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## The Third Reich at War

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like “reform” and “transformation” mean different things to different parties. Brannon never makes clear what he means by his Holy Grail of “reform.”

Brannon sees in Vladimir Putin (and the Dimitri Medvedev–Putin team) the political leadership missing in the 1990s. He suggests that the military is more likely to give its aggressive support and obedience to decisive nationalists who support military reform. This may be both the good and the bad news of this provocative study.

TOM FEDYSZYN  
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Evans, Richard J. *The Third Reich at War*. New York: Penguin, 2009. 926pp. \$40

This final volume of Richard Evans’s trilogy on the Third Reich (the earlier titles being *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 2003, and *The Third Reich in Power, 1933–1939*, 2005) is a disquieting masterpiece of scholarship. Although many of the events recounted here will be familiar to most readers, Evans accomplishes the seemingly impossible by merging both the high politics (if one can use that term in describing Hitler’s Germany) with the best in contemporary social history of the Third Reich. This sordid story has never been told so powerfully or from so many different perspectives. The voices of the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, along with those of the architects of the conquest and genocide, are all heard in chilling detail.

Evans notes that Hitler’s Operation T-4, his “euthanasia action” program, directed against disabled, mentally ill, and incurably sick Germans, laid the

foundation for the more dramatic, Europe-wide extermination programs. To relieve the sense of despair that permeates this book, one searches for heroes, but they are few in number. The sporadic camp and ghetto uprisings were clearly heroic, as was the resistance by such tiny groups as the “White Rose” movement. Although the Roman Catholic bishop Clemens von Galen led the effort to halt the T-4 program, Evans notes that the bishop was silent when it came to the regime’s treatment of Jews and Gypsies. Hitler learned a valuable lesson from the T-4 episode: limit the paper trail and speak in euphemisms when dealing with state-sponsored extermination programs. There was, of course, resistance to Hitler among some members of the officer corps, men whose sense of honor led them to recoil from the atrocities they witnessed in the war in the East. Another group, composed of theologians, lawyers, and some socialist politicians, known to the Gestapo as the Kreisauer Kreis (Kreisau Circle), failed to merge with the military resisters, thus further diminishing the already long odds that Hitler could be deposed.

Unfortunately, more often than not, ordinary Germans reveled in Hitler’s early victories and seemed to endorse, or at least tolerate, Hitler’s annihilation policies. The notion that ordinary Germans were unaware of the atrocities committed in their name is laughable. For instance, in the fall of 1939 German officers and enlisted men wrote home of the incredible “dirt” and “filth” they encountered among the “subhuman” Poles; they began to exterminate parts of the population within days of the

invasion. The swiftness with which Germany implemented a scorched-earth policy designed to eliminate all traces of Polish society is truly breathtaking. Evans convincingly argues that the “final solution” was well under way by the time the notorious Wannsee Conference convened in January 1942. Wannsee was merely an attempt to eliminate bureaucratic infighting and reinforce the authority of Hitler’s point man, Reinhard Heydrich, for the Holocaust.

Evans has written the kind of book to which all scholars aspire. It is a volume in which a lifetime of research and writing comes together in a powerful, and at times moving, manner. It is a book that is sure to become a classic.

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Adams, John A. *If Mahan Ran the Great Pacific War: An Analysis of World War II Naval Strategy*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008. 472pp. \$34.95

It is said of Secretary of War Henry Stimson that in World War II he “frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was God, Mahan his prophet, and the United States Navy was the only true Church.” Now we can judge the validity of that comment, thanks to John Adams’s *If Mahan Ran the Great Pacific War*. Adams grades both the U.S. force and its opponent, the Imperial Japanese Navy (another service professing Mahanian orthodoxy), according to their respective adherence to the sacred text. The result is a lively, interesting exercise in

counterfactual history, one that deals both with what occurred and what might have occurred had the high commands of both navies been more true to what one might call “the revealed Word.”

Counterfactual history is suspect to many historians, who feel they have enough problems figuring out what actually happened, let alone considering what could have happened. However, the Strategy and Policy course at the Naval War College thinks differently, seeking a host of alternatives. Adams essentially agrees, possibly because he is a business executive and not a professional historian; he has written this excellent book as an avocation (more power to him). “War is too important to be left to the generals,” said Clemenceau in World War I. History is too important to be left to historians, if they will not write about counterfactual contingencies.

My reservations about this book are slight but do exist. Excuse my sacrilege, but having taught for twenty years at the U.S. Army Staff College, I cannot help thinking that there might be occasions when Mahan’s precepts could be insufficient. Take his well known injunction, “Don’t divide the fleet.”

Admiral William F. Halsey took this to heart when he was in command of the Third Fleet at the largest naval battle in human history—Leyte Gulf, in late October 1944. As all readers of this journal know, Halsey took his entire force with him to chase down a decoy rather than divide it and provide a blocking force of battleships and escort carriers to prevent a Japanese exit from the San Bernardino Strait. Since Mahan, presumably, cannot be wrong, the blame must fall to Halsey, for not realizing