

## Naval War College Review

---

Volume 32  
Number 1 *Winter*

Article 19

---

1979

# The German Army, 1933-1945

Norman Rich

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Rich, Norman (1979) "The German Army, 1933-1945," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 32 : No. 1 , Article 19.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol32/iss1/19>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

## 102 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

whether by virtue of youth or short tour policies; the incessant demands of news managers at home for "good copy" (destruction was a story; recovery was not); stateside embellishment of basic copy sent from the scene; a predilection for disaster stories ("the conventional journalistic reaction to calamity"); competition (AP vs. UPI, CBS vs. NBC, etc.) to be first in explaining events, even when the overall pattern was clouded and obscure; and finally, a certain degree of resentment stemming from the Administration's "progress campaign" of late 1967, leaving some newsmen feeling they had been used. (Braestrup makes it clear, however, that this sense of "resentment," leading to a degree of "retribution," was not widespread, was present more in New York and Washington than in Vietnam, and was too weak to support any conspiracy theory. Indeed, the reader cannot avoid feeling that the ineptness of the press as a whole in overcoming its so-called "practical considerations" was such that a conspiracy could not have been pulled off even if the press had tried!)

In short, coverage of Tet was shaped largely by habit and convention, ingrained approaches to news reporting that left newsmen ill-equipped to cope with the unusual ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding Tet. Journalism suffered from

a serious lapse of self-discipline. . . . There was no institutional system within the media for keeping track of what the public had been told, no internal priority on updating initial impressions. . . . The result was that the media tended to leave the shock and confusion of early February, as then perceived, fixed as the final impression of Tet, and thus as a framework for news judgment and debate at home. At Tet the press shouted that the patient was dying, then weeks later began to

whisper that he somehow seemed to be recovering—whispers apparently not heard amid the clamorous domestic reaction to the initial shouts.

The final chapter should be read by everyone who reads either a newspaper or a news magazine, or who watches the news on television. It even includes an informal score sheet that rates the performance of various news organizations: AP over UPI, the *Times* over the *Post*, *Time* over *Newsweek* (the latter described earlier as seemingly bent on "merchandizing the jitters"). The description of the role played by stateside news managers behind the scenes at rewrite desks, both for the press and television, will be eye-opening for many readers not intimate with the methodologies of modern American news reporting.

In the end one is led to the conclusion that the search after villains in journalism's coverage of Vietnam—rather like the search after villains in anything related to Vietnam—is essentially sterile. There is plenty of blame to go around. Far more important is Braestrup's conclusion: "The special circumstances of Tet impacted to a rare degree on modern American journalism's special susceptibilities and limitations. This peculiar conjunction overwhelmed reporters, commentators, and their superiors alike. And it could happen again."

DAVID MacISAAC  
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force

Cooper, Matthew. *The German Army, 1933-1945; Its Political and Military Failure*. New York: Stein and Day, 1978. 598pp.

The alleged purpose of this long, tiresome, and poorly written book is to explain Hitler's control over the German Army and the reasons for its defeat in the Second World War. Unfortunately the explanations presented by the

## PROFESSIONAL READING 103

author are simplistic and unconvincing, most of the evidence he uses to support his arguments (apart from errors) is well known to specialists, and his book does not really deserve to be reviewed at all except for the fact that the author and his publishers claim that it contains new and original theories and explodes some generally accepted myths. These theories and explosions require commentary if not outright refutation.

In his introduction, the author states that he proposes to concentrate on two themes. In presenting his first theme, he argues with curious logic that the German generals "were largely innocent of the blame that has so often been lain at their door, but that, at the same time, they inexcusably surrendered up their military responsibility and, knowingly, allowed an ungifted amateur to gain operational control of the Army, pervert its strategy and lead it to disaster."

What we have here is a warmed over version of the theory that Hitler's faulty military leadership was a major reason (or even the major reason) for the ultimate defeat of the German Army. This is true only insofar as Hitler was responsible for the decision to go to war in the first place. We now know that most of the German generals were quite as confident as Hitler that Germany could defeat Russia, and that their joint underestimation of the strength of the Red Army was surely the greatest military error of the war. The controversial questions of Hitler's contribution to the planning of Germany's earlier military victories are ignored or misunderstood.

As his second major theme, the author attempts to refute "the commonly accepted idea of the German Army having been well-equipped and well-trained, and having practised a revolutionary form of warfare known as the Blitzkrieg." The blitzkrieg, he says, was a myth.

Here again, the author's theories are not so novel as he appears to assume. All scholars would now agree that the

Nazi dictatorship was an inefficient complex of competing agencies, that the German Army in 1939 was in many respects poorly equipped and poorly trained, and that the concept of a rapid war of movement and encirclement of the enemy forces (i.e., a blitzkrieg) was not a revolutionary conception of Hitler or his generals. What Hitler did possess in 1939 was a *relative* superiority over his foes, especially if he could face them singly and overcome them one by one. He had the nerve and determination to seize the initiative and to take perilous risks with his troops and equipment to surprise and overwhelm the opposition. He was fully aware that he lacked the resources to wage a long war; hence his emphasis on speed and surprise. As we all know, despite the many errors committed by the German leadership, the German armies *did* win a series of lightning campaigns, often with an imaginative coordination of modern weaponry and daring tactics. It is difficult to see, therefore, how the concept of a blitzkrieg can be blithely dismissed as a myth.

Hitler's lack of equipment prevented him from conquering England or from closing the Mediterranean. Most fateful of all, he lacked the resources to conquer Russia. Once the German armies faltered there and the United States entered the war, it is impossible to see how any kind of military leadership could have saved Germany from defeat. Only the invention and employment of a miracle weapon might have done that, and it is one of the more pleasant ironies of history that scientists expelled from Nazi Germany as inferior peoples played a crucial role in the development of such a weapon. Even if the German armies had been faultlessly led and retained their conquests in Russia and North Africa, Germany in the end would have been defeated by the atom bomb.

NORMAN RICH  
Brown University