



Clarion Review

History

The Death of East Prussia: War and Revenge in Germany's Easternmost Province

Peter B. Clark

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Five Stars (out of Five)

The city of Königsberg, once the capital of the German province of East Prussia, no longer exists. Architecturally exquisite, culturally diverse, and historically significant, the once-thriving Prussian city was ravaged during World War II and, like East Prussia itself, was lost in the aftermath of the war. The Russian city of Kaliningrad now stands in its footprint, but the German city of Königsberg and its German population have effectively vanished.

Author Peter B. Clark, married to a woman born just before the war in Prussian Königsberg, was initially intrigued by stories told by his wife's family and, ultimately, felt inspired to learn more about the events and effects of the war within the city and the province. *The Death of East Prussia* is Clark's impressive, in-depth examination of the fate of the region and its population. The book offers a compelling assessment of the horrors and consequences of WWII in a place that many have already forgotten.

Clark addresses not only the physical destruction of the area and the annihilation of its citizenry through death or expulsion but also the reasons for East Prussia's tragic fate. Exquisitely written and heart-wrenchingly humanized, the story incorporates eyewitness accounts that reveal the true terror suffered by the East Prussians and their incredible resilience in the face of unimaginable tragedy. Although lengthy and exceptionally informative, *The Death of East Prussia* focuses so intensely on the human aspect of the war and its aftermath that even those who rarely read history will be captivated.

The author's well-organized presentation contributes substantially to the book's appeal. Clark provides enough background information about prewar East Prussia to allow a proper perspective on the war and its consequences, but he does not waste time with extraneous detail. He also presents the information with a minimum of editorial comment, allowing the incidents and personal accounts to speak for themselves.

Each chapter is divided into subsections that address individual aspects of a main topic. A chapter entitled "The Brutal Behavior of Soviet Troops . . .," for instance, comprises four subtopics, including "German Eyewitness Reports of Rape" and "Soviet Accounts of Rape and Pillage by the Red Army." This organization of ideas clarifies the components of each general topic, preventing confusion and allowing for an essential summary of relevant issues. References are heavily cited, and there are endnotes in every chapter and an extensive bibliography at the end of the book. A thorough index is also provided.

Clark's volume is a timely and important one. It is only from the perspective of several decades that certain details about World War II are coming to light. Indeed, many who survived the war are no longer alive and their stories are lost with them. Clark's efforts to gather so many of these accounts and present them in conjunction with an overview of the events and issues go a long way toward saving the history of a largely forgotten place and people. His compilation of obscure information is masterful, and his precise documentation of sources is outstanding.

The Death of East Prussia should prove invaluable to others researching the history and fate of East Prussia and be of interest to historians and anyone else interested in WWII and the Soviet regime that followed it. Even the family genealogist seeking information about Prussian ancestors will find much of value in these pages. Clark's book offers a fine balance of history and sensitive human interest that results in a powerful and gripping read.

Cheryl Hibbard