



# The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture

*By Ronald Smelser, Edward J. Davies II*

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From the 1950s onward, Americans were quite receptive to a view of World War II similar to the view held by many Germans and military personnel on how the war was fought on the Eastern Front in Russia. Through a network of formerly high-ranking Wehrmacht and Bundeswehr officers who had served on the Eastern Front, Germans were able to shape American opinions into an interpretation of World War II that left the Wehrmacht with a "clean" reputation in World War II history. A broad subculture of German military enthusiasts continues to romanticize the German army to this day.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **Review**

"Ronald Smelser and Edward Davies vividly show how the pernicious idea of an honorable German war on the Eastern Front permeated the American consciousness with devastating consequences not only for the broad understanding of German atrocities in the East, but ultimately for the Cold War itself. From its lucid discussion of the former Hitler generals who whitewashed their military records after World War II to its disturbing look at the self-proclaimed gurus of army minutia who still pose as authorities on the Wehrmacht, *The Myth of the Eastern Front* is a masterful and incisive combination of military and cultural history."

-Norman J.W. Goda, Ohio University

"The swiftness with which Cold War America embraced vanquished Nazi officers, along with their sanitization of Wehrmacht criminality on the Eastern Front, is a chilling reminder of how historical memory often follows the flag. Ronald Smelser and Edward Davies have performed a signal service in bringing to light the internet's perpetuation of self-serving myths about World War Two. Whether Waffen-SS reenactors and Nazibilia collectors represent harmless playacting or something more sinister only time will tell. But anything that traffics in half-truths, and worse, especially concerning matters of grave moral concern, can't be taken lightly."

-Lawrence N. Powell, Tulane University

"A superb and insightful study of the premeditated manipulation of history and memory in the fabrication of the myth of a "clean Wehrmacht." Expertly exposes the intersection and influence of popular imagination, politics, and popular culture in the rewriting of the German army's experience in World War Two."

Edward B. Westermann, author of *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East*

"Recommended." -Choice

"Smelser and Davies need to be commended for their fascinating and detailed study." -Journal of American History, Gerd Horten

#### **About the Author**

Professor Ronald Smelser has been a Professor of History at the University of Utah since 1974. An expert on twentieth-century German history, Smelser is a former president of the German Studies Association (1989-91), a former member of the executive committee at the Czechoslovak History Conference (1992-5), a delegate from the GSA to the ACLS (1995-9), and current president of the Conference Group for Central European History. He has published extensively in German and English on the subject of twentieth-century German history and received numerous accolades for his scholarly work from the University of Utah, the Holocaust Education Foundation, and the German Studies Association, of which he is a founding member, among others.

Professor Edward J. Davies II is the author of *The Anthracite Aristocracy* and *The United States in Global Perspective* and has also served on the advisory board for National Geographic's recent book of world history. He has published articles in professional journals such as the *Journal of Social History* and the *Journal of Urban History* and reviewed manuscripts for the *Journal of Military History* and other university presses.

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