
The Round Table

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Happy New Year! Welcome to the January meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

It is fitting in the cold Minnesota winter that we will once again be discussing the Eastern Front. Tonight's guest speaker is a favorite of the Round Table, Dr. Dennis Showalter, Professor at Colorado College. He is a former student of Harold Deutsch and his coauthor on the book *If the Allies Had Fallen*, and author of *Hitler's Panzers* and *Armor and Blood*. He will be joined by veterans of the Eastern Front to discuss the Battle of Königsberg, which is not well known in America.

In each nation, certain physical places play a critical role in the nation's self identity; losing that place has as much psychological importance to a nation's morale and will to fight as well as its strategic and military importance. A prime example of this in World War II is that even after losing their center of gravity (the Allied troops concentrated north of Sedan blocking the Germany army's advance), the French held out until Paris fell in June 1940 and then the rest of France surrendered. In Russia, the defense of Stalingrad took on profound political importance beyond its strategic value for both sides. In Germany, the governmental administrative center may have been Berlin, but the historical and spiritual heart of the modern German state was associated with Königsberg. Founded in 1255 by the Teutonic Knights, it was part of the Duchy and then the kingdom of Prussia. Literally meaning "Kings Mountain" it was the coronation site of German royalty even after the capital was moved to Berlin in 1701, and was symbolic of the aristocratic *Junker* class and their landed estates. The connection of Prussian monarchical traditions and the political and cultural legacy of the centuries long *Drang nach Osten*, meant the defense of Königsberg had great significance for Germany; the center of traditional German territory threatened by invaders.

When the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941 they embarked upon a scorched earth policy, murdering millions of civilians who

might have supported them against the Communists. When the Soviets Union invaded Germany in October of 1944, the Soviet hordes wreaked the same treatment upon the German people. The first glimpse of what was to come to the population facing Soviet vengeance was in the ethnic German Prussian town of Nemmersdorf, where defenseless civilians were tortured and then massacred by Soviet Army units. When German units re-took the town, the evidence of Soviet atrocities was widely propagated by the Nazis, in order to bolster the determination of the German people to continue fighting. Thus, a wave of terror preceded the advancing Red Army. By January 1945, Soviet forces were on the outskirts of Königsberg, but the city would not be easily taken. The area surrounding the city had three lines of fortifications consisting of 15 forts, much like Liege in Belgium. The Soviets began a siege of the city that lasted until April of 1945. As the rest of the Soviet armies pushed westward to Berlin, the city of Königsberg continued to resist.

Nazi officials in the city, most notable Erich Koch the *Gauleiter* of East Prussia, would not allow civilians to leave, because it was a considered 'defeatist.' Even so, thousands of the elderly, women and children took to whatever roads they could find in cars, horse drawn carts, or on foot, in subzero temperatures. Those who died were left frozen on side of the roads. Many people in the city made their escape along the road to Pillau, the port where they hoped they could get on a ship, then make it past the Soviet navy to safety in the west.

The final assault on Königsberg, a lone pocket far behind the Soviet front lines, began on April 6, 1945 and the Soviets slowly squeezed the Germans inward, taking the surrounding the forts one by one, and engaging in block by block fighting. The trapped German forces, had no support, no prospects of reinforcements, and were subjected to relentless bombing by the Soviet Air forces. Otto Lasch, the German commander, though Ordered by Hitler to fight to the last man, surrendered on April 9.

The broken historic heart of modern Germany was now destroyed. The German population left in the city and the surrounding countryside was forcibly expelled from the territory occupied by the Red Army in a vast ethnic

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

cleansing of Prussian territories undertaken at the end of the war. The State of Prussia and its capital city ceased to exist. Renamed Kaliningrad, it is a part of Russia and its population consists of Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians resettled from other parts of the Soviet Union.

Further Readings:

Dennis Showalter and Harold Deutsch, *If the Allies Had Fallen* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2010 ed.).

Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

Isabel Denny, *The Fall of Hitler's Fortress City: The Battle for Königsberg*, (Philadelphia: Casemate Publishing, 2009).

Prit Buttar, *Battleground Prussia: The Assault on Germany's Eastern Front 1944-45* (Oxford, UK.: Osprey Publishing, 2012).

Brian Taylor, *The Battle of Königsberg, October 1944 to April 1945*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

Peter B. Clark, *The Death of East Prussia: War and Revenge in Germany's Easternmost Province* (Chevy Chase, MD: Andover Press, 2013).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table -

23 Jan. 2017 – *Island No. 10* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com

St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 23 Jan. 2017 – *Lincoln/Bixby Letters* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net

Cannon Valley CWRT - 19 Jan. 2017 – *Using DNA to Find Your Ancestors* – dnl1.peterson@gmail.com

Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 8 April 2017

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>

Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnang-museum.org 612-713-2523

World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighter-swwiimuseum.org>.

Airshow - Eden Prairie - 15-16 July 2017 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100

Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: 25 Jan. 2017, Atkinson, *Guns at Last Light* - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com

Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717

CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942

Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org

We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2017

9 Feb Nazi Hunters

9 Mar Arsenal for War

23 Mar Gen. Lesley McNair

13 Apr Last Mission of the 93rd Bomb Group

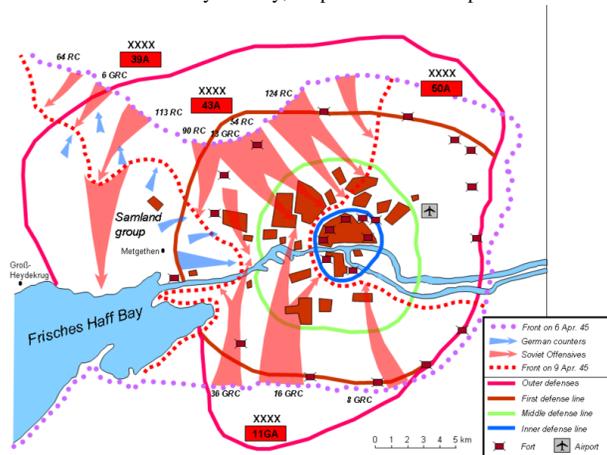
11 May Corps Commanders of the Battle of Bulge



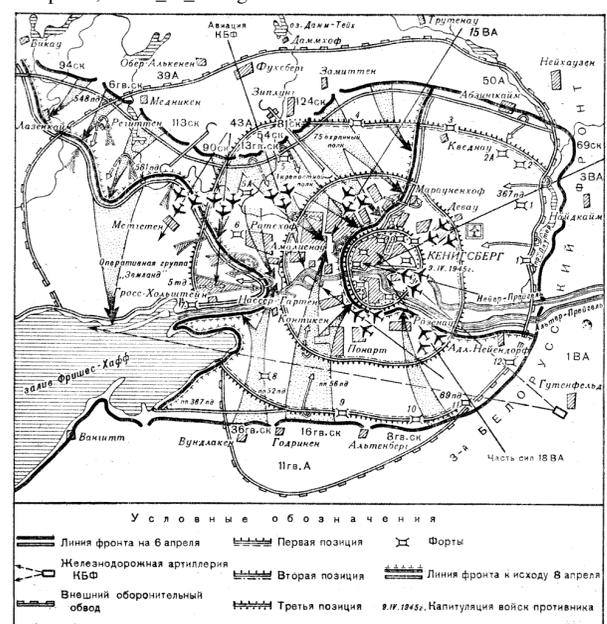
USMA Atlas of Military History, Map No. WWIIEurope01



USMA Atlas of Military History, Map No. WWIIEurope31



Wikipedia, Battle_of_Königsberg.



<http://rkka.ru/maps/kenigsberg.gif>