

Excerpts from the book:

"Die Deutschen in Syrmien, Slavonien, Kroatien und Bosnien"

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(Translator's note. The following is a translation and summarization of **key sections** of Dr. Oberkersch's book that would be of interest to English speaking Danube Swabians whose families came from Syrmien, Slavonia, Croatia and Bosnia as well as those with a general interest in the history and ultimate destiny of the Danube Swabian people in the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.)



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The Historical Development of the Region Up Until 1918

Croatia became a vassal of the Hungarian Crown in 1102. This relationship would continue up to the Turkish victory over the Hungarians at the Battle of Mohács in 1526. The Turks occupied only a portion of Croatia while the northwestern area around Agram (Zagreb) belonged to the Habsburg candidate for the throne of Hungary, and would experience frequent incursions and Turkish raids in the century that followed.

Slavonia and Syrmien endured 150 years of Turkish occupation. As a result, the local Roman Catholic population fled from the area to avoid ongoing conflict and raids and the Turks brought in new settlers as far north as the Sava River, who were Moslems and Orthodox Serbs who were forced to resettle there. By and large, most of the area was unpopulated and settlements were clustered around fortresses. With the defeat of the Turks in their second attempt to take Vienna in 1683 and their retreat throughout Hungary the Austrian Imperial Army and their allied forces proceeded to liberate all of the territories that had once been part of Hungary. So that by 1686 after Buda the capital of Hungary had been taken on August 12th the battle of Mount Harsany took place, which was about 30 kilometers south east of Pécs. Charles of Lorraine attacked the forces of the Grand Vizer and defeated them, which would prove to be significant for the liberation of Slavonia. Shortly afterwards Count Dünwald crossed the Drava River and his army liberated all of Slavonia with the exception of a few towns and by October 5, 1687 the city of Esseg, the capital of Slavonia was taken and the first attacks down the Danube towards Syrmien were undertaken by the onrushing Imperial forces with the Turks in full flight.

Many towns fell to small contingents of troops along the Sava River. The major campaign undertaken by the Imperial troops was under the command of Prince Max Emmanuel of Bavaria, and later Prince Louis of Baden. They occupied all of Syrmien in 1688. On August 6th the fortress of Belgrade fell to them. In the following year they invaded Serbia and Bulgaria and occupied the key fortresses. But then a great portion of their troops had to withdraw to defend the Rhineland and the Pfalz from a French invasion. As a result the Grand Vizer, Mustapha retook Serbia and Belgrade. His invasion of Syrmien against Louis of Baden in 1691 failed and he was defeated and lost his life at the Battle of Slankamen.

The withdrawal of the Imperial troops to deal with the French had lasting effects on Slavonia and Syrmien, in that the Serbian Patriarch from Ipek along with 25,000 Serbian families fled across the Sava River with the Imperial forces. Emperor Leopold I allowed them to settle there and granted them privileges. This resulted in a major increase of the Serbian population in the region of the Vojvodina, which would be crucial in the Revolution of 1848 when they would attempt to declare an autonomous Serbian state.

Finally on September 11, 1697 Prince Eugene of Savoy defeated the Turks at the Battle of Zenta, which led to the Peace of Karlowitz on January 26, 1699. Croatia and Slavonia were ceded to Austria, but southeastern Syrmien remained as a buffer against Belgrade and the Turkish Empire.

In 1716 the war broke out again. The Turks were defeated at Peterwardein on August 5, 1716. In the next year the Imperial troops occupied the Banat, northern Transylvania and on August 18, 1717 re-took Belgrade. The Peace of Passarowitz signed on July 21, 1718 liberated all of the Banat and Syrmien from Turkish rule.

The liberated territories were placed under the jurisdiction of the Royal Chancellery in Vienna. Prince Livius Odescalchi, a nephew of Pope Innocent XI was given the lands and title of Count of Syrmien in 1698. The Neo-Acquistica commission established in Vienna to determine the ownership of lands and estates in the formerly occupied Turkish territories in 1700 received few claims because very few of

the Hungarian nobility had survived the Turkish wars and occupation or had no documented evidence to prove ownership to back up their claims. As a result the lands and estates were sold to many nobles or military commanders who were of German origin.

In 1718 the former Counties of Hungary were re-established. Croatia was unable to lay claim to Syrmien and Slavonia, which now became part of the army controlled Military Frontier District, a defensive measure against future Turkish invasions. In 1751 the area became incorporated into the Hungarian sphere of influence and eventually part of its administration. The nobility of Slavonia were most unhappy with this situation. Throughout the 19th century, "nationalism" became the big issue for the South Slavs who saw the Magyars (Hungarians) as their enemies and a threat to their aspirations, which would erupt in Croatia in the Revolution of 1848/1849.

The hope of the Croats, as allies of the Habsburg Emperor against the Hungarian rebels, was for a far-reaching "national" autonomy with the introduction of the Croatian language as the official government language, but these hopes were not fulfilled. The centralization that took place during the "Bach Era" in Austria created more bad blood among the South Slavs, especially because German was established as the governing language throughout the Empire. They saw themselves under the yoke of Vienna. The Croats saw that the threat to their national survival was no longer the Turks or Hungarians, but the Germans. Hatred of all things German broke out during the Croatian Sabor (parliament) in 1860 and would affect future events right up to 1918. An attempt at re-rapprochement with the Magyars was the new order of the day.

The Hungarian-Austrian Compromise of 1867 was not well received by the leading Croats. The concept of Dualism in the Empire was unacceptable to the Slavs, the Roman Catholic bishop Josip Strossmayer and his political circle were adamantly opposed to it. A Croatian-Hungarian Compromise followed in January 30, 1868. The Compromise allowed the Croats autonomy in their domestic affairs and matters of religion. It was an attempt on the part of the Hungarians to prevent a united front and union of the Slavs.

Political parties of all stripes fought for control of the Sabor beginning in the 1870's; the National Party had the support of the nobles who supported the Compromise with Hungary. The supporters of the "South Slav" idea found expression in the "Independent National Party" under the leadership of Bishop Strossmayer. Their ideology was based on the principle of the unity of all of the South Slavs, except the Bulgarians. The financial support for the party came from the coffers of the bishop's diocese. The third party was "Croatian Rights" who were united with the Austrian Monarchy and its aspirations; in effect they were the official anti-Serbian party. But even this party was suspicious of both Vienna and Budapest.

The 700,000 Serbian minorities in Croatia established their own Serbian Independent Party in Ruma in 1881 to safeguard their rights and demanded equality for their minority. Others opposed the liberal approach among the Serbs, who formed the "Radical Party", which leaned heavily on the Orthodox clergy for support and leadership.

As the 19 century ended, the younger generation of leadership sought to take advantage of the new issues that divided Austria and Hungary to advance their cause of a union of the South Slavs: Yugoslavia.

With the rise of the Kossuth Coalition that came to power in Budapest in 1904 that sought full independence from Austria, the Croatian opposition parties offered support to the Magyars if they would support Croatian self-determination. The Serbian parties also followed suit with the same solution in 1905. As a result a Croatian-Serbian Party was formed to work for autonomy and the ideal of self-determination and unity of the South Slavs and the destruction of the Habsburg Danubian

Monarchy. In the elections of 1906 the Coalition won the majority of seats in the Sabor, and played the leading role in the life and history of Croatia up to 1918. Friendship with the Hungarians did not last very long. The annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, followed by the Balkan War (1912-1913) were flashpoints of conflict and unrest among the south Slavs finally resulting in the outbreak of World War I in Sarajevo and the end of the Danubian Monarchy.

The Settlement of the Germans

The migration of German settlers into the Croatian and Slavonian areas prior to the occupation by the Turks, had its origins in the beginning of the 16th century, chiefly in the towns and cities, made up tradesmen, artisans, miners, and merchants who came from all areas of Germany. The settlers arriving after the liberation from the Turks again consisted of the same urban classes but the majority now were peasant farmers. In both cases they came in response to invitations from the nobles and landlords. At times, of course, some individuals came on their own, taking the risks that were involved.

Prior to the coming of the Turks, the first Germans who arrived were priests and missionaries, most of them monks on missions to extend the boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church and later to stamp out heresy. At the end of the 8th century the land was part of Charlemagne's Empire and remained so until the coming of the Magyars. In this period the local population was Christianized and the central leadership provided for this was in Bavaria.

There is a strong possibility and some evidence that the south Slavs are of Gothic origin, especially the Bosnians. Many of the names of the higher clergy in the Middle Ages are German. All of this was contemporary with Stephen I of Hungary and his Bavarian queen who also brought German monks, priests and missionaries. Nikolaus of Guns in Hungary was later the Banus (Governor) of Croatia from 1280 to 1281.

After the Tatar invasion and the recall of their armies back to Asia, Bela IV of Hungary in 1243, invited Germans to settle in Hungary promising freedom from some feudal taxes. His brother Kolomann who was Count of Slavonia gave special privileges to German monks at Weretz. The German population was increasing in the area. Varasdin is the first and oldest German settlement in Croatia and was established earlier than 1209. In 1231 Germans were also reported living in Vukovar, Petrinja, Samobor, Agram, Kreuz and Kopreinitz. The shoemakers of Agram were well known and the shoemaker's quarter was known as the "German village." Immigrants like these soon filled the land and settled as both small and large groups. The emergence of all of the cities and towns in Croatia and Slavonia can be traced back to them. They also brought new ideas and farming concepts to the peasant population. There were never any totally German communities. In the early history of the towns Germans played a leading role but as they became outnumbered they attempted to guarantee their rights by law before they were totally swamped. This lasted for a much longer period in those communities into which a steady stream of German settlers continued to arrive: Agram and Varasdin. This continuing flow of Germans now also included military personnel, as the Turks became a threat throughout the Balkans. In 1579 they were involved in the re-establishment of the fortress at Karlstadt. In 1645 it was reported that there were 300 German families living in the city.

This tradition of "German towns" in Croatia would continue well into the 19th century and 20th centuries and there were continuing migrations of German settlers, but only in those towns that were not occupied by the Turks. The Germans simply disappeared in these areas. The Germans that could be found there later arrived after the Turks had been driven out.

But how much of the German migration in the Middle Ages consisted of peasant farmers? It is difficult to tell. There are some areas in Syrmien that have names of possible former German villages. The Germans working in the mines were probably Zipser Saxons from Upper Hungary (Slovakia), who brought their own community organization with them. They were especially present in Bosnia. In 1463 the Turks conquered Bosnia and that was the end of the German mining communities.

It was a totally new situation after the Turks were driven out of Croatia, Slavonia and Srem.

In 1700 there were fewer than 14,000 people living in all of Slavonia after the Turks were through with it. To all intents and purposes one could say that Syrmien was totally uninhabited. The remaining towns contained most of the surviving population.

The first stage of reconstruction and redevelopment of the land was repairing and expanding the towns and fortresses to withstand any reappearance of the Turks. The need was for construction workers and skilled artisans. There were none. Esseg and Peterwardein and their fortresses needed immediate attention and as a result the two cities became the first of the new German towns after the expulsion of the Turks. In 1690 Esseg was granted its municipal rights and charter. The influx of merchants and skilled artisans who came primarily from the Austrian territories continued throughout the 18th century. Esseg maintained its German character well into the 20th century although they were a minority of the population.

Semlin located at the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers received its first German settlers in 1721 after the Peace of Passarowitz. There was another large influx of new German settlers after the Peace of Belgrade in 1739. Germans coming down the Danube arrived in Belgrade and moved on from there to towns in Syrmien. Peterwardein and Karolowitz experienced large growth in their German populations. German sections of towns had names to that effect. It was the norm. Germans from Belgrade were the founders of Neusatz (Novi Sad). New Vukovar in effect was the German part of the town, settled with 33 families between 1723 and 1725. There was a high rate of mortality among the German settlers because of the climate and summer epidemics of all kinds.

A massive immigration of German peasant farmers did not take place here as it did to the north of the Drava and Danube Rivers. After 1718 a portion of the land was under the control and administration of the Royal Chancellery and the Department of War while the rest belonged to various nobles without the resources to develop their holdings. There were other obstacles: most of the land was thick forest wilderness; it did not appear as if the land could be developed agriculturally; wolf packs prowled the forests; security against robbers and brigands was non-existent; settlers were offered few concessions or inducements like freedom from taxes or military service; many nobles had no interest in developing their estates and wanted serfs to serve them at their bidding and not free peasants; there were few government officials in the area to whom the settlers could go for help and support; there were no roads and the settlers would have to struggle with total isolation.

In spite of these kinds of difficulties, the Royal Chancellery organized a settlement on the Crown lands at Kutjevo, located in southern Hungary, between 1785 and 1787 at Josefsfeld-Kula and Josefsdorf-Porec. These were the only government sponsored pioneer settlements in the vicinity. The settlers came primarily from Luxemburg, Alsace, Lorraine and the Pfalz. Two other villages were also established but could not be sustained. The settlers in these communities all become Croatianized within a generation or two.

Nor are the settlement attempts under the auspices of the nobles in Syrmien and Slavonia very numerous. The noble Franz von der Trenck established deutsch-Mihaljevci on the Mitrovac estate in 1744. Later in 1752, retired soldiers founded Lukasdorf-Lukac. One of the settlements numbered 8 men, 7 women and 33 children. In six months 5 men, 3 women and 13 children had died.

Characteristic of all of these early efforts was the small number of people involved. Only by an influx of later settlers could the communities have survived. There was no economic base to support the skilled artisans who had come with them and they had to move on elsewhere.

More important settlement work was undertaken during the Theresian phase of the Schwabenzug in Slavonia. A whole line of farm villages were established in the vicinity of Essegg: Krawitz in 1769, Hirshfeld-Sarwasch in 1769 after Magyars and Slavs had left, Deutsch-Rieddorf sometime in 1768/1769 next to the Hungarian village of Retfala, Terezovac-Suhopolje in 1770 and Antonsdorf-Kapan in 1776.

There were other German settlers on estates in Slavonia that were not able to establish permanent settlements for various reasons and merged with their Slavic neighbors.

In Syrmien the following Theresian settlements were established under royal auspices: Ruma, Sotting and Jarmin. All of these later received an influx of German settlers. In Ruma the first Germans came in 1746 and by 1784 there were 700 Germans settled there. Most of the growth was due to the arrival of newcomers.

During the Josephinian settlement period the Germanys settled the Prandau estates were in 1786 at Josefsdorf-Josipovac. The first immigrants came from south western Germany who were later joined by Germans from Bohemia. Settlers from Württemberg founded Neustadt at Essegg in 1792.

The most important settlements during this epoch were located in the Military Frontier District. The earliest was Neu Gradiska in 1748 soon followed by Friedrichsdorf.

In 1783 Neu Slankamen and later in 1787 Semlin received their first German settlers. In 1806 there was a large influx of Germans from Bohemia who moved into Neu-Salankamen that greatly strengthened the community.

In 1791, after many difficulties, Lutherans from Württemberg settled Neu Pasua in eastern Syrmien. At the same time a small German enclave was established in the Croatian village of Neu Banovci, which was very close to Neu Pasua. Only through the later migration of German families from Neu Pasua was the future of the German community in Neu Banovci assured.

At the same time, (1790-1794) Karlowitz received 36 German families, Ruma received 26 families and Bukovitz another 20 families. Most of them came from Alsace, Lorraine, Württemberg, Basel, Baden and Nassau (Hesse).

At the beginning of the 19th century new communities were established in the Military Frontier District to provide fresh produce to the towns and troops. Siegenthal was founded in 1816 to serve Semlin. (Later it would be called Franztal.) The first settlers here came from Lazarfeld in the Banat. In 1819 close to Vinkovci, the Lutheran village of Neudorf was established. They were Franconian pietists who had come from various Lutheran settlements in the Batschka after having left Württemberg originally. In 1828 Hessendorf was established in the vicinity of Mitrovitz but there were too few Germans to develop an ongoing German community.

At the beginning of the 19th century the German settlements on both sides of the Drava and Danube Rivers were experiencing a population explosion and a lack of land for expansion. As a result Syrmien and then later Slavonia were the next areas of expansion. But there were political and national issues and sensibilities at work. While the nobles were anxious to raise their own economic situation by making use of their undeveloped lands and estates they knew that in order for that to happen required an increase in the population. There were Serbians residing there but they were not

seen as the answer to the problem. In fact, the area was moving backwards economically as the Serbs refused to undertake the cultivation of the land, preferring herding cattle.

At this point the nobles and landlords saw that they had to take the initiative and went as far as looking for settlers in Hungary but they also courted others, including Magyars, Russians, Slovaks and many others. As a result the owner of the Ruma estate called for Serbs to settle in 1746 in his new village of India, and then he called for Czechs in 1825 who like the Serbs shortly afterwards went on to other places. It was only in 1827 when the Germans arrived and soon became the majority in a permanent settlement. By 1848 they were 65.8% of the population of 1,500. He also settled Germans in Putinci at that time, while other nobles established Calma, Banostor, Cerevic and Greguerevci and Vukovar and Sotting received more Germans as well.

Compared to the emerging daughter settlements emerging in Syrmien very little development was taking place in Slavonia. But in 1824 Johannisberg was settled with Germans from the Egerland. Germans who came from the Tolna in Hungary in 1836 settled Deutsch-Derschanitz later becoming Johannesdorf-Jovanovac. They had been brought specially to begin the cultivation of tobacco. In 1843 Germans from Veszprem County in Hungary settled Neu Zoljani.

In addition to these contractual settlements between a landlord/noble and a group, some individuals were simply making their own arrangements and purchased land and houses.

To a great extent Slavonia remained a wilderness and backwoods area, relatively untouched by an attempts at settlement. With the emancipation of the serfs in 1848, the local population was more unreliable than ever. The Swabian villages of Hungary and the Batschka were overcrowded and there was now nowhere to go to seek a living. The government in Vienna set the stage for a new settlement movement.

The Regulation and Decree was issued by the Emperor on December 31, 1858 and was addressed to the Kingdom of Hungary, Croatia, Slavonia, the Serbian Vojvodina, the Banat and the Principedom of Transylvania with a renewed call for agricultural settlement and development of the Dual Monarchy.

Some of the regulations included: each settlement requires a minimum of 1,000 Joch of land; homes for at least fifty families must be provided; all members of the community, regardless of their place of origin must be of one nationality and confession (religious denomination). The intention of the decree was to provide a supply of workers for the landholders, but the Emperor also stipulated the need for providing incentives like tax exemptions. The government sought to gain immigrants from other countries to strength its population and broaden its economic base. The would-be-settlers would become citizens of the Monarchy upon arrival; their sons born outside of the Monarchy were free from military service; they were guaranteed the free expression of their religion if they were recognized groups in the Monarchy; cattle, machinery, goods, equipment, would pass through customs at no cost.

To the consternation and disappointment of Vienna there was no response from Germany. The mass migrations had ended with Joseph II and now it was the United States of America that beckoned.

The results of the new settlement Patent of the Emperor were hardly impressive in Croatia and Slavonia. Only ten German settlements were established in response to it. Three were established in 1866 by contracting with the landowners and their agents at Blagorodovac, Eichendorf-Hrastovac and Antunovac. The settlers came from Baranya, Tolna and Somogy Counties in Hungary. In the same year there were also settlements established in Sokolovac and Djulaves (later Miolovicevo), but the contract between the settlers and the noble were only officially ratified in 1877. Dobrovac was also

settled in 1866 but the contract only finalized in 1881. Settlers from the Bühmerwald settled in Filipovac in 1886. The village of Kerndia was already settled in 1880/1881 but a contract with Bishop Strossmayer was not signed until 1891. The last two communities were Kapetanovo Polje settled in 1882 and Franjevac-Strizicevac in 1886 the contracts for which were only ratified by their landlord later in 1891.

We need to be reminded that 80% of the land involved was heavily forested wilderness and the chief task of the colonists was clearing the land. The land they took over was often not very fertile or at best marginal to say the least. They had to pay for the house lot and garden and clear it and were given some of the wood that they cut to use in the construction of their homes and other farm buildings but often at high prices. No other language group or nationality responded to the Patent except the Germans at a time when anti-German feeling in Croatia was at its highest, but the nobles made the adjustment because the Germans were industrious and would stick to it no matter what happened. Exactly what they wanted.

But other settlement was taking place outside of the Patent of the Emperor. Some of the landlords simply parceled out the land. Groups of settlers obtained loans and mortgages to buy land and create a settlement. But it was difficult to cope with the elements, floods, isolation, hunger, epidemics and frequent crop losses. Most of those who responded were from among the poor and they overlooked the risks that were involved because of the possibility of improving their lives and that of their families

With the Slavic peasantry freed from serfdom they were anxious to sell the land and the house they had received and move on, preferably into the towns. As a result, the price of land fell dramatically in Slavonia and Syrmien after 1848. At the same time land was scarce and expensive in other German settlement areas, especially Swabian Turkey and the Batschka. Selling a small plot of land there enabled them to buy a holding in Slavonia.

The new migration was from within the Monarchy and resulted in the strengthening of the original settlements. It especially had a very positive effect on the ethnic German Lutheran communities. The Military Frontier District was an area where this was most noticeable. The first settlers lured their families and friends to join them in Slavonia or Syrmien. As a result villages where ethnic Germans were a minority, by 1880 had become the majority. Banovci 64%, Gasimci 53%, Mrzovic 57%, Slatinik 60%, Tomasanci 65%, Pisak 75%. However, the success of the ethnic German communities led to jealousy and anti-German feelings and subsequent actions against them.

During this period, both in Syrmien and Slavonia, Germans from within the Monarchy settled in almost every single village and bought land and stayed there at least for a time. For that reason it would not be possible to note every such settlement, but only those in which a large portion of the population were of ethnic German origin.

Western and central Slavonia were the locales of the most important of these newly established enclaves: Gross-Pisanitz (1881), Palesnik (1882), Klein-Bastei (1885), Marjanci, Colinci (1870), Kucanci (1876) Cacinci (1908) and the vicinity of Trnjani (1890) and Garcin (1890). According to the mayor of Drenovac the last two mentioned communities were settled in 1875 by colonists from the Burgenland: Oberndorf, Kitzladen, Pinkafeld, Oberschötzen, Würterberg, Althau and Sinnersdorf. A second group of settlers from the Burgenland from the vicinity of Géns established themselves in Uljanik by Daruvar and some individuals went on to Kutina and Dolci. During this settlement with the exception of Gross-Pisanitz and Cacinci, not more than one hundred or two hundred ethnic Germans were involved, but they were strong enough numerically to survive and maintain their ethnic German identity and in some places they formed the majority of the local population some even eventually reaching five hundred ethnic German inhabitants. These villages were also not as scattered from one another as they were in other parts of Slavonia and the contacts between villages were maintained

and their ethnic identity was protected and not threatened with assimilation as it was in other areas that included: Selci, Satnica (1875), Pisak, Vučevci (1850), Gortgani, Gasinci, Tomasanci, Semeljci, Kesinci, Viskorvci, Forkusevci, Mrzovic (1858) Vrbica, Djurdjanci, Slatnik (1875) and Drenje.

The same situation also prevailed in the following settlements and enclaves in western Syrmia: Ilaca, Kukujevci, Bapska-Novak, Schider Banovci, Nijemci (1870), Nustar, Ceric, Svinjarevci, Jankovci, Tordinci, Vodjinci, Ivankovo, Orolik, Drenovci and Rajevo Selo (1883).

In eastern Smyrnia, south of Ruma the enclaves of Nikinci, Hertkovci and Grabovci later resulted.

This inner migration within the Monarchy had a powerful effect and influence on the strengthening of the ethnic German Lutheran settlements in Croatia. Much of it was concentrated in the Military Frontier District, which up until the Protestant Patent was promulgated had to deal with a lot of difficulties, which were now surmounted by the more liberal Military administration in its interpretation of the new laws. Enclaves would emerge in Beska and Krceđin (around 1859), Becmen (around 1860) in Surcin (around 1869) and Obrez (around 1860). The settlement of Bezanija by families from Neu Pasau began already in 1842. With the dispersal of the Military Frontier District all of these settlements received new settlers and developed new daughter settlements in Dobanovci (1875) and Asanja.

Bosnia was finally in the spotlight of European history in the later half of the 19th century. It had been under Turkish rule for over four hundred years and its population had converted to Islam to a great extent. Austria-Hungary claimed its sphere of influence at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and formally annexed Bosnia in 1908.

Economically it was a total mess. Minimal cultivation of its land was taking place. No cattle rearing or sheep herding was in existence. It was in need of development in every sense of the word.

The earliest German settlement resulted from the efforts of monks from Germany led by Franz Pfanner and resulted in the village of Windhorst (1869). Settlers came from Baden, Rhineland, Prussia and later from Westphalia, Hanover, Oldenburg and Holland. Other villages were later established in the vicinity.

Franzjosefsfeld was established in 1886 in northeastern Bosnia, the first Danube Swabian settlement, consisting of 91 families from Franzfeld in the Banat who numbered 402 persons. This was a Lutheran community later joined by others from Neu Pasau, Tšcherwenka, Schowe and other Lutheran villages in the Batschka and Smyrnia. They endured floods, bad crops and epidemics located in the heart of a vast wilderness. Schonborn, known as Petrovo Polje was also an early Lutheran settlement.

As the government got involved and established "colonies" in Bosnia between 1891 and 1904 there were 54 colonies in all with over 9,000 inhabitants. Of these, twelve were German with a total population of 1,800 persons. But attempts were always made to put a stop to the government colonization program, which was finally accomplished by law in 1906.

In 1891 the government established the colonies at Branjevo and Dugo Polje. These settlers came from Lutheran villages in the Batschka and a few families from Smyrnia. Dugo Polje was established by nine Lutheran families from the Batschka and was the smallest of the colonies.

Four more were established in 1894: Dubrava-Königsfeld by twenty families from Slavonia, the Batschka, Galicia and Moravia. Within two years only two men remained, when a new re-settlement was undertaken. Settlers from Galicia established Vrbaska-Karlsdorf. Prosara was established by

twenty-one ethnic German families from Galicia and Russia and proved to be the worst situation in which to plant a colony. Eight families settled Korace, numbering 38 persons from Galicia.

In 1895 the government colony of Ukrinski was established with settlers from Russia, Galicia, Slavonia, Swabian Turkey and Bukovina and other areas. There were 300 persons, half of whom were from Danube Swabian communities. In 1937 there was a population of 1,096 persons. Because of floods and famine, the colony moved to a new site and took on a new name: Schutzberg.

In 1895 the government at Vranovac established another colony and most of the colonists came from Galicia and southern Russia (Black Sea Germans). In 1896 the colony of Kardar was founded on the Sava River. The settlers came from Galicia who were later joined by others from Slavonia and the Banat. Also in 1896 the colony of Ularici-Franzferdinandshöh (later Putnikovo Brdo) after the heavily forested land was cleared the soil was found to be marginal and sugar beet cultivation proved to be the only economically viable crop. Later in 1898/1899 the colony of Sibouska was formed, the only government sponsored ethnic German Roman Catholic agricultural community. The settlers came from Galicia and Bukovina and maintained a close relationship with the Lutheran community of Schützberg in order to maintain their ethnic German identity.

The last government sponsored ethnic German colony was Vrbovac in 1903/1904. The first settlers came from Galicia and were later joined by families from the Banat. There were of course also individuals and families who moved into Bosnia on their own and not part of a planned settlement program. Some of these private settlers also came from Galicia, Bukovina and southern Russia. Often these groups moved on to other colonies later as they were unable to support an ethnic German school or develop congregational life as a Diaspora group.

Some colonies developed factories, saw mills and other businesses, while others remained very small and lived a rather primitive, isolated existence. In 1912 a new colony was formed at Sitnes, consisting of settlers from the other Bosnia colonies. On the whole, life was more difficult and the land inferior on the government colonies.

Croatia and the Colonization Question

Prior to 1848, the Croats paid little attention to the small groups of settlers in the wilderness. It was only in 1865 when the Croatian intelligentsia acknowledged that there were ethnic German and Hungarian minorities present in their country.

In Syrmien, it was a different matter living there among the Serbs who as early as 1846 and 1847 began expressing their concern that they were being "replaced" by the industrious ethnic Germans, whose hard work had led to success, which unfortunately led to embitterment on the part of their Serbian neighbors.

The nationalist press raised a hue and cry against the "invaders" from the north even though they made a tremendous contribution of the economy. Radicalization set in.

By and large there were voices of the opposition but the government had to have a greater concern for the nation's finances rather than its nationalistic feelings. After 1848 there was simply no let up in ongoing immigration and "foreign" settlement. The entry of more and more Hungarian settlers and their setting up of their Hungarian schools created quite an uproar. The Croats saw every minority as a threat and from their perspective assimilation was the only solution. The Reich German threat eastwards as the official policy of Prussianized Germany was read into the real motivations of the

ethnic German settlers moving into Croatia. This would prove especially true in Bosnia were some of the settlers actually came from the Reich.

When that argument failed to work, the Croatian nationalists pictured the ethnic Germans as the tools and weapons of the Magyars in their ongoing attempt to lord it over them. It was a matter of the indolence of the Slavic peasants and the industriousness of the "Swabians" and the economic consequences. The Danube Swabians created an economic miracle in a marginal wilderness for which the Slavs were not grateful as long as they were there.

Many areas of Slavonia were uninhabited and were of no real economic value. Only settlers and capital investment could change that. Many of the settlers brought capital with them. That served as an antidote to the charge that they were opportunists and carpetbaggers and ne'er-do-wells. By 1910, ten per cent of the arable land was still undeveloped. First of all, the nobles preferred ethnic German settlers and then Slovaks and Czechs who were seen as their Slavic brothers. Their last choice was the Magyars (Hungarians) who usually assimilated within one generation. It was the ethnic Germans who resisted assimilation the longest. This would prove to be dangerous in the future.

As neighbors the Danube Swabians got along with the Croatian and Serbian populations. The government saw them as a necessary economic evil at best, and as a threat to the unity of the Slavs at the worst. It was the latter view that would prevail. The answer was to make the Slavs industrious, thrifty and work focused so that they no longer sold their land to the Danube Swabians. The banking institutions would support their peasantry in this endeavor. But there were only minor initiatives, especially in the new areas opening for settlement. The Slavs decided they would rather be farm laborers working for the ethnic Germans. All of the new settlement laws of the government favored inner-migration and attempted to thwart emigration elsewhere as much as possible. Still the population stagnated. The only group that was affected was the Hungarians who began to leave.

But as the 19th century ended, the major issue was no longer immigration into Slavonia but the emigration of countless thousands of young people to the United States and this also included vast numbers of the Danube Swabian population. By the outbreak of the First World War almost all immigration into Slavonia had ceased and the presence of ethnic Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks and the other nationalities was simply accepted as an economic and social reality that had no political implications. There was no conspiracy or a fifth column directed against the Croats.

The ethnic German Population and the Revolution of 1848

Political life in Croatian and Slavonia before the Revolution was a mirror and reflection of neighboring Hungary. In both countries, first place on the political spectrum were the nobles and their agenda. The urban citizens in Hungary, however, were awakening to issues that had no counterpart in Croatia and Slavonia. German speaking nobles were landlords in Croatia and supported the aspirations of the nobility of Hungary and as a special interest group they took their cue from Budapest. The nationality question was of no consequence to them. The German nobles also had no interest in "national" politics as Germans. The "national" movements began among the urban populations fed on "romanticism", mostly the poorer classes who felt discriminated against and the watchword became "Volk" (Folk) and "folk language." The Danube Swabians formed the largest single element in the urban settlements and went over to identifying with the Croatian aspirations and gave up their mother tongue.

Most of the Croatian Nationalists were of ethnic German origin and had German names! This was often through marriage. Bishop Strossmayer is one important example. In his case it became

fanaticism. But under the surface this was not the cultural and social movement born out of romanticism, but ethnic identification, another word for nationalism and racism and had political implications: the unification of the South Slavs. There was the demand for the use of the Croatian language by the government administration over against the use of Latin in the Counties and German in the courts. After 1840 this became more and more contentious.

In Esseg and other communities with a large Danube Swabian population they sided with the nationalist movement and supported their aspirations early in 1848 over the language issue. They would support opposition against the Hungarian attempts to suppress such a movement. In a petition they said the following:

"We all desire to be united with Croatia as we always have been, but without breaking away from Hungary. We are happy to accept the use of the Croatian language in all of the affairs of the city governance; but we will also continue to use our own language in our life and commerce..."

The Croatian Nationalist became more strident and by May of 1848 they introduced the use of Croatian in all of the affairs of Weretz County. The Danube Swabian population was caught between the rival nationalistic groups and had to make a choice and sided with the pro-Hungarian party. They were attracted by the liberalism of Kossuth and a proposed new constitution with broader freedoms. That act was a reflection of the basic liberalism of the ethnic German population in Esseg, which were the ideals of the French Revolution.

The Banus (Governor) Jelacic opposed the aspirations of the Hungarian rebels and sided with the German-Austrian Emperor, while the Danube Swabian population of Slavonia and Croatia by and large followed the lead of Esseg in support of Kossuth and his allies. To the horror of Jelacic, in April 1848 the Hungarian rebels abolished serfdom and declared that all nobles and commoners were equals!

May 30, 1848 the mayor of Esseg, Alois Schmidt left for Budapest to declare the city of Esseg loyal to the Revolution. The next day, the Town Council refused to accept or acknowledge Jelacic as the Banus and sent no representatives to Agram to a meeting of the Sabor to avoid participating in his installation. Jelacic would never forget that. He would later disenfranchise the citizens when he occupied the city and threatened to deport them to the United States. It was only in 1850 that the Danube Swabian citizens regained their civic rights.

In Syrmien things came a head before 1845. Eastern Syrmien was heavily pro-Serbian, while western Syrmien was won over by the pro-Hungarian party. The Germans by and large sided with the Hungarians but not in an overt or political way. Ruma was an exception where the German population supported the Serbs. But this would not last long. By April 26, 1848 the ethnic German citizens complained to the County Administrator about the agitation of the Serbian youth who sowed hatred among the nationalities and threatened to beat up the Danube Swabian population of Ruma. Other communities, like Semlin also wrote letters of complaint to the same effect. This did not sit well with the Serbian Nationalist leadership who sought to control the Vojvodina where the largest ethnic German settlements were located. The Military Frontier District was still under Hungarian control, but most of the officers were German and they needed to be won over. The Serbian leadership prepared a proclamation addressed to:

To Our ethnic German Brothers

"The Serbian nation has been forced to preserve its national rights and freedoms by taking up the sword for the sake of its religion, traditions and customs, its language and nationality, in the face of the threats of the newly situated Magyar government, which we will oppose forever.

The Serbian nation recognizes every religion, nationality, language, traditions, and customs, the right to life and ownership of every individual Danube Swabian brother and citizen. The Serbian nation is not warring against ethnic German brothers, their religion, life, nationality or traditions to destroy them, nor their life, home and lands to destroy, plunder or rob, because such cruelties are not consistent with our own national character.

Therefore, ethnic German brothers we acknowledge before God and all nations, that the Serbian nation and its military power has no aggressive intention against you, our Danube Swabian brothers, nor will we limit your religious or citizenship rights, on the contrary we will protect these rights as we face a common enemy and honor our loyalty to his Majesty, the Emperor, Ferdinand I, as a guarantee of your rights forever.

BUT WE ALSO ISSUE THIS WARNING...all those ethnic Germans who oppose us or go over to the enemy will be treated as our enemies.

Long live the Emperor, and King, Ferdinand I, long lives the ethnic German and Serbian people. Long lives our Brotherhood."

The relations between the local populations were strained. On the local scene the Serbian population did not reflect their leadership's actions and attitudes towards the Germans. Violence broke out in many communities this was especially true in India. The priests of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches both got into the act. On the whole the ethnic German and Slovak populations wanted no part in these conflicts but were physically forced to support the Serbs. The relations between the Serbs and the Roman Catholic population in particular continued to get worse and worse.

The Serbian leadership began to mobilize the entire population regardless of nationality or religious confession. This led to unrest and rebellion among the Danube Swabian population, especially in the Military Frontier District. Troops had to be sent in to restore order and arrested Danube Swabians and took them to Karlowitz to the military barracks. The Serbs declared the Vojvodina a part of their state and were faced by the opposition of the Roman Catholic population. In response to the Serbian provocations, the Roman Catholic population became more and more pro-Hungarian. As long as the Hungarians and Serbs battled one another anarchy reigned in the Vojvodina. Plundering, murder and robbery were the order of the day. The Serbian population simply ran amok. The ethnic Germans, like those in Bukowitz suffered greatly at their hands...

The Removal of the German Language from Government and School

After 1860, the language issue in Croatia was taken up with great vehemence and as a result German disappeared as the language of the Courts.

By action of the Sabor on October 5, 1861 all government authorities and officials had to be able to speak either Croatian or Serbian. All representatives elected to the Sabor also had to speak one of the languages. On October 13, 1861 the language of instruction in the schools was to be Serbo-Croatian, and German could no longer be taught as a subject in the high schools. But Emperor Francis Joseph vetoed the new regulations. The Croatians found other ways to impose their decree, beginning in the cities. But in most of the ethnic German towns and cities, the Danube Swabians were able to maintain the use of their language and elect mayors, parliamentary representatives who were German speaking.

In 1868 the Compromise between Hungary and Croatia and Slavonia was signed that granted some autonomy on domestic and religious affairs.

It is interesting that in their negotiations with the Hungarians they used Kossuth their fiercest enemy as their model. Kossuth had said that the evolving middle class in the towns would be the bearer of the national movement and the ultimate enemy would be the Danube Swabians. "Our future depends on a middle class. The nobles are easy to incorporate, but they are few, the source must be the citizens of the free cities. But they must become Hungarians. Our cities to a great extent are ethnic German, which means that commerce and industry is in Danube Swabian hands. It is our nationality that is threatened by them. They are the enemy. Kossuth's words met a responsive chord among the Croats.

But Syrmien was a different story. No middle class evolved among the early agricultural settlers. They brought their clergy and teachers with them. After 1848 a few farmers sent their sons to study for the priesthood or teaching. Their education was either in Croatian or Hungarian and did not prepare them to function as the intelligentsia of their peasant farmer society. In the 1880's and after the distance between the urban Danube Swabians and the farmers in the isolated areas led to them growing farther and farther apart in other ways as well. The end of both groups appeared to be just ahead. Neither group was of any significant political importance.

The Danube Swabians in Syrmien found themselves caught between the Serbs and the Croats who each sought hegemony over the other. Since the Serbs were the majority, the Croats hoped to catch up by assimilating all of the ethnic Germans into their language group. They were quite successful in western Syrmien, but not in the eastern part.

What happened was a resurgence of a "Danube Swabian consciousness" among the ethnic German population. During the last decade of the 19th century a "Danube Swabian middle class" emerged in Ruma (with a population of 8,000 of whom 7,000 were ethnic Germans) as a result of some leading personalities who had attended German speaking high schools outside of Srem, Slavonia and Croatia, especially in Graz and Vienna in Austria. This had a tremendous effect on the deepening of an ethnic German consciousness on the part of all of the scattered Danube Swabian populations. The first attempt at a Danube Swabian organization and a newspaper began in Ruma, November 2, 1903. The first members were from Ruma, India, Putinci, Beschka and Neu Slankaman. There were none from western Syrmien or Slavonia because information did not flow freely into those areas. The first edition of "Deutsche Volksblatt fur Syrmien" (German People's Paper for Syrmien) was a weekly, with a circulation of 2,000 copies. Soon other newspapers appeared in other areas. This led to local libraries, agitation for German speaking priests and teachers, assemblies and the like. The government legislated against them, but the Danube Swabians had "friends at court" and moved ahead.

The Croatian press and public reaction against the ethnic German activism was to go on the attack everywhere. Serbs and Croats in Syrmien began to organize against the Danube Swabian threat. After 1904, Ruma elected a Danube Swabian mayor and the majority of the Town Council were ethnic Germans, India elected too Danube Swabians of its twelve Town Council members, in Putinci it was eleven out of twelve and the ethnic Germans won a majority in Sotting in 1907. The Croatian Nationalist parties all had apoplexy.

Did this now mean that a Danube Swabian candidate could win election to the Sabor? (Parliament).

There were two categories of voters: twenty-four years of age, male, citizen, and a taxpayer. And the following could vote simply on the basis of their profession: clergy, teachers, physicians, notaries, all

university faculty members, pharmacists, engineers and professors. There were 88 seats in the Sabor for a period of five years.

In 1907 the Social Democrats pointed out that out of 2,500,000 men only 45,000 could vote. The electoral district of Ruma, which included: Ruma, India, Putinci, Kraljevci, Petrovci and Klein Rdinci had only an electorate of 1,108. This was one of the largest of the electoral districts. There were six electoral districts with less than 100 voters. This left the door open to buy votes. The Danube Swabians joined all those calling for universal suffrage just introduced in Austria in 1908. But the government hedged, afraid that the ethnic German and Hungarian minority, which represented ten per cent of the population, would elect their own representatives and therefore influence the nation in some way.

In 1910 an election reform law was passed against universal suffrage but expanding the electorate to 200,000 persons. As a result in Ruma, the Danube Swabians were the majority of the electors at 53.25%, while in Semlin they represented 36.26%. Of the 190,043 votes, 8,388 were ethnic Germans, which was 4.4%. No one was happy with the reform.

In 1917 the number of seats was increased to 122 and all of the electoral districts were made the same size in terms of the number of voters on the basis of the Croatian and Serbian populations, to make sure the minorities did not have the population to elect one of their own. There was no electoral district with a Danube Swabian majority. The closest were Esseg-Upper Town 34.7%, Semlin 38.3%, Esseg-Lower Town 37.3% and Dobrinci 31.0%.

Both Maria Theresia and Joseph II had put a great emphasis on the establishment of schools in the new settlements they supported and stipulated that the schools were the responsibility of the State (1770). Prior to that they were understood to be an additional function of the local parish church. In this sense they were to be "national" schools, reflecting the local population in terms of nationality and religion. But in Croatia and Slavonia, we find that the landlords or the communities themselves established their own schools. In many instances it took time to convince the peasant population of the value of their children attending school. Even where schools existed education was limited both in terms of content and length, which took place only during the winter months. In these schools the children learned to read, write, mathematics, and the catechism.

Schools and their upkeep as well as the salaries of the teachers was an expensive proposition during the early years of settlement and in many quarters was seen as a frill and not a necessity. The teachers during this period were often untrained; some were retired soldiers, tradesmen or farmers and had to take on other responsibilities in order to make a living, such as the notary, knife-smith, bell-ringer and organist. We can get a picture of the schools and the lives of the teachers in this period from that provided by the experience of the first schoolmaster in Franztal, Bernhard Schätzchen. He had been a sergeant in the Baden contingent of the Imperial Army. He not only taught the children in the newly founded school in 1820, but was also the bell-ringer. For every child he taught he received 2 Groschen per month, and received his board from the various families in the community who took turns having him for meals. Friedrich Falkenburger the schoolmaster in Neu Pasau who had been fully trained in Heidelberg also carried on his trade as a shoemaker.

After the death of Joseph II the number of schools declined. At the time of his death there were 35 schools in Pozega County in 1792 and there were only ten in 1847. In all of Slavonia, including the Military Frontier District there were 48 local schools in 1830.

German schools were established in the following communities: Ruma 1772, Neu-Banovci 1786, India 1790, Neu-Pasau 1791, Sarwasch-Hirschfeld 1809, Calma 1821, Neudorf 1830, Johannisfeld-Jovanovac 1836, Erdewik 1838, Putinci 1845, Bezanja 1862, Ernestinenhof 1865, Surcin 1869,

Johannisberg 1892, Alt-Vukovar 1892, Dobanovci 1895, Lovas, 1898. The first of the German confessional schools was established in Eichendorf-Hrastovac and Kapetanovo Polje in 1876, Deutsche Nijemci 1904, Becmen 1876, Obrez 1884 and private German schools in Ivanovo Polje 1871, and Beocin 1882.

In the Concordat with Rome in 1855 the oversight of the schools was given to the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, which was reorganized in 1860 and the parish priest was head of the school in the community.

During the 1840's the Croatian Nationalists demanded that Croatian was to be language of instruction in all schools. The first implementation of the regulation took effect in 1860 when Croatian was introduced into all of the schools after grade four. But many of the larger communities were able to achieve concessions in this regard. Bishop Strossmayer was very much involved in instigating and carrying out this regulation and took his German parishes to task with a vengeance, especially Esseg and others who had appealed for reconsideration to Vienna.

Ruma had a population of 8,000, of whom 5,000 were German, 2,250 were Serbian and there were 250 Hungarians who had been Croatized. The community simply asked: Why not have German instructions? And proceeded to implement it. Four teachers taught German and four taught Croatian. But German instruction was limited to two hours a day. The regulations were eventually successful so that by 1868 there were only eleven German Schools in all of Croatia and Slavonia: six were in the provinces and five were in the Military Frontier District.

In 1874 Croatian was designated as the language of instruction in all schools unless the students had another mother tongue, which could only be taught if Croatian was an obligatory subject for all of the pupils. The government would not share in the costs of any schools that used any other language as the language of instruction other than Croatian. They especially targeted the German confessional schools and attempted to legislate the forbidding of the use of the mother tongue over against Croatian.

By 1881/1882 there were 48 schools that included German instruction in their educational program. By 1918/1919 there were 22 left, but during the two periods the German population had increased by 60%. In 1890 there were 212 children in the average German school compared to 118 Croatians or Serb or 205 Magyars. At that time there were 140,885 Croat/Serbian pupils in school, 10,363 Germans and 3,682 Hungarians. The Lutherans maintained their German schools much longer primarily due to the fact that they had German clergy who played a leading role in the schools. Yet, by 1912/1913 there were only 4,500 pupils in German schools in Croatia and Slavonia. In 1909/1910 there had been 13,000.

The Germans and the Confessional Situation

In Croatia-Slavonia, 70% of the German population of about 175,000 persons were Roman Catholic and were part of two dioceses: Agram and Bosnia-Syrmien. During the first wave of immigration the settlers from Germany were accompanied by their own priests, all of the next generations were to be served by Croatians, who were often Croatized Germans and were fanatic nationalists just like Strossmayer. This would lead to confrontation any time their German parishioners gave any indication of attempting to assert their German language, traditions or heritage. Any German priests who attempted to serve in either diocese were suspect and would not be accepted by their Croatian counterparts or bishops. They would almost always be appointed to parishes that were totally Croatian, regardless of their desire to serve a German parish. None of the bishops would permit the

use of German in the Mass or allow any preaching. Some concessions were made in 1836 and German priests were allowed to serve in Esseg, Jarmin, India and Peterwardein and in some parishes the same applied to the use of the Hungarian language. In the city of Agram there were always German priests serving there because of the cosmopolitan nature of the city and its international connections.

The long term result of this attempt to stifle and muzzle the aspirations of the German population through the church, led to the abandonment of the Church by the emerging German leadership and intelligentsia who stepped outside of the Church, seeing it as irrelevant and simply a political tool of the Croatian Nationalists. Studying in Germany and Austria many of them became fiercely anti-Roman Catholic in response to the growing "Free From Rome" movement that was sweeping Austria and a new phenomenon took place there which was repeated in Croatia and Slavonia: Lutheran prayer houses were erected in Roman Catholic communities, schools established and pastors called especially in the towns.

In Bosnia the situation was somewhat different in that only about one third of the German settlers there were Roman Catholics. Chiefly at: Windthorst, Siboska, Kalenderovci, Polje and Sitnes. In Rudolfstal and Opsiecks the Roman Catholics formed the majority of the population. These parishes were regularly served by German priests many from the various monastic orders in the area.

The Protestants formed only a small minority in Croatia and Slavonia. In 1891 there were 36,151 Lutherans and 12,365 Reformed. This number increased up to 1914 with an ongoing emigration from Swabian Turkey in Hungary. In the national census of 1900 Lutherans accounted for 1.24% of the population and the Reformed 0.57%. With the exception of Slovak Lutherans and Hungarian Reformed, the Protestants by and large were Germans.

With the passing of the General Regulation XXVI in the year 1791 members of the two Evangelical Churches were forbidden to settle or own land in Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, but the existing Evangelicals in Lower Slavonia were not allowed to be harassed. The War Office in Vienna decreed in 1839 that the purchase of land and property by Protestants in the Military Frontier District was also forbidden. The existing Protestant populations already living in the District were to be expelled. There were over 600 of them in Neu Pasua alone and they began to prepare to immigrate to Russia but their pastor, Andreas Weber through a personal appeal to the Emperor was able to prevent it. The Protestant population continued to face difficulties of this nature until 1859.

On September 1, 1859 the Emperor issued an Imperial Patent for Croatia that officially recognized both of the Evangelical Churches. It took up to 1866 before the Protestants were granted freedom of religion by the Sabor. Opposition came from the Bishop of Senj, Vjenceslav Soic, who protested against the legalization of the Confessions of the Protestant Churches whose entry into Croatia was seen as introducing a "foreign" element into the life of the nation.

As a result of the Compromise between Hungary and Croatia in 1868, all of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations in Croatia and Slavonia remained under the supervision of the Seniorats and Superintendents of their respective churches in Hungary, with the exception of the Lutheran congregation in Agram. This would lead to conflict and misunderstanding in the future. In 1873 the government of Croatia attempted to set in motion the legal establishment and administration of an independent Lutheran and Reformed Church of Croatia and Slavonia but were unable to put it into effect.

In 1881 there were 15 Lutheran pastorates in the country: in Agram, Alt-Pasua, Neudorf, Beschka, Antunovac, Eichendorf, Surtschin, Bingula, Brekinska, Rieddorf-Retfala, Neu Pasau, Hrastiin,

Laslovo, Tordinci, Korodj. As mentioned previously, all of them with the exception of Agram were part of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Hungary (Lutheran).

This relationship was frequently challenged both by the Croatian Sabor and the congregations and pastors themselves, but there was no desire to create friction with the Hungarian government or church authorities. Eventually in 1900, the Lutheran congregations formed an independent Seniorat within the Hungarian Church, with the exception of the congregations in Agram that remained independent, and Antunovac and Eichendorf that continued their membership in the Seniorat of Tolna and Baranya in Hungary. The much smaller Reformed constituency maintained distance from the religious authorities in Hungary as much as possible.

Most of the Protestant congregations were served by German pastors and thereby avoided the struggle that the Roman Catholic Germans had with their Croatian priests. The one exception was the pastor in Neudorf, Senior Nicholas Abaffy, a Slovak and also a fanatic pan-Slav who turned his congregation against him with his determination to Croatize the members. He even attempted to change the German name of the village to the Croatian: Novo Selo. The German newspapers also criticized him in 1910 because of his political agitation on behalf of the Coalition Party, claiming he used the pastorate for non-religious purposes. In 1917, after Abaffy's death, Franz Morgenthaler of Neu Pasua was elected the Senior. The Slovaks insisted that the election was void because he could not handle the Croatian language adequately. He was given two years to learn the language and if he failed to be proficient in it, he could not continue in his office.

In addition to that, the assembly of the Seniorat had to deal with the difficulties in Bingula. The Lutheran "brothers" in Bingula were experiencing constant conflict as German and Slovak speaking members of the same congregation sought ascendancy in the leadership of the congregation. Because they could not come to terms over which language to use in worship, the Germans desired to establish their own German congregation and if that was not to be granted to them, they would leave the church. The assembly in convention supported the request of the German members, but that did not settle the local problem.

Another major difficulty in many regions was the question of religious education because a number of the Lutheran teachers did not have a command of the Croatian language and some of the officials of the government insisted that the instruction had to be in Croatian. In 1905/1906 the education officials ordered that all religious instruction at Weretz had to be in Croatian or the school could not be opened. Weretz was a filial of Slatina and the pastor there could not speak Croatian and therefore the children could not be taught religious education in their "church" school!

The two Protestant Churches and their individual congregations had regular contact, received support and maintained relationships with Protestant Church circles in Austria, Switzerland and Germany unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts. As a church of the "Diaspora" the Churches also received financial support and assistance from Germany as well as pastors. They especially assisted in projects beyond the means of the fledgling churches and were instrumental in providing 16,000 Marks towards the building of the new church in Agram.

Bosnia proved to be a different situation and the small-scattered congregations existed autonomously. Franzjosefsfeld at first existed as a filial of their mother church in Franzfeld in the Banat. It became a parish in 1891. This was followed by Banja Luka in 1893, Lukavac in 1904, in Schutzberg in 1910, Bosnisch Brod in 1914. A congregation was established in Sarajevo along with a filial congregation in Zabidovici in 1898. They formed a synod with a president as their provisional church government.

The ethnic Germans as a "Folk Group" in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

With the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire following the First World War, the long held dream of the South Slavs was realized in the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a decision that was made without the input or approval of the populations that would be involved in redrawing the map of this portion of the Balkans. The major partners of this union would turn out to be the Serbs and Croats, but they were not equally matched. Croatia was very much the junior partner and bristled because of their secondary position in the new Kingdom that would have repercussions for the future and in the end have disastrous affects on the Danube Swabina populations involved.

Serbian troops occupied all of the territories of future Yugoslavia, but did so in a rather ruthless manner: plundering, mistreating local populations, murdering and terrorizing the minorities they encountered. There was to be no question of who was in charge. The Serbs. In their minds Yugoslavia was simply Greater Serbia. Croatia alone could offer any resistance and was prepared to do so as subsequent history would prove. During this period of transition the ethnic German population had to endure a lot and was in no position to offer any resistance. Most of the men had gone off to war, mainly on the Eastern Front and were prisoners of war. There were immediate calls to confiscate the property of the Danube Swabian minority and expel them from the country. The Serbian troops could not maintain order and districts set up "home guard" units that often included the older Danube Swabian men to protect their villages from vandalism, raids and attacks from disbanded soldiers, deserters and brigands. Women and children often had to seek safety in the forests in the bitter cold of 1919.

With the declaration of the State and Kingdom of Yugoslavia a whole new relationship arose among the widely scattered ethnic German communities in the new jurisdictions in which they found themselves and their new authorities and rulers with whom they had to deal. In each of the areas of Danube Swabina settlement there were men who were prepared to establish organizations for the welfare, freedom and defense of the ethnic German minority as an identifiable ethnic group, the so-called Volksgruppe (Folk Group), which also had racial overtones. These areas of settlement in the new south Slav state were the western portion of the Banat, the largest part of the Batschka (Vojvodina), Lower Baranya, Sirmien, Slavonia, Croatia, Bosnia as well as Slovenia. Most of these areas had a previous history with Hungary, except for Bosnia and Croatia and Slavonia, which had an existence of their own.

Initially there was little change for the Danube Swabians in Croatia and Slavonia except they found themselves caught in the middle of the struggle between the Croats and Serbs for control of the new nation state. There was no longer a language problem since the ethnic Germans were now Croatian speaking and not very fluent in German at all if they still had any knowledge of their language. Because of the enlarged Folk Group in this new centralized state, the leadership of the ethnic German minority from across the Kingdom in diversified groups and organizations worked towards the objective of establishing a centralized organization to enable them to have a national voice.

The elections that were planned excluded the Danube Swabina minority as well as all of the others and were designed for an electorate that consisted only of Croats, Serbs and Slovenes. This resulted in great unrest in all of the regions with sizable ethnic German populations. One of the stipulations and guarantees that the new state of Yugoslavia had agreed to uphold as a result of the Treaty of Trianon was to protect minority rights but they insisted that to give the minorities the vote would destabilize national sovereignty. Because the Danube Swabina minority was prevented from any role or participation in the political and public life of the Kingdom, they opted to form a cultural organization to unite all elements of the minority, in the various areas of settlement, and as a result the Swabian German Cultural Union (SDKB) was formed at Neusatz (Novi Sad) on June 20, 1920 with over two thousand participants in attendance.

In 1921 a new constitution was passed by the Sabor with a vote of 223-196, which made all citizens equal before the law. This equalization of all of the minority ethnic groups began a new phase in which the Danube Swabians could now fully participate. They had been given the franchise and all of the political parties sought their support for they recognized that the ethnic Germans who numbered approximately one million persons were now a force to be reckoned with. But the leaders of the Folk Group organizations were already planning to give birth to a political party of their own: a "Ethnic German Party" to protect their rights and freedoms and full participation in the life of the nation. The party manifesto that was passed at the assembly in Hatzfeld on December 17, 1922 began with a confession of loyalty to the Dynasty and State and included a twelve-point program to achieve their objectives. The party leadership that was elected included: Dr. Ludwig Kremling of Weisskirchen, president who served with an executive: Dr. Stefan Kraft of India, Dr. Hans Moser of Semlin and Michael Theiss of Hatzfeld. Of the twenty members of the party Council Dr. Sepp Müller of Ruma, Dr. Jörg Müller of Ruma, Christian Marx of Erdwik and Franz Moser of Semlin represented Sarmien .

The new party contested the elections in 1923 and eight members were elected: four from Sarmien, three from the Banat and one from Slovenia. But in various parts of the Kingdom, Danube Swabian candidates were elected representing other parties. In Bosnia the ethnic Germans voted for Moslems and Croatian candidates because they were more tolerant than the Serbs who were running. Many of the parties saw the Ethnic German Party as a divisive force, while they in turn said they would go out of existence whenever the ethnic Germans achieve their full rights guaranteed by the Constitution. This was said in the context of the situation in which many of the Danube Swabian communities lived such as Lazarfeld. In April of 1924, sixty Danube Swabian farmers out working in their fields were attacked by a mob of some two hundred so-called Dobrovoljci (patriots). Sixteen of them were badly injured. The leader of the Serbian mob was a lawyer and he screamed: "You Danube Swabians have your rights, but we have the power!" All kinds of intimidation of voters would follow, leading to the public beating of many of the Ethnic German Party candidates. In the next elections, the Ethnic German Party received more votes but only elected five representatives.

King Alexander set aside the Constitution on January 6, 1929 and declared a dictatorship and disbanded all political parties and issued a proclamation to his: "Beloved people, all Serbians, Croats and Slovenes." He made no mention of the other seventh of the population: the minorities. He always did it that way. He desired a centralized government and national unity, but only on his own terms, which resulted in his assassination.

The Emerging Conflicts (1933-1939)

With the dictatorship in place, in spite of the efforts of the leadership of the ethnic German minority there was great discontent on the part of some in the various areas of Danube Swabian settlement. There were questions about the finances of the SDKB with charges of mismanagement that required the intervention of the German ambassador in Belgrade. At the beginning of 1933 the discontent took on concrete form. Dr. Jakob Awender, a physician from Patschow headed what became known as the "Renewal Movement" and he as its "Führer" attacked the key leadership of the SDKB in the press and at every opportunity. This was at the time of the Depression and there had been successive crop failures all of which fueled the discontent. The co-operatives set up by the SDKB attempted to respond to the crisis but only succeeded in making it worse. Not only were the farmers critical of the leadership but also the young academicians who had studied in Germany and Austria were also vocal in their opposition. They were highly influenced by the political trends taking place in Austria and Germany and were fed up with the old leadership, values and attitudes. At first, this was perhaps nothing more or less than a generation gap. With the coming of the dictatorship in Yugoslavia in 1929 the German Party like the other political parties was banned. This meant fewer positions and offices

available to the new intelligentsia who chafed at the lack of opportunities available to them. These and other malcontents are the ones who assembled at Pantschowa as the "Renewal Movement" and chose Awender as their Leader. They published their own weekly newspaper and wrote highly critical articles and personal attacks against the leadership of the SDKB and demanded their resignations.

In November 1933 a new German ambassador, Viktor von Heeren was appointed and arrived in Belgrade. He officially supported the "old leadership" of the Folk Group but he had really come to get the lay of the land and hinder and avoid any internal squabbles among the Danube Swabian minority, which now was virtually impossible.

With the assassination of the King in 1935, the political parties stepped into the void. In effect the National Party took over the government following the elections in which only two Ethnic German Party representatives were elected. They in turn supported the majority party and were "welcome" to join the party, and Dr. Kraft the leader of the SDKB did, hoping to get a better hearing for the issues that were of primary concern of the ethnic Germans in terms of the school and language issue. The government carried on friendly relations with Germany and felt no need to treat the Danube Swabian minority with kid gloves. The German ambassador's main concern was the foreign policy of the Yugoslavian state and the Folk Group was left responsible for its own fate and destiny.

Attempts were made by the government in 1938 to curtail and prevent the sale of land to the Danube Swabians. This was hardly a new approach on their part. The Folk Group leadership saw this as catastrophic and repressive to the aspirations and economic future of the ethnic Germans. In turn, their discontent was interpreted by the Serb Nationalists as a recognition that they were acting as a "fifth column" on behalf of the German Reich, which sought to interfere in the internal affairs of Yugoslavia. The government however backed down to maintain their lucrative trading relationship with Germany.

The Folk Group leadership faced turmoil within the organization and the Danube Swabian communities. On January 15, 1935 the ruling Council of the SDKB expelled Awender and several of his followers in the Renewal Movement to avoid a split in the membership. Unfortunately this only intensified the conflict. The growth and development of the SDKB in the previous years had been concentrated on the establishment of youth groups in every community and district and they very quickly became the most active organizations within the cultural union. A large portion of the members of these groups were open to the objectives of the Renewers and their propaganda, while there were others who sympathized with them even though they disapproved of some of their methods and continued to accept and follow the "old leadership".

There is no question that the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) in Germany better known as the Nazis and their party organs were involved in the development of the Renewal Movement and both provided support and influenced it. The German ambassador gave "public" support to the "old leadership" in the cultural union SDKB in the press but was involved in the background in providing aid to Awender when called upon.

From the very beginning various other ministries and offices in the Reich government felt sympathy for the Renewers and provided massive support. This was especially true of the 'Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland' (VDA) whose concerns dealt with the ethnic German populations outside of the German Reich. Discussions between Paul Claus the representative of the VDA in Yugoslavia and the leadership of the Renewal Movement took place in the spring of 1935 whereby Awender, Dr. Sepp Janko and Fritz Metzger undertook the task to lead the struggle to renew the Ethnic German Folk Group so that it could stand on its own two feet financially so that it would not be a burden to Reich foreign policy.

Both the "old" and "new" leadership sought approval and support in important Reich circles. Early in 1935, the German ambassador in Belgrade passed on a letter of complaint to the Reich Foreign Office outlining the crimes, activities and faults of the Renewers, highlighting the fact that Awender had no character at all and was a man of ill repute. They requested that the SDKB be the only recognized official voice of the Folk Group in Yugoslavia to speak to any issues affecting the Danube Swabian minority. But in the central organs of the NSDAP, the 'Völkischen Beobachter' (The People's Observer) reported that there was a need to support both groups assisting them to form a united front in carrying out the objectives of the ethnic German minority.

This did not help matters a bit. The SDKB was determined to cleanse itself of the Renewers organizationally. Along with Awender they expelled the Youth Leader of the SDKB, Jacob Lichtenburger. Assuming that they had the support of the majority of the youth group an assembly was called on July 28, 1935 at Neusatz to install a new Youth Führer in his place, namely Dr. Erich Petschauer. But the installation could not be carried out because the vast majority of the youth present were sympathizers of the Renewal Movement and occupied the hall and heckled and disrupted every attempt on the part of any one to speak on behalf of the Folk Group leadership and they then walked out.

The conflict sharpened and deepened. Discontent and concern spread among the membership of the SDKB and it was obvious that things were coming to a head and action had to be taken. On August 5, 1935 representatives of the two groups met in Neusatz to work out a compromise. The SDKB was represented by: Dr. Oskar Plautz, Thomas Menrath, Dr. Sebastian Nemesheimer and Dr. Richard Derner. The representatives of the Renewers were: Fritz Metzger, Peter Kullmann, Jakob Krömer and Branimir Altgayer. The talks broke down and the quarrel simply went on.

Things came to a head at Neu Werbass on August 11th, 1935 in response to a speech by Josef Bürchel the Nazi Gauleiter (District Leader) of the Saar-Palatinate on the occasion of a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the settlement of the Batschka. Both groups hoped to use the occasion for their own purposes. Instead he spoke of the need for unity against the forces that threatened their *racial purity*. His essential message was: take pride in being Danube Swabian and in effect he did not support either group as he had been ordered.

This was a clear indication to both groups that the Reich was determined that the ethnic German minority would not upset or effect their foreign policy in terms of Yugoslavia, but that the Folk Group would adopt the political outlook of the Nazis. As the leader of the old political establishment, Kraft knew he needed the support of the Reich regardless of who was in power in order to achieve such objectives as the school question. He sought such support in the Reich Foreign Office. Although a declared opponent of Nazism he sought out contacts within the various ministries of the Reich and the Party for support for the Danube Swabian minority. In January 1936 he met with Hitler's Deputy, Rudolph Hess who was in charge of all affairs dealing with the Völkische (ethnic Germans) and Dr. Kraft was received warmly as he later reported.

Things would not remain quiet for long. At a meeting on March 18, 1936 the representative of the VDA, Dr. Helmut Carstanjen reported on the situation of the Folk Group in which he made scathing remarks about the "old leadership". The representative of the Foreign Office, Fritz von Twardowski defended them and declared that the question of the Folk Group in Yugoslavia was a matter of foreign policy. He reported that Dr. Kraft was now engaged in friendly discussions with the government in guaranteeing the rights of the Danube Swabian minority and these discussions should not be jeopardized because of any outside interference on the part of the Reich. It was at this point that Heinrich Himmler and his Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (VOMI) intervened. He was highly critical of Dr. Kraft and the VOMI was not prepared to have Dr. Kraft speak on behalf of the Folk Group or under the auspices of the Reich. He inferred that his reception by Hess had gone to his head. He

instructed the German ambassador in Belgrade to invite Dr. Kraft and Awender to dinner, along with a representative of the VOMI some time after Easter to work out a solution to the conflict. It was a futile meeting. The quarrel was now waged out in the open in the German and Yugoslavian press much to the delight of the Yugoslavian government. Meanwhile, at the same time, the Yugoslavian foreign policy was actively pro-German.

The VDA began to lessen its financial support for the work of the SDKB and provided resources to the Renewers instead. The SDKB leadership protested to the Reich, claiming to be the sole voice of the Folk Group in Yugoslavia. They called upon the VDA and the German ambassador for their support since they represented the vast majority of the Danube Swabian minority. But in 1937, the Renewers through Gustav Halwax were calling upon the Yugoslavian government for the legalization of their Party so that they had the right to hold meetings, conferences and assemblies. The police had been repressive, combative and brutal against ethnic German youth groups at their assemblies and the old leadership saw this as a reason for the discontent and fear in the Danube Swabian communities in terms of their rights as citizens of Yugoslavia. Kraft and the old leadership saw this kind of treatment as tantamount to calling forth a radicalization of the Danube Swabian minority.

The relationship between the VDA, the VOMI and the SDKB leadership did not get any better in the summer of 1937. This led to the leadership of the SDKB approaching von Neurath the Reich Foreign Minister and explained the conflict with the DVA with the hope that a peaceful solution could be worked out. The DVA and VOMI were informed of the meeting and letters that were exchanged. In effect, the old leadership was now without support in the Reich ministries.

The membership of the two factions within the Folk Group wished for an understanding and unity among all of their people. But among the leaders there was only division. A call for Dr. Kraft's resignation became public. It was felt that with his ouster rapprochement with the Renewers would now be possible. The opposite was the result and the Renewers were no further ahead because Kraft remained in his position and they became more strident in their opposition.

Berlin wanted no part in the quarrel. Both the VOMI and the Foreign Office wanted nothing to do with it. The German ambassador arranged for an arbitration panel to deal with the feuding parties, both of which agreed in advance to accept the recommendations and results. The panel was made up of various Folk group representatives from other countries including Estonia, Romania and Latvia. A solution was worked out and then presented on May 15, 1939 that called for Dr. Kraft stepping down from his position with an appropriate pension.

Of great importance to all of the ethnic Germans in Eastern Europe were the Anschluss (annexation) of Austria by the Reich and the incorporation of the Sudetenland that raised their German consciousness and in addition in Yugoslavia there was now a great desire for unity. A "German Unity Front" and platform was developed with the participation of Dr. Kraft and sought to establish guarantees that the ethnic German minority had legal rights by law as an identified separate entity. But personal quarrels and aspirations again got in the way and impeded the effort. As always Awender and his followers were at the head of the discontent and sought a political solution through incorporation with the governing party but with minimal success. The ideological struggle went on. On August 26, 1938 two of the "old leaders" Moser and Grassl agreed to support the Radical Party and would join the struggle against Nazi propaganda that was flooding the Danube Swabian communities. They established a committee to plan and carry out actions against the Renewers. Ethnic Germans who would join the voter's list of the Radical Party were to be granted five seats in parliament.

At an assembly of representatives of all groups within the SDKB, on October 29, 1938 all Danube Swabians were called upon to support the list of candidates submitted by the government at the next

election. As a result the Croatian Nationalists (Ustaschi) conducted a reign of terror in Slavonia and Croatia among the ethnic German communities to keep them from voting for the government party.

The occupation of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1939 resulted in intensive anti-German feeling and alarm especially on the part of the Serbian population, as well as the other Slavic people. Army officers were instructed to develop strong anti-German sentiments among their troops. Danube Swabians in the army were suspect and were forbidden to speak German, they were scolded every day and many received corporal punishment. But officially the government policy towards Germany had not changed.

On October 31, 1938 there was a rapprochement with the Renewers, who along with their youth groups returned to the fold of the Swabian German Cultural Union (SDKB).

The Last Years of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1939-1941)

With the personal resignation from the leadership of the SDKB by Dr. Keks the successor of Kraft the functionaries met in early May of 1939 to deal with the question of succession. Awender proposed himself for the position with the support of the Renewers and others. But the VOMI was not pleased with this development. They were opposed to Awender because of his past performance in terms of his relationships with the Yugoslavian government. In his place the Renewers proposed Dr. Sepp Janko who was a "leading personality" and a staunch Renewer. All those present at the meeting cast their votes for him and the VOMI ordered him to report to Berlin. There he was informed of the VOMI's slate of candidates for positions in the Folk Group. Parliamentary representatives were: Hamm, Trischler and Grassl. The leader of the SDKB was Sepp Janko. The Führer of Slovenia: Baron. The Führer of Croatia: Altgayer. The Führer of the Renewal Movement: Awender. But in effect, there would be a triumvirate who would be in charge: Hamm, Janko and Trischler. But the plan was never put into effect because of the swiftly changing situation in Yugoslavia. Yet, Janko ended up at the top as planned. To all intents and purposes the organization was bankrupt. The membership of the SDKB had always remained small during the 1930's and the dues barely covered the costs of the organization. But by November 15, 1940 almost the entire Danube Swabian minority had become members through a vast publicity campaign spearheaded by Joseph Beer and raised 3,000.000 Dinar in one year.

The outbreak of World War Two had little effect on the Folk Group. On September 2, 1939 a partial military mobilization was ordered. Some Danube Swabians were called up and horses and wagons were requisitioned, especially if they were known members of the SDKB. Many of the reservists and recruits who were called into the army who were ethnic Germans were called: Hitler's swine. Germany was seen as the Arch-Enemy of Yugoslavia, and the land would become their cemetery if they dared to invade it. Most of the army officers were very critical of the government's pro-German foreign policy and the demise of the Small Entente. There were however 450 officers in the armed forces who were ethnic Germans.

But the speech of Adolph Hitler on October 6, 1939 caused a great stir and deep concern to the leadership and membership of the SDKB. He called for the re-settlement of the ethnic Germans in the Diaspora back home to the Reich. There was great upset and confusion. No one had a desire to leave "home". The Yugoslavian government also asked for clarification as to how and when this would take place. There were only evasions and no answers forthcoming. By October 28, 1939 Berlin had no alternative than to respond and did through the German ambassador who reported: "The re-settlement to Germany of the German Folk Group in Yugoslavia is not actually planned at the present time."

Meanwhile the Croatian Nationalists gained new concessions and a degree of autonomy from the central government in Belgrade, which was dominated by the Serbians. In short order, Bosnia was also seeking autonomy. Slavonia was now made into a separate jurisdiction and Croatia was making a play for parts of the Vojvodina, but there were also autonomy concerns on the part of the people living in the area.

Dr. Philip Popp, the bishop of the Lutheran Church in Yugoslavia who served the congregation in Agram was appointed to the Croatian senate in March of 1940. Some of the concerns he brought to the government's attention were the school issue, the use of the German spelling of family names, rescinding the law that forbade the purchase of land by the ethnic Germans. He was successful in that in 1940/1941 session of parliament, a private German Lutheran school was opened in Agram.

Fears with regard to a "fifth column" continued to plague the country at the instigation of military men. From their perspectives all ethnic Germans were spies. All suspicious persons should be arrested. The Western Powers appeared to be behind it and supported the spread of leaflets to scare both populations. During May and June of 1940 ethnic Germans were arrested in Sirmien and Slavonia and charged with being spies and guilty of espionage. On June 6, 1940, Ludwig Ritz, a close fellow worker with Altgayer was arrested and taken to the feared Glavna Jaka prison in Belgrade where he was badly tortured but he did not incriminate himself in any way and was later set free after a long well publicized trial.

After the fall of France, Yugoslavia was having a nervous breakdown of its own. It began to assess its relationships with its neighbors and re-established diplomatic relations with the USSR on June 24, 1940 and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia came out of the woodwork. The borders to the north and west were strengthened in fear of an Italian/German alliance. Men aged 40 to 50 years of age were called up to do the defensive preparation and again also included ethnic Germans. These men were not given uniforms nor did they receive rations or shelter. Nor did their families receive any support while they were in the armed forces.

On June 28, 1940 Russia occupied Bessarabia and the northern Bukovina. As a result of an agreement with the Reich, Russia allowed the emigration of the ethnic German populations for re-settlement to Germany. The Folk Group in Yugoslavia took on the task to build a transit camp at Prahovo and Semlin and provided provisions and assistance to the 140,000 ethnic German émigrés. Semlin could accommodate 10,000 at a time, and Prahovo some 5,000 persons. Thousands of young people were involved in setting up the camps over a period of four months. In Agram and Urplje in Croatia aid stations were set up by German girls and women from Slavonia, Croatia and Slovenia at train stations to serve warm meals and refreshments to the people in transit to Germany. The costs were over 2,000,000 Dinars.

As a result of the Vienna Accords of August 30, 1940 Hungary regained some of its former territory lost to Romania and fear reigned in the Vojvodina as the local Hungarian population agitated for a return to Hungary and the Serbs were convinced that the ethnic Germans would support them. By the fall of 1940 political and foreign developments were drawing Yugoslavia ever closer to possible conflict with Germany fueled by the Serbian nationalist circles which became more and more vitriolic in terms of their mistrust of the ethnic German population that led to quarrels, confrontations and on occasions physical mob violence. During one such melee in Beschka, Peter Deringer a well-known member of the SDKB was shot and killed by a Serb in November 1940.

The highest military authorities began to plan measures to take along with the local authorities in the case that war would break out. In all communities with an ethnic German population a list of names of the most prominent and important members of the SDKB were to be prepared by the local officials and these individuals would be immediately arrested and taken as hostages. This would not be true

of the other minorities and their leaders. It was the task of the Secret Police to keep their eye on the ethnic German leadership. The implications for the ethnic Germans should war break out were threatening to say the least. Appeals to the German ambassador were of little value nor was he sympathetic to their concerns.

Sepp Janko who was ill at the time when the question of what would happen to the leadership of the ethnic Germans should war break out, sent Fritz Metzger in December 1940 to the VOMI and asked for weapons to protect the leadership. The ethnic German population was unarmed except for hunting rifles. Because the Reich was still working with the Yugoslavian government in hopes of establishing a military pact, the idea of arming the ethnic Germans was out of the question. There were all kinds of rumors and stories of arms and ammunition being shipped down the Danube to Werbass and buried there in the cemetery. All of the stories were eventually proven false as late as 1963.

But there is also another question that is played up in some circles of whether or not ethnic German men left Yugoslavia and volunteered to serve in the Waffen-SS. The first volunteers from among the ethnic German men who served in the German forces were those who had gone to seek work in Germany prior to the war and had remained there. Their numbers were not large. Some hundreds of younger men accompanied the ethnic Germans from Bessarabia who journeyed from Semlin to the Reich. Janko and the others were not prepared to consider a voluntary recruitment program at this time because of the complications involved. Later when such recruitments took place and parents became aware of what was afoot they raised such a rumpus that Janko had to high tail it to Austria and tried to talk the boys into coming home and they were released in order to do so. This involved about two hundred such volunteers.

The Waffen-SS was in search of recruits for the war effort and sought "volunteers" from among the ethnic Germans throughout Eastern Europe. Under the orders of the Folk Group leadership, Gustav Halwax was sent on a mission to the Reich where he volunteered to serve in the Waffen-SS and saw service on the Western Front. In December 1940 he returned to Neusatz. At this time, Janko was apparently sick, or at least he later claimed to be, and Metzger took over for him. Halwax met with his old comrades from the Renewal Movement to win them over to his plan to carry out VOMI policy and goals because Berlin was not happy with Janko's independent "politics". Metzger and his cronies had the VOMI recall Halwax to Germany where he could do less damage to the ethnic German cause.

In spite of what the SDKB leadership was saying, on January 24, 1941 the VOMI in writing to the Foreign Office indicated that Heinrich Himmler had announced the arrival of 200 Waffen-SS volunteers from Yugoslavia, 500 from Hungary and 500 from Romania. The VOMI planned for a mustering and recruitment of ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia and sent Dr. Hans Huber, the official physician of the SS to be in charge. He would travel around in sport's circles offering his services and examining the young men without the men being aware that he was actually mustering them for the SS. They would participate in sport's events in Germany and then later return home. In March 1941 Halwax reappeared at Neusatz sent under the auspices of the VOMI. The plan was now to convert all of the youth organizations into Sports Clubs and received the approval and endorsement of the German ambassador.

All of this took place two to three weeks before the military uprising in Belgrade and the outbreak of the war and these Sport Clubs could not be put into effect as a recruitment tool of the VOMI.

These sport's fraternities were not to be confused with the Deutsche Mannschaft (German Men's Fellowship). Its origins were within the SDKB in the early summer of 1939. These groups were established for men beyond the parameters of the youth organization and had their beginnings in Apatin, Lazarfeld and India and then spread. They were also involved in assisting in the resettlement of the ethnic Germans from Bessarabia at Semlin and Prahovo. They were characterized as para-

military organizations, but very often that was only window dressing for their real purpose that was defensive in nature.

Yugoslavia maintained its neutrality in the first phase of the Second World War. The USSR was on the move in the Balkans with the occupation of Bessarabia and Bukovina in June 1940 and German interests lay in Romania as a source for wheat and oil. From the perspective of the Yugoslavian government the British were not reliable allies and the Italians were massing troops on the frontier of western Yugoslavia. By October 4, 1940 German troops were stationed in Romania to help keep the peace with Hungary and as a buffer against any moves made by the USSR.

December 27, 1940 saw the signing of the Axis Pact between Germany, Italy and Japan to keep the Western Allies and Russia off balance. Molotov visited Berlin and saw German policy as threatening to the interests of the USSR and demanded to have a free hand in the Balkans...Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece. As a result Hitler saw that war with the USSR was inevitable.

The Italians launched an invasion of Greece on October 29th, 1940 that ground to a halt through British intervention and Italian stupidity. The British could now bomb the oil fields in Romania so Germany had to act to secure the situation. The Axis Pact was signed by Hungary on November 20, 1940, followed by Romania on November 23rd and Slovakia on the 24th. Bulgaria hesitated, afraid of the Soviet response, but joined the Pact on March 1, 1941.

In a letter to Mussolini on November 20th, Hitler indicated that they needed Yugoslavia to secure the oil fields in Romania and that efforts had to be undertaken to entice the Yugoslavians to join the Axis. Meanwhile, the British and Americans tried to win Yugoslavia to their side. The British went so far as to supply weapons and armaments. Negotiations and meetings were undertaken and finally Germany asked for an answer on March 25, 1941.

The Royal Council of the king of Yugoslavia voted to sign the Axis Pact on March 24, 1941 because of the pressures coming from all kinds of directions. Two ministers of the Council voted against it and resigned from the government. The Pact was signed in Eugene of Savoy's Bevedere Palace in Vienna on March 25th. But a military coup took place in Belgrade on March 27th and installed a new king. Riots and demonstrations broke out in Serbian and Slovenian areas. "Better War Than This Pact," was the rallying cry and slogan. The German ambassador was publicly insulted at the coronation of the new king: Peter II.

The new regime was not ready to ratify the Pact and sought other options and considered an immediate mobilization that was suggested by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch, Gavriilo Dozic in order to gain some time. Berlin was also trying to read the signals coming out of Belgrade. On the 27th of March, Hitler indicated that if the new government would refuse to follow the terms of the signed agreement they would be considered enemies and they would be stamped off of the map of Europe.

The leader of the coup, Simovic sought to use the leadership of the Folk Group as intermediaries with the Reich government. On April 1, 1941 he had discussions with the leaders of the Belgrade District of the SDKB, Christian Brücker and Hans Moser. He told them that he wanted to hinder a war with Germany and to break off relationships with the British and the Americans. It was the wish of his government to enter into talks with the Reich government. He also wanted to meet with the Führer of the Folk Group, Sepp Janko as well as Hamm the parliamentary representative to speak on his behalf to the German Foreign Office and other German functionaries. He was personally prepared to go to Berlin to pursue such discussions.

Following the coup and the coronation of Peter II, Janko had sent a telegram on behalf of the Folk Group with a pledge of loyalty to the new regime and indicated to Simovic of his readiness to work

and co-operate with the new government. But on the same day he was invited to meet with Simovic he was asked to meet with the police chief in Neusatz to discuss matters related to the leadership of the SDKB. On that day, March 28, 1941 he was taken into "protective custody" in Gross Betscherek and taken to the Neusatz police station and prison. On the following day he was taken to Simovic and he was to speak to the German embassy to arrange for communication with the Reich government, because Yugoslavia was not prepared to go to war. The message that Janko received from Berlin was, "Keep negotiating, but promise nothing!" That was a way of saying that it would be war. Simovic wanted Janko to speak over the radio indicating that Yugoslavia's foreign policy would not be negative towards the Axis Powers and that the Danube Swabian minority was not being mistreated in any way in spite of propaganda reports on Austrian radio from Graz. Janko pleaded that he was such a man of conscience that he could not do what he had been asked, after all he himself had been arrested and jailed at Simovic's orders.

In his third meeting with Simovic, Janko refused to speak over the radio but suggested that he would accompany a government official to Berlin to begin talks. Agreement was reached and the flight would leave on April 6th or 7th. Simovic wanted to meet with his cabinet first. He had already sent a mission to Moscow, which tried to arrange a military alliance with the USSR, but the Russians were only prepared to sign a "Friendship Pact", with some "nice" words from Stalin:

"We are brothers of the same blood and same religion (?). There is nothing to divide our two nations. I hope your army will hold back the German army for as long as possible. You have mountains and forests, where tanks are useless. Organize a guerilla war."

The issues of the safety and security of the ethnic German minority in Yugoslavia was not lost on Berlin, the Foreign Office or the VOMI. A telegram was sent to the German ambassador in Budapest from the Foreign Office, signed Weizsäcker:

"For your personal information, I inform you that the VOMI has received the following instructions: The German Folk Group in Yugoslavia is in danger of being called up to serve in the Yugoslavian armed forces, and in order to escape that they will be encouraged to cross the border into Hungary on their way to Germany. Please convey to your Hungarian counterparts to permit the fleeing Danube Swabians to freely cross the borders of Hungary and allowed to go on unhindered to Germany."

Other telegrams were sent to Rome and Bucharest, asking for the same kind of assistance to the "refugees".

There is no evidence that such a call for flight on the part of the ethnic German minority was ever issued. Janko is quick to point out that Hitler's so-called order for the ethnic Germans to refuse to comply with their call up into the Yugoslavian army on March 28, 1941 was never received by the SDKB leadership. Very few failed to respond to their call-ups into the military. **(Translator's note:** From my own personal perspective it is interesting to note that the concern of the VOMI and the SDKB leadership was not the danger facing the ethnic German population, meaning the women and children and the elderly, but only the men of military age. The rest of the population apparently was expendable as would prove to be the case in the holocaust that followed.

The Collapse of Yugoslavia

Following the coup of March 27, 1941 the ethnic German population became restless and afraid. In Syrmien the local ethnic German populations were confronted by demonstrations by Serbian Nationalists hostile to Germany and advocating war against the Reich. The Danube Swabians held

back in order not to cause any reprisals against them. To a great degree they remained in their houses awaiting the outcome of the developments that were taking place, realizing that not much good news awaited them. But the Croatian and Serbian populations were just as upset and uncertain about what was happening in Belgrade or the streets of their own communities and the "unknown elements" that might be on the prowl. In some villages with mixed populations, each group depended upon the support of the other to defend them from army forces as they had done during the First World War.

Right after the coup in Belgrade, those settlements with a large majority of ethnic Germans were occupied by Tschetniks (Serbian Army), which guarded all public buildings and installations and kept the population off the streets and in their homes. The Danube Swabian community later paid for this protection. The call up and mobilization of men for the Yugoslavian Army was publicly announced in all communities on April 1, 1941, but all ethnic German men had been called up two or three days earlier. Along with the mobilization there was the requisition of food and supplies, horses and wagons. In some cases this involved shooting and violence.

There is no official record of the numbers of ethnic Germans mustered into the army, or how many failed to report for service. In each community, it was a different story, the only consistency was what was true of one nationality was also true of the others. According to the information contained in the various Heimatbücher, most of the ethnic Germans reported to the Army. The vast majority of them were assigned to duty in remote areas of Bosnia, Macedonia, southern Serbia and Herzegovina.

At 5:30 pm on April 6th, 1941, the Reich government announced that the German Army had invaded Greece and Yugoslavia during the night. To this day we have no idea of how many ethnic Germans fell in this war against the German Army. Numbers are usually not given in the Heimatbücher either, and those that list any names indicate that they were murdered by Yugoslavian troops, usually by men from their own units. The war lasted only two weeks and the losses suffered by the Yugoslavian Army were not very high since the campaign was short. That was also true of the ethnic Germans serving in their armed forces.

As soon as the war broke out the police confiscated all weapons in the possession of the ethnic Germans, mostly hunting rifles and in addition they also took all radios. The prepared lists of leading ethnic Germans were used to arrest them as hostages in Syrmien. In Belgrade and Semlin all ethnic German men were arrested (even an 80 year old man). In Syrmien the total number of hostages numbered about four hundred. The dungeons of the fortress of Peterwardein were filled to overflowing so that those from Syrmien were kept in their own regions. They were released within a few days as the German Army moved quickly into Syrmien and the Yugoslavian troops fled from the area.

Talk of a "fifth column" at work to explain the rapid victory of the German Army really does not hold any water in terms of historical fact, nor does the use of the Deutsche Mannschaft units doing rearguard action. All of that is the figment of the imagination of the retreating Serbs. Many of the Yugoslav troops deserted and wore civilian clothes and headed for home.

A day after the invasion began the news spread that all of Yugoslavia was disintegrating. On April 10, 1941 Slavko Kvaternik declared the independent state of Croatia in Agram and the Hungarians who had not participated in the fighting were already moving in to occupy the Batschka and the Lower Baranya. Along with the retreating Yugoslavian Army fled the authorities and local officials along with the police forces leaving anarchy behind them.

By Easter of 1941, a week after the beginning of the Yugoslavian campaign all of the larger settlement areas of the ethnic Germans in Croatia, Slavonia and Syrmien were in the hands of

German troops that were welcomed by the inhabitants, in Schutzberg in Bosnia as the German troops arrived the villagers stood on the streets and sang, "Now Thank We All Our God."

The Folk Group Organizations

With the foundation of Swabian German Cultural Union (SDKB) in June 1920 in Neusatz, there were representatives from ten Sarmien and two Bosnian communities in attendance. Slavonia was the only area of German settlement that was not represented. The vast majority of members came from the Batschka, Banat and Sarmien. The twenty member governing Council included four from Sarmien, Dr. Viktor Waidl (India), Prof. Josef Taubel (Putinici), Franz Mathies (Semlin) and Jakob Kettenbach the Lutheran pastor in Neudorf.

By 1924 there were 128 community groups within the membership of the SDKB and 12 of the communities were located in Sarmien: Semlin, India, Calma, Bezanjija, Erdewik, Neu Pasua, Surcin, Drenovic, Racinovci, Kertschedin, Beska and Mitrowitz. The SDKB, however, was banned on April 23, 1924 by the Nationalist government because it was perceived to be a political motivated organization. All of the local groups went out of existence and their assets were turned over to the community authorities, but that was not the case in India, which continued to carry out some of its programs. But as the political situation changed by 1927 because of the numerous changes in government the SDKB was reconstituted and new local groups were permitted in Bosnia and Slavonia. The head of the new organization was Johann Keks from the Banat and the governing Council was increased to thirty members including five representatives from Croatia-Slavonia and one from Bosnia. The financial situation of the organization was desperate due to previous government action and interference. In response to appeals to Germany for financial support to assist the "threatened" German communities in Sarmien, Slavonia, Bosnia and Slovenia resulted in the receipt of 6,000 Reich Marks from the VDA (Verein Die Deutschen in Ausland) (Organization for the Germans in Foreign Lands) and 3,000 Reich Marks from the German Foreign Ministry in 1927. This sum would be donated annually by both German government agencies.

With the coming of the Dictatorship in 1929, the SDKB had to change its constitution to avoid any activity that could be termed political. By the end of 1937 there were ninety-one communities in Croatia-Slavonia that were within the membership of the SDKB. (Hrastovac joined on April 5, 1936, and Kapetanovo on February 22, 1936.) There were also eight communities in Bosnia. By 1941 all of the communities had a local group and carried out the program of the SDKB.

The conflict created by Awender and the Renewal Movement had little or no effect in these regions with the exception of Ruma, where it attracted the attention of a lot of the younger sports federations. But it did not lead to the kinds of confrontations that were taking place in other parts of the country.

Despite that, the Renewal Movement would play a major role in the political situation that would emerge in Slavonia. Unlike the Banat and the Batschka that were heavily populated by Danube Swabians and were not threatened with assimilation, Slavonia and Bosnia were sparsely settled by ethnic German populations and in most cases were assimilating with the Croatian population, and losing their identity much like the Danube Swabians in Hungary who were undergoing strenuous efforts to Magyarize them within the next generation.

In 1924, Viktor Wagner under the auspices of the VDA in Berlin visited the area and in his report on his return indicated, "In the many conversations I discovered that these ethnic Germans are absolutely without any leadership. Each one of the farmers told me, "We are ethnic Germans and have always been ethnic Germans and want to remain ethnic Germans, but how can we remain

ethnic Germans when nothing is done to help us.” The German consul in Agram in 1928 wrote about the situation in the following terms: “The number of ethnic Germans in Slavonia is not inconsiderable (I would estimate at least 60,000 persons) but because this region is so far unlike the Batschka and its large Danube Swabian population in closed settlements and communities, these are scattered and in mixed communities and their survival is threatened, it is only the Protestant clergy who encourage and support their flocks in their continued use of their language, while the Roman Catholic priests are totally opposed, all of whom come from Croatian Nationalist circles and work with great zeal to make Croats out of their parishioners.”

In 1934 during the period when large numbers of local organizations were being founded in the communities of Slavonia, one of its own, Branimir Altgayer played a leading role and in December 1934 he was elected to the governing Council of the SDKB but became part of the opposition against expelling Awender and the Renewers from the group. Following their expulsion from the SDKB all local groups were told to distance themselves from Awender and his friends, but the local organizations in Esseg and Georgshof refused to do so citing their constitutional freedom to do so. In December 1935 the two groups were both ordered to disband and quickly on the heels of that action an additional eighteen local organizations in Slavonia followed the lead of the two others and together they formed the KWVD (Cultural and Hiking Society of the Donau Schwaben). The government limited their activities to Slavonia and Baranya for they were quite content to see a weakening of the SDKB, while Altgayer fell under the sway of Awender and his deputy Josef Beer and took his orders from him.

Following their constituting convention that was attended by over six hundred participants of whom two hundred and fifty were from Esseg and its surroundings, Altgayer was given the assignment to recruit the farmers, trades people and labourers to the movement. In the next two years, eighty-two local community chapters of the KWVD were organized in Slavonia. (Hrastovac July 12, 1936 but in Kapetanovo they were unsuccessful.) Communities in which the number of ethnic Germans was miniscule or a small portion of the population joined a group close by. That was true of Antunovac.

The relationships between the two rival organizations were hostile to say the least for the next two years before the two organizations merged at a national level and the situation in the communities was volatile if both groups had a local organization. Friends, relatives and entire families were split. Usually the differences were generational. The union took place on October 30, 1938 when the KWVD joined the SDKB collectively. As part of the union agreement Altgayer became the head of the SDKB in Slavonia, while Sirmien and Bosnia was under the leadership of Sepp Redinger one of the youth leaders of the SDKB. Lichtenberger became head of the Youth organization and Josef Beer became the administrator of the SDKB. And with the retirement of Keks from the presidency of the organization, Sepp Janko was elected to head the SDKB. But this defacto take-over by the Renewers took place in the midst of very difficult times for the organization. The organization was mostly on paper. During the times of the quarrels and disputes many of the members had fallen away or had become cynical and distanced themselves from the activities of the organization. The financial situation above all was a total mess. This situation to a great extent continued until the defeat and break-up of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1941.

The German Reich and Its Policy With Regard to German Minorities “Outside” Its Territories

The VDA was the major organization in Germany that addressed itself to the linguistic and cultural identity of the German populations throughout Eastern Europe. In their minds, the destiny of these populations was directly related to the destiny of the German State. The VDA experienced a surge of

support for its work and mandate and concerns in the mid 1920s. New organizations also emerged in Germany in support of similar goals, especially in the cities.

The Foreign Office co-operated and worked with the DVA. National Folk Groups made contact with the DVA through the German ambassadors stationed in their countries. Between 1930-1932 the efforts of the DVA were curtailed due to a lack of funds during the Depression. But in the late 1920s groups formed within the framework and administration of the DVA that espoused political goals for the organization. With the takeover by the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazis) in 1933, the DVA was a natural tool to be used to further Hitler's policies of whatever was best for the German Reich, or at least as he perceived it. The DVA, in effect, was absorbed into the Nazi government structure. Hitler placed the leadership and the issues related to the "outside" Germans in the hands of Rudolph Hess. He and his staff had total responsibility for this area of activity. The Gustav Adolphus Society of the Lutheran Church that also worked with the German Diaspora abroad fought to maintain its autonomy but was hampered by constant surveillance, interference and restrictions.

The DVA formed a Volksdeutsche Rat (Folk German Council), whose aim was to centralize the Nazi concerns and objectives of the new leadership: that although the Volksdeutsche were not citizens of the Reich they were participants in its national destiny and belonged to the same People and Blood. (Translator's note: it is very difficult to convey the meaning of Volk, which means folk, but it has racial overtones and is all part of the Nazi myth of people, blood, race and superiority.) To indicate its importance in the plans of the Third Reich its budget was increased from 3,000,000 Reich Marks in 1933 to 7,000,000 in 1934. But the VDA found itself in opposition with the Hitler Jugend (Youth) and the Ausland Organization (Foreign Organization) whose jurisdictions and goals were often at cross-purposes with them.

The Folk Groups, in various countries, were only too well aware of the internal conflicts of the Reich ministries and that often the ambassadors either favoured or opposed the work of the DVA. Hess eventually asked Himmler for help and that led to the establishment of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Folk German Governing Office) the so-called VOMI. SS Gruppenführer Werner Lorenz, an SS Police General was placed at its head, even though he had no experience or interest in the Volksdeutsche "Question" as it was known in Nazi circles. Some of the leaders within the DVA were afraid of a takeover by the SS. On July 2, 1938 Hitler in effect handed the DVA over to the VOMI.

The Folk Groups throughout Eastern Europe could not deal with the government of the Reich without incurring difficulties with the government of their own country to whom they owed their loyalty. The DVA, compared to the VOMI was a safer contact, and the officials were less obnoxious. The VOMI now also worked hand in hand with the Foreign Office and its foreign policy. With the outbreak of the war the task of the VOMI was to build up the Folk groups in the various nations and nurture them in the Nazi world-view and enlist them to the cause of the Third Reich.

The Relationship of the Churches with the German Folk Group

Episcopal boundaries were also redrawn after the Treaty of Trianon in 1919, that led to the dismemberment of Hungary and the Danube Swabian Roman Catholics in the Batschka who numbered 165,000 and the 140,000 in the Banat were placed in new jurisdictions but none of the leadership positions were held by Danube Swabian priests. In most cases the priests had been trained in Hungarian institutions and were often the vanguard of assimilation, and yet most of them had a command of the German language. There would be some leading Roman Catholic clergy involved in the formation of local SDKB in their communities. But such support by the priests was

frowned upon by their Bishop, Lajco Budanovic and was brought to their attention and could result in a move to a different parish.

There were approximately 125,000 Danube Swabian Roman Catholics in Syrmien, Slavonia, Croatia and Bosnia and found themselves in the diocese of Bishop Aksamovci who was an ardent Yugoslavian Nationalist. Because their numbers were larger in Syrmien there were constant issues raised around the use of the German language in worship and in the schools. They would always be informed that only those language rights that existed in the past could be continued and nothing new could be undertaken. The vast majority of the clergy were advocates of "Croatian only." The Roman Catholics looked with envy at their Lutheran neighbours who maintained the German character of their worship and the German instruction that took place in their schools, along with their church libraries and publications from the Gustav Adolphus Society in Germany.

In Slavonia the number of German speaking priests could be counted on the fingers of one hand and the episcopate was not prepared to accede to the wishes of their German-speaking parishioners. Meanwhile the Lutheran pastors were preaching and teaching in German in their churches in those areas where German was forbidden to be taught in the Roman Catholic schools.

It was only in 1930 after the SDKB made a breakthrough in recruiting members in West Syrmien and Slavonia that petitions circulated and were sent to the bishop in Djakovo requesting linguistic changes in church and school. This is what they requested.

The Gospel is to be read in German on Sundays and Feast Days.

Once a month Mass to be celebrated with German hymns and sermon.

Religious instruction for children to be conducted in German.

The use of German when Latin is not required in the reception of the sacrament.

Confession can be made in German.

Permission to pray the Lord's Prayer in German at the graveside of German Catholics.

In Berak, where 70% of the population were ethnic German and paid the vast majority of the expenses of the parish the Bishop replied:

"Certainly you Danube Swabians are the majority of the church members, that is why you also pay the majority of the costs of the parish. But you must never forget that you live in Croatia where Croatian is spoken. You want to make Croatia part of Greater Germany and that cannot and will not happen. I tell you, so long as one Croatian household remains in Berak, you will not be allowed to have German services."

They tried again in May 1938 and the Bishop sought the support of the government which only created unrest in the countryside and this time his response was: "because of national considerations and the lack of German speaking priests I have to decline your requests." (The last quoted statement was actually a lie.) When the German Bishop's Conference was informed, Bishop William Berning of Osnabrück and also one of the "outside" Germans, indicated he would send priests to meet the needs of parishes in Yugoslavia, but none of the bishops requested any. In the bishopric of Agram, this was also true in spite of the fact that the bishop was Ante Bauer...a fanatic Croatian.

As early as 1924 there had been attempts to get permission to establish a Roman Catholic and Lutheran seminary in the Vojvodina. The request was denied. Even the German ambassador spoke to the papal nuncio who pointed out it was too late to begin such work since the vast majority of the population was totally assimilated.

When it came to the Lutherans and Reformed both churches had different jurisdictions and relationships prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. They had to use considerable energy and resources to restructure themselves into a “national” church. To their advantage, the Serbs were the majority in the new state and in “in charge”. Relations between Protestants and Orthodox were always good unlike their relationships with the Roman Catholics.

The Protestants were of various nationalities. The Lutherans were Danube Swabians, Slovak, Magyar and Slovenes, while the Reformed were Magyars and Danube Swabians. Even before 1918 there had been a “national” struggle among the Lutherans in Croatia-Slavonia. But by 1920 at Neudorf the national church was established with two Seniorats, each with a bishop of its own nationality. In effect there were two Church Districts: one was Slovak, and the other “Evangelical”. This second District consisted of 100,000 ethnic Germans, 18,000 Slovenes and 5,000 Magyars. The first president of this District was Adolf Wagner who was succeeded on his death by Dr. Philip Popp, pastor at Agram.

All these church structures had to be ratified by the government. In 1926 at Neu Werbass, Philip Popp was elected bishop and the following Seniorats were formed: Banat, Batschka, Croatia-Slavonia, Upper Croatia, Slovenia, Belgrade and Bosnia.

The Reformed Church was divided into four Seniorats: East, Western, Northern and Southern. The Southern Seniorat was made up German speaking congregations and the other three were Magyar in membership.

The Protestants used German as the language of worship and education and administratively, but governmentally and officially used the Serbo-Croatian language. The Slovenes and Magyars followed the same pattern in the use of their own languages. Most pastors were trained in Germany and Austria and were the key representatives of the Danube Swabian communities. Both churches received support from Germany and Switzerland, but chiefly from the Gustav Adolph Society.

The Further Development of the Folk Group Organization

With the occupation and the partition of Yugoslavia, Dr. Sepp Janko sent off his agents to their new spheres of influence on “his behalf” as he put it. These were really rather grandiose pretensions on his part. There was no longer a Yugoslavia. Croatia had declared its independence under the Ustaschi Facists. The Lower Baranya and the Batschka had been annexed by Hungary, and the German Military governed the Banat. Janko maintained his pretensions of “Führership” in the Banat. He sent Branimir Altgayer to represent him in Croatia, Josef Meier in Slavonia and Sepp Redinger in Srymien and Bosnia. After establishing themselves in their respective regions the group met in Esseg on April 13, 1941 a few days after the war ended. Each one of them informed their provisional government that he was the Führer of the Folk Group in their territory. Altgayer indicated that he had the assurance of Pavelic, the Ustascha leader, that all of the rights and privileges of the ethnic German minority in Croatia would be honoured and guaranteed by law as soon as possible. It actually occurred on April 15, 1941. On April 21st, his two other cronies, Meier and Redinger, were to be warmly embraced by Pavelic in Agram. Pavelic later indicated that the two of them argued

between themselves about their powers and jurisdictions and he suggested that they go and see the German ambassador to work things out.

Altgayer went off to the VOMI in Berlin and got official sanction for his Führership. He was informed that Meier and Redinger would be re-settled in Germany because of the embarrassment they had caused with Pavelic. Altgayer was more than happy to be rid of Meier but wanted to retain the services of Redinger. Eventually both were demoted, but allowed to remain. One of the issues for Altgayer in establishing his Nazi fiefdom was the jurisdiction of eastern Syrmien. Would it become part of "Greater Croatia" or not? The people actually liked their current independent status and being occupied by German troops and had already been in close contact with the Folk Group "boss" in the Banat--Sepp Janko. Himmler actually visited in the area as the local leaders of the Folk Group sought to stay out of the hands of the Croats. The German military also had designs on the area, while the government in Agram had already begun establishing the military and civilian government they had in mind for all of Syrmien.

But Hitler stepped in and his decision was that all of Syrmien would revert back to Croatia as it had before 1918. Pavelic and his henchmen made all of the right noises about the ethnic German minority and the rights of the Folk Group organization as they had promised Herr Hitler.

Altgayer established headquarters for the leadership of the Folk Group in Esseg in close contact with the VOMI. But the German ambassador wanted him in Agram where the government was located. And now the Folk Group became the DVK (Deutsche Volkstgruppe in Kroatien) (German Folk Group in Croatia). The first task was to put all of the little Führers in place: men's, women's, youth. Five districts were set up with their own little Führers too. But all was not well in terms of relationships with the Croatian government and resistance against some of the goals and objectives of the DVK. They saw the Croats as their enemies even though Nazism and the Ustaschi were heading in the same direction. The message of Pavelic was becoming loud and clear, there was no room for anyone except Croats in Croatia and no other ethnic group would be accepted. That was not only directed against the ethnic German minority but also the Serbian population. Pavelic's feathers had been ruffled when the Germans allowed the Italians to occupy Dalmatia. There was no smooth sailing ahead.

It was the Serbian question that first took center stage. Along with the Moslems, the Serbs made up half of the population. The Serbian population looked to the Danube Swabian population to protect them from the German military, and also the Croatian government. The Ustaschi units of Pavelic were the enemies of the Serbs in every way. Their teacher from the past, Starcevic had taught them that there were no Serbs in Croatia; they were actually Croats who through the past centuries when the Turks occupied all of Croatia, Slavonia and Bosnia had been forced in one way or another to convert to the Greek Orthodox Church. The Serbs had to disappear from Croatia, if Croatia was to be for the Croats. That left them with three alternatives for dealing with the Serbs: expulsion, forced conversion and assimilation or extermination. The last alternative of course their propagandists were quick to say was only theoretical, it was not really thinkable. The plan for expulsion created other problems. Would the Danube Swabians accept refugees in their territory? The final solution was the mass conversion of the Serbian Orthodox population to Roman Catholicism and they would become "Croats again." Pavelic even gained the support of the higher clergy and the papacy for his plan. Beginning in the Fall of 1941 all officials were instructed to force the Serbian population to convert using whatever means that were necessary. In many cases Danube Swabian authorities refused to comply and ignored the order. There were countless cases of the local Swabian population protecting the Serbs or protesting against the actions taken against them. This led to quarrels and confrontations between Croatian police and the Danube Swabian populations. When the massive extermination program got underway for Serbs who refused to convert, the Lutheran bishop Philip Popp ordered all of his pastors to issue baptismal certificates to all

Serbs who asked for them, in order for them to save their lives and maintain their religious integrity. One third of the Serbian population would perish in this preview of the holocaust to come for the Danube Swabians.

Despite the disagreements, two representatives of the DVK were allowed to sit in the Sabor--- Altgayer and Gasteiger. The Ustaschi and the Danube Swabians in Syrmien were in constant if not perpetual conflict. Pavelic complained to the Reich about the activities and attitudes of the Danube Swabian population as well as the German occupation forces because they tolerated the Serbs and protected the Orthodox population and thereby made themselves enemies of Croatia. Even Tito's Partisan press acknowledged that and even commended Bishop Popp for his actions. Raids were carried out in several communities against the Danube Swabian authorities in which several men were killed. It was made to appear that their killings had been the work of the Partisans, when in fact they were actually carried out by the Ustaschi. In every sense of the word, the Ustaschi and the Roman Catholic Church drove the Serbians into the waiting arms of the Communist Partisans.

Re-settlement and Emigration

From the beginning of the Partisan War in the summer of 1941 it was clear that the Danube Swabian communities in Bosnia were in constant danger and could not be protected. Some had already been re-settled in the area around India in Syrmien. As matters got worse in Bosnia others were re-settled in Syrmien as well. Other communities were occupied or surrounded by Partisans while those who lived in the isolated communities sought refuge in the larger settlements. There was the recognition that they had to move and farmers as well as artisans and skilled workers and their families chose to leave for Germany. It goes without saying that there were countless Danube Swabians who lost their lives at the hands of the Partisans.

It was obvious that the ethnic German settlers had to leave Bosnia and Himmler wanted to carry out the transfer as quickly as possible. If he had his way the entire Danube Swabian population in Bosnia would be re-settled in Germany in August 1942. The local leaders were afraid to oppose the VOMI and they did not want to have to deal with the Croats. On September 30, 1942 an agreement was signed between the Reich and Croatian government to re-settle all of the Danube Swabians south of the Sava River with four exceptions and all of those north of the river. By November 13, 1942 the re-settlement of the Bosnia ethnic Germans was completed and 18,360 persons were at a camp near Lodz in Poland while others were scattered across the Reich. They were to be placed in the homes confiscated from their Polish owners who had been driven from the area. They were evacuated in the spring of 1944 to Alsace as the Eastern Front began to crumble. Himmler was not totally satisfied with the re-settlement of the Bosnia Danube Swabians. He saw himself as having the task of dealing with all the Folk Germans personally, within the Reich borders. His interests then turned to the re-settlement of the Croatian Danube Swabians.

Lorenz of the VOMI and his undersecretary in the Foreign Office, Martin Luther set in motion the plan to re-settle 150,000 ethnic Germans in Croatia, mostly in Slavonia and Syrmien. But uppermost in their minds was the recruitment of at least 5,000 volunteers for the Waffen-SS.

Such a re-settlement could have adverse psychological affects on the rest of the ethnic German populations in South-Eastern Europe. So that Ribbentrop and Hitler needed to discuss the matter. The DVK asked for re-consideration of the issue after the war because a re-settlement at this time would create a great wave of unrest among the Danube Swabian population.

The total re-settlement was officially shelved, but the Foreign Office indicated a partial re-settlement was necessary in certain areas, like Bosnia where there were still some Danube Swabians and western Slavonia by January of 1943. The re-settlement of the Bosnian ethnic Germans had a great

impact on the Danube Swabians in Hungary, and the Magyars as well as the Roman Catholic Church made capital out of it and won many to their point of view.

Western Slavonia's Danube Swabian communities were "young," scattered and small and very hard to defend against Partisan bands. Their economic value was also slight and a re-settlement would not be a major action. Because of transport needs and arrangements in Germany necessary for such a move it was more expedient to move them into nearby Syrmien. The VOMI was highly influenced in their decision by the Folk Group leaders with regard to this issue. It also had to be acceptable to the Croatian government that was totally opposed to a mass migration because of the effect on morale.

Things did not improve in Slavonia in 1943, Partisan attacks increased and casualties among the Swabians mounted. Murders and kidnappings became common. By the end of 1943 Berlin and the Folk Group leaders agreed that the communities in East Syrmien and between the Sava and Drava Rivers must be evacuated. The task to carry out the evacuation would be undertaken by special troops. They would have to contend with Partisan actions such as hostage taking and as a defence against army action in their area.

About 25,000 Danube Swabians from thirty communities were evacuated to more secure areas, but it made them look bad in the eyes of the Croats who demanded that they stay and help fight against the Partisans. Most of the evacuees were women and children and the elderly.

Here is a typical report of an isolated Swabians community, Cacinci:

"On October 2, 1943 the Partisans attacked the area from three sides. The battle lasted thirty hours. Because of the superior firepower of the Partisans and the lack of outside help, the brave defenders, the Croatian military and the ethnic German Home Guard suffered many casualties and had to give up the area. Two men and four women from among the Swabian population lost their lives. As the battle ended the Partisans began to plunder and to burn the Danube Swabian homes. Many Danube Swabian women and children were driven into the yard of the Brenner family, where for many hours they had to listen to a speech while their homes were broken into and robbed. Danube Swabian men, who had been unable to escape, hid themselves. Many of them were discovered and assembled together. They were questioned, interrogated and severely abused. Ten of them were taken away and three simply disappeared. Many soldiers and policemen were killed in a farmyard. The Danube Swabians left in the area now lived in terror and fear."

The VOMI was well aware of the situation. Croatian troops were not able to defend the refugees. They were unable to house and feed them and became more and more unfriendly to the Danube Swabian population.

On April 13, 1944 after hassles between the ambassador, the Foreign Office, the VOMI and Himmler, the order to evacuate the threatened Swabian population was given. On April 18, 1944 Lorenz sent a telegram to Esseg to this effect:

"The ethnic Germans in these areas are in danger day and night. The Croatian government is in no position to provide the necessary protection and therefore their evacuation is absolutely necessary."

By now some 1,500 men were missing or killed and the Partisans harassed Danube Swabians in the villages and let the Serbs and Croats alone. Danube Swabian families with men in the Waffen-SS were especially targeted and threatened and plundered.

The next phase of the evacuation was the removal of 8,000 refugees, who had fled their former communities, but they were unable to leave with the first transports because of a lack of military protection and over 6,000 of them were left behind.

The evacuations were begun again on December 18, 1943 that included 3,593 persons who had fled or been driven from their home communities. After this date a carefully planned evacuation took place in 49 villages of Slavonia including: Georgshof, Spisic-Bukovica, Djulaves, Borova, Cabuna, Suhopolje, Bacevac, Budanica, Pcelic, Kapan-Antonsdorf, Presac, Novaki, Lukatsch, Weretz, Vocin, Adolfsdorf, Ciglenik, Vaska, Budakovac, Ciganka, Neu-Bukowitz, Eralije, Drenovac, Johannesburg, Mikleus, Slatina, Jaksic, Rajsavac, Trestonovac, Kula-Josefsfeld, Porec-Josefsdorf, Kaptol, Vetovo, Grabic, Fericanci, Cacinci, Bankovci. Bidalvac. Cadkavacki Lug, Podravska Moslavina, Viljevo, Kucanci, Golinci, Pridvorje, Drenje, Mandicevac, Drenjski Slatnik, Babina Gora, Radosavci and Tominovac. In addition Obrez and Grabovci in Syrmien were also part of the evacuation of 16,613 persons. In all 20,206 persons left their homeland behind.

To assist in this massive action there were 184 soldiers and officers assigned, along with 14 nurses and 81 men from the labour forces to act as drivers. The trek also included 3,100 cows, 7,200 pigs, 260 sheep, and 3,800 horses in addition to household furniture, food and fodder. Those who decided to remain behind for the harvest would leave for Germany in the Fall of 1944.

The Military Situation

The military in the Reich was chiefly interested in the manpower resources of the Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans). In eastern Syrmien at India the Waffen-SS established a recruitment centre for volunteers during May and June of 1941. In effect it was call-up of certain age groups and those who would not serve voluntarily were released and sent back home.

In mid-July 1941 an officer of the Waffen-SS contacted the Führer of the Deutschemansschaft (The Men's Association of the SDKB) in the Banat, Michael Reiser and told him that his orders were to set up a regiment of Swabians from the Banat, Hungary and Croatia. Nothing came of this because the German ambassador in Belgrade opposed it.

August 6, 1941 Ribbentrop declared the same thing only now it was to be a larger formation consisting of men only from the Banat to fight Bolshevism. The question of military service for the Danube Swabians in Croatia was literally up for grabs. Consideration was given for ethnic German formations in the Croatian Army, but the question of language for use in command was a stickler. In the summer of 1941 the Foreign Office and the VOMI were in touch with the Croatian military but were unsuccessful in their attempts to win concessions and Altgayer played a leading role in the discussions. An agreement was reached September 16, 1941 in which it was stipulated that in terms of members of the DVK called up into the Croatian Army, ten per cent of every age group called up to do military service could chose to serve in the German armed forces and such service would be in fulfillment of their national service. All kinds of concessions and safeguards to maintain the German-ness of the conscripts in the Croatian Army were included in the agreement.

The military forces of the Croatian Army consisted of the regular army units and the Ustaschi brigades. Himmler needed more canon fodder after the disasters in Russia and was not content with his ten per cent of the take of the Danube Swabians of military age in Croatia. He especially detested those "pacifists among the Folk Germans who sat around at home." But the German ambassador in Agram did all he could to hinder the Swabians from joining the Waffen-SS. In order to avoid service in the second rate Croatian Army or serve with the fanatic Ustaschi, Swabians volunteered to serve in

the Prince Eugene Waffen-SS in place of the quota of ten per cent. Their families were also assured of support while they served.

By July 1942, Himmler was on the German ambassador's case with regard to the further recruitment for the Waffen-SS in Croatia. In August 1942 Himmler had pushed his agenda so that the Foreign Office capitulated and took his position of "open" recruitment of the Danube Swabians of Croatia. The Ambassador still stood in the way and pushed for the option that they could serve in the Croatian Army to avoid repercussions with the Ustaschi government.

As far as Hitler was concerned an evacuation of the German military anywhere was "defeatist" regardless of the situation and must be avoided at all costs. Finally on September 21, 1942 the German ambassador gave in and delivered a note to the Croatian government with these terms:

All able bodied Danube Swabian men in the Independent State of Croatia born between 1907 and 1925 would serve in the German Army or Waffen-SS and receive citizenship in the Reich for such service. Secondly, the Croatian state would recognize the rights and citizenship of the families of those serving in the German Armed Forces. The German government would provide the financial support of the families of the men who were recruited. Thirdly, the DVK leadership and a commission of the Waffen-SS would carry out the recruitment program.

This note was sent without the knowledge of the Foreign Office. All of the points were acceptable to the Croatian government with the addition of the care of the families of those men in the Wehrmacht as well as the Waffen-SS and the re-settlement of all such persons and their families to the Reich after the war was over. The agreement was dated October 10, 1942.

Mustering began on August 30, 1942 (even before the exchange of notes had taken place) and ended November 26, 1942. Other recruitment drives followed. The mustering was not carried out fully in Hrastovac because of a Partisan raid. In all, 27,357 reported of whom 20,760 were accepted into the military. Up until November 28, 1942 there were 31 transports of recruits to SS training camps in Germany in Breslau and Berlin, Auschwitz in Poland, Prague in the Czech Protectorate and Pantschowa in the Banat. On December 8, 1942 transport numbers 32 and 33 left. The Waffen-SS got between 6,000 and 7,000 men. Only about two per cent of the men failed to show up for the transports.

The arguments between Himmler at the VOMI and the Foreign Office continued and the ambassador in Agram never ceased to oppose the actions. Ribbentrop and Himmler fought again and again, while Altgayer waited in the wings to see which way the wind was blowing and what opportunities might present themselves for his benefit.

At the end of February 1943 the mustering of men born from 1908 to 1925 was begun. Some 5,000 to 6,000 men were selected for the Prince Eugene Division. Out of a population of 150,000 there were 25,800 men in the armed forces and of these 7,000 would end up killed in action or missing. Many of the deaths occurred in prisoner of war camps after the war. The Partisans in Unter Steiermark captured a large number of those in the Prince Eugene Division and ten days after the war's end many of them were murdered along with Reich troops and Croatians. The survivors were marched from Slovenia to the Romanian border to the mines at Bor. One third of them men died on the march. Tito's right hand man Milovan Djilas reports on all of this but had no idea of the numbers involved. It did not matter. They were enemies. Who would even care?

The German Settlements and the Partisan War

Syrmien with its thick forests was a natural hiding place for the Partisans. After June 21, 1941 small groups of Communist youth fled to the forests. Soon their acts of sabotage announced their presence.

The Danube Swabian population sympathized with the Serbian population and got into conflict with the Ustaschi and the Swabians were seen as a hindrance to their campaign against the Partisans. The Partisans called for an uprising in the spring of 1942.

Individual acts of murder and kidnapping of Danube Swabian farmers began and increased as more and more Serbs left to join the Partisan bands. Ustaschi units carried out atrocities against the Serbian population and the Danube Swabians in many places sought to protect them especially the women and children whenever possible. This was markedly so in Syrmien where Danube Swabians formed a majority of the population in some areas.

Partisan attacks began in Slavonia some time later. This was because the Serbian population in this area were a small minority. The attacks here were directed against the Danube Swabians, especially the small and scattered communities. First major attacks and raids began in the spring of 1942. Most of the attacks were to secure food and supplies.

The western areas of Slavonia had the next series of raids. Klein Bastaji was attacked March 15, 1942 and one Danube Swabian youth and a Croat were shot to death and several persons were kidnapped. On June 5th the Partisans returned. The Defence League with only a few weapons was unable to drive them off. Three Danube Swabian men died, fifteen were kidnapped, and of whom four were later able to escape. The community centre and the Lutheran prayer house defended by the pastor were both burned to the ground. The homes were plundered. Their cattle and livestock were driven away. A Ustaschi unit came to the village the same day, shot four Serbian men and one woman and drove the rest of the Serbian population to the nearby provincial capital of Daruvar. The Serbs were later freed, but no word was ever heard again of the men who had been kidnapped.

The raids reached a highpoint in 1943 despite German and Croatian Army operations against them in Syrmien. Murders, killings multiplied. Raids at battalion strength easily overran the defences of small villages and towns. The people of Hrastovac were encouraged to go to eastern Syrmien for re-settlement.

In 1944 the situation was better because all of the small and scattered groups of Swabians were in re-settled areas of population concentration that were easier to defend. In Syrmien recent campaigns against the Partisans had been successful and they had split up into smaller groups. By mid 1943 there had been a total of 267 deaths among the Danube Swabian population including men, women and children and the Home Defence Leagues in the villages had lost 356 dead and missing, mostly young teenage boys and elderly men. By January 13, 1944 the figures were 563 killed and 353 kidnapped and missing (both civilians and Home Defence League).

The Evacuation

With the capitulation of Romania in the summer of 1944 the Red Army was breaking into the Danubian plains and if Croatia fell, the Danube Swabians would be caught between the Ustaschi and the Partisans. Some of the Swabians still believed in a German victory, others turned to their Serbian and Croatian neighbours for support.

The plans for an evacuation were completed by September 1944. Everyone now claims to be responsible for it, trying to cast the best light on his or her actions. This was especially true of Altgayer and Gasteiger in their faulty recollections of the events that followed. Whatever the case may have been, it required the support of the Reich ministries. On September 11th it was Gasteiger who flew to Berlin to get the official seal of approval. He was denied access to all of the important personages at the VOMI. He then went to the Foreign Office and three hours later he was informed that the Folk Group in Croatia could be evacuated. When he returned to Agram and met with the other DVK leaders he had a hard time convincing them that he had received permission to proceed. On the morning of September 10, 1944 the German ambassador telegraphed the Foreign Office for instructions. Official word finally came on September 25, 1944 to proceed with the evacuation if the DVK leadership felt there was a danger and threat to the Danube Swabian population.

On October 3, 1944 the head of the evacuation, Kammerhofer, informed the leadership in Esseg that he had received orders for the evacuation to begin. The plan called for the evacuation of eastern Syrmien, to be followed later by western Syrmien. Because the evacuation plans were secret and the population was not prepared to leave, the notice to evacuate was so sudden that they had no time to pack and prepare their horses and wagons for the long trek ahead of them. The weather was cold and wet and rain would persist for the flight through Hungary and often they would spend their nights out in the open and the horses and wagons had great difficulty in the mountains of Austria and the heavy snowfall slowed down the long columns of refugees.

The first to leave were the people from Neu Slankamens. Without a warning of any kind, on the night of October 3rd and 4th a telephone call was made by the District DVK leadership in India informing the local authorities to immediately open certain secret orders in their possession and to carry out the instructions without question. The orders for evacuation were very specific and were to be carried out even if there was opposition on the part of the population. The trek was to leave on the morning of October 4th at 9:00 am. "Every family was allowed to take only one wagon. Farmers who possessed two or more wagons had to surrender them to families that had none. If there were still insufficient wagons, the German military stationed there could requisition wagons and horses from the Serbian inhabitants of the village." The wagon trek left Semlin-Franztal on October 5th; Neu Pasua and Neu Banovci left on October 6th. On October 9th it was India's turn to leave followed by Beschka and Kertshedin on the 10th.

While the evacuation was in full swing in eastern Syrmien, Kasche the ambassador, Kammerhofer and Altgayer met in Esseg for discussions on October 3rd to the 5th. At this meeting they made more detailed plans and called for specific actions to be taken in order to avoid panic that could get in the way of the war effort in the area. The three areas that were to be evacuated were specified: eastern Syrmien the region east of Mitrowitz, western Syrmien including the neighboring eastern Slavonian communities and eventually Esseg and the surrounding area. The evacuees were to be divided into two groups. The first group consisted of mothers with children under the age of fifteen, the sick, those unable to march, wives and families of those men serving in the Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS and police. The second group consisted of everyone else. Providing food, supplies, provisions and determining the routes to take were also the concern Kammerhofer and Altgayer. The German ambassador was upset when he discovered that the evacuation was already underway prior to clearance by him and with the approval of Berlin. He saw it as a defeatist act and how on earth could he explain that to the Croatian government? He complained to the Foreign Office but it was already too late. The panic they had anticipated did not take place. In Ceric when the Swabians were ordered to leave a service was held at the church including the Croatian population that prayed for their brothers and sisters leaving on their momentous journey. The Croats by and large were fearful of what all of this would mean for them in the coming days.

The wagon treks were guarded against Partisan attack, but none occurred, not even in Partisan controlled territory. The first wagon treks headed towards Esseg, they then crossed the Danube and left Croatia behind. They went on to Pecs, Segitvar, the Balaton and then on to Sopron and Austria. The eastern Syrmien communities were evacuated in two weeks; some left by rail; others on the Danube ships to Mohacs and others found transportation with the German Army. The combined treks involved up to fifteen thousand wagons and horses. Some of the men accompanying the treks were kept behind at the Hungarian border for enlistment into the German Army.

The last trek left on October 31, 1944 from Sarwasch and crossed the Drava bridge at Esseg that day. In most cases the Swabians left "voluntarily" although some tried to return home but were prevented from doing so. Among the urban Danube Swabians more than half of the population remained. Most wagon treks were on the roads for one to two months. The ambassador in Agram informed Ribbentrop, that as of January 9, 1945 the evacuation of the Swabians in Croatia was completed and that 110,000 had been evacuated. It is estimated that approximately 90% of the German population in Croatia was evacuated. That would hardly be true in all of the other areas of the Danube Swabian settlements in the rest of Yugoslavia, Romania or Hungary.

Partisan Treatment of the Swabians Who Remained Behind

There was a large proportion of the Swabian population who remained behind who did not participate in the evacuation from Syrmien-Slavonia numbering between 10,000 to 20,000 persons. Most of them felt that they had nothing to fear. They had been honest, hard working people and had paid their taxes. Many expected to be protected by their Slavic friends and neighbours. It had been the same during the First World War.

There were obvious signs that this was a pipe dream. Fear was dependent upon the degree of German-ness they had displayed, i.e. membership in the DVK. The Partisans on their part, both the Royalists and Tito's Communists had announced that all of the non-loyal minorities would be expelled following the war. This was especially true in the north including the Swabians, Hungarians and Romanians. The Serbians were on an anti-minority crusade, which included the Croatians. Tito's forces certainly gave the Swabians in Croatia an idea of what to expect during their raids and attacks throughout the war. There was no question of their feelings and intent and it was no wonder that such a large proportion of the Swabian population participated in the evacuation.

The occupation of eastern Syrmien by the Partisans and Russians occurred after taking Belgrade without a fight. A Syrmien Front was established from Brcko-Vukovar and there was heavy fighting between the Partisans and the Waffen-SS Division Prince Eugene that lasted a few months. The German troops eventually retreated and crossed the Sava River and fled to the west. The Partisans took Brcko on April 7th and Vinkovci on April 13, 1945.

Local units of Serbians were recruited from the surrounding communities whose chief goal was to plunder the homes and properties of the evacuated Swabians that had been left unoccupied. Most of them did this secretly and the majority of them were young people. There were isolated cases of rape and numerous beatings of Swabians. In a few days "Narodni Odbori" (Partisan governments) were established and placed in charge. They now proceeded to organize the plundering.

In India on October 22, 1944 close to midnight a Partisan unit under the leadership of a Serb from Vojka occupied the town. On the 24th all of the Swabians were ordered to report at the town hall that day. On October 28th most of the men were arrested and taken to the former Hungarian school, which was also later the assembly point for men taken from smaller communities in the area:

Slankamen, Kertschedin and Beschka. Among them were also several soldiers: Germans, Croatians and Hungarians. The prisoners were interrogated and tortured at night. The murders and killings began in the school and outside of the building. In the town of India itself two Swabian women were beaten in public. After a short release the men were re-arrested on November 8th and 11th. On November 11th seven of the Swabian men, one Croat and a Serb were driven on foot to the neighbouring village of Alt Pasua. Here they had to dig their own graves and were later machine gunned down. Gypsies then took control with axes in their hands to make sure that all of them were dead. They smashed the heads of each man. On November 12th a total of 64 men, women and children were driven out of the town on foot to the local garbage dump where they were murdered in the most gruesome manner. On the 18th more murders took place in India and this time the victims were the elderly of whom only eight could be identified afterwards.

In Semlin and Franztal all of the Swabians were ordered to report to the Salt Office or they would be shot. As always the Swabians were obedient to the authorities and reported with only a few exceptions. Of those who reported, with only a few exceptions, were killed. There were 242 identified victims. They were taken at night to the banks of the Danube River and killed and their bodies were tossed into the river. Those who had not been included, mostly elderly men and women were taken to the first concentration camp for Danube Swabians in Syrmien, at Semlin-Kalvarija (Calvary). Their crime in effect was that they were ethnic German. The number of inmates in the camp from Semlin and Franztal who died there numbered 118 persons including Franz Moser who had been a member of the Croatian parliament in 1912.

In November 1944 both people from India and a portion of the surviving Swabians from the surrounding area were all force marched to the camp at Kalvarija which was some 50 kilometres away, where almost all of them died of hunger. There was another concentration camp for Danube Swabians at Sajmiste where ethnic Germans from the Banat and the Batschka were interned.

The camp Kalvarija was closed down in September 1945, and the survivors were taken to Bezanija to the camp at Mitrowitz. On April 14, 1946 all of the remaining Swabians in Semlin and Franztal were arrested and taken to Mitrowitz. A list of the names of those who died there included 75 persons from Semlin and Franztal and another 114 civilians from the two communities died in various other Yugoslavian concentration camps, prisons and were killed in private homes.

In Ruma, men, women and children were imprisoned in the "Hrvatsi Dom" (Croatian House) along with Swabians from other villages in the area. They were taken in groups to the brickyards and upon arriving there they were either shot or gruesomely murdered and their bodies were thrown into a deep pit among whom some were still alive. In one day 2,800 Swabians died in this way. Many other Swabians in Ruma were shot individually, beaten to death or stabbed and slaughtered with knives.

To give all of this a cloak of legality, the Anti-Fascist Council for the Liberation of Yugoslavia passed appropriate laws on November 21, 1944 taking away the citizenship and human rights of the Danube Swabians and the right to confiscate all of their assets and property. They had no defense or court of appeal because they belonged to the "German Folk Group."

With the secession of fighting on the Syrmien Front, western Syrmien and Slavonia fell into the hands of the Partisans as well as the remaining Swabian population. With the fall of the Third Reich on May 9, 1945 the refugees and evacuees from Yugoslavia who were now in the Russian Zone of Austria were encouraged to go back home by the Austrian officials and the Soviet military. If they did not do so they would no longer receive ration cards. There were other restrictions that were introduced to encourage them to leave. On the other hand there were others who simply wanted to go home and needed no prodding to do so. This was also true in various areas of Germany where the refugees had ended up. Several train transports left Germany and Austria for Yugoslavia and

some wagon treks also set out from the eastern and southern Steiermark in Austria. A portion of these transports came across Hungary, while others crossed directly from Austria. It was only the first of these transports that were accepted by the Yugoslavian authorities and the others were turned back and refused entry.

Those who had come by way of Hungary were immediately locked up in a factory in Subotica and they were robbed of everything they had except for what they were wearing. After a short period of time they were taken to the concentration camp at Sekitsch and from there those unable to work were taken to the camps at Krusevlje and Gakovo. Some of the evacuees from eastern Syrmien were among them.

The same thing was also true for those returning home from Germany and Austria by train crossing the border into Slovenia. None of them ever saw their homes again. Only one of the wagon treks made it home, but before they could even enter their pillaged houses in Jarmina they were taken to the concentration camp at Josipovac. Those who had been on the train transports were robbed of everything and badly abused and eventually ended up in the camp at Mitrowitz.

By the end of 1945 Mitrowitz-Svilara (Silk Factory) became the central camp for the Danube Swabian population in Syrmien and various other areas. This camp would become one of the most horrendous of the concentration camps for the ethnic German population of Yugoslavia. At this point there were 1,000 persons: women, children and men. The three groups were separated from one another. The children could not remain with their mothers. The lack of food, heat and unhygienic conditions in the winter of 1945 and 1946 resulted in countless deaths. Whole families died out in a matter of weeks. In the warmer months of the year some internees were better off. Those who were able to work were "sold" to the mines or farmers for a fee payable to the camp officials. This actually saved the lives of many of them as on the outside they received better rations. Even the sick volunteered to do slave labour.

The Swabians in those communities taken by the Partisans after the Syrmien Front collapsed in May and June of 1945 were taken to the new camp established just for them: Josipovac-Oberjosefdorf. It was here where the Danube Swabians from the following villages and towns were interned: Esseg, Vukovar, Vinkovci, Djakovo and the villages in their vicinity. Facilities for the prisoners were few and far between and many women had to camp out under the sky. Unlike Mitrowitz they were not cut off from the outside world, and that may have been the basis for sending the internees to Austria later. In July 1945, one of these transports was allowed to enter Austria by the British. Also in Josipovac the people who were able to work were employed outside the camp. But the condition of those unable to work deteriorated so that three quarters of the prisoners were sick with dysentery. On July 10, 1945 the camp and its inmates were moved to Valpovo.

The internees had to walk all of the way, many of them were sick and water was forbidden and it was terribly hot and a survivor describes how miserable they looked. In Valpovo it was hunger and dysentery that claimed countless victims. Pastor Peter Fischer describes the situation in these words:

"The camp consisted of ten wooden barracks in terrible shape. Three thousand persons had to be put up in them. Even though we occupied space in two shifts there was still not enough room to accommodate everyone. So some of us had to find a place under the barracks or between them. The misery got especially worse whenever it rained."

Food was almost non-existent. Cleanliness was impossible under the circumstances and so all kinds of diseases were spread among the people. Five to ten persons died each day. The dead were buried naked without coffins. Typhus epidemics were common and resulted in a huge death

rate due to a lack of medication and proper care of any kind. The camp in Valpovo was closed down in May 1946. In January of that same year there were a total of 3,000 internees and the number of deaths up to that point was 1,967 persons.

On July 22, 1945 another train transport with overcrowded cattle cars was sent to Austria. The British refused to accept delivery of the packed train and sent them back. They had travelled for three weeks in all. For two weeks they were at the camp in Gross-Pisanitz in Croatia imprisoned in the out of doors. Many died here exposed to rain and cold, sunstroke, hunger, illness and the sound of constant gunfire over their heads. Many of those who died were children. The survivors were now taken in the direction of Esseg. This time in open wagons, facing rain and hail on the way. On August 15, 1945 the transport arrived in the death camp at Krndija.

This once ethnic German village had been turned into a concentration camp to accommodate the Danube Swabian population. The highest number of inmates at any given time was 3,000 persons. This number was in constant flux as victims died and new victims arrived to take their place. A breakout of typhus was first reported in January. From August 15, 1945 to mid May 1946 there were 1,300 deaths. In May 1946 internees were released if they had relatives outside. The survivors of Valpovo and Krndija were sent to Podunavlje in the Lower Baranya, which in turn was closed down on August 27, 1946. The inmates were sent to the camp at Tenje, which was closed January 20, 1947. Two transports of Danube Swabians were sent to Austria from Tenje. Those left at Tenje were sent to Rudolphsgnad in the Banat. It was an extermination camp.

Eventually many of the survivors ended up at the camps in Gakowa and Krusevlje, which were located close to the Hungarian border and were later not hard to escape from and then they fled across Hungary. Crossing into Austria was again illegal as well as the borders between Austria and Germany, but countless Swabians were successful in making their escape and flight to freedom. In the early months of 1948 the remaining camps were closed. Those who had survived wanted to leave the country as quickly as possible, although now the Yugoslavs had need of them for their labour and were willing to pay for it. The Red Cross attempted to re-unite families, although Yugoslavian officialdom was not very helpful. The cost of a passport to leave Yugoslavia rose from 1,500 Dinars to 12,000 in a short period of time, but the migration continued. Today only a few thousand persons of German origin continue to live in Sirmien, Slavonia, Croatia and Bosnia.

When the Croatian government fled from Agram to Austria in May 1945, Altgayer went with them. The Lutheran bishop, Philip Popp remained in Agram with those in his congregation who were unable to be evacuated, after first calling upon his pastors to join the evacuation if their congregations did, if not, they were to remain behind with them. They all concurred throughout Yugoslavia with each pastor suffering his own fate whether in the labour camps in the Soviet Union or the extermination camps of Tito. The Partisans occupied Agram on May 9, 1945. Now a savage bloodbath took place against the Croatian "collaborators" and any Danube Swabian they could lay their hands on. Bishop Popp was arrested at the end of May 1945 after sending his wife and son to seek asylum in the Swedish embassy. A show trial followed and he was sentenced to death, but over 1,000 local citizens signed a petition to free the bishop. On June 29, 1945 the first and only bishop of the Lutheran Church in Yugoslavia was executed by a firing squad.

Following the capitulation of the Third Reich and the occupation of Austria by the Allied Armies most of the prominent members of the Folk Group leadership who had all managed to escape were in the British Zone of occupation in Carinthia and the Steiermark. The British at Wolfsberg interned these Folk Group leaders, which included Altgayer and Janko as well as the German ambassador Kasche and their closest associates and others. The British turned over Altgayer and Kasche to the Communist powers that be in Yugoslavia on September 30, 1946. Following a series of prolonged show trials both men were condemned to death. Kasche was hung along with the leading Croatian

Ustaschi leaders and Altgayer was shot. Janko, however, managed to escape from Wolfsberg but was tried in absentia in Yugoslavia and condemned to death. He had found refuge in Brazil where he lives to this day. (Translator's Note: Sepp Janko and his deputy Josif Beer are best known for their final declaration to the Danube Swabians in the Banat: We will stay! This was their response to the fact that the Red Army was already entering the eastern Banat and countless evacuation treks were ready to set out at a moment's notice, which would have saved the lives of thousands upon thousands of Danube Swabians. While their declaration was being spread abroad throughout the Banat to remain, they were packing and were among the last to get across the Danube bridges out of harm's way. Only a few of the local Folk Group leaders disobeyed the order and led their treks out of the Banat and saved the lives of their people from the holocaust that was to come.)

The End

Dr. Valentin Oberkersch passed away in 2005.

He will be missed.