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Oliver von Wrochem. *Erich von Manstein: Vernichtungskrieg und Geschichtspolitik.* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2006. 431 S. EUR 39.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-506-72977-4.

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Operational Genius and Master Myth-Maker: Erich von Manstein and the War of Annihilation

On May 7, 1953, the Swabian village of Allmendingen prepared for a festival. The mayor had roused the village inhabitants early in the morning, school was cancelled, the town was festively decorated and, according to a member of the media who was present, nearly every child wore a bouquet of flowers. A brass band provided musical accompaniment. The few villagers initially unaware of the reason for the unusual events were quickly informed: Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, the most celebrated of Hitler's military commanders and most controversial of the postwar military internees, had been released from captivity and was coming to the village. When Manstein addressed the crowd, he thanked them for their support and exclaimed, "We no longer want to think about the difficulties of the past, but only of the future" (p. 260). Following his brief remarks, children approached Manstein and his wife, presented them with lilacs, and burst into song. The illustrated paper, *Das Neue Blatt*, described the scene to its readers in an issue adorned with two photos: one of Manstein as a decorated soldier and the other of him shaking the hands of children presenting him with flowers. The message was clear: Hitler's "most brilliant strategist" was ready to enter West German society.

In this timely, impressively researched study, Oliver von Wrochem describes this "idyllic *Heimat*" occasion as "simultaneously a historical/political signal and a memory/cultural event" (p. 260). Manstein's release symbolized the rehabilitation of the men who had served in Hitler's Wehrmacht, though this rehabilitation was primarily due to the efforts of high-ranking officers to produce their own version of the war, a process in which the former Field Marshal was intimately involved. Wrochem also details the complicity of western governments, particularly the British, in covering up the unsavory aspects of Nazi Germany's war against the Soviet Union to ensure West German support for remilitarization. The truism that the exigencies of the Cold War superseded the quest for postwar justice is starkly illustrated in his account. Finally, Wrochem examines the evolution of German public opinion (both East and West) regarding the fate of Manstein and other Wehrmacht commanders in Allied and West German trials and the influence of veteran organizations in guiding popular memories and understanding of the war.

The author divides his study into four sections. The first deals with Manstein's life through the end of the Second World War, with special emphasis on his participation in the *Vernichtungskrieg* against the Soviet Union. One of Wrochem's primary themes is Manstein's relationship with Hitler and the Nazi regime. In a manner similar to that of many of his peers reared during the *Kaiserreich*, Manstein welcomed the new regime and its commitment to mobilizing German society in support of restoring a greater German Reich. This dedication, however, did not lead to an unqualified support for the NSDAP; according to Wrochem, Manstein maintained a distance from the upper echelon of the political leadership, one that eventually provoked blatant hostility from powerful party figures such as Hermann GÃ¶ring, Joseph Goebbels, and Heinrich Himmler. While Manstein's maintenance of a traditional Prussian military ethos kept him from completely identifying with Nazi ideological precepts and goals (unlike, as Wrochem notes, Ferdinand SchÃ¶rner, the rabidly Nazi Field Marshal of the later stages of the war), his focus on military professionalism was paradoxically a major influence on his role as accomplice in the war of annihilation directed against both Soviet citizens and Jews.

Wrochem analyzes the occupation policies of Manstein's Eleventh Army, which operated in the Crimea from late 1941 through mid-1942. Those seeking for a comprehensive examination of Eleventh Army's occupation practices will want to look elsewhere; the author is more concerned with examining several wartime events in detail and then following them throughout the series of postwar trials. This approach allows for a much more precise reconstruction of these events and Wrochem makes good use of it. He examines the responsibility and actions of various levels of Eleventh Army, focusing on the lower levels of occupation: the Secret Field Police, the Field Gendarmerie sections, the *Ortskommandanten*, and the commandants of the rear Army areas. In agreement with the prevailing historical consensus, Wrochem concludes that the Army worked very closely with the SS *Einsatzgruppen* in liquidating "enemies" both real and perceived. Here, the division of labor initially identified by Dieter Pohl certainly functioned smoothly. And, as Wrochem notes, "no level of authority stood against the murder, but in contrast frequently drove it forward" (p. 70).

While the lower levels frequently carried out the shootings, the Eleventh Army leadership also acted as the driving force behind at least one episode of mass execution. The strained supply system that plagued the entire Eastern Army also affected troops in the Crimea. In order to avoid starvation-driven revolts, Eleventh Army began directing the machinery of murder towards population groups whose annihilation was already foreseen. The 13,000 Jews in Simferopol constituted the first pool of victims. Contacted by Eleventh Army's quartermaster to initiate the killing, *Einsatzgruppe* D had to decline due to lack of manpower and capacity. The quartermaster then offered troops to cordon off the area and guard the Jews during transport, trucks for the transport itself, and munitions to the SS unit. By the time the first phase of the action ended in late December, some 9,500 Jews had been murdered. Wrochem states that no order signed by Manstein authorizing the action exists; he also makes clear that it is nearly inconceivable that such an action could have been initiated by the army staff without his approval.

The remaining three sections of the study focus on how Manstein and other high-ranking members of the Wehrmacht defended themselves against war crimes charges while simultaneously sanitizing their version of the war in the East and thereby generating an acceptable narrative of the war for West Germans. Three separate strands formed the basis of this re-writing of the war. First, many former high-ranking officers, including Manstein, formed an advisory committee to "coordinate witness statements" regarding the initial charges against the German General Staff (p. 111). Coordination included destroying the credibility of officers whose statements diverged from the accepted story. This initial grouping of officers expanded into much larger networks of former soldiers and their supporters who worked tirelessly to provide German defendants with resources for a proper defense. By the time Manstein himself was put on trial in August 1949, this network had also made large inroads into the media, providing him with a pool of public support.

This reservoir of public support, both in West Germany and Great Britain, was steadily increasing due to the growing tensions of the Cold War. Manstein and other former officers exploited fear of communism in two ways. First, Manstein struck up a correspondence with the British military commentator, B. H. Liddell Hart. Liddell Hart had long opposed proceedings against members of the Wehrmacht and became the most powerful advocate for Manstein and his peers in Great Britain. He portrayed Hitler's generals as cool professionals who fought as clean a war as possible against the Soviet Union and omitted the Wehrmacht's enormous crimes from his presentation of the Second World War.

The pro-German propaganda espoused by Liddell Hart and others of his political persuasion was complemented by the ways in which Manstein explained the war in the East. Here, the vocabulary utilized by the Nazis (though shorn of its overt racism) was employed to legitimate the German-Soviet war. Manstein spoke of the "European mission" behind the war, a reference to the rescue of western Christendom from "Asiatic" Bolsheviks (p. 131). Such notions carried special weight during the early days of the Cold War. The offensive launched by Manstein and his peers and their supporters effectively minimized the Army's crimes in the East, as it appeared self-evident that if any of the combatants had committed atrocities during the war, it was the "barbaric" East, not the "civilized" West. By referring to the war as essentially defensive, Manstein pointed to the absurdity of prosecuting him for a war that the West was preparing to fight all over again.

While these two strategies played well in the court of public opinion, within the actual court of law, Manstein and his peers developed a different strategy to absolve themselves of responsibility for their conduct. They tried to separate the war against the Soviet Union into two different campaigns: a military one, in which they exercised authority, and an ideological effort, which they had no power to influence. This dual strategy most concretely manifested itself in the Army's attempts to disassociate itself from the *Einsatzgruppen*. While preparing for the General Staff's defense during the initial Nuremberg Trial, Manstein wrote, "the thought that military leaders were connected with the measures of the S.D. in certain areas constitutes a completely unjustified burden on the military leadership" (p. 110). This question became one of the central issues of Manstein's own trial, and as Wrochem persuasively argues, the names Manstein and Otto Ohlendorf (the former commander of *Einsatzgruppe* D) assumed powerful symbolic weight both within and outside of the courtroom, with the former standing for the "clean" Wehrmacht and the latter for the criminal SS.

As Wrochem makes clear, the strategies employed by Manstein and his peers found a wide-ranging resonance in West German public opinion and during the 1940s and 1950s, support for the interned Wehrmacht elite remained strong. Adenauer himself recognized the groundswell of support reserved particularly for Manstein and was able to link his discharge to the inclusion of a re-militarized West Germany in the Western Alliance. Wrochem tirelessly reconstructs the negotiations between Bonn and London concerning Manstein's release as an aspect of the re-admittance of West Germany to western society. He also convincingly argues that Manstein's release in the Federal Republic carried hefty symbolic weight, as it signaled the welcome of all former Wehrmacht soldiers into the new state. The past was now forgotten or sanitized and re-worked to such an extent that it bore little relation to the reality of the war of annihilation.

Wrochem has provided an extremely important and detailed study of how the German *Vernichtungskrieg* in the East was waged and then how a neutered version of this conflict was transmitted to West German society. He has effectively tied together several very important issues into one generally readable work. At times, his detail becomes a bit overpowering and Manstein himself periodically disappears from the book, but these minor caveats fail to detract seriously from a major contribution to field.

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