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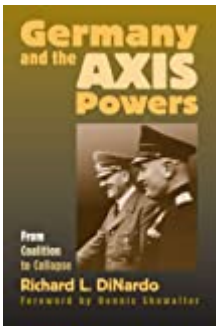

Richard L. DiNardo. *Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005. 282 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1412-7.

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Why the Axis Lost

Richard L. DiNardo's book will be of great interest to military and other historians, as well as the general public. Interest in World War II and especially Nazi Germany's war conduct remains at an all-time high. Some consensus on why the Allies won and the Axis lost has been reached in the wake of an innumerable quantity of studies. It is clear, for example, that the United States simply outproduced the Axis and that the sacrifice of the Red Army contributed significantly to the Allied victory.[1] However, numerous details and questions remain open to debate. DiNardo addresses such an issue: Nazi Germany's method of conducting coalition warfare. DiNardo skillfully dissects the structure of the Axis coalition forces during World War II and presents a detailed analysis of Germany's flawed relationship with its European military allies.

DiNardo agrees with JÃ¼rgen FÃ¶rster that the Axis was "hardly a coalition at all," but comes to what he calls "a slightly more nuanced conclusion" (p. 192). The main reason for the failure of Axis strategy, according to DiNardo, was "that each service conducted coalition warfare a little differently from its sister service" (p. 192). The Luftwaffe, the German army and the navy all operated along different lines. In DiNardo's view, the navy was the most successful and the army failed most miserably in their conduct of coalition warfare (p. 192). Among the problems preventing the successful execution of Axis coalition warfare were unnecessarily complex command structures, the often arrogant attitude (with some exceptions) of Germans toward their allies and the failure of Germany to share military technology appropriately with partners. The outcome was often the fighting of "parallel wars," which severely weakened the overall war effort.

DiNardo's study starts with a welcome investigation of Germany's experience with coalition warfare before World War II, in a chapter reaching all the way back to 1740. He then proceeds to discuss Hitler and Mussolini's relationship and its repercussions for coalition warfare. The remaining chapters are dedicated to a meticulous exploration of Axis war conduct in terms of coalition warfare in North Africa, the Balkans and the Soviet Union. DiNardo's description of the war in North Africa is especially rewarding. He skillfully synthesizes older and

newer scholarship and adds interesting details to provide a clearer picture of the situation. At times the anecdotal nature of his descriptions provides amusing details. When Italy presented a list of supplies it would need to fight alongside the Reich–including seven million tons of oil and two million tons of steel–Mussolini's foreign minister Ciano noted in his diary that the list was "enough to kill a bull–if a bull could read it" (p. 32). DiNardo presents a wealth of other details that will interest professional historians and laypeople alike. Some are well-known; others add to our understanding of the history of German war conduct. For example, DiNardo reminds us what a rampant antisemite Kaiser Wilhelm II was. This attitude affected his willingness to cooperate with Austria-Hungary, which he considered "racially corrupt" (p. 17). Decades after the Kaiser's doomed coalition, Germany was preparing secretly to fight again. DiNardo tells the interesting but little-known story of the emerging cooperation between the Luftwaffe (at that point still a secret) and the Italian Regia Aeronautica in the early 1930s. GÃ¶ring first traveled to Rome in 1931 and became close friends with Italian Air Marshall Italo Balbo. The two worked out plans to train Luftwaffe pilots in Italy secretly.

Despite and sometimes because of details such as these, DiNardo's book works best when used as one source among many about Hitler, Nazi Germany and World War II. The book's narrow focus on coalition warfare makes it a splendid work for military historians and for readers already very familiar with details about World War II. Those who expect more are likely to be disappointed. And in all fairness to the author, DiNardo makes it clear at the beginning of his work that he had not set out to write more than a history of coalition warfare. Nevertheless, throughout the book, instances occur where one would have welcomed another paragraph or two elaborating on some of the statements made.

For instance: one of the most interesting and perhaps seemingly straightforward problems the members of the Axis encountered was the problem of language. Rarely did German officers speak the languages necessary to enable smooth military cooperation. DiNardo provides an interesting discussion of the *Kriegsakademie*, where officers could choose from a variety of languages. Most preferred English to French, and most never learned Spanish, Italian or Romanian. This omission led to all sorts of impasses during the war. Toward the end of the war, the Germans finally introduced a German-Italian military dictionary. Such details are important; however, they open up further questions. After all, translation involves much more than finding the equivalent of a set of words in another language. The cultural context of language determines much of its meaning. A discussion of this problematic in the context of coalition warfare would have been interesting to read.

Furthermore, although DiNardo's first chapter on nineteenth-century and World War I German coalition warfare is enlightening, it falls short. When he proceeds to discuss "Hitler, Diplomacy, and Coalition Warfare" in chapter 2, there is somewhat of a discontinuity between the two chapters. This is partially due to the fact, as DiNardo explains, that coalition warfare was rarely discussed among the German military establishment during the interwar years. This fact in itself is intriguing, and one wonders whether a more in-depth discussion of German military culture in the interwar years would not have been beneficial here. In other words, did the devastating defeat in World War I and the fragile republic that followed it make the prospect of future coalition warfare seem unlikely or undesirable?

DiNardo describes the uneasy alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I and the at times devastatingly bad cooperation between the two powers. If the European alliance system–the diplomatic precursor to what in the case of war will lead to a coalition effort–"forced" Germany to attack first and led to the faulty execution of the Schlieffen Plan, its failure and a horrific two-front war, did the idea of cooperation with anyone seem highly questionable after World War I? To put it differently, did the memory and the mourning Jay Winter has described influence the idea of ever going to war again, much less with unreliable allies? [2] How did German World War I veterans view coalition warfare? Omer Bartov has described the German veteran community after World War I as a *Kampfgemeinschaft*, a "community of struggle," willing to fight again in the future.[3] Would this future struggle be fought in a coalition? Did that seem desirable?

DiNardo of course focuses on generals and other decision makers, and his discussion of the relationships between different axis commanders is very enlightening. Ordinary soldiers could not have decided whether or not they wanted to fight in a coalition. Yet, the attitude of every single soldier toward his counterparts in a coalition would have affected the success of such efforts. DiNardo mentions that Wehrmacht soldiers and officers were to various degrees committed to Nazi ideology. He also writes that the Nazis failed completely in terms of ideologically indoctrinating the soldiers of their allies. How-

ever, he regrettably does not go into any more detail than this. How and why exactly did they fail, and what were the consequences of the failure?

The shallow discussion of ideologies is the book's main flaw. While his book is primarily a work about military strategy, DiNardo does claim at the outset that he will address "[t]o what degree ... Nazi ideology and the Holocaust play[ed] a role in Germany's conduct of coalition warfare" (p. 1). He does not really answer this question, instead periodically mentioning how Hitler was guided by ideology but mostly going no further. In a description of Hitler and Mussolini's relationship, DiNardo writes, "Mussolini's notions about remaking the Italian people smacked more of Ernst JÃ¼nger than the *vÃ¶lkisch* ideology espoused by Hitler" (p. 25). This judgment certainly seems accurate, but deserves to be discussed somewhat more at length. The ideological differences between Italian Fascism and German National Socialism had far-reaching repercussions for the two major Axis partners, as DiNardo shows. A closer comparison of the two ideologies would thus have been welcome. DiNardo also mentions how Hitler reacted with "utter contempt" to Mussolini's plan to present a declaration of war to France in 1940 (p. 36). This deeply ideological reaction on Hitler's part revealed his disgust for adherence to any conventional (not to mention lawful) conduct of war. This kind of attitude inevitably affected Germany's coalition partners and the manner in which coalition warfare would be waged.

The Holocaust was of course the gruesome conclusion of Hitler's ideology. Here, too, DiNardo's analysis falls short. He does provide very interesting information about the widely different degrees to which German allies such as Hungary and Romania cooperated in the Holocaust. Another interesting detail is the fact that Axis partner Finland was not an overtly antisemitic nation and even had Jews serving in its military. DiNardo also briefly touches on the Odessa Massacre and the tragic and late repercussions of the Holocaust in Hungary. But, again, the book includes no detailed discussion about how the Holocaust and its underlying ideology affected coalition warfare. When the Hungarian prime minister Miklos KÃ¡llay started inquiring among the Allies about peace negotiations, Hitler demanded his dismissal for this move, "and, more ominously," as DiNardo writes, "for being insufficiently harsh toward Hungary's Jews" (p. 182). The Jews were clearly a priority to Hitler. In his mind, war against the Bolsheviks and the Jews was one and the same. The Holocaust thus was an issue of war for Hitler, and the eager participation of many of Germany's allies–not only Romania–in the Holocaust can rightfully be considered a sort of coalition warfare, although of a perverted sort. (If one does not consider war a perverted notion to begin with, that is.)

Thus the Holocaust and Hitler's ideology were at the very center of German war conduct. Christopher Browning argues that Hitler's decision to go ahead with the Final Solution was directly influenced by Operation Barbarossa. Mass killings seemed the most expedient means of solving the so-called Jewish problem after the invasion of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, what Browning calls the "euphoria of victory" in the war produced a radicalization of measures against Jews.[4] Thus it would seem that a book like DiNardo's should devote an entire chapter to a discussion of this issue.

Although we do not need to reiterate the brutality of the Nazis, we must not forget–for the sake of military history as well as other approaches–that the Nazi assault on Europe was indeed unprecedented in world history in numerous ways. While Hitler's treatment of his allies certainly hampered the success of the Axis, it was his *Weltanschauung* that determined all his actions and thus the actions–sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly–of the German military. If there is any regime whose war conduct cannot be analyzed separately from its ideology, it is Nazi Germany. The Wehrmacht often did not receive the support it needed on the battlefield or the orders it needed to proceed because, for Hitler, the destruction of the European Jews was the primary objective. If the infrastructure of Hitler's death factories was at stake, supplies or reinforcements for the Wehrmacht could wait. Furthermore, Jews, communists and Slavs were often considered parts of the same threat to the German *Volk*. Military campaigns against other non-communist or non-Slavic countries were considered necessary but not as ideologically important as (for example) Barbarossa. Finally, military logic and reason were subordinated to Hitler's personality: his volatile character combined with his burning hatred for Jews and Communists. The very concept of the infallible FÃ¼hrer made questioning his military leadership and thus a rational conduct of war impossible. All these ideological aspects affected Germany's relationship with its allies; arguably, the Axis more than any other military coalition in history was influenced and tyrannized by its leading member. To relegate this fact to occasional comments in an analysis of Nazi Germany's conduct of war seems neglectful and does not significantly add to our understanding of World War II beyond "pure" strategy. The latter arguably did not exist in a totalitarian state where everything, includ-

ing military strategy, was subordinated to political ideology.

Notes

[1]. See Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: Norton, 1995).

[2]. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[3]. Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide and Modern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[4]. Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).