

Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War 1939-1945: How the Nazis Led Germany from Conquest to Disaster*, Penguin, London, 2008.

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Following *The Coming of the Third Reich* (2003) and *The Third Reich in Power* (2005), *The Third Reich at War* is the third and final volume by Richard J. Evans dealing with the history of Nazi Germany from its pre-1933 origins to its destruction in 1945. To some degree, Evans' work represents a satisfactory and thorough overview of wartime Nazi Germany in all its aspects. Political decision making and military events are interwoven with the stories or anecdotes of individuals at different levels of society. The result is a lucid narrative which achieves more than books of this kind have done in the past. This historiography includes William L. Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany* (1960), which focuses on high politics and military campaigns. In more recent years, Ian Kershaw's two-volume biography of Hitler (*Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* appeared in 1998 followed by *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* in 2000) inevitably deals with those areas which most interested Hitler, namely politics, foreign policy and race, while Michael Burleigh's *The Third Reich: A New History* (2000) concerns itself mostly with genocide and the violent criminality of the regime.

In comparison, Evans paints a sweeping picture of the Third Reich, one which is grandiose in nature, even when considering the third volume alone. Major fields of research, all of which can be considered in their own right, inform the story told by Evans. The political dramas of Hitler and his inner circle receive the attention they deserve, as do diplomatic events, be it with the continued loyalty Hitler demonstrated towards his weaker Italian ally, or the tense relationship with the Soviet Union that lasted two years before the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. Evans, a social historian, is equally comfortable in describing military proceedings as he is in considering the fortunes, or lack thereof, of individuals from several parts of society. Mass murder is viewed alongside the economy, science and the role, or experience, of women in wartime Germany.

Furthermore, the interrelation between these various aspects is highlighted. For example, not only is the economy's influence on war production and therefore the overall war effort shown, but Evans also acknowledges that the war itself, while also racially driven, was focused on economic exploitation. The conquest of Europe would mean its entire economic reorganisation designed to serve Germany's interests. This two-way relationship between the war and the economy is clearly demonstrated by Evans, and is indicative of his ability, throughout the book, to look at multiple aspects of the history of Nazi Germany and weave them together seamlessly, creating a unified narrative.

It is in filling his narrative with people from the period and in allowing their characters to shine through that Evans is at his strongest. The voices of Jewish victims and German soldiers are heard clearly through diaries and letters, but so too, forebodingly, are those of the political and military leadership, not only through diaries and letters but also through wartime speeches or post-war memoirs. Perhaps this reflects the unfortunate fact that, although most might identify themselves with the plight of millions of ordinary men and women, it is those few at the top of the social hierarchy that always play so significant, and all too often so devastating, a role in determining the fate of those millions. Because of this reality, the role of the leadership in a history such as this must always receive attention. But while the voices of Nazism might still be heard, the knowledge of its horrors places their words into context. For instance, Goebbels' speech in February 1943, stirring up enthusiasm for total war, was 'an imposing demonstration of the German people's will to fight to the end' (p.425). Nevertheless, Evans does not allow the voices of these leaders to drown out those of others. A fighter pilot, a Jewish student, a German schoolboy, a Jewish historian and many others are given considerable space within the book's pages. Additionally, the book is of interest in that it brings to attention some lesser known facts. One striking example is that of the North African campaign. Much of what is known centres on Rommel and the British Army's fight against him in the desert. Yet even in North Africa, particularly in Tunisia, Nazi racial policy was implemented, resulting in the death of approximately 5,000 North African Jews.

Being a large, all-encompassing narrative, this book lends itself to general readership. While not focusing, as do many popular history books, on the details of particular battles, it does deal with those significant military events, such as the drive towards Moscow in 1941 or the battle of Stalingrad in 1942-3, in their larger context. Thus these battles, always of interest and of great significance to the fate of the world, appear in this book alongside descriptions of day-to-day life, such as the deterioration of education in Germany or the experiences of those in the Jewish ghettos. Evans, therefore, has crafted a book that makes easily accessible the latest research, making it ideal not only for general readership but also for academic specialists as a reference. Dealing as it does with a multiplicity of subjects related to Nazism, no one of these subjects is dealt with in the sort of detail that could be found in a specialist work. This in itself could be viewed as the book's main weakness, as not one of these fields are mastered, but it must be remembered that what is created here is a narrative, and an understanding of the main themes within each field, and their interrelation, is shown. Nevertheless, for specialists the index is comprehensive, making the book useful as a reference, and the notes and bibliography are extensive, including the latest works in both English and German. If the reader requires further information on any particular topic, the notes successfully point them to the relevant sources.

This is a well-written book which draws together much of what is known about Nazi Germany during the war years. While not the first book of its kind, Evans' *The Third Reich at War* is probably the most complete.