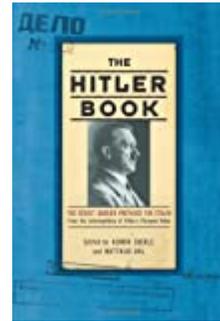




Henrik Eberle, Matthias Uhl, eds. *The Hitler Book: The Secret Dossier Prepared for Stalin from the Interrogations of Hitler's Personal Aides.* New York: Public Affairs, 2005. xxx + 370 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58648-366-1.



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Stalin's File on Hitler

In 2003 Matthias Uhl of the Institute of Contemporary History discovered an unusual file in the Russian archives. Consisting of 413 typed pages and simply entitled "file," or "dossier," it contained a report on Hitler prepared by the Russian secret police (NKVD/MVD) and given to Soviet leader Joseph Stalin at the end of 1949. This document's potential value to scholars is enormous, as most of the information in it came from interrogations of Hitler's valet, Heinz Linge, and his military adjutant, Otto Guensche. Linge and Guensche probably spent more time in Hitler's presence than any other survivors of the Second World War, and thus were in a position to answer many questions about the Nazi dictator.

The editors have done an exemplary job. There are very few typographical errors, and footnotes or endnotes point out mistakes in the text. The volume contains a wealth of explanatory information. Richard Overy's foreword, a translator's preface and the editors' introduction and afterword provide readers with important background information and analyze the strengths and weakness of the volume. Thirty-six pages of notes give biographical sketches of individuals mentioned (many

of whom are not well known), correct mistakes in the manuscript and provide supplementary data. The text itself consists of fifteen chapters arranged chronologically from summer 1933 to May 1945. In this English translation of the German edition, Overy's foreword replaces that of Horst Moeller, and the afterword and bibliographic references have been abridged.

The greatest strength of this volume is that the information came from Linge and Guensche, who were interrogated over a period of four years. The most illuminating part of the book is the very detailed description of Hitler's final days, which provides a riveting account of the tensions, hopes and fears of those living in the bunker. Particularly chilling is Hitler's complete disregard for others, and his failure ever to acknowledge that the longer he lived the more Germans would die. There are also lengthy accounts of Mussolini's fall from power and rescue by German troops (possibly of interest to Stalin because he could not understand personal loyalty to an ally) and the July 20th assassination attempt.

The report at the basis of *The Hitler Book* was prepared exclusively for Stalin. As its authors probably wished to

remain alive and at liberty, the material reveals an evident ideological slant, and certain important events pass without a word while improbable occurrences appear in the text. Furthermore, Soviet interrogators literally beat the information out of Hitler's servants. Although this may have led them to divulge material they otherwise would have kept secret, they just as likely could have told their interrogators what they wanted to hear in order to stop the beating. For example, given the consensus about Hitler's prudishness, the notion of him, in Overy's words, "sniggering over photographs of naked Parisian dance-girls" (p. xii) seems extremely unlikely. Because the Soviet authors had to shape reality to fit Stalin's expectations, there is nothing on the influence of Nazi ideology on Hitler's actions. Instead, on several occasions industrialists' concerns are presented as the driving force behind Hitler's decisions, with the capitalists' greed for raw materials and slave labor helping shape strategy (pp. 82-83). Hitler's alpine home, the Berghof, is described as overly luxurious, and the authors repeatedly emphasize the extravagance of the Reich Chancellery as well.

In some respects one learns almost as much about Stalin as Hitler in reading the report. Stalin apparently was especially interested in Hitler's personal habits, sex life and health. In this version of Hitler, the man appears to have a weak sex drive (yet is no pervert), and he drinks more alcohol than most other witnesses have reported. There are repeated descriptions of Hitler's steadily deteriorating health, from his daily injections of stimulants given by Dr. Morell to his eye drops, supposedly laced with large doses of cocaine (the editors point out the drops actually contained only 1 percent cocaine). Hitler is depicted as an increasingly feeble hypochondriac whose angry outbursts became more violent and more frequent. In criticism of the newly formed government of the Federal Republic, several accusations are made that the Nazis sent their most ideologically reliable youths to the West, and instructed them to feign loyalty to the Anglo-Americans in order to ensure the Party's survival by securing positions in the future administration (pp. 182, 207-208, 211).

The NKVD/MVD authors of the report realized that Stalin would not want to be reminded of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, so virtually nothing refers to this agreement, with only two passing references to the non-aggression pact. They also clearly believed that Stalin had no interest in Hitler before he came to power. The book begins in 1933, and World War II starts on page 46, although no mention is made of the Soviet invasion of Poland. The campaign against the Soviet Union, which began in June

1941, opens on page 76. The colossal initial German victories likewise are barely mentioned. The book focuses on the years 1943-1945, the years of Soviet victories, as this period take up nearly three-quarters of the report, with over a third of the text dealing only with 1945. Obviously Stalin did not want to read about his mistakes and Soviet defeats.

Similarly, the contribution of the western Allies to the defeat of Nazi Germany is seriously downplayed—even more so than the Soviet contribution has been underestimated in most Western histories. Furthermore, the Americans, and even more so the British, appear willing to negotiate with Hitler and sign a separate peace at almost every phase of the war. Allied campaigns in North Africa and the Mediterranean barely receive notice, and the Allied breakout from the Normandy beachheads and conquest of France are depicted not as Allied victories, but as resulting solely from a series of German blunders. According to this interpretation, the Germans barely fought back: "The Wehrmacht retreated behind the Siegfried Line, fighting light skirmishes on the way. Almost without resistance, Anglo-American troops occupied France and Belgium" (pp. 170-171). The volume's editors point out that the Germans lost over 400,000 troops in the West before September 1944, compared to Allied casualties of 40,000 dead, 164,000 wounded and 20,000 missing (p. 334, n. 30). There is no mention of Market-Garden, and Germany's success in the Ardennes Offensive (Battle of the Bulge) is wildly exaggerated. The report states that the Germans had no trouble reaching the Meuse River, and broke off their still-successful attack only because of an impending Soviet offensive in the East (pp. 174-175). The western Allies' bombing of Germany receives scant acknowledgement, and one would not know from this report that the Battle of the Atlantic raged for years.

Another glaring omission is the silence on the Nazi murder of the Jews. This makes sense, as Marxist ideology allows for the possibility of class prejudice, but denies that such an opinion could be based on national, ethnic, or religious grounds. In addition, as the editors point out, at this time Stalin had embarked on an anti-Jewish campaign himself. There is one example of Hitler's involvement in the Holocaust, which reads, "Hitler had taken a personal interest in the development of gas chambers. He thoroughly examined the development of projects of this sort when they were presented to him by Himmler. Hitler decreed that the man who built the gas chambers, an engineer from Eisenach, should be given comprehensive support and the best technical as-

sistance. On Hitler's personal orders gas chambers were first operated in Kharkov" (p. 105). Even though the Germans built no gas chambers in the Soviet Union, this account of Hitler's interest stands in contrast to testimony of other members of his entourage that he never mentioned gassings at all. The book also cites a case where Hitler specifically ordered the shooting of the approximately 2,000 workers, supposedly mostly Soviet prisoners of war, who had built his headquarters near Vinnitsa in the Ukraine (consistently identified as Wehrwolf, instead of the more usual Werewolf or Werewolf). Although Eberle and Uhl note that there is no record of this execution taking place (pp. 84-85), another source states that Jews who constructed the headquarters were murdered.[1]

This is a very interesting—even fascinating—volume, but one must heed Overy's admonition: "As a historical document it must be used with caution. There is

much that is deliberately left out, much that its two Soviet authors did not know. The reconstruction of conversations and meetings relies on evidence from years of cross-examination in which the interrogators played a role in manipulating and selecting what they wanted to hear, just as the witnesses struggled to recall long-distant events which the usual tricks of memory must have distorted and disordered. The narrative is an approximation, not an exact replica of historical reality. But in terms of an overall historical truth it is no more and no less adequate than those many Western accounts of Hitler and the war that pretend that the Soviet Union was an adjunct to the war effort rather than a core element" (p. xvii).

Note

[1]. Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 414.

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