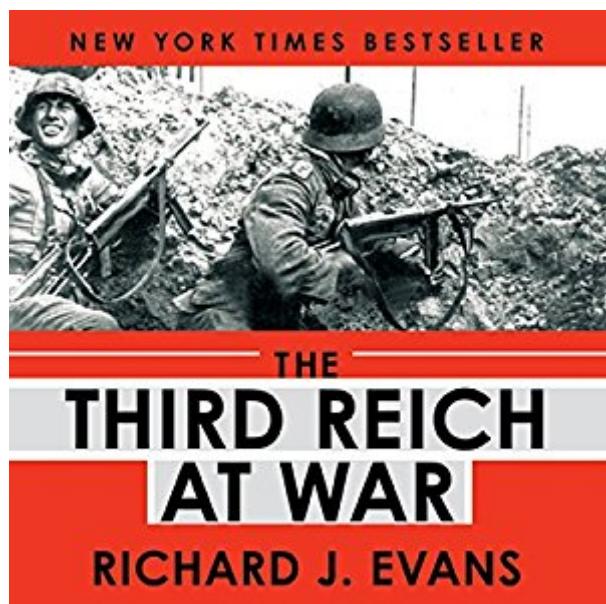


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The Third Reich At War



Synopsis

The final volume in Richard J. Evans's masterly trilogy on the history of Nazi Germany traces the rise and fall of German military might, the mobilization of a "people's community" to serve a war of conquest, and Hitler's campaign of racial subjugation and genocide. Already hailed as "a masterpiece" (William Grimes in *The New York Times*) and "the most comprehensive history... of the Third Reich" (Ian Kershaw), this epic trilogy reaches its terrifying climax in this volume. Evans interweaves a broad narrative of the war's progress with viscerally affecting personal testimony from a wide range of people - from generals to front-line soldiers, from Hitler Youth activists to middle-class housewives. *The Third Reich at War* lays bare the dynamics of a nation more deeply immersed in war than any society before or since. Fresh insights into the conflict's great events are here, from the invasion of Poland to the Battle of Stalingrad to Hitler's suicide in the bunker. But just as important is the re-creation of the daily experience of ordinary Germans in wartime, staggering under pressure from Allied bombing and their own government's mounting demands upon them. At the center of the book is the Nazi extermination of Europe's Jews, set in the context of Hitler's genocidal plans for the racial restructuring of Europe. Blending narrative, description, and analysis, *The Third Reich at War* creates an engrossing picture - at once sweeping and precise - of a society rushing headlong to self-destruction and taking much of Europe with it. It is the culmination of a historical masterwork that will remain the most authoritative work on Nazi Germany for years to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Richard Evans' three volume masterwork seems destined to become one of the definitive histories of the Third Reich. It is thoroughly researched, enormously detailed, very well written, and extremely grim reading. This third and last volume covers the final excesses of the regime, as it moved through increasingly radical steps to attempt to both win the war and to meet its self imposed racial goals. As Evans notes, this volume is centered on the Third Reich itself and is not intended to be a general history of WWII. While there is some coverage of key military campaigns, the main focus is on the territory controlled by the Third Reich, with special attention being paid to the dark events in Eastern Europe. A key part of Prof. Evans' contribution is that he allows us to see the impact of the Third Reich at a local, grass roots level. He makes copious use of diaries, showing the tedium, stoicism, or despair of civilians' everyday lives. In the earlier volumes we saw the creation in Germany of a pervasive Orwellian totalitarian state, which tried to be all-controlling but was also careful to retain a populist base. Now we see that totalitarian state reaching out into territories where the constraints of popular support are both unnecessary and unwanted. In reading Evans' three volumes, I have occasionally felt drained by his detailed descriptions of so many terrible events. But his relentless detail is also key to understanding the real scope of what was happening. It is very tempting to caricaturize the Third Reich by focusing on its senior leadership and reducing its history to a small set of two-dimensional villains in strange costumes, clicking heels and ordering evil deeds. Well unfortunately the reality was much uglier than that.

My God, what a horrible book! Not that the book itself is bad -- it is very good indeed. But its subject matter and exposition is unrelievedly hideous. Virtually every chapter seems to have a new statistic detailing hundreds of thousands of people being killed. And the author has almost nothing good to say about its subject -- the Third Reich from 1939 to 1945. That is probably because there is almost nothing good to say about it. While there is probably not much new in this book, it is a marvellous compendium of what is known about World War II Germany. Naturally, any book on the war years is bound to be selective, and I think Evans does the average reader a favor by accentuating the negative. Not only were the heads of the Nazi hierarchy murderous beasts -- the military leadership were mostly moral cretins, and when they were not moral cretins, were complicit thugs. The civil service and the industrial complex were self-serving cowards at best and more often, complicit vipers. Even the German citizenry, while not quite "Hitler's Willing Executioners," were more than willing to support the regime and overlook its crimes until they were bombed back into the stone age. On top of everything else, they were strategically and politically stupid. Evans makes it clear, by

detailing production and population figures, that there was never a realistic chance that Germany could achieve its wartime goals, much less conquer the world. Taking on three major opponents at once, each of which could outproduce and outman Germany, was madness. The great virtue of this book is to disabuse anyone who might be tempted to admire the Third Reich -- particularly adolescent males who could be seduced by the Wehrmacht's "heroism" or German military efficiency.

"The Third Reich at War" represents the final installment of Richard J. Evans' panoptic on the Second World War. All three volumes are scholarly masterpieces. Hitler's war has probably spawned more articles and books than could possibly be read and absorbed by even the most insatiable professional historian or dedicated lay reader. In other words, even excepting the barrage of sensational fictional works on television, in the print media and on the "silver screen", there's just far too much serious literature and research for consumption. So, out of the cornucopia of works, even those of that attempt an historical synthesis on a "grand scale", why this one? In a phrase, because it's probably the best overview of Hitler's Reich so far published. Contrary to the title's implication, this book does not present a detailed battlefield analysis of Wehrmacht strategy and tactics. The emphasis instead is on the Nazi motives for the war of aggression; how matters were handled; how ordinary (and extra-ordinary) Germans reacted and perceived events as they unfolded: the how and why, in other words. As it happens, the central ideological tenants used to justify the invasion of Europe and later the USSR, were far from rational calculations undertaken by reasonable, pragmatic and logical thinkers. Rather, the war was an integral component of a Nazi goulash of popular current eugenic theory, "racial science" and really rank anti-Semitism viewed through a lens of Social Darwinism. As Evans explains it, the ideologies then current in Nazi Germany were so weird, so bizarre, so fantastic and so overweening as to be blinding. Thus, Nazi true believers evidently could not realize the toxic and fatal consequences for Germany which would follow from actually implementing these beliefs.

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