

Webb, James Jack. *Generals and Admirals of the Third Reich: For Country or Fuehrer, Volume 1: A–G*

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Good general references on the senior German military commanders of Germany's armed forces of World War II are seriously lacking. They tend to be either too general, encompassing only a minimum amount of biographical information on the officers selected, or severely restricted in the number of military men presented. Nonetheless, the demand for such an all-encompassing work is still high, and it is into this breach that James Jack Webb has boldly jumped. He is an American who works in the medical field but presents himself as an avid student of military history. While he is relatively unknown as a writer, Casemate Publishers has more than made its mark as an academic publisher. This work is the first in a set of three tomes, which speaks volumes for the confidence Casemate has in the author and his subject.

Right off the bat, its title is a bit of a misnomer because this ambitious series sets out to provide brief "who's who" type of biographies of all the senior commanders of the armed services of Hitler's Third Reich, and not just the three main services. Additionally, it is interesting because its title seems to recognize that many commanders either saw themselves as serving Hitler in his capacity as head of state or simply their country. This indeed is the "Sophie's Choice" that many of them faced as military men under Hitler's regime. As for the entries themselves, each biography provides the obvious information that one would expect to see in a work of this nature, but the author also provides their party number if they joined Hitler's movement, as well as their SS or SA membership number if they ever belonged to these rather more infamous organizations. If applicable, their service in the First World War or other Second World War-era forces such as the Luftwaffe (German air force) or the SS is included. A small portion of the individual entries are complemented by passport-sized and styled photographs of their subject. Unfortunately, given the quality of the paper used, these images are not as sharp as one could hope for. Given the encyclopedic nature of this volume and its coverage of all senior commanders whose last names begin from A to G, no notable sins of omission seem to have occurred.

Those who actively embraced the ideology of the regime they served, or at least condoned its more questionable facets, receive as much attention as do those who are best remembered as being opposed to it. It is sometimes hard to comprehend the Janus nature of the regime given its gradual evolution away

from the considered norms of the German Second Empire. Consequently, it is also understandable that some commanders' attitudes towards the regime gradually morphed over time; however, some allowed themselves to be bought off with promotions, honours, or material awards like property. Others eventually realized that serving this regime was morally reprehensible but only a very brave few joined the ranks of the resistance. Ultimately, most German admirals and generals failed to question the nature of the regime they were serving until it was far too late.

Nonetheless, there are gaps in the material presented. For example, some commanders felt it necessary to apply for membership to the National Socialist Party once they had been decommissioned from active service, but the author seems to be unaware of this change. An example is General-Admiral Hermann Boehm who applied to join the party fearing some post-retirement consequences for his lengthy conflict with one of Hitler's paladins. However, his party membership number is not cited in the text. Another failing is that the author does not present any information on where these commanders stood on their respective service's seniority lists. For the Kriegsmarine (German Navy), this is a vital consideration, because when Doenitz was named as Raeder's replacement as head of the navy in March 1943, he felt that he had no choice but to make a clean sweep and remove many senior admirals who had joined the Kriegsmarine before him. Given the quality of the sources the author had at his disposal, this indicates a failure to fully utilize the information that should have been available to him. In short, this explains why both General-Admirals Hermann Boehm and Rolf Carls were retired in May 1943.

Overall, given its scope and limitations this is an excellent initial source for anyone interested in the military history of the commanders who led Hitler's military. While it is neither comprehensive nor wholly complete, it is an excellent point of departure for students of the German military services who are interested in its lesser-known senior commanders of the Second World War.

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