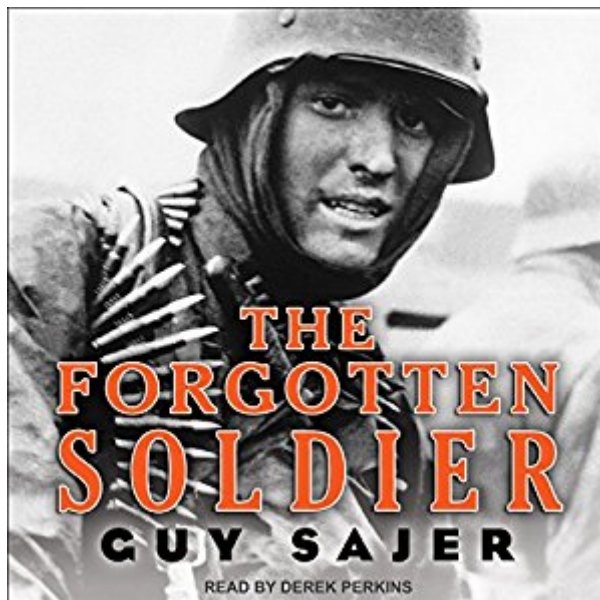


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The Forgotten Soldier



Synopsis

When Guy Sajer joins the infantry full of ideals in the summer of 1942, the German army is enjoying unparalleled success in Russia. However, he quickly finds that for the foot soldier the glory of military success hides a much harsher reality of hunger, fatigue, and constant deprivation. Posted to the elite Grosse Deutschland division, with its sadistic instructors who shoot down those who fail to make the grade, he enters a violent and remorseless world where all youthful hope is gradually ground down, and all that matters is the brute will to survive. As the biting cold of the Russian winter sets in and the tide begins to turn against the Germans, life becomes an endless round of pounding artillery attacks and vicious combat against a relentless and merciless Red Army. Sajer's perspective as a German foot soldier makes *The Forgotten Soldier* a unique war memoir, the book that the *Christian Science Monitor* said "may well be the book about World War II which has been so long awaited". A work of stunning force, this is an unforgettable reminder of the horrors of war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Simply incredible! One can watch all the Hitler documentaries on TV that one wants but nothing will explain the pain and suffering of warfare in intricate detail like *Forgotten Soldier*. When I say "I couldn't put it down"...I truly mean it. All the pain, all the sorrow and all the bloody gore of suffering by the simple German soldier is on display here in words that only an excellent author can express. I'm a "much more than casual" student of military history and this one really got to me. Very highly recommended!

This book is a very personal account of a soldier's life. It is mostly chronological and feels very personal like a stream of consciousness spilled onto the page. I found myself shocked and disturbed by the difficulties endured by those on all sides of the conflict on the eastern front, but the author often notes how poor conditions were for the average German soldiers, which is striking. We envision them as brutal conquerors and plunderers, but as the author describes, the average enlisted soldier on the eastern front was treated "little better than a prisoner", and was often exhausted, underweight and malnourished. Often denied food, clothing, medicine, and most of all rest, they had to deal with the burden of the psychological horrors of war without the healing effect of any eventual victory. After the defeat at Kursk they had to endure years of bloody retreats culminating in the certainty of eventual defeat. In the midst of this terrible war the author speaks of a camaraderie that developed among soldiers which he claims was the deepest sense of connection he would ever feel in his life to anyone. As someone who was never a soldier, I am left awestruck as to what feeling he must be like.

Among many WW II memoirs, this one by Guy Sajer stands out. Mr. Sajer details his 3 years on the Eastern front with amazing clarity. From the advance through the multiple withdrawals, the reader is taken a journey that few emerged unscathed from. Many times through the book Mr. Sajer laments that "There aren't the words..." he needs to describe what he's seeing and experiencing. Bone chilling cold, starvation rations and death all around. Not just for a day or two but for months on end. Mr. Sajer was witness to some of the greatest carnage man has inflicted on man. What sets this book aside is that Mr. Sajer gets inside his own head and ekes out his feelings for us. He comments on the fear, that usually accompanied a loss of bowel control, he felt each time an attack was imminent. He tells how he cried multiple times when he felt his end was near. This is fantastic stuff that relays to us the absolute horror of war and the depths that humans can sink to in the name of survival. In some places it can get a little tedious, maybe confusing is a better word, as we relive the battles he fought in Russia, Poland, Prussia and finally Germany. These moments go quickly. He relays to us incessant air attacks, countless tank assaults, constant artillery barrages and wave upon wave of enemy attacking. Honestly, I have no idea how he survived the carnage. To claim he was leading a charmed/divine existence would take away the tribute he, and the human spirit, are rightly owed. As the book moves along we can feel Mr. Sajer hardening to his environment and, a discernible healing can be felt. By laying all this out for us and making no excuses for what he saw and did, Mr. Sajer is being brutally honest with himself and us. Fascinating memoir. Definitely one of the better I've read.

I read this 40 years ago having found a battered old paperback copy lying around. An eye popping few days later I had barely recovered from reading about the experiences of this non-German speaking Alsatian kid, Guy Sajer, of barely 17 years of age in the WWII Wehrmacht, on the dreaded and lethal Russian front from 1942 to 1945. I discovered the book again in Kindle's library and thought i would reread it to see how it measured-up forty years later.. Sajer's description still holds good. The nightmare of hunger, fear, cold, frostbitten deprivation, horror, and any other adjective that one can think of cannot relay accurately the experiences of this poor kid and his mates, who were either killed by the Russians or the German military police, during training, or, for grabbing a few tins of food to keep themselves alive in the face of starvation when in retreat from the re-emergent Russians, now giving the Wehrmacht a dose of their own medicine. Sarger's descriptions of the plight of retreating German civilian refugees - 20 million eventually died under bombardment or murdered by vengeful Russian hordes - whose families had suffered the same during Hitler's Lebensraum policy of genocide, state sanctioned starvation, ethnic cleansing and wholesale slaughter of Jews and other minorities during the German invasion of Russia. Battered at the Front by the Russian armies, harried in the rear by partisans and on the very few occasions he was given leave to return to Germany, bombarded from the air by USAF daylight raids and RAF night bombings, Sajer saw and experienced it all and amazingly, survived. At war's end, because of his Alsatian roots, he was released early from Allied captivity and returned home to Alsace a shadow of the person he had been before his departure to Russia, several years previously, leaving many of his comrades dead somewhere in Russia, Ukraine, East Prussia, or some other forgotten hell hole, now under threat again from Putin and his new Russian fascist cohorts..Read this and learn what war is actually like and not a watered down cosmetically enhanced version of war as depicted by Hollywood. Moreover, wherever you live and under whatever system of government, if you see or hear people advocating war as a solution to their problems give them a copy of this book. By my reckoning, although not a work of literature, it is an even better anti-war book that Erich Maria Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front" which was burned by the Nazis in 1933, the ultimate critical accolade.

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