

**SWORD and
PLOWSHARE**

Arthur Grenke

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	vii
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BOOK I WAR AND REVOLUTION

Part 1	At Home in Neuland.....	3
Part 2	War and Expulsion.....	53
Part 3	Revolution along the Black Sea.....	131

BOOK II COMMUNIST UTOPIA

Part 1	Return Home.....	201
Part 2	The Man-Made Famine.....	238
Part 3	Transformation and Destruction.....	300

BOOK III ILLUSIONS OF SAFETY

Part 1	The Coming of the Germans.....	375
Part 2	Flight	426
Part 3	Dresden.....	455

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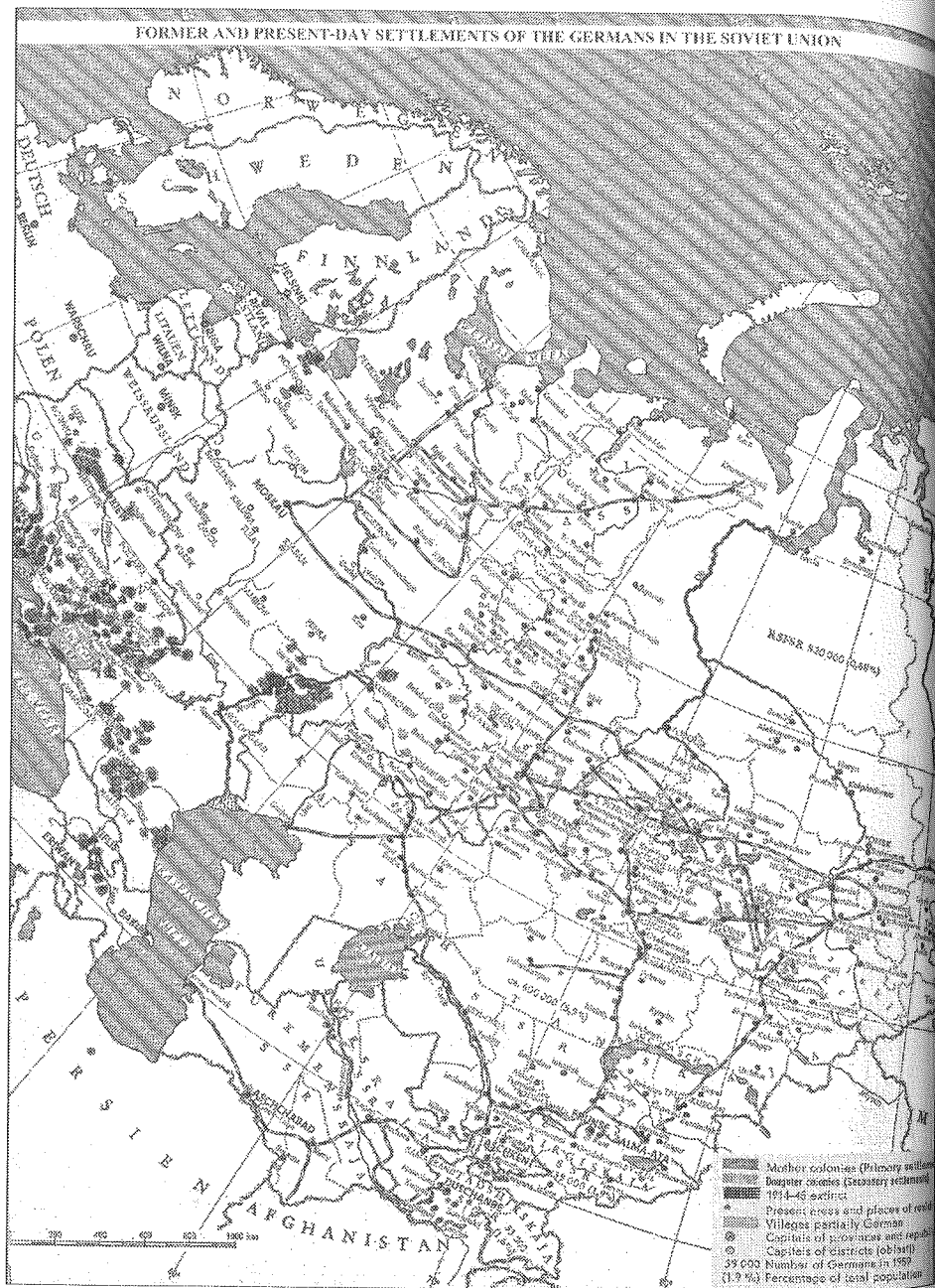
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INTRODUCTION

FEW PERIODS OF EUROPEAN history have witnessed greater violence than the years between 1914 and 1945. Emperors and dictators sought to build empires or create new societies through sword and famine. Millions of people were wiped out in the process, millions who had little more control over the maelstrom sweeping them along than a word has control over the eraser wiping it out. This is the story of some of these people. While the characters are fictitious, the events they experience are based on fact. This is the story of Robert Sprenger who tried to cope with an insane world as best he could. Ruth and Helga, the women in his life, as well as their children, sought to find love and happiness in a world with little of either.

The story begins in Neuland, a fictitious name for a small German-Russian village in Volhynia. German immigrants in search of land started settling in Russia at the time of Catherine the Great, in the 1700s. Lutherans came, and Mennonites, as well as Catholics. With the encouragement of Russian rulers, several major concentrations of Germans arose in the Black Sea area and along the Volga. In the early 1800s smaller German settlements also took root in Volhynia, where local landowners sought to attract German immigrants to drain swamp land which the native population had often neither the skill nor the inclination to make arable.

By 1914, over two million Germans lived in the Russian Empire, most of them in the southern Ukraine. In the western Ukraine, Germans were concentrated west of Zhitomir. The immigrants had cut the forests and drained the swamps. Small villages and rolling fields stood where once had been wilderness.

World War I broke out and the Russian government expelled the German speaking population of Volhynia. During the forced evacuation, thousands of the exiles died. Those who returned to Ukrainian Volhynia

found a changed world. During the late 1920s came the forced collectivization. Then came the man-made famine during which, it is estimated, some five million people starved to death in the Ukraine and a further two million succumbed in the North Caucasus and elsewhere. In Neuland many of the villagers died. The famine had no sooner ended when the expulsions started again, during which some German villages of Volhynia lost almost all their males, with the exception of boys and old men. During this time, many of the men of Neuland were hauled away by the "black crows" which claimed their victims in the dead of night. Then came the invasion of the German Wehrmacht. Inhabitants of Neuland who did not wish to fall again under communism fled in front of the retreating German armies, ever in search of a safe refuge. This search ended in the inferno of Dresden.

BOOK I

WAR AND REVOLUTION