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State Archive in Olsztyn

East Prussia as the only province of the German Empire occupied during the Great War. Wartime histories of East Prussia

Abstract: The article presents the history of East Prussia as a part of the German state during the Great War, focusing on both warfare and the ordeal of the German civilian population under the Russian occupation. The author also describes attempts by the German authorities to provide the province with necessary support.

The intention of the author of this study is to present East Prussia as a part of the German state during the Great War. The history of this province is strikingly different from the histories of other parts of Germany. The province, as the only part of the Second Reich, found itself partially under Russian occupation during the military action of 1914–1915. The author intends to outline the course of warfare and the gehenna of the German civilians, as well as the scale of destruction, the reconstruction process and persecution of war crimes committed by the occupant.

In August 1892, France and Russia signed a military convention. It stipulated that Russia would send at least 800 thousand soldiers to fight Germany¹. The conference of 1912 decided that the Russian army would, within 15 days from the mobilisation announcement, start from the Narew River area and head for Allenstein (Polish: Olsztyn), provided that Germans would be defending East Prussia².

The assumptions of the German commandship presumed that military action should be mainly focused on the west. Their priority was to defeat France. The German commanders delegated the 8th Army to defend East Prussia. It consisted of four corps including a reserve: the I Corps (General Hermann von François), XVII (General August von Mackensen), XX (General Friedrich von Scholz) and the I Reserve Corps (General Otto von Below). General Maximilian von Prittwitz und Gaffron commanded the 8th Army, General Major Graf Georg von Waldersee was the chief of staff. These units were to face more numerous Russian forces on the North-West Front, comprising the 1st Army “Niemen” (General Paul von

1 Szlanta, Piotr: *Tannenberg 1914*. Warszawa 2005, p. 15.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Rennenkampf) and the 2nd Army “Narew” (General Alexander Samsonow), commanded by General Yakov Zhilinski.

The German army had been preparing for war for a long time. The oldest file concerning mobilisation of doctors was drafted a few years before the outbreak. In 1909, a register of doctors residing in the Braniewo *Kreis*³ was established⁴. Information in this register was presented in the form of a table. It provided the degree, name and surname of a doctor, date of birth, place of residence and level of specialisation⁵. The next similar archival unit is dated 1914. In contrast to the previous unit, it included also information regarding preparation of field hospitals which were planned to be staffed with support personnel⁶. In the face of an approaching war and in the light of enthusiasm for battle, a group of women, the members of the Women’s Patriotic Association (*Ortsverein des vaterländischen Frauenvereins*), volunteered to work in hospitals⁷. The Convent of St Catherine’s Sisters delegated 25 nuns to prepare for war⁸. They were expected to report for duty within 20 to 30 days from the announcement of mobilisation⁹. As a result of mobilisation of medical personnel, a few army hospitals were established in East Prussia. In Rastenburg (Polish: Kętrzyn) a reserve field hospital (*Reservelazaret Rastenburg*) was opened. In the Darkehmen (Russian: Озёпск) *Kreis* two hospitals were established: Vereinlazaret and Reservelazaret Gumbinnen (Polish: Gąbin, Russian: Гусев)¹⁰.

During the last days of July 1914, mobilisation was decreed¹¹ and organised according to regionalisation. East Prussia was the seat of the I Corps (Königsberg – Polish: Królewiec, Russian: Калининград) and the XX Corps

3 *Kreis* was the second-level unit of local administration in Prussia. The term *Kreis* is most often translated into English as “county” (trans.).

4 State Archive in Olsztyn (Archiwum Państwowe Olsztyn subsequently referred to as APO), Starostwo Powiatowe w Braniewie (Landratsamt Braunberg subsequently referred to as LB) 474.

5 *Ibid.*, for example – dr Valentin Neumann, born on 1 June 1861, residing in Wormditt, with the level II of specialisation (class II doctor).

6 APO, LB, 473.

7 APO, LB, 475, 25 women volunteered.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 According to the school chronicle from Biskupiec the information about mobilisation was received on 1 August 1914 ca. 5 pm – APO, Stadtschule zu Bischofsburg, 1. Juszkiewicz, Ryszard states that mobilisation announcements appeared on 30 July, cf. *Działania bojowe na pograniczu północnego Mazowsza i Prus Wschodnich oraz sytuacja ludności w latach 1914–1915 w Nad Bałtykiem, Pregolą i Łyną XVI–XX w.* Olsztyn 2006, p. 351.

(Allenstein) headquarters. As we can see, the involvement of East Prussians in the 8th Army was significant: they constituted two corps. The fact that the corps were formed according to regionalisation suggests that ca. 70% of the corps' personnel came from Warmia and the Masurian Lake District.

East Prussia played a special role in the plans of the Russian politicians and servicemen. Some circles in Imperial Russia proposed schemes to annex vast areas of Germany to the tsarist country: to incorporate East Prussia, Brandenburg, Pomerania, the Poznań region and Silesia¹². Such plans served a propaganda function. Their purpose was to present Tsar Nicolas II as a defender and restorer of a united Slavic state on the areas which had been inhabited by Slavs in the Middle Ages. It should be noted that their priority was to incorporate Königsberg, an extremely important southern Baltic port. The Berlin authorities had no intention to be a passive witness in this situation. Germany also had plans pertaining to the areas of the Kingdom of Poland located along the East Prussian border¹³.

Propaganda of both sides of the conflict presented its country as the one that was waging a defensive war. The press promoted general enthusiasm for the war and everybody eagerly left for the battlefield. Kazimierz Jaroszyk, a wartime participant, presented a totally different picture of the war: "the outbreak of the war was announced by ringing bells – on 2 August 1914. Fighting spirit prevailed in the press and in restaurants, but during medical examinations, the recruits tried to show that they were unfit for battle, ill, especially with tuberculosis (a godsend)"¹⁴.

The East Prussia newspaper "Allensteiner Zeitung" reported that in the vicinity of Prostek, 300m from the border, on 1 August, an exchange of fire took place between the German and the Russian patrols. Neither side incurred any losses¹⁵.

Ryszard Juszkiewicz discovered that the first Russian troops which had crossed the East Prussian border belonged to the 6th Cavalry Division (6-я кавалерийская дивизия) commanded by General Vladimir Roop. The fact that this unit consisted of a few regiments stationed in northern Masovia (two from Mława, one each

12 Wrzesiński, Wojciech author of study *Prusy Wschodnie w polskiej myśli politycznej 1864–1945*. Olsztyn 1994, p. 135, based on special issue of the Warsaw "Dzień" of 27 August 1914, which provided a reprint of Oleg's article from the magazine "Голос России", which published a programme of postulated territorial progress of Russia to the west.

13 Ibid., p. 136.

14 Jaroszyk, Kazimierz: *Wspomnienia z Prus Wschodnich*. Olsztyn 1969, p. 32. Unless indicated otherwise all quotations in this text have been translated from Polish by the translator (trans.).

15 APO, Magistrat Allenstein, 161.

from Ciechanów, Ostrołęka and Przasnysz) could mean that it comprised many soldiers of Polish origin¹⁶. On 2 August 1914, a day after the already mentioned inconclusive exchange of fire, the more powerful Russian troops sallied forth to East Prussia. They crossed the Prussian border near Mława but on the next day had to withdraw under pressure from the German army¹⁷. In another part of East Prussia, on 4 and 5 August, dragoons of the 1st Dragoon Regiment “Prince Albrecht of Prussia” (Dragoner-Regiment “Prinz Albrecht von Preußen Nr. 1”) clashed with the tsarist troops¹⁸. A frontal attack on the so-called eastern front, which covered northern Masovia and East Prussia, began in the second half of August 1914. Juskiewicz suggests the date of 19 August¹⁹. The first confrontation was won by the I Corps. Subordinates of General François won the battle of Stal-lupönen (Russian: Нестеров). Another battle took place near Gumbinnen and was won by the Russian army.

The ineffective leadership of Prittwitz, which put the whole of East Prussia at risk, led to his removal from the post of Commander. According to the German researchers, the change of command over the 8th Army was decided during a telephone conversation between Helmuth von Moltke and Maximilian von Prittwitz on 21 August²⁰. A retired General, Paul von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg, was chosen to replace him. On 22 August at 3 pm, the elderly General, aged over 60 years, received a telegram from Coblenz²¹ asking if he was ready to accept the duty²². Erich Ludendorff, a hero of the western front battles, became his chief of staff.

The troops of the 8th Army were in retreat after their defeat in the battle of Gumbinnen. The fear of occupation forced many to abandon their homes and go into exile. This was the fate of Alexander zu Dohn, a young aristocrat who, fearing a Russian invasion, fled with his five siblings as far as Darmstadt to stay their with his family²³.

16 Juskiewicz, Ryszard: op. cit., pp. 352–353.

17 Ibid., p. 353.

18 Osterroht, Hermann: *Geschichte des Dragoner Regiments Prinz Albrecht von Preußen (Litthauisches) Nr 1 1717–1919*, Berlin 1930, pp. 299–300. These battles took place by Ejdkuny – Ejdkuny-Kibarty – on 4 August and by Szirwint – 5 August 1914.

19 Juskiewicz, Ryszard: op. cit., p. 351.

20 Showalter, Dennis E.: *Tannenberg 1914, Zderzenie Imperiów*, Warszawa 2005, p. 316.

21 Field General Staff of the Prussian Army was situated in Coblenz.

22 Ibid., p. 324.

23 Fürst zu Dohna, Alexander: *Schlobitten Erinnerungen eines alten Ostpreussen*, Berlin 1989, p. 68.

Some East Prussian refugees only stopped beyond the Oder, some staying with their relatives in an unoccupied part of the province. Thousands of exiles that had been sent beyond the Vistula stopped in the provincial capitol of Königsberg. At the end of August, 12,000 people were transported to Gdańsk via the Vistula Lagoon²⁴.

In case of Lötzen (Polish: Giżycko) the authorities ordered the evacuation of its population, probably in order to facilitate defense of the Boyen Fortress²⁵. In total, 800 thousand of two million citizens went into exile. The number of refugees from East Prussia is estimated at hundreds of thousands²⁶. Some fled for refuge in the nearest forests. A future Polish activist in East Prussia, Jan Boenigk, recalls in his book:

Two days after the battle the people from Tomaszów returned to their homes. Nobody suffered any losses because the Russians neither stole nor destroyed anything. Landowners found all their livestock grazing in pastures. Only cows mooed painfully as their udders were full of milk²⁷.

As a consequence of the military action, numerous East Prussian locations found themselves under Russian occupation. This group included, among others, Allenstein, Lyck (Polish: Ełk), Neidenburg (Polish: Nidzica), Ortelsburg (Polish: Szczytno).

Alenstein, from 1905 the seat of district authorities, was one of the most important locations under occupation. Reinhold Herbrig, a mechanic from a municipal power plant in Allenstein, provided some interesting information concerning occupation of the city on the Łyna river. This report is preserved in the APO holdings, in a volume concerning memories of the war, which was started on request of the Allenstein magistrate²⁸. The first Russian patrols entered Allenstein in the evening of August 26. An anonymous citizen reported: "I stuck my head out from some alley of the old town to see these unwanted guests"²⁹. According to witnesses when Russians entered the city on Thursday, 27 August,

24 Jasiński, Janusz: *Historia Królewca*, Olsztyn 1994, p. 230.

25 Szostakowska, Małgorzata: *Prasa codzienna Prus Wschodnich od XVII do połowy XX wieku Przewodnik do dziejów wydawniczych*. Toruń 2007, p. 114.

26 *Kalendarz Pruski Ewangelicki na 1916 rok*, p. 61. Up to 350 thousand people [from East Prussia] were for months in exile, spread throughout the whole Prussia, as far as to Hannover and Westfalen.

27 Boenigk, Jan: *Minęły wieki a myśmy ostali Warszawa 1971*, p. 47.

28 APO, Akta miasta Olsztyn (subsequently referred to as AMO), 156, *Kriegserlebnisse der Beamten*, sheet 4.

29 *Kalendarz królewsko Pruski ewangelicki na 1917 rok*, pp. 80–81.

the vast majority of citizens had left Allenstein³⁰. An account of some anonymous Allenstein resident serves as a confirmation of Herbrig's memories. This person described the Allenstein streets during the entrance of the Russian troops: "Along our street the tenements that usually have up to 40 residents, are empty today – we are alone!"³¹. Clerks from the district office, the post and the railway management personnel secretly left Allenstein at the very beginning³². A large part of the Allenstein power plant staff was among the runaways. The only exception was Herbrig and another worker whose identity has not been determined. Their dutiful work enabled a continuous supply of power to the city. By contrast to the district clerks that had left Olsztyn, the municipal authorities, led by the supermayor Georg Zülch, remained in the city. The supermayor, faced with the approaching tsarist troops, appealed to the citizens not to provoke the occupants. This proclamation was supposed to be printed on 27 August but it was probably not distributed. The draft, along with handwritten notes, has been preserved in the APO fonds³³. The people of Allenstein varied in their attitudes towards the occupant. There were some cases of impertinence:

Suddenly one horse reared up. What's this? A drunkard or some daredevil caught it by the bridle and blocked the way of the whole patrol. A Russian soldier aimed at him but before he fired – a senior one pulled his hand and signalled that he should turn back³⁴.

Other people naively believed that a piece of paper with an appeal in Russian not to break into a given apartment would protect their possessions:

Peaceful people live here and they did not escape for fear of you, Russian soldiers, but only went to their friends in... [street] You are kindly requested not to open the flat forcibly, nor to take anything from it. Otherwise, we will be forced to complain to your commander!³⁵

Most people approached the existing situation with calm and humility: "plenty uncovered their heads out of fear"³⁶.

Fate was kind to the Allenstein people. The occupation lasted two days: 27 to 28 August 1914³⁷. Mieczysław Orłowicz in *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Mazurach*

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 81.

32 Bętkowski, Rafał: *Olsztyn jakiego nie znacie*, Olsztyn 2010, p. 27.

33 APO, AMO, 168.

34 *Kalendarz królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki na 1917 rok*, pp. 80–81.

35 Ibid., p. 81.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

Pruskich i Warmii wrote that the Russians demanded the provision of 120,000 kg of bread, sugar, salt, pepper, rice and tea³⁸. The order to bake so much bread was difficult to obey in a city with no bakers, all had left before the occupiers had arrived, and so the requested bread was baked by the Allenstein women³⁹. Pelagia Pieniężna, a wife of an editor of “*Gazeta Olsztyńska*”, was one of the many women who volunteered to bake bread. The Russian commandship delegated a group of soldiers to help with the baking. The *Kannegieser*, master baker, was responsible for the selection of flour and for baking the demanded bread⁴⁰. The ingredients came from the tsarist army’s resources or was purchased based on an occupation calculation, according to which one rouble cost two German mark⁴¹.

Nidzica was under Russian occupation from 22 August. Andreas Kuhn, the city mayor of the time, left the following dramatic account for future generations: “A city which was burning in undiminished flames could be compared to hell on earth. The heat was so extreme that beautiful lime trees along the pavement burnt and people could not bear this heat”⁴². Also, *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki* mentions the shelling, reporting that 300 shells had hit the city in one hour⁴³. After entering the city, the occupation commander of Neidenburg addressed the citizens and warned them that all citizens would be executed if the Russian soldiers were fired upon⁴⁴. The warning was effective: local German authorities decided to hand over all weapons to the Russians to ensure the civilians’ safety⁴⁵. There was only one casualty of the Russians’ entrance, when a worker at the brick factory who was throwing bricks at the Russian troops was shot⁴⁶. Other reports note that a Russian patrol was attacked by an unknown East Prussian labourer who threw stones at them.

Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki of 1916 reported an incident from the Masurian Lake District city of Ortelsburg. Some residents of the city were burnt alive:

38 Orłowicz, Mieczysław: *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Mazurach Pruskich i Warmii*, p. 151.

39 *Kalendarz królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki na 1917 rok*, p. 86.

40 Leśniowski, Henryk: *W cieniu bitwy pod Grunwaldem Tannenberg 1914 fakty, mity, legendy*, Olsztyn 2014, p. 61.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

42 Kossert, Andreas: *Prusy Wschodnie Historia i mit*, Warszawa 2009, p. 183.

43 *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki na 1916 r.*, p. 97.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

Russians not only put houses on fire but even burnt some live people in them. Cheering and shouting hordes were looking at this horrible spectacle. The infantry was guarding doors and windows with bayonets in order to send despairing residents back to the fire when they tried to escape. Russian officers committed similar terrible deeds on a father and two sons who were summoned to the army⁴⁷.

A local priest, Reverend Sack, left a written report of the occupation of Lyck from 9 August to 10 September 1914⁴⁸. His report presents different types of behaviour of the Russian occupants. During the occupation of Lyck, three different commanders governed the city. The first of them was General Sergei Scheidemann⁴⁹. According to Sack, the following persons were taken hostage during his rule: Mayor Klein, Superintendent Bury, Reverend Brehm and District Commissioner Doctor Peters. More than 50,000 German marks were taken from the magistrate cash register⁵⁰. Captain Wittinghoff of the 169th infantry regiment succeeded Scheidemann. Wittinghoff was an Evangelical and probably came from a family of near-Baltic Germans. This officer can be associated with a contribution of 30,000 rouble imposed on Lyck. The citizens were given a strict deadline of 36 hours, until 29 August, and if this amount had not been paid, the hostages, i.e. representatives of the local elite, would have been executed. These events have a very interesting background related to the German occupation of Kalisz. The Russian authorities informed the people of Lyck that the indicated amount of 30,000 rouble was less than the amount demanded by the German army from the people of Kalisz. A description of tsarist army soldiers included in *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki* of 1917 illustrates mentality of some of the occupants: “in my apartment a Russ crossed himself in front of the cross, turned it back, put it aside and rushed to steal from the other part of the room”⁵¹. A commander of the bridge staff behaved in a totally different way. He ordered his soldiers to

47 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

48 *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski ewangelicki na 1917 r.*, p. 94.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

50 There are some doubts as to the collected amount and the date of capturing the above listing persons. According to the data provided by Sack (the priest), 52,000 mark was taken from the safe and the starost, mayor and two priests were taken hostage during the rule of the second commander – “Ełk pod Rusami, relacja księdza Sacka” in *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski ewangelicki na 1917 r.*, p. 94. APO, Naczelne Prezydium Prus Wschodnich (Oberprasidium von Ostpreussen subsequently referred to as OPO), 530, p. 46 provides different information on this issue: *On 19 August Landrat, mayor, two clergymen, two council members, one member of Kreisausschussu were taken hostage and they still remain in captivity, interned in Skotowo by Władywostok.*

51 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

pay tribute to a dead child during the passage of its funerary procession. The procession had to cross the bridge occupied by the Russian troops to get to the cemetery. The lieutenant commanding the bridge staff instructed his soldiers to show due respect in the face of death – “to show respect due to the dead even in front of a child’s coffin”⁵².

Soldau (Polish: Działdowo) was undoubtedly one of the most affected municipalities in East Prussia. Jan Salm quotes L. Goldstein and states that the warfare led to destruction of 1/3 of this city including 152 residential and public utility buildings⁵³. A few volumes of files in the municipal magistrate were devoted to the losses incurred by Soldau. According to the preserved archival documents, public utility buildings including the city hall, the firehouse and the school building were ruined⁵⁴. The damages suffered by the hospital were estimated at nearly 3,500 German mark⁵⁵.

The fact that some locations were not defended did not stop the Russian army from destroying them⁵⁶.

Withdrawal was impeded by crowds of refugees who had abandoned their houses, taken their most important possessions and headed for the East. For instance, the XVII Corps of August von Mackensen, which had earlier suffered at Gumbinnen, encountered problems during its passage. It should be suspected that the German soldiers, who had been trained to protect East Prussia and the civil population, were reluctant to force their way through the crowds of refugees, to push them aside, turn over their carriages, throw away abandoned household equipment or destroy civilian property⁵⁷. The roads were like Dante’s inferno. It must have been particularly heart-breaking to see children that had been separated from their parents during their flight from the warfare area⁵⁸. It is interesting

52 Ibid.

53 Salm, Jan: *Odbudowa miast wschodniopruskich po I wojnie światowej*, Olsztyn 2006, p. 125.

54 APO, Akta miasta Działdowo (subsequently referred to as ADO), 780, *Kriegsschäden der Stadt Soldau* p. 1, the losses incurred by the City Office were estimated at 10450 German mark, those of the fire brigade – 4640 mark and by the school – 43 265 mark.

55 APO, ADO, 782, p. 80.

56 APO, OPO, 528, pp. 317–318, according to reports – despite the fact that there were no battle in Goldap (Polish: Gołdap), the city was destroyed.

57 Showalter, Dennis E.: op. cit., p. 334.

58 Ibid., p. 286.

to note that among others, General Nikolai Martos, the commander of the XV Corps, took care of the lost East Prussian children⁵⁹.

East Prussia was an extraordinary province. The closest circles of the Emperor, his wife and the staff of the Imperial Royal Army included people connected to this province. For example, the family of General Paul von Hindenburg, the commander of the 8th Army that was defending East Prussia, had an estate in the vicinity of Eylau (Polish: Iława). In consequence, nobody wanted to leave the province to its fate. In particular the owner of the Ponarien (Polish: Ponary) estate-Countess von der Gröben, tried to bring the fate of the East Prussian refugees to the attention of the Royal Court in Berlin⁶⁰. Reverend Hensel from Johannsburg requested parliament help the ruined province:

I personally, via my party, submitted to the Prussian parliament in Berlin an appeal to the authorities to try and rescue the captives. And the whole Reichstag supported this motion through their eldest leaders. Besides, I also transferred a list of the captives from my parish to the charity association in Stockholm in Sweden to enable the Red Cross to look for them in Petersburg. Once the addresses are determined, we will be able to send these people some money via the Red Cross in Copenhagen to alleviate their fate⁶¹.

The above fragment shows that the German authorities tried to use all means to support their compatriots in their ordeal. They even asked neutral countries such as Sweden or Denmark to mediate.

In 1914, following the victory over the Russian aggressor, a parliamentary committee travelled to East Prussia to assess war losses. The committee was composed of representatives of all political groups and options from Conservative MPs (von der Osten Wernitz, doctor Busse, baron Maltzahn), through central parties, to social-democrats⁶². Baron von Zedlitz und Neukirch, doctors Ke-woldt and Johanssen represented the Free Conservative Party (*Freikonservativen Abgeordneten*)⁶³. Doctor von Lampe, Fuhrmann, Hirsch, Meyer and Westermann were national liberals⁶⁴. The following Reichstag members represented the centre: Doctor Porsch, Herold, Doctor von Savigny, Fleuster, Giesberts. Wojciech Korfanty represented Polish MPs from the German parliament⁶⁵. Hirsch from Berlin was a social-democrat. The said parliamentary committee for assessment

59 Ibid., p. 351.

60 APO, OPO., 529, pp. 128–129.

61 *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski ewangelicki na 1916 r.*, p. 64.

62 APO, LB, 238, p. 20.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

of wartime losses included also representatives of the government: Kutscher, a secret governmental counsellor (*Geheimer Regierungsrat*), Schmid, a governmental assessor from the Ministry of the Interior, and von Velsen, a secret financial senior counsellor (*Geheimer Oberfinanzrat*) from the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Agriculture was represented by a secret senior counsellor (*Geheimer Oberregierungsrat*) Eggert⁶⁶.

According to the estimates of the above-mentioned delegation, 24 cities, 600 villages and 300 estates were completely or partially destroyed. In total 34,000 buildings were destroyed and more than 100,000 apartments were plundered during the War⁶⁷. Jan Salm notes that Erich Göttgen in *Der Wiederaufbau Ostpreussens* stated that 100 thousand residential buildings and service buildings had been destroyed as a result of acts of war, which to some degree supports the data gathered by the governmental-parliamentary committee⁶⁸.

Table 1: Wartime losses in East Prussia during the Great War

Damage	Parliamentary-governmental committee	Erich Göttgen	J.E. Künzel	Provincial Monuments' Conservator in East Prussia – Richard Dethlefsen
Destroyed cities	24	Not indicated, may be analogous to the committee data	35	35
Destroyed villages and estates	600 villages and 300 estates	-	1,900	1,900
Destroyed buildings	34,000 buildings – more than 100 thousand apartments	More than 100 thousand residential and service buildings	3,100 buildings destroyed in cities, 30,900 – in the country	24,400, out of 33,533 damaged buildings, were completely destroyed

Source: APO, LB, 238, s. 21 and Salm, Jan: *Odbudowa miast wschodniopruskich po I wojnie światowej*, Olsztyn 2006, p. 65.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., p. 21.

68 Salm, Jan: op. cit., p. 65, quoted after Göttgen, Erich: *Der Wiederaufbau Ostpreussens. Eine kulturelle*, p. IX.

Sacral buildings also suffered in wartime: two Catholic churches were destroyed together with 26 Protestant chapels and three synagogues⁶⁹.

Table 2: *Estimated losses and cost of reconstruction according to the data of the governmental-parliamentary committee*

Powiat	Losses and damages	Estimated reconstruction costs	Loss of human life
Osterode (Ostróda)	Destruction of: Olsztynek, 19 villages and 5 estates; 884 buildings, 166 residential buildings, 259 buildings and 116 residential buildings were damaged to some degree	3,981,532 M	Thirteen persons were imprisoned, out of which nine were released after the Battle of Tannenberg, 10 persons were killed for no apparent reason, five were severely wounded
Neidenburg (Nidzica)	In total, 217 residential buildings, two churches, 184 service buildings were destroyed in Nidzica and Działdowo; 464 residential buildings, 1278 services buildings were destroyed in 63 rural municipalities and in 20 estates. All locations were plundered		Ca. 2/3 of the <i>Landkreis</i> population
Ortelsburg (Szczytno)	Eight hundred residential buildings and 1475 service buildings were destroyed in 57 locations. 160 residential buildings and 321 service buildings were destroyed only in Szczytno. 12 locations suffered significant damages and six were almost completely destroyed	6,300,000 M	

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 65, based on *Vom Kirchenbau in Ostpreussen, OB – Z 1916*.

Powiat	Losses and damages	Estimated reconstruction costs	Loss of human life
Johannisburg (Pisz)	Thirty-three residential buildings: 133 apartments were burnt		Eighty-six civilians killed, 25 wounded
Lyck (Elk)	A total of 165 houses lost	17,000,000 M	Three hundred persons murdered, 1000 persons including women and children captured and taken to Russia
Oletzko (Olecko)	All real estates were plundered		Forty-five civilians were killed, 500 were captured in the Olecko <i>Landkreis</i> . 25 women were raped.
Goldap (Gołdap)	In all, 141 residential buildings were burnt		The city was under occupation twice. On the second occasion the Siberian troops were very hostile towards the local community. While leaving in panic on 10 September, the marksmen fired at everyone from a tower – five persons, including one child, were wounded. The priest's maid was raped.
Stallupönen (Нестеров, Stołupiany)	Around 1000 residential and service buildings were completely destroyed.		

<i>Powiat</i>	Losses and damages	Estimated reconstruction costs	Loss of human life
Pillkallen (Добровольск, Pilkawy)	In all, 864 residential buildings, 1808 service buildings were destroyed. Houses were plundered.		A total of 109 men and 13 women were murdered, 507 men, 69 women and 121 children were captured.
Insterburg (Черняховск, Czerniachowsk)			
Darkehmen (Озёрск)	In total, 354 residential buildings and 1178 service buildings		
Gerdauen (Железнодорожный, Gierdawy)	Five estates, 239 other residential buildings, 429 stables and sheds, 5 schools and 1 church were destroyed in this <i>Landkreis</i> .		Eight persons were murdered, 14 women and girls raped.
Wehlau (Знаменск, Welawa)	This <i>Landkreis</i> was partially controlled by Russians (they did not get the northern and the western part): 169 residential buildings, 101 service buildings, 71 sheds, 144 stables as well as churches in Allenburg, Grünhayn and Gross Engelau were destroyed.		Eight persons were killed by Russian soldiers; 251 people were taken to Russia. As a consequence of wartime activity the <i>Landkreis</i> population decreased from 47 179 to 41312.

Source: APO, LB, 238 and Salm, Jan: *Odbudowa miast wschodniopruskich po I wojnie światowej*, Olsztyn 2006.

Table 3: Duration of military occupation in East Prussia

Powiat (location)	Occupation period
Johannisburg (Pisz)	Three weeks, 08/09 1914, 11.1914–02.1915
Lyck (Ełk)	19.08–10.09.1914 07.10.1914–13.10.1914 7.11.1914–14.02.1915. According to the preserved archival materials, Lyck was occupied for the total period of 130 days.
Oletzko (Olecko)	17.08–11.09.1914
Goldap (Gołdap)	17.08.1914–10.09.1914 05.11.1914–12.02.1915
Stallupönen (Нестеров, Stołupiany)	18.08.1914–13.09.1914 07.11.1914–10.02.1915
Pillkalen (Добровольск, Pilkalų)	09.1914
Insterburg (Черняховск, Czerniachowski)	22.08–11.09.1914; 11.1914–10.02.1915
Darkehmen (Озёрск)	22.08.1914–11.09.1914
Gerdauen (Железнодорожный, Gierdawy)	24.08–10.09.1914
Wehlau (Знаменск, Welawa)	25.08.1914–10.02.1914
Osterode (Ostróda)	
Neidenburg (Nidzica)	Russians entered the city on 22 August 1914, in the evening
Ortelsburg (Szczytno)	

Source: Own calculation based on APO, LB, 238.

The Great War entailed the suffering of civilians. Some murders of German civilians were justified by the occupying authorities by saying they were a means of counteracting diversion on the part of the male population of East Prussia. Using this excuse or maybe in revenge for the defeat of Tannenberg, Russian soldiers executed several persons in Santoppen (Polish: Sątopy). On 16 August, the following inscription was installed on their grave: “*Hier ruhen Anton Fittkau – Santoppen – 24 Jahre alt Franz Gischarowski – 29 Julius Gosse – 57, Bernhard Käse – 17, Anton Neuwald – 69, Daniel Rittel – 58, Bernhard – 22, Valentin Rogall, Franz Stockdreher – 40, Franz Weiss – 58, Peter Görigk – Heinrichdorf – 59, Franz Gerigk – 59, Prof. August Kallweit – Rössel – 56, Katharina – 59, Barbara Lompa – Warpuhnen – 52, Paul*” – 16. A local parish priest, Anton Werner, died in dramatic circumstances. He was executed by Russian soldiers on 28 August 1914.

Other groundless murders were committed. On 31 August, a Cossack patrol raided the Lengainen estate of von Oppenkowski and for no obvious reason murdered (executed) Paul Fommerdich, a 20-year-old worker⁷⁰.

⁷⁰ APO, OPO, 528, p. 43.

The outbreak of the war caused distrust, fear of strangers, especially of foreigners. Włodzimirz Borodziej and Maciej Górny write about spymania⁷¹. The civilian population showed some distrust towards both the occupying army and to their own soldiers. In the face of an approaching front, the command of the 8th German Army ordered the construction of watchtowers on hills. They were assisted by teenage boys: “Wooden watchtowers were located on hills. Teenage boys were equipped with bikes so that they could serve as messengers. A few German spies disguised as teenage boys or even as women were caught. When the staff of the 1st Army was notified about these incidents, an order was issued to “check carefully”. General Vasily Gurko, irritated by the order, supposedly said to officers around him: “They went mad in the staff. I will not check what each woman in East Prussia has under her skirt”⁷². The APO holdings contain a file – *Weltkriegs 1914–1918. Sammlung von Flugblättern, Extrablättern, Behörden Bekanntmachungen*⁷³ which provides information about the arrest and execution of a person suspected of spying for Russians. The alleged spy supposedly sent secret data to the Russian military intelligence by means of pigeons of his own breeding⁷⁴.

In contrast to cities, which suffered relatively little damage, numerous villages were ruined during the war. Uzdowo, which was blasted by the “steamroller of war”, is a case in point:

Around 11 Germans entered Uzdowo. They saw a terrible sight: earth bruised by missiles, crushed tree trunks, broken barbed wire barriers, abandoned rucksack and various weapons – from rifles and ammunition to grenades. And corpses. Stacks of dead or dying Russians. Some of them were in convulsions, others were crying for help. Among the dead soldiers- horses, also the victims of the war, with torn bellies, without legs, with crushed heads. The village buildings were still on fire. A horrible, acrid smoke was hanging low above the ground. The source of the smoke was soon determined- human bodies were burning in destroyed basements and under ruined foundations. The victorious party was in a hurry to leave the devastated village⁷⁵.

The above description can be applied to hundreds of East Prussian villages that fell victim to fire. In the Gerdauen *Kreis*, 50 buildings were consumed by fire in the village of Schiffus, 48 in Neuendorf, 29 in Gr. Bahohren, 23 in Doyen, 20 in

71 Borodziej, Włodzimirz/ Górny, Maciej: *Nasza Wojna*, Tom I, *Imperia 1912–1916*, Warszawa 2014, p. 115.

72 Leśniowski, Henryk: op. cit., p. 25.

73 APO, AMO, 161–167.

74 APO, AMO, 161.

75 Ibid., p. 57.

Altendorf, 19 in Sutzken⁷⁶. The already mentioned Jan Salm quotes *Der ostpreussische Provinzialkonservator über den Wiederaufbau der Provinz, OB – Z 1916* and states that 1900 rural *gminas*⁷⁷ were destroyed⁷⁸. Reverend Link retells how Karwia, a village in the *Johannisburg powiat*, was plundered. As an eye witness of such dramatic events the priest stated: “now I have seen what is ahead of us. I saw from my window that they were intentionally destroying houses one by one”⁷⁹.

Another report is not a first-hand account but is based on comments of direct witnesses. A Cossack troop was ordered by their commander to burn the village. However, they had previously caused severe injuries to a 76-year-old, Bolesta, by means of spikes to the breasts, back and arm, set fire to a house with a 90-year-old terminally-ill woman who died after eight days of suffering (her legs and back were burnt) and injured a 14-year-old boy in the head⁸⁰.

The afore mentioned Reverend Link fell victim to the barbarism of the Cossack soldiers. He described his vicarage in the following way:

This terrible mess at my place! Beyond words. Everything from the shop downstairs to the very top has been checked, destroyed. Luckily, only a few pieces of furniture have been damaged. Nobody will believe there can be such mess on the floor until they see my apartment. Bed sheets, clothes, papers, books, in short – everything – was in complete mess and marked with the stamp of the dreadful Russian offenders. The Russian stench could be smelt in the house for a long time⁸¹.

The stories of women on the area occupied by Russians were very dramatic. Many rapes and gang rapes were committed. It can be supposed that for the rapists it did not matter how old the victims were: among others, a 57-year-old Joanna Capeller fell victim to a gang rape (raped six or seven times)⁸². The testimony of August Ney relating to a gang rape on his wife, three times in his apartment, once in the presence of his neighbour, demonstrates that the rapists had no inhibitions about such crimes⁸³. Many women and young girls became pregnant, among them Julia Boczkowska, who provided the following account:

76 APO, LB, 238, p. 55.

77 *Gmina* is the principal unit of administrative division of Poland as often referred to as “commune” or “municipality”.

78 Salm Jan: op. cit., p. 65.

79 *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki na 1917 r.*, p. 105.

80 APO, OPO, 528, p. 51.

81 *Kalendarz Królewsko Pruski Ewangelicki na 1917 r.*, p. 107.

82 APO, OPO, 529, p. 278.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 295–296.

Since 1 November 1913 I was a chambermaid in Marggrabowa for Karl Block, a cattle trader. My employers did not live in Marggrabowa since the announcement of mobilisation. I was there alone with my employer's brother-in-law, a flour trader from Marggrabowa. At the beginning of November Russians returned to Marggrabowa. On 10 November about 6 o'clock I went to a service building and was attacked and raped by two Russians. As a result I became pregnant⁸⁴.

Children born of rape were referred to as *Russenkinder* – “Russian children”⁸⁵. Their mothers were entitled to a monthly allowance of 20 German mark which was granted to women who placed their children for adoption as well as to breast-feeding mothers who decided to keep theirs⁸⁶. After the occupying party had left, Julia Boczkowska and other girls in similar situation fled to West Germany. *In February, the Russians left Marggrabowa and I escaped with other servant girls who had been raped by Russians to the Stade district in Hannover. I stayed with the wife of Stüven, a trader. On 2 July I went to a hospital for women*⁸⁷.

A girl who had before the war worked in an estate near Tylża used the allowance for mothers of “Russian children”. She was raped, became pregnant and delivered in 1915. She was eligible for the allowance which she received from a local council in the vicinity of Bremen, where she settled after leaving East Prussia⁸⁸.

Among others, an organisation called *Provinzial Verein für innere Mission* and led by Reverend Kern provided support for injured girls and women⁸⁹. This organization (as well as other similar institutions) managed to find 300 families in Germany which were willing to take care of raped women and their children⁹⁰.

As a consequence of these rapes, many girls and women contracted venereal diseases. The treatment costs were covered by voluntary donations⁹¹. The Evangelical church took care of these women; however, not only Evangelical women fell victims to rape. A rabbi, Doctor Vogelstein, represented Jewish victims⁹². The Warmia bishop, Andrzej Thiel, and the Kulm (Polish: Chełmno) bishop, Augustyn Rosentreter, were also engaged in supporting Catholic girls who had been raped

84 APO, OPO, 530, p. 9.

85 *Ibid.*, 530, p. 27.

86 APO, OPO, 529, p. 396.

87 APO, OPO, 530, p. 9.

88 APO, OPO, 529, pp. 382–383.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 137–138, document dated 27 July 1915.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 137–138.

92 *Ibid.*

by Russian soldiers⁹³. This interest in the fate of Catholic girls, mothers of unwanted “Russian children”, was an outcome of correspondence exchanged between Kern and the Warmia bishop, as well as the communication between the Warmia and the Kulm bishops⁹⁴.

This article would not be exhaustive if it did not cover the issue of education in East Prussia. The Great War period was a difficult time for East Prussian education which suffered in terms of infrastructure: the damage to the Soldau school can serve as an example. There was also significant loss of human life both among active teachers and the students training to work in education. In the interwar period, a memorial plaque listing the names of students and graduates killed on the fronts of the Great War was placed on the wall of the Hohenstein (Polish: Olsztynek) College for Teachers. One local teacher was shot by Russian soldiers when entering Flammberg (Polish: Opaleniec), while another, William Kloss, was taken to Russia⁹⁵ after being captured on 9 September 1914⁹⁶; his wife informed the committee for assessment of wartime losses in East Prussia. Teachers and those involved in education were often taken to Russia.

The Great War was already started on these areas during the first days of August 1914 through the invasion of the Russian army. In 1914–1915 the front travelled through East Prussia twice.

The tragic circumstances of the civilian population were worsened by the fact that the vast majority of this population living in the southern regions, Warmia and Masuria, was of Polish descent. Poles were also numerous in the ranks of the tsarist army. The 2nd Army, referred to as “Narew”, which was formed in the Kingdom of Poland and commanded by General Alexander Samsonow, included only one fully Russian corps⁹⁷.

It can be claimed that the fate of the East Prussian population depended on the nationality of the occupying soldiers of the Russian army. The situation of communities under occupation of troops consisting of Poles and Russians from

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid., p. 136.

95 Ibid., p. 8.

96 Ibid.

97 Radziwiłłowicz, Dariusz: *Tradycja grunwaldzka w świadomości politycznej społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1910–1945*, Olsztyn 2003, p. 71, based on Giertych, Jędrzej: *Tysiąc lat historii polskiego narodu*, T. III, London 1986, p. 13. Only one army corps by Tannenberg – XIII Smolensk corps – was composed only of Russian. Other corps consisted mainly of the Polish people, reservists conscripted on the spot.

the European part of the empire was better. The situation of people in locations occupied by the infamous Cossacks or soldiers from Siberia was tragic.

Germany lost the Great War. The German state incurred huge losses in terms of its population and territory. Poland, reborn after 123 years, gained access to the sea, which was only possible at the expense of Germany. A plebiscite was held to determine the future of Warmia, the Masurian Lake District and Powiśle. Germany won in the plebiscite but the area of East Prussia was reduced; Poland was awarded Soldau (renamed to Działdowo) and its adjacent areas. The table below presents changes in the territory and population of the province in question.

Table 4: *Changes in population and territory of East Prussia in 1910–1920*⁹⁸.

Province area	Location Kreis	Population	Date (month and year)	Men	Women	Total
37,002.0 km ²	Allenstein Olsztyn	33077	12.1910 (this data was valid till 1914)	1003340	1060835	2064175
37,002.0 km ²	Gumbinen Gąbin	14540	12.1910	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Königsberg Królewiec	245994	12.1910	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Braunsberg Braniewo	13601	12.1910	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Osterode Ostróda	14364	12.1910	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Lyck Elk	13428	12.1910	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Allenstein Olsztyn	34731	08.10.1919	1060796	1168491	2229290
37,002.0 km ²	Gumbinen Gąbin	17374	1921	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Königsberg Królewiec	260896	1921	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Braunsberg Braniewo	13076	1921	-	-	-
37,002.0 km ²	Osterode Ostróda	14826	1921	-	-	-

The data in the above table is derived from yearbooks dated 1910 to 1920. Occupation of the province continued from August 1914 to February 1915.

98 http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PPN=PPN5144013031913&DMDID=dm_dlog8 and <http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PPN=PPN5144013031920>.

On 17 February 1915, Emperor Wilhelm II arrived in the destroyed Lyck⁹⁹. In his address to the people of Lyck, the Emperor described Masur as a desert and promised to do his utmost to rebuild the area. The histories of the occupied locations differ: some were occupied for a short period only (e.g. Allenstein) while others such as Goldap or Insterburg found themselves under occupation even twice in a short term. Some of them, for instance Soldau or Lyck, suffered huge material losses. Germany, as well as some cities of the Habsburg Empire (Vienna, for example), helped to rebuild East Prussia. Twin cities were established in order to facilitate the reconstruction process. Neidenburg-Cologne can be a case in point since Cologne took patronage of the reconstruction of Nidzica. The provincial authorities supported by the Prussian government set and controlled the rules for the reconstruction process and its management. In case of Neidenburg, they established the office of local architect, whose task it was to coordinate the whole process and manage the office of construction advisory. It should be added that the enthusiasm and good organisation of an architect in a given city was very important. In many cases, Russian prisoners-of-war were involved in the cleaning and removal of wartime damages¹⁰⁰.

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