



Kevin T. Hall. *Terror Flyers: The Lynching of American Airmen in Nazi Germany.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021. 400 pp. Ill. Tables. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-05015-1.

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In *Terror Flyers: The Lynching of American Airmen in Nazi Germany*, Kevin T. Hall examines 310 documented cases of German civilians' extralegal mistreatment of downed American flyers. He argues that while civilian populations lynched American airmen before 1943, the Nazi regime's acceptance of total war led to the promotion, expansion, and condoning of *lynchjustiz*—"lynch justice." While Nazi leaders never officially ordered civilians to terrorize and execute flyers, they did promote *lynchjustiz* via propaganda and speeches. Furthermore, the regime granted impunity to Germans who participated in such acts. Hall places these arguments "within the broader milieu of the Nazi regime's war of atrocities as well as within the larger context of the air war" (pp. 13-14).

This book is fascinating, and few scholars have approached these events. Historians who have investigated the mistreatment of Allied flyers previously have focused on *lynchjustiz* in German-occupied territories, including France, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Hall, in contrast, intervenes with his emphasis on civilian brutality within Nazi Germany. This narrow scope allows Hall to focus on a specific source base as well. He relies on primary records from the Dachau, Hamburg-Ravensbruck,

and Wuppertal trials. In addition, he uses sources from the National Archives and Records Administration, such as American missing air crew reports and evasion reports. These documents provide a strong foundation for Hall's arguments.

Hall traces the history of *lynchjustiz* from American flyers' experiences once they crashed to the trials that civilians encountered after the war. First, Hall discusses what happened to downed flyers if they did not reach resistance fighters before civilians apprehended them. In most cases, civilians turned the flyers over to local leaders to be sent to prisoner-of-war (POW) or concentration camps. In other instances, Germans tortured or even killed the flyers. These acts increased as the war went on and civilians took revenge on the flyers. Hall attributes this increase to the Nazi regime's acceptance of total war. Thus, after 1943, Nazi propaganda increasingly portrayed American airmen as murderers and impure Jews or Bolsheviks. In addition to dehumanizing American airmen, Nazi officials categorized downed flyers as *terrorflieger*, or "terror flyers." This label removed the POW status and the protections of the laws of war. Flyers were "terrorists" who "allegedly fired at noncombat targets (primarily civilians) or were caught attempting to evade capture

and were, therefore, considered spies or sabotage troops who could be executed with impunity” (pp. 4-5). Hall further discusses the punishment of civilians in the war trials. Due to destroyed evidence and lack of witnesses, it was often difficult for American tribunals to convict civilians. But the punishments of those who were convicted varied widely. Hall asserts that if a civilian was a member of the Nazi Party, they likely received a harsher punishment, including death or long prison sentences, but by the 1950s, most cases received clemency or shortened sentences.

Hall’s sixth chapter deserves special recognition. It examines civilians’ motives for participating in lynchjustiz. Hall concludes that there were three primary motivations: “the radicalization of the war, obedience to figures of authority, and endorsement by the regime” (p. 206). Civilians believed that they contributed to the war by getting revenge for the bombings. Moreover, this chapter shines because Hall integrates psychological and social theories that helped civilians justify their actions. He delves into the Nazi Party’s ability to exact citizens’ obedience through indoctrination and the use of propaganda. He insists that Germans and propaganda adopted the term “lynching” from its roots in the United States. They did so to demonstrate the hypocrisy of a country that promoted democracy while lynching African Americans in particular. Hall writes, “similar to early lynchings in the United States, Lynchjustiz in Germany committed against American flyers occurred in response to perceived transgressions against property, homicide, or other heinous crimes and often occurred despite the presence of a legal apparatus” (p. 207). Thus, he makes parallels between American racism and Germans’ mistreatment of flyers.

Hall raises questions concerning civilians’ agency and culpability in lynchjustiz. These matters fall within the intentionalism and functionalism of historiographical debates of Nazi war crimes. Did civilians act on their own accord or

did they simply follow Nazi guidelines? He explicitly states that civilians were accountable for their actions, but he maintains that Nazi support and indoctrination also affected decision-making. This dilemma raises the question of guilt because the Nazi regime never ordered civilians to engage in lynchjustiz, yet it promoted and granted impunity for such actions. Hall addresses this concern fairly, but his argument does become blurred at times. For example, he states that lynching “was an initial response by the German public to avenge the devastation caused by the air war” (p. 7). This statement removes culpability from the Nazi regime. However, after the regime’s promotion and propagation of lynchjustiz, Hall seemingly classifies the acts as Nazi war crimes. This criticism does not detract from the overall work; there are just a few instances where it becomes unclear who is to blame.

Overall, *Terror Flyers* is clear, cogent, understandable, and fascinating. Hall sheds light on an understudied aspect of World War II. He provides a path for future scholars to approach this topic from different angles and methodologies. Anyone who has a particular interest in the air war, the impact of war on society, and German war crimes will find this book valuable and intriguing.

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