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Hermann F. Weiss. *Buschvorwerk im Riesengebirge: Eine Gemeinde in Niederschlesien von den Kriegsjahren bis zur Vertreibung.* Herbolzheim: Centaurus, 2006. 240 pp. EUR 20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8255-0663-6.

Reviewed by Amy Alrich (Institute for Defense Analyses, Alexandria, Virginia)

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Die schöne Zeit im Riesengebirge

In *Buschvorwerk im Riesengebirge*, Hermann F. Weiss paints a colorful Silesian village landscape in the mid-1940s. In the foreground (part 1), his canvas features a Bruegelesque depiction of Buschvorwerk, a village that over the course of 1944-45 changed from an idyllic refuge for children evacuated from war-ravaged parts of Germany to a site of occupation by Soviet troops and later Polish militias, who expelled the population and claimed Silesia for Poland. In the background (part 2), Weiss's canvas shows how the Zweigwerk Schmiedeberg, one of Wilhelm Schmidding's rocket engine factories, cast shadows on the village of Buschvorwerk–shadows manifested in the form of labor camps for POWs, Italians, *Ostarbeiter*, and *Ostjuden*. Weiss demonstrates a full spectrum of experiences among the residents of Buschvorwerk during these tumultuous months; experiences and interactions between diverse populations of Silesians, evacuated Germans, POWs, and forced laborers are richly detailed. Weiss's work is a sort of microhistory of both the village and the factory, combining archival research with qualitative interviews and first-hand accounts in order to add the full spectrum of colors to his canvas.

Weiss, a Germanist, focused previous publications on the writings of Heinrich von Kleist, Achim von Arnim, and Novalis. His interest in Silesia stems from his experiences as one of those evacuated children from the Rhineland: he and his family lived in Buschvorwerk from February through September 1944. Weiss's father, Arnold, worked at the Zweigwerk Schmiedeberg and held a position essential enough to the operation that he was excused from military service. Thus, although the events and people described in this book were mostly unconnected with Weiss's family, a personal sheen comes through in the writing. The author not only vividly recalls the idyllic months he and his family spent in Buschvorwerk, but he can look at pictures that recall pleasant memories there as well. That his father held an important position at the Schmiedeberg factory also gives the book a very personal angle; Weiss had no knowledge of or accounts of his father's involvement with the forced labor camps at the factory, but presumes his father not only knew about them but likely was, at least to some extent, engaged in their operations.

Weiss's two-part book, as a microhistory of the vil-

lage and factory, uses memory and perception to retell experiences and recreate the power structures that existed in these two spheres. He begins with "the situation of the majority," describing particular families and their situations in the village. Through the lens of memory and perception, Weiss depicts children playing with POWs; villagers listening to "enemy radio" (p. 27) or otherwise refusing to conform to expectations; and villagers who joined the NSDAP and why. Also in part 1, Weiss retells family histories of those individuals who were not in the majority. Buschvorwerk was home to several "mixed" marriages, including Rudolf Jonas (a "Mischling ersten Grades") and his "Aryan" wife. The Jonas family dealt not only with Nazi policies against mixed marriages, but also later faced the Polish revenge on the Germans in mid- to late 1945; their expulsion did not differ from that of their "Aryan" neighbors.

Weiss's depictions of everyday experiences include the day the Germans of Buschvorwerk witnessed a passing Death March from Schmiedeberg along Krummhuebeler Street. One woman who saw the columns pass exclaimed, "Was sind denn das fÃ¼r Menschen?" (p. 46). Another woman in a different part of the village heard shots and ran to the area, where she saw several of the marchers dead on the ground. A guard who saw her said, "Jetzt geht's denen so; es wird nicht lange dauern, dann geht's uns so" (pp. 46-47). On the edge of town, some Germans who lived along the path of the march had to bury the dead who collapsed near their houses. According to his son Hans, Emil Haering told him as they saw the columns pass, "Da muss man sich ja schÃ¤men, Deutscher zu sein" (p. 47). Over the course of 1944-45, Buschvorwerk saw many columns of people march through town. Whether it was German children evacuated eastward, or–towards the end of the war– throngs of refugees streaming westward, Buschvorwerk had witnessed massive population movements even prior to the May 9, 1945, capitulation and the arrival of the Soviet troops.

In the aftermath of the capitulation, the town's experience of occupation covered a broad spectrum. Weiss portrays confusion and fear as Silesians saw ever more Soviet troops and then Polish militias come through town. From July 1945 to May 1946, many Silesians experienced "wild" expulsions as Polish militia units forced Silesians to leave their homes–a process Weiss terms "the ethnic cleansing of Silesia" (p. 73). Weiss demonstrates that some Silesians were able to stay even after the "wild" expulsions because their labor made them essential to the functioning of the town. Some opted for Polish nationality, while some Germans simply hid from the Polish militia in order to remain in their village. The majority of Germans who stayed did so only through May 1946, when they were forced out during relatively organized expulsions by train.

Part 2 of the book focuses on the Zweigwerk Schmiedeberg der Wilhelm Schmidding KG. In addition to producing motors for the V-1 program, the Schmiedeberg firm developed Myrol, a substitute rocket fuel. The company fled the area in late February 1945. Weiss describes in detail the workers of Schmiedeberg. Because of the acute shortage of labor, both skilled and unskilled, armaments factories relied heavily on non-German labor. In the case of Schmiedeberg, the workforce consisted of POWs, forced laborers from the East, a large numbers of "resettlers" from Luxembourg, French civilian forced laborers, Italian internees, and–through Organisation Schmelt–Jewish forced laborers. Weiss describes working conditions and accommodations for the various groups, all of whom lived and worked in completely separate facilities. Through interviews, Weiss details the everyday experiences of these workers (malnutrition, psychological torture, physical abuse, and unhygienic conditions), the power structure in the camp, and even feelings of alienation and crises of faith remembered by workers at the Zwangsarbeiterlager (ZAL) Schmiedeberg.

Weiss also explores the role of the company leadership with respect to the use of forced labor. He cites sources that suggest the company saw itself as a victim of circumstances: they had such a need for workers and only forced laborers were available; they had nothing to do with who the forced laborers were. Based on existing documentation about the facility's operations and travel reports of the factory leadership, Weiss concludes that Wilhelm Schmidding very likely visited the ZAL Schmiedeberg multiple times and was aware of working conditions there. Weiss believes his own father, a site manager, must have at least known about the foreign forced laborers, but has no information about what his father did with respect to these workers or what he thought about them. In an epilogue, Weiss describes the desire to return felt by both Silesians and even some forced laborers who wanted to see where they had worked. According to the author, both groups have remarked on how little has changed.

Weiss's book is not a standard monograph on everyday experiences of the people in a village in Silesia. Weiss approaches memory and perception carefully

and attempts to construct experiences as they were remembered in a way that shows how aware he is of the potential pitfalls of using interviews and first-hand accounts. In fact, he openly states that many of the sources he used were stories captured on paper after the war and what children saw or reported from their parents some decades later. In order to provide a firm foundation for his account, Weiss meticulously researched this topic, using archives and libraries in three countries and cross-referencing events from interview-based sources with archival materials. Moreover, Weiss painstakingly sought out individuals who could provide eyewitness accounts; he even has a number of camp survivors among the list of individuals interviewed. Weiss's approach to the topic is not only thorough, but also thoughtful and personal. The book is a welcome addition to the literature on the time period.

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