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*The First Soldier: Hitler as Military Leader* by Stephen G.  
Fritz (review)

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*in Nazi Germany* stands as a signal achievement. Both scholars and laypersons will benefit from this comprehensive account of the arts in the Third Reich that attends to both the continuities and discontinuities in the German arts and history.

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*The First Soldier: Hitler as Military Leader.* By Stephen G. Fritz. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 459. Cloth \$30.00. ISBN 978-0300205985.

There are entire libraries devoted to Hitler and World War II, and historians are right to ask why we need yet another book. Stephen Fritz, a leading scholar in the military history of the Third Reich, does not rely on new evidence or new approaches to answer old questions, rather he simply aims to dispel the persisting myth that Hitler's radicalism and erratic decision-making undermined the operational brilliance of his generals. In this engaging scholarly corrective to our understanding of Hitler's military leadership, Fritz synthesizes the voluminous scholarship in English- and German-language secondary sources and constructs a nuanced accounting of Hitler's role as *Feldherr*.

After 1945, German generals engaged in a deliberate effort to deflect blame for Germany's disastrous defeat—the second in a generation—on Hitler, with memoirs by Manstein, Guderian, and others claiming they could have won the war on their own terms had not the “Bohemian Corporal” interfered at every critical turn. This well-worn narrative, of course, conveniently omits the fact that the German officer corps enthusiastically welcomed Hitler's rise to power, condoned and fueled a genocidal war, and slavishly obeyed his orders to the end. *First Soldier* zeroes in on these conflicts and suggests Hitler's military leadership was much less “irrational” and inept than the conventional portrait suggests, especially in the first two years of the conflict. If we believe Fritz, Hitler clearly understood—better than his generals—“the nature of his war, what it meant to accomplish, and by what means” (xiv). He had many strengths as a military leader: his openness to new ideas and operational daring, especially relating to mechanized warfare, made possible the German victory over France in 1940, when he rejected the General Staff's watered-down version of the Schlieffen Plan in favor of General Erich von Manstein's bold offensive through the Ardennes. In Russia a year later, he gave his generals considerable freedom of action while the campaign was going well and took their advice. When he intervened, it was not because he was a fanatic, but because he was indecisive and could not decide between conflicting courses of action proposed by his generals. Fritz reminds us that the German General Staff was not, as the myth would have it, pragmatic, highly professional, and operationally brilliant. The clique-ridden officer corps' decisions were often driven by force of personalities, political intrigue, and petty, internecine rivalries.

The book's twelve chapters cover, among other things, Hitler's reading of Clausewitz; the ideology of *Lebensraum*; the planning and execution of Operation Barbarossa; and how Hitler's military decisions determined the war's final outcome. Fritz situates Hitler's military leadership within the context of Clausewitz's concept of absolute war and argues that Hitler's experiences in the trenches of World War I ultimately shaped his vision for World War II. Germany's catastrophic defeat in 1918 brought Hitler to the realization that it simply lacked the resources necessary, on its own, to attain world-power status. Germany would have to acquire *Lebensraum* (living space) in order to compensate for its vulnerable geographic location and its inferiority in resources. World War II, then, would therefore be very different from World War I, a struggle for national existence that would allow for no compromise. Underpinning Hitler's strategic rationale, Fritz argues, was his fixation on *Lebensraum*—that space and resources were essential for Germany to attain world-power status. Placing the ideological nature of Hitler's military leadership within the Reich's larger plans to colonize the territory west of the Ural Mountains, he links Hitler's attack on Russia in 1941 with the belief that Germany had a closing window of opportunity to seize the resources ultimately to challenge the United States for global dominance and avoid a repetition of 1918. Many of Hitler's controversial military decisions, ranging from his "no retreat" order before Moscow in 1941 to the decision to split Army Group South before Stalingrad in 1942, can be traced back to his preoccupation with space and resources. In the process, Fritz proposes that Hitler generally proved more adept than his military advisors at recognizing the importance of raw materials in Germany's "all-or-nothing gamble," and that his seemingly erratic decisions followed a coherent pattern and were actually rational when viewed from standpoint of the Führer's deeply rooted ideological beliefs (xiv).

Fritz makes a convincing case that Operation Barbarossa was motivated by both pragmatism and ideology. On the one hand, Hitler attacked in the East because he needed to conquer space and resources—in particular, the vast oil reserves of the Caucasus—before America could bring its powerful arsenal to bear. On the other hand, Fritz alludes to Hitler's declaration of war on the United States in December 1941, a move that ultimately sealed Nazi Germany's fate, as a decision driven by the desire to seek a decisive showdown with "World Jewry." While the author quotes Hitler's January 30, 1942 speech to the Reichstag, in which the dictator justified his decision to go to war with the United States by invoking his earlier promise to "annihilate Jewry," he does not extend this analysis nearly far enough (236). Readers would benefit from a more focused discussion of Hitler's intention to not only defeat the Allied armies, but also establish a racially homogeneous empire in Europe, which converged the military, ideological, and genocidal aspects of Germany's war.

Fritz marshals forth considerable evidence to support his arguments, relying heavily on the published memoirs and diaries of senior military leaders, high-ranking

Nazi officials, and Hitler's speeches and meeting notes. In many ways, though, we've read variations of this story before. These arguments are well developed in the recent literature on World War II, including the author's own *Ostkrieg* (2011). Fritz would have done well to offer a robust chapter on the existing historiography on Hitler and the Wehrmacht. Another weakness of the book is the author's use of a single footnote at the end of each paragraph to collectively document his sources. This makes it time consuming, not to mention frustrating, to determine which sources are being cited and to follow the book's methodology.

Despite these criticisms, Fritz's book has much to offer. It is well written, thought provoking, and offers a comprehensive analysis of Hitler's thinking about war and his relationship with his generals from 1933–1945. It will appeal to students of twentieth-century Germany and compel the broader field to reevaluate the myths that have shaped the history of World War II.

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*Gambling under the Swastika: Casinos, Horse Racing, Lotteries, and Other Forms of Betting in Nazi Germany.* By Robert M. Jarvis. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2019. Pp. 208. Cloth \$49.00. ISBN 978-1531012526.

Robert M. Jarvis, a law professor from Nova Southeastern University, asserts in this brief monograph that “a comprehensive treatment of gambling in Nazi Germany does not appear to exist” (3). *Gambling under the Swastika* is a first step in this direction. With no explicit thesis or engagement with historiography, Jarvis sets out to describe the betting laws and practices of the Third Reich. His findings are as diverse as they are intriguing. In sum, the Nazis did not have a coherent policy toward gambling, and often seemed to tailor the practice to the specific needs of other policies of the regime.

Jarvis begins with an overview of German gambling practices before the Nazi seizure of power. Both the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic frowned on gambling, though the latter allowed betting at horse tracks and on riverboats. With the 1933 Spielbankengesetz, the Nazis lifted previous bans on casinos, with an eye toward generating tax revenue for social programs. The largest and most successful casino under the Nazis was located in Baden-Baden, and it attracted clientele from around the world before the start of the war. This was a boon for the regime, which eventually made it illegal to take winnings out of the country. Jarvis also points out that Jews were banned from casinos in 1937. Baden-Baden remained open until August of 1944, following the regime's second declaration of “total war.”

As for other forms of betting, Nazi policy was not consistent. Dog racing, for instance, was never allowed, though the reasoning for this measure is not made clear. Horse racing, on the other hand, was permitted. Yet, sports betting was also