interests.

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[293] Dr. Hüchtling, Min.Rat i. Bds. Wirtschaftsministerium, quoted in Gutachten die dem Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge anlässlich der Feierstunde im Plenarsaal am Volkstrauertag (15. November 1953) aufgrund seiner an die Teilnehmer gerichteten Bitte zugegangen sind, collection of audience reactions to memorial ceremony, no author, no date, VDK A.100-89.

[294] Gerhard Graf von Schwerin (privat) Bonn, and Oberst i.G.a.D. von Bonin, Bonn, Bundeskanzleramt, quoted in Gutachten die dem Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge anlässlich der Feierstunde im Plenarsaal am Volkstrauertag (15. November 1953) aufgrund seiner an die Teilnehmer gerichteten Bitte zugegangen sind, collection of audience reactions to memorial ceremony, no author, no date, VDK A.100-89.

[295] Fr. Fiehn, Bonn, Bonner Burschenschaft Sugambria, quoted in Gutachten die dem Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge anlässlich der Feierstunde im Plenarsaal am Volkstrauertag (15. November 1953) aufgrund seiner an die Teilnehmer gerichteten Bitte zugegangen sind, collection of audience reactions to memorial ceremony, no author, no date, VDK A.100-89.

[296] Landesgerichtspräsident Dr. Schorn, Bonn, quoted Gutachten die dem Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge anlässlich der Feierstunde im Plenarsaal am Volkstrauertag (15. November 1953) aufgrund seiner an die Teilnehmer gerichteten Bitte zugegangen sind, collection of audience reactions to memorial ceremony, no author, no date, VDK A.100-89.

The *leitmotif* of war as a terrible, bloody, and ultimately undesirable event also informed the 1954 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony. That year, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer argued that the casualties of the Second World War, military and civilian, were actually incentives for West Germans to do all they could to avoid another war, declaring that "[w]e see the burning cities and villages but we hear deep within us the warning cry [*mahnende Stimme*] of the dead."[297] While his desire for peace was likely sincere, Adenauer's message seems to rest on the assumption that, if only the Nazis and the military leaders had not tried to settle their political goals with war, then the catastrophic deaths of millions would have been avoided. That is, in his remarks, Adenauer ignored the racial and aggressive character of the Nazi dictatorship, equating Hitler's agenda to the wars of Kaiser Wilhelm II or even the Iron Chancellor Bismarck, only longer and deadlier in scale.

The discussion of war and its horror did not entirely evade mention of the Nazis' crimes, however. Gustave Ahlhorn, President of the VDK in 1954, pointed out the Second World War's unique differences from recent German military history up to 1939, explaining that, not only had more soldiers died by 1945 than in 1918, "also innumerable women, old men and children in small towns" had perished "in the firestorms of the aerial bombing campaign," or as the unnamed casualties from "the ice storms of the treck" westward, before the approaching Red Army, not to mention those who were killed "in prisons, camps and piled up in Gas ovens."[298] Here Ahlhorn moved beyond indicting "war" as a problem and engaged with the problem of explaining the Third Reich, albeit somewhat indirectly. Nonetheless, mentioning the Nazis in

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[297] „Mit ganzer Kraft für den Frieden in der Welt!" *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 16 November 1954, Nr. 216/1954, VDK A.100-18.

[298] „Zeugnis der grossen Schicksals- und Leidensgemeinschaft unseres Volkes," *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 16 November 1954, Nr. 216/1954, VDK A.100-18.

passing at least encouraged the West German audience to fill in the missing details themselves while helping reinforce the interpretive point that "war" was explicitly considered a bad thing.

That Ahlhorn at least entertained the notion that more than "peace" was necessary to avoid another fascist dictatorship and return to bloodshed was a departure from the rest of the *Volkstrauertag* program in 1954, which featured the premier of a newly written symphony by Rudolph von Oertzen, titled *Hiob* [Job]. *Hiob* set to music the anguish and chaos that had been a common experience for many, if not most, German families during the waning years of the war. Though the composer's exact intent is not clear from these records, the Biblical story of Job, if applied to the German experience of the Second World War, would leave soldiers and their families with little need to critically probe their own histories. According to the Old Testament story, Job was a righteous and faithful man who suffered one catastrophe after another, not knowing that he was a pawn in a dispute between God and the Devil. If West Germans were meant to imagine themselves as Job, then it was not possible for families to discover historical (or even moral) reasons why they experienced such losses and grief during the war, because the point of the story was the righteous man's struggle with "the bitter question of 'Why?'"[299] Imagining Germans-as-Job thus problematically made all Germans into bystanders or co-victims, while still keeping to the overall pattern of representing warfare negatively, as a catastrophe that reasonable people only dreaded.

*Fear of the future*

By 1954, West Germans seem to have agreed that they wanted no further wars in their lifetime, yet the reason or justification for this conviction (as presented in the national

[299] Ibid.

*Volkstrauertag* ceremony) varied from one moment to another. As these records indicate, it was not unusual for the interpretive pendulum to swing from understanding soldiers as the primary victims of the war one year to the next year seeing civilians as the most important element of remembering the war, or from understanding the Nazis as the enemy in one moment to seeing authoritarianism in general as the problem at the next. This plurality and fluidity of interpretations is especially evident in the 1955 and 1956 national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies.

In 1955, senior representatives from West Germany's two largest Christian confessions, Roman Catholicism and Lutheran- and Reformed Protestantism, gave guidance to those in grief and explanation to those wrestling with how to understand Germany's recent history. Cardinal Joseph Frings restricted his comments mostly to articles of Christian faith, reassuring his audience that, although they "mourned for the dead," Germans ought "not to mourn as those who have no hope but rather as Christians who believe in their salvation through Christ."[300] Similarly to what listeners would hear at a funeral service, Frings denied any room for calling for vengeance but rather told Christians to hope for a better future in heaven, because the dead were good people (not perpetrators or war criminals), who would there be reunited with their families.[301] For Cardinal Frings, there were nothing but positive consequences to follow the deaths of so many and no possibility that certain guilty parties may in fact have deserved some form of punishment.

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[300] Wortlaut der Ansprachen, die anlässlich der Feierstunde am Volkstrauertag, dem 13. November, im Plenarsaal des Deutschen Bundestages in Bonn vom Erzbischof von Köln, Josef Kardinal Frings, und dem Vorsitzenden des Rates der Evangelischen Kirch in Deutschland, Bischof D. Dr. Otto Dibelius, sowie von Bundesinnenminister Dr. Gerhard Schröder gehalten wurden, transcripts of speeches by Frings, Dibelius and Schröder, no date, VDK A.100-19.

[301] Ibid.

Frings' Protestant colleague, Bishop Otto Dibelius, offered only a slightly more complex message in 1955, talking much more concretely about the pain of surviving family members grieving for dead soldiers. Simultaneously, Dibelius argued for a special respect for soldiers who fought for their fatherland, declaring, "[e]ven the smallest nation has respect for those who wear the soldier's uniform."[302] Dibelius' words carried the message that Germans ought to learn from Second World War: wars kill enormous amounts of people and therefore future conflict must be avoided, because "a war in the era of atomic weapons [can] only be greeted with horror."[303] Thus, from both religious leaders in 1955, West Germans heard the remembered history of a war without the Holocaust and without war crimes but nonetheless a war not to be repeated.

In the following year, West Germans heard a sharply opposite message at *Volkstrauertag*. Writer Manfred Hausmann delivered the keynote speech, incorporating a stinging indictment of the Nazis and German 'fellow travelers.' Audiences in 1956 were told that they must remember the *complete* details and history surrounding these casualties of the Second World War, because the dead "have the right to the complete truth of their deaths" and the events leading to them.[304] That Hausmann called for a more complete and honest accounting for West Germans' actions and choices during the Third Reich is somewhat ironic, since Hausmann himself was not an outright opponent of the regime, even though he did not embrace the Nazi Party and its ideas explicitly.[305] Despite his own opaque history during the Nazi years, nevertheless Hausmann was

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[302] Ibid.

[303] Ibid.

[304] Manfred Hausmann, *Trost im Trostlosen*, text of speech reprinted in booklet form, 1956, VDK A.100-20.

[305] Hausmann was held up as one who resisted the Nazi party by withdrawing into private life (the path of so-called "inner emigration"). However, one recent biography raises doubts as to whether Hausmann was disinterested in the Nazis, finding instead that his works were not burned and his activities not restricted by the regime, as Hausmann

by far more explicit in naming victims of German aggression alongside German civilian victims of violence, pointing to "the innumerable on both sides who died woefully in camps or on the journey to them," "the women and children, the old men and little babies [who died] in the firestorms of the bombarded cities," and those „who because of their conviction, of their pure, upstanding, noble conviction, of their faith, of their deep-seated [*durchgeisteten*] humanity, of their compassion, of their political beliefs, of their birth, were deliberately pursued, beaten, shot, decapitated, hanged, stuck into Gas chambers, who glowed in rows of ovens."[306] Hausmann demanded West Germans acknowledge the dual nature of the Second World War and the German soldiers who participated in it, declaring that "[t]his is the face of war, which on one side sees deeds of such greatness and severity can be done" but which "on the other side [features] a bestiality without equal."[307] The point here seemed to be that individual Germans made choices that led to suffering of others while navigating life under a dictatorship. Thus, the war-dead, soldiers and civilians alike, became an anti-hero, models of imperfection and humanity that signaled the potential for good and for bad. "The Dead warn us of our own failings…between greatness and abominableness, not only in war but also in peace."[308] If the post-war West Germans were just as imperfect as their war-dead, the lesson of these deaths was, according to Hausmann, that war (and maybe even a fascist dictatorship) could return.

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claimed. Instead, this historian claims, Hausmann accommodated himself to the regime and afterwards never clealy corrected the image of opponent of the regime that was often ascribed to him. See Arn Strohmeyer, *Der Mitläufer. Manfred Hausmann und der Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen,1999).

[306] Ibid.

[307] Ibid.

[308] Ibid.

*Hoping for no more to bury*

The fear expressed at the end of Hausmann's 1956 *Volkstrauertag* speech reveals a larger characteristic of West German public mourning during the middle 1950s. When remembering the Second World War and grieving the dead, national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies at this time directed more emphasis onto the wider categories of casualties inherent in 20th century warfare, with the fear of a new, nuclear-armed war always present. Because the Cold War had already sparked a US-USSR face-off in East Asia, West Germans mourned their dead while hoping for no more to bury. This intense focus on war via understanding the wide range of casualties corresponded with an intermittent engagement with the Nazi past, as certain words of critical interrogation towards Nazi supporters or even passively complicit citizens of the Third Reich did occasionally surface but were far less frequent than general admonition to avoid any new military conflict.

**Reframing war in the West, 1955-1959**

Centering public mourning on the casualties of war was an aspect of *Volkstrauertag* in the 1950s that only partially differed from the Weimar-era precedents (see Chapter One). Unlike the original holiday, which had adopted a largely affirmational and celebratory tone by the early 1930s, the post-1945 version maintained a more skeptical, if not critical, outlook on warfare. If Germans had somehow softened their memory of war and death in the decade-and-a-half following 1918, West Germans did not make the same revisions to public mourning ceremonies after 1945. Rather, *Volkstrauertag* had by 1959 reframed the history of war in a way that that seemingly rejected future military conflict entirely. Such a radical change in attitudes was neither universal in reach nor quick in taking effect.

*Finding a new aesthetic*

*Volksbund* leaders were attuned to the West German public's fears of a new war and considered this when programming *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies across the 1950s. Perhaps more pressing to the VDK, however, was the problem of keeping national audiences interested in *Volkstrauertag* at all. A growing generation gap, they feared, meant that the youth of the 1950s had not encountered war closely enough to understand its danger, which in turn threatened to undermine West German society's respect for its dead. Above all, the *Volksbund* wanted to retain interpretive control over public mourning for the war dead. In order to do so, they had to remain relevant in the public's eye, which meant finding ways to reform and update *Volkstrauertag*.

In October 1955, senior representatives of the VDK met with leaders from both churches and from the Federal Interior Ministry, as, well as a group of publishers in the Hessian city of Arnoldshain to discuss a new initiative for organizing the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies differently. The goal of this conference was the incorporation of different forms of memorial activity (e.g. art, music, drama) into the national ceremony in Bonn, imparting new life or relevance into the old-worn formula of keynote speeches interspersed with classical music. The representatives from outside the VDK persuaded the VDK to hold an open competition to search for these new artistic and cultural works, with the VDK still keeping editorial veto and thus interpretive control.[309] Not much came of these early efforts but a series of subsequent meeting

[309] Teilnehmer, list of Arnoldshain conference attendees, no author, 27 October 1955, VDK A.10-69. Ergebnis der Tagung in Arnoldshain, summary of conference findings submitted as Zu Punkt 8) der Tagesordnung for the Vorstand meeting on 5 November 1955, no author, no date, VDK A.10-69. Interestingly, the Federal Interior Ministry pledged financial support for the honoraria to be paid out for the new works selected for Volkstraeurtag but do not seem to have articulated a noticeable degree of censorship at thei time (in 1955).

in December 1956 and April 1957 extended invitations to musicians and writers, soliciting their ideas, as well as clarifying the methods for submitting and vetting proposed works.[310] Having agreed on the mechanics, the *Volkstrauertag* committee now needed to divide on what type of outcome they wanted.

In early April 1957, this special committee met in Stromberg (also in southern Hesse), to tackle the specifics of how to present a collective memory to the public and persuade that public audience of this memory's validity, representativeness, and suitability as a guide for future decision-making.[311] Moving from a consideration of "death" in a general sense, toward a discussion of the meaning of "death in wartime," in particular, these men concluded that, when remembering those killed during the war, "the soldier's death should stand in the foreground."[312] While the committee spent little time parsing the "special German" problem of soldiers' deaths in favor of offering "comfort for the surviving families," this passing mention of the difficulty of placing soldiers into a post-fascist memorial tradition reveals some degree of consciousness of the problematic circumstances of these military deaths – unprovoked war, in the service of a racist dictatorship. Nonetheless, these representatives from the VDK, the Interior Ministry and the West German artistic and literary elites who were planning the new *Volkstrauertag* evidently tabled further soul-searching at Stromberg, concluding instead to focus on providing „comfort,"

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[310] Klaus von Lutzau, 2. Bundesgeschäftsführer, Ergebnis der Tagung in Arnoldshain, summary of conference findings prepared as Zu Punkt 4) der Tagesordnung v. 25.1.1957 for the Vorstand meeting on 25 January 1957, 17 January 1957, VDK A.10-69.

[311] Dr. Priorreck, Protokollführer, Niederschrift über die 2. Sitzung des beratenden Ausschusses am 5. April 1957 in Stromburg, transcript of the Stromburg conferenece's second day proceedings, 8 April 1957, VDK A.10-69. Dr. Priorreck, Protokollführer, Niederschrift über die 1. Sitzung des Beratenden Ausschusses am 4. April 1957 in Stromburg, Begin 15.05 Uhr, transcript of the Stromburgn conference's first day proceedings, 16 April 1957, VDK A.10-69.

[312] Zusammenfassung der Gespräche in Stromberg, executive summary of Stromburg conference proceedings, no author, 29 April 1957, VDK A.10-69.

framed by a "Christian, or at least religious" interpretative framework, to the bereaved families.[313] Even if this "comfort" for the bereaved came at the expense of confrontation over the Nazi past, such a compromise *still* left room for a critical discussion of warfare and death.

The committee meeting in Stromberg seems to have been keenly aware of the difficulty of their position. On the one hand, *Volkstrauertag* was obliged to offer support to families who were mourning their dead soldier but on the other, political difficulties would surely follow any efforts to praise dead soldiers who had served the Nazi regime. What made public mourning more difficult for West Germans to navigate was that, despite the emotional needs for closure and comfort from millions of grieving mothers, fathers, spouses and children,[314] classic notions of soldiers' patriotic death for the greater good or for the national interests were explanations not available to Germans now.[315] Declared Klaus von Lutzau, the Assistant Chief of the VDK's national offices in Kassel, "in response to the question of the meaning [of death]," Germans had "initially no clear answer to give"[316] but instead were forced to „transform" this „self-apparent ‚Glory to the Fallen'" into „a peaceful, reverent bow before the war dead."[317] Whether or not this "reverent bow" entailed a purposeful forgetting of the military's participation in war crimes

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[313] Ibid.

[314] On the issue of children remembering their parents' wartime service, see Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall. *„Opa war kein Nazi" Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), Bernd Boll, "Kriegsouvenirs. Rekonstruktion von Geschichtserfahrung als intergenerationelles Projekt" in Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed. *Eine Ausstellung und Ihre Folgen. Zur Rezeption der Ausstellung „Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944"* (Hamburg, 1999), and Axel Schildt, "Die Eltern auf der Anklagebank? Zur Thematisierung der NS-Vergangenheit im Generationenkonflikt der bundesrepublikanischen 1960er Jahre" in Christoph Cornelißen, Lutz Klinkhammer and Wolfgang Schwentker, eds., *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien, and Japan seit 1945*, Second Ed. (Frankfurt a/M, 2003).

[315] Zusammenfassung der Gespräche in Stromberg, executive summary of Stromburg conference proceedings, no author, 29 April 1957, VDK A.10-69.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid.

and the Holocaust,[318] as well as German society's own "moral indifference," was left unspoken. What this Stromberg committee seemed to have accepted was that public mourning ceremonies were inherently prone to controversy. This was because *Volkstrauertag* moved beyond mourning the act of German soldiers (and civilians) dying, to also suggest how families and friends ought to interpret and remember the events *surrounding and leading up to these deaths*. More than that, *Volkstrauertag* offered a vessel for one generation of immediate survivors and family members to codify and re-present this remembered past to future generations, years or even decades later.

The question at hand in 1957, then, was how to comfort families for the deaths of their soldiers while doing so in a way that did not invoke the ghost of German militarism. If the VDK and their supporters erred on the side of offering too much praise or expressing too much love for the dead soldiers, they would surely please the grieving survivors but offend those in the wider public opposed to rearmament and who, perhaps, advocated of more self-critical collective memory of the Second World War. On the other hand, if the committee was too parsimonious in its comfort to families, perhaps denying that their soldiers had somehow displayed virtuous characteristics in serving a cause greater than themselves, the effect might be scandalous in the eyes West German political leaders then working to integrate the new *Bundeswehr* into the NATO alliance.[319] While the ultimate solution did not please all audiences, it is notable that the

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[318] For examples of Wehrmacht participation in the Holocaust, see Waitman Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews in Peregruznoe, 1942" in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 23 (2): 185-213 and Hannes Heer, "Killing Fields: The Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in Belorussia, 1941-1942," trans. by Carol Sherer in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 11 (1): 79-101.

[319] On rearmament, see David Clay Large, *Germans To The Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996). For 1950s conservative and progressive West German political leaders' respective attitudes towards remembering the Nazi past, see Herf, *Divided Memory*.

VDK representatives and their partners in this project did not seem eager to airbrush all of the wrinkles out of Germans' collective memories of the war.

What seems to have happened instead was to retreat and present war and death in all their horror and tragedy but within the framework of a "traditional" 19th century war between two states acting in their own legal self-interests.[320] A memo to VDK members, explaining the "new" *Volkstrauertag* in advance of its debut, argued that the older tradition of romanticizing war and dead soldiers was no longer suitable to the post-1945 world, because a rose-tinted notion of soldiers sacrificing for the national good corresponded "…no more to the experiences of the individual, but also not to the real event."[321] Yet this newly re-designed *Volkstrauertag* would still be sensitive to the traditional understanding of a soldier's death that many in the audience likely would harbor, acknowledging that "death" as experienced in civilian life "differentiates itself, however, completely fundamentally from the obligation to die in war."[322] This was because "the 'civilian's death' out of reasons of age, of sickness, accident" or other normal aspect of civilian life was "still [a] 'natural' event." On the other hand, death in wartime seemed to the VDK leaders to be associated with certain higher virtues, such as "a citizen's duty to their state, the duty to defend others, readiness for military deployment and for sacrifice."[323] For all their efforts to minimize links with a patriotic, uncritical, nationalist tradition of regarding

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[320] That is, VDK leaders seem to have ignored the racialized goals in Germany's war seeking territorial gain for the purpose of gaining *Lebensraum*. Instead, *Volkstrauertag* planners acted as if Germany's war goals in 1939 were no different or no more problematic than its goals in 1918, or any other nation's war aims in 1918 (or even across the nineteenth century). On the centrality of "race and space" in the Second World War, see Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust,* 2nd edition (2009).

[321] Informationsbrief Nr.5 vom 5. Oktober 1959, memorandum outlining the history of the project to develop new content for Volktrauertat which had culminated in the play, *Der Andere*, no author, 5 October 1959, VDK A.10-69.

[322] Ibid.

[323] Ibid.

soldiers as heroes, Volkstrauertag designers still prompted audiences to express sympathy for the warrior at the expense of the civilian, even as this newly-reformed public mourning apparatus ignored the dictatorship and its crimes that had made the Second World War different from those conflicts before it. If West Germans were ever to let go of their affection for soldiers, it would only be the result of a shocking realization that a rejection of war and death required a similar rejection of soldiers' exalted value.

*A price too high?*

Even if the *Volksbund* and its partners dared not offend military veterans' families or opponents of West German rearmament, the initial 'new' *Volkstrauertag* that resulted from this long set of deliberations featured a play that presented a sharply darker view of war. The radio drama *Der Andere*, with text by Otto Heinrich Kühner and music by Rudolf von Oertzen (composer of *Hiob*), still centered memory and mourning on the war in a "traditional" sense (that is, combatant deaths and formal battle lines) but did so at the expense of remembering the Third Reich and its crimes, attributing the outbreak of simply to the people on one side of a river growing envious of neighbors on the other side.[324] In this mythical world, soldiers appeared not as professional warriors but as transplanted civilians and the characters "Der Eine" and "Der Andere" (The One [Soldier] and The Other [Soldier]), soldiers on campaign, bemoaned the pity that humans could make warfare while also praying, singing, and exploring the heavens and nature.[325] While on campaign, both soldiers fell in love with a girl from the enemy land and

[324] Der Andere/ Eine Ballade vom Tod im Kriege/ Für Sprecher Chor und Orchester/ Musik von Rudolf von Oertzen/ Texte von Otto Heinrich Kühner, text of the play reproduced in booklet form, no date, VDK A.100-23.

[325] Ibid.

eventually quarreled over which man would eventually marry her.[326] The character ”Death” interrupted their argument only to warn that, in the next day’s battle, one of the two soldiers would die, leaving the other one to marry the girl. This disavowal by “Death” for any responsibility relating to the millions of soldiers’ deaths in the Second World War is where the play was meant to strike home with viewers, as “Death” explained that humans were the ones with free will from God but who still decided to wreck all of their peaceful accomplishments with fruitless war.[327] *Der Andere* and *Volkstrauertag* 1959 made clear that remembering the war, not the dictatorship, was the intended framework of West German collective mourning.

In this respect, the 1959 ceremony echoed the 1954 *Hiob* Symphony, equating war with random and meaningless death. However accurate this conclusion may have been, it omitted any explanation of the army’s complicity and eagerness to launch the Second World War, its officers’ own aggressive anti-Slavic sentiment on the Eastern Front, and their tacit (at least) cooperation in Hitler’s racial policies in the conquered areas. ”Death” offered the soldiers a deal: one soldier of the two must die, “One of you must be The Other One,*”* but to serve no greater purpose or end.[328] As the two soldiers cast lots over the girl, they came to a draw and realized how much pain and heartache war brought to all participants.[329] The effect of *Der Andere*, then, was to give war a human face, showing life opportunities that were wrecked by war and warriors who appeared as humans with no *a priori* desire to fight and kill.

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[326] Ibid.

[327] Ibid.

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid.

*Der Andere* and the 1959 *Volkstrauertag* that presented it not only aspired to shape West Germans' collective memory and public mourning practices in respect to the Second World War but also aimed to influence their future behavior, too. In this play, humans also learned to pursue peace, with the mortally wounded "Other One" exhorting "The One" to "Forget us not! And let us not have fallen in vain! Give our death meaning: peace!"[330] When "Death" approached "The One" to ask if he was satisfied that he got to live, "The One" replied no, because "[h]e died in my place" and was "no guiltier than I."[331] "Death" was disappointed that humans had by then learned to avoid future wars and never again "allow him his dead."[332] The moral of this story could not have been clearer to West Germans in 1959: war is no longer winnable, is too costly and promises nothing to be gained except more death. In the words of "The One," "[e]ach additional Dead One proves that war always kills more. Now the price is too high for us."[333] Instead, Germans had now learned, to "have no more hope in victory"[334] but rather only distrust the prospect of war. After all, realized the mother of the dead soldier in the play, "everywhere there are the same tears and the same life and the same death."[335] Thus, the lesson of public mourning, here fixed upon the war (but not the dictatorship), was learning that wars ought to be avoided, however appealing a solution they might appear.

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[330] Ibid.

[331] Ibid.

[332] Ibid.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Ibid.

[335] Ibid.

As groundbreaking a departure from custom as *Volkstrauertag* 1959 was, public reaction seems to have been split, with many of those present in person for the Bonn ceremony responding positively but many of those listening to the broadcast via television or radio voicing less approval. Wrote one senior civil servant, *Der Andere* presented, "for the first time, the tragedy of the meaninglessness of this unnatural and more or less coincidental death, in its complete depth."[336] Moreover, this play provided a "warning" to stave off "a repeat of this senselessness," which would surely come to pass in another war, if contemporary Germans (and Europeans) did not heed the truth that death in war was something tragic. It was clear in 1959 that the "cloud*"* of the *"'dulce est pro patria mori'"* sentiment of the First World War generation had now been completely removed.[337] Instead, *Der Andere* left the audience to ponder solely the personal painfulness of war and death, "prioritizing…the human and personal aspects of death in war," and the "intransitoriness of this suffering," as ends far removed "from all things '*völkisch*' and interpretations of the soldier's death relating to the state."[338] While a majority of responses from the broadcast audience, as well as the individual VDK state-level chapters, were negative, this criticism was directed in part to the quality to the transmission and partly at the exclusion of a more complete discussion of the Nazi dictatorship.[339] Thus, the interpretation of war as "bad" scarcely met with protest.

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[336] Words of Oberreg. Rat Hans Conrad, quoted in 'Der Andere.' Sitmmen und Urteile zur Uraufführung im Plenarsaal des deutschen Bundestages in Bonn am Volkstrauertag 1959 (15. November), collection of reactions and evaluations to the play prepared by the VDK, no author, 4 December 1959, VDK A.10-70.

[337] Ibid. The respondent is paraphrasing the famous Latin phrase, *dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori* ("is it beautiful and fitting to die for one's country") comes from the Funeral Oration of Pericles, part of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

[338] Ibid.

[339] Ibid.,Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge Landesverband Berlin to the stellvertretenden Präsidenten des Volksbundes Deutschen Kriegsgräberfürsorge, letter, 10 December 1959, VDK A.10-70.

*Learning the right lessons*

On the whole, the sentiments characterizing *Volkstrauertag* across the 1950s corresponded with the West German public's reservations about rearmament, attesting to a collective skepticism of renewed military obligations for West German men and fear of their deaths in a new, deadlier war. By and large, the threat of war or recourse to war (in a nuclear age) seemed more likely to West Germans than a return to Nazism, in no small part due to the fact that nuclear weapons and Cold War brinksmanship in Washington and Moscow lay largely beyond Bonn's ability to control. Moreover, West Germans were convinced that they could never again succumb to Nazism and thus they did not need to worry about encountering a new fascist dictatorship. Having gone through denazification by the Allies and then reversing what they (West Germans) considered to have been the excesses of denazification, West Germans were confident that they could trust themselves to embrace democracy (even if a conservative type) and steer a clear of fascist and socialist strongmen.[340]

This near-consensus that future wars proved a more pressing threat than future dictatorships is a key insight into understanding the much-documented "silence" about the Nazi years in 1950s West Germany. If West Germans *had* believed future dictatorships were a threat, this would mean that ordinary West Germans *could* become Nazis again and furthermore *might bear some guilt* for having accepted the Nazi dictatorship the first time around. Whereas, if these survivors were in fact also victims of a police state, who had never voted for or sympathized with the NSDAP, and who had learned never again to countenance a dictatorship, they could safely

[340] On the West German efforts to undo or ameliorate much of the Allies' de-nazification actions, see Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, transl. by Joel Golb (New York, 2002).

ignore the problem of remembering the rise of National Socialism and its crimes, even if doing so would only have warned future generations.[341]

Overall, then, this project to re-imagine *Volkstrauertag* as a "lesson" about the experience of war undeniably presented "war" as a negative, pointless affair. The tragic death of so many warriors was not really celebrated but instead Germans created room to commemorate the abstract casualty lists as human faces and shattered lives. Because the point here was to avoid a return to warfare in the future, *Volkstrauertag* made very clear to the audience that they should not consider the Second World War (and maybe even the First World War) as conflicts limited in their reach to battlefields and generals' map tables. Rather, Germans' experience taught that nearly every aspect of military and civilian life was impacted by war. Furthermore, all Germans ought to be very careful in imagining any future military conflict, with a view to avoiding the massive loss of life that would surely follow.

**Mourning in East Germany: Remembrance and Resistance, 1953-1960**

East German leaders also encouraged their citizenry to reconsider long-held assumptions about war, albeit differently from the process at hand in the Federal Republic. While remembering past wars and cautioning against a threatened new war posed challenges to East Berlin, the East German Communist Party did not believe that some sort of romantic 19th century notion of combat might allow any reckless diplomat or statement to escalate disagreements into wars. Similarly, the SED did not believe that an appreciation of war's grotesque effects upon society beyond the trenches would help avert popular lust for battle. Rather, the SED continued

[341] This was in fact the point of positing a "clean break with the past" and holding only the Nazis and their SS criminals as guilty of crimes and genocide. On the question of "ordinary Germans" and their support for the regime and participation in the Holocaust, see Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992).

to see war as a threat specific to fascism, something that could only be prevented by proactive propaganda campaigns to denounce lingering "fascism" in West Germany and its patron, the United States.[342] Thus, public mourning in the GDR during the 1950s also assumed the form of a "lessons to be learned" warning, similarly to the Federal Republic. The key difference here was that the East presented itself as having already "learned" these "lessons" and thus better positioned avoid future calamity.

*Anti-fascist lessons*

The annual OdF Memorial Day in East Germany continued to serve as an occasion for the SED to remind its citizens and the world that they (the GDR) understood the causes and costs of war. During the early 1950s, these public mourning occasions highlighted the East German state's status as being "on guard," watching for the rise of a new fascist threat and ready to counter it. GDR leaders called on East Germans to direct their continued struggle toward the realization and preservation of peace (meaning a united Germany under SED leadership), which would evidence all Germans' faithful memory of these antifascist dead. *Neues Deutschland* reported that the 1953 OdF day was "the day, on which the peace-loving people of the entire world honor[ed] the heroic fighters against fascism and remember[ed] the victims of the fascistic terror."[343] The memory of antifascist resistance in 1953 did not celebrate exclusively German resistance fighters, but included the "millions of antifascists who led the peoples under the yoke of Hitlerfascism [*Hitlerfaschismus*] in a loyally allied struggle with the glorious Soviet army

[342] The best study on the SED and the Cold War politics of remembering the Nazi regime is Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory.*

[343] Hermann Matern, „Internationaler Gederktag für die Opfer des faschistischen Terrors. Für den Sieg der Sache unserer toten Helden" *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands.* 13 September, 1953. Ausgabe A.

against the Nazi beasts [*Nazibestien*]."[344] Unlike the Federal Republic, who had to learn how to de-emphasize soldiers in its memorial traditions, the GDR, at least officially, already ranked civilian political resistance fighters above regular military contingents in relating the experience of the Second World War.

To be sure, the GDR's leaders reckoned only those civilians who did take up arms in order to wage war upon the Nazis as worthy of top-tier recognition. Beyond that, the only soldiers whom the SED likely had in mind to celebrate were Red Army troops, making public mourning more of an international affair in the German Democratic Republic. The international aspect of this collective memory nevertheless reinforced the message that "out of the struggle of the antifascist resistance fighters, the German people [had to] pull the deciding lessons," articulated by GDR leaders as resisting the "plans of the imperialistic reaction" and "mobiliz[ing] all power for the struggle over the national reunification of Germany and the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany."[345] These lessons about war, according to the Communist Party, meant that the GDR had to stand ready to repel the next assault, which would surely come from West Germany. Yet "war" was still something considered "bad," an event to be feared, which made the GDR's public mourning in some ways consistent with *Volkstrauertag* in the Federal Republic.

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[344] Ibid. This rhetoric centering attention on the Soviet army is more notable as it follows the June 17, 1953 East German uprising, which was put down via intervention of Soviet troops stationed in East Germany.

[345] Ibid. Throughout the Cold War both East and West Germany housed Soviet and NATO troops, respectively. The possibility of German unity in exchange for peaceful German neutrality that did not threaten the USSR was the subject of at least limited diplomatic discussion between the 1952 and 1953. The formal, legal end of hostilities between West Germany and the Soviet Union did not come until the Moscow Treaty of 1970 and the following treaties with other East European neighbors, which recognized the 1945 borders (the Oder-Niess line) and renounced any future West German quests to regain former German lands lost in the war. Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York, 1994), 48-49, 70-74.

*Contested mourning*

Yet this state-led effort did not meet with the East German public's universal approval. This was due in no small part to the nature of the "second dictatorship" and the GDR leaders' penchant for invoking the history of the Third Reich in order to justify demanding East Germans' ideological obedience and compliance. At a time when the regime was most threatened following the June 17, 1953 uprising, the antifascist memory of the Second World War provided examples of selfless and unending dedication to the ideals of the East German state.[346] To the average East German listener, however, these examples could hardly have been representative, because the experience of the KPD, the SPD, and the Red Army did not reflect the wartime experiences of the majority of the German population in the Third Reich. Thus, it is unsurprising that there exists evidence of East Germans organizing into civil society underground, to mourn a wider set of victims of the Second World War.

East Germans responded to the official collective memory in several ways, offering another example of *Eigensinn*. While the attentiveness and interest of the national audience in either Germany cannot be assumed (much less proved easily), there are several examples of individuals or groups responding to official commemoration via their own "social action" in support of or in contest with the elites. In East Germany, this "social action," motivated by alternate collective memories, took the form of religiously framed mourning for those German victims of the Second World War whom the SED chose to ignore. To be sure, East Germans do not appear to have concentrated heavily on mourning the victims of Nazi racial persecution. Yet the existence of organized, sustained efforts at some level below the notice of censors to identify,

[346] „Internationaler Gederktag für die Opfer des faschistischen Terrors. Für den Sieg der Sache unserer toten Helden/Von Hermann Matern." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands.* 13 September, 1953. Ausgabe A.

mourn and foster remembrance of some other dead victims of the Second World War besides antifascist fighters and Red Army troops reveals that public mourning was in fact a contested event in East Germany, too.

Invoking as "victims of war" those soldiers who had served the fascist Third Reich was politically dangerous. This was because those East Germans who participated in alternate forms of public mourning, in opposition to the official anti-fascist memory, did so by reconceptualizing "war," moving beyond or even rejecting the Marxist understanding of the SED elites. East German Protestant Churches were understandably nervous, then, when their brethren congregations in the West held public "Prayer Weeks" for the release of POWs still in Soviet captivity in 1954.[347] Similarly, the secret *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge*, working under the cloak of the Protestant Church to carry out the VDK's gravesite registration and care in the GDR, could only accomplish this mission by asking local churches to compile lists of all known war graves in their parishes or bishoprics, then secretly forward the muster rolls to East Berlin for the creation of a central registry.[348] At a more personal level, individual East Germans sought such information from the VDK in the West regarding loved ones buried there, with the VDK taking care not to use their return address (in Kassel), which might tip off the *Stasi*.[349] Some East

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[347] Das Landeskirchenamt, Ev. Luth. Landeskirche Hannovers to the Herren Ephoren, circular memorandum K 50/54, 7 December, 1954, EKKW C/1057. Bericht des Landesbischofs D. Noth auf der Tagung der Landessynode am 4. Dezember 1957, report forwarded as attachment to the circular memorandum KB I 2390/57 from the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Kirchenkanzlei Berliner Stelle to the Kirchenleitungen der Gliedkirchen der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland and to the Herren Mitglieder des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, 6 December 1957, EKKW C/1041.

The churches in East and West were institutionally united until 1969, when the East German churches split off to form their own union. See Benjamin Carl Pearson, "Faith and Democracy: Political Transformations at the German Protestant *Kirchentag*, 1949-1969." PhD Diss. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2007.

[348] Copy of Kirchenkanzlei-Berliner Stelle, Abteilung Gräberfürsorge, letter regarding Gräberfürsorge, 4 August 1949, EZAB 2/2559.

[349] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge to alle Landesverbände, circular memorandum 15/58, 26 August 1958, VDK A. 10-54.

Germans even tried to arrange to travel to the West (before the Wall was complete in 1963), with the help of the VDK, to view their own family members' gravesites in person.[350] The fact that some East Germans took advantage of these avenues to articulate a different collective memory of the war, though dangerous or perhaps illegal "social action," testifies to a subset of the population's non-acceptance of the antifascist memory of the war, in favor of a more inclusive interpretation.

What these alternate memories contained, as far as narratives or interpretive emphases, is difficult to know. A few sources indicate concern for "not just soldiers," but "all victims" of the war,[351] while others mention caring for Jewish cemeteries, too,[352] but these are exceptional. Motivations to preserve an alternative to the socialist-inspired OdF collective memory could have ranged from Nazi apologists, to older conservative nationalists, to even politically active moderates from the center-right, the center left and the non-communist left. Other reasons might conceivably have included Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. At the very least, resistance to or non-compliance with the SED's propaganda was a result of some degree of anti-communist sentiment, itself a product both of Germans' different experiences with the war and their choices about which of those experiences to preserve for future generations to remember.

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[350] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, to alle Landesverbände (Verteiler I), circular memorandum Nr. 7, 21 June 1957. Rundschreiben Nr. 7, VDK A.10-53. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, circular memorandum Nr. 10/53, 12 March 1953, VDK A.10-49. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge to alle Landesverbände, circular memorandum Nr. 26/54, 23 August 1954, VDK A.10-50.

[351] Untitled draft regarding Kriegsopfergräberfürosrge 1951, dated 7 July, 1950, forwarded as attachment to the letter from the Kirchenkanzlei, Berliner Stelle, Abteilung Gräberfürsorge to the Kirchenkanzlei, Hannover, letter, 7 July 1950, EZAB 2/2559.

[352] Evangelische Kirchenleitung Berlin-Brandenburg to the Herren Vorsitzenden der Gemeindekirchenräte von Berlin und Brandenburg, memorandum, 21 June 1950, EZAB 2/2559.

*Affirming war and death*

Besides consciousness of a wider set of victims and a more complex history of the Second World War than the Communist leadership acknowledged, East Germans had ample other reasons to dissent from the language of "victims of fascism." By the mid-1950s, East Germany was rearming, in response to what the SED viewed as West Germany's provocative creation of the *Bundeswehr*, and, unlike the FRG, GDR citizens did not have the right to conscientiously object to military conscription.[353] Indeed, the new military obligation to prepare to fight West Germany's "fascist" resurgence was coupled with a more emphatic discourse of national service surrounding the May 8 holiday in East Germany. Here, the SED echoed much of the rhetoric of the OdF memorial day, proclaiming May 8, 1954 as the celebration of "liberation" from the Nazis, thanks to the Red Army.[354] Going so far as to offer medals to leading citizens for "patriotic service,"[355] the call to national service in the present and (expected) future fight against fascism meant that public mourning and collective memory of the war and the dead in the GDR echoed elites' larger concerns about the the possibility of war and the need to prepare for war.

This fear of war implicit in the GDR's official May 8 and OdF memorial celebrations was multidimensional, reflecting the Communist Party elites' need to harness a useable past to

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[353] Antrag auf Zulassung des Bundes der Kriegsdienstverweigerer in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, item 6 from proceedings of the Politbüro meeting, Protokoll Nr. 13/55 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 8. März 1955, no author, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 412.

The new East German National People's Army was in fact recruited from those members of the East German People's Police who were considered more loyal and trustworthy. That is, before the army's existence, East Germans had already been living under the guard of a paramilitary police force. Konrad Jarasuch, *After Hilter*, 40.

[354] Staatliche Verwaltung, Berlin, submission to the Politbüro for consideration regarding the May 8 „Day of Liberation" celebration, dated 24 April 1954, Protokoll Nr. 2/54 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 27. April 1954, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 346.

[355] Ibid.

enhance their position in the present. The 1955 OdF memorial day argued that Auschwitz and Hiroshima together symbolized the "two dangers which threaten[ed] the world," but which now arose from "the resurrection of German militarism and the NATO-preparations for an atomic war,"[356] a direct reference to West German rearmament and the efforts to ally with NATO. The response of invoking the "German problem" as part of the Cold War meant that public mourning ceremonies in the GDR gave the USSR and its military dead an enhanced role. According to the SED's preparation for the 1955 May 8 celebration, "[a]fter the liberation of Germany by the Soviet Army, the historic challenge stood before the German people, to eradicate the basic condition of fascism and militarism" and to "hinder that our people ever again be led into a war of aggression."[357] Moving closer to the USSR over the issue of rearmament naturally meant moving the East German people closer to the USSR and further away from the US and West Germany.[358] That is, the official collective memory of the Second World War for East Germans, which promised in 1955 to have "wreath-layings and celebratory programs honoring the fighters of the Soviet Army,"[359] held little that could have felt representative to most families who lost loved ones during the war. For regular East Germans who had seen the war through Wehrmacht retreats and Allied aerial bombing, the experience of having served the Nazi regime,

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[356] „Auschwitz mahnt! Zum Internationalen Befreiungstag/ Von Edward Kowalski, Warschau, Mitglied des Internationalen Verbindungskomitees der Widertandsbewegung." *Neues Deutschland. Zentralorgan der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, 11 September, 1955. Ausgabe A.

[357] Vorbereitung und Durchführung des 10. Jahresages der Befreiung des deutschen Volkes von Hitlerfaschismus durch die ruhmreiche Sowjetarmee am 8. Mai 1955, submission to the Politbüro for consideration as part of item 9 on the meeting agenda for 29 March, 1955, Protokoll Nr. 16/55 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 29. März 1955, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 417.

[358] Ibid.

[359] Ibid.

however problematic, and suffering because of it, were not reflected in the triumphant OdF or May 8 celebrations.

The anti-fascist tradition seems to have become a celebration in *affirmation* of war on the part of the GDR elites, positioning itself as an almost equal opposite to *Volkstrauertag* in West Germany. Yet, for both holidays, the war was the point of public mourning, not the Nazi dictatorship's crimes (at least not completely). Because the SED privileged the suffering and victimization of political opponents to the Nazis, the larger program of racial persecution against Jews in Germany (and, it seems, against ethnic Slavs, Roma and Sinti in Germany in in Eastern Europe) was not a part of publicly remembering the Second World War. In the framework of Marxian analysis, fascism was dangerous because it inevitably led to wars over resources, following from the conviction fascism was the most highly developed form of monopoly capitalism. What is interesting is that, far from denouncing all war as bad, the SED denounced *only fascist-instigated wars as bad*, leaving wars fought by anti-fascist forces in resistance to be highly praised.

This selective enthusiasm towards war and encouragement to fight (albeit only to fight against fascism) at public mourning events in the GDR corresponded with a larger set of developments establishing a Socialist military institution with some sort of historic link to a decidedly non-Socialist German past. In September 1956, shortly after that year's OdF memorial celebration, the Politbüro of the SED met to consider, among other business, the creation of a "National People's Army Day."[360] The NVA, the East German military, was actually a successor and augmentation of the state's paramilitary police force, the *Kasernierte*

[360] Untitled submission to the Politbüro regarding the National Volksarmee Day for consideration as part of item 18 on the meeting agenda for 25 September 1956, Protokoll Nr. 46/56 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 25. September 1956, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 520.

*Volkspolizei*, and was meant as an answer to the Federal Republic's new *Bundeswehr*, labeled by East Berlin as the latest in a long line of fascist, authoritarian, anti-democratic abuses of power in German history.[361] Thus in 1955-1956, at the moment when the *Spätheimkehrer* returned from prolonged captivity at the hand of the "heroic" Red Army, East Germans were encouraged to both herald these sacrifices by resistance fighters, the heroic Red Army and even the "excellent role of the National Committee for a Free Germany in the struggle against the Nazi regime and for the conclusion of the criminal Hitlerwar"[362] as lessons to be learned to guard against a return of fascism. Simultaneously, these East Germans were told to understand the creation of a new military apparatus, in which their sons had no choice but to participate, as the application of these lessons that the antifascist memory of the Second World War prescribed.

However much SED leaders had to stretch history and the public's memory to secure legitimacy and acceptance of this new military concentration, these documents do not indicate the public's response. It is striking, however, that GDR leaders not only tried to legitimate the NVA via antifascist resistance and allegiances with the USSR, but also by selectively embracing the Wehrmacht veterans themselves. In 1957, the *Politbüro* discussed the creation of a

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[361] Strangely enough, the *Politbüro* in 1956 was having trouble choosing the date for this new day of celebration for their socialist, anti-fascist armed forces. One idea was to use January 18, "because on January 18 in the *Volkskammer* the Law over the creation of the National People's Army and the formation of the Ministry for National Defense was passed." The other option on the table was March 1, because on that day "the Ministry for National Defense and the Organizing of Military Districts were formed." Ironically, and left unspoken in the *Politbüro* discussion, was the fact that January 18 was the date of Frederick William I's coronation as King of Prussia, while early March was the beginning of the Lenten season in the Christian churches, which it will be recalled is when *Volkstrauertag* had long been celebrated in the 1930s, eventually being fixed as *Heldengedenktag* on March 15 by the Nazis. Untitled submission to the Politbüro regarding the National Volksarmee Day for consideration as part of item 18 on the meeting agenda for 25 September 1956, Protokoll Nr. 46/56 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 25. September 1956, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 520.

[362] Untitled submission to the Politbüro from Georg Spielmann dated 15 September 1956 regarding a public presentation about the National Committee for a Free Germany, for consideration as part of item 14 on the Politbüto's meeting agenda for 9 October 1956, Protokoll Nr. 48/56 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am 9. Oktober 1956, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 522 .

"Working Group of Former Officers of the Second World War," a veterans' organization for Wehrmacht officers, whose purpose would be the "[s]ystematic ideological influencing of former officers and soldiers in West Germany, as well as the officers and soldiers of the Bundeswehr" through professional contacts, political publications and even historical work to undermine West German support for the Bundeswehr and the "clean Wehrmacht myth."[363] What is striking is the SED's decision to depend on officers, long considered by the German political left to be the most reactionary and anti-democratic elements in the history of the German army, who repeatedly had resisted political democratization or even liberalization in preference for loyalty and obedience to the status quo and the monarch. This came at the time when many of the leading generals of the Wehrmacht were busy writing and publishing their memoirs, hoping to preserve the image of an "honorable" and unblemished record of service for the army from the taint of Nazi criminality. This argument, of "guilty senior Nazis" versus "innocent bystanders" in the military *was exactly the argument that the SED had worked to disprove,* via the logic of the OdF and Antifascist fighters! Only now, when it appeared to serve policy needs of the present, did they allow slightly more nuance in the official collective memory of the war.

The shared history between the GDR and the FRG and the shared challenge of remembering that history without repeating it becomes more visible via public mourning ceremonies and other tangible manifestations of collective memory. That is not to suggest that either state got their version unimpeachably correct, or much less that censorship and surveillance in the GDR was somehow justified in the pursuit of a more correct body of

[363] Untitled submission to the Politbüro regarding an Organization for Former Officers, for consideration as part of item 10 on the Politbüto's meeting agenda for 30 July 1957, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 576. Supporting documents titled Richtlinien über die Ziele und Aufgaben der ‚Arbeitsgemeinschaft ehemaliger Offiziere des 2. Weltkrieges, for consideration as part of item 10 on the Politbüto's meeting agenda for 30 July 1957, BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 576.

knowledge. Yet both Germanys sought to reach back into time, latching their post-fascist militaries to the Prussian Reformers of the early 19th century and later, with East Berlin resurrecting the statues of von Blücher, Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Yorck, only "altering [the] inscription," so that "the Prussian eagle [would] be removed."[364] Similarly, the GDR began to use the *Neue Wache* memorial in East Berlin as a war monument once more, this time commemorating both victims of war and also the (antifascist) victims of dictatorship,[365]which mirrored the slow process of *Volkstrauertag* urging West Germans to think of more than simply soldiers when they thought about the "war dead."

Probably the most striking evidence of the dual states' competition to "master their past" in a way that served their then-present needs is the "*Totenehrung*" read at the 1959 OdF memorial service. Here, the SED recited its catechism of antifascist belief, organizing "the dead" under the categories of first "the many millions of humans out of almost all European nations, who became victims of the Hitler-fascism and the criminal war it unleashed." Secondly, the SED called attention to the "eleven million men, women, and children" who suffered "on account of their world view, on account of their country of origin, on account of their beliefs, on account of their ethnicity." Next came the "comrades and fellow fighters…who…fought against fascism and militarism," and "sacrific[ed] their lives" in the process.[366] In short, the more selective, less historically-grounded East German memorial tradition organized the hierarchy of

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[364] Vertrauliche Verschlusssache from Beschlüsse. Tgb.-Nr. 56/69, Politbüro resolution regarding the re-erecting of statues of generals from the Anti-napoleonic Wars, dated 15 December 1959, Protokoll Nr. 56/59. Sitzung am 15. Dezember 1959, BA-DDR DY 30/4624.

[365] Einrichtung der 'Neuen Wache/ - Unter den Linden – als Mahnmal der Opfer des Faschismus und Militarismus, submission for consideration in support of item 7 on the Politbüro's meeting agenda for 15 December 1959, Protokoll Nr. 56/59. Sitzung am 15. Dezember 1959, BA-DDR DY 30/J IV 2/2A/731. On the issue of Neue Wache, see also Gilad Margali, *Guilt and Suffering.*

[366] Totenehrung from the 1959 OdF ceremony, no author, no date, BA-DDR DY 57-766.

victims from international, to civilian Germans, to combatants and those who took up armed resistance, whereas the West German *Volkstrauertag* did the opposite: listing German soldiers first, then civilian Germans, then non-Germans last. In both cases, however, the shared conclusion was that another war would break out and that it would be a tragedy. What set official mourning in the GDR apart was the solution to have enough East Germans in uniform to anticipate the threat and thus be victorious, whereas the West German solution seems to have been to avoid war via appeals for peace.

*Resistance or Remembrance: publicly mourning "as often as possible"*

Even if all East Germans agreed with the SED that another war would only bring more casualties and suffering, those individuals who were working underground in the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* appear to have increased the publicly-visible profile of their work promoting an alternative collective memory of the Second World War. Whereas the SED's official acts of memory and other changes to policy and ceremonies tended to heighten the emphasis on the military, with the goal of bolstering contemporary opinion in support of it, the *Abteilung*'s cemetery restoration practices and community-level remembrance ceremonies appear to have underlined the conclusion that war is not glorious and necessary, only deadly. To be sure, public opinion among a citizenry living under censorship is difficult to gauge at best. While there is proof of a discussion inside the EKD of holding *Volkstrauertag* in East Germany, the impulse seems to have originated in the West. Indeed, senior EKD officials in West Germany reasoned that "it could surely not prove politically provocative" to mark *Volkstrauertag* in the GDR "if the memory of the dead" were invoked "in prayer during a worship service."[367] This impulse to

[367] Der Bevollmächtigte des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland am Sitz der Bundesrepeublik Deutschland, Prälat D. Kunst to Herrn Bischof D. Dr. Dibelius, letter, 30 April 1955, EZAB 2/4417.

counteract the state-led mourning that dominated the wider public sphere with an alternative memory and set of rituals at the local and more intimate level of the individual congregation is a remarkable example of memory as "social action."[368]

These memorial activities reveal much about how 1950s East Germans perceived the extents and limits of the police state. Although *Volkstrauertag* does not appear to have been openly observed in the GDR, the *Abteilung* instead actively organized "prayer services [*Andachten*]" on the "great soldiers' cemetery in Halbe" where "20,000 fallen soldiers" were buried.[369] Pastor Ernst Teichmann, the head of this underground organization, wrote in 1957 that, since "Church President of Hesse [in West Germany], Dr. Martin Niemöller, first held Prayer Services at this cemetery during his lecture tour through the GDR," the Halbe congregation "now [had] also the possibility" of holding more such services, "with permission from the authorities."[370] Eager to exploit this opening, Teichmann added, "now we would also like very much to make use of that [permission] as often as possible," demonstrating that apparently this privilege was still available.[371] Here, these East Germans had a small chance to organize collective memory and public mourning on their own terms, and did so eagerly.

What is unclear from these records is the degree to which Halbe's experience was exceptional or not. It is conceivable that local government officials made allowances such as this to help keep the public compliant in other matters. It is also possible that such renegade public ceremonies were open secrets, unacknowledged but unchallenged by local political leaders who

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[368] Confino and Frietzsche, *The Work of Memory.*

[369] P. Ernst Teichmann to Herrn Bischof D. Krummacher, letter, 29 January 1957, EZAB 4/1133

[370] Ibid.

[371] Ibid.

were sympathetic or powerless to change their peers' opinions. Teichmann mentions many ceremonies as a way, "with God's help," to meet their Christian "obligation to those in sorrow."[372] He also described very public demonstrations of the *Abteilung*'s politically unorthodox activity, as his church had erected two plaques in its Halbe cemetery. The first plaque presented traditional Christian mourning language, that "Jesus Christ has taken power away from death" and believers should therefore "[n]ot be sorrowful" but rather trust that "he will also heal us."[373] The second plaque transformed these abstract rejoinders to faith and hope into concrete terms, declaring that the community remembered "[o]ur fallen soldiers," "the men, women, and children of our nation [*unseres Volkes*], who in the year 1945 at the end of the calamitous war… had to sacrifice their lives."[374] This is another example of East Germans imagining their own alternatives to the Party ideology, but one that is difficult to parse for its underlying political or social motivations. At the very least, this was an alternative to the Communist formula that was displayed in public, through the competition over public mourning.

Pastor Teichmann and his *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* appear to have enlisted the support of a number of communities across the GDR in preserving collective memories of the war and public mourning for the dead as alternatives to Communist Orthodoxy. This was indeed deliberate, sustained, "social action" by these East Germans to provide their families and future generations a more representative way to remember the Second World War. In 1957, Teichmann described "reburials [of dead bodies] out of the Feldmark" and from "other cemeteries" into that in Halbe, as well as efforts to secure "wrought iron hurricane lamps to be burned on Days of the

[372] Ibid.

[373] Ibid.

[374] Ibid.

Dead at the cemetery."[375] Further ceremonies were held with different guest speakers on Good Friday and *Totensonntag*, with visitors coming to Halbe at other times of the year.[376] In 1959 he wrote of other cemeteries at Bansin, "the crosses and headstones [were] finally erected," and at Neu-Petershain, "a wonderful celebration on *Totensonntag*" had been reported.[377] He had "been invited to the dedication of memorial stones" at Rüdensdorf bei Berlin, but could not attend.[378] Everything did not always go smoothly for Teichmann's organization, as he noted "long-lasting difficulties" with the cemetery groundskeeper at Treuenbrietzen, making the completion of that project quite delayed, "despite all efforts of the pastor" there.[379] Similarly, the Beelitzer cemetery was also behind schedule, with difficulties ordering the cross for the monument, which "must now be allocated from a *Volkseigene Betrieb*," resulting, he feared, in a much more expensive monument.[380] The ups and downs of this secretive, or at least unorthodox, publicly-visible mourning work Teichmann summarized in 1960, writing that "[t]he status of care of war victims' graves is very uneven, depending strongly on the initiative of the cemetery organization."[381] That is, organizing alternate collective memory displays and "social action" through public mourning practices was not something that all communities did as a matter of

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[375] Vertraulicher Bericht über einen Teil der Tätigkeit der Abteilung Gräberfürsorge im Jahre 1957, report, 13 January 1958, author unknown, EZAB 4/1133.

[376] Ibid.

[377] Vertraulicher Bericht über einen Teil der Tätigkeit der Abteilung Gräberfürsorge im Jahre 1958, 15 January 1959, letter, author unknown, EZAB 4/1133.

[378] Ibid.

[379] Ibid.

[380] Ibid.

[381] Vertraulicher Bericht über einen Teil der Tätigkeit der Abteilung Gräberfürsorge im Jahre 1959, 21 January 1960, letter, author unknown, EZAB 4/1133.

course. Rather, only those East Germans so motivated by their own experiences, their concern for the past and the future, or with sufficient fearlessness of the consequences undertook these projects.

There were other East Germans, probably far fewer than any congregation of Protestants or Catholics hoping to cling to older Christian mourning rituals, who enacted another separate publicly-visible mourning rituals to augment the official antifascist orthodoxy. In September 1957, the "Jewish Community of Greater Berlin" organized its own "religious ceremony… at the memorial at the Güterbahnhof in Grunewald," to coincide with the official anti-fascist celebrations that year.[382] Additionally, September 8 of that year, "just like every other year," the Jewish community would also hold a "memorial service at the memorial at the Jewish cemetery in Berlin-Weissensee," which would include a wreath-laying to remember these dead victims of Nazi racial violence, apart from the (fewer but more politically empowered) victims of political violence.[383] In the case of the remaining Jews living in East Germany, their status as victims of the Holocaust and their claims to recognition did not conflict necessarily with the SED's "victims of fascism" discourse. After all, part of the point of OdF and May 8 celebrations was to remind the world of the crimes committed by Hitler and the dangers posed by the threat of resurgent fascism. Yet, the extension of this warning into an aggressive military posturing, calling upon East Germans to ready themselves to fight the new "fascists" in West Germany and Western Europe, seems to have given little place in public mourning for Jews murdered in concentration camps. In this way, East German Jews apparently had the opportunity to mourn their dead, killed because of racial and religious reasons, under guise of anti-fascist ideological

[382] Willy Bendit, Secretary of the Jewish Community of Greater Berlin to Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der DDR, letter, 15 August 1957, BA-DDR DY 57-761.

[383] Ibid.

public ceremony, enacting some level of non-compliance or even resistance against the dictatorship while outwardly taking part in the regime's own organized commemorations.

In a larger sense, the question remains of whether or not these alternative forms of public mourning and non-compliant collective memory were known to the East German regime or not. At least in the case of the *Abteilung*, their attention to the bodies of dead German soldiers was at least compatible with the new emphasis on the military traditions and NVA on the part of the regime. How threatening or how dangerous these alternative "social actions" appeared to the regime on a day-to-day basis is not clear from these records. This uncertainty is partly a product of the incompleteness of these documents, which do not tell much of the actual contents of these graveyard prayer services. While the *Abteilung* believed themselves to be in some danger if they were to be caught, hence the secrecy, the Jewish community apparently did not share this concern. Yet given Jews' experience during the Third Reich, it is highly unlikely that fascist or German nationalist sentiments would be aired in their memorial services, whereas East German Protestants could easily have harbored ideological sympathies that made the SED uncomfortable. At the very least, East Germans on a very local level did engage in activity related to collective memory and public mourning that can safely be called non-communist, though any conclusions more precise must await further research.

*An uneven revision of tradition*

Public mourning practices in the GDR looked at times similar and also different from those in the Federal Republic. While the Communist Party framed official mourning in terms of antifascist resistance, past and future, underground- or alternative collective memories used different lenses, either religious or ethnic, to emphasize other, larger, groups by dead victims

than those that state wanted to celebrate. While it is unclear exactly how seditious such practices were in the eyes of the *Stasi*, it is reasonable to conclude that both the East German government and some highly engaged, yet non-communist, groups of East German society re-imagined "war" over the decade of the 1950s, moving further away from pre-1945 traditions. While the OdF ceremonies substituted for the heretofore tradition of commemorating heroic soldiers, it kept the uncritical praise of the dead, only now directing such applause at anti-fascist fighters. The GDR added soldiers back into the mix only selectively, when it became important to then-pressing national security considerations amid the Cold War and the confrontation with West Germany. Yet this dynamic did build toward a plurality of victims for public mourning rituals to consider (though this plurality still did not encompass all victims with historically grounded claims to having suffered during the war). At the same time, underground mourning activities changed the canon of official praise for "victims of fascism" to those dead soldiers who had died and their families who had survived them. While publicly-visible mourning at this local level still left open room for uncritical nationalist sentiments, this had to be kept to a minimum because of the surveillance of the state. Still, mourning in East Germany offered avenues of resistance, or at least non-compliance. In a larger sense, East Germans, at a national- and local level, took measures to alter the pre-1945 tradition of reverence for soldiers and the military, though they did so unevenly and largely incompletely, compared to public mourning practices in West Germany.

**Re-militarizing West German public mourning, 1960-1961**

While East German elites were enhancing the role of their military in the public mourning rituals related to the Second World War, conservative West German politicians sought

to make similar changes to *Volkstrauertag* in the early 1960s. These leaders in Bonn seem to have been responding both to the highly critical *Der Andere* in 1959 but also to the dynamics of louder and more boisterous military celebrations in the GDR. While some members of the *Volksbund* may have been sympathetic to this goal, the government's campaign to direct more control over *Volkstrauertag* revealed sharp divides in West Germany over how to interpret the Second World War, its dead and the lessons they implied for the future.

*Re-affirming military death*

The most recent national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, 1959's debut of *Der Andere*, had offered West German audiences a decidedly negative interpretation of all wars, past and future. Although this had been an "absolutely worthy and impressive" program, wrote one observer, there were "once more many young Germans" who were donning "the honorable cloak of the German soldier" and, therefore, *Volkstrauertag* had to be careful in presenting anti-war messages, lest this public mourning and collective memory prevent these young men from fulfilling "the duty of defending the home and hearth."[384] As it turned out, individual members of the general public were not the only ones with this reaction.

The following September (of 1960), when VDK leaders met to begin planning the 1960 national ceremony, one of the first considerations raised was that "the last program of the *Volksbund*" was seen as "disfavorable and burdensome" by "different heads of the cabinet." In fact, Chancellor Adenauer and Minister for Defense Franz-Josef Strauß this time wanted more input in planning *Volkstrauertag*, with the goal of preparing Germans to be ready for another war

[384] Dr. Ludwig Scheuer to the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorege, Büro des Beauftragten in Bonn, letter 19 November 1958, VDK A.100-89.

if necessary.[385] Harkening back to an affirmative history of military death, Adenauer wanted to place "a strengthened national emphasis" on the ceremony, "in consideration of the thought of sacrifice from the past, and in a possible future."[386] Thus, for all their disagreement over interpreting the Third Reich and how to continue the existence of a German state in the aftermath of war and genocide, both the SED and Adenauer's CDU government took for granted the necessity to prepare to fight a new hot war and both further agreed that convincing the public of this goal would require the mobilization of a different kind of collective memory of war.

Unlike the GDR's reliance on the Red Army and resistance fighters to legitimate a post-fascist military as a response to and defense against the tradition of German militarism, the Federal Republic's Minister of Defense, Franz-Josef Strauß, wanted to embrace old traditions from the Reichswehr and the Wehrmacht, allowing the Bundeswehr to play the role of only the latest incarnation of a military tradition apparently needing no reforms. Strauß had suggested "a larger representative participation by the Bundeswehr" in *Volkstrauertag* 1960, to include "the music corps of the Guards Regiment" in the ceremony" as well as "inspection of the ranks of the honor guard by the President, the Chancellor and the Defense Minister."[387] Lastly, he thought that "drum roll and *Deutschlandlied*" would be best suited for the "*Totenehrung*" portion of the program.[388] The conservative politicians' suggestions met with mixed responses by ceremony

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[385] Franz-Josef Strauß's preference for a more pro-miltiary remembrance is unsurprising, given his hopes of building up the Bundeswehr to an equal footing with the other Western Allies, complete with nuclear weapons. His later involvement in attempting to have the reporters involved in the Spiegel Affair tried for reason (following publication of a story highly critical of the Bundeswehr's operational preparedness in 1962) is also indicative of the attitude he brought to questions of mourning the war dead. Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 40, 119, 147, 160.

[386] Konstantin von Beguelin to the Bundesgeschäftsstelle, letter regarding the arrangement of Volkstrauertag, 21 September 1960, VDK A.10-70.

[387] Ibid.

[388] Ibid.

planners at the *Volksbund*. Although some ideas, they thought, would "connect meaningfully to the tradition of ceremonies between the Opera House and the *Neue Wache* in Berlin" (a reference to pre-1945 practice), other *Volksbund* representatives made clear that the "*Totenehrung*" part of the ceremony should not be allowed to resume the form of a Nazi (or old nationalist) spectacle, going so far as to forbid the use of torchlight processions.[389] In a remarkable reversal from 1952, it appears that, in 1960, the West German government pushed to preserve Nazi-era practices while the Volksbund advocated a clear separation of the post-fascist present from the past.

It is worth pointing out the dilemma both the VDK and CDU leaders faced in making *Volkstrauertag* a popular, representative, but politically safe public mourning event. No one seems to have seriously believed that resuming Nazi-era practices would be a good idea for the sake of maintaining a connection to the Third Reich. Yet those years would have been most familiar to families of the dead or wounded soldiers (not to mention civilian casualties, too). It was this public, rather than the political establishment in Bonn, whom Interior Minister Schröder had in mind when he suggested making *Volkstrauertag* a more popular event, one that "surviving families" would appreciate, instead of designing it as only an "affair for the suits [*Bratenröcke*]."[390] Clearly, these politicians saw the potential for public mourning of the past to impact political discussions about the present and appreciated the need to carefully consider that present-day audience's expectation.

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[389] Ibid.

[390] Copy of untitled memorandum regarding the Aktennotiz „Gestaltung des Volkstrauertages" from 21 September 1960, no author, dated 26 September 1960, VDK A.10-70.

Yet this very outcome, the dissolution of collective memory and public mourning for the dead into electioneering and angling for votes, was *precisely* the situation that the *Volksbund* feared. One senior VDK official wrote that straying from comforting families into advocating policy would be a "dangerous" move,[391] yet the organization felt it was in a difficult position, relying on federal funding and bound to work closely with the federal- and state level officials in carrying out its cemetery projects.[392] However, these elites were aware that cemeteries were not at the center of Adenauer's attention – it was the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony that was a highly visible, powerfully symbolic chance to make grandiose statements about the German past and its present efforts to deal with the past. This was the reason why "since 1954," "a member of the Federal government [had] carried out the *Totenehrung* at the lead ceremony in Bonn – and scarcely out of explicit request from the *Volksbund*."[393] Rather, this intense interest in mourning by the CDU politicians made sense only "in view of the at-the-time wide-ranging abusive disparagement (*Verfehmung*) of the soldier and the soldier's death."[394] Given the public ambivalence or even hostility towards rearmament and the creation of a new military to follow on the heels of the tarnished *Wehrmacht*, the conservative political leaders seem to have understood the need for some sort of re-shaping to polish West Germans' memory of war and their warriors.

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[391] 1. Bundesgeschäftsführer von Lutzau to the Geschäftsleitung of the VDK, letter regarding the „Gestaltung des Volkstrauertages," 27 September 1960, VDK A.10-70.

[392] President Trepte and Protokollführer Froneberg, Niederschrift über die Vorstandssitzung am 18. November 1960, transcript, 8 December 1960, VDK A.10-70.

[393] Ibid.

[394] Ibid.

The public esteem and high acclaim given to German soldiers in 1813, 1871, 1914 (and maybe even in 1941) seems to have been the Adenauer government's goal in *Volkstrauertag* 1960. The public's skepticism about a new war, coupled with the growing opinion that a serious understanding of the Second World War could not be separated from an explanation of the Nazi dictatorship, were countered by the Federal government's efforts at "Participation and Collaboration," to "identify itself" with the *Volkstrauertag* ceremony and give the private organization's program an even greater imprimatur of officialdom.[395] While the *Volksbund* had encountered opposition and skepticism from the government a few years earlier in the *Termindebatte* of 1951-1952, "through the build-up of the Bundeswehr and its integration into NATO" there came "a very strong interest in topics related to defense politics."[396] Present-day politics of 1960 related to the Cold War in general (and to the German question in particular) made "[w]hat had been a hot potato [*heißes Eisen*]" in 1945, that is, "the memory of the war dead and in particular the honoring of the fallen soldier," into a "more and more state-political" matter.[397] Thus the Federal government was interested in inserting itself into public mourning for a number of reasons, including positive public relations derived from the nation-wide broadcasts, the normal involvement of politicians in memorial ceremonies, and especially the once-taboo topic of memorializing dead soldiers, in a time when these same politicians were trying to shepherd into place the Bundeswehr, get into NATO, get Western acceptance and full sovereignty back, and rebuild the image of the German soldier in the process.

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[395] Ibid.

[396] Ibid.

[397] Ibid.

This plethora of political calculations behind Adenauer's efforts to shape *Volkstrauertag* made the *Volksbund*'s leaders increasingly nervous. Because this military-political significance makes the holiday so important, the Adenauer government had been, in the VDK's eyes, exercising a form of "preliminary censorship" over the content of the ceremony in recent years.[398] Despite the VDK's closeness to veterans' issues and its sympathy for the military dead before civilians, the *Volksbund*'s leadership viewed the instrumentalizing of *Volkstrauertag* for the purposes of gaining support for West German Rearmament as a "moment of danger."[399] This was because it created the problem of how to make the ceremony representative of "the entire people," when "the entire people" were not of one mind about the Nazi past. Instead, when it came to "examining our own history and past, there is in our people no single basis of opinion."[400] In order to program a *Volkstrauertag* ceremony that spoke to Germans' diverse and competing memories of the war in an even-handed manner, the VDK tried to exercise no (or at least, minimal) editorial control over the artists and speakers from year to year, "never having exercised a preliminary censorship" such as that which the government now sought. The result had been messages that varied from year to year but which avoided any attempt to create one central "truth" which is applicable to all people.[401]

Aware of the political divisions and consequent divided reception to *Volkstrauertag* during the 1920s and 1930s, the VDK saw the problem arising when the government moved to shape the message, making the act of remembering the dead into a politically-directed "social

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[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid.

[400] Ibid.

[401] Ibid.

action," which would alienate the segment of the population who did not support the party in power. "So arises the danger, that out of the *Volkstrauertag* would emerge a Holiday celebrating the State [*Staatsfeiertag*]," one whose meaning could change radically as soon as a new party came to power. That is, the VDK feared that no common set of values would be brought to bear to direct public mourning each year but rather a set of rules that could change with each new government, meaning that "the answer to the question of the meaning of *Volkstrauertag* given from us would only reach a portion of the population."[402] It should be pointed out that the VDK does not seem to have minded the ceremony changing some from year to year, as long as such pendulum swings from conservative to more progressive and back were organic, the results of the artists, speakers, and musicians' own choices and decisions that would (hopefully) resonate with the German people. The reality of a holiday that resonated with only part of the population but not others was a situation already at play in the GDR, with the VDK suffering exclusion because of it. A divided collective memory was the outcome no one in Kassel wanted.

*Naming the dead (and the killers?)*

Taking a step back from the debate over the place of the military in West German public mourning, it is apparent that the topic of war and German society's historical and future relationship to warfare and its soldiers were the chief animus behind discussions over *Volkstrauertag* in 1960-1961. Although the government and the VDK agreed to bring the Bundeswehr into the wreath-layings and other events surrounding *Volkstrauertag*, the new soldiers were not made part of the formal remembrance ceremony broadcast nationwide and

[402] Ibid.

attended by foreign dignitaries.[403] At the same time, the representatives from the VDK and from the Federal Minister of the Interior's office began creating a more formal *Totenehrung* to read out at each year's national ceremony. This register of the dead victims who were officially mourned had, then, to navigate the question of how much emphasis to put on the war itself versus the dictatorship behind it. That is, the VDK realized that mourning the dead was only part of what they were doing on *Volkstrauertag*.

At the same time they named the dead, the *Volksbund* were also proposing to West Germans (and the world) how to remember the Nazi regime, its crimes committed before and during the war, and how this part of German history, beyond the Second World War, should be explained to future generations. This question was perhaps most challenging for the generation who had grown up and been socialized in the Third Reich, since it involved confronting the absence of widespread opposition to the regime and even "passive complicity (or at least, "moral indifference") to the plight of German Jews and other minorities who were targets of Nazi racist policies even before 1939. In the end, the *Totenehrung* hammered out in 1961 never really did explain these thorny questions, only making passing mention of the Concentration Camp dead, preferring to emphasize the nature of modern warfare and its deadly consequences beyond the formal battlefield.

Yet this move to clarify the exact memory and scope of *Volkstrauertag* was not a response only to the pressure from the government. Instead, the *Volksbund* was responding to pressure from the conservative end of their audience (those elderly Germans who thought that the holiday always was, and always should be, dedicated to the battlefield dead) on one hand and

[403] Dr. Walter, Kurzes Gedächtnisprotokoll über die Besprechung ‚Volkstrauertag' im Bundesministerium des Inner am 21. November 1960 – 17-18,45 Uhr, memorandum, 30 November 1960, VDK A.10-70.

the more critical progressive end of their audience (those who demanded an outright publicity campaign dedicated to honoring and memorializing murdered Jews) on the other.[404] In formulating their response, *Volksbund* officials declared that *Volkstrauertag* was meant, in the first instance, "like for instance Memorial Day among the Americans," that is, "a day of mourning for the losses of the German people."[405] Yet, perhaps unlike Memorial Day in the U.S., by 1960 the West German *Volkstrauertag* had moved beyond German soldiers and emphasized the "sacrifice" of the "fallen soldiers of *other* nations" (emphasis added), "which belonged to many different population groups."[406] Nonetheless, the *Volksbund* continued to cite *Volkstrauertag'*s purpose in inspiring "reconciliation" among former belligerents,[407] which suggests that remembering the war (but not the dictatorship) and warning that war (but not dictatorship) must be avoided in the future were the VDK's primary goal in public mourning. That is, explaining how, why and by whom the Second World War began were less important elements of programming *Volkstrauertag*.

Beyond the military experience, the *Volksbund* leadership was certainly conscious of the multi-sided civilian experience of the Second World War and understood that an honest, meaningful public mourning ceremony for the German people had to incorporate civilian victims, too. After all, the category of "Fallen" victims underwent "a considerable expansion in the Second World War," to explode the older, simpler boundaries around fallen soldiers.[408]

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[404] Untitled proposal submitted as Attachment 3 for the Niederschrift der Präsidiumssitzung vom 17.3.1961, regarding point 3(b) on the agenda, „For whom does Volkstrauertag apply?," no date, no author, VDK A.10-70.

[405] Ibid.

[406] Ibid.

[407] Ibid.

[408] Ibid.

Instead, now "women in Wehrmacht rear areas, Auxiliary Service Personnel in the Work Service and OT,[409] Police, German Red Cross Sisters, civilian aerial bombing victims and refugees, who met their death due to enemy actions or hunger and cold" all undeniably died because of the Second World War.[410] What is revealing about the VDK's near-perpetual focus on "war" but not the "dictatorship" is their reliance on the military designation "Fallen [*Gefallenen*]," and their efforts here to fit civilian victims into this category, even though "fallen" ordinarily implies a battlefield presence that is "standing" and combatting the enemy. This perhaps helps explain the VDK's only lukewarm interest, initially, in mentioning victims of Nazi crimes in *Volkstrauertag* at all. Apparently Nazi crimes were outside the war experience, according to the *Volksbund*'s logic.

The initial moves to include Nazism's victims in *Volkstrauertag* had been part of the conversation in 1951-1952, when the *Volksbund* had been on the defensive and was forced to reform its pre-1945 practices. According to the VDK, it was the Federal Government who, in 1953, had made the suggestion of including "also those" who were murdered out "of racial reasons and because of their political and religious convictions," whereupon the *Volksbund* "did not oppose…this idea."[411] The VDK's less-than-enthusiastic response to bringing in victims of Nazi dictatorship at that time had stemmed from a distinction they were contemplating, between "victims of immediate [*unmittelbar*] enemy actions," and victims "of mediated [*mittelbar*] circumstances of war."[412] The first group included, according to the VDK, soldiers "in the first

[409] Organization Todt, the compulsory labor battalions conscripted by the Wehrmacht to build defensive fortifications in Western Europe.

[410] Ibid.

[411] Ibid.

[412] Ibid.

place" but also aerial bombing victims, refugees and expellees, whereas the second category included victims who died of hunger, exposure, or who were driven to suicide.[413] Thus Concentration Camp victims seem to fit beneath the radar, as it were, with the VDK leaving open the possibility of expanding the categories for public mourning if more victims were suggested whose experience was in line with these categories. Yet they seemed much more concerned about how to reckon with those killed because of war than those murdered by the Nazi regime.

This very point, whether to understand and interpret the years 1939-1945 as part of the larger Third Reich or not, whether to understand "war dead" as only combat deaths or not, or how far to compromise on each of these questions, was not a problem which the *Volksbund* felt they could easily answer. In part, they felt the difficulty lay in generational differences by which 1960 West Germans understood the concept of war and war dead. Given that "those on one hand wanted only the soldiers" to be the center of *Volkstrauertag*, whereas "those on the other and [wanted to include] also those dead who died in flight," and "those in the third instance also the KZ-dead, etc.,"[414] VDK leaders concluded that they needed to work to change the West German public's attitudes, to reflect a consciousness of the Second World War's complex, multi-faceted and difficult-to-explain history, by which many different groups suffered some harm.[415] What was clear to VDK leaders was that the older, pre-1945 understanding of war dead, "those who in the war fell as victims, [was] no longer tenable."[416] Instead, however the exact discursive boundaries for *Volkstrauertag* were to be drawn, "[i]t must be made clear to the older members,

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[413] Ibid.

[414] President Trepte and Protokollführer Froneberg, Niederschrift über die Vorstandssitzung am 18. November 1960, transcript, 8 December 1960, VDK A.10-70.

[415] Ibid.

[416] Ibid.

with all due respect," that the civilian and military dead "can no longer be separated from one another" in any meaningful remembrance of the Second World War.[417] As great a change as they proposed to force on their members and supporters, the VDK felt that they should attempt these cultural changes via *Volkstrauertag* themselves, instead of leaving the job to politicians who might embrace some victims and not others, due to political whims.[418] Regardless, what had happened by 1960 was that the *Volksbund* leaders had concluded that remembrance and mourning for the war dead were not self-apparent or incontestable ideas. Rather, if mourning was a culturally-constructed process, depending on historical circumstances and individual choices, this practice was due for a change among West Germans. 1960 was a moment to reconsider how their society thought about and reacted to warfare and warriors.

The result of this long process of re-imaging what "war" and "death in war" really meant was the codification of the *Totenehrung* in March 1961. Actually, this statement came about both from the VDK's own internal discussions but also some external pressure from "considerations…on the side of the Federal Government" too.[419] The precise formula they arrived at was as follows:

> We remember
> The soldiers of both World Wars who fell, who succumbed to their wounds [*ihren Verwundungen erlegen*] and who died in POW camps,
> The men and women who were killed [*getöteten]* or died [*verstorbenen*] in the wake of the military at that time [*im Gefolge der damaligen Wehrmacht*],
> The men, women and children who perished [*umgekommenen*] due to combat operations [*durch Waffeneinwirkung*] on the home front [*Heimat*] or during flight.
>
> On our Nation's Day of Mourning for the Dead of every calamitous [*notvollen*] year of the ordeal [*Prüfung*], we remember but also all of those, who were victims [*Opfer*] of

[417] Ibid.

[418] Ibid.

[419] Untitled proposal submitted as Attachment 3 for the Niederschrift der Präsidiumssitzung vom 17.3.1961, regarding point 3(b) on the agenda, „For whom does Volkstrauertag apply?," no date, no author, VDK A.10-70.

> their political or religious conviction, or from whom life was taken [*das Leben genommen wurde*] on account of their racial group [*wegen ihrer rassischen Zugehörigkeit*].
>
> The German people's *Volkstrauertag* is the time, carried by the pressing hope [*heißen Hoffnung*] for reconciliation in our midst and in the entire world, finally our remembrance [*Gedenken*] to the war dead of all of the nations who took part in these wars.[420]

Critics might have pointed out that, by extending recognition to nearly everyone who had any connection to the war, *Volkstrauertag* gave special recognition to no one in particular (least of all those who were persecuted or victimized at German hands).[421] Yet the evidence does show that, however uncomfortable West Germans remained in critically discussing the Nazi regime in 1961, they *had* begun moving towards a reconsideration of war and the desirability of future wars and further military and civilian dead.

It should not be inferred that all of West Germany accepted this compromise and collective memory without question. However much these VDK elites in Kassel knew to tread carefully, they faced criticism from both sides – those in the public who felt *Volkstrauertag* did not go far enough in recognizing victims of historic, racial or other forms of discrimination and persecution on one hand, such as complaints lodged with the Defense Ministry over the need to reinstate the names of Jewish veterans from the First World War onto war monuments (the names had been removed by the Nazis).[422] On the other hand, traditionalists believed any moves to broaden *Volkstrauertag* and the official collective memory of the war betrayed the status and special honor historically reserved for soldiers, such as the controversy in a small town

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[420] Ibid. Dr. Walter, Kurzes Gedächtnisprotokoll über die Besprechung ‚Volkstrauertag' im Bundesministerium des Inner am 21. November 1960 – 17-18,45 Uhr, memorandum, 30 November 1960, VDK A.10-70.

[421] Gilad Margalit makes an argument along these lines in *Guilt and Suffering*.

[422] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Bundesgeschäftsstelle to alle Landesverbände, memorandum, 30 January 1961, VDK.A.10-101.

surrounding a "young Catholic vicar" who "vented…over the dead of the war, as if the death of soldiers were a meaningless sacrifice for the strive for power of National Socialism" and was promptly chased from the stage by an older VDK member.[423] Clearly, it would take time and much convincing to get older, more traditional Germans in agreement with the new *Volkstrauertag* but, at the same time, moving too fast or too far, in order to satisfy the critics looking for more acknowledgements of the dictatorship and its crimes, would only make those older traditionalists angrier.

The 1961 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony's keynote speech reveals this tension between recognizing wartime German suffering in hopes of a future where Europeans will have learned the costliness and undesirability of war, while at the same time somehow acknowledging crimes committed by Germans that added to the brutality about which Germans wanted to warn the world. In 1961, VDK President Walter Trepte, speaking at the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, tried to walk a very fine line insisting that, "No, we are today on *Volkstrauertag* neither ennobling war nor the soldier's death. But we seek the truth and find it in this gripping voice of humanity, which I read out as well: Immutable holding fast with comrades, deep longing for peace, but a self-evident readiness for the final deployment."[424] After outlining the military experience, Trepte proceeded to talk about the German civilian experience, calling attention to the "defenseless women, children and old men on the home front [who] died," as well as those who perished "amid showers of bombs or in flight [from] unmerciful persecutors." In third place (after soldiers and German women) came the Holocaust victims, "the terrible death

[423] Bezirksvorsitzende Hennig, untitled Aktennotiz from Herne, 18 November 1960, VDK A.100-24.

[424] Walter Trepte. Gräber mahnen: Wandelt euren Sinn! Gedenkrede des Präsidenten des Volkbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge bei der Feierstunde zum Volkstrauertag 1961 im Plenarsaal des Bundeshauses in Bonn, speech, VDK A.100-25.

upon the execution site and in the Concentration Camps, in the torture- and gas chambers," indeed "[t]he darkest page of German history," which was just as much a part of the Second World War as German soldiers' deaths. Anticipating that at least part of the audience would react negatively to this indictment, Trepte cautioned that Germans were obliged "to hear the truth" in this "solemn hour," and that "guilt must be called guilt, crimes must be called crimes, even when they relate to the German name."[425] While many in the audience could have overlooked the issue of guilt, "which allow[ed] the mourning to be more burdensome and more crippling,"[426] there was a general agreement that the experience of total war could not be repeated a third time. On *Volkstrauertag*, mourning Germans heard calls "to give the hand of cooperation, of Reconciliation, and of peace to the other."[427] This peace could not be simply understood as an absence of war, but was really "a constant building of a new order of coexistence among people."[428] A newfound German devotion to peace appears to have been the only way to reconcile this tension between recognizing and expressing admiration for soldiers' resoluteness on the one hand while also recognizing and attesting to the brutality and horror of war for soldiers and civilians alike on the other.

*A tradition of mourning, rearmed?*

Set against the context of the Cold War and West Germany's efforts to integrate politically and militarily into Western Europe, it becomes clear that rearmament and military considerations informed decisions about public mourning, too. The annual *Volkstrauertag*

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[425] Ibid.

[426] Ibid.

[427] Ibid.

[428] Ibid.

ceremony in Bonn offered an opportunity to remind audiences about the past and explain to newer generations that past's lessons for the present and for the future. For this very reason, the conservative West German government reversed its earlier stance in favor of a less-militarized *Volkstrauertag* from early 1950s, towards a greater emphasis on veterans and the military in German society by the early 1960s. The focus of public mourning in West Germany was thus still the Second World War and the impact of warfare (and not the place of the Nazi dictatorship) on German history but, just as the conservative government tried to steer this critical interpretive emphasis on war away from pacifist sentiments, enough of a mass of critical opinion had bubbled up among *Volkstrauertag* critics to begin demanding more acknowledgement of the fascist roots of the Second World War and the crimes and excesses that accompanied it. For both supporters of a more traditional, militarized, *Volkstrauertag* and those who demanded a larger understanding of war and its consequences, fear about West Germany's future were among the chief considerations.

**Conclusion: Remembrance of the past as reaction to the present**

From this survey of *Volkstrauertag's* content across the 1950s, as well as the decisions involved in programming that content, it becomes clear that West German public mourning was focused on explaining Second World War and remembering the dead resulting from it, while minimizing whatever similar explanations of the Nazi regime and its victims that might be needed fill in the blanks. As a consequence of the the decision to devote attention to the war, with an eye to convincing future generations that war must be strenuously avoided, *Volkstrauertag*'s planners began a project in the mid-1950s to re-design the ceremony and frame war as an explicitly negative, sorrowful, dreadful affair, minimizing whatever discursive space

might have remained for uncritically praising soldiers' deaths as heroic and selfless acts for the greater good (which had been the older, pre-1945 custom). Thus *Volkstrauertag* operated to not only keep alive memories of the dead soldiers (and some German civilian victims) of the Second World War but was also directed at influencing then-present-day minds about warfare.

The picture that emerges from East German public mourning is more complex. At the level of state-sanctioned-public mourning, the OdF and May 8 celebrations similarly treated war as a negative experience but slowly across the 1950s moved away from this interpretation. Instead of a manifestation of fascism that was uniformly undesirable, war and soldiers became seen as positive elements, reinforcing an antifascist defense policy stance that thought the best defense was to be aggressively poised and ready for a war with the West. Thus remembering war changed over time, from singling out the experience of resistance fighters and political prisoners, to also praising those uniformed soldiers who fought against the Nazis, too. At the same time, however, the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* reacted against the state's focus on antifascist fighters and eventually military service, moving to center mourning on the sadness of death. While the *Abteilung*'s explanation for the Second World War and the Third Reich likely differed from that offered by the official SED-led public mourning events, the exact contours of this counternarrative for East Germans is not clear. In each case, the SED-led official mourning and the unofficial alternative seem less drastic departures from older rituals mourning military dead, yet were heavily informed and motivated by Cold War concerns of the present.

These fears of a new World War also animated West German leaders' attempts to revise *Volkstrauertag* toward a holiday embracing the military and priming the population to produce a new generation of combat-scarred veterans. Yet these conservative leaders and the (somewhat more moderate) *Volksbund* officials agreed on the primacy of the war, and not the dictatorship,

in German public mourning. That is, West Germany's efforts to distance itself from any attempt to explain National Socialism and instead explain only the war as a terrible ordeal not to be repeated reveals one assured conclusion: that West Germans believed that no one who had lived through the Third Reich would ever let it be repeated, because they had seen how bad fascism was. That is, If West Germans had felt the slightest potential of sliding back into fascism (like they did for sliding back into war), this would have required mobilizing public mourning and collective memory to call for avoidance of future fascism (along the lines of avoiding future war). It precisely this confidence in West Germany's imperviousness to fascism that began to erode at the beginning of the 1960s, which has been voluminously documented by historians of the New Left and the West German student movement. Thus the turn towards a more serious and self-critical interrogation of the Nazi past had its roots in an earlier, less controversial, process of reconceptualizing warfare and death.

## CHAPTER FOUR: "Quite far removed from worshipping heroes?" Public Mourning in East Germany, 1959-1972

On September 1, 1959, a Protestant congregation in the small East German community of Groß Gievitz erected a monument to "all of the Fallen and Missing of the Last War 1939-45 from this community."[429] East Germans publicly commemorating casualties of the Second World War on the twentieth anniversary of its outbreak may be unsurprising but what is perhaps more striking about this episode is the inclusion of the names of the dead soldiers and the missing, all underneath a quotation of 1 John 5:4, "[o]ur faith is the victory which has overcome the world."[430] Concepts of "victory" and "overcoming" adversity are not uncommon in Christian teaching, especially in connection with mourning the dead. Yet at the same time, these phrases could reasonably be construed as code for rejecting the prevailing values that the SED dictatorship had tried to instill in matters or remembrance and mourning. Thus it is clear that, while the officially atheist regime preferred to center collective memory of the war on the Communist victims of Nazis political persecution, certain segments of the (largely still Protestant) East German population had other ideas about mourning and memory.[431]

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[429] Pastor Werner Bollmann to the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR, Abteilung Gräberfürsorge, June 14, 1972, EZAB 101/226.

[430] Ibid. This is my translation from German of the biblical text as quoted by the pastor.

[431] Mary Fulbrook estimates that at least 90% of East Germans in 1945 were registered as Christians, with the majority being Protestant. Mary Fulbrook, *The Peope's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, 2005), 264. Like Fulbrook, I prefer to use the English adjective "Protestant" instead of "Evangelical" to refer to the same "Evangelisch" confession, because "evangelical" has assumed a fundamentalist meaning in the United States not shared by the German equivalent.

This example of East Germans maintaining older (here Christian) cultural practices under a Communist dictatorship that promised to reform the historic problems with German society may be only somewhat surprising. After all, East Germans would eventually re-invigorate their public sphere and sap the regime's last pretenses of legitimacy on their own, largely using networks outside of the regime's direct concern, or at least its ability to directly control. Mourning the war dead in the 1960s and early 1970s was a far cry from demanding democratic reform in 1989, yet the problems of public mourning do form one part of the gap between the SED's rhetoric and its actual practices. In this case, East Germans had been largely told to mourn and remember the sacrifices of Communist fighters, Red Army soldiers, but not allowed to express grief or acclaim for the deaths of the Wehrmacht soldiers who came from nearly every family and who died serving the Nazi regime. That is, the Communist government was enforcing censorship over peoples' individual emotions and ideas, making it understandable that certain members of the public refused accept the party's instruction.

At the same time that East Germans were being taught to not value the military service of their dead fathers, brothers and sons before 1945, the SED was also trying to convince these same families that military service in the new National People's Army *was* a laudable and beneficial thing for society. Thus while the regime seemed to be rejecting any suggestion that old dead soldiers' contributed honorable or positive benefits to their society, the regime also indicated the new Socialist soldiers did fulfill the nation's needs. Furthermore, the imperative to prepare for the war that the SED suggested was being planned by the West Germans made it more important for the SED to encourage more young men to enlist. All the while, this encouragement carried the implicit argument that war (or at least war in defense of Socialism) was a worthwhile and desirable endeavor. Yet this suggestion likely flew in the face of many if

not most East Germans' personal encounter with the Second World War, in final stages of which brought the Red Army to their doorsteps.

Public mourning for the war dead was therefore a complicated issue, for Germans in both West and East. While West Germans were famously slow to direct their attention to Nazi crimes and aggression, provoking criticism from progressive and anti-authoritarian audiences in the 1960s, East German leaders showed a similar hesitance to acknowledge the entire history of the war, also leaving their audiences not completely satisfied. This chapter will examine both changes in the official state-led public mourning apparatus across the 1960s and sources documenting manifestations of "alternative" collective memories of the Second World War among private East Germans. Four questions will guide this inquiry: *Firstly*, what were the central concerns of official public mourning in the GDR across the 1960s? *Secondly*, in what ways did official public mourning reflect the wider political, military and cultural contexts of the German Democratic Republic? *Thirdly*, what possibilities for publicly-visible mourning still existed in the 1960s for East Germans outside of the Communist-led tradition? *Fourthly*, in what ways could East Germans who were unsatisfied with official public mourning use their alternative (non-Communist) traditions to challenge the regime?

**A past to explain the present: official public mourning in the GDR**

The steadfast commitment to antifascist resistance that had been largely missing among Germans before 1945 remained the centerpiece of the *Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus* across the 1960s. As if to convince East Germans that their political leaders were guiding them towards their destiny, the East German press declared that the 1961 OdF ceremony was "an impressive confession of the legacy of the anti-fascist resistance fighters, who gave their lives for

the stamping out of fascism and militarism in all of Germany."[432] Indeed, the deaths of Communists in resistance against the Nazis was part of the GDR's founding myth, its source of political legitimacy, as the SED declared that "we [East Germans] have fulfilled the legacy of the antifascist resistance fighters" in persevering to create a Socialist Germany.[433] The issue of grief that East German families might have over their own dead Wehrmacht soldiers and dead civilian bombing victims, who by an large had *not* died to achieve this goal, was largely ignored (to say nothing of families grieving victims of Nazi racial persecution).

*"True patriots" and "glorious deeds"*

Indeed, the "legacy" of a Socialist Germany for which the resistance fighters had died was still, in 1961, only incompletely realized, reaching only half of Germany. Moreover, the benefits and promise of this new, purportedly more enlightened, more peaceful and more free Germany coexisted uneasily alongside the anguish of families and friends who had suddenly been walled apart from all contact with the West in exchange for these benefits. September 1961 was a scarcely one month after the Berlin Wall had been erected, finalizing the division of the two Germanys that had begun in 1945 and, while the GDR officially called for "peaceful re-unification" of West and East, it was understood in East Berlin that Bonn would have to lay down its arms and embrace "Real Existing Socialism" in order to heal the wounds. Considered

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[432] „150 000 Berliner im Gedenken an die opfer des Faschismus: Nieder mit dem Militarismus/ Her mit dem Friedensvertrag! Grosskundgebung mit Hermann Matern auf dem August-Bebel-Platz/Mächtige Demonstration der internationalen Kampfgemeinschaft zur Sicherung des Friedens in Europa." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland*. Berlin, September 11, 1961.

[433] „Mit Hingabe und Leidenschaft. Aus der Rede von Hermann Matern." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland*. Berlin, September 11, 1961.

The SED insisted that that East Germany represented the antifascist "better" Germany who had ceaselessly resisted the Nazis and now worked to overcome lingering fascism in West Germany. See Herf, *Divided Memory*, Chapter 2. Gilad Margalit makes a similar argument in *Guilt, Suffering and Remembrance*, 87-89.

from the standpoint of public mourning, East Germans who had lost relatives in the service of the Wehrmacht might counter (not entirely incorrectly) that, for all its faults, at least the Wehrmacht had ostensibly fought to preserve a whole Germany (which of course was also to be territorially enlarged and racially "purified"). Even if one grants that the division of Germany did not rank among the antifascist fighters' goals, Stalin and his Red Army had, at least in part, ensured that no unification would take place with the Western Zones (or Western Berlin). Thus, for East Germans on the street, mourning dead Communist fighters and resistance leaders in 1961 implicitly involved praising or at least approving the post-war division of Germany.

As if to address lingering unreformed German nationalist sentiments among Wehrmacht families, in 1967 the SED-controlled press printed a number of heroic biographies of "true patriots and sons of their nation" in connection with the OdF celebrations. The message here was clear: the "glorious deeds" of these German antifascists, as well as those of "the great world-changing power," the Soviet Union, had roundly defeated the Nazis in 1945.[434] In winning their great battle against fascism, these heroic resistance fighters had worked to undo the longer tradition of unquestioned loyalty to the king and the military in German history. German communists who had "participated in the 1917 Sailors' Uprising" or "fought in the 1929 Red Army of the Ruhr against Kapp and Lüttwitz," were in turn "forced to don the hated Wehrmacht uniform" and serve on the Eastern Front but had been undeterred in selflessly working to undermine the German war effort, passing information to the Soviets or organizing underground resistance.[435] Such actions to rescue Germany undertaken by both soldiers and civilians

[434] „Sie gaben das Leben für ihre Freunde. Toten deutscher antifaschistischer Kämpfer im zweiten Weltkrieg als treue Verbündete der Sowjetunion." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland*. Berlin, September 10, 1967.

[435] Ibid.

sympathetic to the Socialist cause had cost them their lives in Buchenwald, Flossenburg, Sachsenhausen, or even summary executions at the front, all fates which were presented here by the official propaganda as acts of sacrifice and patriotism, far beyond any claims available to Wehrmacht survivors whose presence on the battlefield had only prolonged the dictatorship.

This attention to the deaths of German Communists and to the fact that they (the Communists) had undertaken actions in opposition to the goals of the German Wehrmacht was no accident. While West Germans publicly and privately sought acceptable ways to mourn and remember their Wehrmacht dead positively, the East German regime used the issue of mourning to remind East German citizens that anyone who did *not* resist the Nazis was in fact a failure. Even without considering the problem of passive complicity versus indifference on the part of Third Reich Germans, this official collective memory sponsored by the SED in the 1960s was likely not a story that reassured or comforted most East Germans, whose fathers and brothers had largely fought for the Nazis.

*Memory as moral authority*

Beyond concentrating on the largely unrepresentative experience of past anti-fascist heroes, the OdF memorial ceremonies across the 1960s increasingly responded to contemporary German tensions of the Cold War. Reporting on the 1965 OdF memorial ceremonies, East German press described mass crowds meeting in East Berlin, determined "to do all they could to preserve peace" but apparently not ready to consider armed conflict as a means of doing so.[436] Besides the East German leadership, representatives from communist-, antifascist-, and other

[436] „Grösste Berliner Kundgebung zum OdF-Tag seit 1945. Den Frieden sichern/Keine Atomwaffen für Revanchisten." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland*. Berlin, September 13, 1965.

leftist organizations in France, the US, Great Britain and the Soviet Union were present in 1965, too, giving the memorial day event an air of international unity around the cause of preventing the return of fascism and war in Europe. What was not said but can be easily implied from the press reportage, was the apparent failure of the Western Allies to 'learn' the right 'lessons' from the victory they had shared with the USSR in 1945. Rather than pursuing peace and building a Socialist future without war, France, Great Britain, and the United States had all by 1965 been involved in one war or another to maintain European control over colonies (or former colonies) in the developing world. Thus remembering war, violence and death from the past was in many ways inseparable from the concerns of the 1960s present.

In many ways, the morally advantaged truth of ending fascism within an international collaborative effort was a valuable platform for the post-war GDR to claim authority and from which to deny Western countries the same. In the wake of wars in the Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia, East Germans could speak "honoring words in remembrance of the dead heroes of the anti-fascist resistance." This praise even extended to "those soldiers and officers of the Allied Powers of the Anti-Hitler Coalition who fell in the struggle for the liberation of Germany from fascism"[437] but did not, in this case, give way to the belligerent rhetoric of OdF speeches in past years, even if the ceremony criticized West Germany's open pursuit of nuclear weapons and the US's rapidly escalating war in Vietnam.[438] Instead, East German public mourning seemed to make a distinction between demanding peace and remembrance of the dead on one hand and promoting a new war in furtherance of the dead's mission on the other.[439] Thus

[437] Ibid.

[438] Ibid.

[439] Other press reports in connection with the OdF memorial day in 1965 are consistent with the preference for peace but not necessarily the promotion of war. See for example, "Warum ich hier lebe. Ein Schriftsteller auf der Wählervertreterkonferenz." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei*

criticism of German militarism of the past and outrage at nuclear proliferation in the present did *not necessarily* lead to a call to arms or hint of readiness to aggressively defend against the FRG and their nuclear-armed allies (though this link had been made often in 1950s). In fact, it was this sort of deliberative, nuanced and careful attitude toward initiating war that the East German regime presented to the world that the same regime claimed was missing from the West.

This is not to say that belligerent posturing and saber-rattling were absent from the East German official public mourning tradition. Rather, SED leaders demonstrated a flexibility in centering attention on their own narrative of communist suffering during the Third Reich while simultaneously restricting attention to the numerically larger groups of racial and ethnic victims of Nazi violence but also expanding the circle of Communist victims to include Red Army soldiers who fought fascism, too. In conjunction with the 1967 OdF memorial day, press reports announced that a delegation of "Soviet friends" were touring the GDR and were learning that "Lenin's legacy" was "in good hands" there.[440] Here the message clearly indicated that a proper remembrance and understanding of the Nazi years must necessarily lead to support of the USSR in its confrontation with the West. No mention was made, however, of the brutality that had characterized the fighting between the Red Army and the Wehrmacht only two decades earlier, leaving open the question of whether Wehrmacht families felt uncomfortable with the suggestion they forgive and forget the reasons and circumstances under which their missing loved ones died.

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*Deutschland*. Berlin, September 13, 1965; and „Dresdner Gedenkstätte eingeweiht." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland*. Berlin, September 13, 1965.

[440] „Meeting an Iskra-Gedenkstätte. Sowjetische Helden vor 900 Jugendlichen in Leipzig." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland*. Berlin, September 10, 1967.

On the brutality of the Eastern Front, see Omer Bartov, "Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich," *The Journal of Modern History*, 63, 1 (March 1991):44-61; and Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, Trans. By Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: 2006).

On the whole, the conclusion being conveyed in these official acts of collective memory and public mourning across the middle 1960s was that only a select few Germans' deaths had ushered fascism's fall and were thus deserving of the public's attention. Outside the circle of antifascist resistance (which included the Red Army), the remaining German war dead were not worth commemorating in the eyes of the regime because of their failure to take part in the resistance. Considered from the theoretical framework of memory-as-"social action," these ceremonies were not simple exercises in rehearsed rhetoric and performance but rather had very real implications for how the regime hoped its citizens reacted to the Cold War tensions around them. The distinction between whose deaths should be and should not be publicly mourned in remembrance of the Second World War informed citizens' support or disdain for the regime.

*Remembering violence past and present*

What the SED ideology animating official public mourning could not hide, and what attentive East Germans could easily notice despite the official OdF rhetoric of peace, was the continued threat or actual employment of violent measures by East European post-fascist authorities in order to solidify their Socialist regimes. What was effectively a continuation of war and unrest in the supposedly peacefully Socialist world stood at the top of official public mourning in the GDR into the late 1960s, with the 1968 OdF memorial ceremony featuring "leading personalities from our Republic as well as other tried-and-true Anti-fascists from twenty-six European nations," devoted to the "all-around strengthening" of East Germany.[441] In

[441] "Kampfkundgebung der über 150 000. Wir gehen einen guten und richtigen Weg. Die Hauptstadt gedachte der Opfer des Faschismus/Kurt Hager: Der Sozialismus ist inanfastbar und unüberwindlich, er ist die Zukunft aller Völker." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*. Berlin, September 9, 1968.

this case, “strengthening” probably meant increasing production and standards of living while also ensuring proper devotion and dedication to the memory and continuation of the “victims of fascism’s” work. Yet, this “strengthening” was usually accomplished with the help of the USSR, who had “strengthened” Socialism in East Berlin in 1953 and in Budapest in 1956. The Soviet Union’s influence in defeating the Nazis in 1945 and its continued control over the Eastern Bloc in 1969 was impossible to ignore. Said one speaker at the ceremony, “our success is based on the creative application of the lessons of Marxism-Leninism and the experiences of the Soviet Union.”[442] If it was the clear-headedness of German Communists and their Soviet partners who defeated fascism the first time, the much-feared third world war in Europe would require GDR leaders and citizens to continue following the example of the OdF (and of the USSR) in order to survive.

That the “path of socialism, of democracy and of peace” led from the Anti-fascist sacrifices of the Second World War through the GDR’s continuation of their ideals in the present was certainly nothing new in 1968’s remembrance ceremony.[443] Nor was it new that the invocation of the Communists’ experiences in other East European nations downplayed the memory of Wehrmacht dead and German civilian dead with which many more East German families were likely coping. Yet the message in September of 1968 could not have been seen by East Germans except through the lens of the then-recently put down Prague Spring. The Brezhnev Doctrine and Eastern European satellite regimes’ intolerance for democratic reform only reinforced the notion – bound up in the *Opfer des Faschismus* tradition – that it was only the successful antifascist fighters who were qualified to lead post-war regimes in pursuit of their

[442] Ibid.

[443] Ibid.

fallen comrades' dreams. What 1969 made clear, from the standpoint of public mourning, was that mourning and remembering the proper victims was not merely a personal reflection but a decision with political, social and military repercussions for East Germans.

One year later, the image of an occupied and oppressed people fighting for their freedom again animated the OdF ceremony in East Berlin. The promise that "the progressive peoples will never forget the heroes who gave their lives in the struggle against the *Hitlerregime*," might easily have reminded East German listeners that even *after* 1945, members of their communities had met their deaths while continuing to fight for their people but in 1953, 1956 and 1968, such resistance fighters' deaths were *not* acknowledged and mourned by the state. This irony may have seemed starker given that the 1969 official *Opfer des Faschismus* ceremony also reached out to remember "all of those people who fell in Vietnam in defense of their homeland against an treacherous and gruesome enemy."[444] Clearly, the SED meant this line as a jab at the United States but the nearness of war and violence to the 1969 East German people had been made clear, either through contemporary political events before their eyes or via public remembrance ceremonies such as this one reinforcing the East-West standoff.

**Compelling a new military enthusiasm**

The connection between violence in the 1960s present on one hand and war and bloodshed in East Germans' recent past on the other was apparent far beyond the annual *Opfer des Faschismus* mourning ceremonies. Across the decade, political-, cultural- and military events combined to create an environment in the East German public sphere where the

[444]"Kampfkundgebung der über 150 000. Wir gehen einen guten und richtigen Weg. Die Hauptstadt gedachte der Opfer des Faschismus/Kurt Hager: Der Sozialismus ist inanfastbar und unüberwindlich, er ist die Zukunft aller Völker." *Neues Deutschland. Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands*. Berlin, September 9, 1968.

possibility of war and the necessity of military values to answer such threats seemed very close at hand. If East Germans were reminded once a year that they should look to the dead victims of fascism as role models and examples of public service, these same audiences witnessed the growth of a new set of expectations and rewards, designed to persuade people to serve the GDR, with a sense of duty and respect. To be sure, the machinery of the regime did not stop only at persuasion and indeed could deploy deadly force to achieve its goals. Nonetheless, the compelling public memory or cultural affinity for military duty and readiness to die for the German Democratic Republic were ends perhaps out of even this regime's reach. Instead of forcing East Germans to take part in and believe the discourse of the *Opfer des Faschismus*, the East German regime left these goals to be accomplished by propaganda and other suggestive policy measures. By crafting a set of structures to enhance and reward military service that continued a supposedly long-standing Socialist military tradition, the SED and its servants hoped to augment the messaging and lesson-learning implied by the OdF holiday, subtly fashioning a new East German military enthusiasm to replace the one that Germans had lost in 1945.

*Indicting one past while rehabilitating another*

Despite the slight changes in official OdF rhetoric across the 1960s, the closeness of war to present-day East Germans had been a fixture since 1962, when the German Democratic Republic's legislature began discussing a law enacting universal male conscription. The GDR had begun the armament process much earlier, first creating the *Kasernierte Volkspolizei*, an armed paramilitary police force in 1952, out of which eventually grew the *National Volksarmee* (NVA) in 1956 as a (initially) volunteer force.[445] It is of course difficult to gauge public opinion

[445] Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, 2006), 146-147. Interestingly, although the GDR was reluctant to express official grief for the deaths of Wehrmacht

on the issue of military service given the political and social constraints on free expression of ideas within the GDR. Nonetheless, in their efforts to promote acceptance and enthusiasm for the new universal obligation on young men to serve in the armed forces like their fathers and grandfathers had done before, SED appears to have leaned heavily on Wehrmacht veterans and the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NDPD), which had been established in 1948 as a successor to the various conservative middle class parties of the past and therefore was aimed at building support among those members of the East German citizenry thought least likely to accept the regime.[446] Thus the East German regime, after distancing itself from older German public mourning practices (such as *Volkstrauertag*) that had praised or at least endorsed patriotic military service to the nation, now turned to those elements of German society within their borders whom the regime believed would have been most amenable to these older traditions, were they still in place.

In January 1962, NDPD leaders were already planning a series of articles to be published in the party newspaper, *Der nationale Demokrat*, to persuade East German men that renewed military service was a good idea.[447] At the same time, another report circulated within the NDPD leadership concluding that, based on surveys of local party chapters, the proposed law creating universal male military service was supported almost universally by the GDR population. The opaque authors of this report gave numerous quotations from interviews to

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soldiers who fought the Soviet Union, those POWs taken captive and held by the Soviet Union were sought out by the regime as prime candidates to serve loyally in the East German military. It is also important to note that Bundeswehr exists after 1955 but the West German men have the right of conscientious objection to military service enshrined in the Grundgesetz, a right that East German men never fully receive.

[446]Biess, *Homecomings*, 139.

[447] NDPD, Protokoll der 153. ordentliche Sitzung des Parteivorstandes am Dienstag, dem 23. Januar 1962, agenda of NDPD Executive board meeting, January 23, 1962. BA-DDR DY 16/ 2331: Bd. 6: 153. Bis 157. Sitzung.

testify that East Germans were not opposed to the draft in principle and that some were even enthusiastic about it.[448] Although the genuineness and reliability of this document and other similar materials is open to question, the *Nationaldemokratische Partei* at least believed that a new nationally-representative East German army was worth pursuing and furthermore believed that their own party membership would join eagerly. Whether any East Germans had reservations about a new conscript army manned by their sons, the existence of a force on such a scale only meant that the chances of another war were now *de facto* increased. That is, the SED regime was preparing to force the East German people to put the *Opfer des Faschismus* memory into "social action," whether they wanted to or not.

The very idea of the SED fostering a new emphasis and warmth for military tradition and institutions may appear surprising, given the German Left's historic disdain for officer corps, the General Staff, and the military in general. Yet both in the early 19th century and during the Third Reich, communists could point to an alternative tradition of violence used to advance politically progressive goals.[449] It was this alternative, more fitting for the East German present in the 1960s that the political leaders sought to resurrect. While the Bundeswehr in West Germany had made the mistake of "again resurrecting" the tradition of "German Imperialism" and "militarism," "from the *Kaiserreich*, then the *Hitlerreich*" and "now in the *Kanzlerdemokratie*," their mistake lay in latching onto the 20th of July conspiracy as a founding myth for its military

[448] Abteilung Organisation, Gruppe Parteiorganisation und – information, Vertrauliche Parteisache, Information über Diskussionen zur Volkskammersitzung am 24. Januar 1962, supporting documents prepared for consideration at NDPD Executive board meeting, January 23, 1962. BA-DDR DY 16/ 2331: Bd. 6: 153. Bis 157. Sitzung.

[449] The 1848 democratic revolutions had seen the beginnings of communists taking up arms, while the role of communists fighting back against the Nazi Party was a central element of East German public mourning from the very beginning. On 1848, see Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849* (Princeton, 1991).

institutions.[450] By ignoring "the true resistance fighters against the Hitler-Regime" – the communists – the West Germans blindly ignored the truth that "Goerdeler, Beck and Schacht…in no way stood in opposition to Nazism."[451] Rather, the 20th of July heroes of the West had really acted to try to "rescue German Imperialism and militarism" by removing Hitler so they could win the war against the USSR.[452] Instead of these flawed and misguided heroes, the East German political leadership suggested Germans look to a leftist military tradition as a more credible source for leadership in the Cold War present.

This credibility granted to a tradition of fighting for Socialist or Communist goals, past and present, was not shared by all of East German society. In particular, two senior leaders of the Protestant Church in East Germany wrote to the SED in 1962 to voice their objections. In assembling its response to these Protestant Bishops' objections to universal military service in the GDR, the Politburo members relied on their own specific understandings of German political, religious, and military history, evidencing another form of "social action" in outlining how East German Protestant Christians should understand the NVA and its mission, which themselves built upon the accomplishments of the *Opfer des Faschismus* who were already models for GDR citizens.

To begin with, the SED ministers criticized the German Protestant Church in West Germany as "completely integrated into the accomplishment of the military and political objectives of the Bundeswehr," a result of German Protestants' historic and uncritical loyalty to

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[450] Author unknown, Rundfunkvortrag zum 20. Juli 1959, NDPD lecture prepared for radio broadcast, July 20, 1959. BA-DDR DY 16/3471 Bd. 1.

[451] Ibid.

[452] Ibid.

the German state and its army.[453] It was no accident that these Communist leaders painted the West German Protestant Church as the continuation of illiberal and reactionary trends in German history – this is also how the SED regularly described the Federal Republic in general. The alleged close identification of the West German Protestant Church leadership with the West German political leadership was simply the result of "the old chauvinistic ideology of 'God, he who gave us iron' [*'Gott, der Eisen wachsen ließ'*]" now being "dangerously resurrected once more" with "the help of the West German Church leaders" who themselves formed a "military church [*Militärkirche*]."[454] Perhaps reluctant in 1962 to denounce religious faith as the root of the problem, these party leaders instead framed the issue as religious institutions' improper influence on soldiers' civilian Germans' everyday lives.

This incomplete rejection of religion did not prevent the SED from pointing fingers at German Protestant leaders for their historic alliance with the German political right. In fact, they insisted their new Socialist military would avoid employing any religious elements in the loyalty oath sworn by recruits, setting it far apart from "the fascist army" and the ways in which "military chaplains and NS leadership" had countenanced the commission of "gruesome crimes" by soldiers whose oaths had made it a pseudo-religious obligation to follow orders.[455] Thus, the NVA and its new universal male military tradition would present a clear departure from the "tributary obedience" of German soldiers in centuries past. It was this long history of Germans accustomed to unquestioning obedience that was exploited by German Protestant leaders' long

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[453] Argumentation zu Fragen über die Allgemeine Wehrpflicht, die von Bischöfen der evangelischen Kirche gestellt werden, supplementary materials prepared for submission in support of Point 8 on agenda for February 20, 1962 meeting of the Politbüro, Protokoll Nr. 7/62. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 878. The authors of this report are reportedly quoting a Pastor Marquardt from West Berlin here.

[454] Ibid.

[455] Ibid.

promotion of a „Christian-patriotic duty of the soldier," which in turn had convinced German men for generations to fight "unconditionally" in the service of the Emperor and "in the fascist Army of Hitler."[456] Beyond indicting the history of German Protestantism, this SED position paper reveals basic assumptions about the nature of war and the new types of conscription armies and wars that this new post-fascist East Germany would model. The crucial connection to mourning lay in how the SED framed military service as an ideological action: East Germans could not mourn the dead Wehrmacht soldiers because their deaths had helped prolong the fascist state, whereas East Germanys' sons who went to war and died would certainly be mourned and respected for their sacrifices in the service of "real existing Socialism."

*A new Germany, a new army*

Beginning with the supposition that the German Democratic Republic was no different than any other sovereign state in history, SED leaders calmly pointed out to their Protestant critics that states have always compelled their citizens to perform military service in times of need. In addition to denying any reason why the East German Protestant Church might have historically-grounded objections to military service by its parishioners, the *Politbüro* attempted to re-frame the question as one of equality among all citizens, asserting that "[a]ll citizens, regardless of religion, social class, and world view" possess "the right and the duty to protect their Socialist home front, life and the existence of all its citizens."[457] Thus, because all East Germans were created equal and were equally indebted to their government, all East German

[456] Ibid. The problem of how to require obedience to superior officers while still allowing room to disobey criminal orders, was a central problem for the West German Bundeswehr, who was also rebuilding military institutions in light of the Wehrmacht's oath and loyalty to Hitler. See Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*.

[457] Ibid.

men must therefore protect Socialism, without exception. As if to assuage fears of Christians facing a crisis of their faith, these partly leaders insist that there are "no regulations" in the conscription law as written, "that would make it impossible for Christian citizens" to perform military service. Having denied any room for conscientious objection on political and religious grounds, SED ministers continued, insisting that East German Christian men also had political- and religious reasons for embracing that military service.

These arguments for accepting military service reveal more than the SED's assumption that military service in the GDR was unproblematic, even after considering recent German history. Rather, universal male military service marked yet another measure of how much more just and enlightened the GDR was, compared to the Third Reich. In this case, the equality of opportunity and obligation undergirding military service "correspond[ed] in full measure to the interests of Christian citizens and their equal rights" in the GDR.[458] Going further, these leaders make the point that the Church should not find this equality objectionable, since "exceptions to the rule" could only result from the existence of "privileges or discrimination" which "contradicts" the GDR Constitution "as much as the will and the beliefs of Christian citizens of the GDR" who "want neither privilege… nor [to be] 'second-class citizens.'"[459] Whether or not these counterarguments addressed the exact concerns raised by Protestant leaders is not clear from these documents. Church leaders' objections to military service may have stemmed from their own remembrance of the Third Reich as a site of glorification of military heroes (see Chapter II) or from the Church's (more traditional) anti-Communism. In either case, it seems clear that both church leaders and SED ministers had different memories of German military

[458] Ibid..

[459] Ibid.

history and each believed East Germans ought to take correspondingly different "social actions" in the post-war present.

In particular, the *Politbüro* took great pains in drafting its response to the Church to elaborate the many ways in which the *Nationale Volksarmee* existed as a new kind of military institution, one incapable of repeating the misdeeds of earlier generations. Unlike centuries of German history, the NVA existed "not for imperialistic revanchist plans" but instead acted to preserve "peace, international friendship and prosperity for humankind."[460] As problematic as this statement may be, given the NVA's key role as a first line of defense for the Warsaw Pact, this conceptualization of East German Soldiers as somehow serving a novel cause represents another instance of Germans (here, SED leaders) re-thinking the German people's relationship to the military and to their own military history. That is, East German political leaders were here responding to the same history that had motivated West German political leaders to create the doctrine of "*innere Führung*" for the Bundeswehr.[461]

To be sure, the SED had nothing but criticism for the Bundeswehr, denouncing it as having simply re-incarnated the mistaken assumptions of past German militarism. Yet this instinctive invective against the Bundeswehr was more than a well-rehearsed philippic. Instead, the East German leaders needed West Germans' *own* hesitance toward military service for the Bundeswehr in order to explain to East Germans why military service east of the Elbe was so crucial. That is, the SED explained that the question of conscientious objection to military service must be re-framed to consider the nature of the state and military involved. In the case of

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[460] Ibid.

[461] On the founding of the Bundeswehr and the struggle to define this sort of internal moral leadership for West German soldiers, see Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces* (Princeton, 1988).

West Germans, their "pacifist traditions and beliefs" present "the point of departure for their struggle against militarism and nuclear armament." That is, West Germans who objected to military service must have done so because they understood the unresolved 'fascist' tendencies of the Federal Republic. Whereas for East Germans, service in the NVA was the most moral choice available, as the presence of a strong East German Army would deter the 'fascist' West from launching another war. Given these reforms of military-religious relationships, the SED decried any GDR Christians who still conscientiously objected to military service as insincere, concluding that such a stance could not be motivated "pacifism but instead [by] Anticommunism."[462]

*Rediscovering a shared tradition*

If this optimistic defense of a Socialist alternative to traditional military concerns carried weight with East German audiences, one might expect sons of Wehrmacht veterans to have joined up without needing to be drafted, notwithstanding Christian leaders' hesitance. While it is nearly impossible to discern exactly how many young men and their families saw military service for the GDR as the proper "social action" to take based on remembrance of the Second World War, we do know that there were also voices from within the NDPD asking "why is there no possibility for conscientious objection to military service for us [in the GDR]?"[463] Perhaps in the age of atomic weapons and the wake of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis, any

[462] Argumentation zu Fragen über die Allgemeine Wehrpflicht, die von Bischöfen der evangelischen Kirche gestellt werden, supplementary materials prepared for submission in support of Point 8 on agenda for February 20, 1962 meeting of the Politbüro Protokoll Nr. 7/62. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 878. The authors of this report are reportedly quoting a Pastor Marquardt from West Berlin here.

[463] Rösser to alle Mitglieder des Parteivorstandes, information bulletin to executive board of the NDPD, April 30, 1962. BA-DDR DY 16/ 2777 Bd. 4: Sitzungen.

aspirations for continuing military traditions of the past or improving for the future seemed futile. One way that the East German allayed such concerns was by reaching back to triumphant moments of German military history, in an attempt to frame the present-day standoff with the West as the latest chapter in this celebrated history of Germans resisting unjust authority. Thus the young men of the 1960s had a historic task before them: not only to follow in the footsteps of the *Opfer des Faschismus* but also to prove equal to generations of earlier German men who had also fought to defend their communities.

The history of the early nineteenth century Wars of Liberation and Revolution provided SED leaders a way to justify re-creating a tradition of military service while instructing East Germans to mourn those recent dead who had performed non-military service under fascism. In July of 1963, preparations began to mark the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig, one of the turning points in Napoleon's (first) defeat and banishment from the European continent.[464] While the history of Germans taking up arms to protect their king and deny the imposition of French Revolutionary ideals might seem problematic to the Communist Party (who saw their role as fulfilling the promise of the French Revolution), the SED solved this incompatibility by turning to the history of German-Russian relations. Pointing to the ancient regime's failures to resist Napoleon's imperial designs, it was "a few enlightened nobles and bourgeois intellectuals" who had prepared the way for Germans to win their freedom from foreign oppression.[465] Despite

[464] On the German experience and memory of the Battle of Leipzig, see Karen Hagemann, "'Unimaginable Horror and Misery': The Battle of Leipzig in October 1813 in Civilian Experience and Perception" in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall, eds., *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790-1820* (Basingstoke, UK, 2009).

[465] Anl. 4. Thesen zum 150. Jahrestag des Befreiungskrieges von 1813 und der Völkerschlacht bei Leipzig, documents prepared in support of Point 8 on the agenda for Politbüro meeting on July 16, 1963. Protokoll Nr/ 22/63. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 974

the importance of Gneisenau and Scharnhorst,[466] East Germans would be told in 1963, it was actually the Russians who provided the key to German independence: "Decisive for the beginning and result of the Wars of Liberation was the shared struggle and brotherhood-in-arms of the German and Russian peoples."[467] Because the Russians had fought "shoulder to shoulder" with the Germans in 1813 (and, at least in the case of the anti-fascist resistance fighters, in 1945), the SED asserted that it was more historically accurate for East Germans to see historic ties to Moscow and not to Paris and Washington, which had each "clearly 'forgotten,'" as it were, this important history.[468]

In addition to publicly celebrating armed service in defense of the socialist cause, the SED had also recently begun to draw upon pre-1945 German history to find examples of a tradition of violence employed in the furtherance of socialism (or, at least, anti-fascism). In 1963, the *Politbüro* had discussed preparations for the twenty-year anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943.[469] In reaching back to the Warsaw Ghetto, which had seen Jews unsuccessfully but heroically fighting back against their SS jailers without the leadership of anti-

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[466] These were the two famous military thinkers responsible for leading the way towards Prussia' adoption of the mass conscript army of citizens fighting because of their loyalty to the state. For general histories of he Prussian army, see Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (London, 1964) and Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription, and Civil Society*, Translated by Andrew Boreham with Daniel Brückenhaus (Oxford, 2004).

[467] Anl. 4. Thesen zum 150. Jahrestag des Befreiungskrieges von 1813 und der Völkerschlacht bei Leipzig, documents prepared in support of Point 8 on the agenda for Politbüro meeting on July 16, 1963. Protokoll Nr/ 22/63. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 974.

[468] Anl. 4. Thesen zum 150. Jahrestag des Befreiungskrieges von 1813 und der Völkerschlacht bei Leipzig, documents prepared in support of Point 8 on the agenda for Politbüro meeting on July 16, 1963. Protokoll Nr/ 22/63. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 974.

[469] The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was separate from the Warsaw Uprising, which had seen ethnic Poles resisting the Nazis while expecting but not receiving military assistance from the Russians in 1944. On the divergences between Jewish armed resistance to the Nazis and (non-Jewish) Polish national armed resistance, see Yehuda Bauer, "Forms of Jewish Resistance," in Donald L. Niewyk, ed. *The Holocaust: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, Fourth Edition (Boston, 2011). The Bauer article is an edited excerpt, reprinted from Yehuda Bauer, *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness* (Toronto, 1979).

fascist or Communist brigades, the SED made a point of noting that, by inviting international visitors to East Berlin in1963, the world could see evidence of "the eradication of anti-Semitism and revanchism in the GDR," simply by observing the state of the education system, school textbooks, and literature in general.[470] Thus even if the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was itself a stretch to link to the new NVA, demonstrating the GDR's non-antisemitism was yet more proof of how the OdF tradition had led East Germans away from its fascist predecessor. Furthermore, the example of the "Victims of Fascism," whether German Communists or Russian Red Army soldiers, provided the key for framing a new tradition of universal male military service for East Germans, the "social action" implied by remembrance and mourning in the OdF tradition. The key distinction was that the East German armed forces would fight for ideologically just reason, disregarding the traditions that the Nazis and the Wehrmacht had gotten wrong.

*Incentivizing the present*

In addition to taking steps preparing for a possible new war, despite what claims to peacefulness they made at the annual *Opfer des Faschismus* memorial ceremony, the East German government by the mid-1960s had also begun taking concrete actions to materially reward past armed service to the Anti-fascist cause. Beyond words applauding and affirming the deaths of Anti-fascist fighters in resistance against the Nazi regime, the SED approved the "granting of an honorary pension [*Ehrenpension*] to the Fighters against Fascism and the

[470] Westkommission beim Politbüro, Vorlage an das Politbüro des Zentralkomitees, Anl. 8. Betr.: Feierlichkeiten zum 20. Jahrestag des Ghetto-Aufstandes in Warschau vom 18. Bis 22. April 1963, proposal prepared in support of point number 15 on Politburo meeting agenda for March 27, 1963. Protokoll Nr. 8/63. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 953.

Persecutees of the Nazi Regime as well as their Survivors."[471] Although the category of "Persecutees of the Nazi Regime" [*Verfolgten des Naziregimes*] could appear open to Jews and other racial minorities who had survived the Holocaust, it seems more probable that this category was understood by the SED to include victims of political persecution, which would be consistent with the annual OdF memorial day ceremonies' focus on communists, to the exclusion of Jews and other racial and ethnic minorities. Moreover, the point of this pension was to give concrete reward to the actions which the OdF memory was supposed to inspire in the East German population.

At the same time that it rewarded the actions warranting remembrance in the GDR, the SED's actions here denied discursive but also physical public space to Wehrmacht veterans and their survivors, to whom memories of their veterans' military service could have implied other forms of action in the 1960s that might have given name and recognition to other memories of the Second World War. Instead, East German society "respect[ed] and honor[ed] the men and women" who had taken part in "the struggle against fascism and militarism" and who had "helped prepare way" for the flourishing of socialism in the GDR.[472] While other *realpolitik* concerns on the part of the regime are not clear, it is apparent that, in granting monetary pensions of model citizens, two decades after their efforts had paid off, the regime made a point of framing such rewards as its "political-moral obligation" to those who had served the socialist cause loyally.[473] Limiting the discussion and physical space of permissible public memory, these

[471] Komitee der Antifaschistischen Wiederstandskämpfer in der DDR, Vorlage für das Politbüro des ZK der SED, proposal for the Politbüro meeting on March 30, 1965 regarding payments to antifascist resisters or their survivors, Protokoll Nr. 11/65. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 1086 bis 1087.

[472] Ibid.

[473] Ibid.

communist fighters were allowed to demand and receive public acclaim and material reward, whereas decorations won by Wehrmacht soldiers could win their bearers equal status only in West Germany.[474] Put into the context of remembering war and military service in the GDR, the granting of pensions would seem to underline the expectation that East German citizens answer the call of duty to their Socialist state and furthermore that they could expect material reward for doing so.

Granting material rewards of the OdF fighters and survivors from the past was a small example of the kind of universal commitment envisioned by the regime for its citizens to fulfill. Alarmed in 1965, in the wake of West German elections and the surging political power of conservatives there, East German political leaders in the NDPD spoke of "the dangerousness of the effects of anti-Communism, *revanchism*, and nationalism" on their border.[475] These leaders hoped to convince their own membership that the future of the GDR depended on "a national consciousness developed on all sides," which would inspire all East Germans to persevere and resist "wavering," the "insinuations of enemies," and "pacifism in our ranks."[476] Moreover, these leaders made clear that they spoke not in metaphors for discipline and ideological purity but of concrete actions: "The October Storm [Military] Maneuvers were socialist internationalism in action."[477] Consistent with the long-preached message of the OdF memorial

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[474] The continuities bound up in maintaining the practice of awarding the Iron Cross military decoration across quite different historical- and political contexts and into the present, is a chief concern of Abenheim's *Reforging the Iron Cross.*

[475] Parteivorstand, Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, Thesen zum Referat auf der 10. Tagung des Hauptausschusses, November 9, 1965, position paper for consideration by party leadership. BA-DDR DY 16/3109 :DY 16/3109 Bd. 6: 10. Tagung.

[476] Ibid.

[477] Ibid. Although conscription was enforced beginning in 1962, after 1964 men had to option to serve as "Bausoldaten [construction solders]," meaning they did not necessarily have to carry rifles in order to serve socialism. Yet this was the chief understanding of how the lessons of memory from 1945 apply to 1965. Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, 2005), 125.

day, these politicians had concluded in 1965 that Germans' "preparedness for defense of our German Democratic Republic" resulted from citizens properly understanding their role and obligations to the state.[478]

The nearness of war to the present, the long history of war fought for anti-Fascist causes (and in league with, not against, the Russians), and the promotion of a new East German military tradition all reached a high point in the re-dedication of the *Neue Wache* Monument in East Berlin in January 1969. The *Neue Wache* Monument, in the "new" guard house near the Berlin Palace, had been the sight of *Heldengedenktag* ceremonies during the Third Reich.[479] The decision by the SED to re-instate some form of commemoration for military dead there, tempered by including also anti-Fascists, makes sense then only in the context of the larger project to create an East German tradition of national military service, grounded in a particular reading of German history and augmenting a tradition of remembering and celebrating armed Anti-Fascist resistance against the Nazis. In January 1969 the *Politbüro* considered the proposal, ultimately approved, to inter the remains of "an unknown Victim of the antifascist resistance fight and an unknown soldier as victim of militarism." These symbolic dead would be interred "with military ceremony" in the *Neue Wache* monument, along with samples of earth taken from the battlefields in Moscow, Leningrad, Stalingrad, Normandy, Monte Cassino, Narvik, Warsaw,

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[478] Hans Luthardt, quoted in Stenographisches Protokoll der 10. Tagung des Hauptausschusses der National-Demokratischen Partei Deutschlands zm 24. und 25. November 1965 in Berlin, 1. Tag, transcript of NDPD leadership committee on November 24, 1965. BA-DDR DY 16/3109 Bd. 6: 10. Tagung.

[479] Alexandra Kaiser points out that the Nazis initiated holding ceremonies here only after the Reichstag was burned out in 1933, in *Von Helden und Opfern,* 187-189.

and Prague, and from the concentration camps at Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Natzweiler, Theresienstadt, Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, and Dora-Mittelbau.[480]

While the decision to blur the lines between dead victims of Nazi violence and dead perpetrators (or at least enablers) of Nazi violence has been seen by Gilad Margalit as an effort to "symbolically mix" different experiences of the war into one memory supportive of the regime, it is also worth noting that this "mixing" simultaneously created room to equate future military service to the East German state with the morally-advantageous resistance against the Nazis, instead of the morally-tainted enabling and participation in Nazi crimes. To be sure, these sources do not make clear how many East Germans took such rhetoric and implied obligations seriously or without question. Subject to legal obligation under a dictatorship, many men may simply have not contested their conscription for reasons of practicality. Yet it is safe to conclude that any large-scale effort to contradict efforts to build national 'consciousness' or support for military service, or even the memory of the OdF dead upon which it was based, could have posed great challenges to the regime. Whatever the message individual East German spectators took away, the nearness of war and the expectation of military service by all young men in defense of the German Democratic Republic could not have been seen as remote, given the rhetoric and actions of the East German regime on the questions of the military and the dead.

## Dissent, non-compliance, or resistance? Alternative public mourning

### *Locating dissent under a dictatorship*

Given that questions of properly mourning the war dead in East Germany were closely connected to the maintenance or creation of a new tradition of military service in the NVA, it is

[480] Endgültige Gestaltung des Ehrenmals Unter den Linden, supporting documents submitted in support of Point 8 on the Politbüro agenda for January 14, 1969. Protokoll Nr. 2/69. BA-DDR DY 30/J IV 2/2A/1350. Gilad Margalit also describes this change in *Guilt, Suffering and Memory*, 91-93.

unsurprising that skepticism in one case might correspond with reluctance in another. The Protestant Church in Germany had voiced its opposition to East German conscription while it simultaneously gave people there space within its walls to question the assumptions bound up in the rules for officially mourning the war dead. If the state did not allow conscientious objection to military service, what about objection to official mourning rituals? Can non-participation in such officially-sanctioned events be read as politically significant statements? Do the existence of alternative traditions outside of the SED-controlled channels equal sites of resistance or simply non-compliance? Did the regime allow a certain level of "venting" by disaffected citizens, even at the risk of undermining its own anti-Fascist ideology, as a means of keeping the disgruntlement from boiling over?[481] In the case of public mourning in East Germany, the sources presently available do not answer all of these questions but they *do* suggest continual manifestations of non-Communist (but not necessarily anti-Communist) civil society traditions of public mourning.

The Protestant Church in Germany was the vehicle for an alternative sphere of public mourning and collective memory activities in East Germany. In the case of resistance to universal military service, it seems that Church leaders' attitudes were shaped in fact by differences in how they remembered the Nazi past and what response this history required of them in the post-war present. Two influential Provincial Church leaders, Bishops Mitzenheim and Krummacher, wrote to the SED to object to this policy, only to be called out by the regime for the church's historic support of the Nazis and military institutions in the past.[482] According

[481] Mary Fulbrook describes "a degree of controlled debate" in the GDR that "was in part actively fostered, in part tolerated" but still subject to censorship, in *The People's State*, 256.

[482] 8. Argumentation zu Fragen über allgemeine Wehrpflicht, die von Bischöfen der evangelischen Kirche gestellt werden, supplemental materials regarding objection to conscription for consideration as agenda item 8 for Politbüro meeting on Febrary 20, 1962, Protokoll Nr. 7/62. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 877.

to SED Party documents, the exact nature of these churchmen's objections seems to have been related to the requirement of swearing an oath on the regimental colors by new NVA recruits.[483] While the SED refused to see why Christians would have any problem completing this task in service of such an unobjectionable goal as forestalling war (see above), putting this complaint into broader context is revealing.[484]

What is most striking about these Protestant Church leaders' objections is the appearance within their actions of a re-thinking of the church's long history of unconditional praise for the military and deference to state authorities. Indeed, SED officials raised this criticism against the church's historic pattern of behavior, too. That these Christian leaders resorted to open resistance in the name of their faith does not *necessarily* amount to them feeling penitent about their actions during the Third Reich. This is all the less likely since the German Protestant Church had long harbored anti-communist and anti-socialist sentiments, even before 1933. Resistance against a politically leftist regime might be, therefore, more natural to these mature church leaders than efforts to critically distance themselves from a rightist tradition. However, this newfound readiness and willingness to dismiss, or at least question, old traditional support for military service and the state in the East is consistent with what the Church in the West was saying and doing on the question of *Volkstrauertag*. Even though the Churches split in 1969, with the East German churches forming their own federation, the Protestant Church had long

[483] Politbüro of the ZK to die 1. Sekretäre der Bezirks- und Kreisleitungen der SED, Betr.: Argumentation zu Fragen über die allgemeine Wehrpflicht, die von Bischöfe und anderen kirchlichen Amtsträgern der evagelischen Kirche gestellt werden, letter submitted as supporting document and introducing problem of church objections to conscription for agenda item 8 of Politbüro meeting on February 20, 1962, Protokoll Nr. 7/62. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 878.

[484] 8. Argumentation zu Fragen über allgemeine Wehrpflicht, die von Bischöfen der evangelischen Kirche gestellt werden, supplemental materials regarding objection to conscription for consideration as agenda item 8 for Politbüro meeting on Febrary 20, 1962, Protokoll Nr. 7/62. BA-DDR DY 30/ J IV 2/2A/ 877.

offered East Germans space for dissent, non-compliance, and resistance to the demands of the regime.[485] Thus, already operating on the margins of officially-approved East German public life, the Protestant Church's activism in publicly mourning the war dead while also raising doubt about the new East German military tradition may have been another step along the way to its well-known role in the 1989-90 peaceful revolution.

*Publicly visible sites of mourning*

Besides questioning the present regime's military policies and reconsidering its attitudes towards earlier governments' military policies, underground activists operating within the Protestant Church in Germany had worked for decades to complicate official East German mourning for the Second World War dead. This "social action" in the form of grave maintenance, information gathering and recovery and reburial of bodies, does not appear to have taken place everywhere with enthusiastic support. However, those individuals and groups who did work to recover the bodies, preserve the memories, and offer comfort to grieving families of these war dead were *de facto* rejecting the notion that the antifascist resistance and Red Army sufficiently represented the entirety of Germans' wartime experiences.

Besides the care for graves and the sharing of information about the remains of the dead, East German Protestants were also concerned about the preservation of those very gravesites, the destruction of which would severely impede on future generations' abilities to mourn their own dead. In January 1965, local churchmen wrote to their superiors in East Berlin, "alarmed" at having heard rumors "that not just community offices" had to limit military graves to the

[485] Spotts, *The Churches and Politics in Germany*, 18; Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 264-265

customary twenty-year *Liegefrist* ("resting period")[486] but that, apparently, such graves in church cemeteries were also subject to disinterment after twenty years in order to make room for the remains of the more-recently-deceased. Realizing that they were, in 1965, at the end of this *Liegefrist* for any war-related dead killed before 1945, these churchmen begged for clarification and instructions.[487] A High Church Council member in East Berlin replied to explain that church cemeteries were exempt from what were apparently guidelines for municipal cemeteries. Yet, not content with simply preserving this space for the cultivation of alternative public mourning and collective memory traditions, this councilman also suggested that local pastors try to erect memorials on these graveyards that "keep alive the memory of the Fallen" but at the same time "call out for peace."[488] Thus this exchange proves that at least some Protestant pastors realized that the state's hostility to any war-related dead outside of the anti-fascist collective memory meant that geographic space and physical remnants documenting those other dead would soon be lost and therefore must be somehow protected. Interestingly, these churchmen appear to have been borrowing or repeating language about remembering the dead in order to preserve peace that was featured in similar debates about a decade or so earlier in West Germany.[489]

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[486] These individuals seem to distinguish the idea of a limited period of time during which the deceased are allowed to remain buried before disinterment (Liegefrist) from the concept of the permanent right of certain categories of dead to remain buried indefinitely (temed Ruherecht, "right to be left in peace"). West German churches also debated this issue with their repective government officials at about this time. Examples abound in EZAB 2/2560. In general, the problem of limited space for the burial of the dead in a community that has existed for several centuries is not altogether surprising.

[487] Nora Noth to Oberkirchenrat Behm, January 12, 1965, EZAB 104/1221.

[488] Author unknown to the leitenden Verwaltungsbehörden der Gliedkirchen in der DDR, January 22, 1965, EZAB 104/1221. These instructions do not make clear whether such monuments were meant to be erected only in church cemeteries or also in municipal ones.

[489] The best example is the play, *Der Andere*, featured at the 1959 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn. Rudolf von Oertzen and Otto Heinrich Kühner, *Der Andere. Eine Ballade vom Tod im Kriege. Für Sprecher Chor und Orchester*, no date, printed and bound script, VDK A.100-23.

As striking as this "public action" on the part of East German Protestant leaders may sound, it should not be assumed that all pastors or all congregations were of the same mind on these questions. Tied up with the question of keeping or disinterring graves was the issue of defining a "war grave" in the first place and whether certain civilians might qualify or not for this designation. One local Protestant leader in Borna wrote to his superiors that, because the 1922 law defining and governing war graves and their care did not include civilians killed in the First World War (only civilians who died as internees during the war), the East German churches should similarly deny German civilian victims of aerial bombing or combat operations the status of "war graves."[490] Consequently, such civilians' remains would be subject to disinterment after their 20-year *Liegefrist* was expired. Interestingly, the Saxon Church official who answered this letter responded that all East German Protestant Churches should indeed include civilians killed by the aerial bombing or as a result of combat operations as "war victims" with "war graves," thus extending to them the permanent *"Ruherecht"* (the right not to be disinterred) if they were buried on church grounds.[491]

Such differences of opinion should not necessarily be read only as evidence of sympathy or hostility toward the regime on the part of these local and state-level church leaders. Rather, it is also fruitful to understand them as reflections of East German Protestants grappling with questions of how to understand war, the meaning or death in wartime, and the question of whether soldiers ought to continue to enjoy the enhanced social prestige in life and in death that they had known in the German lands since the early nineteenth century.

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[490] Evangelisch-Lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens to the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Kirchenkanzlei für die Gliedkirchen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, May 6, 1965, EZAB 104/1221.

[491] Ibid.

*Questioning the past*

The issue of soldiers' proper place in East German society came up again when Pastor Günter Pilz from Mittelherwigsdorf wrote to Dresden church officials to register his vehement objection to the entire concept of "war graves." The recent rules calling for the gravesites of dead war victims (but not other dead congregation members) to be maintained "with particular care and love," seemed wrong-headed.[492] This pastor instead believed that East German Christians should not protect "war graves" (he seems to have meant "soldiers' graves") in any way that set them apart from the rest of the "regular" dead, since "in death all people are equal."[493] Besides, "many years ago" Germans had already "done away" with organizing the dead into "different classes upon burial."[494] With his comment about "different classes" having long been evened out, it is not clear whether this pastor meant to refer to the egalitarian nature of the GDR or the new critical attitude toward mourning the dead adopted by leading Protestant Churchmen (in the West) a decade or earlier. In either case, this pastor clearly harbored a memory of the Second World War and its dead casualties that implored him to abstain from showing uncritical honor or reverence for them.

Continuing to repeat arguments similar to those leveled by the Protestant Church in the 1952 West German debate over *Volkstrauertag* (see Chapter II), this pastor wrote that soldiers' graves should receive no special treatment. "Do we have today a particular reason" asked the pastor, for which the war graves needed to be "exposed?"[495] "Do we have a moral obligation

[492] Ibid.

[493] Ibid.

[494] Ibid.

[495] Ibid.

toward these dead," which requires Germans to devote particular care to their graves?[496] Conscious of the Weimar- and Third Reich era practices of *Volkstrauertag* and *Heldengedenktag*, whereby the dead soldiers and SA fighters were made into rhetorical role models for an uncritical German public, in turn helping promote the public's support for a new war, this pastor insisted that "[w]e are all really quite far removed from worshipping heroes."[497] Yet at the same time and like other pastors in the GDR, this church leader couched his critical discussion of mourning practices and collective memory in the framework of pastoral care, adding that Christians should obey Jesus's words to "let the dead bury their dead."[498]

This is an argument that one might expect from liberals within the Protestant Church in West Germany or one that might resonate with progressive student groups and others critical of the West German "silence" on the Nazi past at this moment in history. Yet, the pastor did not want to entirely brush off his congregations' needs for comfort and closure. Relating that his church recently discussed erecting a monument for the war dead, he explains that "the congregation wanted a monument to honor the dead [*Ehrenmal*]" but that he, the pastor, wanted instead to build "a monument to remind us of the dead [*Mahnmal*]," which was apparently consistent with the building permit the church had secured.[499] Ultimately neither suggestion

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[496] Ibid.

[497] Ibid.

[498] Ibid. Here the pastor is quoting Matthew 8:22, Jesus's instructions to potential disciples to concentrate on the future and not let burdens of the past distract them, which is the complete opposite of what public mourning practices in each Germany were trying to accomplish.

[499] Evangelisch-Lutherisches Landeskirchenamt Sachsens to the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, Kirchenkanzlei für die Gliedkirchen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, May 6, 1965, EZAB 104/1221.

came to fruition, but the pastor's resistance to celebrating the "heroes" marked his ideas about mourning the dead and remembering the past as being similar to his colleagues in the west.

At the same time, in the context of the GDR, these ideas could be read as politically consistent with the SED's official memory since they evince a discomfort with the historical propensity to elevate the military above all else in German society. It will be recalled that the SED was making arguments to persuade Protestant leaders of this very point, at about the same time, to secure support for the new NVA and universal male conscription in the GDR. Furthermore, this pastor seems quite clear on culpability for the Third Reich, writing that "the war dead are victims of our collective guilt" and that war grave care alone would not atone for "our sins."[500] However, for this pastor, the "social action" implied by the proper remembrance the war and the dictatorship was not the lesson of following the OdF's example and resisting fascism via fighting for socialism. Instead, making amends for Germans' past sins were best accomplished through "a public word of solidarity with the conscientious objectors."[501]

*Publicly-visible mourning as pastoral care*

When they were preserving space for alternative collective memory and publicly-visible mourning practices within the church or the church's cemeteries, Protestant officials did so while re-framing publicly-visible mourning as part of the pastoral care they were obliged to provide for their congregations' spiritual needs. In this way, Protestants could use religion to provide political cover for activities that might otherwise be seen as suspicious by the regime, especially given that the SED was already skeptical of organized religion and had taken steps to minimize

[500] Ibid.

[501] Ibid.

the churches' threat by socially isolating them.[502] A lengthy set of instructions to pastors regarding "the Erecting of Monuments [*Gedenkmalen*] for the Dead of the last World War" explained that "the message of the Gospels" was the answer for congregations and individual believers coping with "the horribly deadly events of the last war." In this vein, congregations erecting monuments were to take care to ensure these memorials were suitably "churchly monuments" that "allude[d] to God's Word, to the seriousness of his holy presence [*seiner Heimsuchung*] and to the unfathomable deepness of his mercy."[503] While the ostensible goal of these monuments was framed as fulfilling the pastoral care mission of the churches, inspiring their grieving parishioners with words of comfort and hope in God's grace, the implicit reason for the monuments themselves was that these congregation members felt a deep sense of loss and a need to make sense of their loved ones' deaths, concerns that were not addressed via the GDR's official antifascist public mourning tradition.

This move to erect monuments and inscribe the names of the dead, visibly attesting to their absence from the community of the living, was by its nature a very public form of "social action" motivated by concerns of collective memory. To address the non-finality of grief and mourning facing communities who still did not know the fate of all their dead, these church leaders suggested also placing a "Memorial Book for the Fallen," where the names of the dead, as well as the date they died, could be listed with room for adding more names in the future, once their fate became known.[504] The chief goal of these monuments, memorial books, and such

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[502] Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 35-36.

[503] Author unknown, date unknown, Copy of Über die Errichtung von Gedenkmalen für die Toten des letzten Weltkrieges/ Auszug aus einem Entwurf des Evangelischen Kirchbautages, forwarded with memo KD 107/66 I dated January 13, 1966, EZAB 104/1221.

[504] Ibid. The Soviet Union repatriated most of its captured German POWs by May of 1950, announcing then that there were no more POWs to be released. The West German public and as well as government leaders protested loudly while the East German government simply adopted this position and discouraged and denied that there were

attention to cemeteries in general was to foster a space that would "promote, in particular, the quiet prayers of the congregation and the next-of-kin." At the same time, however, these church leaders made clear that the militaristic excesses of the past public mourning traditions were to be avoided, writing that "the conversation" must "no longer be about 'Heroes' Memorial Sites,' but rather only about 'Monuments to Memory [*Gedächtnismalen*]' or 'Monuments to Remembrance [*Gedenkmalen*].'" Furthermore, such physical reminders of history should include "not only soldiers…but also include all those who lost their lives as a result of the war."[505] Through these explicit instructions to avoid uncritically borrowing from Weimar- or Nazi-era traditions, East German Protestant leaders reveal a sensitivity not just to remembering the history of the war beyond the Communist experience but also a commitment to re-thinking (East-) Germans' historical relationship to warfare and the military.

These monument instructions continue, reflecting perhaps some level of contriteness over German Protestants' history of offering the state and its policies their uncritical support. According to these guidelines, any such local monument to the war dead must not be allowed to take the form of a shrine or site of prayer for soldiers' fortunes at war that might suggest the Church's endorsement of war and soldiers' deaths. "Only in exceptional cases should the sanctuary serve" as a location for the monument, and in "no cases may the Monuments to Remembrance [*Gedenkmal*] stand in the Alter room, in the vicinity of the pulpit or in line of sight of the worshipping congregation."[506] As if to directly refute the role of German Protestants

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any more POWs left. However there were two final waves in 1953 to 1954 and 1955 to 1956. Biess, *Homecomings*, 45, 179-180.

[505] Author unknown, date unknown, Copy of Über die Errichtung von Gedenkmalen für die Toten des letzten Weltkrieges/ Auszug aus einem Entwurf des Evangelischen Kirchbautages, forwarded with memo KD 107/66 I dated January 13, 1966, EZAB 104/1221.

[506] Ibid.

in supporting the First World War, the rise of the Nazis and the launch of the Second World War, these church leaders drew very clear lines around what their brethren could and could not do in the name of God, even when taking action to oppose Communism. Despite this rather self-critical reading of German Protestants' history, it seems that East German Protestants had a range of responses to official public mourning and collective memory in the GDR, ranging from sympathy with the military dead, concern for civilian dead also, as well as disdain for the dead soldiers or even contempt for the very idea of differentiating the dead for any purpose whatsoever.

**Publicly-visible challenges to the regime?**

The picture that emerges from these Church sources is one of wide variations in the possibilities for alternative public mourning but a scenario nonetheless where possibilities for dissent and some expression of conflicting ideas were possible. By the early 1970s, East Germans still turned to their church officials for word of their missing military dead in such numbers that East German Protestant Church officials certified to their superiors in East Berlin that "the work of the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* is still meaningful."[507] This does not suggest that publicly-visible mourning for the wider circle of war dead was easy or always successful for East Germans. One pastor wrote of his congregation's successes in installing monuments in their own cemetery and in the cemetery of another nearby parish, only to report that "a third attempt," this time to install a "memorial plaque in stone in a neighboring community" was

[507] Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik to the leitenden Verwaltungsbehörden der Gliedkirchen, June 8, 1971, EZAB 101/226.

"shattered" by the objection of local government officials.[508] Moreover, generational changes within East German Protestant congregations meant that efforts by East German pastors to devote space and efforts at preserving alternative collective memories of the war and of the war dead were increasingly less important to younger generations of East Germans into the 1970s. One parishioner lamented that, for "the younger generation… the service in the *Gräberfürsorge* appears as not so crucial."[509] Thus Protestants in East Germany looking to mourn a wider, more representative (as they saw it) set of war dead did not encounter obstruction solely from the SED regime.

These setbacks must not have been universal or universally frustrating for all East German Protestants. In 1972, parishioners were still consulting with the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge,* through their local Protestant pastors, for information on their loved one's grace or resting place.[510] At the same time, others worked secretly with the VDK to gain money and documents to travel across the inner-German border to the West, in order to view their family members' gravesites.[511] These documents do not tell how many people attempted with any success to work around the official limitations on publicly-visible mourning in the GDR. Still, the efforts of certain circles of Protestants must have enjoyed a degree of support from one

[508] Werner Bollmann to the Bund der Evangelischen Kirchen i. DDR, Abt. Gräberfürsorge, June 14, 1972, EZAB 101/226.

[509] Evangelisches Konsistorium Görlitz to the Sekretariat des Bundes der Ev. Kirchen in der DDR, July 7, 1976, EZAB 101/226.

[510] Author unknown to die Gräberfürsorge der Ev. Kirche, September 7, 1972, letter forwarding materials from a pastor on behalf of a parishioner looking for information about her husband, EZAB 101/226.

[511] VDK to alle Landes-, Bezirks- und Kreisverbände, Rundschreiben Nr. C 1/73, March 28, 1973, memorandum foarwarding information about East Germans aksing for help in visiting their families' graves from across the Inner-German Border, VDK A.10-114.

generation to the next, at least on a very small level, in order to account for the chronological span of documentation.

Yet at the same time, there were moments when the issue of mourning the dead moved East Germans to the point of openly expressing outrage and criticism against their regime. Wrote one angry individual to the High Church Council in East Berlin, while the "other nations' skeletons of war, even those of the Russians, were immaculately cared for," dead German soldiers' remains "must always atone" for their history. It is unclear whether this individual East German author was upset at the state of care for war graves or the official taboo of discussing dead Wehrmacht soldiers but they turned their complaint about remembering the past into one touching on the present: "People talk about an Army [the NVA] pulled from Prussian tradition, people give the soldiers even certain ideals to take with them, but [people] don't really talk at all about Soldiers' Deaths!"[512] Although the author of this particular letter gives few clues to their personal background, the concern over mourning practices and soldiers' graves should be most closely associated with the generations who were either already adults in 1933 or at least who grew up into young adulthood before 1945. That is, those East Germans who much later resurrected public civil society in the 1980s were by and large younger people, born in the decades after the war's end and with less knowledge of, less personal experience with, and less expectation of traditional patterns for mourning dead German soldiers. Thus, while discontent over collective memory and public mourning practices in the 1960 and 1970s were phenomena largely unconnected with the peaceful revolutions of 1989, one wonders if these discursive and physical spaces for alternative collective memory and publicly-visible mourning might present

[512] Author unknown to Oberkirchenrat Behm, June 11, 1971, EZAB 101/226.

historians with important precedents to consider in understanding the ultimate triumph of East German civil society in 1989.

**Conclusion: Between Submission and Subversion**

Despite the inconclusiveness of the evidence all around, if we return to the questions posed at the beginning, we can nonetheless draw some general conclusions about the changes that emerged in East German public mourning for the war dead over the 1960s and early 1970s, as well as arrive at a clearer appreciation for the political and cultural context that gave form and relief to these practices, both official and unofficial. *Firstly*, the SED's official memory of the war dead continued to focus on a collective memory of antifascist resistance, both by German Communists and the Red Army, neither of which realistically represented the majority of German families' wartime experiences. If anything, the attention to the Red Army over everyday German families' losses would have promoted increased tension over time, given the then-contemporary collisions between reform-minded elements within the Eastern Bloc and Moscow's inflexibility, which was enforced by the same Red Army whom East Germans were supposed to thank.

*Secondly*, official public mourning echoed and underscored the then-contemporary political and military concerns of the regime – namely, preparing the public for the possibility of war as well as the need for East German men to serve in any such fight, in fulfillment of the OdF example. Below the political- and military concerns of the regime, and their likely limited resonance with the East German public, alternative publicly-visible mourning suggests some degree of reluctance among the population to entertain the likelihood of fighting in a third world war. Even some of the pronouncements by the party and other elites regarding their new

conception of military service and of warfare, coupled with the lengths they took to (forcibly) persuade people to embrace it, indicate that these elites were at some level aware that their citizens had reservations about fighting another war. Whether or not East German leaders felt they were dealing with true pacifism, unrepentant Nazism, older German conservatism, or simply anti-communism, is not altogether clear.

*Thirdly,* this reluctance on the part of the East German public towards military service seems consistent with efforts to move outside of strict Communist canons of memory and think about the death and suffering of more non-Communist victims and soldiers, whose families were also impacted and mourned personal losses more immediate than a small minority of political elites. Thus it was not surprising to find the Protestant Church at the front and center of this underground debate, given the degree to which the Church had debated these issues in West Germany during the 1950s, as the still-connectedness of the Church in East and West at this time.

*Fourthly*, any of these avenues of alternative public mourning could have provided grounds for challenging the regime but there seems never to have been overwhelming support of these non-Communist traditions among East German Protestants to build a solid and continuous opposition to the regime. Instead, the present evidence suggests clear moments of dissent in some sectors but enough non-dissent to keep the regime from feeling threatened or at least from taking action to quell these alternative practices and bring them around to the OdF line.

In the end, it is hard to know how many people, on an individual level, sympathized with the Communist collective memory of the war, the alternative presented by elements of the Protestant Church, or neither. Yet we do have a more complex picture of public mourning and publicly-visible mourning, where it seems East Germans had small areas where they could

choose to think and act differently. Furthermore, we can also see that conversations about memory and mourning inside the GDR were not restricted to proxy fights in support or opposition to the regime but also demonstrate moments where East Germans began re-thinking their society's relationship to soldiers and to war. Whether individual mourners found themselves submitting or subverting the Communist Party's orthodoxy, East Germans were, by 1972, quite far removed from worshipping heroes of their past.

## CHAPTER FIVE: "No longer finding agreement everywhere?" Public Mourning in West Germany, 1961-1969

One Sunday morning in late November 1968, the congregation of the Protestant Hauptkirche St. Marien in Wolfenbüttel was shocked to find their house of worship vandalized. A twenty-five year-old theology student, Dietrich Düllmann, had hidden himself within the recesses of the church, waiting until the dark of night to remove four large wooden plaques from the wall, each bearing the names of soldiers from the community who had died in the First World War, paint red "SS" symbols on them, then chop them to pieces with an axe. Before being caught, the student also defaced two other plaques as well as the walls themselves, painting "'Do not glorify criminality as the death of heroes' and 'My house is meant to be a house of prayer for all people but you have made it into a hall of honor for your crimes against all peoples.'"[513] Upon Düllmann's arrest, the police shook their heads at the young man's self-professed divine inspiration. Yet this episode, widely reported in the press, neatly encapsulated many of the dynamics bound up in public mourning and collective memory of the Second World War dead across 1960s West Germany.

Beyond the element of youthful exuberance and impassioned protest offending the sensibilities of middle-aged and elderly generations of West Germans, the Wolfenbüttel scandal illustrates well the layering of tensions and concerns over how to talk about the war dead that

[513] „Wolfenbütteler Kirche geschändet. Theologiestudent zerstrümmerte Gedenktafeln aus Protest gegen Gefallenenehrung," *Hildesheimer Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 25, 1968, VDK A.100-89. This last slogan of course paraphrases the biblical story of Jesus clearing the temple of merchants and money-changers, whose trade as "robbers" preyed upon and corrupted the otherwise innocent and obedient act of worship by 1st century Jews. Mt 21:12-13 (ESV).

had been accumulating in West Germany since 1945. The well-known rebelliousness of the "68ers" against what they saw as unreformed fascism or authoritarianism in the Federal Republic clearly played a part in motivating this young theology student to vandalize physical markers of the memory of 1918 (apparently by mistake). The notion that West German survivors of the Third Reich might once more exhibit Nazi-like tendencies if allowed to carry on with Nazi-era practices was not new but instead had characterized *Volkstrauertag* planning in the late 1940s and early 1950s (see above). Similarly reminiscent of earlier chapters in this history was the fear that maintaining any public dedication to remembering past wars or dead warriors, however abstract, would somehow equate to giving renewed cultural sanction to warfare and death that could ultimately lead West Germany back to the battlefield. In each case, identifying and removing the perceived flaws in German culture from post-1945 commemorative practices had worked to allow West Germans space to mourn the dead, bemoan Germany's structural failings, and neglect thorough-going discussions of their actions during the Third Reich. It was this unexplored aspect, how survivors of the war had served the Nazi regime without consequential resistance, that 1960s West Germans critical of *Volkstrauertag* worked to reform and which the student in Wolfenbüttel had attempted to confront.

Despite the layering of continuity, there were also important changes in public mourning that began taking place across the 1960s, making *Volkstrauertag* in 1969 much different than it had been in 1961. The VDK had regarded itself as the sole interpreter of German memory and mourning practices from the earliest moments after the war and had established a formula for public mourning designed to teach the public to value peace. Yet these understandings of the past had, by the 1960s, begun to ring hollow for an increasingly vocal minority of West German society. This chapter will trace the opening up of control over official collective memory and

public mourning in West Germany, tracing the re-negotiations over the boundaries of inclusion and interpretations of history from 1961 until 1969. The following four questions will guide this inquiry: *Firstly*, what obstacles shaped revisions to collective memory and public mourning following the inauguration of the "new" *Volkstrauertag* in the late 1950s? *Secondly*, when competing parties attempted to reconsider the *Volksbund*'s holiday, what alternative vision(s) did these dissenting voices offer for collective memory and public mourning? *Thirdly*, in what ways did both the traditional and revised understandings of the Nazi past each shape the messages of the official national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies? *Fourthly*, to what degree did *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies below the national level correspond to the Bonn program from year to year? What does the relationship of local to national, as well as the dynamics of change in memory over time, suggest about the history of West German public mourning?

**Governing collective memory**

The inauguration of the new *Totenehrung* portion of the 1961 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn could be understood as the moment when West Germany collectively turned toward a more open or inclusive memory of the Second World War, yet such a conclusion would be premature. While the consensus discourse of mourning was moving away from a preoccupation with military dead, laws governing the care of war graves (which naturally also informed public mourning) still clung to the traditional distinction between battle front and home front that had been enshrined into law in the 1950s. For all of the *Volksbund*'s introspective efforts to reexamine cultural assumptions about death, military service, and the burden of mourning in the wake of fascism, it proved ultimately more difficult to alter or augment the legal codes governing gravesites of war victims and thereby informing the collective memory of these dead.

*Social "inaction"*

To be sure, the act of planning, preparing, and carrying out the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn certainly constituted "social action" on the part of the *Volksbund*'s leadership. Physical gravesites, too, would certainly count as manifestations of "social action" inspired by memory and are undeniably related to the acts of mourning and remembering. Yet the War Graves Law of 1952 institutionalized the care and maintenance of *certain* graves, defined as "war graves," while leaving other categories undefined by the law and, by extension, not remembered and not mourned for as a matter of public policy. That is, if one can read "memory as social action" in legal codes regulating state-endorsed acts or memory and mourning, then the *non*-adaptation or *non*-revision of such memory and mourning practices can itself constitute "*in*action" based on an absence of memory.

It will be recalled from Chapter III that the War Graves Law of 1952 had marked a turning point in Germans' legal understanding of war victims and, hence, warfare itself, by reaching beyond the battlefield to also designate civilian victims of aerial bombing as well as the victims of Nazi racial violence, as equally valid "war victims." Marking these "war victims'" gravesites as "war graves" made their final resting places into permanent, lasting physical sites of remembrance and preserved history, ensuring that, decades later, future generations would at least be confronted with the existence of so many millions of dead remains, whether or not those future Germans tried to explain these deaths and remember that history. Yet by 1960, after nearly a decade in place, close observers noticed at least one gap in the law's efforts to preserve the physical remnants with which to call forth remembrance of the past.

More specifically, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the oversights in the War Graves Law of 1952 did not affect German military dead or German civilian dead who were killed by aerial bombing or some other manifestation of violence directed at Germans by their enemies. Instead, the oversight was found to be an under-comprehension and incomplete explanation of the Nazi regime and its victims. Buried in Section 6 of the law were a number of specific definitions of victims of Nazi racial violence who would be recognized as "war victims" and whose remains would thus be designated "war graves." Ordinarily, graves of these victims would be recognized and awarded "*dauerndes Ruherecht*" status, enjoying federally-financed maintenance and care at the hands of the VDK. Yet, due to a technicality in the wording, it was possible for an unknown number of graves of Nazi victims to be allotted only the shorter "*Ruhefrist*," leaving them open to the threat of being disinterred after fifteen years. While the exact numbers of such affected graves are not readily available from these records, the scenario wherein certain graves lost their enhanced protected status, and thus their histories were forgotten, seemed a real enough threat to garner sustained public attention.

To be sure, the West German government did not callously set about to remove or neglect gravesites of Nazi victims. Nonetheless, the chaotic conditions following the collapse of the Nazi government, during which family members sought out their missing relatives and recovered remains of the dead, left some proportion of graves for which no surviving family members existed, within German territory or otherwise. In such cases, when no family members could be found to claim and identify individual gravesites, which could in turn not be definitely categorized as "war victims" (as defined under the 1952 law) or not, and when no other community came forward to care for them, such graves would be eligible for only limited maintenance and care under the aegis of the war graves law. Yet these graves that were on the

edge of falling through the cracks, as it were, were only eligible for the shorter "*Ruhefrist*" protection instead of the longer lasting "*dauerndes Ruherecht*."[514] Complex as the details were, it was apparent to the governments' critics that some undeterminable number of the Nazis' victims, whose identities and lives had already been forgotten by post-war German society, were in danger of losing their permanent place in German history and collective memory. Because the weathering of time and the elements would surely erode these gravesites if they were not in fact disinterred after the *Frist* had expired, it appeared that these graves would be eliminated from German memory a second time.

While such a bureaucratic conundrum as this might seem remote from the memorial concern of most German families, the VDK, whose chief task aside from *Volkstrauertag* was the care of these very graves, noted the problem already in 1960. Quite apart from the odd set of unidentifiable remains whose next-of-kin could never be successfully tracked down, "to this group also belongs those graves listed in § 6e)," the "graves of foreign laborers who were forcibly employed by the German Labor Mobilization Office during the Second World War inside the then-German borders (so-called Foreign Workers)."[515] Thus, by allowing this group of neglected graves to lose their protected status, the Federal Republic was not merely risking offending the sensibilities of families from whom they would likely never hear complaints but

[514] Dr. König, Aktenvermerk Betr: Gräber verschleppter Personen und nichtdeutscher Flüchtlinge, uncirculated memorandum, August 12, 1960. VDK A.10-100.

[515] Ibid. These foreign laborers were a combination of POWs, civilians conscripted from German-occupied territories and in some cases details of Concentration Camp prisoners sent to factories. While the Third Reich did employ a few hundred thousand foreign laborers in 1939, the numbers of these foreign laborers increased dramatically after the invasion of the Soviet Union. By late 1944, there were nearly 7.9 million foreign workers forcibly deployed within the German borders, making decisive contributions to German war production due to the drain of manpower to the fronts (and to casualties) as well as the limitations on deployment of German women in the labor force. Figures from Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, Second Edition (Lanham, MD, 2009), 217 and Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York, 2006), 517. These sources do not make clear how many of these foreign workers were killed over the course of the war, leaving unanswered how many graves fell into the gap in legal protections described above.

instead symbolically showing the world that these victims were easily forgotten and their remains allowed to rot in disrepair. The prospect, however unintended, of the conservative government of the Nazis' successor state willfully erasing any of the Third Reich's victims from the rows of physical reminders of that history, and therefore making it harder to account for these victims in collective memory, was a political problem but one that denied easy solution.

*An "unobjectionable" memory?*

As a domestic political issue, the controversy over the expiration of certain graves' *Ruhefrist* and the withholding of *Ruherecht* from these graves quickly became a conversation about how much West Germany did or did not resemble the Nazi regime. While this conclusion may seem obvious, the comparisons between the Adenauer government and Hitler's dictatorship were continuously implied by critics on the far left but otherwise rarely articulated openly. In this case, an internal memo from the *Volksbund* made clear that the care of war graves was "a true obligation of international law, which the Federal Republic took on in the treaty with the former occupation powers governing the return of remains of soldiers." The subtext here was of course that the National Socialist government had broken the various treaties negotiated after the end of the First World War, as Hitler prepared his way for war. Therefore, the lingering skepticism towards Germans and any German state meant that West German politicians and social leaders had their own special obligation to meet the letter *and* spirit of the agreements negotiated in 1945, in order to demonstrate their trustworthiness and dedication to the rule of law.

This in turn meant that, whatever the oversights in the 1952 War Graves Law, the graves of non-German victims of the Nazi regime (in this case, the "*Fremdarbeiter*") were "until their

giving up [into the care of families or other parties besides the Federal Republic] to be cared for in accordance with all rules and kept in good condition."[516] That is, when those graves that were scheduled to lose their protective *Ruhefrist* were in the final days of this period of guardianship, state and local authorities were still required to maintain all care and protections granted to war graves as long as statutorily required. At the same time, *Volksbund* leaders seemed to indicate hope for a political solution to this sensitive problem but noted with regret that such political will appeared to have been lacking late in 1960. As the most visible face of the Federal Republic when it came to war graves and public mourning, the VDK were in some respects hamstrung in only being able to carry out the work that the state paid for, despite the VDK's insight into how such shortcomings would appear to the wider German and non-German public.

If political will to demonstrate consciousness and remorse for the crimes of the Nazi regime, by preserving the graves of the Nazis' victims, was lacking in the conservative government, such sentiments were clearly present in the opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD). Aside from the pedestrian political maneuvering and seizing of any opportunity to criticize their chief electoral opponents, the SPD had in the years since 1949 often and loudly invoked its relatively unstained credentials, as having been the only party in the Reichstag to vote against the Enabling Act in 1933. By the early 1960s, after over a decade in opposition, the SPD was still stubbornly determined to remind the conservatives of their (the German center right's) failings in not strenuously enough resisting the Nazis' rise to power. In April 1962, amid the controversy over the gaps in the War Graves Law, the SPD protested, calling for such undesignated graves to be granted "war grave" status by an expansion of the War Graves Law.

[516] Dr. König, Aktenvermerk Betr: Gräber verschleppter Personen und nichtdeutscher Flüchtlinge, uncirculated memorandum, August 12, 1960. VDK A.10-100.

More specifically, the SPD asked that the government amend the Law, so that "the graves of victims of National Socialism that do not fall under the Agreement with the French Republic of 23 October 1954 receive the same legal status, including permanent *Ruherecht*, as the graves of fallen soldiers."[517]

This was probably easier said than done, and the opposition party in the Federal Parliament did not themselves bear responsibility for writing legislation and initiating the approval and appropriations process. Thus it is unsurprising that the CDU Federal Interior Minister, Hermann Höcherl, responded that he thought such legal changes would be too difficult, perhaps even unconstitutional. Still, he did allow that steps could be taken on a case-by-case basis to expand the provisions for long-term protection of gravesites whose preservation was threatened.[518] Thus beyond what was in some measure political wrangling for public opinion, both the mainstream right and left in West Germany seemed to have understood the need to evince compassion for the graves of *any* and all Nazi victims, lest these parties appear to be revising collective memory and public mourning practices to underemphasize any aspect of the former regime's crimes.

In some respects, this controversy over "war grave" designation in 1962 replayed a number of the characteristics of the 1952 *Termindebatte* over *Volkstrauertag* (see Chapter II). In

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[517] Ollenhauer und Fraktion, Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion SPD, April 4, 1962, formal petition from SPD to CDU government to pass a law expanding the types of graves covered under the War Graves Law, EZAB 2/2560. The petition is referred to elsewhere as Drucksache IV/333.

[518] Bundesminister des Innern Höcherl to the Herrn Präsidenten des Deutschen Bundestages, April 17, 1962, formal response to the SPD's petition cited in Note 7 above. EZAB 2/2560.

Höcherl was born in 1912 and thus was already a young man when the Nazis took power in 1933. He fought and served time as a POW during the Second World War, joining the CSU in 1949 and serving in a number of local and regional offices before rising to the Federal Cabinet in 1961. Perhaps old enough by 1918 to have understood the hardship of the home front during war time, Höcherl's combat experience appears to have exercised a heavier influence on his understanding of war and the experiences of war for both soldiers and non-combatants. Hartmut Weber, et al., *Die Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung Band 14. 1961.* **(**München, 2004), accessed on 30 April 2013 via http://www.bundesarchiv.de/cocoon/barch/0000/k/k1961k/kap1_3/kap2_1/para3_1.html

that event, the necessity of avoiding any substantial resemblance to Nazi-era practices of public mourning motived the federal government as well as the Protestant Church in Germany to pressure the *Volksbund* into reforming its resurrected mourning holiday. That is, critics in the early 1950s wanted to remove any traces of the National Socialist past from the post-fascist public so as to appear to have marked a "clean break" with that discredited history. In 1962, critics of the War Graves Law and the larger phenomenon of restrictions on the designation of "war grave" wanted to expand this recognition to more victims' remains, so as to keep these gravesites present in the new democratic West Germany. If the graves in question were allowed to be disinterred, some aspect of the Nazis' crimes, however small or limited, would be figuratively stricken from collective memory as it was erased from the physical landscape. Writing to the SPD to express its support, the Protestant Church once more swung into action in order to ensure the post-1945 Germany did not repeat the mistakes of the 1930s.[519] Again similarly to 1952, the Conference of Interior Ministers of the States would eventually come to agreement on the need to change the War Graves Law, this time pressuring the Federal Interior Minister to enact reforms (instead of a recalcitrant *Volksbund*).[520]

The impasse over how to reform the War Graves Law, and by extension, clarify this constituent part of West German public mourning for the war dead, is all the more surprising given that both the Federal and State governments had, in 1958, already agreed that the appearance of West Germans' cold-hearted retreat from preserving and maintaining the graves of the Nazis' victims should be avoided at all costs. "There exists also from the standpoint of

[519] EKD to the Herrn Innenminister des Landes Niedersachsen in Hannover, July 6, 1962, letter conveying disappointment that the government has not altered the war graves law. EZAB 2/2560.

[520] Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche, OKR von Harling, August 6, 1964, letter including clipping of the article„„Namenlose ohne Gesetz," *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, July 21, 1964, EZAB 2/2560.

international relations a considerable interest," explained a memo circulated by the *Volksbund*, to demonstrate "in every case an unobjectionable care and keeping-in-order" of the graves for the entire period under which they were in the state's care.[521] Here the concerns for how the rest of the world viewed West Germany's actions in the matter of graves care was more than symbolic, as the VDK expressed its fear that allowing unprotected graves to eventually be disinterred would make it more difficult for West Germany to negotiate the right of the VDK to access and care for sites of German war dead in other countries.[522] Such concerns about international law were not merely abstract conventions that West Germans needed to observe, in order to save face before its neighbors and allies. Rather, other documents from the *Volksbund* make clear the very real demands and importance of proper grave maintenance and care for victims of the war and the dictatorship, such as graves of Russian citizens who died on German soil. In June 1963, the Third Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in West Germany visited a number of VDK offices and cemeteries, apparently to determine the state of care of the graves.[523]

The degree to which political hurdles such as those described above impeded the reforming of West German law governing the definition and care of graves for war victims plainly demonstrates the lack of consensus on the question of how to mourn the dead, which dead to mourn, and the level of political, financial, or even simply symbolic effort and support deserved by the several categories of dead victims of the Second World War. For all the effort that the VDK expended from 1960 to 1961 to create the new, standardized *Totenehrung* portion of Bonn *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, their efforts to push the West German public towards a more

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[521] Dr. König, Aktenvermerk Betr: Gräber verschleppter Personen und nichtdeutscher Flüchtlinge, uncirculated memorandum, August 12, 1960. VDK A.10-100.

[522] Ibid.

[523] VDK to alle Landesverbände, June 18, 1963, Rundschreiben Nr. 28/63, memorandum, VDK A.10-103.

comprehensive and more completely informed collective memory of the Nazi past was not supported by the legal codes governing the physical remnants of that past. At the same time as consensus lacked between the parties attempting to create cultural norms and the structures enforcing such beliefs, other documents indicate that more voices were joining the debate between the *Volksbund*, West German leaders, and the public at large.

## A "completely different" memory

Political hurdles were not the only hindrance to the crystallization and popular acceptance of a singular collective memory of the war and the dead. While the *Volksbund* had encountered critics in one form or another continually throughout the post-war era once *Volkstrauertag* was resurrected, by the mid-1960s a clearly defined alternative voice with an opposing memory of the past had emerged. The *Evangelische Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* did not harbor the same memory of the Second World War as did the *Volksbund*, the conservative West German government, and the War Graves Law from 1952.[524]

### *Documenting a larger history*

Quite oppositely from demarcating the dead who had died due to "immediate effects of the war" from all the other casualties, the *Hilfsstelle* explicitly linked the war and its effects to

[524] This organization is somewhat mysterious. Evidently founded by or at least under the leadership of Pastor Fritz Majer-Leonhard from 1945 until 1964, this organization appears to have been a leading, if lonely and tireless, voice calling the EKD to pressure the VDK to expand Volkstrauertag and its war graves projects to include more recognition racial victims of the Nazi regime. Majer-Leonhard himself was a Protestant pastor whose family was of Jewish ancestry. Unable to serve in a clerical post during the Third Reich, Majer-Leonhard ended up in the Wolfenbüttel Concentration Camp in 1944. Majer-Leonhard and his colleagues appear to have comprised a decisive minority, vying for influence over the minds of the church leaders and the clergy (attention that they did not enjoy, since they aggressively sought it out). Gerhard Gronauer, *Der Staat Israel im westdeutschen Protestantismus. Wahrnehmungen in Kirche und Publizistik vom 1948 bis 1972* (Göttingen, 2013), 502.

the Nazi regime who had launched it, in the process illustrating the qualitative disparity in mourning military dead versus civilian dead, despite the relative quantitative parity in numbers of victims. In reimagining what West German public mourning should look like, whether in the form of the legal provisions for care of war graves or through *Volkstrauertag* itself, these critical voices from within a lay office of the institutional Protestant Church in Stuttgart drew out what had long been missing from the annual memorial ceremonies: attention to those aspects of the Second World War that made it different from the First World War and earlier conflicts in German history.

Just as the *Volksbund* was motivated to preserve and promote a memory of the two World Wars out of the fear for another conflict, the lay Protestant activists working to subvert or at least modify *Volkstrauertag* were also motivated by a fear that the older, more nationalistic and brash practices of *Heldengedenktag* would re-emerge from parts of West German society where it had not been entirely discredited. For this reason, even though the *Volksbund* elites had taken steps to modify the annual national ceremony in Bonn with a wider palate of victims who deserved to be mourned, and therefore a more complicated and potentially self-critical memory of the Second World War, critics in the *Hilfsstelle* and also within the institutional Protestant Church in Germany seemed to have remained suspicious of Nazi practices hiding behind the curtain, ready to spring forth at any moment.

Though it is unclear the degree to which these fears were justified, what is most notable is the appearance of another, separate center of interpretive thought on the complex question of mourning the war dead and explaining the history of the war. Though the Protestant Church and the various government representatives had before voiced opposition to *Volkstrauertag*, they had always ultimately come to an agreement with the VDK and supported, however grudgingly, the

holiday. While the lay *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* also confronted West German society with a very different and difficult-to-digest image of the war and the dead, their campaign to revise *Volkstrauertag* and collective memory came from outside the heretofore traditional bounds of public mourning practice.

Equally representative dead?

The 1962 campaign to force a revision of public mourning and collective memory began from an assumption of equality between all deaths, no matter the circumstance of the victims' dying or the ends which their suffering may have served. In a pamphlet published to criticize *Volkstrauertag* for preserving a limited understanding of victims of the war, the *Hilfsstelle* explained that, "[i]n the First World War, some 10 Million soldiers" were estimated to have died, whereas „during the Second World War, between 50 and 55 Million people died [*umkamen*], of which every other one was a civilian."[525] The authors of the pamphlet continued by breaking down Second World War casualty figures for France, the USSR, Poland, Yugoslavia, Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, and Germany, in order to implicitly argue that, in nearly all cases, civilian deaths because of the war were equal to or even exceeded military deaths related to the war.[526] Of course, the whole point of the 1961 *Totenehrung* portion of

[525] Hilfsstelle für Rassenverfolgte bei der Evangelischen Gesellschaft in Stuttgart, „Zahlen, die zu denken geben," March 1962, pamphlet, VDK C.1-5.

These numbers from 1962 appear more or less correct, at least when compared to more recent estimates. While calculating exact numbers of dead is extremely difficult, a total estimate of 55 Million deaths due to the Second World War is given in a popular American newsmagazine. While this magazine's sources are not made clear, and while these authors refer to worldwide numbers of dead (and not just European dead), the authors here write that 45.5% of worldwide casualties were military and 54.5% civilian, which suggest that the Protestant critics in Stuttgart in 1962 were justified in arguing for more recognition of civilian deaths, considering their near-parity with military deaths. See „The Costs of World War II," *American History*, Aug2005, Vol. 40 Issue 3, p24-25

[526] Hilfsstelle für Rassenverfolgte bei der Evangelischen Gesellschaft in Stuttgart, „Zahlen, die zu denken geben," March 1962, pamphlet, VDK C.1-5.

The *Hilfsstelle* offers the following tabulations, making clear that "included in these numbers are the losses of the European Jewry, against whom the Second World War was also directed."

*Volkstrauertag* (referenced above) was to codify a formula by which military and civilian dead, including racial victims of the Nazis, would be remembered. Yet these categories were then presented abstractly and ranked (with the military at the top) as if they were otherwise equally historically representative. That is, if the war dead were mostly equally distributed into these three general groupings of victims, then prioritizing the combat dead would make sense only if combat death carried a heavier value politically, culturally, religiously, or otherwise. Yet by starting with the proposition that civilian deaths were *just as important to recognize* as military deaths, the *Hilfsstelle*'s argument begged the question of why civilian graves and deaths did not receive as complete a protection and recognition as soldiers' graves and deaths, considering their near-numerical parity.

Beyond simply comparing aggregate military and civilian death tolls, the *Hilfsstelle* went further, identifying one of the most important historical differences between the First and Second World Wars. The brochure explained that "[c]ontained in these numbers [were] the losses of European Jewry, *against whom the Second World War was also directed*."[527] This important distinction had been conspicuously missing in nearly all national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies up to this time. Instead, the war was always presented as a negative experience, an inexplicable tragedy, a tragedy of circumstance, or an event caused by German failures but one that affected all of its victims the same way. That is, very little mention was made of the special violence and

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| France: | 192,600 dead soldiers; 331,000 dead civilians; |
| Russia: | 13,600,000 dead soldiers; between 7,000,000 and 30,000,000 dead civilians; |
| Poland: | 100,000 dead soldiers; 4,200,000 dead civilians; |
| Yugoslavia: | 300,000 dead soldiers; 1,400,000 dead civilians; |
| Netherlands: | 10,000 dead soldiers; 200,000 dead civilians; |
| Belgium: | 12,000 dead soldiers; 76,000 dead civilians; |
| Greece: | 20,000 dead soldiers; 140,000 dead civilians; |
| Germany: | 3,500,000 dead soldiers; 3,500,000 dead civilians |

[527] Ibid, my emphasis added.

persecution meted out to Jewish communities or other minority groups.[528] Even the new *Totenehrung* in 1961 placed victims of Nazi aggression *after* German soldiers and German civilians, and envisioned dead soldiers of both world wars as having shared the same experiences and suffering in pursuit of the same ends (See Chapter III).

The final page of this critical pamphlet from the *Hilfsstelle* clearly made the argument that West Germans were singularly misinformed or under-informed about the scale of death resulting from the Second World War. Criticizing school textbooks, films, and military history statistical records for categorically underplaying the numbers of civilian dead, the *Hilfsstelle* also referred to such sentiments at the 1962 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, calling on West Germans to recognize non-soldiers as equal victims of the war and therefore deserving of public memorial attention: "As far as we know, all victims of the war are considered as war graves *in all the countries of Western Europe*" and only in West Germany "do people hold on to the so-called 'traditional war-grave concept.'" [529] Furthermore, the *Hilfsstelle* considered it shameful and disingenuous that "a minister could in the year 1962 declare before the *Bundestag* that the Millions of dead civilians (Concentration Camp victims, foreign workers, deportees, euthanasia-victims, victims of starvation, etc…) were not victims of immediate circumstances of the war."[530] Interestingly, the *Hilfsstelle* apparently left out German victims of aerial bombing or

[528] Indeed, professional historians in West Germany and in the Anglo-American academy were still at this time largely researching and conceptualizing the Second World War as a purely military affair. Raul Hillberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* was only published in 1961, the same year when Adolph Eichmann was tried in Jerusalem, and was the "first massively documented history of the Holocaust," which initiated the academic field of Holocaust research. Quote from Donald L. Niewyk, *The Holocaust: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, Fourth Edition (Boston, 2011) 7.

[529] Hilfsstelle für Rassenverfolgte bei der Evangelischen Gesellschaft in Stuttgart, „Zahlen, die zu denken geben," March 1962, pamphlet, VDK C.1-5. Emphasis original.

[530] Ibid.

combat operations on the ground from this designation of "civilian" victims, perhaps because they considered all "fellow-travelers" to be co-perpetrators. Yet clearly the *Hilfsstelle* considered all the casualties of the Nazi regime to be necessarily and simultaneously casualties of the war, since they (the *Hilfsstelle*) saw no dividing line between the regime and the war it began.

The *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* continued its criticism in a barrage of literature directed against the *Volksbund* and the West German Ministry of the Interior for adopting a "traditional" view of war graves. Indeed, the very basis for comparing civilian to military deaths was subjected to relentless interrogation, with the hope of denying any logical basis for observing or demarcating one group of dead (namely, the military dead) as being different from any other group of dead (like civilians). In another pamphlet, apparently drafted as a response to the SPD's enquiry into the War Graves Law debate (see above), the *Hilfsstelle* remarked that, it "was doubtful, whether one may simply adapt a law created in 1922 amid circumstances completely different from the Second World War."[531] Lest supporters of the "traditional" distinction between military and civilian victims attempt to deflect criticism based on technological changes in warfare or even sheer numbers of people involved, the *Hilfsstelle* made its reasoning crystal clear: "[b]esides the purely military goals of the Second World War, the wider goals (Decimation of the peoples of the Eastern regions, Murder of the Jews and Enemies of the State, and 'Annihilation of Lives not worth being lived') may not be overlooked."[532] These non-battlefield dead were not collateral damage but "victims" of the "measures taken by the German War Leadership" and therefore "were war victims, their graves therefore war-

[531] Hilfsstelle für Rassenverfolgte bei der Evangelischen Gesellschaft in Stuttgart, „Der ‚traditionelle Kriegs-Gräber-Begriff' und die Tatsachen," position paper offering arguments against the Interior Minister's decision not to reform the War Graves Law, no date, EZAB 2/2560.

[532] Ibid.

graves" and thus deserving of the War Graves Law's enhanced protections.[533] Having identified the heart of the problem with interpreting and celebrating dead soldiers on *Volkstrauertag* after 1945, the *Hilfsstelle* concluded here that "[w]hoever makes the 'traditionally developed war-grave concept' the basis of their considerations" on questions of memory and mourning, necessarily "trivialized the monstrosities of the Second World War."[534]

A history "not easy to hear"

The larger phenomenon of West German youth confronting their parents' generation (who had lived through and taken part in the war) in the 1960s for not resisting Hitler has been well-documented. Yet the place of public mourning in this moment of "cultural revolution" has surprisingly not yet been acknowledged, despite the *Hilfsstelle* making this challenge central to their campaign to revise public mourning and collective memory in the early 1960s. Another pamphlet published as part of the campaign to revise the War Graves Law found the *Hilfsstelle* much clearer about also criticizing *Volkstrauertag*, loudly pointing out the contradiction or double-standard in treating "war graves" differently from regular graves of people who died during the war. "The coming generation should know what happened and should, through a completely personal and visible sign, be made familiar with the actions of the recent past."[535] Such an honest and bare representation of the war and the dictatorship who launched it would necessarily have to demonstrate "that the Second World War was not conducted in the traditional

[533] Ibid.

[534] Ibid.

[535] Hilfsstelle für Rassenverfolgte bei der Evangelischen Gesellschaft in Stuttgart, „Kriegsgräber-Fürsorge oder Soldatengräber-Fürsoge," July 1962, pamphlet, VDK C.1-5.

form of earlier wars"[536] but rather saw a more complete dissolution of the line between combatant and non-combatant, whereby "POWs were brought into concentration camps (and there killed), mentally disabled civilians were designated as 'useless mouths to feed' through a decree from 1 September 1939 (the Outbreak of the War) and Millions of Jews were in the number of war dead included, as the Third Reich declared war on 'world-Jewry.'"[537] Perhaps anticipating (or more likely, enacting the early stages of) the well-known confrontation between '68ers and their elders later in the decade, the *Hilfsstelle* acknowledged that the truth was "doubtlessly…not easy to hear"[538] but insisted on a truer understanding of the past and a more honest way for Germans to talk about it.

This more honest and historically accurate appreciation of the past was echoed in a letter sent from the *Evangelische Hilfsstelle* to the Chancellery of the Protestant Church in Germany in August of 1964, expressing dismay that the state-sponsored mourning ceremonies for *Volkstrauertag* did not acknowledge the more complicated and damning history of Germans' actions during the war. In its letter, the *Hilfsstelle* invoked the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War but then immediately conjured up the image of the *Einsatzkommandos* murdering the Jews of Poland in 1941, instead of the *Wehrmacht* first rolling across Poland in 1939, much less launching "Operation Barbarossa" in 1941. Of course, the anniversary of the war was an important factor in re-igniting the debate over graves and therefore victims. Yet this time, unlike the early 1950s, the judicial proceedings in West Germany and in Israel against Holocaust perpetrators had begun, allowing the *Hilfsstelle* to point out that "the gruesome

[536] Ibid.

[537] Ibid.

[538] Ibid.

Annihilation measures taken by the '*Einsatzkommandos*' [had] by now become generally known."[539] This increasingly public knowledge, though not entirely unknown earlier, made the gap between caring for, preserving, and commemorating the graves of "purely military" actors but not non-military actors harder and harder to defend. In light of this ugly reality, that the "pure military" side of the war was intimately connected to the criminal acts of German men-at-arms, the *Hilfsstelle* declared that they "could not regard it as just, that the grave sites of the 'militarily-deployed SS-Men' must be permanently preserved while the graves of the concentration camp dead do not receive this protection."[540] The image of SS remains being cared for and treated as an object of reverence, while the victims of SS brutality were trampled and left to rot, was a potent argument indeed.

Such convincing arguments did not fall on deaf ears. A story run in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* in July 1964 explained that the Interior Ministers of the different West German states had all agreed on the need to revise the existing War Graves Law but that the Federal Interior Minister Höcherl favored instead an entirely new law. While not wholly clear on the details of the negotiations, this article reported that the Federal Minister had proposed the Federal government pay for care of soldiers' graves from the Second World War while the states pay for the care of both soldiers' graves from the First World War plus Concentration Camp victims. Apparently willing to shoulder the burden of soldiers from the Second World War (and, presumably if financial means were unlimited, those of the First World War, too), the Federal Minister was quoted as being hesitant to take on the care of concentration camp victims due to a

[539] Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche, OKR von Harling, August 6, 1964, EZAB 2/2650.

[540] Ibid.

particularly constructionist reading of the West German Basic Law, whereby "[t]he Federal Interior Minister believed himself thereby compelled…only to overtake expenditures for domestic and foreign costs associated with the war."[541] While a number of state-level officials agreed on the linkage between war and regime as the most proper understanding of history and the dead, this federal official still believed that the victims of the Nazi regime were not part of "the war" and therefore, not technically his concern.

The irony of a conservative West German government's punctilious dedication to upholding the letter of the law as a way of separating itself from the shadow of the Nazi regime, and in the process ignoring the victims and history of that regime, barely requires explanation. The *Hilfsstelle* immediately criticized this non-common sense approach to war graves and commemoration (as they saw it) and praised the states' willingness to realize the equality of military and civilian graves, declaring that "[h]appily, the *Landesinnenminister* demonstrate[d] more instinct and refused this bill from the federal government," because they "recognize[d] that one should not carry on the discussion of military victims and political victims on into the topic of graves on account of a couple million Marks."[542] The *Hilfsstelle* instead encouraged the states to take this initiative to the *Bundesrat* and there initiate the amendment process for the War Graves Law, since the *Bundestag* had by now (in July 1964) failed to act and, in September of that year, the graves in question would lose their protected status.[543] In this case, the *Hilfsstelle* had the VDK seemingly on its side, as they pointed to the 1961 *Volkstrauertag* speech by VDK

[541] Transcription of „Namenlose ohne Gesetz," *Stuttgarter Zeitung* July 21, 1964, Forwarded with Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche, OKR von Harling, August 6, 1964, EZAB 2/2650.

[542] Ibid.

[543] Ibid.

President Trepte, in which he explicitly equated victims of the Nazi regime as worthy of just as much attention as military victims of the (German) regime's war policy, using VDK's own words and logic against those conservative elements in the government or elsewhere who would prefer to continue minimizing Germans' problematic tradition of mourning the dead warriors, not those whom their warriors had killed.[544]

*Framing a more critical memory*

Appealing to the pulpits

Besides loudly critiquing "traditional conceptions" of war and war victims as they related to graves and preservation of graves, the *Hilfsstelle* simultaneously connected this discussion about the physical remains of the dead to the annual *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies meant to guide all Germans in their mourning of the dead and remembrance of the war. As a practical matter, the *Hilfsstelle* did not rest its hopes on circulating brochures and issuing statements blindly but rather worked by lobbying the German Protestant Church directly, providing reading materials and talking points to pastors for use in preparing their annual sermons for *Volkstrauertag* Sunday. A memo from the Provincial Church of Electoral Hesse and Waldeck, in northern Hesse, to its regional and local clergy, took the opportunity "to advise" its local leaders "on the meaning of *Volkstrauertag*" since, "in line with our experience," the holiday usually "only remembered the war victims."[545] Yet this Protestant leadership objected only to practices that preserved *Volkstrauertag* as a military memorial festival, insisting that "the victims of the

[544] Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft, „'Kriegs-Gräber-Fürsorge' im Dritten Reich," August 1964, pamphlet, forwarded with Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche, OKR von Harling, August 6, 1964, EZAB 2/2650.

[545] Evangelisches Landeskirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck to the Herren Pröpste, Dekane und Pfarrer der Evangleischen Landeskirche von Kurhessen-Waldeck, November 5, 1962, memorandum, EKKW C/1042.

National Socialist Terror [should] also be remembered."[546] To give pastors in the VDK's backyard materials for use in preparing their sermons accordingly, this Provincial Church Office provided a brochure from the *Hilfsstelle*, which at this time was also worried about stubbornly antiquated interpretations and commemorative practices that "make a memorial day for the German soldier out of *Volkstrauertag*," with the result that "the remembrance of the other dead of the Second World War" might "slowly be pushed out of the German consciousness."[547] To be clear, the *Hilfsstelle* never made clear in these documents who "they" (the party working to corrupt *Volkstrauertag* back into its former *Heldengedenktag* self) were but, nevertheless, these activists in Stuttgart remained convinced that, if left alone, West Germans would not force themselves to confront and re-learn this dark history of their lives under the Nazi dictatorship.

A few months later, the *Hilfsstelle* wrote again to the Provincial Church of Electoral Hesse and Waldeck's office in Kassel, expressing continued "worry over the attempt to create a new *Heldengedenktag*" in some circles of culturally- or politically conservative (or otherwise unreconstructed) West Germans.[548] Thanking the Kassel church office "for all of its efforts" to ensure "the correct celebration of *Volks-Trauertag* [sic]," the *Hilfsstelle* explained that the VDK and the Interior Ministers of the Federal States were all in agreement about including all victims of the war equally in official public mourning and collective memory activities, as evidenced by the state governments' near-consensus on the "preservation of the Concentration Camp graves."[549] In the face of this near-unanimity, the Federal Minister for the Interior was the

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[546] Ibid.

[547] Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte to the Evang. Landeskirchenamt Kassel-Wilhelmhöhe, April 17, 1963. EKKW C/1042.

[548] Hilfstelle für Rassenverfolgte bei der Evangelische Gesellschaft to the Evangelische Landeskirchenamt [in] Kassel-Wilhelmhöhe], August 21, 1963, EKKW C/1042.

[549] Ibid.

holdout, preferring to maintain the older distinction between battle-field and home-front (see above).[550]

The ultimate reasons for the federal government's intransigence and preference for thinking (and remembering) "the war" was something separate from "the regime" (and its crimes) are not clear from these records. Still, for senior civil servants in the 1960s, the war would have been a formative experience for them as (mostly) young men, generationally speaking. Thus it is not hard to imagine bureaucrats and political leaders wishing to maintain any grounds, however small, for separating their Wehrmacht service away from association with the SS and other committed Nazi groups. Unfortunately for the war generation, episodes such as this one, when political obstacles and bureaucratic delays prevented a more complete and perhaps critical discussion about the Nazi years from taking place, seemed to confirm the 68ers' suspicions that "fascism" and "authoritarianism" lurked still in the West German corridors of power. After all, rules that make reform and especially critical thinking and truth-seeking so difficult would not enjoy such respect unless the German people were still a nation of individuals who followed rules and deferred to state authorities.

The *Hilfsstelle's* fear of a return *to Heldengedenktag* and the uncritical glorification of Germany's military dead, whatever the probability of coming into fruition, resonated loudly with like-minded circles within the West German Protestant Church. When the Protestant High Church Council wrote to the Chancellery of the Protestant Church in Germany to explain that the *Hilfsstelle* had gone so far as to suggest a "specially-designated memorial day for the Victims of the Third Reich," the High Church Council admitted that the new settlement from 1952, whereby

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[550] Ibid.

"*Volkstrauertag* [was] dedicated to the memory of the Fallen of the two World Wars and also the Victims of the Nazi Regime," could by 1961 "no longer find agreement everywhere."[551] It seems highly likely that the common picture scholars paint of Cultural Revolution, youth up in arms, and families in strife because of conflict between older and younger generations of West Germans over the history of the Nazi past, all had some roots in a larger building of discomfort with public memory and collective mourning practices.

An ambiguous heterodoxy?

In their relationship to the *Volkstrauertag* holiday, the Protestant Church in Germany, as an institution, seemed to be going in circles, with some critics unhappy about the 1952 settlement (which left *Volkstrauertag* extant, albeit in a moderated form), while other pro-*Volkstrauertag* groups were unhappy about the compromise and unwilling to accept any additional changes to the holiday at any future date. At the suggestion of creating yet *another* holiday somehow dedicated to publicly mourning, even one especially dedicated to the "Victims of the Third Reich" which might counterbalance the apparent failings of *Volkstrauertag*, the Church's senior leadership had to conclude that "the great majority of the Provincial Churches [were] not prepared to celebrate a new special memorial day with the vestments of religion."[552] Still, there stood the "many local clergy" for whom delivering their Sunday morning sermons on *Volkstrauertag* was quite difficult due to their congregations' "misunderstandings of *Volkstrauertag* into the shape of the earlier *Heldengedenktag* but also due to the close following

[551] Evangelischer Oberkirchenrat, Stuttgart, to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche in Deutschland, Hannover-Herrenhausen, August 15, 1961, memorandum, EZAB 2/4419.

[552] Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche in Deutschland, Hannover-Herrenhausen, to the Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat, Stuttgart, September 11, 1961, memorandum, EZAB 2/4419.

of *Volkstrauertag, Buß- und Bettag* and *Ewigskeitssonntag*"[553] in the church year. Given that the 1952 ruling to move *Volkstrauertag* from the Lenten season to the end of the church year, and thus depart with Nazi-era practices, "did not find applause in all the Provincial Churches"[554] (perhaps here meaning their provincial leaderships) but had found some resonance within the pastorate, the Protestant Church was not in as nimble a position to unilaterally demand changes or reforms to collective memory and public mourning in the 1960s as was the *Hilfsstelle.*

Thus, while the Protestant Church was more or less forced to adopt an institutional posture of some ambivalence toward the historically-troubled public mourning holiday, these documents also indicate that the national church leadership were themselves indeed more sympathetic to the Stuttgart activists than perhaps the middling- and lower-level church bureaucracy. In some ways, this dichotomy of progressive/conservative approaches to mourning and remembrance may have been a product of age, as the men who had by the 1960s risen to senior leadership in the regional and state-level church bureaucracies were most likely old enough to have also served in the Second World War and also have been socialized during at least the Third Reich, if not the Weimar Republic. Whereas those junior men still serving in local pastoral offices in the 1960s may have been, on the average, too young to have known these older mourning practices, and the war that made them seem urgent, firsthand. If the state-level Provincial Church leaderships and even local congregations were largely only grudgingly accepting of the newer, less militarized *Volkstrauertag* into the 1960s, the deal from 1952 that guaranteed this new holiday had also failed to please the critical voices in the church for whom

[553] To Herrn Professor D. Martin Fischer, Berlin-Zehlendorf, February 28, 1962, EZAB 2/4419. The exact author of this letter is unclear, listed only as „N."

[554] Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche in Deutschland, Hannover-Herrenhausen, to the Evangelischen Oberkirchenrat, Stuttgart, September 11, 1961, memorandum, EZAB 2/4419.

the 1952 agreement did not do enough to constrain mourning for the military dead. These progressives' disappointment put bluntly, "[o]ur hope that its removal out of the Lenten Season to the end of the Church Year would lead, over the passage of time, toward a melting together with *Totensonntag*, has not been fulfilled," wrote one pastor to his colleague, a Professor in Berlin in 1962.[555]

The problem of collectively remembering the dead on successive Sundays, alluded to by this pastor above, was also a problem for pastors who did not necessarily want to see *Volkstrauertag* disappear. One clergyman from Wiesbaden wrote to his superiors to express this frustration, that if *Volkstrauertag* was to be kept separately for "war dead," this would mean only discussing non-war dead on *Totensonntag* and consequently leaving meditations on personal guilt and repentance for sins to *Buss- und Bettag*, a setting not directly related to the war and the issue of German crimes and culpability. The indirect result of restricting discussion of moral concerns to days other than *Volkstrauertag* would be to leave nothing but war dead to talk about on the memorial Sunday, and usually soldiers at that, which could allow it to resume the form of "*Heldengedenktag*."[556] In this case, this pastor was asking for further and more detailed guidance in the form of a special pericope from which to prepare sermons and ensure theological consistency among all Protestant congregations and their pastors on these days of mourning.[557]

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[555] To Herrn Professor D. Martin Fischer, Berlin-Zehlendorf, February 28, 1962, EZAB 2/4419. The exact author of this letter is unclear, listed only as „N."

[556] Copy of Pfarrer Heinz Geibel, Wiesbaden-Erbenheim to tbe Leitende Geistliche Amt der Ev. Kirche in Hessen und Nassau, December 7, 1961, forwarded with Kirchenleitung der Evangelischen Kirche in Hessen und Nassau to the Evangelische Kiche in Deutschland, Kirchenkanzlei, Hannover-Herrenhausen, January 22, 1962, EZAB 2/4419.

[557] The anglicized Greek word "pericope" refers to specific scriptural excerpts assigned to a given Sunday, which pastors were to use as the basis for planning their worship services and sermons. These passages were decided upon by church leaders and circulated in the lectionary, usually repeating the same scriptures on a single- or multi-year rotation. By asking the church elders to assign a new pericope for *Volkstrauertag* Sunday, this pastor was proposing a situation wherein conservative pastors who preferred to preach the same praises for the military as they had been for decades would be forced to write new sermons and therefore alter the liturgical emphases being

This problem of having to define separate liturgical messages for the separate Sundays of mourning, while insisting that these different classes of dead were in fact all equal, seems to have evaded the calculations of the church leaders who worked to move *Volkstrauertag* in order to dilute its significance. After all, the Church's position as far back as 1950 was that "the memory of the victims of the war should be bound up with the generalized memory of those who have passed away *[die Entschlafenen]*,"[558] since the "boundaries between the ordinary death and the death through events of war" had "become fluid" due to the "catastrophe of total war."[559] Thus for all of the national Protestant Church leadership's enthusiasm for the campaign launched by the Stuttgart activists, *Volkstrauertag* and its associated mourning and memory challenges were problematic for churches in a number of ways, and Protestant enthusiasm for ending *Volkstrauertag* cannot simply be equated with a reformist or progressive stance on memory and history.

Instead, the Protestant Church's leadership in Hannover seems to have feared, in the event *Volkstrauertag* should be allowed to continue unchanged, a different outcome than did the *Hilfsstelle* in Stuttgart. The "social action" to reform the holiday taken by the Protestant Church in 1952, and again in support of the lay activists in the mid-1960s, sought to prevent the resurrection of a tradition for glorifying soldiers. That is, a memory of the Second World War that taught that all victims, military and civilian, were equally part of the war experience, and therefore soldiers should receive no special treatment, demanded the "social action" of denying

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broadcast to their congregations. S.v. "pericope" in Samuel Macaulay Jackson, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, 1950),

[558] Archivamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland to Herrn Lutz Niethammer, Heidelberg, August 27, 1962, EZAB 2/4419.

[559] Ibid.

such special treatment to those soldiers. This was, of course, the position of the Protestant leadership across the post-war decades. Contrarily, the *Hilfsstelle* in Stuttgart feared that the non-recognition of Nazi victims' graves would lead to the public conceptualizing the Second World War without also attaching the Nazi regime and their own (the public's) role in that regime. Only when "social action" to ensure that "*all* graves of the victims of the war and of the persecution" were protected, were marked "with clear inscriptions" to explain their deaths, and "that on *Volkstrauertag* also these dead are remembered," would Germans possess a clear and complete memory of the past.[560] Such a radically different vision and articulation of mourning and memory as here makes clear that, by the 1960s, the VDK no longer held a monopoly on collectively remembering and interpreting the past.

**Divergent memories, shared goal**

One ostensible reason why the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* objected to the *Volkstrauertag* practices in the early 1960s was the tendency for the national ceremony in Bonn to anchor its highly visible, officially symbolic program to a memory of the Second World War that gave primacy to the soldiers' experience. To be sure, even the highly praised reforms to the national ceremonies through the late 1950s had also used the military experience as a jumping-off point for discussion of the wider effects of war on the civilian population. The point of these reforms, after all, was to press for the necessity of peace for the future in the age of atomic weapons. The concentration on peace by VDK planners maintained during *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies into the 1960s, but the military experience became increasingly prominent as the basis of the programs. At the same time, amid the debate on revising (and widening) the

[560] Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Evang. Kirchenausschuss, Bremen, December 6, 1963, EZAB 2/2560. Emphasis original.

regulations on "war graves," this tendency of *Volkstrauertag* to prioritize military graves and largely ignore non-military graves appeared more and more of an anachronism to the VDK's critics. For the *Hilfsstelle* and the Protestant Church, the *Volksbund*'s concentration on war graves for inspiration to learning and "social action" seemed to largely miss the contemporary concerns relating to the continuation of war and violence in the 1960s present.

*Celebrating post-war successes?*

"Youth among the War Graves"

One year after unveiling the new, formulaic, *Totenehrung* as a fixed element of the *Volkstrauertag* national ceremony ensuring that all groups of dead victims were remembered from year to year, the 1962 *Volkstrauertag* program did not mirror the previous year's attention to dead victims of German-directed violence. In 1962, the centerpiece of the Bonn ceremony was the reading of the dramatic text, "Youth among War Graves. From Letters and Reports of Young People," a feature designed to direct West Germans' attention to the "nearly 30,000 young people" who "during the past ten years" had "put their time and energy into the service of the war graves of the fallen from the two world wars."[561] Although it is not unreasonable to interpret this program as encompassing earnest, emotional, and authentic reactions of young West Germans who had volunteered to build and restore gravesites of both combat and non-combat dead, the audience's attention in 1962 was most likely directed at German military graves in France, with perhaps also secondary attention to those in German territory.[562] Of their

[561] Friedjung Elter, „Einführende Wort" from the 1962 Volkstrauertag ceremony in Bonn, November 18, 1962, VDK A.100-26.

[562] By this time, the VDK had dedicated a total of sixteen renovated cemeteries outside of West German territory, with several more in development. Of these sixteen, six were in France, which were also the most recently (at that time) dedicated gravesites. Of the rest, four were in Italy, two in Belgium, and one each in Egypt, Ireland, Libya

experiences, said "Speaker 1," "we saw the multiplied pain, of course not the immediate but that which over long years alleviated pain" of next-of-kin and survivors who came decades later to visit the remains of loved ones and comrades.[563] Bearing witness to the emotional pain of families coping with the death of their loved ones during war, the speakers also made a point of refining the imagery of the war graves projects held so important by the VDK and its *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, to include not only "German cemeteries" but also "Czech [cemeteries] in France," Slovakian and Hungarian cemeteries in Italy, or even "at the redesign of two Russian cemeteries… in the Luneburg Heath."[564] To be sure, the ceremony did mention that "it made no difference" which cemetery these German youths worked, their dedication to remembering the history of war and providing a service to the next-of-kin in the present, all in the hope of maintaining peace in the future, was the same in all cases.[565]

Even though the program noted that some war dead remains did not fall into the traditional categories of combat dead or even civilians caught up in combat operations, noting that "a few kilometers" from the Russian cemetery mentioned above "lay the Concentration Camp Bergen-Belsen," the 1962 ceremony emphasized much more the duty to keep peace in the wake of the war, more than any duty of future generations to avoid political chaos and descent into a dictatorship. "What would be said and done in the evenings, around the campfires, was nothing in particular, neither from the side of the Germans or from the others" but, "on all sides,

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and Luxemburg. Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, *Dienst am Menschen, Dienst am Frieden : Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgraberfursorge e.V. [1919-2000]* (Kassel, 2001) 91, 97, 100,106-107, 110.

[563] Author unclear, „Jugend an Kriegsgräbern. Aus Briefen und Berichten Jugendliche" from the 1962 Volkstrauertag ceremony in Bonn, November 18, 1962, VDK A.100-26.

[564] Ibid.

[565] Ibid.

the will grew toward mutual understanding, to comprehension, and to respect for one another."[566] Given that these youth cemetery projects featured partnerships between German youths and their peers from France, Italy, and other former belligerents, but not from the Eastern European Slavic peoples impacted by the war, much less the persecuted communities of European Jews, as well as German Sinti and Roma, Communists, disabled and "a-socials," it is hard to read such outpouring of emotion and action as resulting from anything less than a memory of the Second World War that minimized the political and racial goals of the Nazi Party while portraying the 1939 war as little different from its 1914 predecessor. Perhaps more to the point, the centerpiece image of *Volkstrauertag* in 1962 was still combat deaths as deserving (and receiving) special memorial attention and preservation efforts beyond that which non-combatants received.

"Fallen Without a Grave"

The use of German military graves as inspiration to remembering the war years and the war dead was also the centerpiece of the 1965 Bonn ceremony. This time, the primacy of military dead in this memory was more pronounced simply from the title of the drama, "*Gefallene Ohne Grab,"* featured at the 1965 ceremony. The point of this play was to articulate the importance of giving war graves "*dauerndes Ruherecht*," especially considering the fate of many victims of the war whose remains were not properly buried or even identified in the aftermath of the war. Certainly, the necessity of mourning and the desirability of mourning at the graveside was not something restricted to families of military dead and, for surviving family members, the gravesite itself was considered a crucial component of mourning, as a site where the headstones provided the survivors a tangible remnant "in which we set our hope, the hope

[566] Ibid.

that what [remains of the dead that] were not earthly" would still one day "be called to life."[567] It was at the gravesite where the spiritual remnant of the deceased could be properly imagined (and perhaps communicated with), because the grave held "the dead, really and symbolically."[568]

However, as this play makes clear, the weaponry and conduct of the Second World War meant that, in many cases, the dead could not be properly identified and their remains not individually preserved and marked. It was these "people who died [*gefallen sind*] and who possessed no known resting place, much less a grave," who were simply "missing and forgotten."[569] These victims of the war, depicted in this play as German civilian victims of aerial bombing, German soldiers who died in ground combat, missing German POWs and civilians expellees and refugees, had no known gravesite and thus those survivors mourning them had no specific place to focus their grief. These victims of the war were "doubly killed and erased, gone without a trace," or at the very least, burned and dismembered beyond recognition,[570] therefore leaving their survivors with "nothing left that was human" to mourn.[571]

It is worth noting that there is a degree of ambiguity hidden in the terms and images of this play. Firstly, the VDK planners and the artists whom they recruited to prepare the programs continued to use the term, "fallen [*gefallen*]" to describe the war dead in general, whether military or civilian. Similarly, "Concentration Camp" is used to refer both to *Volksdeutschen*

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[567] Otton Heinrich Kühner, „Gefallenen Ohne Grab, Eine Auswahl aus Berichten, Dokumenten und Briefen mit verbindenden Worten von Otto Heinrich Kühner," from the 1965 Volkstrauertag ceremony in Bonn, November 14, 1965, VDK A.100-29.

[568] Ibid.

[569] Ibid.

[570] Ibid.

[571] Ibid.

incarcerated by Eastern European authorities after the *Wehrmacht*'s retreat,[572] as well as Jews and other targets of Nazi violence,"[573] without much explanation of how these two groups of victims differed from one another. While it was possible to interpret "*Gefallene ohne Grab*" as a call for respectful preservation of all war graves, regardless of circumstances, it is equally likely that critical voices, such as the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* and the Protestant Church, would see in this example insufficient efforts to positively include and explain how West Germans should evaluate the responsibility and circumstances of these different deaths.

*Confronting past failures*

"Suffering of all people"

Much more explicitly than the 1965 "*Gefallene ohne Grab*," the *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies in 1964 and 1967 featured speeches making clear calls for just the sort of honest accountability to history that "*Gefallene ohne Grab*" and the 1962 ceremony avoided. In 1964, the pendulum of *Volkstrauertag* saw a return to the older keynote speech and classical music program, in this instance featuring the VDK's then-president, Walter Trepte, once again at the podium. Trepte's speech invoked not only the dead soldiers from the Second World War but also went out of his way to link a series of anniversaries together that year: the fifty-year anniversary of the First World War's outbreak, the twenty-five year anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, the twenty-year anniversary of the 20th of July Conspiracy, the twentieth anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, as well as the twentieth anniversary

[572] For example,"...Out of the German population remaining behind in the German Eastern Territories, over 900,000 men and women were brought into Concentration Camps during the year 1945." Ibid.

[573] For example: "...The dead of the Concentration Camps, mostly former Jewish prisoners, were buried immediately." Ibid.

of the Warsaw Uprising and brief mention that the Auschwitz Trials had only just begun in 1964.[574] In linking both the Polish experience of the war in 1939 and in 1944, as well as the Western Allies' experiences of defeating Germany, to Germans' own memories of the war, Trepte framed the task of mourning incontestably as a confrontation with Germans' failures. It was this larger history of death and dying beyond Germans' own suffering, which West Germans in 1964 were to have realized. "They outline a total event which has given rise to a *Volkstrauertag"* and which amounts to "a community of emergency and of suffering of all peoples who were touched by the war and its effects."[575] In other words, *Volkstrauertag* was an occasion to move *beyond* Germans' immediate encounter with war and reflect on the several overlapping, competing and interconnected ways in which different people were negatively impacted by the Second World War.

In his speech, Trepte seemed to be less interested in haranguing Germans for their own contributions to the Nazis' ability to do so much damage but more concerned with erasing any lingering distinction between "front" and "home front" or between the "war" and the "regime." Declaring that "in the course of a generation, twice" had the "greatest and strongest so-called Cultural Nations of the world" sought "with all their available means" to kill "not only men of military age but also women, children and old men."[576] Trepte left no room to define civilian deaths and suffering as anything unrelated to the war. Going further, he added that, "when we are talking about death in war," Germans "may not omit anything from the size of this sacrifice

[574] Dekan a.D. Walter Trepte, „Ansprache bei der Gedenkfeier im Bundeshaus" from the 1964 Volkstrauertag ceremony in Bonn, November 15, 1964, VDK A.100-28.

[575] Ibid.

[576] Ibid.

of human life."[577] Echoing sentiments expressed by the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* in Stuttgart, this VDK leader was envisioning a past wherefrom few, if any, positive examples could be drawn.

The 1964 *Volkstrauertag* speech made clear that the Nazi regime was the link between deaths of German civilians caught up in the war and the deaths of Germany's victims who were the targets of the war in the first place. "Next to those whose deaths were immediate outcomes of the war," and who had been long recognized as legitimate victims of the war and part of the collective memory of the war, "are there not still many thousands who died by terrible methods during the last war on execution sites or in Concentration Camps?" asked Trepte.[578] Here Trepte left no room for equivocation on the issue of the Jews, declaring it was impossible to "blur" the "innumerable hundreds of thousands of Jews" who "were forced to suffer in torture- and gas chambers" on account of Germans' own failings.[579] Because these deaths fit within the events of the regime and the war, it was undeniable that "they belong also in the circle of those to whom our remembrance on *Volkstrauertag* applies."[580] In so elaborately linking the Nazis' victims' deaths to the larger war, Trepte not only adapted the *Hilfsstelle*'s position but implied that peace-learned-from-former-wars was not the only lesson Germans ought learn from remembering history but rather they also needed to learn how to prevent violence and inhumanity from ruining Germans' lives, too.

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[577] Ibid.

[578] Ibid.

[579] Ibid.

[580] Ibid.

"Between memory and sensitivity"

The confrontation with Germans' failures and responsibilities relating to the Nazi dictatorship also surfaced at the 1967 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, where Trepte again spoke. While the degree of emphasis or the balance of editorial content clearly varied considerably from one year to the next, the common touchstone for ceremonies over time always remained the necessity of peace and increasingly also the presence of physical remains of the dead, as inspiration to mourn and remember. In 1967's Bonn ceremony, Trepte began his keynote speech with a frank acknowledgement that Germans' collective memory necessarily had to incorporate "not only …the German losses" but also could not "spare" the chance "to be reminded of *all*, who for any reason had to bring the sacrifice of their lives in these wars."[581] However, Trepte did not pretend that doing so was easy, conceding that "[w]e find ourselves in a conflict between memory and sensitivity,"[582] making the point that VTT forced Germans to split their energies between wanting to remember favorably the dead soldiers and even civilian victims they had known while also necessarily expressing grief and remorse for the harm inflicted by some of these dead onto innocents. This was not the first time such a message was featured at the national mourning ceremony nor is it the most revealing element of the 1967 speech.

What is perhaps more notable about this year's ceremony is the attention given to the youth generation (who had not experienced the war first-hand) and their attitude toward publicly mourning the war dead. The preservation of gravesites of the "war dead" was still thought critically important by the VDK, since these sites were seen as key to inspiring and catalyzing

[581] „Mahnung zum Frieden und zur Verständigung," *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, Nr. 134, S.1195, November 21, 1967. VDK A.100-31. This is a reprint of Trepte's Volkstrauertag speech, emphasis original.

[582] Ibid.

this youth generation towards mourning and remembering. Thus in 1967, it was the very future of collective memory of the war and publicly mourning for the war dead that appeared to be at stake. Repeating what was steadily becoming a more common conversation, Trepte remarked that an honest, historically-informed understanding of the Second World War and the Third Reich on the part of young West Germans who did not live through it would only naturally lead them "to continually ask us older people, 'Why did you all allow this?' 'Why did you all not resist with all your might so that in no case could the Second World War have broken out?'"[583] Interestingly, the image of youth „shaking their heads" at their parents' and grandparents' failings, failings which had allowed the Nazis to remain in power and do so much harm for so long, was exactly what the VDK, as reflected in Trepte's speech, thought would secure a peaceful future for the German peoples. However, the leaders in Kassel did not imagine this confrontation with the past would take the form of protests, demonstrations, arguments and sit-ins.

Long before the generational conflict of the late 1960s heated up, VDK leaders had envisioned the youth work camps designed to renovate and maintain German military cemeteries in France and other former enemy nations as the site of such a sober reckoning. When "a generation who, in light of the recent history of their nation, with the failures and guilt of their fathers, cannot yet be finished with [the history] that is truly so difficult, thereby also the access to the victims is made difficult…."[584] The underlying assumption seemed to be that the "younger generation" would want to forget and ignore the Third Reich's history and crimes, out

[583] „Mahnung zum Frieden und zur Verständigung," *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, Nr. 134, S.1195, November 21, 1967. VDK A.100-31.

[584] „Mahnung zum Frieden und zur Verständigung," *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, Nr. 134, S.1195, November 21, 1967. VDK A.100-31.

of disgust or passivity, which would tragically lead to a repeat in the future. Having determined to push the youth to engage with this history via reburying the bodies of 18- and 19-year old young men (often the age of the VDK's youth brigades), the VDK happily believed that this project, getting West German youth working side-by-side with other youth from other nations would naturally foster understanding and reconciliation.

*Remembering deaths, not wars*

Granting for the differences in reception and experience among individual youths involved in these programs, as well as among West German audiences hearing of these activities on *Volkstrauertag* and elsewhere, there is ample evidence that some people did reach the outcome and impression desired by the VDK. After all, if none of the parties involved or observing were satisfied, the program would not have existed for over a decade. Still, the concentration on gravesites as impetus to a memory of the war and the dictatorship aimed at a full and honest reckoning of the past, understanding of guilt, and change for the future, did not please everyone. This is all the more the case given that many, if not most, of the projects were recovering military graves.

Such a deeply paradoxical break, between shared desires for the outcome yet divergent opinions on means and methods, helps explain the otherwise surprising and anachronistic national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in 1968, which featured a dramatic reading about the process of identifying and recovering the remains of dead German soldiers. More specifically, the text "…once again has his name" chronicled the process of a grieving mother asking for help locating her missing-in-action son or his remains, which involved a complex research process on the part of the VDK, the *Deutsche Dienststelle*, as well as local parish authorities in Normandy, France.

The final scene, an emotional highlight for the audience, saw the mother laying flowers on her son's grave, along with earth brought from home in Bamberg. This finale was intended to be all the more touching to its audience via the dramatic explanation that this mother's other two sons were also killed in action but had been deployed on the Eastern Front, meaning their remains were somewhere in the USSR, where the mother cannot visit them. The mother even leaves flowers on a grave nearby her own son's grave, because "perhaps…there are no relatives left to care for this grave."[585] Here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in the discussion of war graves, is the inherent tension over interpreting and valuing combat versus non-combat deaths (and moreover, the deaths of Victims of Nazi persecution) as more or less important made clear.

Despite the drama arising from the mother endeavoring to complete the herculean task of navigating the multiple overlapping agencies charged with preserving information on missing, dead, presumed dead, and buried soldiers, critical observers could have easily inferred a comparison. If this mother had the problem of too many bureaus and bureaucrats to consult for help, the drama "…once again has his name" largely ignored the problem of surviving next-of-kin searching for information on their missing or dead *civilian* relatives. Besides the civilian casualties of the war, there were also Displaced Persons whose families undoubtedly counted their own grief among the costs of the war. Moreover, families of Jewish and other racial and social minorities who had faced persecution and death, faced a much more painful challenge of wading through fragmentary records of the International Tracing Service in order to locate their loved one's fate. Objections that these situations of missing non-military dead formed an equally important part of comprehending and bringing closure to the war were apparently not raised, at

[585] Otto Heinrich Kühner, "…hat seinen Namen wieder, eine Mutter erhällt Gewißheit über die Ruhestätte ihres in der Normandie gefallenen Sohnes," from the 1968 Volkstrauertag ceremony in Bonn, November 17, 1968, VDK A.100-32. Note the program includes the more suggestive subtitle whereas the script itself does not.

least not within the VDK planning committee for 1968. On the contrary, the 1968 *Volkstrauertag* ceremony's contents left only the conclusion that, if audiences (and younger Germans, in particular) would only consider the pain of families separated from their soldier sons, this would be enough to engender empathy also for victims of the Nazi regime for whom these soldiers fought.

The next year, the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony again urged the youth to use encounters with the dead and the grief of their survivors as an inspiration toward maintaining peace although with somewhat less exclusive attention to Germans' military memories. The program presented textual descriptions of the August days of 1914, the disillusionment of the Western Front in 1916, followed by Hitler's Seizure of Power in 1933 and then the violence that attended the Nazi regime, as well as the Eastern Front of 1941, Stalingrad in 1943, and finally refugees fleeing East Prussia in 1945.[586] To this somewhat nationalist German-centric narrative, the program also added glimpses of the 20 July conspirators, the rounding up of Jews in Lidice, and even the emigration of surviving Jews from liberated concentration camps to Palestine in 1945.[587] The apparent design of these sketches was to build momentum for "social action" towards democracy and peace, in view of a memory of fascism and war.

Hidden behind these designs was a growing fear on the part of VDK leaders that *Volkstrauertag* might appear less and less relevant to audiences, especially post-war-born audiences, nearly twenty-five years after the war's end. Moreover, this problem would surely only increase over time, with fewer and fewer individuals in future generations feeling the

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[586] Author unclear, „Die Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft – Helfer zu Toleranz und Frieden," from the 1969 Volkstrauertag ceremony in Bonn, November 16, 1969, VDK A.100-33.

[587] Ibid.

emotional impact of lost family members whom they never met, therefore becoming less and less likely to feel called to mourn and remember before the graves. "A seventeen-year-old in our time" might think that "*Volkstrauertag* is no longer necessary" because "we should live in the present and not in the past." If young West Germans took the position of "seeking to forget the war and all that is connected with it," in order to more simply "engage themselves for peace," they would surely be unsuccessful, according to the VDK's logic.[588] The notion of the youth rejecting the need to mourn over the bodies in order to preserve peace in the present, in effect, forgetting the war on the way to embracing peace, was the nightmare scenario that 1969's *Volkstrauertag* ceremony was supposed to correct.

Instead of taking the war lightly so long after the fact, the VDK argued on *Volkstrauertag* that youth working on gravesites projects abroad would learn that "[w]hat played itself out 25 years ago may not repeat itself in your generation."[589] This would surely be the case because "youth" of 1969 "learn languages and care for friendships over the borders."[590] Interestingly, the 1969 program did assume that such an appreciation of the experience of war (as measured through battlefield casualties and also the grief of survivors) would, somehow, feed a discussion among Germans over their role in the Nazi regime. Quoting an unnamed Berlin politician, one 1969 speaker concluded that "It is futile, and I find it is unjust, when the act of atonement is only expected from the young generation, without us older people being prepared to account for these times…"[591] Perhaps conscious of the lingering disharmony among the war generation over how best to mourn and remember on *Volkstrauertag*, which had in fact been the case all along after

[588] Ibid.

[589] Ibid.

[590] Ibid.

[591] Ibid.

1945, the VDK seemed to hint that steering the future generations of West Germans toward a memory encouraging peace and democracy was West Germany's only hope to survive in a world still at war.

**An elastic model of remembrance?**

While the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies in Bonn worked hard to find the precisely balanced message, often fluctuating from year to year, local *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies did not strictly follow Bonn's lead from one year to the next. Instead of a universal concern with the physical remains of German soldiers or civilian dead, there is evidence of some middling-level VDK leaders and ceremony planners designing their ceremonies to depart from the Bonn model, placing even more, or in some cases, even less, emphasis on German suffering, especially the soldier and refugee experiences. This heterogeneity is all the more notable given that, despite the variety of emphases and tropes characterizing the conservative as well as more progressive examples of public mourning, *Volkstrauertag* everywhere seemed directed at heightening the public's appreciation for peace and dedication to renouncing all future wars. Whether relying on imagery of the Nazi dictatorship and its murder of Jews behind the Eastern Front, or invoking the suffering and loss of German soldiers fighting an unwinnable war in the service of the fatherland, audiences nowhere encountered a rose-tinted representation of the war years as something to remember fondly.

Thus the history of collective memory and public mourning in West Germany had become, by the late 1960s, a model of "levels" of memory operating to layer local specifics below more general national conclusions. The survey of *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies up to now has revealed the degree to which the nationally-televised *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn was

strictly controlled by the *Volksbund*'s national leaders in Kassel, who were also subject to pressure, formal and informal, from influential political-, church-, and civil society leaders. Simultaneously, examples of *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies at the middling- and local levels (below) demonstrate the ability of local elites to adapt this model to suit the concerns of those lower-level leaders, whether this be addressing a lacking appreciation for Germany's guilt and responsibility or an incomplete attention to the sacrifices of the soldiery. Thus, if one community felt that insufficient attention was being directed at the Holocaust, their specific version of *Volktrauertag* could address this shortcoming. Whereas if another village deemed a serious appreciation for soldiers' sacrifices to be missing among the young people of the present, that local village's *Volkstrauertag* could be molded to address this shortcoming.

*A heterogeneous holiday?*

The potential for state- and local level *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies to depart from the message of the Bonn ceremony throws into relief the potential for mixed messages to be circulated in conjunction with *Volkstrauertag* from year to year. In 1962, the VDK chapter for Lower Saxony hosted the state's own VTT ceremony in Hannover. There Otto Benemann, the state's Minister of the Interior, delivered a speech that from the very beginning presented the dual nature of "the dead" in conversations about the war, rather than hiding the victims of the Holocaust and war crimes behind a nebulous exploration of the problem of recovering and burying the "war dead" in general. "In cities and villages of our land" people had gathered together "in order to remember those who forcibly lost their lives in the two world wars or

through the brutal violence of an inhuman dictatorship."[592] In one breath, Benemann asked the audience „Who among us does not mourn for a beloved person, for a good comrade, who gave up his life as a soldier in the war? Who does not know of a friend, someone from our age cohort, who had to suffer death on account of his beliefs, his race, his political convictions."[593] Rather than invoking Stalingrad, Dresden, Tobruk or Normandy, the Lower Saxony VTT ceremony instead called attention to "the terror camps of Buchenwald and Dachau, of Bergen-Belsen and Sachsenhausen," to the "gas chambers of Auschwitz, Maidanek and Treblinka."[594] This attempt to equalize the importance and weight of military dead with the victims of the Nazi's racial persecution was the result of a sharply more critical memory, compared to the presentation about military cemeteries in France that was featured in Bonn.

The degree to which *Volkstrauertag*, by the 1960s, had become a heterogeneous holiday, an occasion for suggesting different (sometimes conflicting) memories to audiences in different places, is also attested to by the records of national television programming broadcast in conjunction with the holiday weekend. This sort of public relations, though not appearing to be planned by the VDK, was nonetheless a subject of their interest, and documents survive indicating that in 1962 most of the television programming dealt with the history and memory of the war. Titles such as "*Das verlorene Bataillon* [The Lost Battalion]" on *Sender Freies Berlin*, "*Krieger, Helden, Opfer* [Warriors, Heroes, Sacrifice]" on *Deutsches Fernsehen*, "Der Andere [The Other Soldier]" on Radio Bremen, „*Kriegsgräberfahrt nach Norwegen* [Visiting War

[592] Otto Benemann, „Gedenkrede des Herrn Niedersächsischen Innenministers Otto Benemann Anlässlich des Volkstrauertages 1962 im Opernhaus zu Hannover," from the 1962 state-level Volkstrauertag ceremony in Lower Saxonry, November 18, 1962, VDK A.100-26.

[593] Ibid.

[594] Ibid.

Graves in Norway]“ on *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, „*Die Toten mahnen* [The Dead Admonish Us]“ by Manfred Hausmann on *UKW II* suggest a predominant interest with war, POWs, war graves, and prior *Volkstrauertag* speeches from the 1950s.[595] What was missing was missing was anything that explicitly brings the Concentration Camps or the Nazi regime into discussion, except maybe “*Der Tod hinter Stacheldracht* [Death behind Barbed Wire]” on *Deutsches Fernsehen*, which could have reasonably presented the stories of Allied- and Soviet-held German POWs but also could have addressed Concentration Camp inmates.[596]

Two years later, *Volkstrauertag*-themed programming similarly centered around the war, with many more programs listed for broadcast. Although the exact contents are not clear from the VDK’s records, most of the titles (nearly twenty) appear to concern the general problem of finding meaning in death during wartime, while perhaps a fourth as many suggested coverage of the First World War or Second World War in particular.[597] Once more, there seems to have been scant attention devoted in television or radio programming to remembering the Holocaust (or if such programs were in fact broadcast, they must have been thought unrelated to *Volkstrauertag* and thus omitted from the records). The dearth of airtime devoted to remembering civilian victims of Nazi violence, at least as far as is discernable from these records, in 1964 is striking when considered alongside the much more critical contents of that year’s Bonn ceremony (see above).

What seems apparent is that, by the 1960s, the multitude of voices, memories, and “social actions” circulating in connection with *Volkstrauertag* meant that the VDK no longer possessed

[595] Author unclear, „Fernsehen und Rundfunk am Volkstrauertag 1962,“ spreadsheet, no date, VDK A.100-26.

[596] Ibid.

[597] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürorge, Bundesgeschäftsstelle, to the Landesverbände, Bezirksverbände, Kreisverbände, memorandum, November 5, 1964. VDK A.100-28.

a monopoly on interpretive authority, and moreover, such a hegemonic position may have become increasingly less tenable, since audiences could tune in to or tune out of whichever interpretation of West Germans' duty to remember the past they felt most correct. It should not be assumed, however, that the somewhat malleable *Volkstrauertag* was more likely to evolve from a traditional, conservative, military-centric spectacle towards a more critical, politically progressive reckoning with both the problems of the military past and the Nazi regime, despite the examples offered above. In fact, as critics from within the VDK, the Protestant Church in [West] Germany, and the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* pushed for more accounting for the history of German crimes and for recognition of the substantial body of non-military victims, *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies carried out at the lowest level of individual towns and villages preserved room for forces sympathetic to the old *Volkstrauertag* to continue its practice. Thus in September 1964, the Lower Saxony state government announced that it would "involve itself more strongly in the events of *Volktrauertag* than up to now" and that, more specifically, it would "take greater influence on the organization of this state holiday."[598] When commenting further on the state government's decision, the Interior Minister for Lower Saxony explained that his goal was that "the character of the memorial day for all victims of the war and violence" be "particularly meaningfully" articulated in the planned celebrations, so that "the memory of the earlier customary, and clearly not entirely forgotten, *Heldengedenktag* drifts further into the background."[599] Thus participants sympathetic to and skeptical of *Volkstrauertag* had by the

[598] Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to the Oberbürgermeister der Stadt Düsseldorf, memorandum relating to the organizing or Volkstrauertag, September 24, 1964; this item was forwarded with Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to the Landesverband des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, memorandum relating to the organization of Volkstrauertag, September 24, 1964; this item was also forwarded with Der Vorstand, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Landesverband Nordrhein-Westfalen, to the Präsidenten des Volkbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, letter relating to planning Volkstrauertag in North Rhine-Westphalia, October 5, 1964, VDK A. 100-28.

[599] Ibid.

1960s realized the potential for shaping their own messages on the annual day of mourning, beyond the best-laid designs of the VDK in Kassel.

*Lamenting disunity?*

It was this specter of the old *Heldengedenktag* hiding within the malleability of local and regional *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies that similarly raised alarms among critics of *Volkstrauertag* in Protestant circles. Apparently not troubled by the prospect of baldly resurrecting these discredited past practices in the national ceremony in Bonn, the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* wrote to the Chancellery of the EKD in September 1964 to acknowledged the problem of "how many pastors must deliver speeches at local ceremonies" on *Volkstrauertag*, and that these pastors faced audiences with very specific versions of history in mind. These pastors "did not have it easy" in preparing their remarks, walking a fine line between nationalist or uncritical remarks about soldiers and death on one side and an acknowledgement of the Nazi regime's crimes on the other, which was why the *Hilfsstelle* was offering to send the Church pamphlets for such pastors' use in writing a balanced sermon of address.[600] Another document from the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* underlines the fact that they were comfortable with the national Bonn ceremony but were instead worried about the lower-level *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies. In a memo from September 1966, *Hilfsstelle* officials reported an agreement with the VDK about making sure to mention and include these gravesites of civilian victims in any new VDK publications that pertain to war graves. But even if elites in Kassel (and therefore the federal ceremony in Bonn) did adopt this position of a wider sense of victims and the war, the *Hilfsstelle*

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[600] Hilfsstelle fur Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Kanzlei der Evang. Kirche, OKR von Harling, September 14, 1964, EZAB 2/2560.

*für Rasseverfolgte* admitted that they were still having trouble reaching a few communities in a few places, who were "trapped in the appearances of the world in 1925."[601] The *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* hoped that its information campaign, as well as its flyers, could help pastors prepare *Volkstrauertag* sermons for congregations that will address the deficiencies in the national (or, rather, local) *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies year to year, and that pastors will be empowered "to remember the circa 25 Million victims of the Second World War at memorial ceremonies on *Volkstrauertag*."[602]

Indeed, the senior leaders of the VDK were also realizing the potential for West Germans to take *Volkstrauertag* into their own hands and repurpose this moment of dedicated mourning and recollection for ends other than the comforting of surviving families and the preservation of military war graves. In September of 1963, alarmed that the VVN might join the memorial activities in West Germany with the purpose of ennobling Communists who were persecuted during the war (and whose political activities were illegal in West Germany), the Kassel headquarters wrote to their state-level chapters, asking them to report whether or not they had been approached by the VVN and, if they had taken part in ceremonies, what was said and how it was received.[603] The VVN, after all, had created and inaugurated the rival OdF memorial day in the GDR, which had subsequently been taken over by the SED itself. Even if the VDK were sympathetic to the Communists' plight (which is unlikely, since the OdF memory of the war

[601] Hilfstelle für Rasseverfolgte bei der Evang. Gesellschaft to the Landeskirchlichenamt [Kassel], letter forwarding sample brochures critical of Volkstrauertag, September 21, 1966. EKKW C/1065. 1925 was the year the original War Graves Law from the Weimar Republic, the military-centric definitions of which heavily informed the Federal Republic's understanding of "war" and "war graves," much to the Hilfsstelle's consternation.

[602] Ibid.

[603] Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge to all Landes- und Bezirksverbände, Rundschreiben 19/63, circular memorandum, April 9, 1963. VDK A.10-103.

ignored the military and even German civilians who were not Communist), the very possibility of alternative or revisionist versions of *Volkstrauertag* had long been feared by the VDK.

This concern for unity in all practices and interpretations on *Volkstrauertag* went back to the Weimar Republic, and indeed had fueled the tenuous arguments over structuring the holiday and ensuring its recognition in state-level laws in both the 1920s and again in the 1950s. This is the same sentiment that animated an editorial prepared by the VDK for publication in the Erlangen *Kirchenblatt* in November 1964, apparently responding to some criticism. *Volkstrauertag* was to "continually admonish our people," so that Germans "will be unified" in remembering the "suffering for all victims of the monstrous catastrophe" but "unified also in the duty to keep alive the legacy of the millions of dead in active works and creations for a better future."[604] It was this unity of purpose that the VDK understood to stem from *Volkstrauertag* that was at stake if renegade ceremonies took the meaning of *Volkstrauertag* into their own hands. After all, the key lesson to be learned from remembering the dead, commonly cited by the VDK in literature and on *Volkstrauertag*, was to "demonstrate the power of reconciliation, which arose from the graves of the dead and out of the suffering of women and mothers." In the VDK leaders' minds, there existed a universally-applicable potential for reconciliation and therefore the realization of peace between all enemies, past, present, and future, into which *Volktrauertag* tapped. Yet underlying this conviction was the unspoken assumption that all wars, from the most ancient of history, to the most recent Second World War, had operated in basically the same fashion: as contests between uniformed armies, fought over the demands of each nation's own self-interest. This inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the racial

[604] „Trauer, Buße, Gebet," *Sonntagsblatt für den Evang.- Luth. Kirchenbezirk Erlangen*, Nr. 46, Novmerb 15, 1964, EZAB 2/2560.

dimensions to Germany's launching of the Second World War, which would put the onus solely on Germany to "reconcile" with its enemies, seems to have been one main motivation for those dissenters who sought to reshape local *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies to include this dimension, thereby departing from the VDK's universalist understanding of both war and how to remember it.

*"Excluding misrepresentation"*

Interestingly, the supposition that centering memory on war graves and the youth's involvement with them would lead to a securely peaceful future for Germans does not seem to have been shared in VDK leadership circles outside of Kassel. In 1968, the VDK chapter in West Berlin organized its own local *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, where SPD politician Carlo Schmidt delivered the keynote address, in which he left behind the imagery of graves in calm manicured fields in favor of emphasizing the violence still present in the world in 1968. Urging Berliners to remember "those who died their deaths for the fatherland, for any fatherland," Schmidt insisted that such a designation extended not only to soldiers but also to "the deaths of partisans, who in the struggle for their freedom of their peoples, perhaps also for human dignity, met their deaths."[605] In almost a diametrically opposed message from what the national ceremony in Bonn had featured for years, the Berlin 1968 ceremony took the "the Millions of Dead, in the Concentration Camps, who were strangled on the gallows, who were stuck into gas

[605] Carlo Schmidt, „Der Wille zur Versöhnung, Gedenkrede von Prof. Dr. Carlo Schmidt zum Volkstrauertag 1968 bei der Feierstunde des Landesverbandes Berlin des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge," copy of Schmidt's West Berlin speech transcribed for the VDK's records in Kassel, November 17, 1968, VDK A.100-32.

chambers" as the point of departure towards a discussion of the lack of peace and human rights that had resulted from the fall of the Nazi regime in 1945.[606]

Indeed, Schmidt understood the point of *Volkstrauertag* as something larger than just German history. Reaching beyond Europe, to "the dead who fell in foreign wars," Schmidt invoked the memory "of Hiroshima, of Vietnam, and so many others still who are, along with their fates, chained to us."[607] For Schmidt, European affairs were connected to the rest of the world, meaning that the war that brought so many dead European victims by 1945 also gave rise to the violence of the Cold War and Decolonization. Because "these wars are, of course, a run-off of a political system, a key part of which we ourselves form," violence and death for many victims across the world was the unsavory "opposite side of the question of good and evil." The conclusion for West Berlin audiences, themselves at the front line of the Cold War, as it were, was that Germans' wartime suffering, even the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, was intimately connected to the suffering and death of victims across the globe, necessarily transforming *Volkstrauertag* from a *German* day of remembrance into a day for mourning *humanity* writ large. The corollary to acknowledging the scale of suffering, already enormous in the European context but all the more so outside of it, was to charge the audience to "[p]rove through [their] actions in the present and in the future, that behind [their] mourning stood the will to prevent those events which had brought [West Germans] together today to mourn from happening ever again."[608]

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[606] Ibid.

[607] Ibid.

[608] Ibid.

The turn from remembering the past toward criticizing the present as inspiration for preserving peace in the world was also a feature of the local *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies in Bremen in 1968. In a particularly visible departure from the "reconciliation-over-the-graves" pattern of national ceremonies on *Volkstrauertag*, which had often featured Franco-German cooperation at its core, a French student from Compiegne, Luc Rispal, delivered the speech to the German audience. Rather than rehearsing the troubled history of Franco-German antagonism, Rispal instead declared that "the young generation" of the present could not base their commitment to peace in the present on the memory of "the events of the past, which are remembered on *Volkstrauertag*, and which they did not experience."[609] Rather, "in a moment when the conversation must be about Vietnam, about Biafra, about the Near East and Czechoslovakia," the youth of 1968 "must refuse all acts of violence and confess that never again may the satisfaction of a politics of ambition produce so many dead and the fallen soldiers."[610] If Luc Rispal's (and Carlo Schmidt's) determination that Verdun and Normandy (and maybe even Auschwitz) were insufficient to tell the entire story of *Volkstrauertag*, such a conclusion were anathema to the *Volksbund* leadership in Kassel, who steadfastly understood 1918 and 1945 as the key moments onto which Germans ought to focus their remembrance in order to secure a peaceful future. De-emphasizing the two world wars, and thereby the German military and civilian victims killed by them, appeared to Kassel as a lapse in mourning and a threat to peaceful reconciliation.

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[609] „Junger Franzose hielt Gedenkrede," Weser-Kurier, Bremer Tageszeitung, November 18, 1968. These quotations come from the newspaper article that was paraphrasing the French student, VDK A.100-32.

[610] Ibid.

While the VDK does not appear to have directly criticized the Bremen chapter for its locally-organized memorial activities in 1968, which rather drastically departed from the Bonn *Volkstrauertag* model, an internal document indicates that the local Bremen leaders saw themselves as striking out in a decidedly new direction, leaving the memory of soldiers and of their military cemeteries behind. Whereas "[u]p to now, the schools [of Bremen] had sent representatives to the war grave sites" in the surrounding area, and the schools themselves had held memorial ceremonies on *Volkstrauertag*, these ceremonies "regretfully sometimes carried the character of *Heldengedenktag*."[611] "This interpretation of the memorial day is however not in our interests and the interests of the Volksbund" wrote the Bremen school leaders in this memo. For this reason, Bremen's 1968 *Volkstrauertag* celebrations dropped any mention of war graves as a source of reconciliation and adopted instead a new motto, "Admonishment to Peace! [*Mahnung zum Frieden!]*," which "excluded any misinterpretation."[612] This call to work for peace, rather than continue telling war stories (however grim or cautionary), was much more of a direct call to "social action" in the present based on the remembrance of death and destruction. The Bremen organizers apparently understood the commemorative potential of war graves to be somewhat limited to suggesting only „reconciliation" of former enemies nation-states, whereas peace as a world-wide goal required removing the limits on how West Germans understood *Volkstrauertag* and the history that demanded remembrance.

Indeed, the desire to move *Volkstrauertag* away from a simple linkage to the German military experience of the Second World War and towards a more global lesson about violence,

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[611] Rainer Hushar, Plannungsgruppe [of the ABS], Zur Kenntnisnahme, October 31, 1968, memorandum concerning planning Volkstrauertag in Bremen, VDK A.100-32.

[612] Ibid.

human rights, and peace was gaining currency in Bonn, too. In October 1969, the *Bundespräsident* Gustav Heinemann expressed to his aides his preference that the *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn move away from a highly militarized pageantry, which Adenauer had largely inaugurated earlier in the decade.[613] In addition to "a certain 'dampening' of the military elements of the wreath-laying," Heinemann also wanted to see the "introduction of a wreath delegation for the Victims of the Dictatorship" too.[614] While 1968 was by far not the first mention of remembering Holocaust victims and other victims of Nazi persecution on *Volkstrauertag*, the rolling back of military precedence suggested by Heinemann, himself a foremost critic of West German rearmament and the continuation of military tradition after 1945, echoes the efforts to reimagine *Volkstrauertag* and its meaning for contemporary West Germans seen in West Berlin and in Bremen.

In each of these examples, exceptions to the general trend for sure, planners behind these ceremonies and the speakers crafting the messages took advantage of the flexibility available to them in the *Volkstrauertag* model to draw their specific audience's focus away from the keys of the old Bonn ceremony. What had been, perhaps in 1961, a radical move to codify the Holocaust victims alongside German military and civilian casualties in public memorial consciousness had not apparently led to the sort of groundbreaking shake up in memory and present-day actions that the critics may have expected. By the late 1960s, dissenters had learned they could tweak their messages to promote more critical soul-searching and indeed a general questioning of the value of the military and of warfare. At the same time, these progressive voices did not see their views echoed consistently in the Bonn program and, furthermore, coexisted uneasily with more

[613] Gruppenleiter K, Aktenvermerk, October 1, 1969, documentation of conversation with Federal President's office regarding Volkstrauertag, VDK A.100-33.

[614] Ibid.

traditionally conservative local leaders who saw 1961 as *too radical* a departure. This is the reason so much concern circulated in reformist circles about unreformed *Heldengedenktag* ceremonies taking place out in the provinces. *Volkstrauertag*, in order to encompass all of the history of the Second (and First-) World Wars, had rather clumsily become a listing of victims without consistently working to explain how each group of victims related to each other in the actual history of the Third Reich. Thus on one holiday, different audiences across West Germany could choose which message and which memory to hear, perhaps even selecting one shaped in advance to meet that audience's specific wishes.

**Conclusion: A peaceful discord?**

Scholars often see the 1960s as a watershed moment for the history of (West) Germany, the point where external democratic political and social structures became internal democratic cultural values. Although such a conclusion would not be incorrect, the processes of change over time were slow, uneven, and highly contested along the way. More specifically to the topic of collective memory, the critical interrogation by "68ers" of their fathers' wartime activities has come to symbolize for many the hour of German's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Yet specialists on collective memory would still point out, however, that such "mastery" over Germans' painful and haunting past was not complete in 1969 but continued to simmer quietly over the ensuing decades, erupting at moments of crisis or scandal, even into the present. As this chapter has demonstrated, even the idea of a singular turn towards critically evaluating the Nazi era cannot be presumed to have taken root uniformly or without question across the Federal Republic. By returning to the questions posed at the outset, a more nuanced set of conclusions become clearer about the scope and nature of changes to 1960s West Germans' understanding of the Nazi past.

*Firstly*, contemporary political sensitivities as well as legal barriers to changes in commemorative practices must not be discounted from a discussion of collective memory and public mourning. While it may be tempting to theorize "memory" as an ethereal cultural force or narrative structure at work connecting people to a past, the present discussion demonstrates that "memory" can and does carry material consequences. In the case of West Germany's annual memorial ceremony, the legal prescriptions for war graves carried within them shards of a particular memory of war, which in turn limited the types of victims whose deaths could be recognized and memorialized by the state. At the same time, the relative willingness or reluctance of political leaders to reform these legal guidelines also served as a rough gauge for the degree of relevance these questions of history and remembrance had on West German elites' day-to-day behavior. Whereas the *Volksbund* could rather easily (by comparison) revise or alter the content of its national Bonn *Volkstrauertag* ceremony to push public opinion in one direction or another, the legislative process of reforming or simply revising which memories of which classes of dead victims would be preserved by the state for future generations was much more protracted.

At the same time as legal structures inhibited reform in West German collective memory practice, one could reasonably argue that it was just the sort of paradox provided by the War Graves Law that helped push critics into action. With the internal logic of defining "war graves" laid bare by the Law, the *Hilfsstelle für Rasseverfolgte* could use the then-emerging detailed historical studies of the war, the Nazi regime, and the regime's treatment of its enemies to forcefully argue against any separation of military casualties from civilian casualties when those casualties were deliberately targeted as part of the war effort. Thus the very limitations the Law put on remembrance via categories of graves and victims helped catalyze calls to re-interpret this

history and include a more honest appraisal of the past. In this way, we can interpret collective memory as a field of action wherein the players move between structural limitations on remembrance on one hand and the free agency to reinterpret meanings and question assumptions on the other.

*Secondly*, when critics such as the *Hilfsstelle* proposed alternative visions of West German public mourning, such ideas usually involved further emphasizing a more historically complete accounting for the persecution and murder of religious, ethnic, and political minorities. Of course, a complete account of this history was not everyone's goal, least of all Protestant forces working to reduce the importance given to remembering German soldiers. What is perhaps most notable is that a number of critics in the Protestant Church presented themselves not as activists working to stop *Volkstrauertag* but trying to stop a resurgent *Heldengedenktag*. Thus these critics may not have been so outraged at everything related to *Volkstrauertag* but perhaps only the most outrageous elements of the extreme outliers. What is common across the criticisms of *Volktrauertag* and the proposals to modify it is an unspoken agreement that the fallen German soldier and his shell-shocked family on the home front were insufficient examples for explaining the history of war and death in the context of the Second World War.

Behind these prescriptions for a new way to remember the past, the principle of interpreting collective memory as an impetus to "social action" offers fruitful insights. In the case of critics of public mourning in the 1960s, if these West Germans were fearful of, among other things, the return of Nazism, fascism, authoritarianism, and dictatorship, it is unsurprising that the ways in which they articulated their collective memory of the Third Reich period placed exceptional emphasis on the history of the fascist regime, the Germans who supported it, and the crimes they committed in its name. In short, the "social action" implied by collective memory

and public mourning at any given time is a direct result of which portion of the complex national past is seen by the public to bear the most relevance to their contemporary lives. Thus if war seemed the most pressing threat, the lesson might be to not create soldiers; if fascism was the threat, the lesson might be to prevent discrimination against minorities and prevent genocide. In this way, different circles of rememberers could observe ostensibly the same collective past but draw different "lessons" to "learn."

*Thirdly*, when it came to the implementation of the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony in Bonn each year, both traditional and progressive understandings of the German past had the potential to influence the program. This is because, as has been demonstrated in earlier chapters, the national *Volkstrauertag* program was not itself a monolith but instead was open to a degree of revision or adjustment from year to year. Still, the national ceremony seems to also reflect the limitations of that very openness, since they VDK never really abandoned discussions of the military experience of the Second World War. Indeed, on some occasions in the late 1960s, the military experience, by then the subject of controversy and revision, was the sole topic of the ceremony. Thus devoting attention to the victims of the Holocaust and of war crimes seems to have been moments of exception, however regularly scheduled, to the more commonly expected military-centric program.

Behind this push-and-pull of the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony appears a fundamental weakness in post-1945 public mourning and collective memory. While the trajectory of *Volkstrauertag* up to this time had been one of expansion and inclusion of more and more victims, the *Volksbund* seems to have invested less effort into making sense of this increasingly complicated history. While providing many glimpses of the reach of the war and the Nazi regime allowed more points from which to access the remembrance of the past, the

formula for the *Totenehrung* (read each year as one of the central elements of continuity – another continuity was the singing of the *Kameradlied*) simply acknowledged the many categories of dead victims, without also explaining to audiences how these different groups had affected one another in the real history of the war (this was left to the featured keynote speakers or dramatic works). In this way, the VDK's work to actively include all stories of those touched by the war (and not just settle for soldiers) became a means of passively letting the audiences figure out what these stories added up to on their own, based on the messages of one year's programming versus another.

*Fourthly*, despite this problem with the Bonn ceremony, by the 1960s, *Volkstrauertag* had also become a nation-wide phenomenon that realized a large degree of malleability from one local community to the next. That is, the Bonn ceremony was no longer necessarily an indicator of remembrance and mourning in local West German towns and villages. To be sure, the lock-step organization and obedience of local VDK chapters had never been assured and, of course, the degree to which ordinary West Germans agreed with the VDK's guidance is still open to question. Whereas during most of the 1950s, the VDK was the only body working continuously to shape public mourning and collective memory of the war and the dead, by the 1960s, critical voices, some old and others new, worked with a new energy to undo *Volkstrauertag* or at least reimagine how it should take place on a local level. Most interestingly, by the 1960s, there were apparently not only critics who thought *Volkstrauertag* was too traditional *but also critics who saw it as too radically untraditional*. Thus local leaders pursued the ability to revise the (perhaps, centrist) Bonn message into a more conservative direction or into a more progressive one, based on local audiences' sensibilities.

At the same time as West Germans could not uniformly agree on how to talk about their Nazi past and how to evaluate the deaths of so many, both at the hands of Nazi violence but also those in the service of it, it is striking to note that the 1950s consensus holding that peace was more desirable than war was not questioned. The commitment to "peace" that remained a constant element, however, need to be unpacked and interrogated. As much as "war" or "nationalism" had been reconsidered or at least opened to question in other decades, the meaning of "peace" seems to have been dependent on the circumstances in which it was invoked as a lesson to be learned from memory. If the war generation understood "peace" as simply the absence of war, or the absence of any potential for future wars with Germany's long-time antagonists, then perhaps West Germans needed to learn to reconcile its disputes and embrace its neighbors. Similarly, if the 1960s youth understood "peace" to mean the absence of violence, the respect for human rights, and equality for all peoples, then an understanding of the Holocaust and an interrogation of life under a dictatorship would both be in order. It was this notion of "peace," much more so than "war," that occupied West German attitudes across the 1960s when they gathered to publicly mourn all the dead.

## CHAPTER SIX: "The consciousness of our people has changed"

In early July 1970, a senior civil servant in the Interior Ministry of North Rhine-Westphalia wrote to his colleagues in the other *Land* governments, expressing concern over the "far-reaching differences of opinion over the form and content" of the locally-organized *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies, citing tension "between military veterans' unit associations, organizations of victims of Nazi persecution and resistance fighters, as well as associations of surviving family members of war victims."[615] That these diverse groups remembered the Second World War and the dead through unique and at times conflicting ways was not a new development, and the potential for one group's interpretation of the past to offend another organization's sensibilities was, after all, one side-effect of expanding *Volkstrauertag* to include so many and varied categories of war dead, all on apparently equal footing. Indeed, it was not the tension over public mourning that alarmed this official but rather the possibility of that such divergent memories under *Volkstrauertag*'s umbrella would dissolve any nationally-observable moment of remembrance. Indeed, this fracturing had already begun, as "this group stays away when the others march around with their flags, and the others do not take part when the ceremony does not restrict itself only to remembrance of soldierly sacrifice."[616]

[615] Dr. Rietdorf, Staatssekretär [from the office of the] Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to the Innenminister/senatoren der Länder, copy of letter dated July 2, 1970, VDK A.100-139.

[616] Ibid.

In 1970, three decades after the height of the Second World War, West German officials responsible for organizing official public mourning and collective memory of the dead found themselves in a situation awkwardly familiar to the earliest efforts to celebrate *Volkstrauertag* after 1945. At the same time, this was not the same West Germany in 1970 as it had been in 1945. Beyond the political and economic successes of the intervening decades, the bumpy 1960s had seen intense conflicts over how to remember and discuss the Nazi period (though this had happened earlier, too, during the 1950s), with the nationally-organized *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies from year to year bluntly reminding audiences of the suffering endured both due to the war but also due to the Nazi dictatorship. Yet tempting as it might be to see the history of public mourning as a unilateral success, another step in West Germany's ladder upwards and onwards out of the mire of 1945, the irritation revealed in this official's memorandum hints at the seemingly-unresolvable gap between different groups' memories of the war. The lingering existence of different collective memories, so emotionally charged and steadfastly held in opposition to others, could easily be described as West German political- and civil society's long-running duel with the "past that will not go away," no matter how often it is confronted.[617]

When concluding this dissertation on the history of public mourning in divided Germany after 1945, it is worthwhile to examine one final controversial episode over the place of *Volkstrauertag* in the Federal Republic, a fitting bookend that revisited many of the key developments discussed in the preceding chapters. Two central questions will guide this brief investigation: *Firstly*, what do the discussions between governments and the *Volksbund* at this time suggest about the nature of West Germans' attitudes toward public mourning in the early

[617] This phrase refers, of course, to Ernst Nolte's article in the FAZ in June 1986, igniting the Historikerstreit. See Konrad H. Jarausch, "Removing the Nazi Stain? The Quarrel of the German Historians," *German Studies Review*, 11, 2 (May 1988): 286-287.

1970s? *Secondly*, despite the difficulties inherent in programming *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies that resonated with audiences at this time, was there any common element in West Germans' collective memories of the past that all groups could agree was unobjectionable?

**Mourning with a "considerably altered character?"**

In April 1969, another movement began to reform practices of public mourning and collective memory in West Germany. However, unlike protests or complaints lodged against *Volkstrauertag* in the past, this newest effort was led by the Interior Ministers of the state governments, not the Protestant Churches or lay Germans organizing at the grassroots level. As early as the summer of 1968, the Standing Conference of Interior Ministers of the eleven federal states had begun discussing the question of "the standardization of the holiday laws,"[618] endorsing the "recommendation…for a reduction of the number of silent holidays [*stillen Feiertage*]" as one key goal of their project. Outlining their intentions in more detail, Interior minister Weyer suggested that the "first step toward a wide-reaching standardization" of this type appeared to be "the suggestion of combining *Volkstrauertag* with one of the other silent holidays in November," perhaps even resulting in "the combination of more than two silent holidays" together.[619] While this early report did not clarify which of the other silent holidays in November (Catholic *Allerheiligen*, Protestant *Totensonntag*, or even *Buß- und Bettag*) might be identified for consolidation, it was clear to the VDK that *Volkstrauertag* had already been

[618] Following the legal traditions of the Weimar Republic, law codes regulating activities or restricted activities on Sunday and holidays were left to each individual federal state to legislate. Thus while Volkstrauertag always played the part of a "national" memorial holiday, it was technically a holiday being observed by all the states at the same time, in unison.

[619] Willi Weyer, Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to the Vorsitzenden des Landesverbandes Nordrhein Westfalen [of the VDK] und stellv. Präsidenten des VDK, Herrn Bankdirektor Hatteisen, April 28, 1969. VDK A.100-139.

flagged by the state governments for some sort of change. While they awaited more complete details, the VDK's national leadership mulled over the best tactic to employ in meeting this challenge, whether that would be to object outright to any changes being forced on *Volkstrauertag* or instead maybe angling for the holiday's relocation back into the springtime *Reminiscere* Sunday that had been taken away in 1952.[620] The stage seemed set for some sort of rematch of that earlier controversy, with the *Volksbund* aiming high to regain its losses from the first round.

In a larger sense, however, the stakes of this dispute over public mourning in 1969 appeared much larger than they had been immediately after the war, when the emotional pain of these deaths had loomed much more immediately and irreducibly over bereaved family members and friends. Now a generation removed from the events, the task of mourning these losses and remembering the war competed for West Germans' attention with a range of many more concerns, worries, pleasures or pursuits. While the 1952 *Termindebatte* had revolved heavily around political concerns, the least of which included the unseemly appearance of resurrecting Nazi-era memorial ceremony practices, the 1969 incarnation involved less straightforward worries about history and memory. This time, the arguments lodged by the Interior Ministers for changes to the holiday did not reflect a concern with shaping or restricting speeches and ceremonies. Instead, these efforts sounded much more bureaucratic and uninspiring, articulating both a desire to re-write legal regulations on "silent holidays" in the different *Länder* in such a way that West Germans everywhere shared a common calendar of holidays, as well as a hope to relax legal restrictions on the types of commercial activity that could take place on such

[620] Dr. Füßlein, Beauftragte des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge to Ministerialrat Dr. Fischler, note for records addressed to Fischler, May 5, 1969. VDK A.100-139.

protected holidays. In 1969, restricting how Germans mourned was not the governments' problem; instead, there appears to have not been enough activity *outside* of public mourning and remembrance.

In fact, the Ministers' statement from May 1969 hinted that these rationales for consolidation and reform of the November holiday calendar could easily have been interrelated, given that they saw no problem lumping *Volkstrauertag* together with *Totensonntag* and even *Allerheiligen*, all on the same Sunday, allowing West Germans to more efficiently complete all of their annual secular and spiritual mourning exercises on the same day, thus freeing up some of the other November weekends for other pursuits.[621] That economically-minded ministers could seriously suggest streamlining these traditional practices seems quite a world away from the context of late 1940s and early 1950s, when the VDK had argued that West Germans were then so emotionally wrought with sorrow and grief that they could not be stopped from continuing their Third Reich-era practices relating to mourning, out of sheer force of habit, which had prompted the federal government after all to intervene. Now, nearly three decades after Germany's invasion of Poland and the loss of the earliest casualties, the VDK's Second Vice-President, Klaus von Lutzau, concluded that it was "industry, mostly the hospitality industry, who find unbearable the laws restricting activities and commerce on holiday Sundays over the entire month of November."[622] That is, business leaders had complained that they could not serve the customers who were queuing up on these once-sacred Sundays, demonstrating that perhaps public mourning was becoming less important to West Germans. Feeling itself once

[621] Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein Westfalen to the Vorsitzenden des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Landesverband Nordrhein Westfalen, May 14, 1969. VDK A.100-139. The point about freeing up holidays is my own.

[622] Auszug asu der Niederschrift über die offene Sitzung des [VDK] Präsidiums, transcript excerpt for Point 8, regarding the relocation of Volkstrauertag, May 20, 1969. VDK A.100-139.

more backed into a corner, the VDK began searching for an answer to the consolidation question that would serve all parties favorably, hoping to arrive at an agreement that still preserved the special role played by *Volkstrauertag* as the day of civic mourning.

Though it is important to point out that no one suggested discontinuing *Volkstrauertag* altogether, the other parties in the dispute (the state governments and the churches) had no problems imagining a future without *Volkstrauertag* as a standalone holiday. In fact, the Protestant Church, which had long harbored suspicions or at least reservations about this mourning tradition, was not troubled at the prospect of *Totensonntag* sharing the same Sunday with *Volkstrauertag*.[623] The Catholic Church was similarly enthusiastic about making this change, voicing no real Catholic preference on the subject of public mourning on *Volkstrauertag* or *Totensonntag*.[624] Even some voices within the VDK reasoned that, if this consolidation were to become reality, the reduced number of mourning holidays might even translate into a boon for the *Volksbund*, because the "abundance" of "memorial days [*Totentage*] in November," only worked to "detract from the publicity of *Volkstrauertag*," meaning that offering the public one, not several, holidays set aside for remembrance and mourning could help the *Volksbund* focus the West German people on its message.[625] If the public was indeed becoming less and less interested in such activities, a polyglot Sunday of several traditions might deliver more audience members who were already led to seek out emotional or pastoral comfort. A more influential

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[623] Von Lutzau, 2. Bundesgeschäftsführer, Aktenvermerk, notes regarding conversation between senior VDK officers and Bishop Kunst in Bonn, November 13, 1969. VDK A.100-139. In fact, the Protestant Church was not troubled at the prospect of *Totensonntag* sharing the same Sunday with *Volkstrauertag*, with only two of the smaller Provincial Churches objecting, three other wholeheartedly agreeing, and the rest ambivalent.

[624] Kommissariat der Deutschen Bischöfe to the Präsidenten des Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Herrn Trepte, December 4, 1969. VDK A.100-139. Presumably, if the motion had been to merge *Volkstrauertag* with *Allerheiligen* first, the Catholic leadership would have evidenced more interest in the question.

[625] Author unclear, "Zu Punkt 8 der Sitzung d. [VDK] Präsidiums am 20.5.1969," supporting documents from May 20, 1969 meeting of VDK executive council, regarding the relocation of Volkstrauertag. VDK A.100-139.

sentiment among VDK leaders, though, was the fear that any such relocation of *Volkstrauertag* onto another Sunday shared with another holiday "would considerably alter the character of *Volkstrauertag*."[626] To the national VDK leadership, one Sunday marking multiple mourning traditions was tantamount to discontinuing *Volkstrauertag*.

Indeed, the *Volksbund*'s obstinate contention that its holiday could not be easily merged with another similar but confessionally-specific day of mourning sounded similar to their argument in 1952 but, upon closer inspection represented something novel. Instead of couching its position in terms of concern for families' emotional needs, in 1969 the *Volksbund* framed *Volkstrauertag* as something of a public or even state interest, marking quite a departure from the 1952 episode. Whereas back then the holiday had been presented as an outlet for organized grieving, reassuring the surviving next-of-kin that their hardships were not unnoticed, in 1969 *Volkstrauertag* was meant as an occasion to lament the human costs of war and call instead for peaceful international relations. Thus losing this moment of reflection in *Volkstrauertag* would have imposed a significant harm on the German people, a point articulated by *Volksbund* leaders who, in 1969, were defending their holiday using arguments *not* based on a preference for military tradition (one of their chief tools in earlier disputes). This time they claimed instead that the VDK "not only held fast onto the heretofore tasks but also had moreover become active for peace," a task that would be made more difficult "if now *Volkstrauertag* were to be consolidated with *Totensonntag*, since then the conversation would be completely about the dead again," and assume a "gloomy voice,"[627] instead of also pushing for some sort of larger message that West Germans could apply for their futures.

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[626] Ibid.

[627] Auszug aus der Niederschrift über die offene Sitzung des [VDK] Präsidiums, transcript excerpt for Point 8, regarding the relocation of Volkstrauertag, May 20, 1969. VDK A.100-139.

Below all the bluster, it is not clear from these documents whether the West German people, or any sizable portion thereof, passionately supported the then-current *Volkstrauertag* tradition and how they might have demonstrated their support. At the same time, by arguing that the unique social value in *Volkstrauertag* lay not in the occasion to mourn the dead but rather lay in the occasion to agitate for peace, the VDK's actions seem to suggest that they thought that the legal rules restricting commerce and public activity were the only problem that the Interior Ministers sought to fix, not the holiday's mere existence and message. That is, *Volkstrauertag*'s history of providing fodder for nationalism or militarism, as well as its potential for such continued uses in certain traditionalist circles in West Germany, were seen by the *Volksbund* leaders as merely an aberration or distraction from the true purpose of their public mourning tradition, outcomes that could easily be avoided, even if the holiday were to return to the Sunday *Reminiscere*.[628]

**Misguided mourning or teachable moment?**

In fact, this problematic history behind *Volkstrauertag* was *exactly* what alarmed the Interior Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia in 1970. Although this worry was either absent or unmentioned in the Standing Conference's earlier memos on the subject of holiday consolidation, suddenly it assumed center stage. Yet this civil servant was not raising suspicions about the large, carefully-managed ceremonies in large urban areas but instead pointing a finger at those held in provincial towns outside of national oversight. Writing to his counterparts in the

[628] Ibid. The discussion documented in this transcript reveals several points at which VDK leaders voice their beliefs that Volkstrauertag faced some number of determined antagonists who would willfully misunderstand the holiday as "Heldengedenktag" no matter what the VDK did to reform and modernize it.

other *Länder*, this minister surmised that the central VDK had been reasonably successful in insuring that the annual Bonn ceremony remembered both soldiers and civilian victims of the war, German and non-German, but, "in a country this big there are certainly ceremonies on *Volkstrauertag*, often not organized by the *Volksbund* but instead by the local military- and soldiers' organizations," which "overwhelmingly still hold onto the traditional pattern of remembrance ceremonies for *Heldengedenktag*."[629] As a result, the North Rhine-Westphalian government had "in recent years striven to promote the inner repositioning of *Heldengedenktag* into a day of unvarnished memory [*illusionslosen Gedenkens*] of all victims of the war and dictatorship."[630] Thus for this official, un-rented hotel rooms and un-sold consumer goods and services were not the lamentable outcome of unreformed or overly-traditional mourning ceremonies in small towns. Rather, it was the potential for West Germans to fall prey to notions of warfare bringing only heroism and valor.

Remarkably, the solution apparent to this minister was not the immediate censorship and clamping down on recalcitrant veterans and their supporters. Asking other Interior Ministers to share their experiences and offer suggestions as to how much influence the *Land* government ought to exert over these ceremonies, this official rather hoped that the more responsible and carefully-managed ones in larger urban areas would serve as an "instructive" examples for the local ceremonies to emulate.[631] Thus, while the discussions over consolidation had begun with

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[629] Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, to the Innenminister/-senatoren der Länder Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Hessen, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein, mit Überdrucken für die Staatskanzleien, Nachrichtlich an den Bundesminister des Innern in Bonn / an den Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e.V, copy of letter relating to organizing Volkstrauertag, July 2, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

[630] Ibid.

[631] Ibid.

economic and legal reasons, just beneath the surface there had remained cultural fears about Germans' un-reflected patterns of behavior. That is not to say that economics were a cover to mask the state- and federal governments' ulterior motives. Indeed, this same memo from Düsseldorf reiterated the state's interest in "initially reducing the number of silent holidays enjoying special legal protections" in November and thus relax the "economic disadvantages unavoidably bound up" with this situation.[632] Yet the economic concerns were new in 1969, augmenting more long-standing worries that had been the subject of efforts in the mid-to-late 1950s to reform the aesthetics of *Volkstrauertag*. If censorship or at least leading the locals by the Bonn example had met with some success earlier, these officials seem to have believed that the remaining outliers could also be won over.

It is important to note that in all of the correspondence and supporting documents related to these events preserved here, allegations of unreconstructed public mourning always appeared in the skeptics' criticism as anecdotes or unsubstantiated claims, unreinforced by specific facts or reports from specific locales.[633] Still, the ministers in this debate rendered a general picture of grassroots mourning practices with which the national VDK disagreed only partially. At the same time as the *Volksbund* leaders fended off suggestions that the national *Volkstrauertag* ceremony was a problem, something worth being eliminated, they also admitted that there *were* in fact problems attributable to the flexibility model that *Volkstrauertag* had assumed over the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter V) and, simply put, ceremonies in large cities were nearly-

[632] Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to the Vorsitzenden der Ständigen Konferenz der Inninminister der Länder, Herrn Minister Schnur, Saarbrücken, copy of letter relating to Volkstrauertag's relocation, August 3, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

[633] Although ample evidence does exist, in the form of press clippings, that local Volkstrauertag ceremonies across West Germany presented a range of content and mnemonic emphases, from highly traditional and highly militarized to more pacifist (or at least un-militarized) and inclusive. These documents are also preserved in the VDK archives in folder VDK A.100-89.

universally evaluated positively and accepted as unobjectionable by the VDK elites and government leaders whereas low-level local leaders seemed to present all-too-frequent mistakes or infelicitous invocations of the German past.

Perhaps predictably, state-level VDK leaders brushed aside any suggestion that a tiny minority of outliers should dictate policy for the majority of well-meaning and carefully-nuanced memorial planners. "Isolated misguided ceremonies" in small towns, wrote the Bavarian VDK leadership, such as those that might be "not modern enough," or "those organized by veterans' organizations," simply "do not justify the consideration that the efforts at achieving a memorial day of the entire nation for all soldiers and civilian victims of world wars and dictatorships have failed."[634] That the bad apples should not ruin the rest of the bushel was also the message conveyed when the national VDK leadership in Kassel wrote to the Federal Minister of the Interior to plead its case for preserving *Volkstrauertag* as a stand-alone holiday, even though these officials could not guarantee that every memorial ceremony in every West German town would devote as much serious attention to "the thought of the admonition to peace in the center of the memorial ceremony" as the Bonn ceremony would.[635] Indeed, even though Kassel issued "minimum standards for the instilling of meaning and formulation" of local ceremonies, it was still "not possible to force through a unified formulation of *Volkstrauertag* overall [of West

[634] Der Vorsitzende, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Landesverband Bayern, to the Bundesgeschäftsstelle des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, copy of letter relating to Volkstrauertag's relocation, July 24, 1970. VDK A. 100-139.

Another example of this attitude can be found in Vorsitzenden des Landesverbandes Rheinland-Pfalz [of the VDK] to the Rheinland-Pfalz Ministerium des Innern, copy of letter relating to organizing of Volkstrauertag, August 3, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

[635] Dr.v.Gudenberg, Leiter der Gruppe Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, to the Bundesministerium des Innern, carbon-copy of letter passing along suggestions for Volkstrauertag from youth group in Kandel, August 20, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

Germany]."[636] A precise assessment of the degree to which *Volkstrauertag* did in fact vary from town to town across West Germany is not available from these materials.[637] However, more crucial to the present study's concern is the answer put forth for dealing with the problem, however large- or small scale: making *Volkstrauertag* into a teachable moment in the service of furthering peace.

In fact, the importance placed on teaching the population the desirability of peace, instead of returning to further warfare, served as the Kassel- and regional *Volksbund* leaderships' central animus in defending against the governments' suspicion that inconsistent *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies were begging to be reformed or restricted. By sending out "the yearly publication of a printed *Volkstrauertag* service (prepared by the *Volksbund*)," "a suitable means is realized for supplying the local *Volktrauertag* ceremonies with adequately worthy contents."[638] At the same time, the senior VDK leadership also evidenced an awareness that questioning the morality and social value of death required of soldiers was still a sensitive issue. This sensitivity was made more pointed given the need to explain history objectively while remembering emotionally attached family members' contributions to that history. That is, the *Volksbund* seem to have understood that local ceremony organizers could not simply read out bland or vague statements about the dead, their painful absence from the lives of their loved ones, and the necessity of

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[636] Ibid.

[637] That is, even with the preserved press clippings of especially controversial or especially warmly-received speeches or ceremonies, the Volksbund Archives undoubtedly contain outliers or exemplary specimens. It is not clear from the finding aids or from the collection itself what criteria were applied in deciding examples to keep or to discard. Therefore we have a limited sampling that may or may not be fairly representative, of a larger but still limited sampling of public mourning ceremonies across this time.

[638] Leopold Ankenbrand, der Landesvorsitzende, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Landesverband Bayern, to the Bundesgeschäftsstelle des VDKs, July 24, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

peace in the future to prevent similar losses from reoccurring. Rather, it was necessary to explain the circumstances of these deaths, in order to most fully appreciate how peace and reconciliation would serve the future.

In the context of the entire span of this study, a relatively sudden conviction on the part of the *Volksbund* leadership that discussions (or invitations to such discussions) of individual responsibility for wartime activities for- or against the regime were now vital parts of public mourning, suggests that times had changed. Indeed, these issues had long been too sensitive a topic to broach, making it all the more extraordinary when the VDK national leadership wrote to the Federal Ministry of the Interior that, "the consciousness of our people has changed" and therefore in 1970 it was much easier to talk about how the „the terrible events of the National Socialist dictatorship, all the way to the Mass-gassing in the Concentration Camps, throw difficult shadows on the memory of the dead of the last war."[639] Far from advocating a reduced emphasis on the Holocaust or on the popular non-resistance to the Nazi regime, the *Volksbund* seems here to have envisioned itself as a mediator between audiences of different generations or political persuasions, not wanting to discontinue memorializing and caring for the remains of dead German soldiers and civilians but also now believing

> that one can only properly remember the dead of the war and dictatorship, when one acknowledges that in addition to the Fallen soldiers, who admittedly gave their lives because they served a higher good than their own selves, come the others those who were victims in the truest sense of the word [and] who were forced to die even though it was not their time to do so and also it served no meaningful purpose.[640]

[639] Dr.v.Gudenberg, Leiter der Gruppe Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, to the Bundesministerium des Innern, carbon-copy of letter passing along suggestions for Volkstrauertag from youth group in Kandel, August 20, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

[640] Ibid.

Those members of the West German public who were inclined to support this conclusion were those same ones who were unlikely to attend *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies in their community, so thought at least the *Volksbund* leadership. Yet to those dedicated supporters of the holiday, who were seeking comfort and meaning out of the bereavement they felt, the VDK insisted that "when one wanted to understand the past and learn from it," one must explain the history of how these different groups of victims met their deaths and why.[641]

**Mourning "in the spirit of peace and international understanding?"**

While the *Volksbund* leadership tried passionately to argue that any differences in interpreting *Volkstrauertag* were minor, amply corrected for via efforts to inform *Volkstrauertag* "below" with sample materials from "above," and not serious enough to discontinue the holiday, a second, separate, controversy arose within the senior *Land*-level leaderships of the VDK chapters and their national leadership over this very question. Given that the government ministers were seriously considering a merger between *Volkstrauertag* and another "silent holiday," a solution that would find *Volkstrauertag* stripped of its independent Sunday, the *Land*-level chapters' leaderships were maintaining a mostly-united front in support of their national leadership's insistence on keeping the holiday on its own calendar date, even if that meant returning it to the springtime *Reminiscere* Sunday of old. It was quite a surprise, then, when this bloc solidarity was broken by the Bremen chapter volunteering their support to the Bremen Senator for Internal Affairs for the proposal bringing about the merger.

The Bremen *Landesverband* of the VDK had been much more critical of the traditional *Volkstrauertag* holiday and worked to re-imagine how to celebrate the holiday in recent years

[641] Ibid.

(see Chapter V). Already in April of 1968, Bremen had proposed renaming *Volkstrauertag* to somehow make "more precise emphasis of the day onto the admonishment for peace," and not just peace for Germans but "peace in all the world."[642] Subsequently, the Bremen VDK chapter would also eventually break ranks with the other state-level chapters, coming out in support of merging *Volkstrauertag* with another holiday.[643] The Bremen chapter's move understandably angered the Kassel leadership, especially since the VDK's national leaders had planned to assent to the merger of *Volkstrauertag* with another November holiday only as a fallback position, if no way remained to keep it independent.[644] Bremen had thus shown the VDK's hand too quickly.

At the same time, the Kassel leadership faced just the sort of scenario with Bremen that it (the Kassel leadership) had assured the government ministers would not jeopardize *Volkstrauertag* as a whole – that one or two local bodies had different goals and ideas about public mourning than those presented in the Bonn ceremony. Thus Bremen proved correct the contention that *Volkstrauertag* could not be the same everywhere while simultaneously demonstrating that the dynamic of center-periphery was not only one of ultra-conservative to more moderate contrast when it came to the politics of remembering the past. That is, Bremen

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[642] Landesverband Bremen, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, „Diskission um eine Umbenennung des Volkstrauertages," transcribed copy of a report from the Brememn LV meeting of April 19, 1968; this copy was completed on September 4, 1968. VDK A.100-139.

The West Berlin LV also makes a similar argument but did not appear to incur as much ire from Kassel as Bremen. Der Vorsitzende, Landesverband Berlin, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, to the Präsidenten des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, August 25, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

[643] Landesverband Bremen, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, "Der Vertretertag des Landesverbandes Bremen im Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge hat am 11. April 1970 folgende Entschliessung zur Vorlage an den Bundesvertretertag des Volksbundes über die Zusammenlegung des Volkstrauertages mit dem Totensonntag gefaßt," transcribed copy of proposal from LV Bremen over the merger of holidays, to be considered by the assembly of local VDK representatives, Septemnber 18, 1970. VDK A.100-139. This item was preserved as one of several position statements offered in support of Point 10 on the agenda for the VDK's national assembly of local representatives on October 23, 1970.

[644] Der Präsident, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, to the Vorsitzenden des Landesverbandes Bremen, Herrn Senatspräsident Otto Schlicht, copy of letter from June 9, 1970; this copy was completed on June 29, 1970. VDK A.100-139.

was here pushing a *more* self-critical, more potentially offensive public mourning ceremony, to which Kassel strenuously objected. This put Kassel in the awkward position of having insisted that certain outliers (those pursuing a more military-centric holiday) could be tolerated (albeit while the national VDK worked to convince them to adapt their ceremonies), whereas a second, smaller set of exceptions (those pursuing a more aggressively peace-focused holiday) had to be silenced for threatening the holiday's existence. Working from the logic outlined earlier in its dispute with the state government ministers, which held that *Volkstrauertag* on any Sunday other than its own separate Sunday was meaningless, the Kassel VDK leadership felt that Bremen's pro-merger heterodoxy was more of an existential threat to public mourning than an out-of-touch veterans' club in some small town in the countryside.

In a development similar to the divergence in national- and regional *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies of the late 1960s, Bremen's eventual proposal put forward to the entire national *Vertretertag* grounded its suggestions for changes in *Volkstrauertag* in the desire for peace and the hope of preserving the holiday in some form, despite declining public interest in it. These goals were nearly identical to those being pursued by the mainstream VDK leadership, only those leaders in Kassel were trying to accomplish this end via the route of holding fast to *Volkstrauertag's* independence and necessity, rather than allowing for changes up front. Bremen, on the other hand, thought the best route forward was merging *Volkstrauertag* with *Totensonntag*, renaming the resulting holiday as "*Totengedenktag*" and dedicating this new holiday to remembering all the war dead "in the spirit of peace and international understanding."[645] In view of the fact that "the Interior Ministers and Senators, as well as the

[645] Landesverband Bremen, Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, "Der Vertretertag des Landesverbandes Bremen im Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge hat am 11. April 1970 folgende Entschliessung zur Vorlage an den Bundesvertretertag des Volksbundes über die Zusammenlegung des Volkstrauertages mit dem Totensonntag gefaßt," transcribed copy of proposal from LV Bremen over the merger of holidays, to be considered by the

Protestant and Catholic Churches had spoken out in favor of a merger of *Volkstrauertag* and *Totensonntag*," Bremen concluded, "it is necessary to preserve this memory [of the war dead]" through the only remaining means available – "only in the context of a general remembrance of the dead." While such a prospect had long been antithetical to the national VDK, going all the way back to the earliest post-war years, submerging wartime death into the more general conception of death was actually a solution in the Bremen leadership's eyes. This arrangement would mean that "wartime death would occupy a completely unique position" since "it affects young and old alike" in its violence and suddenness. That is, if the youth and *Volkstrauertag* skeptics could not avoid pondering the issue of wartime death as something that could impact them in a future conflict, "the confession and admonition to peace" would naturally follow.[646] Once more, this antagonism within the VDK was motivated by choice of tactics, not disagreement on the ultimate goal of mourning.

**Sorrow from the past or plans for the future?**

In a larger sense, nearly all parties in this debate seem to have shared a general agreement on the final outcome to which *Volkstrauertag* should lead the West German people. That none of the ministers, the VDK leaders, or other observers articulated a desire to mourn the war dead in a manner that granted uncritical or unqualified support for war means that at least some parts of the *Volkstrauertag* question could have been solved agreeably. However, it appears no final agreement quickly came. In January 1971, the North Rhine-Westphalian

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assembly of local VDK representatives, Septemnber 18, 1970. VDK A.100-139. This item was preserved as one of several position statements offered in support of Point 10 on the agenda for the VDK's national assembly of local representatives on October 23, 1970.

[646] Ibid.

Interior Ministry wrote again to the VDK, this time with a new minister in office who was much more supportive of *Volkstrauertag* and very sympathetic to the VDK. Though this minister agreed on the importance of both a "Memorial Day to remember and to admonish [*Gedenk- und Mahntag*]," he did not think this mission necessarily warranted the holiday its own special calendar date, since there existed still the problem of having too many "*stillen Feiertage*" in November. Over three years into this project of consolidating holidays, the only new proposed solution, beyond the simple merger of holidays or removal of holidays into other parts of the calendar year, was the VDK President's suggestion for the "transformation of *Volkstrauertag* into a more-focused-on-the-future and less-filled-with-sorrow Day to Call for Peace [*Friedensmahntag*], without the character of a silent holiday."[647] Despite the appearance of this solution that might appease all parties, there was still no decision from Interior Ministers' conference in January 1971.

The impasse over reforming or maintaining public mourning practices seems to have centered on West Germany's particular constitutional design. Under the Federal Republic, despite the existence of a Federal Interior Minister, holidays were designated as affairs managed by the individual *Land* governments and their own respective Interior Ministries. For this reason, noted the VDK's Parliamentary observer and liaison representative, the Federal Minister would not dictate a common policy decision to his *Land*-level counterparts, since the Federal office was only responsible, indeed "only allowed" to design "regulation of a remembrance of the war dead at the federal level," without the ability to enforce such rulings at any other level of governance.[648] It was therefore highly ironic that the 1949 constitution, designed in part to

[647] Der Innenminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen to the Präsident des Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, Herrn Verwaltungspräsident Prof.Dr. Theile, January 6, 1971. VDK A.100-139.

[648] Ibid.

restrict the powers of the federal government to force actions and policy on the state governments as a measure to limit the potential for another dictatorship, served to restrict the ability of well-meaning government and civil-society leaders to push West Germans into a somewhat more self-critical and complete collective memory of the dictatorship of which the law was afraid. Moreover, the earlier 1952 decision to initially force the *Volksbund* and its local members to abandon *Heldengedenktag*-type ceremonies reminiscent of the Nazi past was, in the eyes this flustered VDK officer in 1972, a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. At that time, noted the author dryly, "Dr. Lehr [the Federal Minister of the Interior in 1952] had at that time pressured the *Volksbund* against its will" to accept the new November date, in order to appease the political pressures of the moment.

In the face of the apparent inability or unwillingness of the Federal government to force through a new regulation on the holidays, the eleven Land-level governments' potential for arriving at a common agreement withered further away. As of March 1971, only eight *Länder* had offered position statements on how to proceed with their joint holiday regulation but none of these eight were in favor of keeping the current arrangement, with *Volkstrauertag* on its own Sunday. Beyond their collective dissatisfaction with the present mourning holiday arrangement, only one *Land* (West Berlin) actually favored merging *Volkstrauertag* with *Totensonntag*, leaving the rest simply expressing some preference for some sort of undefined consolidation of holidays. Three *Länder* (Bavaria, Bremen, and Hamburg) in fact had not yet even submitted a position statement, still apparently exploring other options for how this matter could be resolved.[649] Thus political and bureaucratic inertia (or idling down of inertia) seemed to be the

[649] Der Beauftragte des Volksbundes Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge am Sitz der Bundesregierung, „Vertraulich/Aktenvermerk," confindential notes relating to conversations between VDK representatives and Interior Ministry representatives over holiday laws, March 12, 1971. VDK A.100-139.

reason why an admittedly problematic practice of *Volkstrauertag* was to be allowed to remain, without strenuous efforts to regulate when, but also how, West Germans mourned their dead. Instead of collectively re-defining public mourning (again), the individual Land governments were left to proceed on their own, without a unified position on dates and regulations and restrictions to be legislated.[650]

**An incomplete resolution?**

The long-term outcome of this impasse in 1971 was the continuation of *Volkstrauertag* on the second-to-last Sunday of the Church Year calendar, surrounded by the other still-independently-standing mourning holidays. Still, this brief history of still-lingering conflict without clear and complete resolution is still valuable to the historian for the insight it offers. If we return to the questions posed at the beginning of this section, a couple of firm conclusions appear that help more clearly characterize the state of West German public mourning in the early 1970s.

*Firstly*, on the question of West Germans' attitudes towards the relative importance of public mourning practices, it appears that opinions were split. Although the sources presented here do not include precise measures in the form of polling data, in the eyes of the VDK and some state governments, the public's support for or interest in *Volkstrauertag* was dwindling. This hunch is all the more telling in that the VDK had an interest in keeping the public enthusiastic toward the holiday in order to leverage public sentiment into favorable political and

[650] For example, Hesse adapted its holiday laws in May 1971, explaining that "it is at this moment not clear, when these far-reaching efforts [to negotiate new rules for the "silent holidays"] will be able to be successfully concluded." Hesse's solution was to keep *Volkstrauertag* on the second-to-last-Sunday of the Church Year but to reduce the number of hours during which certain commercial or public activities could be held, so as to interfere slightly less with economic or other social pursuits unrelated to *Volkstrauertag*. Hessischer Langtag. 7. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 7/463. [Dated 26.05.71] Vorlage der Landesregierung betreffend den Entwurf für ein Viertes Gesetz über die Sonn- und Feiertage.

legislative treatment, thus one would not expect them to admit defeat very easily. This was, after all, why the holiday law changes appeared so threatening to the *Volksbund* leadership: because *Volkstrauertag* already enjoyed only a tenuous grip on the public's attention and anything to diminish the holiday's profile relative to other similar holidays would only erode *Volkstrauertag's* position. This reality of a public generally less interested in mourning and remembrance may, in fact, help explain why the VDK made a greater effort to use *Volkstrauertag* as an opportunity to talk about peace, since this was a goal (perhaps unlike the goal of remembering the dead) that all West Germans in 1972 could agree was important.

At the same time, we cannot fairly say that everyone (or even practically everyone) in West Germany believed that remembering soldiers' deaths and grieving for their suffering was unimportant. This is because there was still in 1972 clearly some (albeit apparently smaller) portion of the population who still sought out *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies, whether national or local, and who voiced a clear engagement with the on-going efforts to preserve the memory of the war. In fact, these circles of West Germans who needed no coaxing or persuading to support *Volkstrauertag* appear to have themselves continued to see the holiday in terms of its older traditional mission of remembering primarily or even exclusively fallen soldiers. Such an inclination probably made these traditionalists appear even more out-of-date or questionable to the rest of the public, for whom the holiday held little meaning and to whom these dedicated supporters of tradition appeared as die-hard conservatives. Thus, instead of merely navigating between one side who wanted a holiday and the other side who did not want it, the VDK found itself floating between two preferred positions on the extremes that were potentially laden with political and emotional freight. Locating a middle ground between those still-mourning families and the forward-looking descendant generations required the *Volksbund* to identify a way to

reach out to the interests of each side without offending the organized sensibilities of the other one. In this way, the history of public mourning in West Germany mirrors and in fact pre-dates much of the lingering social tension over history and memory of the Third Reich seen in more recent decades.[651]

*Secondly*, to the question of whether West Germans could articulate any common element of collective memory or public mourning across the gap that divided their views on the victims, it is readily clear that all sides did agree on the need for peace in the future. That is, no matter how exactly different parties understood the war and represented it in their collective memory, any future return to violent conflict was unthinkable. Given the massive scale of suffering and death, mourning for those lost, whether in combat, on the home front, or those whose deaths resulted from Nazi racial policy, those grieving seemed to understand that a resolution to preserve peace for the future would best protect against a repeat of such tragic events.

In fact, the usefulness of *Volkstrauertag* as an occasion for teaching the public the value of peace was recognized by both the *Volksbund* and by state government leaders, who called for this sort of "social action" in cases where they perceived local communities to have been mourning on *Volkstrauertag* in a way that insufficiently appreciated the seriousness and undesirability of war. In the case of the state interior ministers, certain communities whose local *Volkstrauertag* variations were deemed too conservative for even center-right politicians spurred the project to reform and moderate *Volkstrauertag* as a national phenomenon, reducing the profile of the holiday in order to diminish the potential for any spilling over of the nationalism of earlier eras into the present. At the same time, the VDK recognized the suitability of

[651] For example, the "Bitburg Incident" in 1984, the *Historikerstreit* in 1986, the re-dedication of the *Neue Wache* memorial in 1993, as well as the *Wehrmachtausstellung* in 1996.

*Volkstrauertag* as a teachable moment for resisting such ultraconservative visions of Germany's military past, arguing that the need to lead by responsible examples in how to mourn and remember made it more crucial to keep *Volkstrauertag* as its own stand-alone holiday. In both cases, the action implied by mourning could only be peace. Even in the national VDK leadership's dispute with the provincial leadership in Bremen, both sides agreed on teaching the lesson of peace, only meeting friction on the question of calendar dates.

This friction between mourning the dead German victims and mourning the dead victims of German violence seems to have held steady across the decades following the end of the 1971 controversy. West Germany and then Re-Unified Germany continued to mark *Volkstrauertag* each year, largely following the standard formula of memorial speeches by political and cultural dignitaries as well as inclusion of classical or other high-brow musical selections, and capped off with the (sometimes updated) *Totenehrung* recitation. In recent years, two processes have worked in opposite ways to reinforce the tension between those audiences anticipating a military-centric program and those hoping for a non-military ceremony: first, the generation of veterans and other survivors of the war is dying off, removing the most natural and emotionally-invested demographic who would be likely to prefer a memorial focus on military deaths. Second, the deployment of the Bundeswehr abroad to Afghanistan in support of anti-terrorism and peace-keeping missions has given rise to combat casualties, who are then available for inclusion in the annual *Volkstrauertag* ceremony, opening the door to new generations of soldiers' families to expect a public mourning ritual informed by the discourses of sacrifice and bravery.[652]

[652] Indeed, Alexandra Kaiser sees this as a problem, because remembering the Second World War dead had taken a long time to achieve a point where military deaths were not heroized but understood as tragically meaningless,

A casual visit to Berlin on *Volkstrauertag* 2009 revealed a different sort of tension within the German population. Rather than arguments on the streets or demonstrations for or against the holiday, Germans seemed split roughly along generational line in the degree to which they noticed or sought meaning in the holiday. Across *Unter den Linden* from the *Neue Wache* memorial, Germans stood crowded on the sidewalk behind temporary barricades, wondering aloud why traffic was being diverted and why the police were heavily deployed. The response from the (relatively few) elderly pedestrians was to explain impatiently that it was *Volkstrauertag*, the day to remember the "war dead." In response, the middle-aged adults and their children strained not for a glimpse at the monument and the soldiers but rather for Chancellor Merkel's limousine, as she was to arrive to help lay a wreath. The presence of soldiers (or really any visual acknowledgement to the Second World War Dead) was muted at best; only the *Neue Wache* wreaths and the flags at half-staff marked the day in Berlin as in any way different from another (aside from the traffic delays).

Inside the Reichstag, the *Volkstrauertag* ceremony was also a collection of cultural artifacts and fragments of different memories, lined up together to speak to different slices of the audience at the same time. The familiar classical art music, speeches by political leaders, and inclusion of the *Kameradlied* (played by solo trumpet, not sung in unison) and the *Deutschlandlied* all bespoke continuities with the immediate post-war period and before. The *Totenehrung* spoken by Federal President Kohler did invoke the older agreed-upon categories of German soldiers, civilian victims, and victims of the Nazi regime but also included people who

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making it less likely for public mourning ceremonies to be taken to excess. Whereas now, with the Bundeswehr dead being brought in to Volkstrauertag, the death of the soldiers is once more becoming a phenomenon regarded positively by German society, meaning that this attitude could bleed over into contemporary remembrances of the Second World War military dead, too. At the same time, Kaiser leaves largely unexplored the issue of German attitudes toward peace, which do not necessarily align with the outward continuities apparent in Volkstrauertag over the post-war decades. *Von Helden und Opfern*, 408-409.

fought for human rights, victims of terrorism and also the Bundeswehr soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. Moreover, the common thread identified in all of these victims' experiences was their demonstration of the necessity of peace. That is, even as different audiences were still, to some extent, hoping for different messages of mourning, at no time did the comfort extended to one group or another include praise for war or acclaim for the benefits of violence. Instead, Germans, Europeans, the world as a whole, was urged to learn the lesson of protecting peace in order to protect lives and avoid the tragedy of having to mourn for so many dead again.

# CONCLUSION

## Memory with "no clear answers:" German history, collective memory and mourning the dead

This dissertation set out to find out how Germans talked about and remembered their dead soldiers from the Second World War, in a context where those soldiers' military service and deaths had served not a victory or even noble war aims but instead a fascist, racist dictatorship whose war effort failed. Besides an incredibly high number of dead soldiers, the war had also delivered huge numbers of dead civilians, some of whom had been targeted by these very soldiers or other officers of the German state for destruction, others of whom were unlucky enough to have been incidentally caught up in the fighting. It is common for modern nation states go to great lengths to officially mourn their dead soldiers in an effort to validate their deaths and service to the nation as positive contributions, something to which future generations should also aspire. In recent decades, western states have also begun extending the apparatus of state-led or state-endorsed mourning to civilian victims of natural disasters or other man-made tragedies outside of military service. For Germans after 1945, the possibilities for embracing their soldiers as exemplary servants to the state were restricted by the reality of the Nazi regime's conduct and goals. At the same time, Germans were still left with both military and civilian dead to bury, mourn, and remember while also rebuilding their society after their defeat.

By examining public mourning ceremonies for the wartime dead, this study has also searched for moments when Germans talked about and interpreted their own (or their families'

own) actions and experiences on one hand and how those life stories drove post-war Germans' choices and actions in the present-day. In doing so, this dissertation hoped to make a connection between the historical literature discussing Germans' failed efforts at remembering the Nazi past on one hand and the attention given by scholars to documenting and exploring Germans' peaceful recovery and rehabilitation among the states of Western Europe on the other, in an attempt to find out how the incomplete efforts to overcome the Nazi past in some areas paired with the successful efforts to learn from past mistakes in others. After all, if Germans neglected a probing discussion of the Third Reich and the Holocaust, they at least did not repeat these episodes again. Even in the case of Germany's "second dictatorship" in the GDR, this came to power fundamentally differently and pursued completely separate goals, if no less brutally in certain cases than the Nazi regime. Again, the end result seems clear from the outside: Germans somehow learned to avoid going to war again while they also learned to respect human rights and democracy. This dissertation has contended that public mourning ceremonies offer a glimpse into how these cultural changes took place and why, illustrating how slow, uneven, and at time contradictory the process was.

This dissertation has also aimed to contribute to the historiography detailing German efforts to rebuild or adapt their military institutions across the latter twentieth century. By tracking public mourning ceremonies specifically created to mourn dead soldiers, and then examining how these boundaries were expanded or contracted over time, this study hoped to connect the history of Germans' discussion of military institutions and soldiers' deaths in the past to the prospect of returning to them in the present. By comparing how Germans perceived the experience of war and the lessons to be learned from their own military history, it is possible to see Germans taking "social actions" to reform their society's attitude towards war, in ways

that may not be visible to studies focusing solely on the roster of victims mourned or the attitude toward the Nazi past prescribed by these ceremonies to their audiences. Indeed, the changes in Germans' attitudes toward war seem to have transpired earlier than those associated with confessing and learning from the Nazi past.

Before surveying the major findings, it is worth re-stating the central questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation. *Firstly*, how did official German public mourning ceremonies define or categorize the war dead after 1945 and whom did these ceremonies instruct audiences to mourn and remember? *Secondly*, to what degree did the categories of dead victims being invoked at official mourning ceremonies change over time and how? *Thirdly*, why did official mourning ceremonies revise their understandings of these different group of dead over time and to what degree did the reasons for such revisions change or remain the same? *Fourthly*, what do these changes in official practices of memory and public mourning imply about German culture in the decades that followed the Second World War? Unsurprisingly, the answers to these closely-related questions are in many ways overlapping and mutually reinforcing.

*Many faces of war*

For Germans recollecting and trying to understand the Second World War, no single category or understanding of "war dead" or "victims" seemed able to encompass the whole story. For every conversation about aerial combat, U-boot patrols, airborne jumps or digging foxholes, other survivors could talk about aerial bombing of civilian homes and armaments factories, stray bullets or tank rounds from encroaching Russian or Allied ground forces, eviction and expulsion from civilian homes, and of course the relatives who shipped off to war and never returned. Moreover, critically-minded German survivors as well as members of non-German survivor

communities could point out the violent toll that Germans arms wreaked on their enemies. Last but not least, the racial, ethnic, and other social minority groups targeted by the Nazi regime had few representatives left in 1945 to remember their deaths but their absence from the post-1945 period were just as undeniable. After 1945, remembering the dead meant acknowledging the many faces of the war.

Yet this reality was not acknowledged everywhere at once. In West Germany after 1945, soldiers' deaths from both world wars were still considered extremely important and the necessity of publicly mourning them was almost taken for granted. To be sure, the late 1940s and early 1950s saw controversies over the structure and content of public mourning ceremonies but the major dispute was the question of whether to settle with only soldiers' deaths or also recognize (German) civilians' deaths as demanding of the state's expressions of grief and remorse, too. This change reflects in part the even larger scale of death and violence, with military deaths approaching 4.5 Million and civilian deaths 0.5 Million. This altered emphasis in mourning also suggests that, for Germans, "war" was no longer considered a domain only for fighters but also for victims who were not part of the fighting.

Of course, West Germans' conceptualization of war as something larger than a battlefield only slowly grew to also recognize the racial policies of the Nazi regime, which themselves were deeply enmeshed in the war plans themselves. While the majority of literature on Germans' memory of the Third Reich and the Holocaust have rightly criticized this reluctance to acknowledge Holocaust- and other victims of German crimes on a level equal to German civilians or soldiers, the reasons given for why was so usually relate to guilt or an unwillingness to confront guilt, coupled with the immediacy of Germans' own sufferings and the absence of

surviving racial victims to relate their stories.[653] That is, Germans talked most often about what they themselves experienced and remembered, foregrounding their militarized society and the totality of its collapse in their collective memory. If Germans were more likely to have personally encountered the war via their family members' military service or their own civilian experience with violence, the prioritizing of soldiers' deaths makes the most sense. Moreover, when considering that these initial phases of negotiating a collective memory of the war took place under the threat of the Cold War's nuclear arms and also within longer history of German public mourning for the wartime dead, the discussions around soldiers and their priority take on a more nuanced meaning.

The conflict over memory in West Germany during the 1940s and 1950s centered around the question of mourning solely military dead versus also mourning non-military dead victims too. Thus, while it is true that West Germans were largely content to avoid a painful or difficult conversation over victims of the Nazis or even victims of the regular armed forces, the fact that these same West Germans were navigating questions of legal designations for war graves and appropriations of funding for these graves reveals more than the value they placed on their own dead (instead of the dead with whom they did not identify).[654] Simultaneously, West Germans' conversations about how to remember the German victims of war outline newer ways of

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[653] For instance, see Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001) on West Germans' concern with their own victimization; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge,MA, 1997) on the "multiple restorations" of East and West German elites memories of the Second World War through their own (narrow) experiences; Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943-1949* (Chicago, 2005) and Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (New York, 2007) on Germans' shame or guilt as influence on memory; See also Svenya Goltermann, "The Imagination of Disaster: Death and Survival in Postwar West Germany" in Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann, eds, *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth Century Germany* (New York, 2008) on the inability to discuss trauma.

[654] This categorical preference for Germans over German victims is part of Gilad Margalit's argument *in Guilt, Suffering, and Memory. Germany Remembers its Dead of World War II*, Trans. Haim Watzman (Bloomington, 2010).

recognizing the impact and human costs of war. Certainly, some West Germans already skeptical of *Volkstrauertag* saw a drive to add more types of (German, war-) victims to public mourning efforts as a departure from the older, more traditionally established groups of victims deserving public mourning.[655] At the same time, supporters of a more traditionally envisioned *Volkstrauertag* saw themselves as correcting a misallocation of emphasis and resources and not as self-conscious Nazis.[656] At the same time, those critics who opposed a traditional *Volkstrauertag* often saw efforts to maintain these old habits and customs as automatically evidence of lingering Nazi sympathies. Ultimately, though, the overall West German trend became increasing, not decreasing, the number of groups of dead victims to include.

East Germany presents a different context in which to look for and interpret public mourning. Amid a different set of rules than West Germany, here all German soldiers' deaths were interpreted negatively, as efforts only to maintain the Nazi dictatorship in power. The only combat deaths evaluated positively (at first) were those soldiers from the Red Army and also the antifascist fighters. Thus similarly to the Nazis' practices themselves, the GDR too, worked to shape memory and mourning practices in ways that bolstered the Party's memory, instead of population's memories. Still there was a slow movement over time to lessen the stigma attached to German veterans and those who died in the Wehrmacht.[657] Besides reducing the chances that

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[655] Axel Kapust makes an argument along these lines for the Protestant Church's role in revising Volkstrauertag after 1945 in *Der Beitrag der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland zum Volkstrauertag* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 143-144.

[656] Alexandra Kaiser is highly critical of West Germans who maintained older Nazi-era symbols and rituals in Volkstrauertag, even as they updated the rhetoric. For her this history amounted to one of continuity in the respect for soldiers over all others. See Alexandra Kaiser, *Von Helden und Opfern. Eine Geschichte des Volkstrauertages* (Frankfurt/New York, 2010), 407-408

[657] Margalit also notes this phenomenon, See Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering and Memory*, 89-93.

these veterans or their survivors would object to the regime's official mourning, these moves to situate the Wehrmacht into the official East German history of the war also relates to finding an East German military history to which the NVA could connect. Still, despite the official censorship and boundaries on public discourse, the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* also marked a different memory of different deaths in cemeteries, outside of the Party, returning to the (older) tradition of remembering German soldiers first and foremost. Although their mission was to comfort and support the families of soldiers, it is not clear how much emphasis landed on non-soldiers' deaths. All in all, though, the official efforts directed at remembering soldiers (Russian, plus Germans) plus party fighters resulted in a formula for public mourning in East Germany that enveloped slightly more types of survivors and deceased than the projects during the Weimar Republic, though not really reflecting the sort of reconsideration of war that West Germans saw.

Both Germanys showed a dynamic of defining increasingly broader categories of dead victims as "war victims" or "war dead." Reluctant to confront the complete history of the Nazi period and the complete range of dead victims it left behind, each Germany nonetheless recognized a growing understanding of war and its reach beyond the combat zone.[658] Whether framed as the suffering of German victims or antifascist fighters, each society jettisoned any strict reliance only on those who faced combat to define the boundaries of public mourning. Whereas most of the historiography on this point has framed this finding through the lens of asking after the absence of a Holocaust memory, this dissertation argues very strongly that

[658] This is similar but not the same as the points Moeller and Biess make about masculinity becoming less identified with soldiers, as men become less identified as typifying this role. That is, the assumption that there will always be wars and men will always need to fight them seems to slowly fall away, just as the notion of the home front as something distinct and isolated from the battle front also falls away. See Moeller, *War Stories*, 121 and Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton, 2006), 89-91.

Germans' attention to understanding war as an event involving both soldiers and civilians is new and noteworthy, since earlier attempts to make a similar redefinition via public mourning after 1918 did not achieve the permanent consensus on this point that was achieved after 1945.

*A remembered past shaped by the present*

It has become evident through this study that the relationship between an individual's memory and even select groups' collective memories on one hand and the collective memory endorsed by the larger society on the other is complex to say the least. From the start, this dissertation has understood the ability of the individual to choose what elements of their own experience to remember and what to forget, initiating a process that, when magnified to the level of families and communities, allows for whole societies ultimately build a shared version of the past, based on the elements that are common enough to all, or nearly all, the participants.[659] Yet some of the evidence relating to West Germans' collective memory and public mourning practices presented above strongly suggests that collective memory formation need not always be a process of stories bubbling up from below. Rather, the interaction between West Germans' post-war contemporary concerns and the shifting emphases of their collective memories of the Third Reich and the war suggest another model for understanding collective memory formation, whereby larger external forces and contextual factors can also shape the selection and refining of memory from the top down. That is, events after the fact can effectively shade certain elements of people's past experiences as seeming most relevant to the concerns of the present-day, the

[659] On the building up of memory from below and the contestation over what elements to keep and what to discard, see Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Identities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 317-341; Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 11, 7, 8, 11.

standpoint from which memory is being conjured.[660] In the case of West Germans, the crisis of the Cold War and fear of renewed violence enhanced the degree to which memories of the Second World War seemed important to the present-day, as warnings of how terrible war would be if Germans allowed it to return. The numerous examples offered above suggest that memory is not only a function of the experience of living through the past actions being recalled but also a result of the present moment, when the recollection happens.

This somewhat revised understanding of collective memory formation across different social "levels" helps explain the changes in West Germans' assumptions about public mourning exercises during the Occupation and even the early years of semi-sovereignty, when the *Volkstrauertag* holiday was pushed away from its *Heldengedenktag* iteration and even the older nationalist traditions of mourning. During these early years, while under the close scrutiny of the Allies, the importance of rebuilding post-war Germans society to look and act differently from its Nazi predecessor shaped the ways more self-critical or politically-aware West Germans reacted to suggestions that *Volkstrauertag* resume right where it left off during the war years. Indeed, this imperative to depart from Nazi tradition helped explain the shift to include civilian victims of the war alongside military dead, an understanding of warfare which the Nazis had not recognized. Despite the importance of offering comfort to surviving families, German church and political leaders understood the necessity of marking a "clean break" away from Nazi-tainted traditions, which is also why they were skeptical to allow the singing of the *Kameradlied* and the observance of *Volkstrauertag* on the springtime *Reminiscere* Sunday. This need to appear

[660] This is similar to the filtering of later versions of memory through earlier efforts to remember (or to forget), along the line of what Olick and Moses each present. Alaric Searle and David Clay Large make similar points about popular attitudes towards the military in West Germany being filtered through the presence of former Wehrmacht generals or the threat of war in Europe at this time. See Alaric Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society, and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959* (West Port, CT, 2003) and David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill, 1996).

unconnected to morally-compromised and politically-untenable Nazi practices drove the reformist voices in the late 1940s and early 1950s to dispense with Nazi-era practices in favor of something that looked and acted quite different.

By the mid-1950s, the Cold War and the alarming threat of nuclear weapons being deployed on German territory but without German direction exercised a much more far-reaching influence on German public mourning. Just as the history of the Second World War and its effects on larger civilian populations had led West Germans to question the distinction between mourning military dead versus civilian victims of the war, the added threat of nuclear war's far deadlier effects reinforced the tendency for Germans to collectively remember all elements of warfare negatively. That is, even for those who had not experienced the war directly or who had been small children at the time, all aesthetic representations of warfare at the annual *Volkstrauertag* ceremonies depicted it in a negative light, coloring the remembrance of the Second World War and perhaps even all wars as hopelessly tragic and meaningless endeavors. Simultaneously, the history of the Third Reich seemed to have little relevance to the everyday choices of West Germans in the 1950s, allowing the memory of the Nazis to wilt into neglect, or at least grow dim in comparison to the importance attached to the war. It was the necessity of peace and avoiding war became the most pressing contemporary policy goals to survivors and contemporary populations remembering the Second World War.

In some ways, then, the question of why West Germans did not initially dwell on the memory of the Holocaust instead of their own casualties might be projecting outside perspectives onto a context where such concerns had no place. That is, in the immediate aftermath of the war, there were tragically too few survivors of the Holocaust still in West Germany to share their stories of persecution. Thus, this perspective was absent (*because the Germans had removed the*

*people from Germany*) leaving practically only memories of German experiences of the war to circulate within West German borders. By the 1960s, the older generations who had survived the war or were born immediately after the war had grown accustomed to the contours of public mourning and collective memory framing a contemporary anxiety about war, and not the dictatorship. Yet this exclusive attention to the history of the war, driven in part by the demographics of the survivors but also the post-war political context, allowed the younger West Germans in the 1960s to see this as a deliberate silence, which corresponded with their own (the youth's) alarm over the prospect of a West Germany being run by unreconstructed fascists and authoritarians, many of whom had been Nazis and who had not been held accountable for their actions. Thus if the '68ers were already worried about a return to fascism and authoritarianism in West Germany, *this* contemporary external pressure (fear of fascism) shaped their more critical memorial concerns and activities of the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Of course, these critical youth also desired no resumption of war, so they did not object to the discourse and "social action" supporting peace, since they valued peace, too. Yet it is ironic that the supporters of a more traditional, military-focused *Volkstrauertag* tradition and those preferring a new, radical, Holocaust-centric mourning tradition, each looked for largely the same outcome but saw each other as enormous antagonists blocking this important work.[661]

[661] This confluence of interests in support of peace on all sides is what is largely missed by asking the question of where is the Holocaust. Examples here are Gilad Margalit's *Guilt, Suffering and Memory*, and Alexandra Kaiser's *Von Helden und Opfern*. It is also not really explained or interpreted by VDK literature which simple takes the goal of peace as self-evident, without explaining the conflict over how to achieve a peaceful society or the direction mourning needed to take in order to best guarantee the existence of peace. See Thomas Peter Petersen, *Der Volkstrauertag: Seine Geschichte und Entwicklung* (Bad Kleinen, 1998).

In the case of public mourning within the German Democratic Republic, it is less appropriate to discuss choices people made and agency that actors had to make choices, since the regime possessed outright censorship power. Of course, individual East Germans and even some underground organizations within the GDR did ignore or work around the SED's propaganda and restrictions. Still, even if just considering the officially-approved rhetoric and messaging of the SED, the ability of external contextual factors to influence collective memory seems to be in play. Of course, the East German leaders most straightforwardly articulated an official memory of the war and the Nazi regime that drew attention to the sufferings of Communists (and few others), wishing to emphasize their own (in their eyes) uniquely-qualified and morally-righteous position as leaders of the GDR. Still, the tense atmosphere of the Cold War, which found East Germany divided from its western half (and also what was once *really* Eastern Germany no longer even German but now Polish), as well as the permanent occupation and supervision by Red Army detachments, worked as another example of external contemporary pressures to shape changes or modifications to the SED's official memory. In this case, the Party needed to somehow make the separation and control of their people by the Soviets, for whom the Germans had no warm feelings, appear justified as a logical lesson to be learned from remembrance. Similarly, the routine inclusion of Red Army dead soldiers, as well as anti-fascist resistance fighters, into official public mourning efforts left the absence of *German* soldiers from these traditions even more glaring when the final wave of released POWs returned home. Moreover, when the East German regime began working to ramp up the NVA, a highly noticeable ideological adjustment was the state's sudden warmth to the embrace of a far-distant East German, anti-fascist, military tradition, in order to rest its own contemporary credibility on this older history of German forerunners waging war. Interestingly, the underground *Abteilung*

*Gräberfürsorge* was also responding to the absence of the Wehrmacht soldier from East German public mourning, well before the SED adjusted its commemorative posture. Yet the *Abteilung* worked to mark graves and mourn the dead without (as best we can tell) encouraging more youth to proudly prepare for war. Rather, this underground Protestant organization espoused, as much as can be determined, a commitment to stopping future wars and preserving peace, largely to be accomplished via reflection and mourning at the expansive gravesites.

So to return to the question of how did these changes in categories of victims being remembered occur over time in each Germany, the circumstances on each side of the division make it difficult to draw conclusions that apply to each setting cleanly. In each case, there existed a dynamism of broadening public mourning discourses and ceremonies, to incorporate more and different groups of wartime dead victims over time. These changes were generally beginning from a more restricted understanding of the past, endorsed by the state- and society leaderships, but which left enough of a gap between its selective explanation of the war and the unacknowledged experiences of other segments of the population, who were either disempowered or absent, but whose stories were either too large or too significant to ignore. At the same time, contemporary critics of these mourning exercises in the West pressured the officials in charge to make these changes when those critics, often of a different generation than those leaders, perceived circumstances in post-war West Germany as requiring a different set of "lessons" or reflections from the German past. In East Germany, changes in the categories of victims also came about as products of contemporary current events, either the continued occupation and supervision of the GDR by the Red Army or the ramping up of military conscription to prepare the NVA for military action, pressuring the regime to modify the vision

of the past which they used to leverage for their claim to leadership. None of this is to say that individuals' personal experiences and recollections do not relate or carry weight in the collective memory of society. Rather, these findings suggest that individuals do carry weight in how a society mourns its dead and remembers its past, because these larger patterns of continuity or change in remembrance rhetoric or practices can only result from groups of individuals making decisions to accept, ignore, or contest the narrative being offered to them.[662]

*Different visions of the past, one vision for the future*

This dissertation has interrogated beliefs and practices of public mourning and collective memory using a theoretical understanding of collective memory as a shared understanding of the collective past that inspires social action in to preserve or correct that understanding over time. The chief benefit of this methodological approach is the ability to ascribe some sort of explanatory power to the cultural phenomenon of collective memory, rather than limiting memory's interpretive usefulness to documenting what people remember and interpreting the manifold factors that produced this memory. Rather than viewing collective memory as something only to be explained *by* actions, this study has taken the stance that collective memory *itself* can then also explain other, subsequent actions. At the same time, one of the chief findings at the end of this history has been that collective memory, and the public mourning exercises where memory is voiced, should also be seen as being in some ways informed and influenced by other contemporary events and choices, stemming from the audience's lives after the events being remembered. This more nuanced understanding of how Germans remembered and

[662] This is the heart of "social action" described by Alon Confino in Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, eds., *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana, 2002).

mourned their dead still assumes public mourning ceremonies as cultural sites of upholding or renegotiating boundaries over victims, recognition of suffering, and the reasons behind why they died. However, a more complete understanding of why Germans revised their understandings of the war dead over time, such as they did, calls for attention to the fears and anxieties expressed by Germans as they mourned, which reveal what these Germans thought might befall their society and their future descendants in the event the Second World War and its dead were not properly remembered.

In the case of West Germans' collective memory and public mourning, audiences and critics alike revised their understanding of the war dead because the more traditional definition of war dead (i.e. just soldiers) no longer served as a sufficient answer on its own. The reasons for this shortcoming were manifold and doubtlessly varied to a person. To begin with, civilians were by 1945 in no way safe from the violence that was directed at their armies, whether in terms of weapons systems' increased ranges or the targeting of civilians, or at least targets of military significance located within civilian sectors, outright. The boundary between armed combatants whose deaths somehow contributed to the national good, and unarmed non-combatants whose deaths were unfortunate side-effects of pursuing this national good, was quickly dissolving and on a scale that could be noticed on a daily basis. Yet the grief being felt by surviving families for victims who were equally dead was difficult to weight in favor of fallen soldiers.[663] Furthermore, evidence of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust, while not immediately finding complete acknowledgment within West German public mourning, did make the

[663] That is, eventually it became clear that these soldiers were dying without delivering a victory to Germany, making it harder to describe their deaths as possessing greater political or moral value to the regime than non-combatants. Konrad H. Jarausch, ed. *Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front* (Princeton, 2011), 34-35 for one example.

continuation of Nazi-era practices worshipping the heroic soldier all the more suspect. To be sure, the ennobling of soldiers was a tradition older than 1933 but critics of this practice had neither the patience for nationalism or for National Socialism, especially when the occupying Allies were watching and looking for signs of lingering Nazi sympathy. That some proportion of the population accustomed to the older *Volkstrauertag* and *Heldengedenktag* practices still accepted their continuation as unproblematic demonstrates that even this seemingly logical adjustment was fraught with controversy.

For those West Germans critical of ceremonies continuing to devote special attention and emphasis on soldiers' deaths, as well as for those West Germans who still supported such a traditional practice, the discussions of whether and how to incorporate German civilians' deaths into *Volkstrauertag* took place against the background of the Cold War. The looming threat of a return to war, this time with nuclear weapons and this time fought without any Germans ability to steer the course of events, propelled a tendency to include calls for contemporary leaders and audience members to work for peace, even if these parties disagreed about soldiers' and civilians' relative importance in the history they were remembering. For supporters of the older, more conservative and traditional pattern of mourning the war dead, any suggestion to reduce the emphasis on the military in public mourning was met with the fear that such a change would leave future generations without an understanding of the true dangers of war, and therefore an appreciation of how important peace really was. That is, setting aside the extreme elements who saw no problem with continuing Nazi-era practices, those West Germans who wanted a strong military atmosphere to their public mourning thought that this aesthetic would serve to confront the present generations with a true picture of war's lamentable effects on their families and society. At the same time, West German critics who pushed for more inclusion of civilian

victims also acted out of concern for the same goal of promoting peace, but believed that this was best accomplished by presenting war as something not cleanly separable from the civilian world, restricted to the tidy map tables of the general staff. Making civilians just as much a part of *Volkstrauertag* as soldiers would mean that anyone who called for war in the future would have to reckon with the potential civilian losses, as well as military ones, rendering the prospect too costly to entertain. The fact that these two factions in apparent disagreement both felt the same calamity would result from incorrect memorial and mourning practices, shows that the possibility of war was something that had affected *all* West Germans in the past and naturally could do so again in the future.

Bound up with why West Germans made changes to their public mourning practices was these same West Germans' assumptions about their post-war selves. Setting aside the dichotomy of those West Germans in favor of emphasizing only the military dead versus those believing that civilian- and military dead were crucially important (discussed above), West German survivors of the war did not, on the whole, want to admit their support or at least passivity and non-resistance in face of the Nazi regime. Rather, these survivors sensed that another dictatorship could not *possibly* come to pass in West Germany, either because West Germans had learned their lesson to not suffer fascism or because they believed the Nazis were an ahistorical exception to German history. In either case, the supporters and critics of mourning and memory practices in the late 1940s and early 1950s believed there was *no need* to educate younger Germans or even each other about dangers of Nazism. This left a consideration of West Germans' lives under the Nazi dictatorship unnecessary in a mourning tradition designed, in part at least, to prepare contemporary West Germany for challenges it might face in the future. War, on the other hand, seemed a real threat and one that had been a constant feature of the past

century-and-a-half of European history, making the possibility of another war and education on the importance of avoiding another war into an important element of public mourning. That is, West Germans feared that those who did not remember and understand this history of war might easily fall into that trap again.

Publicly considering the possibility of another war that could result from an insufficient attention to past mistakes was a much easier pill for West Germans to swallow than imagining that the Nazi dictatorship could happen again. This was because, considered in this light, all of Europe had been at war with each other for the last couple of centuries, so Germans were thus *normal* in being the aggressors and losers in warfare, not terribly dissimilar from any of their European neighbors. Following this logic, if Germans on the other hand considered themselves to be possessing some special flaw that made them uniquely suited for a Nazi dictatorship, this belief would then demand that public mourning and collective memory practices acknowledge and warn the public for the benefit of the future. In this scenario, West Germans would have to admit that something was wrong with German culture and they would have to question how they became Nazis the first time, admitting some responsibility or flaws that contributed to the rise of the Nazi party and its hold on power. From this perspective, explaining war appears to have been a much simpler and *much less potentially incriminating* path for memory and mourning to take.

West Germans' contemporary self-perception and anxieties also help explain changes in West German public mourning and memory into the 1960s, when West Germans finally did realize a more historically honest memory of the Holocaust. By that time, the youth of 1960s were not so much terrified by war, though they and their elders still considered it a threat, but were rather more immediately worried about lingering authoritarianism and fascism steering the

Bonn Republic toward Weimar's fate. Though the '68ers believed theirs was the task of staving off a return to dictatorship, this fate could also have led Germans back to war. Thus the political, social and cultural criticism of the larger 1960s that filtered into collective memory and public mourning practices shaded these activities to emphasize the threat of the future return to fascism or dictatorship, instead of looking at a failure of international relations or diplomacy, as the "lesson" to learn from the German past. Still, in each case, whether the somewhat revised public mourning emphases of the 1950s or the more far-reaching changes called for in the 1960s, peace was an agreed-upon goal for all West Germans to realize, even if the '68ers understood the term differently than did their parents. This was because, while the youth *did* see what they thought were the fundamental flaws in German culture requiring immediate repair this critical position called for the re-calibration of collective memory and public mourning to include German crimes and culpability but not to undo the emphasis on peace.

To the question of why the East Germans changed their understanding of victims to be mourned over time, the answer looks quite different since, on this topic as with so many others, the GDR represents a different kind of change and continuity than does the Federal Republic. On one level, the GDR actually continued the older tradition of using state-sponsored collective memory and public mourning exercises to uncritically praise dead military heroes who fought and died to bring about the present status quo, in this case the SED regime. At first glance this might not seem dissimilar to what nation-states ordinarily do for their military dead, and it looks quite similar to what the Nazi regime did to exalt the First World War dead as well as their fallen SS troopers. Yet, as much as the GDR carried on this tradition unbroken, so too did it break away, since the Weimar- and Third Reich practices, indeed the nineteenth mourning traditions

also, circled around honoring soldiers and highlighting the combat experience of war, which was far from the history that the SED wanted to memorialize.

The German Democratic Republic instead staged public spectacles, including parades and rallies, for the purpose of celebrating those aspects of German history that served to benefit the regime's grip on power. In the case of remembering the Second World War and mourning the dead, it was the OdF fighters who best fit this mission, even though these dead victims were *not* uniformed troops and were *not* always or even typically on the battlefield. Instead, these were ideological defenders, who had not acted to protect the (Nazi) regime and the German people *per se*, but purported instead to fight in the best interests of the German people. When the GDR did expand its mourning traditions, it began by reaching out to include the Red Army dead, to bolster and legitimate the Eastern Bloc military and political alliance. Only eventually did (East) German veterans receive mention and only insofar as it helps ideological needs of linking the GDR present to a supposedly socialist or anti-fascist military past. What is important to note here is that the dynamism in this case was not so much driven by popular demands or fears but instead operated to support the regime's ideological claims on the past and the future.

In nearly all cases over the time span under study here, official SED remembrance was driven to, at some level, oppose or counteract individual East Germans' and groups of East Germans' memories of the Second World War as well as their understanding of the present. This goal of actively frustrating or suppressing East Germans' memories might be characterized as similar to the West German goal of reforming military-centric mourning in order to make way for mourning German civilian victims and civilian victims of Germans, too. Yet those West German processes were designed to *augment* older, more traditional practices with new ones, whereas the GDR began by *ignoring* tradition, rather than trying to minimize it, only slowly

adding more victims over time. When it came to the question of how ordinary East Germans were supposed to feel about their dead Wehrmacht soldiers, when the regime offered an answer, even then it was inconsistent: East Germans were either to see them as servants to the Nazis or victims of the Nazis, depending on what was needed by the regime. Even in the underground *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge*, where East Germans created a separate space to articulate and organize based on memories of the Second World War outside the OdF narrative, it appears that East Germans here pushed a memory of soldiers, mostly. It is unclear whether and to what extent German civilian- and Holocaust victims were acknowledged, but in response to the yes-and-no nature of the change or continuity in mourning offered by the SED, the *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* answered with its own yes-and-no type of answer, approximating the early FRG years of focusing on soldiers and not others, even though the *Abteilung* was doing this at a time when different concerns had been animating the FRG in the late 1960s that are quite far removed from those of the late 1940s. Even in this context, however, the East Germans were hearing a message about soldiers and sacrifices that emphasized peace, even if the *Abteilung's* peace was not the same as the SED's peace.

Returning to the question of *why did Germans in East and West revise their understanding of the war dead over time*, there are some common answers we can identify. The answers and definitions of "war dead," indeed of how to conceptualize "war" itself that had been circulating and informing official mourning ceremonies in earlier post-war time periods (see above) were no longer satisfactory. Certainly some survivors were content to mourn and celebrate soldiers but the expansive nature of both the war and the regime meant that many more survivors or families had stories to tell in addition to or beyond the battlefield history. Moreover,

for the West German state, it was (domestically) politically dangerous to refuse to acknowledge the history of German victims and (internationally) perilous to ignore the history of the Holocaust and crimes. In many ways, the diversity of classes of victims recognized in *Volkstrauertag* made generalizations difficult, if not impossible, because explaining how different groups related to each other would have brought speculation of guilt and responsibility.

In fact, the "peace" discourse appears to be the *only* way to find agreement between different memorial factions in West Germany. The emphasis on remembering the past in a way that allowed different parties who suffered to each claim recognition and affirmation, without their suffering being too deeply questioned or problematical, seemed only possible if the "social action" implied by these competing memories was the same: working to preserve peace in the future. At the same time, the GDR's rhetoric also centered around "peace" as a goal, though it was certainly a different form of peace envisioned by that regime, and one that ignored the deaths of German soldiers and many civilian victims. At the same time, the underground *Abteilung Gräberfürsorge* also praised peace while recognizing German dead outside of the Communist discourse. In fact, the *Abteilung* seemed to be the only example of 1918 patterns of mourning victims being kept intact, although notably the praise for war was gone, leaving only praise of peace remaining. Thus it appears that, however great the gaps were in different factions of Germans mourning different versions of the past in different post-war contexts, all Germans agreed that remembering the Second World War and its dead taught them to appreciate and pursue peace in the present and future.

*Reformed mourning, reformed society*

Although "peace" appears to be the only way Germans could find discursive commonality and shared conclusions amid their wide-ranging lived experiences of the war and the dictatorship, this *does not mean* we should discount Germans' pronounced support for peace as merely a rhetorical strategy. Instead, it is a chief argument of this dissertation that Germans' cultural appreciation for peace, and newfound distaste for war which was its consequence, was *indeed the salient factor in the post-1945 history of public mourning in Germany*. As articulated above, West Germany saw public mourning practices no longer feature only dead soldiers, as part of an argument promoting the rejection of war, since civilian victims were thought to magnify and clarify the harshness of war and seriousness of threat of war. A side effect of this nearly exclusive focus on the threat of war by West Germans was that Holocaust victims became subsumed in the process, either seen erroneously as merely other victims of total war like German victims, or at most as simply other victims of an aggressive Nazi regime who was conducting a war, making these victims also "just" war victims. For West Germans, "peace" was the logical lesson to be learned from remembering this history, the key to preventing more death and destruction. Therefore West Germans cautioned themselves against the sources of war, variously seen as outcome of nationalism, international power politics, cavalier political leaders, or imperialism and right-wing authoritarianism. In East Germany, the pattern for official remembrance was that peace would naturally come about as a result of socialism, and that in order to successfully realize this end, the Western Imperialists had to be resisted. Yet aside from the political goals, an end to actual violence and a determined effort to keep the peace were featured in public mourning on each side.

It is worth detailing the fact that "peace" may have been cover to not have to talk about the Holocaust. The slowness to do this in the West and near-absence of these conversations in the East could be seen to speak in favor of an intentional absence of the Holocaust from memory. At the same time, eventual discussion in West (and reunified) Germany demonstrates a willingness over time to think seriously and critically about the German (Nazi) past. Furthermore, even as "silence" on Nazis was criticized and subject to revision, at no point did West Germany and East Germany openly reject the rhetoric of "peace." No one ever started calling for war, no one acclaimed further loss of life as a good and desirable end. So it seems we can conclude they were seriously committed to "peace," even after they also came to commit themselves to remembering the Nazis. That is, peace was not a passing fad or mask, because when the shortcomings of the "peace" discourse were addressed, the "peace" part was kept even as other omissions were corrected. Both of these elements, early and sustained commitment to peace and not war, plus a slow and halting incorporation of a memory of the regime and its designated victims into the war memory, fit well into the larger literature on cultural change of German society after 1945. If Germans were more successful in some areas than others, no one seriously thinks they were (or are) on the verge of another right-wing dictatorship.[664] Similarly, the results of memory and mourning deserving of scholars' notice might not be the largely incomplete explanation of the Nazi past but rather the unambivalent commitment to peace. If historiography has noted the former, why ought not also note the latter?

[664] See Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilising Germans, 1945-1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (New York, 2006) for one wide-ranging survey of recovery and reform.

It is hoped that, in addition to addressing the specific history of collective memory and public mourning for the war dead in post-1945 Germany, this study will also contribute some more general insights to the field as a whole. In the case of the history of memory during the early decades of the Federal Republic, some of these findings relate to what might be missed when specialists focus only on the gaps and imperfections in Germans' collective memory, rather than the changes in the actual content over time. Of course, it is important not to praise failure and the process of pointing out what Germans did omit from their discussions over memory help to more fully appreciate and analyze the reasons behind these decisions. However, instead of only stopping with the problems, it is also possible and indeed advisable to try to evaluate the solutions that West Germans found as they discussed their national past. Far from letting West Germans who hid their secrets off the hook, this interpretation, emphasizing West Germans' outspoken aversion to violence and death as a product of experiencing the war and remembering the dead, suggests that people must and can make choices as to what their collective memory and public mourning practices say about the past. Thus the historian can dig into the history of these very choices and why they were made, without simply noting what was present or absent.

For the historiography on the German Democratic Republic, this dissertation offers fewer firm conclusions. In part, this shortcoming results from the sources themselves which are uneven, more opaque and present less of a nuanced story than those on the West. Nonetheless, the demonstration of East Germans leaving behind the official OdF memorial tradition, rather than accepting or rejecting it, adds to the research dispelling the notion that East Germans either completely accepted or completely rejected propaganda and state censorship. At the same time, this underground body offers a glimpse of East Germans organizing for "social action," thus taking an active role in opposition to their regime. Yet at the same time, these proto-dissidents'

actions must have ranked as passive resistance or accommodation to the regime at some level, because they appear to have been allowed to carry out their work for at least two decades, meaning that they could not have presented a stance that was too threatening to the regime and its official memory needs. Other recent research has indeed revealed a certain dynamism within East German official collective memory and mourning exercises, especially with regard to dead German Wehrmacht veterans. This small additional glimpse into how East Germans dealt with their past and with their present circumstances ultimately begs for more future research into how this underground operation worked on a day-to-day basis and how much accommodation versus friction they encountered from the regime.

In addition to the historiography of post-war Germany, this dissertation has also aimed to offer an intervention into the methodological field of collective memory studies. In particular, this study has set out to identify not only the way(s) in which Germans recollected their past, how this changed over time, and what elements of this recollected history were omitted or augmented, but it has also attempted to locate actors and groups making choices and taking "social action" to preserve, correct, or otherwise apply insight from memory of the past to the present day's problems. That is, this study has worked to present collective memory, and the public mourning ceremonies where memory was articulated and contested, as more than a set of narrative practices or cultural traces that were passively consumed or rejected. Far from rejecting a study of symbols and tropes, searching for the ways in which memory and mourning motivate concrete actions, as the present study has done, only adds to the explanatory power of collective memory. By helping reveal the connections between the content being remembered and context of that remembrance, scholars can enrich their understanding of what sort of past is transmitted between generations, as well as the degree to which the past or the present exerted

more influence on post-war populations.  After all, it was not only remembering the suffering of wars in the past but also experiencing the anxiety about more violence in the present that prompted post-war Germans to fashion a post-war society.

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