



A Stranger to Myself: The Inhumanity of War: Russia, 1941-1944

By Willy Peter Reese

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A Stranger to Myself: The Inhumanity of War, Russia 1941-44 is the haunting memoir of a young German soldier on the Russian front during World War II. Willy Peter Reese was only twenty years old when he found himself marching through Russia with orders to take no prisoners. Three years later he was dead. Bearing witness to--and participating in--the atrocities of war, Reese recorded his reflections in his diary, leaving behind an intelligent, touching, and illuminating perspective on life on the eastern front. He documented the carnage perpetrated by both sides, the destruction which was exacerbated by the young soldiers' hunger, frostbite, exhaustion, and their daily struggle to survive. And he wrestled with his own sins, with the realization that what he and his fellow soldiers had done to civilians and enemies alike was unforgivable, with his growing awareness of the Nazi policies toward Jews, and with his deep disillusionment with himself and his fellow men.

An international sensation, *A Stranger to Myself* is an unforgettable account of men at war.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sometimes lyrical, this memoir by a German youth who miraculously survived four tours of duty on the Russian front during WWII—he died on his fifth deployment—is a significant historical document. It is also a laborious and overwrought cacophony of Wagnerian proportions. Reese, who was a 20-year-old bank clerk in 1939 when he was first drafted, inhabits many different worlds, all of them conflicting. Despite Schmitz's assertion that Reese was "no Nazi," he was, like the vast majority of German youths of the time, deeply imbued with Nazi ideology and experienced the war as a sort of sacrament. Duty, abdication and heroism are just some of his motifs. Reese sees himself as a poet deciphering the human condition, but mostly he is just a soldier who plays his part in the atrocities—often exuberantly. He laughs with the other members of his platoon at the spectacle of Russian partisans hanging by the neck—"yellow-brown ichor dribbled out of their eyes and crusted on their cheeks"—and makes Russian women dance naked. Despite its long-winded homilies and repetitiveness, this stark testimony provides new insights into both the ravages of Nazi indoctrination and the bloodiest military campaign in history. (Nov.)

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From Booklist

Starred Review The brutality of battle is vividly rendered in this harrowing memoir from Reese, a German soldier who served on the Russian front during World War II. Killed in combat at the age of 23, Reese left behind a diary documenting the atrocities of war and his growing disillusionment with the attitudes of his fellow countrymen. (Reese was no Nazi, writes editor Schmitz in the book's preface, in which he first recalls reading the blistering manuscript inherited by Reese's cousin.) The late soldier's meditations are by turns poetic and macabre; he reflects on the literature of Tolstoy and Baudelaire—and dramatic clashes drenched in blood. War both robs Reese of his soul and imbues his life with a sense of purpose, leaving him feeling like "a stranger to myself." His prose resonates with images of a bitter, corpse-strewn Russian landscape, where it's only a matter of time before a young man's heart turns to stone. One soldier, unable to find his felt boots, chops off the frozen legs of a dead Red Army soldier. "He bundled the two stumps under his arm and set them down in the oven, next to our lunch," writes Reese. "By the time the potatoes were done, the legs were thawed out, and he pulled on the bloody felt boots." *Allison Block*

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Review

"This book [is] a revelation. And--where historical witness is threatened with disappearance, or has already disappeared--an enrichment."--*Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*

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