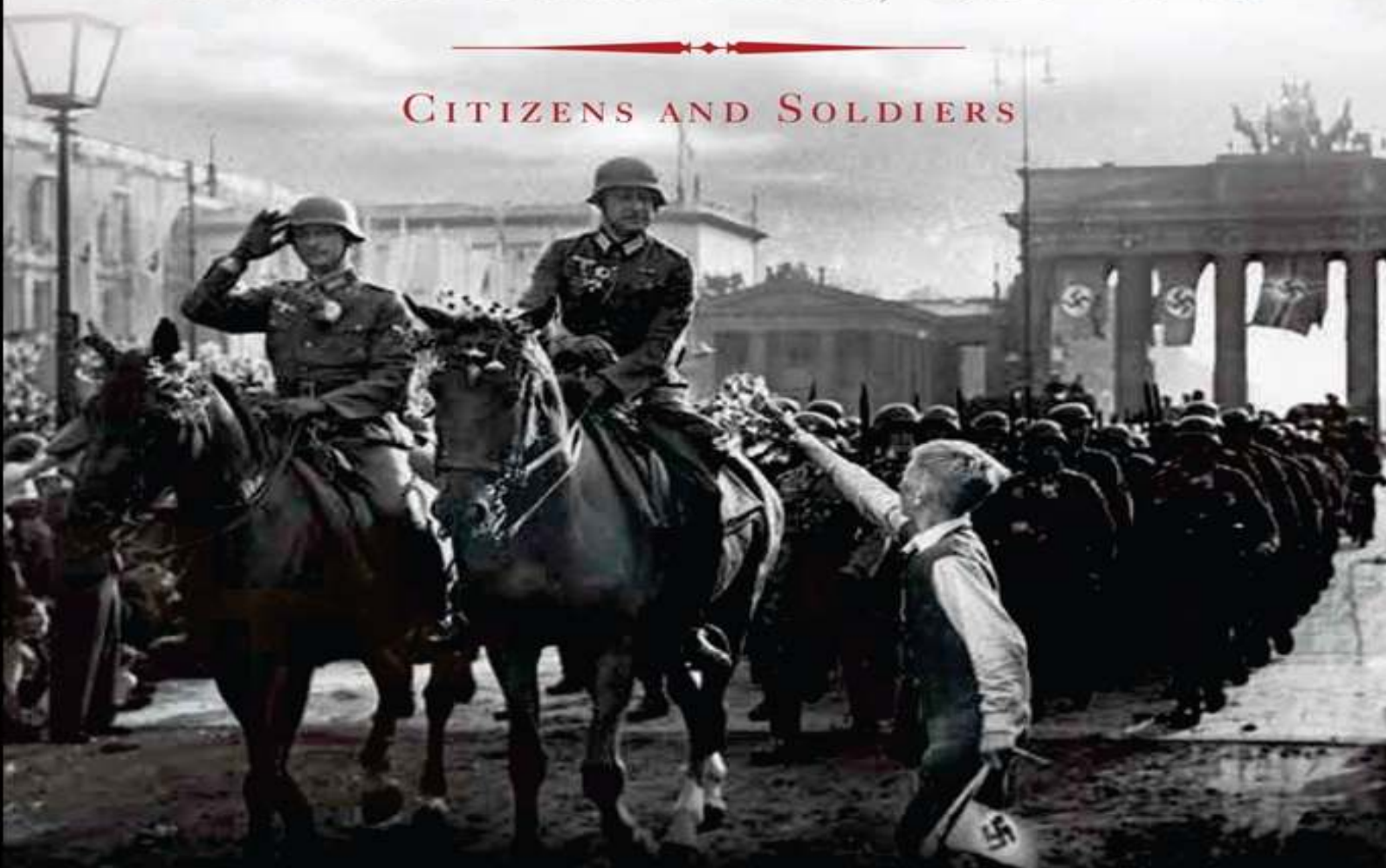


THE GERMAN WAR

A Nation Under Arms, 1939–1945

CITIZENS AND SOLDIERS



Nicholas Stargardt

More Advance Praise for *The German War*

“Little by little, with a raft of new insights, and a clear and empathetic eye, Nicholas Stargardt’s remarkable new book transforms our view of something we thought we already understood: the German population’s evolving attitudes during the war. For the first time, the wartime chronology of German sentiment, of popular hopes and fears, realism and fantasy, becomes truly visible. A powerful and compelling account.”—Mark Roseman, Professor of History, Indiana University

“Why did most Germans, reluctant to enter a second world war in 1939, ultimately unify behind an effort that by 1943 seemed doomed to failure? Weaving together first-person testimonies drawn from diaries, memoirs and letters, Nicholas Stargardt provides insightful, illuminating, complex and convincing answers in this big book. Seven decades and a mountain of monographs later, I wouldn’t have thought there’d be much more to say about WWII. Stargardt has proven me wrong.”—Robert Moeller, Professor of History, University of California, Irvine

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“*The German War* is a tour de force of historical learning, breadth of vision, and narrative skill. In depicting the intricate back and forth between the big violence of the conduct of the war and the impossible complexities inside individual stories—between the challenges facing ordinary lives and the relentlessness of a wartime beyond their control—Nicholas Stargardt brings an acuteness of insight and sureness of touch to an extraordinary wealth of material. A truly epic account.”—Geoffrey Eley, Professor of History and German Studies, University of Michigan

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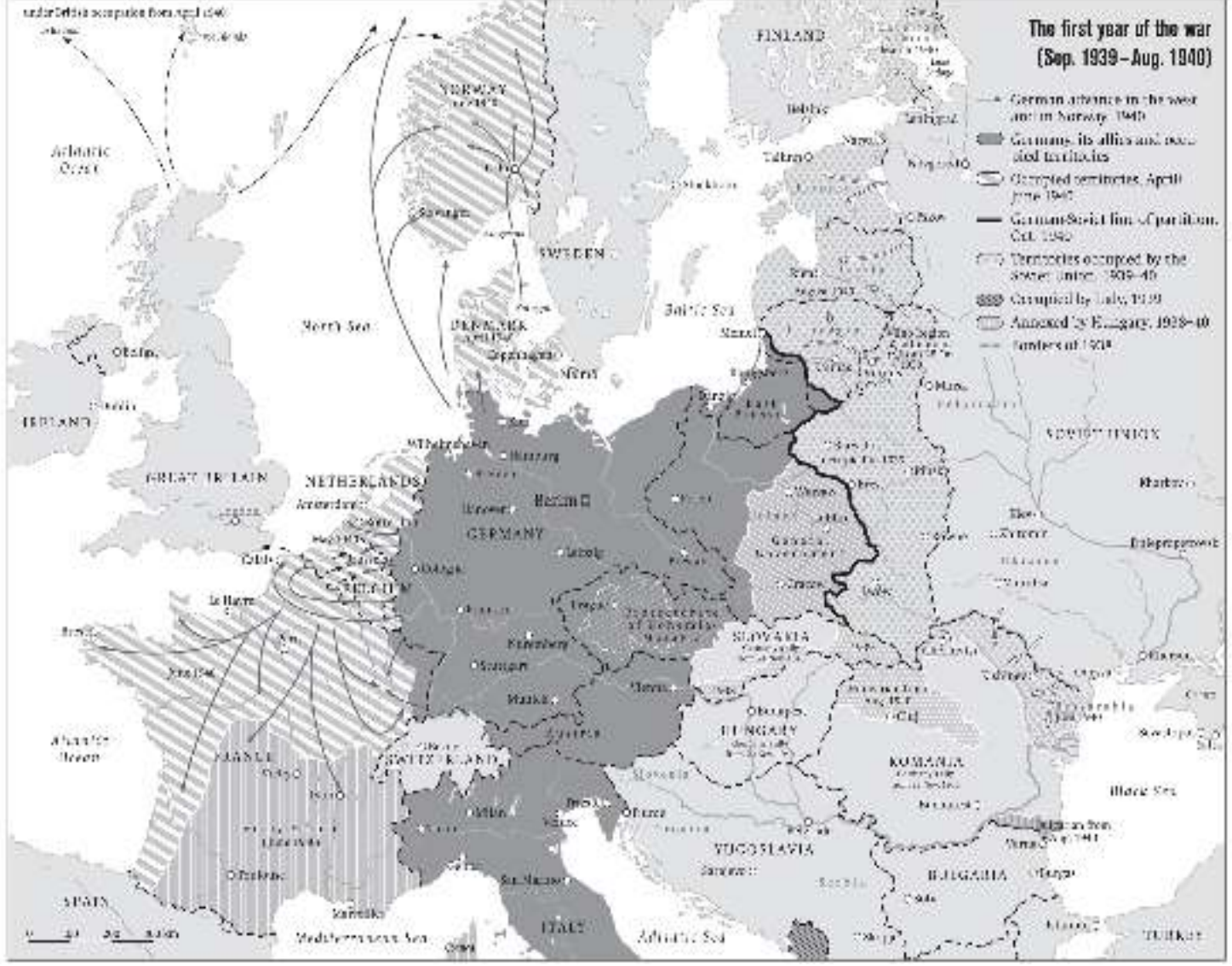
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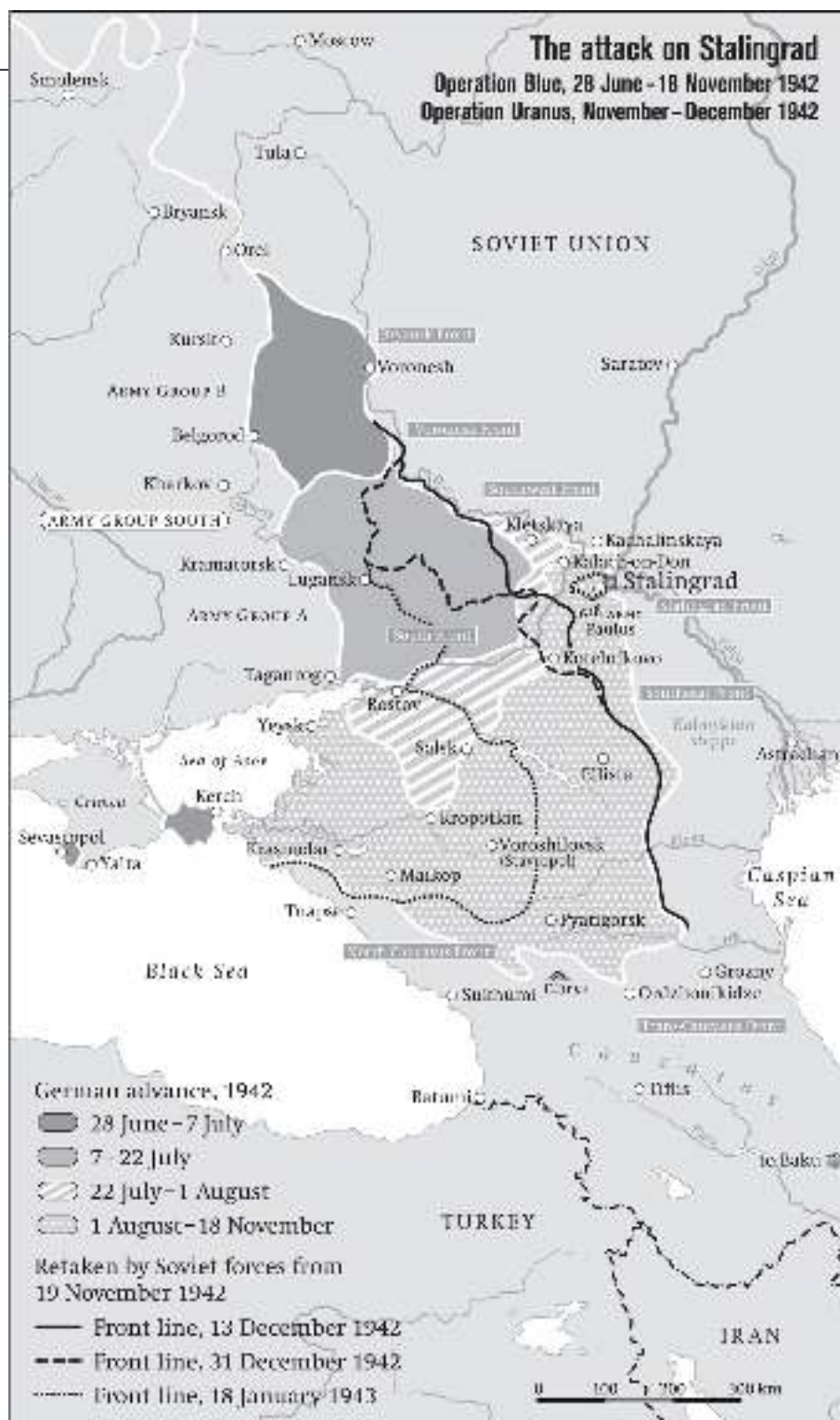


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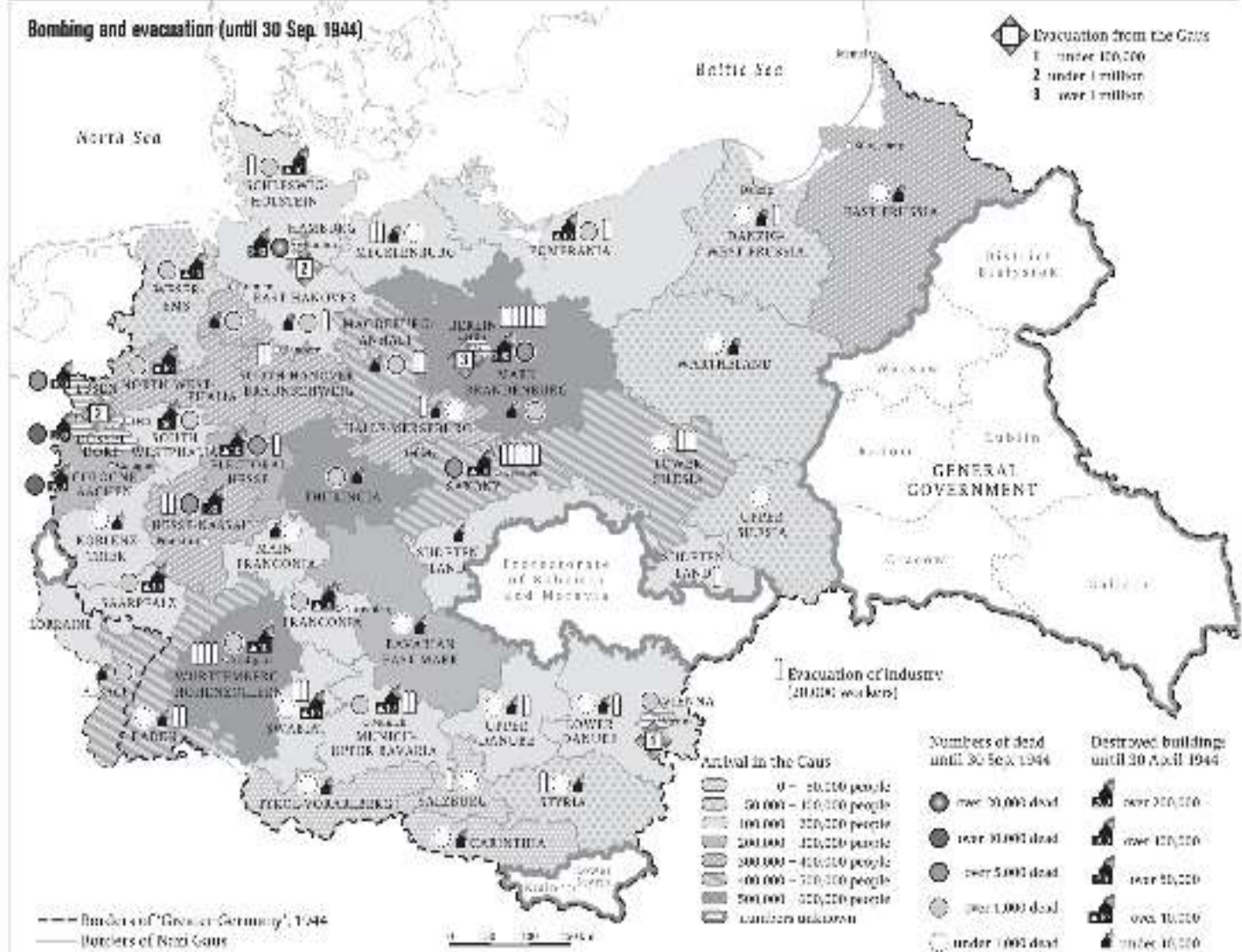


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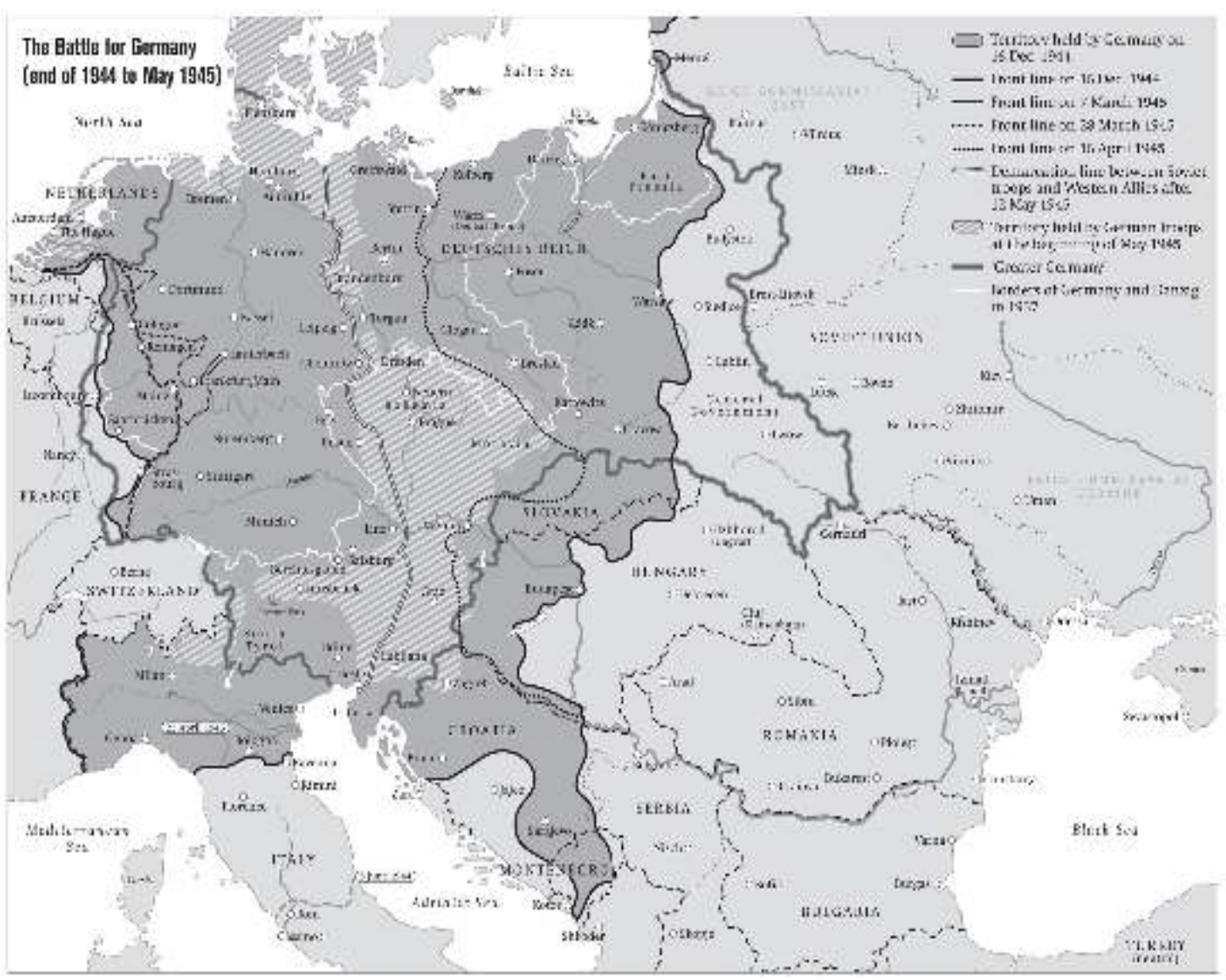
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Preface

This book completes a period of just over twenty years in which I have tried to understand the experience of those who lived in Germany and under German occupation during the Second World War. It is also a book I did not originally intend to write. In 2005, I promised myself and anyone else who would listen that having just completed *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis*, I would not be writing anything more on children, the Holocaust or Nazi Germany. This book began as a short essay about what Germans were fighting for, as something that I felt needed to be said before I could move on, and started to take shape as something far bigger during a sabbatical year spent at the Free University in Berlin in 2006–7.

There are some clear continuities between the two books, most obviously my interest in exploring the subjective dimensions of social history, using the contemporary record to work out how people judged and understood events while they were unfolding around them and before they knew the eventual outcome. There are also some clear differences. In *Witnesses of War*, I wanted above all to treat children as social actors in their own right; I also set out to juxtapose the irreconcilable perspectives of children divided by war and racist persecution into victors and vanquished. *The German War* presents a different problem: how to uncover the fears and hopes of the society from which the victors and perpetrators came in order to understand how Germans justified this war to themselves. To focus on this question I have tried to develop both a sense of breadth and of depth: breadth by using 'macro' snapshots of opinion, drawing on what eavesdropping reporters for the regime picked up from public conversations or military censors from sampling the mail bags; depth by following a select cast of individuals, drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, over a considerable period of time, exploring how their personal hopes and plans were entwined with their changing experience of the war. Doing this has made the voices of the victims less prominent than in *Witnesses of War* but they are never absent: without their contrasting perspective, we would not know how differently – and often solipsistically – Germans framed their understanding of the war.

One of the key ingredients of this book are the collections of letters between lovers, close friends, parents and children, and married couples. Many historians have used these kinds of sources, but often to different effect. For example, the Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte in Stuttgart has a famous collection of some 25,000 letters assembled by Reinhold Sterz. Unfortunately, the letters were catalogued by time and not by author, so that they provide a snap-shot of subjective opinions at particular moments of the war, without it being possible to test how firmly the letter writers held these opinions over any length of time. What guided my selection was the opposite principle: I wanted to read collections of letters in which both sides of the correspondence are preserved and which continued for several years, at least, so that it would be possible to see how the personal relationships between the correspondents – their principal purpose in writing at all – developed and altered over the course of the war. This allows us to reconstruct more carefully the private prisms through which individuals viewed major

events. It is the kind of research which historians of the First World War have been developing since the 1990s and I have learned a great deal from Christa Hämmerle about how to do this.

I was particularly fortunate in having access to the private archive assembled by Walter Kempowski while he was still alive, and well remember the generous welcome which Walter and Hildegard Kempowski gave me to their home in Natum: the archive itself is now held at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. At the Deutsches Tagebucharchiv in Emmendingen, Gerhard Seitz was very helpful, as was Irina Renz at the Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte in Stuttgart. In Berlin, Andrea Michaelis at the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Veit Didczuneit and Thomas Jander at the Feldpostarchiv of the Museum für Kommunikation and the Bundesarchiv all provided invaluable source materials, as did Christiane Botzet at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg. Klaus Bauer and Konrad Schulz from the archive of the Jehovas Zeugen in Deutschland at Selters-Taunus provided copies of the last letters which Jehovah's Witnesses wrote before their execution for refusing to perform military service, and Alexander von Plato at the Institut für Geschichte und Biographie. Lüdenscheid introduced me to the large collection from the early 1950s of schoolchildren's recollections of the war in the Wilhelm Roessler-Archiv. I am grateful too to Li Gerhalter and Günter Müller for material from the Dokumentation lebensgeschichtliche Aufzeichnungen and the Sammlung Frauennachlässe, both at the University of Vienna. I owe a special debt to Jacques Schuhmacher for his indefatigable willingness to help in every way he could at many stages of this research. It was supported financially by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Leverhulme Trust and I am grateful to both.

The intellectual debts I have accumulated over such a long period are too large and numerous to do justice to. During the year 2006–7 in Berlin, Jürgen Kocka was a wonderful host and many other people made my time in Germany memorable and fruitful. Many friends and colleagues have encouraged me along the way, shared their ideas and findings, giving me a very vivid sense of history as a collective endeavour. Among my wonderful colleagues in Oxford at the History Faculty and Magdalen College, I am particularly grateful to Paul Betts, Laurence Brockliss, Jane Caplan, Martin Conway, Robert Gildea, Ruth Harris, Matt Houlbrook, Jane Humphries, John Nightingale, Sian Poole and Chris Wickham.

At the Bodley Head I have been privileged to work with Jörg Hensgen, Will Sulkin and, following Will's retirement, Stuart Williams. With her extraordinary energy and acuity, Lara Heimert brought me into the world of Basic Books. Their commitment to publishing books they believe in is incredibly affirming and, time and again, has provided just the kind of assurance I needed. Lara and Jörg acted as twin editors, without ever stepping on each other's toes or mine, with Jörg's taking on the painstaking task of editing page by page. They have been wonderful to work with and I am deeply grateful to all four of them. Clare Alexander and Sally Riley at Aitken-Alexander have remained a pair of faithful godmothers sharing their wisdom and encouraging me throughout. I have been very fortunate.

Without the great intellectual generosity and support of many friends, there probably would have been no book at all. Paul Betts, Tom Brodie, Stefan Ludwig Hoffmann, Ian Kershaw, Mark Roseman, Jacques Schuhmacher, Jon Waterlow and Bernd Weisbrod all interrupted their own work to read the whole manuscript for me. I am grateful to each of them for making invaluable suggestions, sharing their own research and saving me from making, at least some, historical howlers. Ruth Harris and Lyndal Roper read the whole thing twice and so have both left an indelible imprint on it. At every stage of this project, Lyndal has discussed the key ideas as I was trying to formulate them. I cannot thank her enough.

Dramatis Personae

(in order of appearance)

Ernst Guicking, farmer's son from Hesse, professional soldier, infantryman; and **Irene Reitz**, florist from Lauterbach, Hesse; they marry during the war.

Wilm Hosenfeld, Catholic, First World War veteran and village schoolteacher in Thalau in Hesse; serves in the German garrison in Warsaw; and his wife **Annemie**, a trained singer and Protestant convert to Catholicism; they have five children.

Jochen Klepper, a writer from Nikolassee, Berlin; married to Johanna, a Jewish convert to Protestantism, with two step-daughters.

Liselotte Purper, photo-journalist from Berlin; and **Kurt Orgel**, jurist from Hamburg, artillery officer; they marry during the war.

Victor Klemperer, Jewish convert to Protestantism, First World War veteran and academic; and his wife **Eva**, a former concert pianist.

August Töpperwien, First World War veteran and Gymnasium teacher from Solingen, officer in charge of prisoners of war; and his wife **Margarete**.

Fritz Probst, a carpenter from Thuringia, building battalion; and his wife **Hildegard**; they have three young children.

Helmut Paulus, doctor's son from Pforzheim and eldest of four teenage children, infantryman.

Hans Albring and **Eugen Altrogge**, from Gelsenkirchen-Buer near Münster, friends and members of Catholic youth movement, signals and infantryman.

Wilhelm Moldenhauer, shopkeeper from Nordstemmen near Hanover, radio operator.

Marianne Strauss, Jewish kindergarten teacher from Essen.

Ursula von Kardorff, journalist from Berlin.

Peter Stölten from Zehlendorf in Berlin, despatch rider and tank commander.

Lisa de Boor, journalist from Marburg; married to Wolf, with three grown-up children: Monika, Anton and Hans.

Willy Reese, trainee bank clerk from Duisburg, infantryman.

Maria Kundera, railway worker at Michelbeuern near Vienna; and **Hans H.**, railwayman's son, paratrooper.

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