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 German 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
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 Belarusians resettled from other parts of the Soviet Union.

Further Readings:

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 Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
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

See our programs on YouTube at [http://youtube.com/ww2hrt](http://youtube.com/ww2hrt)