



Wolfram: The Boy Who Went to War

Giles Milton

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This work overturns all the cliches about life under Hitler. It is a powerful story of warfare and human survival and a reminder that civilians on all sides suffered the consequences of Hitler's war.

Wolfram: The Boy Who Went to War Details

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Author : Giles Milton

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From Reader Review Wolfram: The Boy Who Went to War for online ebook

Anna says

3.5 stars. Slow to start, spending a lot of time on child-Wolfram's interests in art, but gives an interesting view into how ordinary Germans experienced and thought of the rise of Nazism and its increasing intrusions into everyday lives, as well as lesser-known items like the Lebensborn program, the handling of German POWs, and how the activities of the death-camps were kept secret from the general populace for so long. Wolfram comes from an anti-Nazi family, but he can't escape the draft forever and eventually gets sent to war with other teenagers, first on the Eastern front and then to Normandy, just in time for D-Day. A thought-provoking glimpse into a less often seen and told side of the Second World War.

Taylor says

Brilliant, insightfull. Many times I stopped reading just to collect myself. Left me with a deep sense of appreciation of the current peace we enjoy, the price paid and just the lives lost and the lives that were disturbed. Very educational especially about the world and what it looked like pre, during and post world war 2. It was an honest account, nothing heroic but something really exceptional.

Debbie says

Remembrance of an artistic boy, born in 1924 in a small Bavarian village, and drafted into the German army in 1942, who survived, by luck. The same for the rest of his family. But the details of the Nazi's gaining power and the impact of war time life, especially on all civilians, is always an important story to read again and never forget.

Elgin says

This was outstanding and I recommend it to everyone. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed "Wolfram: The Boy Who Went to War." This book was the (fortunate) product of an experienced writer (Giles Milton) with a German father-in-law (Wolfram Aichele) who fought for the Third Reich in WWII. This is Wolfgang's story, from his boyhood in a small German community to his conscription to fight on the Russian front and in Normandy, to his capture and time as a prisoner of war in the US. The book focuses on Wolfram but also follows many of Wolfram's family members and friends. The book describes an idyllic life in a small town in pre-Nazi Germany, and takes the reader through its evolution to a community of German citizens living in terror and fear under the Nazis. There is not much here about the people resisting this...they felt powerless to do so, having to go with it and conform or be killed.

I don't think one can criticize the ordinary German citizens for this unless one has faced something similar. The stories of Wolfram's war experiences were many and terrible but also made an engaging reading. I finished this book in one day...very unusual for me!

Jessica Lambert says

Very good book.

Not one that I would allow a young person to read, but only because of the gruesome details of WWII. Definitely one I would recommend to adults.

Robert Hepple says

The book is a biographical account of Giles Milton's father-in-laws experiences during the rise of Nazism and subsequent ordeal as a soldier of the Wehrmacht. The text appears to fall into two main concurrent narratives – first, dealing with Wolfram's experiences and second, historical background details of events in Germany at the time, presumably to put Wolfram's experiences in context. The blurb inside the dustcover says 'The Boy Who Went to War overturns all the clichés about life under Adolf Hitler'. I have doubts about the claims of the dustcover – however surprising or eye-opening the narrative is, there is nothing new here that is not in many other publications on the subject. The accuracy of the experiences themselves is at times suspect – the dates of events from June to August 1944 just do not make sense, and not due to misprints. There are misprints and mistakes in addition to this, although some appear to be repeating mistakes from the sources listed in the bibliography. The photographs provided of the young Wolfram, key events in his town, and of him during his Wehrmacht service are remarkable. An enjoyable, if flawed biography.

Gretchen says

Well told story mainly of Germans who hated national socialism and Hitler, but "wanted to preserve their own lives. They had young children to protect; they were scared of the Gestapo. They did not want to end their days in Dachau."

Wayne says

The Disease of Hitlerism and its MANY malign Manifestations gradually asserted itself , until like a heavy suffocating blanket it had managed to cover even the most private and secluded locations that made up the Nation of Germany.

Those who hoped and expected to ignore, make themselves not obvious, decline without fuss to participate in Nazi events, were soon to realise that it would not be so simple or easy to carry on with a Safe Parallel Existence. Those who refused to join the National Socialist Family found that other methods, ways of co-existence would not do, that participation was inevitable, the only way to stay safe and alive. Rubbing shoulders with keen and fanatical Germans could not be avoided...from schools attended to armed combat to what books you read and what art you prized, to shopping in Jewish shops, going to your Jewish doctor, having Jewish friends or a Jewish spouse - a Stand was demanded, expected...toeing the Line was a Must. Not to belong was nothing less than a Crime.

The provincial market town of Pforzheim in the northern part of Baden was a charming, thriving , rich but

insignificant place. Those who people this story lived there. None were spared the Burning of books (1933) not approved of by the New Government. Their Jews were suddenly vilified and any association with them soon tabu. One could not trust...anyone really. Pforzheim's Jews were being deported as early as October 1940. What you did or failed to do became a matter to be pointed out by both friend and foe. The old town had been dragged well into the Whirlwind. No one was immune or safe. To participate was essential. Clubs, Groups, Associations from Butchers to Religious to Young people with sport, health and radical jazz music, whatever their title, membership or purpose might soon find that their existence was totally tied in with Nazi Government rule and their group dissolved or penalised...even executed.

Yet some changes came late AND forcefully.

Pforzheim was among cities which fell into the lowest of five categories potentially targeted as a candidate for bombardment. Its watch-making industries fell under suspicion of being used to produce precision weapons. Now on the 23 February 1945, 379 aircraft carrying almost half a million high-explosive bombs created a firestorm with a staggering temperature of around 1,600 degrees centigrade. Metal beams and girders turned liquid.

People in underground bunkers in the city's centre died of heat and smoke en masse , many reduced to small piles of ashes. 17,000 people had perished.

Pforzheim had become a Sister City to Dresden.

This is a rivetting book simply and clearly told.

Rivetting because of the huge number of people who never embraced Hitler's outrageous, immoral and cruel policies - People from all walks of life and of every age group. Fanatic and Humanist fought along side each other in the Cause of Germany; in the effort to save and protect the Jews, although how many ever really knew their unbelievable Fate. Many came from Pforzheim, young and old , male and female. They did not see themselves as heroes although their actions were often heroic and demanded belief in themselves. We meet these families, these individuals.

"Ordinary" is the most appropriate word to describe each one and it is done with admiration.

Read their stories...these people still exist. You could even know some ...and be one.

See...ORDINARY can be an EXTRAORDINARY word !!!

Kevin Hawkins says

The book started out slowly, but from about page 80 on I found it increably interesting. It gives an interesting account of a German army soldier that leaves one thinking how could the German army last so long.

Deb says

True story about Giles Milton's father-in-law, German conscript during the second world war. An artsy boy who loved drawing historic beauty/artifacts and he loved nature. His parents were intellectuals and not the Nazi german ideal.. Heart wrenching. My first read about how ordinary Germans coped with the rise of Nazism and the second world war.

There were also historic perspectives that I did not realize even tho I have read countless stories about Nazi germany and WWII. The situation inside Germany had not been clear for me, the ordinary German's perspective on the devastation of the WWI restoration payments, the failures of the Weimar govt and its fledgling democracy, the fact that Germans did not majority vote for Hitler and the story describing how he

'stole' the elections. And, that H burned the Reichstag to create fear of the communists. Actually, I did not realize the extent of the fear of communism.

It was interesting that H knew how to awake the Germanic traditions and "ethnicity." From other books that I have read, the GERMAN superiority mentality started back in the 1400s with the Teutonic knights. H knew how to tap into that. And, Goebbels propaganda machine was, sadly, phenomenal; he did not want mere conformity. "Rather, we want to work on people until they have capitulated to us, until they grasp ideologically what is happening in Germany today."

And, the explanation for the nazi block leaders in every city neighborhood in Germany! I had never heard of that. And, the justification for 'unifying' Austria, Czech territory, Poland, etc...it was for the ethnic germans in those lands, as if they were being mistreated!

And, the world reaction that led to H believing that he could get anything he wanted!

It was a very revealing story for me...and true.

Maryantoinette says

The author provides a very detailed and well-written account of his father-in-law's experiences (along that of his family and family friends) during the reign of Hitler and World War II.

I appreciated learning more about how Hitler came into power, and the means he used to gather support. I also feel the narrative was accurate, and not biased. There was lots of detail made available through written materials, and from the first-hand account of his father-in-law, Wolfram, who is still living (or at least was at the time of the writing).

I felt it dragged a bit at first with a lot of detail about Wolfram's childhood that wasn't entirely pertinent to the WWII experience. Other than that, an interesting read, including a number of photos that really enhanced the story.

Alice says

For many years I have read books, both fiction and non-fiction, about WWII and the holocaust; the stories of the Jews and the concentration camps, the hiding, the torture, the killing.

I had never read about the normal, ordinary German, trying to live each day throughout the rise and fall of Hitler.

I was born in 1940; I was alive on this earth during such a horrific time, but safely lived in the US, and unaware of what was happening across the vast Atlantic Ocean.

This book tells the details of the war, both pre and post years, how it affected the lives of a family, especially one young boy who was only nine years old when Hitler came to power.

Karl says

I have probably given all of Giles Milton's books five star ratings due to the fact he happens to be one of my favorite authors. This is the latest book by the English writer and historian. It is the story of his father-in-law Wolfram Aichele who was a German conscript during the second world war. Today, he is eighty-six and lives in Paris. He survived both the eastern and western fronts and was a prisoner-of-war. The story is so well-told and intriguing from the standpoint of a young reluctant conscripted soldier whose interests were in the arts and nature and anything but war.

Jennifer says

A very sad insight into the plight of ordinary people whose lives were overtaken by war. Everyone should read this book.

David Lowther says

The Boy who went to war is one of the finest true stories about how ordinary Germans coped with the rise of Nazism and the second world war.

The author traces Wolfram's childhood in a happy artistic home in South West Germany (near the Black Forest) and, with some small cultural difference, this is no different from most countries in Western Europe. The creeping menace of Nazism is illustrated not with innocent people being dragged off to concentration camps but with the growing control of people's everyday lives by the state.

When Wolfram goes to war, the full horror of the Eastern Front becomes evident, not so much through the action, but the atrocious conditions - hunger and disease - that formed most of their daily lives. Wolfram's colleagues are, like him, conscripts, and do their utmost to maintain some degree of dignity in the face of the horror of war 'my country, right or wrong.'

The action takes place in Normandy, in the immediate aftermath of the D Day landings, and is terrifyingly described.

The finest chapter in a book full of gripping story telling, is the one that deals with the firebombing of Pforzheim, Wolfram's home town. Of course, the Nazis did it to the Poles, the Dutch and the British who retaliated by bombing, amongst others, Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Dresden and Pforzheim. But reading Milton's description of the RAF's raid on Wolfram's home town, made me convinced for ever that there cannot ever be any justification for the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, whatever the provocation.

A superlative book.
