In the final year of the Second World War, as bitter defensive fighting moved to German soil, a wave of intra-ethnic violence engulfed the country. Bastiaan Willems offers the first study into the impact and behaviour of the Wehrmacht on its own territory, focusing on the German units fighting in East Prussia and its capital Königsberg. He shows that the Wehrmacht’s retreat into Germany, after three years of brutal fighting on the Eastern Front, contributed significantly to the spike of violence which occurred throughout the country immediately prior to defeat. Soldiers arriving with an ingrained barbarised mindset, developed on the Eastern Front, shaped the immediate environment of the area of operations, and of Nazi Germany as a whole. Willems establishes how the norms of the Wehrmacht as a retreating army impacted behavioural patterns on the home front, arguing that its presence increased the propensity to carry out violence in Germany.

Bastiaan Willems is a Research Fellow in Modern European History at University College London.
Cambridge Military Histories

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Violence in Defeat

The Wehrmacht on German Soil, 1944–1945

Bastiaan Willems

University College London
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Acknowledgements

This book has been over a decade in the making, and if it wasn’t for the help of dozens of encouraging individuals, it would not exist. The work is a remodelled version of my PhD thesis, which, in turn, was born out of my Bachelor’s and Master’s theses, both of which examined the different aspects of the Red Army’s siege of Königsberg. My first thanks should therefore go to my supervisors on these projects, Ad van Kempen at the Fontys University of Applied Science in Tilburg, and Iain Lauchlan and Perti Ahonen at the University of Edinburgh. It was Perti who gave me the confidence to continue with this topic and pursue a PhD. At its earliest stage, Valery Galtsov and Viktor Apryshchenko invited me to develop my argument at their universities in Kaliningrad and Rostov respectively, where, despite the location, my argument moved away from the role the Red Army played in the final year of the war. At the halfway mark of my research, Dr Ahonen left for Finland to take up a professorship, and I was fortunate enough for Stephan Malinowski to take over the role as primary supervisor, a development that suited the new direction of the dissertation particularly well. Eventually, in the final year of the PhD, the Soviet element was dropped completely, and Iain stepped down from the project in favour of Tim Buchen. Stephan and Tim have been instrumental in carrying that project to the finish line. Life as a PhD student would not have been possible without the funding of the German Historical Institute, the Erasmus traineeship schemes, the University of Edinburgh School of History, Classics, and Archaeology McMillan Award, and the SPIN Foundation.

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Lastly, I would like to thank my family, particularly my parents, Bart and Jenny. Their patience and encouragement have been the bedrock of my own confidence in the project, and allowed me to pursue my passion.
# Chronology of Events

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1 August 1914</td>
<td>Start of the First World War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30 August 1914</td>
<td>Battle of Tannenberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1914</td>
<td>One-third of East Prussia’s population flees in anticipation of its invasion by Russian forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–22 February 1915</td>
<td>Winter Battle of the Masurian Lakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1916–1918</td>
<td>High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff assumes control of the war effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 November 1918</td>
<td>German army signs armistice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 June 1919</td>
<td>Versailles Treaty cuts off East Prussia from the rest of Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 February 1920</td>
<td>Declaration of Party programme of the NSDAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1924</td>
<td>Klaipeda Revolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 September 1928</td>
<td>Erich Koch becomes Gauleiter of East Prussia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 January 1933</td>
<td>Machtergreifung (Nazi seizure of power)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 March 1935</td>
<td>Hitler openly breaks with the military restrictions imposed by the Versailles Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 November 1938</td>
<td>Königsberg’s Neue Synagoge destroyed during the Kristallnacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 September 1939</td>
<td>German invasion of Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 June 1941</td>
<td>Operation Barbarossa commences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 July 1941</td>
<td>Koch becomes Reichskommissar für die Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 February 1943</td>
<td>Führerbefehl 4 turns scorched earth practices into official military policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February 1943</td>
<td>Goebbels proclaims Total War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 March 1944</td>
<td>Führer Directive 53 orders the establishment of fortress cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 June 1944</td>
<td>Start of Operation Bagration, the Soviet summer offensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 July 1944</td>
<td>Plot to kill Hitler in his East Prussian headquarters, the Wolfsschanze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 October 1944</td>
<td>Formation of the Volkssturm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chronology of Events

**East Prussian Operations**

October 1944  
Evacuation of the border regions of East Prussia; one-quarter of province’s population displaced

9 October 1944  
First Baltic Front reaches the Baltic at Heydekru, south of Memel

16 October 1944  
Third Belorussian Front commences the Gumbinnen Operation

21 October 1944  
Nemmersdorf captured by Red Army

23 October 1944  
Nemmersdorf recaptured by Wehrmacht

27 October 1944  
Start of Nemmersdorf propaganda

12 January 1945  
Second Belorussian Front starts operations by breaking out of the Rozan bridgehead on the Narew, north of Warsaw

13 January 1945  
Third Belorussian Front starts East Prussian offensive between Ebenrode and Schlossberg

21 January 1945  
Koch orders the families of Gauleitung employees to be evacuated by a special train

27 January 1945  
Memel abandoned by German troops

27 January 1945  
Koch announces the general evacuation of Königsberg

27 January 1945  
Lasch appointed as Fortress Commander of Königsberg

30 January 1945  
Königsberg encircled

15 February 1945  
Reich Justice Minister Thierack announces the establishment of summary courts in areas that were immediately threatened

19 February 1945  
Operation Westwind commences, Metgethen recaptured

25 February 1945  
Start of Metgethen propaganda

27 February 1945  
Large scale evacuation from Königsberg starts

10 March 1945  
Evacuation ‘postponed until further notice’ due to ‘technical issues’

13–29 March 1945  
Destruction of the Fourth Army in the Heiligenbeil Pocket

6 April 1945  
Final storming of Königsberg

9 April 1945  
Surrender talks commence

10 April 1945  
Surrender signed

13 April 1945  
Final offensive towards Pillau commences

27 April 1945  
Pillau captured

7 May 1945  
Surrender of the German Wehrmacht, remnants of Armee Ostpreußen surrender in Hela
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKO</td>
<td>Archiv Kulturzentrum Ostpreußen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARLZ</td>
<td>Auflockerung, Räumung, Lähmung und Zerstörung – Breaking-down, Evacuation, Paralysing, and Destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BArch</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDM</td>
<td>Bund Deutscher Mädel – League of German Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDO</td>
<td>Bund Deutscher Offiziere – League of German Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAKO</td>
<td>Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kaliningradskoi Oblasti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiwi</td>
<td>Hilfswillige – Auxiliary volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJ</td>
<td>Hitlerjugend – Hitler Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IfZArch</td>
<td>Institut für Zeitgeschichte archive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPD</td>
<td>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands – Communist Party of Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NKFD</td>
<td>Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland – National Committee for a Free Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NKVD</td>
<td>Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – National Socialist German Workers’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSF</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft – National Socialist Women’s League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSFO</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistischer Führungsoffizier – National Socialist Leadership Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSV</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt – National Socialist People’s Welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKH</td>
<td>Oberkommando des Heeres – Supreme High Command of the German Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKW</td>
<td>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – Supreme Command of the Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL</td>
<td>Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Organisation Todt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAF</td>
<td>Royal Air Force</td>
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RVK</td>
<td>Reichsverteidigungskommissar – Reich Defence Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Sturmabteilung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Sicherheitsdienst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Schutzstaffel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPrO</td>
<td>Wehrmacht Propaganda Offizier – Wehrmacht propaganda officer</td>
</tr>
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</table>