

TITLE PAGE

Antje Vollmer

A Double Life.

Heinrich and Gottliebe von Lehndorff and Their Resistance against Hitler and von Ribbentrop

With a recollection of Gottliebe von Lehndorff by Hanna Schygulla, an essay on Steinort Castle by art historian Kilian Heck, and unpublished photos and original documents

Sample translation by Philip Schmitz

Eichborn.

Frankfurt am Main 2010

© Eichborn AG, Frankfurt am Main, September 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

History and Interest /9/ Six Brief Profiles /15/ Family Stories I – Illustrious Forebears /25/ Family Stories II – Dandies and Their Equestrian Obsession /35/ Childhood in Preyl /47/ The Shaping of Pupil Lehndorff /59/ Apprenticeship and Journeyman Years /76/ The Young Countess /84/ The Emancipation of a Young Noblewoman /92/ From Bogotá to Berlin /101/ Excursion: The Origin, Life Style, and Consciousness of the Aristocracy /108/ Aristocrats as Reactionaries and Dissidents during the Weimar Period /115/ A Young Couple. Time Passes Differently /124/ A Warm Autumn Day /142/ The Decision to Lead a Double Life /151/ Hitler's Various Headquarters and "Wolfschanze" /163/ Joachim von Ribbentrop at Steinort /180/ Military Resistance and Assassination Attempts /198/ The Conspirators Surrounding Henning von Tresckow /210/ Private Life in the Shadow of the Conspiracy /233/ The Days before the Assassination Attempt /246/ July 20th at Steinort /251/ The Following Day /264/ Uncertainty /270/ On the Run /277/ "Sippenhaft." The Entire Family Is Arrested /285/ Interrogation by the Gestapo /302/ Before the People's Court /319/ The Escape to the West and Final Certainty /334/ The Farewell Letter /340/ Flashbacks /352/

Epilogue by Hanna Schygulla – My Friend Gottliebe /370/

Kilian Heck – From Baroque Castle to Fortress of the Order. The History and Art History of Schloss Steinort in Masuria /375/

References and Acknowledgments /401/

Bibliography and Photo Credits /407/

SIX BRIEF PROFILES

((pp. 15 to 24 in the original edition))

Setting out to find traces of resistance fighter Count Heinrich Lehndorff is to embark on a long and difficult search. That has its reasons. Neither before nor after July 20, 1945, was there any time to secure documents or leave behind hints. The object was to cover one's tracks and to conceal relationships with co-conspirators. When operation *Walküre* was called, Heinrich von Lehndorff was at the top of the list of liaison officers for the coup d'état, with responsibility for Military District I, Königsberg. This explains why the search for him began as early as July 21. Eleven days beforehand, he had put his three children on a train heading west so that they would be safe with his parents-in-law in Graditz, near Torgau on the Elbe. His wife Gottliebe, née Countess Kalnein and nine months pregnant, was driven out of the castle on July 23 by Foreign Minister Ribbentrop. Seething with rage, he feared for his reputation and credibility because he realized only then that he had been double-crossed by his greatly admired host family, whose Schloss¹ Steinort he had chosen as a "befitting" domicile – six kilometers from *Mauerwald*, the High Command of the Army, and 14 kilometers from *Wolfschanze*.²

With Hitler's foreign minister as a permanent guest in one's own castle, it was far too dangerous to keep photos, historical documents, let alone diaries and letters, or to move them to a secure location well enough in advance. At the beginning of August 1944, after Heinrich Lehndorff's second escape, his entire family was put in "Sippenhaft," that is, his wife, daughters, parents, and sister, were collectively placed under arrest. As an ancient East Prussian family, the Lehndorff's owned no estates in the West where they could transfer letters or records for safekeeping. After the war, and their collective custody and escape, they were housed in constantly changing

¹ Schloss: a castle or fortress, in this case the building resembled a large chateau.

² Mauerwald: code name for the High Command of the Army near Angerburg in East Prussia. Wolfschanze: "wolf's lair," code name for Hitler's military headquarters on the Eastern Front.

emergency shelters; their daughters recall some 16 of them. The old, meticulously kept family archive from the days of previous estate owners ends in the year 1931. Today, major portions of it are held by the Sächsischer Staatsarchiv in Leipzig, with smaller holdings in the archive at Allenstein (currently Olsztyn, Poland). We can assume that the young lord of Steinort himself saw to it that the latter documents were taken to a secure location in sufficient time, whereas he probably destroyed all current documents pertaining to the period of the conspiracy. Original finds from the 1930s and 40s are therefore rare. Nevertheless, if one delves deeper isolated fragments can be found: recollections, pictures, and descriptions not only by friends and relatives but also by enemies. When they are pieced together, a clear, specific, and distinctive picture emerges of the person we seek.

Interviews with Heinrich von Lehndorff's wife, friends, and relatives, and the written records they kept, are quoted extensively as sources in the following book, particularly when they pertain to his youth and private life. The texts have their own special appeal. They transport us to a world where there was still no sense of apprehension about the impending catastrophe. Sometimes they strike a note and evoke memories of things that are as distant from people living today as a sunken continent. It is only when we have heard the music of this language that we can sense the scope of what collapsed during the years between 1933 and 1945.

The first brief personal description of Heinrich von Lehndorff stems from the Gestapo itself, which dispatched a telegram with the following content.

Schwerin Criminal Investigation Unit Schwerin, August 9, 1944

Log number...5.K.-NS-5171/44.

Bulletin

Distribution list C:

Subject: Wanted persons search for accomplice in July 20, 1944, attack - RM5,000 reward - intensified *Kriegsfahndung*³ with particular emphasis on traffic checks.

Arrest as accomplice to the assassination attempt on July 20, 1944: husbandman Count L e h n d o r f f, DOB June 20, 1909, in Hanover, last residing in East Prussia.

Description: 1.90 m tall, slender, broad shouldered, receding forehead, long head, blonde hair parted on the left, blue eyes.

Last seen wearing: Brown single breasted sport coat, brown-green hunting shirt and necktie, gray riding breeches with dark leather trim, light brown sport socks, brown shoes, slouch hat.

Manhunt for wanted individual to be conducted within the framework of an intensified *Kriegsfahndung*, with particular emphasis on traffic checks in conjunction with the NSKK.⁴

By order of:

Köppen

[top rectangular stamp]

4th Police Precinct

August 11, 1944

[illegible signature]

[lower rectangular stamp]

Archive of the Hanse-City of Rostock

Copy

[circular stamp]

Criminal Investigation Unit 4, Schwerin]

[photo caption: Search Alert of August 9, 1944]

This urgent bulletin made Count Heinrich Lehndorff a wanted man throughout the Reich and in all countries occupied by German forces. Telegrams are extant from locations as disparate as Cologne, Krakau, and Schwerin. The arrest order was issued to: "A//

³ RM: Reichsmark; *Kriegsfahndung*: a search conducted during wartime that involves all military forces; an all-out national alert.

⁴ NSKK (Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps): National Socialist Motor Corps

local/central crime investigation offices within the territory of the Reich to include Criminal Investigation Units Strasbourg, Metz, and Luxembourg, Commanders of the Security Police and the SD⁵ Department V, Königsberg, Tilsit, Zichenau, Krakau, Warsaw, Radom, Veldes, and Marburg/Drau."It also specifies a "cc. to SD commandants in the aforementioned regions."

This and all subsequent wanted persons alerts were based on a "blitz" telegram from Berlin, Nr. 10636, of August 9, 1944, 15:00, ordering that pertinent information should be reported "*immediately by telephone, telegram, police radio, or courier*" to the Special Commission on July 20, Gestapo Headquarters, 8 Prinz Albrecht Strasse, "*Telephone 120040 or 126421.*"

Five days later, on August 14, 1944, *Sturmbannführer*⁶ Paul Opitz of the Special Commission of the Secret State Police, Group II, was able to report to all central Gestapo offices that the urgent wanted persons alert of August 9, 1944, had produced the desired effect: "*The fugitive Count Heinrich Lehndorff, DOB June 22, 1909, in Hanover, has been apprehended. Discontinue search.*"

[marginal note on p. 18:

All copies cited here were supplied
by the German Resistance Memorial Center in Berlin.]

Previously, the wanted man had twice escaped his pursuers. The first time was on July 21st at Schloss Steinort, his estate in East Prussia; the second time was on the night of August 8th just before he was to be interned at 8 Prinz Albrecht Strasse, the Gestapo's own infamous "house prison" in Berlin. Beset though he was by the dogs in pursuit, he eluded his hunters to know the last five days of liberty in his life.

⁵ SD (Sicherheitsdienst): Security Service

⁶ Equivalent to a major.

The second sketch of the fugitive was recorded by his wife, Countess Gottliebe Lehndorff, during a later conversation with her daughter, Vera. After his first escape attempt and first arrest, they had briefly taken her husband upstairs to the second floor of the castle. There, as she reports in the taped interview, *"...we stood in front of his beautiful big desk and there they were, sitting there, constantly opening and closing the drawers, taking everything out and throwing it all on the floor. You know, it's frightful, because you're completely at their mercy! And he stood there across from the desk, with one of those black Gestapists sitting on his right, and another black Gestapist on his left. He wasn't handcuffed. He just stood there with his long arms, so absolute. He was always wearing one of those little country squire jackets - that's what I called them - just a little green jacket, a bit ragged, well, not ragged, but slightly weakened by age, somewhat frayed. And so there he stood, with his arms hanging down, and you couldn't look at his face. It was horrible."*

"Suddenly broken, somehow?"

"It was more than that, it wasn't fear in his face, but total desperation."

"Because, of course, he knew what it meant?"

"Yes. It was over. And I stood there on the other side, in the same desperation, with my huge stomach. Well, what could you do?"

Shortly thereafter, Count Heinrich Lehndorff was initially transferred to Königsberg prison, for his first "harsh" interrogation in custody.

The third profile stems from Count Carl-Hans Hardenberg and was written down on "New Year's Eve, 1945." Carl-Hans Hardenberg was a gnarled conservative Prussian monarchist who had been a friend of Lehndorff's even before the war and had repeatedly hosted him at Neuhardenberg, his estate. Early in the war, he and Lehndorff had made a joint effort to enlist Fedor von Bock for the resistance. Later, von Bock would advance to General Field Marshal and Commander of the Army Group Center;

Lehndorff and Hardenberg served as his aide-de-camp and adjutant respectively. That they did not succeed was no fault of their own. *"Even during the first discussions we conducted with individual field marshals and four-star generals, it became clear that not a single one of them was of a mind to take steps against any of us. Almost to a man, they had toyed with the thought, recognized the necessity, expressed their willingness to participate if someone else assumed the responsibility."*

In his memoirs, Hardenberg mentions personally and with great respect two close friends from the circle surrounding Henning von Tresckow, namely, Fabian von Schlabrendorff, a relative of Tresckow's and later justice of the Federal Constitutional Court, and Count Heinrich Lehndorff.

[photo caption p. 20: General Field Marshal von Bock with aide-de-camp Heinrich Lehndorff.]

"Heini Lehndorff, that outstanding son of the East Prussian soil with whom I enjoyed a bond of genuine friendship from our mutual posting at the Army Group, had apparently escaped from them at first but was then unfortunately apprehended again. During the war years he matured in a strange way and developed from a carefree officer into a person with the highest sense of responsibility. He was a true man, and he died a hero's death."

[marginal note p. 20:

Carl-Hans Hardenberg, *Patrioten im Widerstand. Erlebnisbericht. 1945.*
 (Patriots in the Resistance. An Experience Report. 1945),
 in: Countess Reinhild von Hardenberg: *Auf immer neuen Wegen*
 (Always Breaking New Ground), p. 163 ff.)

[photo caption p. 21: Lehndorff's brother Ahasverus]

Marion Dönhoff, publisher of *DIE ZEIT*, grew up and for periods of time was educated together with the Lehndorff children, Heinrich, Karin (Sissi), and Ahasverus. She recalls

the following farewell scene: *"In August 1939 we all met in Königsberg and had a sense that this might well be the last time. There could be no doubt that Hitler was bent on war and war alone. I will never forget the moment when we were standing in front of Hotel Berliner Hof and Heini's younger brother was bidding farewell to my brothers. He was 23 years old at the time, a tall, serious youth of well-nigh classical beauty who was serving as a lieutenant in the 1st Infantry Regiment. His parting remark was, 'We'll meet again on the barricades!' – with his eyes aglow as I hadn't seen since his childhood days.*

He (Ahasverus) had established ties to the nascent resistance movement very early, even before the war broke out, and was completely taken with the task of liberating Germany from the scourge of Hitler. He fell in Estonia as a company commander in June 1941, two months after the war against Russia had begun.

For Heini Lehndorff, losing his only brother was a bitter blow that he was barely able to overcome. There can be no doubt that the sense of having to fulfill the task his brother had set for himself was a contributing factor in his decision to establish contact with the opposition.

[marginal note p. 22:

Countess Marion Dönhoff, *Um der Ehre Willen*

(For the Sake of Honor), p. 143f.]

Count Hans Lehndorff, cousin to the resistance fighter and the later author of *Ostpreussisches Tagebuch* (East Prussian Diary), provides the following description of the young farmer who assumed control of the huge but extremely rundown Steinort estate in 1936: *"Heini, who had studied agriculture, took a passionate approach to the task of setting the grossly neglected estate in order again. By nature, he was the right man for the job. He combined a sense of the practical with a great sense of humor and a tangible zest for life. The feminine element played an important role in his life allowing him to create a much more easy-going, less critical impression than, for example, his*

significantly younger brother Ahasverus. (...) When I visited him and his wife in October 1940, I noticed as I drove through the Mauerwald Forest that many old spruces had been stripped bare by insects. The forest looked desolate. In the assumption that Heini would be very upset over this, I greeted him somewhat hesitantly. Yet he was the same as ever, and when I mentioned the enormous damage he replied, 'Yes, it disturbed me very much at first. But in the meantime I've calmed down again because over the next few days the forest is going to see something far worse. Eight thousand laborers from Organisation Todt⁷ are supposed to come in and build an ammunition depot. Of course, we seriously doubt whether it will be limited to an ammunition depot. The commercial airliner from Moscow to Berlin has already changed its flight path and has been flying over our forest for several days.' Eight months later our troops marched into Russia, and it turned out that they had not built an ammunition depot but the Army High Command for the Russian Campaign"- right on the Lehndorff estate.

[upper marginal note p. 23:

Count Hans Lehndorff, *Menschen, Pferde, weites Land*
(People, Horses, Open Country), p. 283f.]

[lower marginal note and photo caption p. 23:

Front: von Ribbentrop with the Lehndorff children.
Background: Heinrich, his sister Karin (Sissi), and Gottliebe.]

In conclusion, a photo that reflects the tensions of living a conspiracy: taking a walk in the park surrounding Steinort, beginning from the rear terrace, passing by the park's ancient oaks, heading toward the small Schinkel-style teahouse. The smiling man in the foreground wearing an elegant white jacket is Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister. As of 1941, he had taken up residence in the left wing of the Lehndorff's castle where he resided with his administrators, cooks, servants, military officers and Gestapo security agents. He leads two little girls by the hand, left and right: Nona and Vera

⁷ A civilian and military engineering consortium.

Lehndorff at the ages of roughly six and four. The girls with their pageboy cut blond hair are wearing pretty little white summer dresses, knee socks, and shoes with straps. The children are pulling away from the "nice man," they're unwilling, don't want to be led by the hand and turn toward their parents, Heinrich and Gottliebe Lehndorff, seeking help. The parents are looking at the children with concern, calming, soothing them, conveying security. In the row behind we see Heinrich's sister Sissi, on either side there are military officers from Ribbentrop's retinue and diplomats in riding boots. The young Countess is lovely, slender, and radiant, she wears a long narrow string of pearls. When Ribbentrop encountered her in private, he would kiss her hand; when Gestapo men were present, he greeted her with "Heil Hitler." The photo could be a still from a film: *Last Year in Steinort* or *The Last Time I Saw Masuria*.

[marginal note p. 24: Not shown in the detail on p. 23.]

FAMILY STORIES I - ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS

((pp. 25 to 34 in the original edition))

Young Count Heinrich was a Lehndorff. Even if it apparently didn't mean a great deal to him during his childhood and school days, a person with that kind of heritage grows up with history, and with many family stories as well.

The Lehndorffs number among the grand and notable families of East Prussia, along with names such as Dohna, Dönhoff, Eulenburg, Groebens, and Kanitz. Today, none of these families still live where they originated, nor have they retained their former prominence. This is the point where the difficulties begin when one is searching for the distant roots of an individual destiny that cannot be understood apart from its origins. Every childhood has a background story, and many a background story shapes an individual's later life more than he or she perceives.

Many of the grand aristocratic families arrived in East Prussia at the beginning of the 16th century along with the Order of Teutonic Knights. The roots of the Lehndorffs reach even further into the past. They are descended from West Prussian/Baltic Prussian stock and therefore inhabited these Eastern tracts of land from time immemorial. The family seat, which would later become Steinort, is mentioned for the first time only in 1420. But the family's origins are to be found in West Prussia's Kulmerland in the House of Stango. Long before the arrival of the Teutonic Knights, they settled in a place named Mgowo. During the rule of the knights, this village was called "Legendorf." The Lehndorffs' ancestors must have played a leadership role in their tribal territory, either through open election by the local yeomen or through fortunate victories in family feuds. It was only when the century of foreign colonization began that they had to submit to the Order of Knights or were forced to reach an accommodation. What had previously belonged to them was now declared a fiefdom (Ger. *Lehen*). As a result, they were called "von Legendorf" and later "von Lehendorf" or "von Lehndorff."

Politics, the military, land ownership, and above all, horses determined the fate of all Lehndorff family lines. One of the best known members of the family from this period of cooperation with the Teutonic Order State was Paul Legendorf, Bishop of Ermland. The first owners of the estate received the title of "Lord Seneschal of Prussian Eilau or, respectively, Oletzkow." The expanded estate was probably granted to Fabian von Lehndorff, even though East Prussian historical literature generally reports that it was not until the beginning of the 16th century that the Order of Teutonic Knights issued the deed of tenure for the "great wilderness by the lake" (the later Steinort) jointly to Fabian, Caspar, and Sebastian von Lehndorff. In 1590, Meinhard was born, one of their grandchildren who would later plant the avenue of oaks which is the most famous point of interest on the Steinort grounds. It is a site of natural beauty and has a magical aura to this day. Meinhard was a lieutenant colonel and the district administrator of Rastenburg. It is his son who marks the Lehndorffs' entry into the arena of high-level politics and grand adventure far from their origins in Kulmerland, but also far from the marshy wilderness surrounding Steinort, where horse-drawn coaches regularly became deeply mired in the mud during the long severe winter months, even as the first oaks had begun to grow.

[marginal note p. 26:
Information obtained in 2009 from
Count Stanislaus Dönhoff, Schönstein.]

Hans von Lehndorff wrote a captivating little family story about this first of his political forebears.

"Meinhard's son, who bore the curious name of Ahasverus (Ahasversus Gerhard 1637-1688), was born in 1637; he was only two years old when his father died. His mother, née zu Eulenburg, appointed her brother to be his legal guardian. Ahasverus spent his childhood at Steinort and was then sent to various schools where he received a broad-

based education.

Today, when we read his letters to his mother and to friends, and the diary entries he wrote as a young man, it seems almost inconceivable that a person could acquire such sweeping knowledge under the conditions prevailing in his times. At 19, he and his same-aged cousin, Georg Friedrich zu Eulenberg, accompanied by a “Hofmeister”,⁸ were sent on a so-called “cavalier’s tour,” which in his case lasted for seven years (1656—1663) and took him to Denmark, Holland, England, France, Italy, and Spain. Since he was extremely communicative, his letters provide an exceptionally vivid picture of the circumstances at the focal points of European life during his day. His written records also impressively depict the traveling conditions of the era and the drudgery they entailed. He describes making landfall in England by night, and how they were forced to wander long and aimlessly before they could find shelter from the rain; how they were robbed before they were able to continue their journey, but then, several days later, were the guests of Oliver Cromwell and were allowed to be present when he and his family took their midday meal; and how Cromwell’s cupbearer led them to the wine cellar afterwards. In Paris, where Ahasverus remained for three years, he experienced Louis XIV at close range, frequented the houses of many prominent personalities, met innumerable young people from all over the world who, like he, were striving to expand their horizons, and he was an appreciated guest in the house of King Gustav Adolf’s daughter, Queen Christine of Sweden, who had emigrated to Paris and whom he later encountered again in Rome. One time, when he asked his mother to increase the financial support she regularly supplied, she informed him that she was not in a position to do so because enemy troops and other marauders had leveled a number of farms attached to the Steinort estate, burning the castle itself almost completely to the ground. She was, however, in a position to send a coach with two horses to Paris for his use. From Italy, he later visited the Knights of Malta on their island, where he

⁸ A private tutor/companion to a young aristocrat.

established friendships with many knights of the order and was taken along on naval raids against Turks and pirates. The knights accorded him the honor of being the first to jump across to a pirate ship, where he realized that the entire crew was ill with the plague or had already succumbed to it. Lastly, he sent reports from Venice and his journey across the Pyrenees to Spain, returning from there to Prussia via Paris. A greatly experienced man of 26, he placed himself at the disposal of his sovereign, the great Electoral Prince of Brandenburg, for important political tasks. Yet since he was apparently a difficult and demanding person, no agreement could be reached on the nature of his posting within the government. Instead, he accepted a military assignment from King Casimir of Poland which busied him in Warsaw for six years. Here, he mustered a German infantry regiment and was the sometime commander of all German troops serving in Poland. During these years he enjoyed the special trust of King Casimir as well as his successor Michael. As a matter of fact, the latter once asked him to travel to Vienna and take a look at Kaiser Leopold's sister whom he intended to marry. Ahasverus found a way to sidestep the precarious assignment, however. It is also unlikely that he would have been able to prevent this unhappy marriage. After his stint in Warsaw, he served the great Electoral Prince and the state of Holland for six years in the era's desperate wars. The reports in his letters focus more on soldiers dying from hunger and disease than on his losses in battle. This was followed by another several years of military service to Denmark, whereupon he returned to Steinort as a four-star general at age 42."

[marginal note p. 29, top:

Count Hans Lehndorff, *Menschen, Pferde, weites Land*
(People, Horses, Open Country), p. 204–206.]

The much-traveled count barely had enough time to look after the restoration of his own landholdings – the whole village and the castle itself had been almost totally destroyed in a Tartar attack in 1656 – when he was appointed Lord Burgrave of the Prussian

Electoral Prince in 1683 and charged with administering nearly the entire gamut of his distant sovereign's affairs. A number of historical sources indicate that he remained independent-minded in this new position as well. *"The permanent state of war had paralyzed business and trade in Prussia, sapped the country's strength, decimated the ranks, rendered property insecure, and opened the door for all manner of crime. The tax burden was horrible; the billeting of soldiers had risen to an almost unbearable level with some households lodging four people. Naturally, attacks by foreign troops did not fail to materialize. On top of this, heavy taxes were levied on food."*

[marginal note p. 29, center:
Count Hans Lehndorff, *ibid.* p. 206.]

In his letters and in the reports he submitted, Ahasverus repeatedly confronted the Electoral Prince with the deplorable state of affairs, appealing in plainspoken terms to his sense of honor as a sovereign. Basing his opinion on his own bitter experience, he maintained that great monarchs and lords could not afford to treat their subjects in such fashion if they wanted to defend their country in the long term.

"On the day after his installation as Lord Burgrave, he took his third wife, marrying a young Countess Dönhoff. His first two wives had both died after childbirth, as was often the case in the 'good old days'; most of the children did not survive much longer. In 1686, Kaiser Leopold elevated Ahasverus to the rank of Count. Two years later, Ahasverus died suddenly and unexpectedly. When news of his death reached the great Electoral Prince, he is reported to have burst out, 'I've lost my best statesmen!' He himself also died in 1688."

[marginal note p. 29, second from the bottom:
Das Herold-Jahrbuch, volume 12, New Series, Special Edition,
p. 63, cites the year 1687.]

[marginal note p. 29, bottom:

Count Hans Lehndorff, *ibid.* p. 207.]

The next Lehndorff to play a political role was Ahasverus's grandchild, Ernst Ahasverus Heinrich. He was lame in one leg because of an early foot injury and therefore could not become a soldier. Brilliantly educated, he held the position of legation counselor by the early age of 19, and at 21 became chamberlain to Queen Elisabeth Christine, the ever-shunned wife of Frederick the Great. He remained in her service at the Prussian court for nearly 30 years and wrote numerous diaries in French which are stored in the Lehndorff Archive in Leipzig to this day. He became friends with the three brothers of Frederick the Great, and Prince Heinrich's nearly 800 letters show that their friendship remained intact even after Ahasverus's late retirement from court office. His diary accounts were translated from French into German and were celebrated in the early 20th century for the witty period atmosphere they conveyed.

Born in 1770, Ernst Ahasverus's son, Carl Ludwig, was the next Lehndorff to become entangled in European politics. He was the common great-grandfather of Heinrich and Hans von Lehndorff, and the latter composed a brilliant little profile of him as well: *"Carl Ludwig, my great-grandfather, had therefore already reached the age of 16 when Frederick the Great died. Initially, he was raised at Steinort, he attended the Joachimsthaler Gymnasium⁹ in Berlin at age 15, and then entered the École Militaire. Much like his great-grandfather Ahasverus, whom he must have resembled in terms of character, temperament, talent and verve, he was predestined for a military career. After serving for some time in Potsdam, he participated in the 1793 and 1794 campaigns against the armies of the French Revolution, from which he returned unscathed. In the year 1800 he was transferred to the cavalry, in keeping with his keen desire, and for a number of years commanded a company of the Rouquette Dragoon Regiment in southern East Prussia. He participated in the ill-fated war against Napoleon as a major in this regiment, was wounded in 1807 and captured by the French. What*

⁹ Gymnasium: a German secondary school with an academic orientation.

emerges from his letters is the unimaginable degree of freedom that prisoners of war enjoyed during that era, based on their word of honor. Initially, he lived without restrictions of any kind in Nancy, renting a private apartment with his own means. However, he had himself transferred to Paris. From there, he could better negotiate his release, which subsequently came about as part of an exchange. He felt a compelling need to return to East Prussia, his war-torn homeland. Retiring from the military for the time being, he devoted himself intensively to rebuilding the country and especially Steinort, his much loved estate where enemy forces had lodged with particular abandon. When Napoleon's defeated armies flooded back from Russia, he marshalled a cavalry regiment that was financed with monies from local Prussian landowners and distinguished itself in the 1813/14 Wars of Liberation. He called it the "East Prussian National Cavalry Regiment"; it would later form the basis of the Guard Hussars. After the war, he continued to serve in France as a colonel and brigade commander in the occupation forces. In 1819, after the occupation was lifted, he was transferred to Cologne as Commander of the 15th Cavalry Brigade. It was here, at almost 53 years of age, that he took his family by surprise and decided to do something which he himself had always rejected. In 1823, he became engaged to the still very young Countess Pauline Schlippenbach. How little he had thought of ever marrying becomes clear when we consider his longstanding plan to bequeath Steinort to the son of his especially loved sister, who was now married to a Dönhoff. But this changed the situation completely. His mother, with whom he had shared an intimate bond from childhood and who enjoyed his confidence in all personal matters, wrote to her friend and relative, the Duchess of Holstein-Beck, 'Regardless of that - seeing as the matter is now, contrary to all expectations, and yes, contrary even to Carl's, who did not consider it possible that he would still be capable of imbuing anyone with so intense an emotion of this nature - seeing as the matter is now beyond recall, I would like to believe that the Lord, in His great and undeserved mercy, has bestowed upon him domestic happiness even in his old age, and that the marriage is made in heaven, and for such reason will also not remain

childless. A hope to which I so dearly submit when human actions do not contravene reason and are undertaken with good and honest intention.'

In 1824, Carl Ludwig was transferred to Danzig as Commander of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, retiring from military service nine years thereafter with the rank of lieutenant general. He was awarded the title of Landhofmeister (State Steward) and was later honored with the Orden vom Schwarzen Adler (Order of the Black Eagle). His marriage produced five energetic children; it was the only generation of my family that was not decimated by war and, often enough, nearly eradicated...."

[marginal note p. 32: ibid. p. 208f.]

Just how delighted the extended family was over this late-life marriage, and the unexpected children who guaranteed the continuation of the Lehndorff line, is attested by the patriarch's unmarried brother who took up the pen, composed little poems, and nailed them to the oaks in the avenues of the park:

Glück auf, Glück auf, du lang ersehnter Knabe,
 Im Lande, wo die Freude wohnt und Leid.
 Gelobt sei Gott für diese hohe Gabe,
 Zerstreut ist nun der Zukunft Dunkelheit..."

Good luck! Good luck, you longed-for boy
 In this land where gladness dwells and sorrow.
 Praise be to God for this gift of joy
 That now dispels a dark tomorrow.

What Hans Lehndorff reports next was even more remarkable for the destiny of Europe:
"Above all, Carl Ludwig Lehndorff set himself a monument through the active influence he exerted at the Convention of Tauroggen in the final days of 1812. In a matter of only

hours, he rode the 100 kilometers from Gumbinnen to Tauroggen on deeply snow-covered roads to bring General Yorck von Wartenburg the news that the country's estate owners had agreed to Napoleon's solution. Three years later, it almost came to a highly curious encounter with Napoleon. He (Carl Ludwig) speaks of it in a letter to his mother. 'Just imagine, dearest Mother, a peculiar assignation I would have had by a hair. There was and is a requirement that Napoleon must be guarded on the Island of St. Helena by individuals commissioned through each of the powers allied against him. The Army conducted a lengthy search to find a person who, by virtue of his military rank, language, intellect, etc., would be suitable for this occupation. The proposition was made to me as well, and truly, had I been a few years younger, and had it not entailed the obligation to commit oneself to a sojourn of at least two years, I do not know whether I, for the sake of the peculiarity of the matter and of making a more detailed acquaintance with this still extraordinary bird, would not have offered my services. As it stands, however, I considered it excessive to cross off two of life's sparely allotted years, not including the year that would be lost traveling there and back.' But his allotted time was not as scant as he thought, for he only died 39 years later at the age of 84, richly blessed after many years of rebuilding his homeland and the Steinort estate."

[marginal note p. 33: *ibid.* p. 212.]

With this thwarted guard of Napoleon, however, the involvement of the Counts von Lehndorff with major European politics comes to an end for the time being. The next owner of Steinort, Carl Meinhard (1826—1883), trained as a diplomat and was an Imperial Knight of the Order of St. John, as were his forebears. Moreover, he was a member of the Prussian House of Lords and also participated in the Congress of Paris in 1856. Nevertheless for the most part he limited his activity to business endeavors in his home province, including, among others, the high-risk venture of founding the East Prussian Southern Railway which was later connected to the Russian railroad system. He and his beautiful wife, Anna, who was a born Countess Hahn-Basedow and his cousin

as well, place us in the midst of the generation that has become the subject of many family anecdotes. As on all East Prussian estates, they were recounted with delight and at length, and constantly repeated. In particular, a great-aunt of Heinrich von Lehndorff's, Anna, must have been an expressive personality. Not least, she saw to it that a gap-free family history was compiled, ensured that the diaries of the important Prussian Chamberlain were published, founded homes for orphans and the poor, and initiated an extensive range of activities for their care. *"The story of her death is also unusual. A piece of bone became lodged in her lung as she was eating. One was powerless against such a mishap in those days. When death approached, after long days of agonized suffering which she endured heroically with unwavering faith in her Redeemer, she summoned her entire domestic staff one last time and took leave of each person individually. Then she closed her eyes and awaited the end. She did not wish to be disturbed again, but she overheard the younger of the two physicians in attendance ask the elder whether he should prepare another injection for the patient. At that, we are told, she opened her beautiful eyes one more time, looked graciously at the young doctor and said, 'You dimwit.' And those were her last words."*

[marginal note p. 34: Count Hans Lehndorff, *ibid.*, p. 214.]

A Young Couple. Time Passes Differently

((pp. 124 to 141 in the original edition))

During the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, between the opening ceremony on August 1 and the closing ceremony on August 16, Heinrich repeatedly looked for Gottliebe. She was busy day and night, however, and only rarely available to speak with him because she had to look after foreign visitors. She accompanied them from one festivity to the next. Nobody slept much during those summer days; the atmosphere was too scintillating in a buoyant Berlin that was trying to dismiss all shadows and dark forebodings for those two weeks. The days never ended, the nights were short and filled with innumerable balls where young people met summer guests of their own age and danced, just as their parents had at fêtes in Kaiser-era Berlin. Except that the music was more modern, and the lyrics sometimes seemed frivolous. The many young athletes from other countries brought an international flair to Berlin for one last time.

When those days came to an end, the always bustling and idolized hostess was approaching the limits of her strength. She had a fever and developed a sore throat. For this, Heinrich had the only right idea. He packed the utterly fatigued Gottliebe into his car and drove his exhausted and yet joyous girlfriend to Steinort (almost non-stop), put her into a soft bed in a large cool room and let her sleep around the clock. Just how seriously he was taking the matter can be gauged by the fact that he interrupted the trip only once, namely, in Graditz, so he could ask Gottliebe's father for permission to abduct his daughter to Steinort for 14 days. That was the good, old-school way, but it also entailed a pledge. As a result, Gottliebe found herself in a completely novel situation: there were no parents at home and no relatives. A young woman who had just turned 23 and a young man of 26 were left to their own devices, surrounded by one of East Prussia's loveliest country estates. From the balcony on the front side of the castle they could see the sailboats on Lake Dargainensee, and behind the park lay the vast expanses of Lake Mauersee.

[photo caption p. 125: Arriving at Steinort]

Yet the couple's late-night arrival was still to hold a few surprises, as Gottliebe recalls: *“We arrived in the middle of the night. Heini opened the doors. As we entered the house, I let out a scream. A bat had become tangled in my hair. ‘Nothing to fear!’ Heini called out. ‘We’re in the country here, so we have big animals and little ones, too.’ Heini turned on the lights, and now I was jolted by a pleasant shock. That hallway! To me it looked as if everything had been covered with gold. Portraits of the Lehdorff’s ancestors lined the walls up to the ceiling. In the center of the ceiling were the Lehdorff and Dönhoff family crests. I opened one of the large cabinets and was jolted by another shock. Silver trays, ceramic vases, and broken porcelain came tumbling out. I looked at Heini aghast. I wanted to tell him that I couldn’t help it. He said, ‘Never mind. Don’t worry about it. You know, that’s all from my Uncle Carol. He was a bachelor and just stuffed everything into a cabinet.’*

[photo caption p. 126: Avenue of oaks at Steinort]

As Gottliebe later told her children and nephews, after she had slept for an entire day and night, the two descendants of comital stock set out on a long walk through the woods, along the lake and over the fields. He described the steps he would take to modernize his business operations. He was convinced there was no place more beautiful to live in the whole world. For a long time he sat with her at the edge of a field that had already been harvested of its grain, speaking quietly and thoughtfully in his rich, sonorous voice. He picked up some earth, crumbled it in his hand, and explained how much terrestrial life a handful of dirt contains, and how one needed to treat the fields in order to preserve the good quality of their soil. *“You have to smell this earth, then you’ll understand the entire landscape.”* At that moment, she fell hopelessly in love with him, with his love of nature, his straightforwardness, his repose. And even if this sounds like

the storyline from a film in those days, it was exactly what she felt, and it became a lifetime memory.

"It was very peculiar ... we rode horseback together, sailed - and almost lost our lives in the process - went hunting in the evening, for ducks. Everything was incredibly earthy, real and big. I was very, very impressed by it. Until then, my world didn't have that authenticity."

[marginal note p. 127:
From Gottliebe's blue notebook,
the Lehndorff Family Archive.]

Early in November 1936, the couple became engaged. Two misfortunes overshadowed the following weeks. Heinrich's mother, Harriet, was injured aboard the "Bremen" on her return voyage from a trip to the United States, and in Dresden, Kurt Kraemer had a fatal accident. It was not a particularly appropriate point in time to celebrate a big wedding. All the same, on February 24, 1937, six months after the summer weeks spent in Berlin and at Steinort, Gottliebe and Heinrich were married in Graditz. In keeping with ancient tradition, the parents of the bride arranged the celebration. And even though it was viewed as a love marriage, in this instance the parents of the bride were content as well because Steinort was considered one of the most important enterprises in East Prussia, notwithstanding the financial difficulties it had encountered under Carol's leadership. Both the Lehndorffs and the Kalneins were descended from ancient nobility, few objections could be made in that respect. If nothing else, anyone with eyes in their head could see that Gottliebe was a ravishingly beautiful woman. And so the two of them soon became known as a couple who turned heads as they wafted through the ballrooms of Berlin.

"Niemöller married us. Basically, I had no relationship at all to Christianity or Niemöller. He was a revolutionary, that was the unusual thing about him, and it piqued my interest."

But it was nothing personal. The marriage ceremony, Niemöller's speech, the wedding verse, etc., I don't remember any of it."

[marginal note p. 128: *ibid.*]

[photo caption p. 128: The wedding in Graditz. Seated to the left of the bridal couple are the Kalneins, parents of the bride. The Lehndorffs, parents of the groom, are seated to the right.]

Still, the pastor, whose participation Gottliebe reports in such unemotional terms, was no gratuitous adjunct. Apart from Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he was the most important personality of the Confessing Church. Martin Niemöller was a former U-boat commander, as was Gottliebe's stepfather, Mellenthin. Much like the latter, he originally stemmed from a strictly conservative-nationalistic background but had emerged as one of the most resolute critics of Nazi ideology at the Confessing Synod in Barmen in 1934. He had protested against the so-called Aryan Paragraph, founded the Pastors' Emergency League in 1933, and had been summoned to appear before the Gestapo some 20 times. He even had a personal audience with Adolf Hitler in the Reich Chancellery; it had turned so vehement that he had to reckon with being arrested every day from that time on – which he was, two months after the wedding in Graditz. Niemöller was interned until the end of the war in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp as a "special prisoner of the Führer," as was assassin Georg Elser later on. Even during the final days of the war in 1945, he was dragged from location to location along with others whose fate likewise was to be held hostage by Himmler, ultimately, as if by a miracle, these "special prisoners" managed to survive.

We can no longer reconstruct precisely how it came about that Niemöller was invited to serve as pastor for the wedding. It is certain, however, that Heinrich had established close ties to the Confessing Church early on through his cousin Hans; Marion Dönhoff and presumably also Heinrich's parents were card carrying members of the Confessing Church.

For their honeymoon, the young couple traveled to Dubrovnik. Heinrich had not seen much of the world and enjoyed himself immensely. Gottliebe began experiencing the first queasiness of early pregnancy. In the following year, 1937, the couple again ventured abroad to Sicily and Tripoli, which would be their last foray into the wide world together. The year of 1938 was already overshadowed by nervousness and premonitions of the war to come.

Even on their honeymoon, after ten days Heinrich was already anxious to return to Masuria, where the first spring tillage under his oversight lay ahead.

A second wedding celebration was held at home at Steinort, Heinrich placed great value on that. The festivities took place on the Opalten Peninsula, lasted for three days, and included all of the employees, administrators, and farm hands from Steinort's outlying farms. It was the first major fête the young squire and lord of the castle had arranged, and the first chance for all the residents of Steinort to meet the new lady of the castle. The atmosphere was generous and cordial, and to this day word has it that nothing was lacking. Gottliebe reports: *"When we reached the boundary of Steinort, a delegation from the various farms came to meet us. The landholdings of the Steinort estate comprised some 10,000 hectares devoted to farming, forestry, and fishery. One of the five foresters presented us with bread on a rough hewn oaken board and congratulated us on our marriage and our entry onto the estate. Even though I came from the big city, this simple ceremony left a lasting impression on me. Tears filled my eyes, and I made no effort to conceal them. Every person at Steinort had made some small contribution to this day. The front door was garlanded with fir branches. The gardener had prepared huge pots with all sorts of different plants and stood them in the vestibule. An enormous array of cakes had been set out on tables in the reception room. The domestic staff came forward and greeted me. 'Quick, somebody get a knife,' Heini said. Then he cut a cake into pieces and distributed them among the members of the staff. Everyone stood around munching a piece of cake and enjoying themselves. The ice had been*

broken."

[photo caption p. 130: Home again after the honeymoon.]

[upper marginal note p. 130:

The correct number is 5500 hectares of farm and wood land.
Presumably the figure in the text includes the surface area of the lake.]

[lower marginal note p. 130:

From Countess Gottliebe von Lehndorff's unpublished
recollections of Steinort, the Lehndorff Family Archive.]

It was a pity, though, that the wedding didn't take place in the summer, in the meadows on the estate grounds! On the other hand, the first harvest festival was celebrated there six months later. That was a tradition, and it remained the high point in each of the altogether seven years that Gottliebe and Heinrich von Lehndorff were allowed to spend at Steinort.

It was only their old intimate friends from childhood and adolescence, for example, Heini's sister Sissi who in 1933 married Dieter Dönhoff, the later heir to the von Friedrichstein estate, or cousin Marion, Sissi's former bridesmaid, who harbored their little misgivings whether the new mistress of Steinort might not be too citified and elegant to feel entirely comfortable in the empty solitude of East Prussia. But such doubts were customary whenever someone married in from the outside. Both Dorothea, the wife of Marion's older brother, Heinrich, (she was a Catholic to boot!) and bourgeois Vera, who in 1931 had ultimately been married to Marion's brother, Toffi, (although against his family's wishes) had to refute doubts whether they were genuinely suited for the people of East Prussia and their horses. Meanwhile, the young counts apparently had a penchant for falling in love with women who were somewhat different from their sisters and cousins, perhaps even slightly less capable. Instead, they seemed more vulnerable and presumably also more erotic.

Naturally, written records of these initial years at Steinort are sparse. Gottliebe recalls an unbroken stream of projects. The roof had to be repaired. Central heating had to be installed and the kitchen needed renovating. Old furniture and rubbish cluttered the attic. The cellar of the house was flooded. Heini had a large number of oaks felled in the forest so he could pay his inheritance taxes. He liquidated his uncle Carol's extremely valuable coin collection so he would have the means to invest and modernize. Among other things, this allowed him to buy a modern, *Lanz* brand tractor.

[photo caption p. 132: Gottliebe also with the dog]

At first, Gottliebe struggled with some uncertainty over the proper way to behave as the new lady of the manor. If it were a question of planning the midday meal or receiving guests, she was to *summon* the cook, rather than visiting the kitchen herself and seeking her out! She was not to go into the woods alone to gather mushrooms or fruit, but rather have someone accompany her. She was also not supposed to go jogging in the park in her skimpy running shorts, in East Prussia one was not accustomed to that. Altogether there were eight household servants, each of whom had been assigned particular duties; many of them stemmed from Uncle Carol's days. The young lord and lady energetically went to work removing the dust and must of parlors and rooms that hadn't been aired in decades. The window with the extensive wood rot was restored. Whenever they opened a drawer, they found piles of broken porcelain, crystal, and damaged minor art treasures that had been hidden by former servants from the strict eyes of Uncle Carol. Heini believed in saving on personnel costs. For example, he reassigned a servant whose main responsibility had been to wind every available clock. In the end, Heini could do that himself! The clocks didn't keep such perfect time after that, but no one was upset. As well, the tradition of polishing all of the silver with sand at regular intervals and drying it with damask napkins was discontinued and reserved for very special occasions.

Heini's main thrust was modernizing his business operations. A worker from one of the

farmsteads received special training so that the newly acquired *Lanz* could be put to optimal use. The drainage canals for the arable fields were cleared and renovated. He had major plans to expand his horse farming and had completed an apprenticeship as a tanner. This not only reflected a custom that applied to other estate owners as well – namely, that each person should have mastered at least one trade – it presumably also played a role in his ideas about processing animal hides himself and thereby increasing his profits. These plans were never realized. Even so, he had the houses in the attached village of Klein-Steinort enlarged in a way that created additional living space under the dormers for the land workers and their frequently numerous children. In contrast, for the time being he postponed measures to improve the castle's external appearance. Steinort, where the gravel was never clean and the terrace never free of weeds, hadn't ever been a particularly well groomed let alone an elegant property, but it was beginning to function as a business.

Apart from this, there continued to be time and opportunity for hunting, especially in winter. As soon as the first snow was on the ground, the foresters were called together to find the tracks of wild boar. Then invitations were sent out to impassioned hunters, relatives, and the town notables of Angerburg. A wild boar hunt was an all day affair. Six to eight boar were often taken in one hunt. The months of December and January were rabbit season. Forest workers were deployed as beaters; they knew the terrain and that guaranteed successful hunting. When the hunt was over, hunters and beaters gathered for steaming pea soup served along with grog and beer. *"Every year in July there was a duck hunt at Steinort. Because of the estate's large population of ducks and it's beautiful scenery, the hunt was famous as a social event. Days beforehand, long swaths were cut into the reeds at the edge of the lake. At the call of the hunting horn, beaters wearing tall rubber boots waded through the reeds, driving the ducks into the swaths, where the hunters were waiting for them on unsteady footing. Often, up to 700 ducks would be shot in a day's hunt. Several times in the summer, at six o'clock in the morning, Heini and I rode out in the motorboat with Schuchardt, the fishery master, to catch*

whitefish in Lake Dargainensee. The nets for the catch had been set the evening before. You could already tell whether the catch was good or not by the time the nets had been pulled halfway out of the water. If you were lucky, the flapping fish glittered like silver treasure trawled from the lake...

[photo caption p. 135: Gottliebe and Heinrich with fishermen on Lake Mauersee.]

In the wintertime, the Masurian lakes always froze over. That's when the ice fishing began. For that purpose, holes were broken in the ice at certain points, and nets were pushed from one hole to the next. I once experienced a catch weighing 800 centners. It was only with the greatest difficulty that a number of men were able to raise the nets. Afterwards, the fish were taken to Königsberg...

Paddle boating numbers among my most pleasant memories of Steinort. My boat was docked on the canal that led from the park through the reed belt to Lake Kirsaitensee. Everything was covered with water lilies far out into the lake. White mute swans floated amidst the water lilies with their still-gray young. All day long, the water was populated with rafts of tufted ducks, white-winged scoters, and wild ducks. Seagulls and terns bobbed on the waves. In the spring and fall one could watch flocks of water and marsh fowl that used the Steinort area as a stopover point on their flight from south to north and back again. Every so often, one was lucky enough to spot a sea eagle circling above the bog forests.

The best way to travel the long distances separating the holdings was on horseback. The saddle horses for Steinort were stabled next to the main building. There were four saddle horses. Heini's favorite was named Jaromir, mine was called Fine-Fine. Naturally, during the summer you couldn't trample down the fields on horseback. But in the fall, after the fields had been cut, you could gallop over the stubble to your heart's content. Fine-Fine enjoyed that. I would get up early for a ride across the fields in the morning

mist... There were some 40 producing mares on the Steinort properties, and they would foal every year. After three years, the foals were weaned and prepared for sale. The young horses were cleaned and curried, and their manes and tails were trimmed and styled so that they looked as if a magician had just conjured them onto the field. Everything was prepared for the appearance of the horse market commission.¹⁰ The equerries led the horses in front of the castle and presented them to the commission. As a rule, all horses offered for sale were also purchased. After the sales had been concluded, everyone was invited inside for a meal in the handsome Samson room, thus called because it was furnished with old oak furniture and decorated with five tapestries depicting the story of Samson.

[upper marginal note p. 137:
Countess Gottliebe Lehndorff's recollections
of Steinort, the Lehndorff Family Archive.]

[lower marginal note p. 137:
Source: German Federal Archive, formerly Berlin Document Center,
Central Index of Members of the NSDAP.]

One thing that doesn't jibe with this story of an intact, perished world is a note reporting that Count Heinrich Lehndorff was accepted as a member (Nr. 5286568) of the NSDAP¹¹ on May 1, 1937. Experts are aware that hundreds of thousands of others were simultaneously admitted to the Nazi Party on that date. This followed an outright admissions freeze that began in May 1933 on the grounds that membership had risen from 850,000 in January to 2.5 million in April of that year. Thereafter, the admissions freeze was lifted only for subsidiary organizations such as the Hitler Youth, the Mounted Forces, or the Motorcycle Corps. By 1939, membership exceeded 5 million, and by 1945 it had reached 8.5 million. A membership application signed by Heinrich von

¹⁰ The Lehndorffs sold unbroken young horses which are called "Remonten" in German.

¹¹ NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei): National Socialist German Worker's Party.

Lehndorff has not been found. Nevertheless, it would presumably be too simple to excuse this as a case (and there were many other such cases) where an individual was placed on the Party membership roster both unknowingly and against his will. Nor can we assume that he applied for membership with the intention of camouflaging his preexisting political opposition to the Nazi regime, which definitely applied to Hitler's later enemies, for example, Adam von Trott and Arvid Harnack. We can therefore assume that at some point between 1933 and 1937 Heinrich von Lehndorff actually put his signature on an application for membership in the Nazi Party or one of its subsidiary organizations. But why? Was it because he, like many East Prussian aristocrats who lived close to Stalin's revolutionary Soviet Union, were thinking primarily in anti-Communist terms? The childhood scene described above, when Heinrich and his cousin Hans fired a shotgun at what they assumed to be a communist gathering, much to the consternation of the parish consistory, shows that militant anti-Communist sentiment was already widespread among the young. Or was it youthful naïveté? In a conversation late in life with her granddaughter, Anna Dönhoff, his sister Karin (Sissi) described what she remembered from her own childhood in terms that were of the same tenor. In her case, the initial involvement with the Nazis sounds almost like an episode from the youth movement. *"In certain youth circles, you were a Nazi back then. As a young person in those days, when things were getting underway with National Socialism, you had a certain youthful enthusiasm."* She recalled that one night she and several other young people had ridden their bicycles to Serappen together so they could paste up Nazi posters at the train station. Still, at a minimum that entails covering several kilometers in complete darkness. And she recalled yet another situation from the same period. *"One time when we had gone skiing, there was an election in Germany. So you had to travel to the next border town in order to vote. And among us young people who were skiing there, only Alexander, who was older... voted for the German National ticket, which was the opposition party. And all of us young people voted for Hitler, for the Nazis. Everyone thought there was something new about it, you just had to get on board and things would turn around again... People today can't imagine why half of the world didn't rise up in*

revolt. It was such a crazy thing."

[marginal note on p. 138:
From Anna Dönhoff's master's thesis.]

There is no indication of which election she might have meant, and it is also difficult to determine. In 1932 alone, there were two presidential elections and eight elections to the Legislative Assembly. It was a year of crisis and armed conflict verging on civil war between Red Front fighters on one side and gangs of SA/SS thugs on the other. Heini was fully twenty-two years old in 1932, his sister Karin twenty-one. We are not told whether Heini had come along on this skiing vacation which was interrupted for a trip to the polls.

And if his application for Party membership wasn't due to recklessness or naïveté, was it perhaps motivated by opportunism or economic calculation? Was it a decision based on business interests? This would by all means apply to his brother-in-law, Dieter Dönhoff, the later owner of Friedrichstein, who joined the Party in 1933 despite his lack of enthusiasm. Membership seemed useful and advantageous for his future business interests which had suffered substantial setbacks during the world economic crisis.

The exact date of Count Heinrich Lehndorff's admission to the Party is not known because the NSDAP simply let all applications accumulate during the membership freeze. Could it perhaps have been filed in 1935, the year Heinrich presumably finished his military service and subsequently wanted to head for Africa, where – that same year – the other Dönhoff, Christoph (known as Toffi), had entered the Foreign Organization of the NSDAP? Or perhaps he was indulging a whim of opposition; there was a certain rebelliousness about the generation that had been caught "between the fronts." Traditional conservatism seemed too fainthearted for them, too behind the times, and for a while they entertained the idea that National Socialism, once it had shed its

extreme aspects, would show itself to be a movement that was both "social and national," and thus modern and timely. That, in turn, does not fit well with the rather liberal-minded and cosmopolitan upbringing he enjoyed, and it doesn't correspond at all to the political orientation of his father who was a signatory of "To the German Nobility", an appeal encouraging aristocrats to support the Weimar Republic. And what did Gottliebe have to say about all this? She had experienced the Nazi movement's early anti-Semitic excesses from frighteningly close by, and purposely characterized them as the beginning of her own "independent thinking." Was she aware of that he had applied, did he ask her? We don't know. Still, it seems likely that the application was submitted earlier, a good while before the marriage.

All we know for certain is that when war broke out three years later, in 1939, he had already discussed the necessity of a life "on the barricades" with his oppositional brother, Ahasverus; that as early as 1940 he was aware of resistance circles and their plans; and that he himself had joined the innermost circle of conspirators surrounding Henning von Tresckow no later than 1941. Somewhere, sometime, in the life of Heinrich von Lehndorff a deep caesura occurred, a fundamental break with his earlier occasionally thoughtless and spur-of-the-moment decision making. What matters in life, it would seem, is not lacking experience, making mistakes and then correcting them, but the degree of decision-making autonomy one attains through one's own wisdom, experience, and a willingness to put one's own life at risk.

Still in the same year, on November 28, 1937, Heinrich's daughter Marie Eleonore (called Nona) was born in Berlin. She saw the light of day at the Hotel Adlon. That sounds more unusual and extravagant than it was. The East Prussian nobility differed from the court aristocrats of Vienna or Paris in that they did not maintain palaces in the capital. From the beginning of the 18th century on, this was a thorn in the side of Prussia's kings, for they would have liked to see the center of up-and-coming Berlin adorned with the imposing palaces of the aristocracy. It would have provided the capital with a look of

prestige, particularly as it vied with other major cities. But the East Elbian aristocracy would not comply, presumably more because of the cost than for reasons of independence. When they were in Berlin, they and their entire families lodged at one of the hotels "befitting their rank," which was assuredly less expensive than the costly upkeep on two major properties with staff.

In any event, the Hotel Adlon was an exclusive address, which explains why Eleonore (Nona) was born there. The delivery was somewhat complicated because Gottliebe was suffering from pyelonephritis. A year and a half later, on May 14, 1939, their daughter Vera was born at the hospital in Königsberg. Their third daughter, Gabriele, was born at Steinort on December 14, 1942, shortly before Christmas and in the very midst of the war. Catherina, their fourth daughter, was born just under two years later on August 15, 1944, in the infirmary attached to Torgau prison, where her mother had been interned after her husband's escape. Some 14 days later, Catherina's father, Heinrich, whom she would never lay eyes upon, was executed. Gottliebe later remarked, "I'm certain we would have had many more children, if times had been different."

The Decision to Lead a Double Life

((pages 151 to 162))

Of the critical moment when Heinrich von Lehndorff made up his mind once and for all in favor of the assassination, Gottliebe writes: *"One day, when Heini had come home for a few days from the Eastern Front, I sensed that something extraordinary must have happened. Since we couldn't talk at home, we rode into the forest. 'Listen, I desperately need to tell you something,' Heini said to me. 'I had a horrific experience. An SS man grabbed a child and flung it against a tree until it was dead. So I've decided to join the resistance now, once and for all. There's a whole group of us gathered around Bock. We've got Tresckow, Schlabrendorff, and Hardenberg. All of them want to see Hitler eliminated.' And with that, the die was cast."*

[marginal note p. 151:

From the first draft of Gottliebe von Lehndorff's
Erinnerungen an Steinort (Recollections of Steinort),
the Lehndorff Family Archive.
Gottliebe wrote this in the 1960s;
the term "resistance" was only coined during the postwar years.]

This conversation must have taken place very close in time to the massacre of 7,000 Jews by an SS unit in Borissow, which Hardenberg and perhaps also Lehndorff witnessed in person and which resulted in an absolute uproar in Henning von Tresckow's circle. The garrison commander at the time was driven to suicide by shame and by the protests of his colleagues. Yet von Bock once again neglected to intervene personally with Hitler, notwithstanding fierce pressure from Tresckow, Hardenberg, and Lehndorff. The massacre occurred in October 1941 in the immediate vicinity of the Army Group Center's Central Command Headquarters. In this same Borissow, Stauffenberg and Tresckow had met for the first time only a few months before, in June 1941.

[photo caption page 152: manuscript page from Gottliebe's memoirs]

Heinrich's sister, Karin von Lehndorff, also refers to the massacre at Borissow in a conversation with her grandchild, mentioning that it was the event her brother cited as his ultimate reason for entering the innermost circle of conspirators. His father and mother, his sister, his intimate childhood friend Marion Dönhoff, and his cousin Hans von Lehndorff were aware of the step he had taken and his justification for doing so. Naturally, his relatives received no detailed information. Lehndorff was too cautious and tight-lipped for that. Still, on occasion his kin would be of service by relaying his desire to speak with someone. As an example, his sister passed a message to Fritz-Dietloff von der Schulenburg encouraging him to contact Lehndorff at his earliest convenience: there was something they needed to coordinate. The meeting took place at the end of May 1944 when Schulenburg was in East Prussia to discuss final arrangements. Sometimes Marion Dönhoff would also help when a meeting had to be scheduled with co-conspirators from the Kreisau Circle, whom she knew well. At the beginning of May 1944, there was a meeting near Königsberg involving Count Peter Yorck and his wife, Marion, Lehndorff, and Dohna. *"Of the evening at Dohna's home in Tolksdorf, Marion Yorck reported that Dohna, Lehndorff, and her husband withdrew together after dinner as was the custom. One can imagine the subject of the discussion."*

[marginal note p. 153:

Detlev Graf von Schwerin, *"Dann sind's die besten Köpfe, die man henkt"*
(Then It's the Best Minds They're Hanging), p. 376.]

Shortly thereafter, in June 1944, Heinrich, Gottliebe, and Hans von Lehndorff, who was a staunch member of the Confessing Church, attended a church service in Insterburg and later had supper together. Their formerly fun-loving and so ebullient cousin Hans seemed very grave that day. Afterwards, when the two of them were taking a walk together, Heinrich asked the young doctor whether his family and co-conspirators could, in the event, also rely on him. Hans assented, while knowing in his heart that his own

Christian convictions would make him try his utmost to prevent a murder from becoming necessary.

[marginal note p. 153:
Hans Graf Lehndorff, *Die Insterburger Jahre*
(The Years in Insterburg), p. 86-88.]

After his personal experiences of earlier Nazi crimes, Heinrich had reached the point from which he could not, and did not want to, return. This is also borne out by his 1942 meeting in Stettin with Swedish consul Karl Ingve Vendel, whom Saul Friedländer discusses: *"In reality, Vendel was a Swedish abwehr agent. Under cover of his consular activity, he was observing German troop movements and therefore also maintained clandestine contacts with several members of the German military resistance against the regime. After visiting a friend at an estate in East Prussia, Vendel filed a detailed report dated August 9, 1942, that outlined conditions in the so-called Generalgouvernement¹² and also contained a section on the extermination of the Jews: 'In one town, all of the Jews were assembled for an activity that was officially billed as 'delousing.' They were forced to remove their clothing at the entrance, but the delousing process consisted of gassing them and then heaving them all into a mass grave . . . The source from which I received all this information on the Generalgouvernement is of the kind that allows not even the slightest doubt as to the veracity of my informant's accounts.'*

According to research conducted by historian Jozef Lewandowski, Vendel received the intelligence from his friend, Count Heinrich von Lehndorff, a reserve lieutenant in the Army Group Center, and from a guest who joined them at Gut Gross Steinort, Lehndorff's estate in East Prussia. In all likelihood, the guest was a man we have already

¹² Areas of Poland that were under German military occupation from 1935-1945.

*encountered, namely, Lieutenant Colonel Henning von Tresckow, the most active organizer behind the military conspiracy against Hitler. Vendel's report was also not forwarded to the Allies.*¹³

[marginal note p. 154:

Saul Friedländer, *Die Jahre der Vernichtung 1939-1945*

(The Years of Extermination, 1939-1945), p. 488.]

Apart from the (futile) attempts to inform foreign countries, and the equally failed attempts to win von Bock over to the conspirators' side, Lehndorff's main responsibility within the inner circle around Henning von Tresckow was to persuade the hesitant and doubting to participate, and to make inconspicuous meetings possible at his castle, Steinort. Not only was Steinort now located in the immediate proximity of *Mauerwald*, the Supreme Command of the Army, beginning in 1941 it became the permanent residence of Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. In itself, this proximity was fatal, but at the same time it served as perfect camouflage for the double life the family now began to lead. Initially, no one could have reason to harbor suspicion when ranking officers from *Mauerwald* visited the house where the Foreign Minister himself was living. As a result, the list of visitors at Steinort reads like a *Who's Who* of the July 20 conspirators. Naturally, a list such as that didn't really exist in written form; no guest book was kept, and for good reason. The ever-courted yet ever-reluctant General Field Marshal Kluge spent a number of days there as a guest on repeated occasions, as did Tresckow, Schlabrendorff, Stieff, Fellgiebel, Hahn, and Thiele, as well as Wagner, Fritz Schulenburg, Axel von dem Bussche, von der Groeben, von Uexküll and even Helmuth James von Moltke. It goes without saying that they all assumed that the house was bugged and that everyone was being watched. The forest was vast, however, and the

¹³ Friedländer's book was translated into English and published by HarperCollins. In the event that Vollmer's "Doppelleben" is published in English, the translator of the current sample text has recommended quoting the Friedländer passage from the existing translation.

estate sprawling; what harm could there be in officers riding on horseback, or in a sleigh or carriage ride? Routinely, Tresckow and Schlabrendorff would always arrive after nightfall.

[photo caption p. 155: General Field Marshal von Kluge visiting the Lehndorffs at Steinort. Conspiratorial discussions took place during cross-country drives in the carriage.]

Within the framework of recruiting new supporters, Lehndorff had the task and the opportunity to throw his prestigious family name into the balance as a means of opening initial lines of communication with potential conspirators and making discreet contacts. By pointing to his own risk in a castle that was besieged by the SS, he was convincingly able to underscore the seriousness and gravity of the risky venture.

[photo caption p. 156: Taking coffee in the garden with officers from *Mauerwald*.]

To that end he visited numerous East Prussian officers and aristocrats at their estates, cautiously probing whether he might be able to enlist their participation. As well, meetings at family gatherings and hunting events, at cattle markets and racetracks were opportune occasions for planning initial contacts or arranging for discussions to take place. When Axel von dem Bussche, a still thoroughly unseasoned officer at the time, witnessed a massacre of Jews on October 5, 1942, at the airport in Dubno, Ukraine, he subsequently remarked to his friend Karl Konrad von der Groeben that something had to be done about getting rid of this criminal Hitler; he himself would even be willing to handle it. Von der Groeben passed the information to his wife's cousin, Heinrich von Lehndorff, and Lehndorff invited Axel von dem Bussche to Steinort. Lehndorff spoke very little with the young officer during the meeting, but he listened to him, observed him, and then contacted Schulenburg and Stauffenberg in Berlin. Two days later he returned with the news that Schulenburg would introduce Axel von dem

Bussche to Stauffenberg. And that resulted in concrete planning for the assassination, which was set for November of 1943 but ultimately had to be abandoned. Von dem Bussche waited for three days near *Wolfsschanze* under enormous emotional strain (perhaps even visiting Steinort during that time) for an opportunity to carry out the assassination. In vain. He subsequently had to return to the front line and was seriously wounded in one of the first operations. He still had the explosives with him in the field hospital. His friend von der Groeben came to visit him and disposed of the satchel in a lake.

[marginal note p. 157:
This information stems from a conversation with
Ria von der Groeben in May 2009.]

The transcript of the People's Court trial under presiding judge Freisler against Count Dohna contains an annotation that the plan for the July 20 coup d'état (code-named *Walküre*) designated Dohna as the chief political officer for East Prussia, and that he had accepted the position in a conversation with Heinrich von Lehndorff. At that point Lehndorff had already been executed, hence it is also possible that Dohna named him as a go-between because he could no longer jeopardize him. In as much as one of Lehndorff's key functions was to enlist supporters for the resistance, we can assume that he actually conducted the decisive negotiations himself.

We also have a prominent witness to substantiate this. In a letter to his wife, Freya, dated August 19, 1943, Helmuth James von Moltke writes: *"In the evening, a Count von Lehndorff from East Prussia was here, very clever and pleasant, and gave quite an interesting account of sentiments and positions in East Prussia. Apparently, people there are already very concerned about their further destiny. It seemed to me that L. represents important progress for us in East Prussia, and in the week ahead he will try*

to make an another appearance with the man in question (Dohna). I'm anxious to see whether it will work out..."

[marginal note p. 158:

H. J. von Moltke, *Briefe an Freya 1939-1945*

(Letters to Freya, 1939-1945), p. 526.]

At Tresckow's behest, Lehndorff also used every opportunity to gather intelligence about the political and military thinking in von Ribbentrop's circles. His double life at Steinort included participating in any of the Foreign Minister's briefings that took place at the castle. He was shocked at the way the military and political situations were viewed: *"Naturally, Heini had very detailed information about the situation on the front, about everything, they had the briefings with General Field Marshal Bock, too, of Army Group Center, and knew exactly where things were happening and how. And Heini often received furloughs because of his enormous farming operations, so he would always attend whenever Ribbentrop held a briefing in our castle. As Foreign Minister, you have just as much information about the state of the war. And Heini said it was completely incredible; what was being presented to the Foreign Minister never lined up with what was actually going on."*

[marginal note p. 158:

Gottliebe in the interview with Vera.]

One particularly dangerous move was Lehndorff's attempt in 1943 to recruit Karl Wolff, a high-ranking SS functionary, for the resistance.

[marginal note p. 158:

For a character study of this colorfully opportunistic personality at the interface

between Hitler and Himmler,

see Jochen von Lang,

Der Adjutant (The Adjutant).]

"And it always entailed having to put oneself at their mercy. And, remarkably, they didn't inform against him, not even the people who participated, and afterwards hadn't participated after all. And by that I mean a certain Obersturmführer or Obersturmbannführer¹⁴ Wolf(f), that was his name, I knew him, too, very good-looking, and he was also a guest of ours once . . . And Heini solicited him as well, and Wolff never denounced him . . . There were a number of them who said, if you're successful . . . But they never gave him away, otherwise he would have been arrested beforehand."

[marginal note p. 158:
Gottliebe speaking with Vera.]

Wolff was Himmler's personal adjutant, his "eyes and ears" with Hitler at *Wolfsschanze*. He was a slick-mannered upstart and parlor fascist who held the same political rank as SS-Führer Heydrich or Kaltenbrunner and was known as a thoroughly unscrupulous and opportunistic power seeker. On July 26, 1944, shortly after the assassination attempt, he was actually promoted again and rose to the positions of Supreme SS and Police Leader as well as Official Representative of the German Army in Italy. On the afternoon of July 20, he accompanied Mussolini (arriving from Italy) on his visit to *Wolfsschanze*, which went forward pointedly in spite of the assassination attempt. For that reason he was one of the first to be informed when Lehndorff was arrested the following day.

[photo caption p. 159: Wolff (top, at far right – below, at far left) shadowing Hitler and Himmler.]

Absurd as it may seem, Wolff was not the only SS man to consider switching sides when he encountered difficulties with Himmler. As early as 1942, Henning von Tresckow recruited the shady SS Leader Nebe for the resistance. Such risky attempts to enlist even high-ranking SS officers for the coup d'état were based on a sober and realistic

¹⁴ Senior Assault (or Storm) Leader, a rank used in the SA and the SS.

assessment of the provisions that would be necessary if the plan were actually to succeed. To illustrate, in numerous discussions with his adjutants Hardenberg and Lehndorff, General Field Marshal von Bock insisted that, if at all, a coup d'état had the potential to succeed only if key, top-echelon members of the SS had been recruited by the opposition beforehand. When they had accomplished that, they would be welcome to approach him on the topic again.

When Heinrich Lehndorff came home after such difficult and risky forays into the innermost circles of SS leadership, he occasionally intimated that his wife Gottliebe should reckon with the possibility of his exposure even before the assassination was staged. Discussing this with Vera, Gottliebe described the situation in the following way: *"One time he told me, 'My position is such that it could be that I don't come back again. That wouldn't mean that I'm dead yet, but that I've been arrested. And then somehow, through Schlabrendorff or heaven only knows who, you'll find out where and how and what. But that could happen.' And so that put me under enormous stress every time he left, he was always away, almost always away, and he always came back. But he never told me whom he had seen, so he wouldn't incriminate me . . . We had to work hard on ourselves, the two of us, when he came back, so that we didn't touch on the subject too much in the first place, because that weakens you. The last three years, we really had to make an effort, because, he told me, all of that weakens a person, we mustn't allow it to weaken us, because then fear takes hold of you and then you're finished."* *"So you didn't discuss the subject at all?"* *"Oh yes, we did discuss it, but that was relatively rare, actually. He only needed to say a few words: 'Things went well,' or 'It was very tough again this time,' no more than that, really...."*

[marginal note p. 161:
Gottliebe speaking with her daughter Vera.]

Sometimes, as Gottliebe's cousin Ria von der Groeben reports, a great unspoken sense of tension hung over Steinort; after all, von Ribbentrop and his staff occupied the entire left wing of the castle for over three years. Looks often spoke more than words. The Gestapo agents were always an invisible presence.

In the end, however, Heinrich von Lehndorff's most important role was to function as a liaison officer between the two centers of resistance. Until the final days, he acted as a courier, relaying plans and intelligence back and forth between the top resistance echelons in Berlin surrounding General Olbricht and Colonel Count von Stauffenberg, and Henning von Tresckow at his remote post on the Eastern Front. Schlabrendorff was also frequently engaged in this activity.

Begun in 1941 in Borissow, relations between Tresckow and Stauffenberg intensified considerably late in the summer of 1943 when Stauffenberg and he collaborated with Olbricht to develop plans for the coup d'état in concrete detail. Tresckow was actually on rest leave but remained in Berlin. These two highly determined personalities and strategists of military resistance were very close in their shared convictions. They constantly needed to exchange secret plans and information, but were often posted in locations that separated them by thousands of kilometers. Contact between the conspirators never occurred in writing or by telephone; Lehndorff memorized each of the messages and transmitted them orally. Gottliebe recalls that from time to time he would write telephone numbers on the bathroom mirror, impressing them on his memory repeatedly before wiping them off. On July 11th, the first opportunity for Stauffenberg to attempt the assassination, we find Lehndorff in Bendlerblock¹⁵ where he met with Mertz von Quirnheim as well as General Fritz Lindemann. This can be taken as evidence of the enormous degree to which Lehndorff was privy to the final decisions leading up to

¹⁵ A military administrative building in Berlin that served as headquarters of the conspirators.

July 20th. The meeting was noticed and later surfaced during interrogations. He also conveyed Henning von Tresckow's advice to Stauffenberg early in June 1944, when Stauffenberg asked whether the whole assassination still made any sense at all given the Allied invasion on the Western Front. Henning von Tresckow conveyed the following message via Heinrich von Lehndorff to the still-determined assassin Stauffenberg:

"Hitler's assassination must be carried out regardless of cost."

[marginal note p. 161:
Schlabrendorff: *Offiziere gegen Hitler*
(They Almost Killed Hitler), p. 109.]