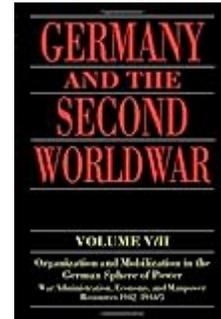




Bernhard R. Kroener, Rolf-Dieter Mueller, Hans Umbreit. *Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power, part 2: Wartime Administration, Economy and Manpower Resources, 1942-1944/45.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003. xli + 1142 pp. \$295.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-820873-0.



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This half volume of the German official history of World War II is an impressive collaborative work that synthesizes both secondary and primary research. It originally appeared in German in 1999. Weighing in at just under 1100 pages of text (with a bibliography of over 40 pages and more than 16 pages of abbreviations), this is not a work for the uninitiated or the casual reader. To some extent, this book is three related monographs that share a common binding, introduction, and conclusion. Their common focus—a rather broad one—addresses the German war economy between the years of 1942 and the end of 1944. Indeed, there is a common thesis which is that the German war economy, while achieving some impressive specific results, had no realistic hope of adequately supplying the effort needed to pursue the kind of global aims set out by Adolf Hitler. Thus a clear subtext of the book is to demonstrate the gulf between German resources and Nazi goals, which, in turn, illustrates that one must understand the policy and conduct of hostilities during the Second World War as a characteristic expression of National Socialist ideology (p. 1). On the whole, the authors do quite well at weaving together politics, economics, morale, and military events in support of their conclusions.

In part 1 of the book, “German Rule in the Occupied Territories 1942-1945,” Hans Umbreit argues that Ger-

man actions in the occupied territories were guided by a blend of ideology, pragmatism, and short-sightedness that combined to create a spiral of brutality, exploitation, and genocide. The Nazi leadership never established clear long-term goals or objectives for the occupied areas, which tended to raise both the false hopes of collaborators and the avarice of local German administrators. As the war progressed and the tide turned against them, the Germans increasingly exploited the occupied territories for the Reich with no consideration of the consequences among the local population. This included expanding conscription of labor for work at home or in Germany as well as harsh requisitioning of all sorts of items from raw materials to finished goods. Nazi ideology exacerbated this trend as groups deemed less valuable than Germans (i.e., French or Belgians) were exploited so as to minimize the burden on Germans themselves. Groups such as Jews, Russians, Poles, or other Slavs, whom the Nazis considered subhuman, would be brutally exploited or worse. As Umbreit points out, this predictably tended to generate increasing resentment and resistance that was ultimately counterproductive to German economic efforts. Overall, this section is quite successful in laying out the self-defeating nature of Germany’s treatment of occupied Europe.

Part 2, “Albert Speer and Armaments Policy in To-

tal War” by Rolf-Dieter Mueller, comprises over half the book’s length and provides a detailed discussion of the German war economy from 1942 until late 1944. Mueller shows how Albert Speer proved himself a master politician in the Third Reich by relying on his apparent technical skills, his keen political sense and, perhaps most importantly, his close relationship with Adolf Hitler. Speer, often credited with an armaments miracle, comes off as less than the cool technocrat of other interpretations (including Speer’s own memoirs) than as an ambitious schemer. Indeed, Mueller proves that Speer was Machiavellian, calculating, manipulating, and not above lying to portray his achievements to the Fuehrer as unqualified successes. The author also shows that while Speer did achieve impressive production figures, the Allies greatly outproduced the Germans in all categories. In response, Speer never sought to demonstrate that Germany was well behind its opponents, nor did he ever attempt to convince Hitler that the goals the Fuehrer had set were significantly beyond the reach of Germany’s human and economic resources. To have done so would have risked losing favor with Hitler and thus losing power; Speer’s ambition would not allow him to risk this fate.

Mueller also clearly demonstrates how the Nazi leadership deluded itself into believing that Germany enjoyed huge technological advantages over its opponents. As the war situation worsened, this delusion clearly became more significant in what passed for strategic thinking in the Third Reich. Mueller successfully demolishes this myth showing that while Germany was successful in producing certain impressive technological achievements (e.g., jet airplanes, rockets or the nerve gasses Tabun and Sarin), there was no coordination in the German war economy to develop, produce, and employ such new weapons properly. Technological advances were often rushed into production only to be modified therein (which slowed production, as with the Tiger and Panther tanks) or found to be fatally flawed and cancelled (as with certain torpedo boat engines). In some cases, weapons (e.g., the V-2 rocket, the nerve agents, or magnetic anti-tank charges) were produced at great cost without there ever being a clear strategic or tactical use for them.

In this second section Mueller successfully shows that the armaments miracle and the idea of German technological superiority were actually myths fostered in part by Speer (and others) who had a stake in creating such legends to enhance their political powers. Mueller, however, sometimes overplays his case by minimizing or neglecting genuine German weapons improvements. For example, Mueller asserts that by 1944 the Allies had long

since had large numbers of heavy tanks that were even superior to the Tiger and Panther (p. 733), a statement which would generate challenge from many experts on the era’s armor. Also there is no mention of the influence of the German MG 42 machine gun or the MP 44 assault rifle, both of which are often credited with having considerable impact on post war arms design. In spite of this, Mueller clearly demonstrates that Germany’s war economy faced severe, indeed insurmountable, problems that the Reich leadership refused to consider, much less acknowledge because of their own inadequacies and ideological preconceptions.

Part 3, Bernhard R. Kroener’s “Management of Human Resources, Deployment of the Population and Manning the Armed Forces in the Second Half of the War 1942-1944,” reveals that the war economy was severely handicapped by the lack of any centralized control over manpower. As the war progressed, Germany was caught in a nearly impossible situation where army losses skyrocketed but could not be replaced without cutting deeply into the German workforce needed—and jealously protected by Speer—to supply the war effort. The effort to substitute foreign workers for Germans largely failed as these workers were often treated worse than slaves, and discussion of mobilizing German women generally foundered on the objections of the Fuehrer and other lesser ideologues. Kroener reveals that General Friedrich Fromm, who as commander of the Replacement Army could clearly see the impossibility of rebuilding the battered field army, warned Hitler as early as 1942 that the German manpower situation warranted a serious and immediate re-examination of the war. This was, of course, not heeded and the German army increasingly lived hand to mouth, striving to replace its losses by combing out men from the rear areas and specific lower priority industrial concerns. Here again, the ceaseless political conflicts among Hitler’s lieutenants, particularly Speer and Fritz Sauckel (General Plenipotentiary for Manpower), played a central role in ensuring that this critical problem was never addressed rationally. In addition to successfully presenting the detrimental impact of Germany’s manpower dilemma, Kroener also covers a wide range of interesting issues (like wartime changes in the Wehrmacht officer corps) in this section.

One of the most significant interpretations presented by this book is the role of Adolf Hitler himself. The authors clearly view Hitler as the lynchpin of the Nazi system, a man without whose approval no significant project in the Third Reich could proceed very far. Yet, this was hardly the advantage that Nazi proponents of

the *Fuehrerprinzip* claimed it was. The authors prove conclusively and repeatedly that Hitler was inept in his decision-making in economic coordination, research and development, manpower and, indeed, in grand strategy. Thus the German war effort was handicapped by entrusting power to a man incapable of either exercising that power himself or rationally delegating aspects of it to subordinates. Moreover, the authors see this as strong proof that Germany could not have won the Second World War after 1942.

For all its contributions, this work does suffer from some flaws. The scope and thematic organization of the book make for difficult reading as, partially by necessity, topics are compartmentalized. This makes for a lack of flow, causes repetition, chronological confusions, and jarring transitions. For example, Umbreit's discussion of occupation policy in every area of Europe is interesting individually but becomes repetitive and overwhelming. The authors also tend to assume a very high level of knowledge from their readers (e.g., Speer's illness in early 1944 crops up again and again but is never specifically discussed). Moreover, there are translational oddities (e.g., OB West is variably rendered as C-in-C West, commander in chief West, and GOC West) and errors such as the table on page 1024 that lists two columns for Panzer Divisions when one should be entitled Panzers. Lastly, a full index rather than the traditional German *Personenregister* would have enhanced the book as a reference tool.

More disconcerting are certain errors of fact. For example, the book states that in July 1944 Himmler was still commander of the Replacement Army when that was the

date of his appointment to this post (p. 490). The statement that early in 1942 the blockade war to starve the country out was, for the Germans, at its height (p. 509) is somewhat confusing as the Battle of the Atlantic was going quite well for the Germans at that point. The author states that coal production dropped dramatically in late 1944 but provides no explanation for the cause of this significant development (p. 813). In his discussion of armor production, Mueller claims that the Germans did not produce self-propelled artillery yet neglects mention of the Wespe and Hummel SPGs, although more than 650 of each were produced. He also claims that the obsolete Czech 38(t) tanks were produced in large numbers in the final phase of the war (p. 737). The chassis remained in production and service, but as the platform for the rather successful Hetzer tank destroyer not the pre-war designed tanks themselves. Such errors do not undermine the overall validity of the authors' arguments, but they do cast unnecessary doubt about the credibility of other specific claims or interpretations.

In spite of these problems, this study is encyclopedic in breadth and depth and forms an essential research tool. It is not merely a compendium of facts, but is quite analytical and valuable for its interpretations on a huge range of issues including biological and chemical warfare planning and preparations, the exploitation of specific occupied territories, mining, the organization of research and development, the impact of Nazism on the German officer corps, the impact of strategic bombing, the employment of women, and a whole host of other issues. As a result, this book belongs in the bibliography of any study addressing any aspect of the German war effort or the Third Reich between the years of 1942 and 1945.

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