
Reviewed by Robert Kirchubel (Purdue University)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Bruce Sait’s *The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht* makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Wehrmacht’s politization. The book is divided into two parts, distinguished by the title “Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht” and subtitle “War Crimes of the German Military.” Sait’s linkage of the two is tenuous, and we are left to assume he means that the first led to the second—not a far stretch. However, his skillful weaving of primary documents and the best of current secondary sources ably supports his thesis that the Wehrmacht (Sait concentrates on the army) intentionally embraced and expanded on the Nazi Party’s indoctrination efforts and the politicization of other aspects of German culture, society, and national life.

The apolitical German military trope died generations ago, and Sait sticks another knife into the corpse. Far from being a part of—much less above—the rest of the Third Reich, the Wehrmacht almost tried to outdo itself by creating and sustaining its political credentials. This was not new behavior for the German military or even unique to the Third Reich. During World War I, sensing the ambivalence and war weariness on the part of Germans in and out of uniform, in 1917 the Hindenburg-Ludendorff regime foregrounded political training and watchfulness. This was not neglected during the Weimar Republic, either.

Of course the trend greatly accelerated in the hyper-politicized Third Reich, and here Sait makes his real impact. Not satisfied with premilitary indoctrination provided by the Hitler Youth and Reich Labor Service, the German military built its own infrastructure of political philosophy, doctrine, learning resources, and training cadres. Here Sait builds on such works as *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (1991), in which Omer Bartov links Nazi indoctrination with German battlefield performance. In Sait’s telling, however, the Wehrmacht did not wait for Stalingrad or the *Attentat* (the 1942 assassination of Reichprotektor Reinhard Heydrich in Prague by Czech partisans); these efforts at self-*Gleichschaltung* (coordination, organized Nazification) were part of the mid-1930s mobilization. Critically, political indoctrination was not limited to masses of new conscripts; huge segments of the twin officer and senior noncommissioned officer corps willingly threw themselves into the task.

Certainly some officers naïvely thought in terms of a self-serving quid pro quo: if we voluntarily become politicized then Adolf Hitler will make the military a full-fledged pillar alongside the Nazi Party. This is somewhat old thinking, for we now know that a great many officers were naturally fertile ground for Nazism and easily submitted to their brown masters. *The Indoctrination*
of the Wehrmacht makes good use of army pamphlets, booklets, and training materials, military “magazines,” and soldiers’ letters to argue that “Nazism was the official political doctrine of the [German] armed forces” (p. 49). This should never be in doubt. Already the self-described “school of the nation,” completely without coercion, the Wehrmacht eagerly added racism, anti-Semitism, and Mein Kampf to its lesson plans. Also, as we know from elsewhere, major sectors of German Christianity threw their lot behind Hitler, with army chaplains reinforcing Nazi ideological education.

The book’s final third on the role of indoctrination on war crimes is the less satisfying of the two parts. Sait does include some new and interesting comparisons between the German and Austrian segments of the Wehrmacht. Otherwise there is little fresh material here and certainly not enough to counterbalance secondary works quoted at (extreme) length with too many well-known arguments.

None of this is to say Sait has failed to produce a work of significance. The Indoctrination of the Wehrmacht has much to offer, including what I consider its most important sentence: “Nazism was regarded as the norm and driving force of the military, rather than a discredited and disgraced political movement that had brought great dishonor to it” (p. 159). Sait demonstrates that the Wehrmacht’s political indoctrination made this notion a sad reality.

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