

chapters' timeframes, Kuchenbuch begins each chapter with two sections, entitled "vignette" and "Verortnung" (location). The former discusses exemplary artefacts or representations of global thinking, such as the British propaganda film *World of Plenty* (1943), the New York spherical monument *Unisphere* (1964), *McArthur's Universal Corrective Map of the World* (1979), or *Ökolopoly*, the 1983 board game. The latter discusses the changing cultural meanings of the "world" in each period of time, from "one world," which needs to be healed, in the mid-1940s (51), to "many worlds" in the 1990s (530). As Kuchenbuch states, "when people spoke and still speak about globality, it does not have to mean the same thing" (569).

The strength as well as the weakness of this monograph lies in its rich and often confusing structure. On the one hand, it proposes a new historical methodology that manages to deal at once with material, social, cultural, and political aspects of history, while trying to avoid the lacunas of each type of history. As a result, it should almost be viewed as an experiment in historiography. On the other hand, the structure is not very easy to navigate, to say the least, and is one of the causes of the book's length. For example, chapter 4, titled, "A Media-Historical Intermediate Step" ("Medienhistorischer Zwischenschritt") is an unexpected methodological interlude which reviews theories in media studies and critical cartography. Breaks in the general flow of Kuchenbuch's historical narrative make reading the book a challenge. In addition, the chapter and section headings are not very informative, since many are quotes from historical sources and thus cannot be understood before reading the relevant sections. As a result, the book is better read as a unified whole, from start to finish.

Despite these issues, *Welt-Bildner* is an impressive interdisciplinary monograph that will be useful to anyone interested in the history of globalism (and glocalism), the history of twentieth-century media, Peters and Fuller, and new and innovative forms of historiography.

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## The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944

By David A. Harrisville. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. 328. Hardback \$34.95. ISBN: 978-1501760044.

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David Harrisville challenges the existing paradigm surrounding the creation of the "clean" Wehrmacht myth. According to conventional wisdom, German politicians, generals, and veterans' associations crafted the myth after the Second World War, insisting that German soldiers had fought honorably, and conversely that Hitler, his lackeys, and the SS were solely responsible for Nazi crimes committed on the Eastern Front. According to Harrisville, however, the myth of the virtuous Wehrmacht and morally upright German soldier was created during the war by the soldiers themselves. Indeed, despite their willing participation in Hitler's racial war of annihilation, German troops fighting on the Eastern Front persuaded themselves, as well as their families and friends at home, that they had behaved chivalrously as members of an honorable military institution. Insightful and at times even brilliant, Harrisville's investigation explains how the "bad guys" fashioned a narrative that transformed them into "good guys."

Harrisville posits that Nazi ideology powerfully influenced Wehrmacht culture, and thus the army willingly implemented Hitler's racial war of annihilation against the Soviet Union,

including the Holocaust and the mass murder of Soviet soldiers and civilians. Yet, as an institution, the German army was large enough and flexible enough to harbor and accommodate other value systems, including Christian ethics, middle-class norms, nationalist virtues, military codes of honor, and even the Prusso-German concept of “military necessity.” These traditional value systems all too often overlapped with Nazi morality, and this, says Harrisville, facilitated the troops’ willingness to participate in murderous actions, while simultaneously making it possible for them to convince themselves that they had behaved virtuously. This righteous self-image, in turn, became part of a larger constellation of self-affirming “autobiographical narratives” they shared in their letters home. With these “whitewashed” accounts, German soldiers effectively safeguarded the Wehrmacht’s reputation, justified its crimes, transformed the war in the East into a worthy cause, and vilified their Soviet opponents. The troops were supported in their efforts at building a façade of moral legitimacy by Wehrmacht commanders, field officers, and army propagandists. Indeed, officials at every level of the military hierarchy employed the comforting language of traditional morality, which gave the troops a variety of officially sanctioned justifications for the war. Inundated with such ambiguous messaging from above, troops were free to choose whichever narratives they found most comforting. The most common tropes crafted by the troops include the contrasting image of the “honorable-self” with that of the “villainous” Soviet enemy; the war as a religious crusade to liberate Slavic Christians from godless communism; the emancipation of an oppressed people from the yoke of Bolshevism; and finally, the German soldier as a heroic but ultimately tragic figure and true victim of the inferno in the East. All, of course, are stunning inversions of the truth, and yet all effectively aided the *Ostkämpfer* to evade responsibility for their actions and save their consciences.

Methodologically, the author applies both the top-down and bottom-up approaches to Wehrmacht historiography. To accomplish this, the author exploits a wide (and impressive) variety of primary sources from all levels of the political and military hierarchy. At the heart of the investigation, however, are over 2,000 letters to loved ones penned by thirty soldiers between June 1941 and December 1944. Part of a new collection at the *Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation* (MPT) in Berlin, these letters have not been exploited by scholars until now. The collection differs markedly from other sources of letters used in previous scholarship. For each soldier represented in the MPT collection, a large number of letters are available, rather than just one or two letters from random individuals. With as many as 200 letters from each soldier selected for this investigation, the author was able to reconstruct the personality, background, worldview, and most importantly, the letter-writer’s perceptions of himself and the war as those evolved over time. As rich and textured as the resulting historical fabric is, there is a price to be paid for this approach. Relying on the opinions of only thirty soldiers (out of the ten million men who served in the East!) quite naturally weakens the investigation’s punch, especially when one considers that just eight soldiers authored over 55 percent of the letters (1,116 of 2,018) in the author’s sample. Furthermore, the soldiers in the pool are relatively homogenous, belonging almost exclusively to the German lower middle class. In short, Harrisville’s template will have to be applied to a far greater number and much broader cross-section of soldiers before a final verdict on his thesis can be rendered.

Also weakening the analysis is that, with just a few exceptions, the author fails to assess how his conclusions reinforce or contradict previous scholarship. Although Omer Bartov (*Hitler’s Army* [1992]), Christian Streit (*Keine Kameraden* [1991]), and Stephen Fritz (*Frontsoldaten* [1995]) receive brief mentions, far too many valuable studies are ignored. The author should have addressed other seminal contributions to the historiography by scholars such as Christopher Browning (*Ordinary Men* [1992]), Christoph Rass (“*Menschenmaterial*” [2003]), and Geoffrey Megargee (*War of Annihilation* [2006]), standard texts which are difficult to reconcile with Harrisville’s conclusions.

Despite these criticisms, this is an extremely valuable addition to the historiography that sheds new light on the Wehrmacht's complicity in Nazi crimes. Effectively organized, appropriately cited, and elegantly written, this is a must-read for German scholars.

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## Prevail until the Bitter End: Germans in the Waning Years of World War II

**By Alexandra Lohse. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. 208. Cloth \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1501759390.**

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The German experience in the closing months of the Second World War continues to captivate both professional and popular audiences. The alleged self-destruction in the face of unprecedented violence and certain defeat has produced a rather macabre fascination with what Michael Geyer has called “catastrophic nationalism.” (“There is a Land Where Everything is Pure: Its Name is Land of Death’: Some Observations on Catastrophic Nationalism,” in *Sacrifice and National Belonging in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Greg Eghigian and Matthew Paul [2002], 129) The question remains, why did so many Germans continue to fight with such tenacity until the final moment? Were they motivated mainly by fear and desperation, or was it a certain obedience to an ideology and a leader? Alexandra Lohse’s book contributes much to the topic by examining rumors, gossip, and dissonant reactions that circulated among soldiers and civilians during the final two years of the war. She does not offer a simple answer to what the prevailing mood of the time was, nor does she seek one, but instead communicates with impressive inquiry the “stories Germans told themselves to make sense of their world in crisis” (149).

Lohse’s source base is rich and largely original, which in itself makes her study important. She draws from private diaries and letters, OSS surveillance studies, and Nazi censorship reports, but much of her analysis is of surreptitious recordings of German POWs held in Western captivity, mainly at the British War Office’s Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre. These transcripts are not representative but still offer thousands of mostly unfiltered stories shared among soldiers. The sources undoubtedly support Lohse’s claim that the German response to the losing war was both diverse and malleable, and that “there was no single German experience of defeat” (132). During the closing months of the war, many soldiers and civilians remained hopeful that Hitler would somehow salvage the dire situation, but others became disillusioned with the regime and distrusting of its assertions.

The book begins in the opening weeks of 1943, when the country was struggling to make sense of the defeat at Stalingrad. Chapter 1 relies largely on Nazi and Allied army morale monitors, which interpreted popular opinion using various measures. While most Germans did not recognize the defeat as permanent, Lohse believes that the shock of Stalingrad resulted in a widespread questioning of national leadership, including its authority as a source of accurate war information. This caused a “serious and enduring rupture between the people and the regime” (26).

Chapter 2 focuses on Joseph Goebbels’s inflammatory Sportpalast speech (February 18, 1943), as Lohse wonders if the population did, in fact, desire *totaler Krieg*. Often depicted in the