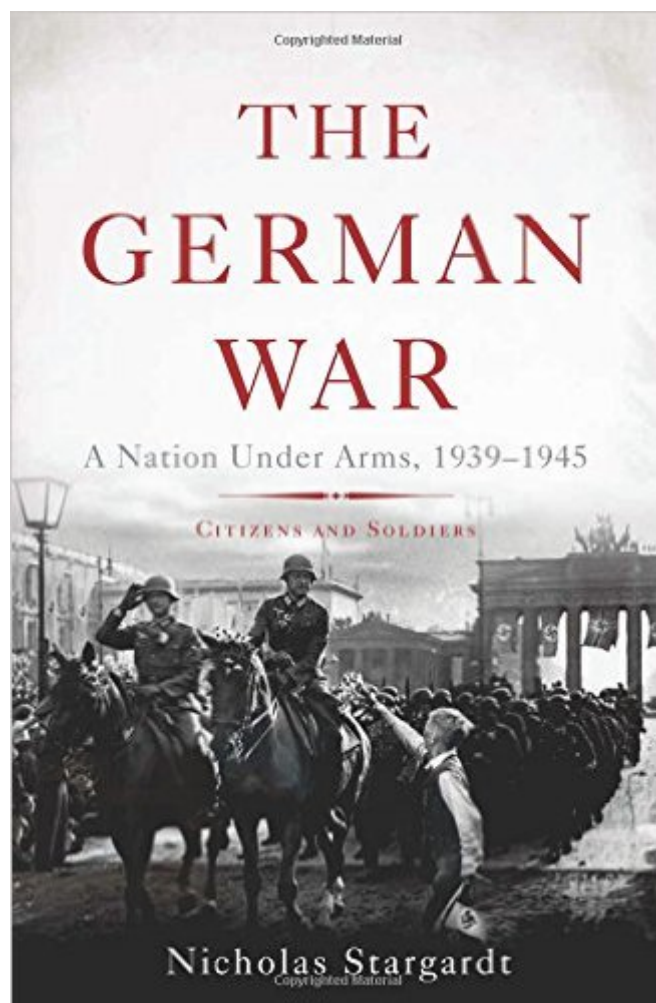


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The German War: A Nation Under Arms, 1939–1945



Synopsis

As early as 1941, Allied victory in World War II seemed all but assured. How and why, then, did the Germans prolong the barbaric conflict for three and a half more years? In *The German War*, acclaimed historian Nicholas Stargardt draws on an extraordinary range of primary source materials—personal diaries, court records, and military correspondence—to answer this question. He offers an unprecedented portrait of wartime Germany, bringing the hopes and expectations of the German people—from infantrymen and tank commanders on the Eastern front to civilians on the home front—to vivid life. While most historians identify the German defeat at Stalingrad as the moment when the average German citizen turned against the war effort, Stargardt demonstrates that the Wehrmacht in fact retained the staunch support of the patriotic German populace until the bitter end. Astonishing in its breadth and humanity, *The German War* is a groundbreaking new interpretation of what drove the Germans to fight—and keep fighting—for a lost cause.

Book Information

Hardcover: 760 pages

Publisher: Basic Books; First American Edition edition (October 13, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0465018998

ISBN-13: 978-0465018994

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.9 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (164 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #31,501 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #76 in Books > History > Europe > Germany #276 in Books > History > Military > World War II #909 in Books > History > World

Customer Reviews

This is a superb book. The writing is outstanding, the book is thoroughly researched, the photos are unusually good, and overall it offers a new perspective on Germany and Germans during the war. It's over 500 pages, and Stargardt's ideas take some time to develop, so this is not an easy read. It's another book that the "I love it" phrasing with 5 stars is not very helpful; this is not a topic one loves, as a great nation engages in a destructive and evil war, on a course to catastrophe. I find it not so easy to tell why I think this is a superb book, and why it stands out in a category of books that must total in the thousands (I've read scores of related books). Some of it is the wonderful way the

story is told. Stargardt uses period letters and journals to follow a number of actors through this story--their story and Germany's story. The author manages to integrate large-scale events with the personal, and the result is a deeper understanding of what it was like for Germans engaged in the war than any other book I have read. It's also the range of stories. There's a good deal of discussion of how German religious figures related to the war (mostly fatalistic patriotism, for lack of a better phrase). There are some touching stories: a soldier writing home to a deeply loved spouse is touching, even if the soldier is fighting in an evil cause. This last is an important point. Stargardt pulls no punches, and this book in no sense attempts to mitigate German atrocities--he even makes a solid case that knowledge of the atrocities (including mass murder of Jews) was rather widely known. What the book does is humanizes people caught up in a pending catastrophe not really, for the most part, of their own making.

As another reviewer has stated, this is not a book about which you should say "I love it" -- except to say that one loves getting closer to the truth about one of the most difficult realities in world history, a reality that is still, to this day in October 2015 a few weeks after the book's publication, "current events." At over 500 pages, Stargardt's history have been very well developed, and his sourcing is almost frightening in its intensity (at one point I thought that every paragraph had a footnote, and many many do). But the basic work that "The German War" does best is to continue the debunking of the Cold War mythologies that many of us were plagued with when we were growing up in the USA during the 1950s and 1960s. As Stargardt's research makes very very clear, the German war was a war supported, even after the Wehrmacht began retreating following Stalingrad and Kursk, by the majority of the German people (the "Volk") and by a probably greater majority of their various leaders -- religious, social, political, and especially in the entertainment industry. The German people who formed the base for the worst the Nazis did in the 1930s and 1940s were not "occupied" by Hitler and the Nazi Party. They were willing participants in the project, at almost every level of German society. Years ago, as we were discussing how difficult it was to get a clear understanding of World War II in Europe, a friend of mine quipped, "Ah, the Germans and the Nazis. You can't blame everyone for what the majority did."

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