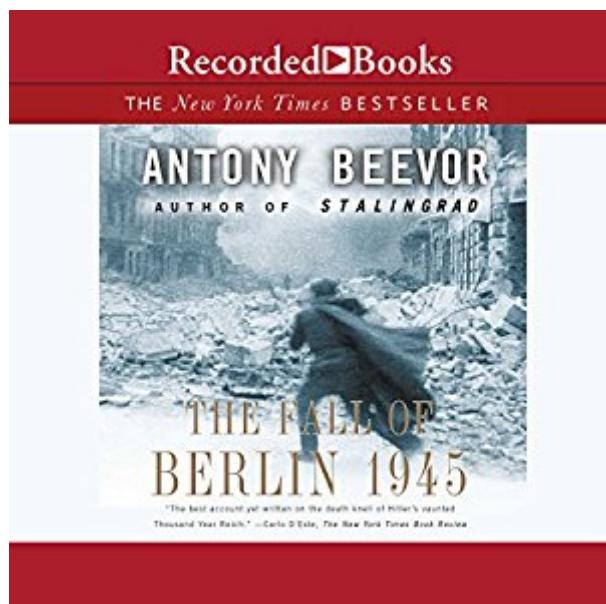


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The Fall Of Berlin 1945



Synopsis

The Red Army had much to avenge when it finally reached the frontiers of the Third Reich in January 1945. Frenzied by their terrible experiences with Wehrmacht and SS brutality, they wreaked havoc - tanks crushing refugee columns, mass rape, pillage, and unimaginable destruction. Hundreds of thousands of women and children froze to death or were massacred; more than seven million fled westward from the fury of the Red Army. It was the most terrifying example of fire and sword ever known. Antony Beevor has reconstructed the experiences of those millions caught up in the nightmare of the Third Reich's final collapse. The Fall of Berlin is a terrible story of pride, stupidity, fanaticism, revenge, and savagery, yet it is also one of astonishing endurance, self-sacrifice, and survival against all odds.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 17 hours and 31 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: August 22, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01KOTEM64

Best Sellers Rank: #9 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe #17 in Books > History > Europe > Germany #33 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Military

Customer Reviews

Beevor's new book is a worthwhile, accurate and, I think, well balanced description of the campaign leading up to the battle of Berlin and the battle itself. It confirms many suppositions, destroys some myths, and adds a fair amount of information gleaned from sources not available before the break-up of the Soviet Union. I found particularly interesting the confirmation of the imperatives of Stalin's need to take Berlin before the Americans got there, and while I knew about the atomic research conducted in Berlin, I was not aware of the development of Sarin and other poison gases in laboratories there. Also I was not aware that so many of the German units defending Berlin were in fact third country nationals, including fascist French units. The Soviet Union's terrible treatment of their own soldiers and citizens and those of their allies, released from camps and slave labor

factories, is well described, as is the abysmal stupidity of the leadership on both the German and Soviet sides. And a significant proportion of the combatants, especially in the Red Army, were drunk out of their skulls on liberated wine and booze most of the time. Mr. Beevor implicitly destroys the myth that Stalin withdrew front line units from the battle and replaced them with barbarians from central Asia to do as much damage to the population as possible: the Red Army units were already well filled with Asiatic replacements, but they certainly had no monopoly on committing atrocities. Arguments among armchair generals about the U.S. Army stopping at the Elbe will undoubtedly go on forever - personally, I think Beevor's interpretation of the event is correct, and Eisenhower's strategy, based on military intelligence and political perceptions current at the time, can't be faulted.

The preponderance of space in the Central Armed Forces Museum of Moscow is devoted to the Great Patriotic War. You will see memorials to fire-scorched Byelorussia and Ukraine, bomb-devastated Stalingrad, and famine-besieged Leningrad. You'll see an entire hall dedicated to the Holocaust, with grisly displays of Nazi barbarism, including products made from the bodies of concentration-camp victims. You'll see photos of emaciated Jews as well as Czechs, Bulgarians, and Hungarians showering flowers and kisses on Red Army tanks and troops. You'll see tributes to American Lend-Lease convoys, and snapshots of Western and Soviet Allies embracing on the Elbe. Your guide will tell you how only in recent years can the truth be told about the paranoid cruelty of Stalin, Beria, and the NKVD toward "liberated" Europe and the Soviet people. But while documenting the suffering and sacrifices of the USSR, there is little mention, even today, of crimes committed by Red Army occupiers of Berlin. I disagree with the detractors of Antony Beevor that in addressing these atrocities his book negates the heroism of the Soviet soldier. On every page, the author emphasizes the appalling conditions in which the Red Army had to wrest its victory, and the terrible cost in Soviet lives. Under-nourished, under-supplied, poorly-trained soldiers were motivated not only by the brutality of SMERSH and NKVD forces. Their "Noble Fury" was incited not only by relentless propaganda from Political Instructors or incendiary front-line correspondents such as the popular Ilya Ehrenburg. Every Soviet family had suffered personal loss during the German invasion and occupation, and every soldier was driven by hatred of the Fascist Beast. It is the mass rape perpetrated by the Red Army which comprises the controversy of Beevor's book.

The facts of the story only hint at the carnage. By the beginning of 1945 the allied armies had halted after crossing the Rhine in western Germany. There they waited for a move from the Red Army in the east. It was not long in coming and was preceded by a wave of millions of fleeing German

civilians, who abandoning the occupied territories of Prussia and Silesia, had only one panicked and fearful expression on their lips: "Der Ivan Kommt!" Indeed the Russians were coming and in a massive way. They had assembled "the largest army the world had ever seen" comprising 2.5 million soldiers, over 40,000 artillery guns, 6,000 tanks and four air armies, all for the purpose of a rapid attack and capture of the capital of the Third Reich. Berlin in contrast was defended by 45,000 Wehrmacht troops and about 40,000 militia. The militia comprised the young (mostly 14 year old Hitler Youth), the old (Volkssturm), and also foreign fascist volunteers (mostly French and Latvians) who still believed in the fight against Bolshevism. This last point is well developed by Beevor. He mentions the Nazi and fascist antipathy towards the Russian peasant army and the Soviet form of totalitarianism. The Russians in turn hated all things German. This had been building since Stalingrad and Stalin himself had deliberately stoked the flames of revenge. When unleashed on Berlin this unquenchable fire took the form of drunken violence, looting, and gang-rape of German women by vast numbers of Red Army soldiers. Here is where Beevor's book differs from the many previous descriptions of this battle. THE FALL OF BERLIN 1945 is much too dull a title for the gruesome, disturbing, and emotionally wrenching descriptions of the inhumanity of both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army.

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