



# Hitler's Last Levy in East Prussia: Volkssturm Einsatz Bataillon Goldap (25/235) 1944-45

*Bruno Just, Frederick Steinhardt*

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On 16 October, 1944, the 3rd White Russian Front launched its massive offensive against Heeresgruppe Mitte. The German 4th Armee, whose line of defense stretched from Nowograd on the Narew to Memel, was quickly broken through.

This is the very personal war-diary of the adjutant of Volkssturm Einsatz Bataillon Goldap (25/235), which was activated, with a strength of 400 men, on 17 October, 1944. Inadequately armed with Russian infantry rifles lacking slings, light machine guns and Panzerfäuste, with no uniforms, entrenching tools, identity discs, blankets or medical packets, the battalion was hastily thrown into action three days later, on October 20, in the Goldap sector of the 4th Armee front, losing 76 killed and wounded in its first action.

Withdrawn on 23 October for urgently needed training and better armament, the battalion went back into action on 18 January in the Eichwald northeast of Insterburg, near Stobingen, and fought on, with hardly a break, falling back to the city of Königsberg and taking a valiant part in the bitter defense that enabled the escape of refugees and most of the surviving military units by sea. The 70 survivors of the battalion owed their personal survival to an order forged by their last battalion commander that led to their relief by a Wehrmacht division and enshippment for Denmark. The author chronicles daily life dominated by desperate military action, interspersed with brief glimpses of his family, as he crosses paths with his wife and daughter, caught up in the mass of refugees fleeing before the advancing Russians.

There are very few personal accounts of Hitler's last levy, the Volkssturm. For years, the handwritten diary and a copy typed by the author, remained in the files of the Bundesarchiv (L) in Bayreuth. The author's granddaughter approved publication for distribution, in photocopied form, to survivors and family members of the battalion. Such copies, in German, are hard to find. Now at last, this precious document from the closing days of World War II in East Prussia has become available in English translation, with careful footnotes filling in details regarding the Volkssturm, a unique force called into being by the Nazi Party in the closing months of the war, conceived as a party-led alternative to the Wehrmacht. Ill-equipped, pitifully armed (when armed at all) and poorly led, nevertheless on the Eastern Front – where the youngsters and older men comprising its battalions were highly motivated in a desperate attempt to delay the onrushing Russian hordes so that their wives and children could escape rape, torture, mutilation and murder at Russian hands – the Volkssturm sometimes achieved their goal.

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