

**When losers write history:
A critical analysis of “Good Nazi” myths and their
prevalence in academic work and popular culture**

Student: Leo Feypel

Student number: 6404545

Supervisor: James Kennedy

Institution: University Utrecht

Date of submission: 17.06.2020

Word count: 12936



¹ Mufson, Daniel. “The 2001 NPD/Neo-Nazi Demonstration against the Wehrmacht Exhibition.” danielmufson.com, August 26, 2009.
<https://danielmufson.com/translations-excerpts/the-2001-npdneo-nazi-demonstration-against-the-wehrmacht-exhibition/>.

Table of content

Abstract	p. 3
Introduction	p. 4
Methodology	p. 5-7
1. Historiography	p. 8-12
- Historiography on “Good Nazi” myths	
- How were these myths created?	
- What are “Good Nazi” myths	
2. Albert Speer’s work	p. 13-18
- Historiography on Speer	
- “Good Nazi” myths in Speer’s work	
3. Erich von Manstein’s work	p. 19-25
- Historiography on Manstein	
- “Good Nazi” myths in Manstein’s work	
4. The Wehrmacht exhibition	p. 26-29
- 1995 exhibition and protests	
- 2001 exhibition and protests	
5. Academic literature	p. 30-33
- “Good Nazi” myths in Liddell Hart’s work	
- “Good Nazi” myths in John Keegan’s work	
6. Popular culture	p. 34-38
- “Good Nazi” myths in journalism	
- “Good Nazi” myths in video games	
- “Good Nazi” myths in movies	
Conclusion	p. 39-41
Bibliography	p. 42-45

Abstract

Following the end of the Second World War, many former German leaders sought to escape justice by distorting the events of the war and their involvement in war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against the peace. This thesis will seek to establish categorisations for these distortions based on existing academic literature and the works of Albert Speer and Erich von Manstein as case studies. Looking at both past and present forms of academic writings and pop culture, this thesis will then seek to analyze to what extent these historical distortions can be found in academic writings and popular culture and how they have evolved over time. The thesis will conclude by offering some suggestions on how the reproduction of such historical distortions could be prevented in the future.

Introduction

From a Republican political candidate dressing up as a Waffen SS soldier² to the New York Times referring to Erwin Rommel as honorable³, depictions of the Second World War which seek to deny or lessen the severity of the crimes which the German state and its leadership committed during the war are omnipresent. These depictions are in the popular culture we consume and the academic literature we read, where they risk altering how we perceive the numerous war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against the peace that were committed by a great number of German institutions and individuals during the war. Therefore, whilst this distorted interpretation of the war, hereafter referred to as “Good Nazi” myths, in which crimes were committed by the few and abhorred by the powerless many, may once have been a necessity to preserve the unity of the state and come to grips with Germany’s horrible past, it is time to recognise that these interpretations have distorted our perception of historical events and to seek to rectify this mistake. Thus, this thesis will seek to answer the question: *How were “Good Nazi” myths created and spread, how can they be categorised and how are they expressed in academic literature and popular culture?*

² Green, Joshua. “Why Is This GOP House Candidate Dressed as a Nazi?” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, October 8, 2010.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/10/why-is-this-gop-house-candidate-dressed-as-a-nazi/64319/>.

³ Stephens, Bret. “Suleimani Died as He Had Killed.” The New York Times. The New York Times, January 4, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/03/opinion/iran-airstrike.html>.

Methodology

As such, this thesis will make use of a number of primary and secondary sources, from the works of historians and memoirs, to newspaper articles, science fiction novels and video games. The thesis will first review existing literature on “Good Nazi” myths by a number of historians who have published extensively on the Eastern Front in general and the historical distortions which make up specific elements of, what this thesis calls, “Good Nazi” myths, in particular. This will include the works of Beorn Waitman⁴ and Geoffrey Megargee⁵ who held lectures on the subject, Ronald Smelser who published “*The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*”⁶ and David Harrisville who wrote “*The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944*”⁷, in order to situate the thesis in the ongoing academic debate before analyzing how the current debate has failed to establish broad categorisations for “Good Nazi” myths which are necessary to trace these myths and how they evolved over time through the works of German war-time leaders to academic works and popular culture. Using the existing literature, this thesis will then establish five categories which collectively form the “Good Nazi” myths and which will be the theoretical framework for this thesis.

The second and third part of this thesis will demonstrate how this theoretical framework, established in the previous section, can be applied to the works of two case studies. Albert Speer and Erich von Manstein were chosen for this analysis because they were both important German leaders during the war who succeeded, to some extent, in rehabilitating their images by spreading “Good Nazi” myths. Speer was the minister for armaments and munitions for much of the war and he was convicted of crimes against humanity for the use of slave labor⁸, yet the “Good Nazi”

⁴ Waitman, Beorn. “Killing the ‘Clean’ Wehrmacht: The Reality of the German Army and the Holocaust.” *Youtube*. Lecture. Accessed June 9, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJOrtC8ODXA>.

⁵ Megargee, Geoffrey. “A Blind Eye and Dirty Hands: The Wehrmacht’s Crimes.” *Youtube*. Lecture. Accessed June 9, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=el_rjd9mukw.

⁶ Smelser, Ronald, and Edward Davies. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁷ Harrisville, David A. *The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944*. Ithaca (N.Y.): Cornell University Press, 2021.

⁸ “Nuremberg Trial Judgements: Albert Speer.” Jewish virtual library. Accessed June 9, 2022. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nuremberg-trial-judgements-albert-speer>.

myths which he spread in his works, notably his book *Inside the Third Reich*⁹ cleared his name to such an extent that a 1970 review of his book even praised him as “a man who appeared to be as decent as he was intelligent”¹⁰. Similarly, Manstein was a field marshal on the Eastern Front during the war, yet despite being convicted of mistreating Jewish civilians and Soviet prisoners of war¹¹, the “Good Nazi” myths which he spread throughout his trial and his book *Lost Victories*¹² rehabilitated his image to such an extent that high-ranking political figures, including Winston Churchill¹³ and Konrad Adenauer¹⁴ pushing for his early release. Through an examination of the reception history of Speer’s and Manstein’s works in the form of book reviews, this thesis will also show to what extent the “Good Nazi” myths presented in these books were accepted at the time and how these perspectives shifted over time.

In the fourth section, this thesis will apply the “Good Nazi” framework to a discourse analysis of the reporting on the protests surrounding the 1995 and 2001 Wehrmacht Exhibition which sought to inform the general public about many of the historical distortions surrounding the German army that were spread after the war. In doing so, this thesis will directly connect the discourse of protestors to “Good Nazi” myths, as well as Speer’s and Manstein’s work, thus showing that similar historical distortions can be found in all of them and that these myths have reached acceptance by an audience beyond “Good Nazis” whilst also allowing for an analysis of the changes in elements of “Good Nazi” myths which have been emphasized over time.

This will be followed by an analysis of two academic works in the fifth section of this thesis, using the “Good Nazi” myths framework. *The German Generals talk* by Liddell Hart¹⁵ was selected for this analysis because the book was written based on the testimony of German wartime leaders and, as this thesis will demonstrate, a number of “Good Nazi” myths are perpetuated throughout the book due to a lack of critical analysis. The second book which will be

⁹ Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*. Sphere, 1971.

¹⁰ Toland, John. “Inside the Third Reich.” *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, August 23, 1970. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/08/23/archives/inside-the-third-reich-third-reich.html>.

¹¹ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*. London: Phoenix, 2011, p292-293.

¹² Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*. Minneapolis, MN,: Zenith Press, 2004.

¹³ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p1151-1152.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p1150.

¹⁵ Liddell, Hart Basil Henry. *The German Generals Talk*. New York: Perennial, 2002.

analyzed in this section is *The Second World War* by John Keegan¹⁶ due to it being published significantly later than Hart's book, yet still featuring a number of "Good Nazi" myths. Through this analysis, this thesis will show that academic works are not immune to spreading "Good Nazi" myths whilst demonstrating that this is a problem which has persisted over time.

The sixth and final section before the conclusion will analyze several examples of popular culture through the lens of "Good Nazi" myths. This will range from a literary analysis of articles published by the New York Times¹⁷ and the Spectator¹⁸, to an analysis of video games such as *Battlefield V*¹⁹ and books such as the *Star Wars: The New Jedi order* series by Walter Jon Williams²⁰.

¹⁶ Keegan, John. *The Second World War*. New York: Penguin, 2016.

¹⁷ Stephens, Bret. "Suleimani Died as He Had Killed."

¹⁸ Taki. "The Other Side of D-Day." *The Spectator*, May 19, 2018.

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/high-life-17-may-2018>.

¹⁹ DICE. "Battlefield V." Electronic Arts, November 20, 2018.

²⁰ Williams, Walter Jon. *Star Wars: The New Jedi Order*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.

1. Historiography

There already exists some literature on the “Good Nazi”, including the term itself, which has been used by Gilbert King²¹, as well as literature on elements of the “Good Nazi” myth, but this literature often focuses on disproving specific historical distortions and fails to establish common themes which are crucial to tracing the spread of these myths over time, analyzing the ways in which they change and adapt and recognising when they influence academic writings and popular culture. This chapter will seek to outline the existing literature and its shortcomings in order to establish a definition of “Good Nazis” and “Good Nazi” myths.

Historiography on “Good Nazi” myths

The existing historiography largely focuses on three distortions of historical events which were spread by wartime leaders following the end of the war with those distortions being the claims that the army was not political, that the Wehrmacht was not involved in war crimes, crimes against humanity or crimes against the peace and that the army was a force for good on the Eastern Front throughout the early parts of the war. This section will summarise the historiography on these myths and analyse how the existing literature fails to offer a broader categorisation which can be used to detect and trace “Good Nazi” myths over time.

As Ronald Smelser notes in his work, many “Good Nazis” after the war began their accounts by stating that they had never been political²². This element of the “Good Nazi” myth runs counter to observations made by Geoffrey Megargee, who points out that the army supported the “stab in the back” myth, they instituted a loyalty oath to Adolf Hitler, they had begun tracking Jews in their ranks as early as 1916 and they were more than willing to exclude Jews from the army²³. Similarly, the army had never been against the war and only blamed Hitler after the fact as a convenient scapegoat²⁴. Thus, both historians agree that the army was political before and during

²¹ Magazine, Smithsonian. “The Candor and Lies of Nazi Officer Albert Speer.” Smithsonianmag.com. Smithsonian Institution, January 8, 2013.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-candor-and-lies-of-nazi-officer-albert-speer-324737/>.

²² Smelser, Ronald, and Edward Davies. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*, p135.

²³ Megargee, Geoffrey. “A Blind Eye and Dirty Hands: The Wehrmacht's Crimes.”

²⁴ Smelser, Ronald, and Edward Davies. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*, p56-57.

the war. According to Smelser, spreading this myth was convenient for “Good Nazis” who were on trial after the war because they could, by pretending that they had been blind to the political side of the war, completely sidestep many difficult questions about crimes committed during the war²⁵, or even completely deny that they had any knowledge of crimes which had been committed²⁶. Whilst both historians make a compelling case as to why high-ranking military leaders would claim to have been a-political, they fail to consider, as the analysis of Speer and Manstein’s work will show, that some civilian leaders made these same claims whilst some military leaders made such claims in an attempt to rehabilitate institutions, rather than to defending themselves whilst on trial.

Beorn Waitman and Gitta Sereny both deal with the myth that the Wehrmacht did not commit any crimes. Waitman notes that this myth came about because the waging of war and war crimes came to be seen as separate issues when, especially on the Eastern Front, these were seen as interconnected by the Nazi leadership²⁷. Sereny even goes one step further in arguing that our collective understanding of crimes being committed during the war has become hyper-specific due to the strong cultural focus on the Holocaust in general and concentration camps specifically. This, she argues, ultimately helps the “clean” Wehrmacht myth because it shifts the focus away from the millions of people who were killed by Einsatzgruppen and Wehrmacht personnel and toward the concentration camps which were not under the direct control of the Wehrmacht. Even worse than this, because the Wehrmacht’s crimes were committed by soldiers and during military campaigns, she argues that they have, to some extent, been justified as necessary acts of war²⁸. In both cases, the authors fail to clearly outline how the cultural interpretation of the war came about and what role key figures had in shaping this perspective. As this thesis will outline, “Good Nazis” deliberately sought to interpret the war in a way which lessened the severity of certain crimes and drew focus away from the actions of these individuals. If crimes being committed during the war came to be seen through the lens of the Holocaust then this was because individuals such as Speer and Manstein deliberately chose to ignore other crimes which might have incriminated them.

²⁵ Smelser, Ronald, and Edward Davies. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*, p56-57.

²⁶ Ibid, p64-65.

²⁷ Waitman, Beorn. “Killing the ‘Clean’ Wehrmacht: The Reality of the German Army and the Holocaust.”.

²⁸ Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*. London: Picador, 2015, p896-897.

Finally, as David Harrisville points out, some “Good Nazis” have argued that the Wehrmacht also did a lot of good during the war by freeing the people in the East from Soviet tyranny. According to him, this myth began in an uncoordinated way in the letters of Soldiers to their loved ones back home, in which they described how the Ukrainians “feel only affection and sympathy towards us Germans”²⁹ and that the Wehrmacht “brought security and a better life to inhabitants who had suffered under communist rule”³⁰. Harrisville sees this as an attempt to reassure the soldier’s loved ones that they were safe and that the war was not that bad. This, he argues, then created a false narrative at home which persisted after the war³¹. Whilst soldier’s letters certainly contributed to such myths during the war, and even to some extent after the war, in an attempt to reassure their loved ones that these individual soldiers had not committed crimes, Harrisville completely ignores the importance which key figures with significantly more public notoriety, such as Speer and Manstein, had on shaping these myths as historians like Liddell Hart mostly drew their information from wartime leaders rather than from soldiers. Soldiers also mostly did not publish memoirs which would go on to become bestsellers, unlike many of these “Good Nazis” who would therefore have had significantly more influence.

What are “Good Nazi” myths?

Through the summary of existing academic literature which has been outlined above, five distinct arguments which make up the “Good Nazi” myth can be observed. Together, they broadly form an argument made by many “Good Nazis” after the war, which is that they did not know about crimes that occurred, that they were not involved in these crimes, that there were a few people responsible for the crimes, that these “Good Nazis” opposed the crimes and that the crimes which they might have been involved in were not that bad. This section will seek to demonstrate how these categorisations were created from the existing academic literature.

The first category is “*see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*” which is a claim made by a number of “Good Nazis” after the war that they, and often the institutions they worked for, were

²⁹ Harrisville, David A. *The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944*, p211.

³⁰ Ibid, p212.

³¹ Ibid, p210.

unaware of the crimes which were being committed at the time, even when they reasonably would be expected to have known about them. This is closely related to Smelser's statement that many "Good Nazis" after the war began their accounts by stating that they had never been political³². As this thesis will show in more detail during its analysis of Speer and Manstein's work, claims that these individuals had been politically blind were often used as a justification for claims made by "Good Nazis" that they had not known about certain crimes because they defined these crimes as politically motivated.

The second category is "*do no evil*", and it refers to the claim, made by many "Good Nazis", that they, or the institutions they worked for, were not responsible for the crimes which had been committed, even when evidence to the contrary exists. This is based on statements made by Waitman³³ and Sereny³⁴ who argue that the Wehrmacht came to be seen as not having been involved in crimes because these crimes came to refer almost entirely to the Holocaust in which the army was less involved. In addition, many "Good Nazis" used arguments which fit in this category to attempt to restore the image of the institution they worked for during the war, as the analysis of Manstein's and Speer's work will show.

The third category is the claim that there were only "*a few bad apples*", often placed in positions of power by individuals or institutions who were outside of the reach of the "Good Nazis" spreading these claims and that it was these individuals or institutions who were responsible for all the crimes which occurred. This is based on Sereny's observation that the crimes committed during the war came to be seen as mostly the Holocaust which itself came to refer to the gas chambers at Auschwitz specifically³⁵. Thus, such a narrow focus on one key aspect of the crimes which have been committed places the blame for these crimes in the hands of a few individuals. By claiming this, many "Good Nazis" sought to create scapegoats by portraying the vast majority of individuals and institutions associated with the war as non-criminal.

This was often preceded or followed by a fourth category of claims made by these same individuals, which states that they, and other individuals, were a part of "*a few good men*" who tried, but failed, to stop the crimes being committed, which is based on observations made by Harrisville who argued that soldiers often felt sympathy towards the Soviet population and

³² Smelser, Ronald, and Edward Davies. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*, p135.

³³ Waitman, Beorn. "Killing the 'Clean' Wehrmacht: The Reality of the German Army and the Holocaust."

³⁴ Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, p896-897.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p896-897.

rationalize their actions by arguing that they were helping these civilians³⁶. In presenting themselves in such a way, many “Good Nazis” sought to portray their character in a favorable light by arguing that they had stayed in a position of power to do good. Both Manstein and Speer made use of this claim, as this thesis will show.

The fifth and final category is the broad claim that “*it was not all bad*”. These are claims made by “Good Nazis” during and after their trials when many of them sought to lessen their degree of guilt and the severity of the charges they were facing by arguing that the crimes they had committed were not as bad as they seemed or that they had been necessary to achieve some greater good. This is based on Harrisville’s observation that soldiers often justified the horrors of the war in the East by arguing that this was ultimately necessary to free the civilian population from Soviet oppression³⁷.

³⁶ Harrisville, David A. *The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front*, p212.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p212.

2. Albert Speer's work

Albert Speer was one of many German wartime leaders who spread “Good Nazi” myths following the end of the war. This section will summarize some existing historiography on Speer in order to outline his questionable actions during the war, before analysing his work, which will function as a case study, to show how he used “Good Nazi” myths to clear his reputation and to what extent he was successful in this regard.

Historiography on Speer

Immediately after the war, Albert Speer, the former Reichs Minister of Armaments and war production, went to work building his defense by showing himself as a valuable asset to the western allies. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey interviewed Speer for as long as they could because they wanted to know how to defeat Japan through bombing campaigns³⁸. Speer left a good impression on his interrogators who noted that he pleasantly answered questions and that he evoked sympathy³⁹. Eventually, he was put on trial at Nuremberg where he continued to cultivate his “Good Nazi” image. He was one of only a few accused who cried when faced with video evidence of the Holocaust and he was the only one to apologize for it, even if he states that he had no knowledge of the Holocaust⁴⁰. This too left a good impression and he only served twenty years in prison despite being found guilty on two counts of crimes against humanity for the use of slave labor⁴¹.

In 1969, after having served his sentence, Speer published *Inside the Third Reich* which continued to spread many of the “Good Nazi” myths which he had first espoused during his trial. The book was well-received at first and a 1970 review of his book by John Toland largely presents Speer in a positive light. According to Toland, Speer “took full responsibility for the slave labor battalions in his factories, and for collaborating with the S.S. which provided him concentration camp prisoners”⁴². Speer, he argues, was incredibly critical of himself and his

³⁸ Magazine, Smithsonian. “The Candor and Lies of Nazi Officer Albert Speer.”.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Nuremberg Trial Judgements: Albert Speer.”.

⁴² Toland, John. “Inside the Third Reich.”.

work, sometimes even without regard for his own safety⁴³. He, therefore, refers to Speer as “the most responsible member of Hitler's lieutenants, a man who appeared to be as decent as he was intelligent”⁴⁴. Although he was perceived as a “Good Nazi” at the time, his image has since drastically shifted. In 1971, Erich Goldhagen alleged that Speer had known about the Holocaust and after his death in 1981, a number of personal letters which confirmed this accusation surfaced⁴⁵. A 2017 review of his book by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is far more critical of Speer’s work, calls it a “silver-tongued project of exculpation”⁴⁶, and argues that Speer mainly disagreed with the methods being used to commit crimes, rather than the crimes themselves⁴⁷. In addition, Adichie calls out Speer’s “Good Nazi” image and characterises him as “a man whose ruthlessly steady hand kept the German war machine churning”⁴⁸ and someone who “denied that he knew of millions of Jews being murdered”⁴⁹: a ruthless man whose actions prolonged the war and who sought to escape justice by lying. Speer’s book, Adichie argues, is so dangerous because it uses seeming honesty to disarm the reader, shift blame away from Speer and represent him as some kind of ideal⁵⁰, when in reality, Speer was anything but a “Good Nazi”.

“Good Nazi” myths in Speer’s works

Speer’s first line of defense against any accusations made against him can be categorized as “*see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*”. He often claimed that he had no knowledge of crimes which occurred because he had no interest in politics and he only cared about his work. Speer repeatedly stated that he “had no wish whatsoever to mix in politics”⁵¹, even when he joined the NSDAP or began working for Hitler. In fact, he goes out of his way by pointing out that, when it came to artists, Hitler “simply didn’t care about politics”⁵². In doing so, Speer seeks to reject the notion that he was a convinced Nazi or that he held any of their beliefs which, following the horror and suffering that the Nazis had caused throughout Europe, can be seen as a prerequisite

⁴³ Toland, John. “Inside the Third Reich.”.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Magazine, Smithsonian. “The Candor and Lies of Nazi Officer Albert Speer.”.

⁴⁶ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. “Rereading Albert Speer’s ‘Inside the Third Reich.’” *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/rereading-albert-speers-inside-the-third-reich>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, p191-192.

⁵² Ibid, p275.

to being seen as favorably by the general public in the first place. Instead, Speer chooses to describe himself as an artist: someone who simply took a job like any other. In this way, he tries to persuade the audience that his work was not politically motivated. He goes on to argue that this sentiment continued when he became Hitler's architect and eventually the minister for armaments and munitions, thus justifying how he could have accepted these positions without being a convinced Nazi. Speer even points out that he sought to reduce the party's influence on his ministry. He specifically recalls one incidence when, after the failed assassination attempt of Hitler in 1944, the Gestapo had wanted to indict three general managers for defeatist remarks but they were denied this request by Speer who stated that "the nature of our work compelled us to speak candidly about the situation"⁵³. He, however, also points out that he did not blindly protect people and severely punished those who hoarded crucial war materials⁵⁴. Speer makes it clear in these passages that he could act along or against party lines and that, whilst he may have been politically blind, he did have a strong sense of honor and justice. So why did Speer not apply this sense of justice to the crimes which were being committed at the time? Here, his earlier statements about his political blindness and his focus on his job allow him to argue that he was too focused on his work to pay any attention to it. When Speer was asked why he used slave labor from concentration camps, he said the following: "I had no influence on the method by which workers were recruited. If the workers were being brought to Germany against their will (...). Whether such laws were justified or not, that was a matter I did not check at the time. Besides, this was no concern of mine"⁵⁵. In other words, Speer did not know about it because it did not fall within his work and he did not care to ask. In addition to this, he claims he never read *Mein Kampf* and thus could not have known the crimes which Hitler was willing to commit to achieve his vision⁵⁶. This convenient political blindspot that he created for himself allowed him to deny that he knew about the extent of the euthanasia program in Germany⁵⁷, that he had known anything about the *Kristallnacht*⁵⁸, or that he had known about the pogroms which occurred in Vienna when he was visiting the city⁵⁹. By pretending that he was not politically interested and therefore had no knowledge of these crimes, Speer can not only justify continuing

⁵³ Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, p212.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p212.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p788.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p472.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p524-525.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p424.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p495.

to work for the regime but it also allows him to create a version of events which do not negatively reflect on his character.

Of course, this image of a just artist being pushed into a war of which he knew nothing only works if he manages to convince his readers of the second categorisation of “Good Nazi” myths, that is to say, that he could “*do no evil*”: that he did not commit any crimes. Throughout his book, he repeatedly downplays his importance in the Nazi regime, especially once he becomes the armaments minister in 1943. Whilst he does mention how he shared a special connection with Hitler, he repeatedly fails to mention how much power and influence this gave him over Hitler, his ministry and the whole Reich, as Hitler was remarkably willing to listen to him time and time again. At this stage, Speer was even considered as a successor to Hitler⁶⁰: a fact which he only mentions in passing when it would have been the biggest breakthrough of his career. In doing so, he downplays his power and therefore his involvement in crimes, both directly through his ministry and indirectly because he, at times, did not stand up to Hitler. At Nuremberg, Speer was accused of using forced labor in his factories. He does briefly mention this in his book, but only to state that he should have, but did not know that the way in which these workers had been coerced was criminal⁶¹. He then goes on to say that, because he should have known, he “must share the responsibility for Sauckel’s dire labor policies”⁶². This is a key example of his defense strategy. Whilst it appears as if he is one of the few “Good Nazis” who is taking responsibility for his crimes and is therefore showing an honest character, he is simultaneously saying that he did not know about the crime and thus, how could any reasonable reader hold him accountable for this crime, even if he should have known. He then finishes his act by shifting the blame to Fritz Sauckel, the General Plenipotentiary for Labor Deployment, which gives the reader a scapegoat that they can fully blame for this crime with no chance for self-defense.

Even when Speer was not directly accused of a crime, he often shifts blame to “*a few bad apples*” who, he claims, were responsible for all the crimes that Germany committed during the war. Chief amongst these people is Hitler. Speer notes in his book that the changes which he wanted to make could not be achieved by replacing anyone lower down in the hierarchy and he

⁶⁰ Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, p966-967.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p788.

⁶² *Ibid*, p809-810.

even quotes Goebbels as saying that they did “not having a 'leadership crisis' but strictly speaking a 'Leader crisis’”⁶³. Where Hitler can not be blamed, Speer blames the leadership below him. When Speer became armaments minister, he argued at a conference that all construction that was not war-relevant should be halted, which led to countless party officials swarming him after the conference and asking for an exemption⁶⁴, which led Speer to write that “after only nine years of rule the leadership was so corrupt that even in the critical phase of the war it could not cut back on its luxurious style of living”⁶⁵. These anecdotes are not limited to the political leadership. Speer also shows how incompetent the leadership was by recounting how Wilhelm Keitel, who was a general of the artillery at the time, mislabeling an anti-tank gun as a light field howitzer whilst the Reich Marshal Hermann Goering once mislabeled a number of planes which he was presenting because he was reading off an incorrect list⁶⁶. Thus, whilst Speer could not stop these crimes because he had no knowledge of them due to his political blindness, these “yes-men” are responsible for the crimes because they helped perpetuate them or failed to stop Hitler. In this way, Speer can explain how crimes still occurred whilst simultaneously putting the blame on as few people as possible and thus representing most of the leadership, which he was a part of, as “Good Nazis”.

When all these defensive tactics, which represent elements of the “Good Nazi” myths, failed to adequately shift or remove blame from him because a crime could undeniably be linked to him, Speer argues that “*it was not all bad*” in an attempt to lessen his guilt. One accusation which he could not deny because he was convicted for it at Nuremberg was his use of slave labor, for which he received two counts of crimes against humanity⁶⁷. Therefore, Speer seemingly did take some responsibility for these crimes by arguing that he should have known about them and that, even if he had not known, he still carries some of the guilt. However, he then spends a considerable amount of time arguing that the conditions for forced labor were not that bad, thus seeking to mitigate his guilt. Upon finding out about the conditions within worker camps, Speer writes that he allocated materials to improve the living conditions in camps⁶⁸ and thus, “the SS

⁶³ Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, p258-259.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p215.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p217.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p235-236.

⁶⁷ “Nuremberg Trial Judgements: Albert Speer.”

⁶⁸ Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, p370-371.

made considerable improvements in the sanitary conditions and rations of the camps”⁶⁹. In fact, he even goes so far as to say that “a great number of the foreign workers in our country did their work quite voluntarily once they had come to Germany.”⁷⁰. Therefore, whilst it seems as if Speer is taking responsibility for the use of slave labor, he makes it very clear that he did not know at the time, thus preserving the morally clean version of himself which he presents to his readers. He also partially absolves himself of the blame because the admission that he should have known can not be seen with the same degree of guilt as if he had actually known. Finally, by asserting that he improved the conditions of the workers and by stating that many of them worked voluntarily, he is not only questioning the Nuremberg verdict, as voluntary workers do not count as slave labor, but also arguing that his involvement ultimately had a positive effect for these workers.

By using several rhetorical techniques which can be separated into the different categories of “Good Nazi” myths, Speer has thus created layers of defense which seek to rehabilitate his personal character. He first claims that he knew of no crimes because he was not politically interested and he committed no crimes because he had no power. He then goes on to admit that some crimes were committed by certain individuals, but that he stayed in his position to try and stop these people. Finally, when crimes can be linked to him, he defends himself by arguing that these crimes were not that bad. In doing so, Speer has done more than simply setting up his personal legal and public defense. Particularly his statements that some elements of the Nazi regime did not commit any crimes and that not all crimes were as bad as they seem reverberate in the protests surrounding the Wehrmacht exhibition and some academic literature, as this thesis will discuss in respective paragraphs.

⁶⁹ Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*, p370.

⁷⁰ Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, p863-864.

3. Erich von Manstein's work

Erich von Manstein, who is a well known military commander to this day, represents the second “Good Nazi” case study for the purposes of this thesis. This section will summarize some existing historiography on Manstein in order to outline his questionable actions during the war, before analysing his work to show how he used “Good Nazi” myths to clear his reputation and to what extent he was successful in this regard.

Historiography on Manstein

As a military commander on the Eastern Front, Erich von Manstein had a lot to answer for following Germany's defeat. In 1949, Manstein was put on trial with seventeen charges including the accusation of bad treatment of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war during the fighting in the Crimea, being leveled against him⁷¹. Despite receiving a prison sentence, the explanations and justifications which he gave for his actions raised so much political resistance from academics such as Liddel Hart, politicians like Winston Churchill⁷² and Konrad Adenauer, as well as a great number of former generals and soldiers⁷³ that he was prematurely released in 1953⁷⁴.

In 1955, Manstein would go on to publish *Lost Victories*, in which he espoused many of the same arguments and views which he had presented during his trial. Whilst his political success and notoriety helped the popularity of his book, it is clear today that many of the sentiments within it can be categorised as “Good Nazi” myths. In a 2017 review of Manstein's book, James Davis writes that “the reader of *Lost Victories* is nagged by the idea that Manstein emphasizes his role in the tactical achievements of the Wehrmacht and downplays its alleged involvement in war crimes”⁷⁵. Another 2017 review by Sebastian Dannhoff goes even further in denouncing the book for its selective focus away from crimes. Dannhoff calls the book an attempt at “whitewashing”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p292-293.

⁷² Ibid, p1151-1152.

⁷³ Ibid, p1150.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p1151-1152.

⁷⁵ Davis, James. “Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General' by Mungo Melvin.” The Cove, May 16, 2017.

<https://cove.army.gov.au/article/manstein-hitlers-greatest-general-mungo-melvin>.

⁷⁶ Dannhoff, Sebastian. “Book Review – Field Marshal Erich Von Manstein *Lost Victories*.” Academia.edu, May 12, 2018. https://www.academia.edu/36618549/Book_Review_Field_Marshal_Erich_von_Manstein_Lost_Victories, p5-6.

and specifically denounces Manstein's claims that the German population did not believe that they were the master race, his claim that criminal orders were not executed by soldiers under his command and his belief that his tactics could have won the war in the East⁷⁷. Dannhoff goes on to argue that Manstein selectively told his story in an attempt to build his legacy and profit from his involvement in the war through his role as advisor to the Bundeswehr⁷⁸. Both reviews, therefore, show a clear rejection of Manstein's "Good Nazi" myths.

"Good Nazi" myths in Manstein's work

Much of Manstein's defense of the army and its leadership is built around establishing them, and therefore, by extension, himself, as honorable and duty-bound. In doing so, he characterizes himself and the military as "*a few good men*", who fought against those committing crimes. Manstein characterizes the Oberkommando des Heeres as professional gentlemen, referring to field marshal Gerd von Rundstedt as "brilliant"⁷⁹, a "talented soldier"⁸⁰ and "a gentleman of the old school"⁸¹. He also characterizes commander Hermann Hoth and his staff as "calm"⁸², "resolute"⁸³ and "someone who repeatedly outplayed his enemies"⁸⁴. In this way, he indicates that the entirety of the army leadership consisted of competent career commanders who were driven by military considerations and understandings of honorable conduct, rather than political ideology. The characterisation of the army leadership in such a way allows Manstein to counter the accusation levelled against many "Good Nazis" in position, which is that they should simply have resigned and refused to do their job if they had truly wanted to stop the crimes which were occurring under their watch. Manstein essentially argues that he and his companions simply performed their duty for so long due to some higher responsibility and sense of duty which especially caused Franz Halder, the chief of staff of the Army High Command, and Walther von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, to stay on in an attempt to save Germany and its soldiers from the political leadership by resisting Hitler⁸⁵. For his own part, Manstein claims to have threatened resignation repeatedly but he remained to save

⁷⁷ Dannhoff, Sebastian. "Book Review – Field Marshal Erich Von Manstein Lost Victories.", p4.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p5-6.

⁷⁹ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p12.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p12.

⁸¹ Ibid, p12.

⁸² Ibid, p243.

⁸³ Ibid, p243.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p243.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p45.

his troops, with one of his staff members even being quoted as saying that “If I had not kept begging him to stay for the troop’s sake, he’d have chucked the job back at Hitler long ago”⁸⁶. Interestingly, when defending the army leadership in his book, Manstein mostly talks about other commanders. This is likely because he goes to great lengths to characterize himself as a simple soldier. He refers to himself and his command as “we soldiers”⁸⁷ and during his trial, his lawyer would go on to state that “what field marshal von Manstein asks for is to be treated as a soldier”⁸⁸. Considering his unwillingness to discuss the crimes which had been committed, it makes sense that he would seek to sidestep difficult questions by characterizing himself in such a way. As a simple soldier, his jurisdiction is severely limited and he can therefore claim that he simply followed orders and that he does not wish to discuss certain crimes because he has characterized them as political issues, as this thesis will discuss later on, and they, therefore, fall above his level of responsibility. It also allows him to represent the common soldier, and by extension himself, as honorable and the Wehrmacht as “clean”. About the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, Manstein writes that “their aggressive spirit was unparalleled; and when the situation appeared hopeless they would stand and fight unflinchingly”⁸⁹ as well as saying that “they went to the very limit of endurance to carry out these demands, reciprocating the trust of those who led them”⁹⁰. He even spares a couple of good words for the Waffen SS whom he calls “comrades”⁹¹ with whom he fought “shoulder to shoulder”⁹² and who “always showed themselves courageous and reliable”⁹³. Having characterized the soldiers in such a manner, he then spends some time outlining how harshly the odds were stacked against them. Writing that “but for the almost superhuman achievements of the German troops and their commanders in facing up to an enemy many times their superior in numbers, the Army Group could never have succeeded”⁹⁴ and “their courage and self-sacrifice did much to compensate for the enemy’s numerical preponderance”⁹⁵. He then evokes an image of heroism, martyrdom and last stands by comparing it to the battle of Thermopylae, when he writes: ““Stranger! To Sparta say, her faithful

⁸⁶ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p720-721.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p1047-1048.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p1100.

⁸⁹ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p124.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p124.

⁹¹ Ibid, p115.

⁹² Ibid, p115.

⁹³ Ibid, p115.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p278.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p278.

band Here lie in death, remembering her command'. Never will these lines, telling of the heroism of the defenders of Thermopylae and ever after regarded as the song of praise to bravery, fidelity and soldierly obedience, be carved in stone at Stalingrad in memory of the Sixth Army's martyrdom on the Volga. Nor is any cross or cenotaph likely to be raised over the vanished traces of the German soldiers who starved, froze and died there"⁹⁶. Thus Manstein equates the soldiers, but also himself and his command, to tragic heroes who acted out of duty and valor to stop an evil enemy and fight against overwhelming odds. This archetype leaves no space for any questions of crimes or wrongdoing.

Having established himself and much of the army as virtuous, Manstein justifies why they did not stop the crimes which were occurring by arguing that they did not know about many of them, which can be categorized as "*hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil*". He begins his account of the war by stating in the beginning of his book that "I watched political developments after the Austrian Anschluss from a point far from the center of military affairs"⁹⁷. This sets the tone for the rest of the book. Manstein chooses to see himself as a military, rather than a political figure, and thus he does not discuss any political matters in his book unless they concern the army. He then goes on to claim that he brought the same a-political mindset to his command. He mentions one instance where he chose to promote one subordinate over another: a mention which he justifies by saying that there had been accused after the war of selecting staff based on their political beliefs, which he denies⁹⁸. Aside from allowing him to refute an allegation, this story also helps him establish a cornerstone of his defense, which is his claim that he was not political and had no political interest.

He then goes on to define a number of crimes, which he might rightfully have been expected to know about, as political issues, thus explaining to the reader why he did not know about them. Due to this political blindness, Manstein claims that he "had no suspicion at the time of the momentous differences of a strategic nature existing between Hitler and OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres)"⁹⁹ and thus he had no prior knowledge of Hitler's intentions to go to war¹⁰⁰. He even considers the crimes committed by the Einsatzkommandos behind the front to have been a

⁹⁶ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p177.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p11.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p37.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p107.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p107.

political issue and thus he claims not to have known about them, stating that he “never personally saw or reliably heard of the shootings of the Jews en masse by these Einsatzkommandos”¹⁰¹. Similarly, he also does not mention what happened to the tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war which his troops captured during Operation Barbarossa¹⁰², likely because they were no longer militarily relevant once they were captured, and he fails to mention the crimes which had been committed in Poland following the end of military actions in the country¹⁰³. Because the book was written ten years after the end of the war, Manstein could have, even if he truly had not known about any crimes at the time, reflected on his contributions to those crimes with the benefit of hindsight whilst also stating that these events did not occur under his jurisdiction, thus continuing to not incriminate himself. This is a crucial difference to Speer’s political blindness as he accepted after the war that certain crimes occurred which he should have known about, whilst Manstein, despite undoubtedly being aware of them, simply refuses to mention them, thus all but denying that they occurred or that he shares responsibility for them.

When crimes can not be ignored by citing political blindness, Manstein tries to downplay them instead by arguing that “*it was not that bad*”. For instance, he states that the army did not systematically plunder. In fact, “in contrast to what happened later in Germany, it did not occur to us to act as lords and masters who could do as they pleased with enemy property. On the contrary, a strict check was kept on houses occupied by German troops, and the removal of whole sets of furniture or the appropriation of valuables as 'souvenirs' certainly had no place in the German Army's code of behavior”¹⁰⁴. Through this very clear statement and the mention of the army’s code of behavior, Manstein appeals to the honor of the army which acted with restraint and by stating that the army were not lords and masters over the countries they occupied, he even makes a broader point about the nature of the occupation. To substantiate this claim, he cites the occupation of France where, “as a result of the impeccable behavior of our troops, nothing happened to disturb our relations with the civil population”¹⁰⁵. Sometimes, Manstein claims, his army did take things, but this was done only out of military necessity.

¹⁰¹ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p1039-1040.

¹⁰² Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p159.

¹⁰³ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p292-293.

¹⁰⁴ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p91.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p91.

Manstein writes that during his retreat from the Crimea, his army employed scorched earth tactics to delay the Soviet army by taking all items from factories and warehouses. The reason Manstein gives as to why this is not plundering is that all factories and warehouses were “the property of the State and not of private individuals”¹⁰⁶ and thus they were taking from an enemy state and not civilians. In this way, he provides an excuse for his army’s conduct to allow them to plunder under the guise of military tactics. Apart from military necessity, Manstein writes that soldiers only rarely plundered out of a “perfectly explainable human lapse”¹⁰⁷. However, he goes to great lengths to illustrate to his readers that these were individual acts which were not systematic in any way and which were therefore not condoned by the army. Manstein states he severely punished bad conduct, which even included the death sentence for two soldiers who had raped a woman¹⁰⁸. Similarly, he recounts that in 1939, when soldiers had opened fire into a crowd of Polish Jews by accident¹⁰⁹, the officer responsible for this was jailed and demoted¹¹⁰.

So If the army was not political, they did not want war, they committed no crimes, they behaved honorably and they were essentially heroes, then who, according to Manstein, was responsible for all the crimes which undeniably occurred? Manstein uses yet another “Good Nazi” myth by referring to a “*few bad apples*” whom he scapegoats for all the crimes. According to Manstein, it was Hitler who wanted the war and who had ordered the army to make the necessary preparations for an invasion of Poland¹¹¹. It was also Hitler who tried to limit the power of the Oberkommando des Heeres in favor of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht which he sought to control more easily. Manstein claims that Hitler quite deliberately chose Brauchitsch as the Commander-in-Chief of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht for this reason. According to him, Brauchitsch was “never really the sort of man to get his way by sheer force of personality”¹¹² and because of this, Hitler had effectively taken command of the army as early as 1938 by influencing the highest levels of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht and ideologically indoctrinating the army in this way¹¹³. This ultimately left the army leadership in political hands

¹⁰⁶ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p296.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p135.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p135.

¹⁰⁹ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p292-293.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p292-293.

¹¹¹ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p11.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p42.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p43.

which Manstein despised. In his book, he spends a few pages in his book mocking the Nazi leadership with Hermann Göring, the commander in chief of the German air force, receiving most of the ridicule. On one occasion, Manstein describes Göring dressed in a military-style costume and even refers to him as a “fat boy” and a “strong-arm man”¹¹⁴. Thus compromised, Manstein argues that the army was incapable of stopping the crimes from occurring. Hitler had used their political blindness against them and it was this which led to the crimes that occurred.

Just like Speer, Manstein’s recounting of the war and his role in it shows a number of claims and rhetorical tools which can be categorised as “Good Nazi” myths. He begins by characterizing the army as honorable and bound by a code of conduct. He then uses this to argue that they had no political interest, which left them blind to many crimes being committed. This is the only real concession which Manstein makes in his book, as he classifies all crimes which had been committed by the army as either military necessities or individual lapses in human judgement. The true crimes, he argues, were committed by the political aspects of the Nazi regime which the army was powerless against. Many of Manstein’s statements resonated with a wider audience, which helps explain the political support behind his early release from prison. Specifically, his sentiments that the army fought honorably and that it was only certain aspects of the army which committed crimes are reflected in the protests surrounding the Wehrmacht exhibition, as well as popular culture, whilst his downplaying of crimes can be found in academic literature, all of which will be discussed in more detail in respective chapters.

¹¹⁴ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p15.

4. The Wehrmacht exhibition

The Wehrmacht exhibition marks one of the first times that historians sought to disprove some of the historical distortions which had been created after the Second World War as part of the “Good Nazi” myths. This section will analyse the language used by protestors to the original 1995 exhibition, as well as the revised 2001 exhibition in order to show how “Good Nazi” myths reached a wider audience within the general public, how these myths changed over time and that, despite the work which had been done by the exhibition, some historical distortions remained in the public consciousness.

1995 exhibition and protests

The exhibition first opened its door to the general public in Hamburg in 1995 under the name *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-44* and it focused on the crimes which the Wehrmacht had committed during the war¹¹⁵. The exhibition documented, through photographs, newspaper clippings and letters from soldiers, how the Wehrmacht had systematically murdered Jews, Gypsies and prisoners of war on the Eastern Front¹¹⁶ in an attempt to give an “insight into the way Nazi Germany and its violent regime worked”¹¹⁷. By showing how every level of the Third Reich became an instrument of their crimes, the exhibition wanted to, as the curator Hannes Heer said at the time, “get rid of the 50-year-old legend which showed the Wehrmacht as a clean and courageous army, which had nothing to do with war crimes”¹¹⁸. The exhibition was discussed in several German state parliaments, as well as the national parliament¹¹⁹, there were repeated protests against it by a number of neo-Nazi groups, as well as counter-protests and the exhibition was even bombed in 1999¹²⁰. Throughout the protests, a great number of “Good Nazi” myths can be seen, which shows their persistence over time.

¹¹⁵ “Controversial Wehrmacht Exhibition Back on Show.” dw.com. Deutsche Welle, December 2, 2001.

<https://www.dw.com/en/controversial-wehrmacht-exhibition-back-on-show/a-338282>.

¹¹⁶ Underwood, Kim. “German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate.” CNN. Cable News Network, February 25, 1995. <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9702/25/germany.exhibition/>.

¹¹⁷ “Controversial Wehrmacht Exhibition Back on Show.”

¹¹⁸ Underwood, Kim. “German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate.”

¹¹⁹ “Controversial Wehrmacht Exhibition Back on Show.”

¹²⁰ “Far-Right to Protest Nazi Exhibit.” CNN. Cable News Network, December 1, 2001. <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/29/berlin.protest/index.html>.

Chief among these “Good Nazi” claims was that individual survivors and the Wehrmacht in general “*did no evil*”, that is to say, they commit no crimes. Helmut Lebert, a former soldier on the Eastern Front during the war, protested the exhibition, saying that he had been “with the 51st Infantry Division in Russia and (his) unit was not involved in one single atrocity”¹²¹. A newspaper report by Terrence Petty also makes light of “several World War II veterans” who claimed that some pictures in the exhibition were forgeries¹²². Another report by Kim Underwood notes that protesters often argued that these crimes were the acts of individuals, rather than the collective efforts of a murderous system, by yelling slogans such as “a few thousand is not the Wehrmacht”¹²³. Underwood explains this by saying that it was a lot easier to accept that some people, especially those in the SS, had committed crimes, rather than to insinuate that a great number of the 17 million Wehrmacht soldiers, many of whom were still around and had family and friends, could be criminals too¹²⁴. It is, of course, possible that these specific survivors did, in fact, not commit any crimes during the war. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems impossible to come to any other conclusion than that the crimes which the Wehrmacht committed had been systematic. Whilst the statements of these survivors might be correct, by voicing them at the exhibition, they are therefore questioning the findings of the exhibition and thus arguing that the Wehrmacht did not systematically commit crimes.

Another aspect which emerges quite strongly throughout the protests is the claim that “*it was not all bad*” because the army mainly committed crimes to defend the homeland¹²⁵. At the time, such sentiments were not just shared by neo-Nazis and protestors, but also Peter Gauweiler of the conservative political party CSU, who stated that “we don't think it is right on the one hand to hold an exhibition about world war crimes and then only to present the half the truth, for example, to completely ignore the crimes committed by the Russian Red Army”¹²⁶. In protest, he and a number of other CSU leaders boycotted the opening of the exhibition and instead laid a

¹²¹ Petty, Terrence. “Rightists Demonstrate in Munich, Leftists Stage Counter Protest.” AP NEWS. Associated Press, March 1, 1997. <https://apnews.com/article/7afac1c48315aeebd12fc8ee18f36534>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Underwood, Kim. “German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate.”

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “Neo-Nazis Battle German Leftists over Anti-Nazi Exhibit.” The New York Times. The Associated Press, January 25, 1998.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/25/world/neo-nazis-battle-german-leftists-over-anti-nazi-exhibit.html>.

¹²⁶ Underwood, Kim. “German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate.”

wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier¹²⁷. In doing so, they sent a clear message that many fallen soldiers were still worth honoring and that whilst some had committed crimes, others had simply defended their home country against the Soviets who were committing crimes themselves. The image which was created, in this case, in the context of the ongoing Cold War, is similar to Manstein's portrayal of soldiers at Stalingrad as brave defenders, although key differences also exist. The CSU did not place as much emphasis on the heroism of former soldiers, likely because denying that crimes had occurred had become a fringe position in light of the evidence against such views. Instead, they focused more on the bad being committed on both sides, thus arguing that no side was morally clean, which lessens the guilt of the Wehrmacht because its crimes can be seen in a more forgiving context.

2001 exhibition and protests

Although the claim by some veterans that a number of pictures within the exhibition were forgeries¹²⁸ has never been proven, there were some problems with the original exhibition. In 1999, three historians discovered that some pictures of victims said to have been killed by the Wehrmacht had instead been killed by the Soviet security police, the NKVD¹²⁹. In addition, they found that a number of pictures had been cut into segments and placed in different orders, so as to suggest a wrong sequence of events. A full enquiry eventually found a number of structural mistakes, inaccurate and careless handling of material and a number of false generalizations¹³⁰. All of these problems were reviewed in cooperation with historical institutions and advisors, including the historian Alf Luedtke, who stated after the review that "the new edition is much more concrete about the cooperation, acceptance and active participation of the Wehrmacht"¹³¹. This is in contrast to the original exhibition which had only focused on the crimes directly committed by the Wehrmacht¹³². The new exhibition had, therefore, become much more nuanced by taking a more all-encompassing approach.

¹²⁷ Underwood, Kim. "German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate."

¹²⁸ Petty, Terrence. "Rightists Demonstrate in Munich, Leftists Stage Counter Protest."

¹²⁹ "Controversial Wehrmacht Exhibition Back on Show."

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ "Far-Right to Protest Nazi Exhibit."

¹³² Underwood, Kim. "German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate."

Despite these significant changes and the admission of mistakes which had been made, protests against the exhibition resumed when it reopened in 2001. Thousands of neo-Nazis in various cities¹³³, along with members of the far-right NPD party protested against the exhibition¹³⁴. However, it is clear that public resistance against the exhibition had decreased. Although far-right and neo-Nazi groups were always going to protest the events, reports of these protests mention no support by Wehrmacht veterans and they also received no backing from major mainstream parties, such as the CSU. Despite the fact that the original exhibition had been flawed, it is clear, therefore, that it had been effective, to some extent, in combatting the myth of the “clean” Wehrmacht which fits into the “*do no evil*” categorisation which this thesis has used for “Good Nazi” myth. Through the awareness that both exhibitions created, there seems to have been a shift in the degree of overt support for “Good Nazi” myths which either deterred protests or changed the minds of former members of Germany’s armed forces and the CSU at the time.

¹³³ “Controversial Wehrmacht Exhibition Back on Show.”.

¹³⁴ “Far-Right to Protest Nazi Exhibit.”[1](#).

5. Academic literature

Through a literary analysis of two books by Liddell Hart and John Keegan, this section will outline what “Good Nazi” myths can be found in academic literature, to what extent these historical distortions differ between books and what reasons there might be for both historians publishing “Good Nazi” myths, thus showing the relevance of focusing on these myths as they continue to have an impact on academic works.

“Good Nazi” myths in Liddell Hart’s work

It is, of course, no surprise, that a historian like Liddell Hart, who was instrumental in securing the release of Manstein and who published his book *The German Generals talk* in 1948, when many “Good Nazis” were spreading these myths to save themselves from prosecution, would fall in this camp.

Hart, for instance, asserts that the army leadership had not known about Hitler’s plans to go to war. In fact, he notes that “it was remarkable how hazy most of his generals were about the reasons for a step that had decided their fate. Most of them had been apprehensive when they were told of the decision, but they were told very little, and told very late”¹³⁵. Hart goes on to argue that the army leadership tried to stop Hitler throughout the war, acting as “a brake upon his aggressive plans”¹³⁶. The generals tended to express their doubts and concerns but Hitler would simply overrule them¹³⁷. Thus he seems to be in agreement with Manstein who states that, prior to the Poland campaign, he had not been “briefed on the plans and intentions of the Supreme Command. For this reason (he) had no suspicion at the time of the momentous differences of a strategic nature existing between Hitler and O.K.H.”¹³⁸. Just like Manstein, Hart, therefore, argues that the army leadership “*did no evil*” as they had not wanted a war and they opposed Hitler’s plans, which means that they were not guilty of crimes against the peace.

¹³⁵ Liddell, Hart Basil Henry. *The German Generals Talk*, p319.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p9.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p346.

¹³⁸ Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*, p107.

Just like Manstein and Speer, Hart also mostly blames Hitler and the political leadership, who represent the “*few bad apples*”, for the crimes which had been committed. According to him, it was Hitler who wanted the war¹³⁹ and it was he and the political leadership that continued the war for propaganda reasons¹⁴⁰. Hart quotes a German commander who said that he had planned a retreat from the Caucasus but “Goebbels’s propaganda made so much of our arrival at (...) the gateway to the Caucasus, that we were prevented from carrying out this plan. My troops were forced to hang on at Rostov longer than I had intended, and as a result suffered a bad knock from the Russian counteroffensive”¹⁴¹. Furthermore, commander Günther von Kluge told Hart that if the assassination of Hitler in 1944 had succeeded, “his first step would have been to order the discharge of the V1s against England to be stopped, and that his second step would have been to get in touch with the Allied Commanders”¹⁴². Thus Hart squarely places all the blame for the start and the continuation of the war with all its crimes on Hitler and the political leadership and, by not questioning Kluge’s remarks, seems to imply that the German army without its political leadership would not have committed any crimes.

To justify how these “*few good men*”, as this thesis would categorise Hart’s use of “Good Nazi” myths, could have remained at their job despite proving to be ineffective at stopping the crimes which were occurring, Hart argues that the generals “were essentially technicians, intent on their professional job, and with little idea of things outside it”¹⁴³. This, firstly, seeks to decrease the blame which can be levelled against any of these “Good Nazis” by arguing that they simply did their job like anyone else. As such, Hart not only seeks to de-politicise our perception of these offices but also creates an excuse used by many perpetrators after the war that they were “just following orders”. Manstein attempts a similar tactic when he refers to himself and others as “we soldiers”¹⁴⁴, thus rhetorically taking himself out of the criminal decision-making process. Secondly, by stating that the generals had “little idea of things outside”¹⁴⁵ their profession, he is arguing that they were unaware of all the crimes which occur outside of their jobs. This is the same argument as that made by Manstein and Speer, that they were politically blind and

¹³⁹ Liddell, Hart Basil Henry. *The German Generals Talk*, p9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p323.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p341.

¹⁴² Ibid, p487.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p8.

¹⁴⁴ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p1047.

¹⁴⁵ Liddell, Hart Basil Henry. *The German Generals Talk*, p8.

therefore knew nothing about all the crimes which they defined as political. Of course, saying that the generals essentially operated in obliviousness to anything happening around them is convenient for Hart because it allows him to argue that the generals tried but failed to stop the crimes being committed. According to Hart, the leadership had been isolated by Hitler who outmanoeuvred them due to their political blindness¹⁴⁶. Upon realizing this, many of the generals tried to leave but Hitler simply refused to let them go¹⁴⁷ and many of them felt honor-bound by their oath of loyalty to Hitler and therefore continued serving¹⁴⁸. In Hart's interpretation of the war, the German leadership was, therefore, simply too honorable to not commit crimes. and his book agrees with a number of "Good Nazi" myths spread by Manstein and Speer which downplay the role of the army leadership, their political awareness and their involvement in the crimes which had been committed.

"Good Nazi" myths in John Keegan's work

Whilst Hart wrote his book based on the testimony of "Good Nazis" who had a vested interest in spreading certain myths to prevent themselves from being put on trial, the same can not be said for John Keegan who published *The Second World War* in 1989 when mounting evidence of widespread crimes, a large amount of testimonies and a great number of post-war trials and convictions were available.

Despite this, Keegan repeatedly fails for the "*see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*" category of "Good Nazi" myths by failing to mention German crimes when covering the war. Despite covering the Balkans campaign, he makes no mention of crimes which had been committed in Yugoslavia¹⁴⁹ or the scorched earth policy which the Germans applied when retreating from the Dnieper river in 1943¹⁵⁰ and although he mentions the Warsaw uprising and several revolts in Yugoslavia, he fails to mention the involvement of the Wehrmacht in these campaigns¹⁵¹. In addition, he refers to a resistance suppression campaign in Yugoslavia as "large-scale pacification operations"¹⁵². Through the use of such euphemisms, Keegan plays an active role in

¹⁴⁶ Liddell, Hart Basil Henry. *The German Generals Talk*, p18.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p367.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p18.

¹⁴⁹ Keegan, John. *The Second World War*, p122-127.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p395.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p405-425.

¹⁵² Ibid, p414.

downplaying the crimes committed by the Germans during the war. Worse still, Keegan then goes on to refer to the Greek campaign as “an old-fashioned gentleman’s war, with honor given and accepted by brave adversaries on both sides”¹⁵³: a sentiment which is entirely contradicted by the reality of the brutal suppression campaign fought by the Germans in Greece. In this way, he ignores or downplays the crimes committed during the war and even ascribes honorable qualities to the Wehrmacht, just as Manstein had done in his book. In doing so, Keegan, therefore, also offers a plausible reason for ignoring crimes that occurred, by arguing that the army was too honorable to have committed them. As a subject matter expert, Keegan’s book goes a long way in misleading readers and ensuring the continued spread of “Good Nazi” myths whilst simultaneously showing how these myths can become pervasive in the academic field, thus spreading beyond the audience of the original books and memoirs which were written by “Good Nazis”.

Despite both historians falling for “Good Nazi” myths, there are clear subtle differences between the two which show changes over time in the rhetoric surrounding these myths. Because Hart relied mostly on the testimony of German leaders and because he did not evaluate their perspectives critically enough, he argued in his book that there were “*a few bad apples*”, mainly Hitler and the political leadership, which were responsible for all the crimes and who were being opposed by “*a few good men*” who are, of course, the same Generals whom he talked to and who had a vested interest in defending themselves first and foremost. In contrast to this, Keegan’s reasons for spreading “Good Nazi” myths likely stem from a far more innocent source. It seems implausible to argue that academics, who know about the crimes which have been committed, would consciously choose to exclude these crimes from their narrative of the Second World War without ascribing deeply concerning ulterior motives to them. It is much more likely that Keegan felt compelled to leave these crimes out of his narrative because they would have diverted from his existing narrative structure. The fault, in this case, is caused by the way in which historiography is written to focus on certain aspects of history when most events are so interconnected that creating a coherent narrative is often impossible without ignoring, or simplifying, certain events.

¹⁵³ Keegan, John. *The Second World War*, p128.

6. Popular culture

From academic literature, “Good Nazi” myths have made their way into popular culture, into journalism, movies and video games where the antagonists are often compared to or portrayed as Nazis and, in the process, some unintended “Good Nazi” myths are often spread.. This section will analyze what specific “Good Nazi” myths can be found in popular culture and how they are presented, which will indicate how far these historical distortions have spread and how vast the audiences which they have reached truly are.

“Good Nazi” myths in journalism

One example of this within journalism is an article series published in the Spectator which, Waitman Beorn claims, was originally published under the title *In defense of the Wehrmacht*¹⁵⁴ and which has since had its title changed to *The other side of D-day*. In these articles, the author describes how he visited Normandy and the D-day landing beaches with a couple of friends. What stands out, however, is that he clearly falls into the “*few good men*” category of “Good Nazi” myths by characterising D-day as a heroic last stand for the Germans. The author states that “the disparity in men and materiel between the Allied forces and the Germans made the fight a charge-of-the-light-brigade contest”¹⁵⁵. This description is very reminiscent of Manstein’s writings where he compares the German soldiers holding out at Stalingrad with the Spartans at Thermopylae¹⁵⁶ as both accounts portray the German soldiers as heroes and martyrs. By portraying them in such a way, the author assigns a heroic character to the defenders at D-day, which creates an image in the reader’s mind that leaves no room for the discussion of crimes which these soldiers may have committed. Worse still, since they are represented as heroes, the author insinuates that they are fighting for a worthy cause and that it is the Allied soldiers landing on that day who are the antagonists in this struggle. All of this language creates sympathy for the Germans in the minds of the readers, as does the author’s statement that his “heart goes out to those defenders”¹⁵⁷. “Good Nazi” myths even occur in journals which are perceived to be of a better journalistic quality than the Spectator. An opinion piece which was

¹⁵⁴ Waitman, Beorn. “Killing the ‘Clean’ Wehrmacht: The Reality of the German Army and the Holocaust.”.

¹⁵⁵ Taki. “The Other Side of D-Day.”.

¹⁵⁶ Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*, p707-708.

¹⁵⁷ Taki. “The Other Side of D-Day.”.

written by journalist Bret Stephens, titled *Suleimani Died as He Had Killed* and published in the New York Times, writes the following about the former Iranian general Qasem Soleimani: “to think of him as a worthy adversary - an Iranian Erwin Rommel - is wrong. He was an evil man who died as he had killed so many others”¹⁵⁸. Thus, just like the article in the Spector and Manstein’s writings, Stephens article creates a false image of Rommel as a honorable person, despite the fact that Rommel used Jewish slave labor in Africa¹⁵⁹ and can therefore certainly not be described as an honorable person. Thus, journalism tends to recreate, and therefore reinforce, the popular image which we have of “Good Nazis”, rather than to question it. In this way, “Good Nazi” myths are spread to a wider and less critical audience who might not be aware of these myths.

“Good Nazi” myths in video games

Video games too show that a number of “Good Nazi” myths are still present in popular culture. To illustrate this point, this thesis will briefly analyse *Call of Duty World War Two* and *Battlefield 5* due to their popularity, *Wolfenstein the New Order* because it has been called “the gold standard of Nazi-harm”¹⁶⁰ and one would therefore not expect to find any “Good Nazi” myths in it, and finally, *Hearts of Iron 4*, to show that these myths are not just persistent in first-person shooters, but also grand strategy games.

Despite covering the Second World War, *Hearts of Iron 4* and *Battlefield 5* both implicitly make claims which can be classified as “*see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*”. In the case of *Hearts of Iron 4*, the player can choose to play as the leader of any given country beginning in 1933. In the case of Germany, this means that they take control of a country run by Hitler and the NSDAP, with a number of noted criminals which the player can choose to appoint for government and military leadership positions. Whilst Johannes Aschim points out in his thesis that the birdseye or “big picture” style gameplay does mean that the actions of individual soldiers are not visible to

¹⁵⁸ Stephens, Bret. “Suleimani Died as He Had Killed.”.

¹⁵⁹ Paterson, Tony. “Was the Desert Fox an Honest Soldier or Just Another Nazi?” The Independent. Independent Digital News and Media, December 4, 2011.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/was-the-desert-fox-an-honest-soldier-or-just-another-nazi-6272076.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Houghton, Stuart. “The Alt-Right Are Complaining about Nazis Being Killed in Video Games.” New Statesman. newstatesman.com, June 13, 2021.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/2017/06/alt-right-are-complaining-about-nazis-being-killed-video-games>.

the player¹⁶¹, the perpetration of crimes represents such an important part in the historical relevance of the Second World War that it should be hard to ignore. *Battlefield 5* even puts the player in first person as individuals fighting during the war, yet it also makes no mention of any crimes¹⁶². Both games are effectively erasing systemic crimes from their interpretation of World War Two, thus indicating to the player that these crimes did not occur in the first place or that they are not worth mentioning. This exact tactic, as has been stated in previous paragraphs, has been used repeatedly by “Good Nazis” such as Manstein and Speer who simply refused to mention events which could lead to uncomfortable questions.

Wolfenstein the New Order, although it is known for being overtly anti-Nazi, ironically presents an interpretation of the war in which there are *a few bad apples* who are responsible for all the crimes being committed. Just like *Battlefield 5* and *Call of Duty World War Two*, the player in this game plays from the perspective of an individual fighting against Nazi rule. What is notable here is the roles which the game assigns its antagonists. During the game, the protagonist kills countless German soldiers who are arguably only doing their job by defending their lives and attempting to keep the protagonist out of an area. However, whenever an antagonist actively chooses to commit a crime, such as experimenting on humans, guarding a concentration camp or killing patients at a mental hospital, they are represented as a member of the SS. In this way, the game insinuates that it was the political part of the army, meaning the SS, which committed all the crimes. A similar theme can be found in Manstein and Speer’s works who both argue that they were politically blind and therefore did not know enough about the crimes being committed. Worse still, the other branches of the armed forces are given the moral justification of self-defense or military necessity which is similar to the argument made by Manstein on the conduct of his troops. In this way, these games portray a version of the war in which crimes were not being committed systematically and only a small number of people were responsible for all of them.

Another favored trope in popular culture is that the Third Reich was significantly more technologically advanced than its counterparts. This ranges from minor inaccuracies, such as

¹⁶¹ Aschim, Johannes. “Playing Hitler: The Representation of Nazism in Hearts of Iron IV.” Inland Norway University, 2020. <https://brage.inn.no/inn-xmli/bitstream/handle/11250/2740422/Aschim.pdf?sequence=1>, p11.

¹⁶² DICE. “Battlefield V.”

Call of Duty World War Two showing Panzer 4's with long-barreled 75 millimeter guns in 1940¹⁶³ or *Battlefield 5* featuring Tiger tanks in Libya in 1941¹⁶⁴ when both tank variants did not exist at that time, to the ridiculous, such technological advances which *Wolfenstein the New Order* ascribes to the Nazis. Despite this game being set in 1960, the Third Reich has apparently already landed on the moon and established a lunar base, invented laser guns and deployed robots in combat¹⁶⁵. Ironically, despite being overtly anti-Nazi, *Wolfenstein the New Order*, and to a lesser extent *Call of Duty World War Two* and *Battlefield 5*, imply that we would all in some ways be better off under the control of the Third Reich, due to their technological advances. Although this trope has no parallel in Speer's or Manstein's work, it is so pervasive that it is worth mentioning and it could perhaps be seen as a modern-day evolution of the "Good Nazi" myth, as it insinuates that "*it was not all bad*" and the Nazis reached a greater good in the form of technological innovation through their conduct.

"Good Nazi" myths in movies

Nazis also often represent the antagonists of popular movies, from *Schindlers List* and *Inglorious Bastards* to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and, perhaps more surprisingly, *Star Wars*. As journalist Noah Berlatsky notes in one of his articles, the creator of *Star Wars*, George Lucas, took direct inspiration from the Nazis. "The Empire's evil army of Stormtroopers is a direct reference to Nazi Stormtroopers, while the streamlined Imperial military uniforms reference German Nazi dress. According to costume designer John Mollo, Lucas wanted the Empire soldiers to look "efficient, totalitarian, fascist"¹⁶⁶. Berlatsky even goes so far as to claim that the Death Star in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, which is used to destroy an entire planet, is used to associate the Empire with a crime that is comparable to the Holocaust¹⁶⁷. But if the metaphorical Nazis are the antagonists of this saga and they are directly associated with crimes, how does *Star Wars* perpetrate "Good Nazi" myths?

¹⁶³ Sledgehammer Games. "Call of Duty World War Two." Activision, November 3, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ DICE. "Battlefield V."

¹⁶⁵ MachineGames. "Wolfenstein the New Order." Bethesda Softworks, May 20, 2014.

¹⁶⁶ Berlatsky, Noah. "Star Wars' Is Influenced by the Nazis - and It Fails to Hold Them Accountable." The Forward. forward.com, December 10, 2017.

<https://forward.com/culture/film-tv/389632/star-wars-nazi-influence-leni-riefenstahl-triumph-of-will/>.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

The first thing to note is that the Empire differs from the Third Reich in a few crucial ways. Chief amongst those differences, as Berlatsky notes, is that the hatred which exists in the Empire is “motivated neither by anti-Semitism or prejudice against the marginalized”¹⁶⁸. Instead, it is a more generalized hatred which is largely being forced upon the empire by the evil Emperor¹⁶⁹. Thus, *Star Wars* is inadvertently insinuating what Speer and Manstein both tried to claim in their books: that it was “*a few bad apples*”, mainly, the political leadership, which was responsible for the crimes being committed and that the people below them felt no such malice. Worse still, following the movies, a number of authors wrote books and comic books which are now collectively known as the Expanded Universe. Within this collection, the book series *The New Jedi Order* by Walter Jon Williams deals with an invasion coming from outside the galaxy by a species known as the Yuuzhan Vong. During the book series, it is revealed that the Empire knew of this threat and they became militarized and constructed a Death Star to fight against the invasion¹⁷⁰. Considering the direct influence which the Empire takes from the Third Reich, it is no stretch in interpretation to compare the message of this book series with statements made by Manstein during the Cold War, that the Germans knew of the communist threat and fought the Soviets to protect Europe. Thus, although this was most likely not his intention, Williams book series inadvertently argues that “*it was not all bad*” by offering an excuse for the German’s conduct in defense of a greater good.

¹⁶⁸ Berlatsky, Noah. “Star Wars’ Is Influenced by the Nazis - and It Fails to Hold Them Accountable.”.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Williams, Walter Jon. *Star Wars: The New Jedi Order*.

Conclusion

In summary, following the Second World War, “Good Nazis” like Speer and Manstein tried to restore their honor and defend themselves from prosecution by attempting to persuade people, through various rhetorical tactics, that they had not known about any crimes being committed, that they or the institutions they worked for had not committed any crimes, that, if they had committed crimes, those crimes had not been that bad, that they had wanted to stop these crimes from occurring and that it was other individuals, often the political leadership, which were responsible for these crimes. Although a great number of historians have since published academic works debunking individual parts of the “Good Nazi” myths, the focus on individual lies has prevented the thematisation of such myths in a more generalised context. By broadly categorising different “Good Nazi” myths, this thesis has shown how these false perspectives were used in the works of Speer and Manstein and how they continued to be relevant in the discourse surrounding the Wehrmacht exhibition. This thesis has also shown that these myths have often not been questioned enough by historians who have inadvertently continued spreading some of these myths, thus allowing them to be picked up by popular culture, which has struggled to depict Nazis, or metaphors for Nazis, without perpetuating “Good Nazi” myths. As such, these historical distortions risk subtly altering our academic and cultural understanding of the crimes committed by Germany during the Second World War and actions should, therefore, be taken by academics and popular culture content creators to combat this development.

An analysis of “Good Nazi” myths and the way in which they changed over time offers three important conclusions. Firstly, whilst both Hart and Keegan’s books spread some “Good Nazi” myths, the motives for spreading them has shifted over time. In Hart’s book, “Good Nazis” profited from the historical distortions within the book because it helped them create a clean public image of themselves as Hart was far less critical of these individuals than later historians would be and, in a sense, allows them to speak for themselves through his book. In contrast to this, Keegan’s work shows how modern historians can accidentally spread “Good Nazi” myths as they focus on some aspects of the war in an attempt to follow a coherent narrative whilst simultaneously leaving other aspects of the war, which often includes the crimes that have been committed during the war, out of the story because they would represent an irrelevant side

tangent to the point the authors wish to make. Secondly, from the analysis of the Wehrmacht exhibition, it is clear that the degree of public and political support for overt “Good Nazi” myths has decreased between the 1995 and the 2001 exhibition. This case study also illustrates how important it is not to make generalized statements when dealing with “Good Nazi” myths as the second exhibition was a lot more nuanced when it comes to the accusations of crimes levelled against the Wehrmacht when compared to the first exhibition. As a result, the categorisations of “Good Nazis” and “Good Nazi” myths have become a lot more nuanced too, especially when it comes to who fits the categorisation, what historical distortions are being spread and how they are presented in academic works. Finally, “Good Nazi” myths in popular culture have often remained unchallenged for two reasons. On the one hand, many references to “Good Nazis” in popular culture refer to individuals, such as Speer, Manstein or Rommel, who have a good reputation because they have managed to clear their public image by spreading “Good Nazi” myths. On the other hand, popular culture often uses metaphors for Nazis as antagonists, rather than using Nazis directly. These metaphors are often not analysed as critically and thus they end up as a platform for “Good Nazi” myths.

For these reasons, more academic work is crucial to combat “Good Nazi” myths. A clear categorisation of all aspects of these myths, as well as more critical analysis of academic work and popular culture could go a long way in combating these historical distortions. On top of this, a lot of “Good Nazis” have published a great number of documents which have since been used in a vast amount of academic works. In order to combat the myths, these documents will have to be reviewed using the theoretical framework established in this thesis in order to assess the lasting impact of documents written by “Good Nazis” and containing “Good Nazi” myths on our academic understanding of the Second World War.

In addition, the works of “Good Nazis” such as Speer and Manstein which have been published without analysis to the general public, which is ill equipped to recognise the authors subtle attempts to alter history in their favor, must be looked at more critically. To allow audiences to pick up on the ulterior motives of the authors, these works should be re-published with analysis and remarks being added by historians to the most problematic passages.

Finally, popular culture content creators need to recognise that they can reach millions of people with their content and they, therefore, have a responsibility to accurately depict Nazis or Nazi

metaphors without falling into the trap of “Good Nazi” myths. More care should be given to the utilisation of propaganda footage from the Third Reich, as well as the way in which Nazis or Nazi metaphors are depicted by consulting experts in these fields to ensure that popular media does not accidentally depict and spread “Good Nazi” myths.

Bibliography

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "Rereading Albert Speer's 'Inside the Third Reich.'" *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2017.

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/rereading-albert-speers-inside-the-third-reich>.

Aschim, Johannes. "Playing Hitler: The Representation of Nazism in Hearts of Iron IV." Inland Norway University, 2020.

<https://brage.inn.no/inn-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2740422/Aschim.pdf?sequence=1>.

Berlatsky, Noah. "'Star Wars' Is Influenced by the Nazis - and It Fails to Hold Them Accountable." *The Forward*. forward.com, December 10, 2017.

<https://forward.com/culture/film-tv/389632/star-wars-nazi-influence-leni-riefenstahl-triumph-of-will/>.

"Controversial Wehrmacht Exhibition Back on Show." dw.com. Deutsche Welle, December 2, 2001. <https://www.dw.com/en/controversial-wehrmacht-exhibition-back-on-show/a-338282>.

Dannhoff, Sebastian. "Book Review – Field Marshal Erich Von Manstein Lost Victories." Academia.edu, May 12, 2018.

https://www.academia.edu/36618549/Book_Review_Field_Marshal_Erich_von_Manstein_Lost_Victories.

Davis, James. "'Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General' by Mungo Melvin." *The Cove*, May 16, 2017. <https://cove.army.gov.au/article/manstein-hitlers-greatest-general-mungo-melvin>.

DICE. "Battlefield V." Electronic Arts, November 20, 2018.

"Far-Right to Protest Nazi Exhibit." CNN. Cable News Network, December 1, 2001.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/11/29/berlin.protest/index.html>.

Green, Joshua. "Why Is This GOP House Candidate Dressed as a Nazi?" *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, October 8, 2010.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/10/why-is-this-gop-house-candidate-dressed-as-a-nazi/64319/>.

Harrisville, David A. *The Virtuous Wehrmacht: Crafting the Myth of the German Soldier on the Eastern Front, 1941-1944*. Ithaca (N.Y.): Cornell University Press, 2021.

Houghton, Stuart. "The Alt-Right Are Complaining about Nazis Being Killed in Video Games." New Statesman. newstatesman.com, June 13, 2021.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/2017/06/alt-right-are-complaining-about-nazis-being-killed-video-games>.

Keegan, John. *The Second World War*. New York: Penguin, 2016.

Liddell, Hart Basil Henry. *The German Generals Talk*. New York: Perennial, 2002.

MachineGames. "Wolfenstein the New Order." Bethesda Softworks, May 20, 2014.

Magazine, Smithsonian. "The Candor and Lies of Nazi Officer Albert Speer."

Smithsonianmag.com. Smithsonian Institution, January 8, 2013.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-candor-and-lies-of-nazi-officer-albert-speer-324737/>.

Manstein, Erich von. *Lost Victories: The War Memoirs of Hitler's Most Brilliant General*. Minneapolis, MN,: Zenith Press, 2004.

Megargee, Geoffrey. "A Blind Eye and Dirty Hands: The Wehrmacht's Crimes." *Youtube*.

Lecture. Accessed June 9, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=el_rjd9mukw.

Melvin, Mungo. *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General*. London: Phoenix, 2011.

Mufson, Daniel. "The 2001 NPD/Neo-Nazi Demonstration against the Wehrmacht Exhibition." danielmufson.com, August 26, 2009.

<https://danielmufson.com/translations-excerpts/the-2001-mpdneo-nazi-demonstration-against-the-wehrmacht-exhibition/>.

“Neo-Nazis Battle German Leftists over Anti-Nazi Exhibit.” The New York Times. The Associated Press, January 25, 1998.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/25/world/neo-nazis-battle-german-leftists-over-anti-nazi-exhibit.html>.

“Nuremberg Trial Judgements: Albert Speer.” Jewish virtual library. Accessed June 9, 2022.

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/nuremberg-trial-judgements-albert-speer>.

Paterson, Tony. “Was the Desert Fox an Honest Soldier or Just Another Nazi?” The Independent. Independent Digital News and Media, December 4, 2011.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/was-the-desert-fox-an-honest-soldier-or-just-another-nazi-6272076.html>.

Petty, Terrence. “Rightists Demonstrate in Munich, Leftists Stage Counter Protest.” AP NEWS. Associated Press, March 1, 1997.

<https://apnews.com/article/7afac1c48315aeebd12fc8ee18f36534>.

Sereny, Gitta. *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*. London: Picador, 2015.

Sledgehammer Games. “Call of Duty World War Two.” Activision, November 3, 2017.

Smelser, Ronald, and Edward Davies. *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs*. Sphere, 1971.

Stephens, Bret. “Suleimani Died as He Had Killed.” The New York Times. The New York Times, January 4, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/03/opinion/iran-airstrike.html>.

Taki. “The Other Side of D-Day.” The Spectator, May 19, 2018.

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/high-life-17-may-2018>.

Toland, John. “Inside the Third Reich.” The New York Times. The New York Times, August 23, 1970. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/08/23/archives/inside-the-third-reich-third-reich.html>.

Underwood, Kim. "German Exhibit of Nazi-Era Art Raising Debate." CNN. Cable News Network, February 25, 1995. <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9702/25/germany.exhibition/>.

Waitman, Beorn. "Killing the 'Clean' Wehrmacht: The Reality of the German Army and the Holocaust." *Youtube*. Lecture. Accessed June 9, 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJORtC8QDXA>.

Williams, Walter Jon. *Star Wars: The New Jedi Order*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002.