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# Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw (English Edition)



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## RISING '44

*'The Battle for Warsaw'*

### NORMAN DAVIES

*'Should be compulsory reading' Guardian*

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**Par Norman Davies : Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw (English Edition)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw (English Edition):

**Description :** Description du produit In August 1944, Warsaw presented the last major obstacle to the Red Armys triumphant march from Moscow to Berlin. When the Wehrmacht was pushed back to the Vistula River, the Polish Resistance poured forty thousand fighters into the streets to drive out the hated Germans. But Stalin halted the Russian offensive, allowing the Wehrmacht to regroup and destroy the city. For sixty-three days Soviet troops and other Allied forces watched from the sidelines as tens of thousands of Poles were slaughtered and Warsaw was reduced to rubble. Like Antony Beevors bestselling The Fall of Berlin, Rising 44 is a brilliant narrative of one of the most dramatic episodes in twentieth-century history.

Prsentation de l'diteurRising '44 is a brilliant narrative account of one of the most dramatic episodes in 20th

century history, drawing on Davies' unique understanding of the issues and characters involved. In August 1944 Warsaw offered the Wehrmacht the last line of defence against the Red Army's march from Moscow to Berlin. When the Red Army reached the river Vistula, the people of Warsaw believed that liberation had come. The Resistance took to the streets in celebration, but the Soviets remained where they were, allowing the Wehrmacht time to regroup and Hitler to order that the city of Warsaw be razed to the ground. For 63 days the Resistance fought on in the cellars and the sewers. Defenceless citizens were slaughtered in their tens of thousands. One by one the City's monuments were reduced to rubble, watched by Soviet troops on the other bank of the river. The Allies expressed regret but decided that there was nothing to be done, Poland would not be allowed to be governed by Poles. The sacrifice was in vain and the Soviet tanks rolled in to the

flattened city. It is a hugely dramatic story, vividly and authoritatively told by one of our greatest historians. **Chapter One THE ALLIED COALITION** The history of 'Western Alliances' in Europe is a long one. Throughout modern history, whenever one power threatened to establish a dominant position on the Continent, a coalition of states, great and small, was formed to oppose the threat. The most frequent coalitionist was Britain, whose navy ruled the seas but whose land forces were never of a size to challenge their Continental rivals. British-inspired alliances emerged in the War of the Spanish Succession against Louis XIV, in the wars against revolutionary France, and in the two world wars. In the twentieth century, they brought in the USA, whose impact on Europe rose from the peripheral to the decisive. Yet they all had one feature in common. They all sought to include at least one partner in the East. According to circumstances, that partner could be Prussia, Russia, or even Turkey. In the exceptional circumstances of 1939, it turned out to be a country which, though possessed of ancient credentials, had played little part in

European power games for nearly three hundred years. The Allied cause of the Second World War is invariably described in the simplest of terms. If ever there was a just war, one hears, this was it. The enemy was wicked. The goal of defeating that wickedness was noble. And the Allies were victorious. Most people, certainly in Britain and America, would not think that there was much more to be said. Of course, they are aware that the conduct of the war took many twists and turns. Those who have studied it know that the Allies stared defeat in the face on several occasions before victory was finally assured. But on the basic political and moral framework they harbour no misgivings. Few would contest the popular image of the wartime Allies as a band of brothers who fought for freedom and justice and saved the world from tyranny. Several basic facts about the Allied cause, therefore, need to be emphasized from the outset. Firstly, membership of the Allied coalition was in constant flux. The band of brothers who set out to defy the Nazi threat in 1939, when the war is generally judged to have started, was not the same as that whose victory brought the war to a close six years later. Several important states changed sides in midstream; and the most powerful of the Allies stayed aloof almost until the mid-point of the conflict. Secondly, the Allied coalition contained all manner of member states, from global empires to totalitarian dictatorships, semi-constitutional monarchies, democratic republics, Governments-in-Exile, and several countries divided by civil war.

Thirdly, when the fighting spread in December 1941 to the Pacific, the original war in Europe was complicated by numerous forms of interaction with the Asian theatre. In theory, the Allied cause came to be based on the undertakings of the United Nations Declaration of 1942, which obtained twenty-six signatories.

The Declaration in turn was based on the terms of the earlier Atlantic Charter which, among other things, condemned territorial aggrandizement and confirmed 'the right of all peoples to choose their Governments'. In practice, the Allies were united by little except the commitment to fight the common enemy. Throughout the war, the Alliance was clouded by the old-fashioned and highly paternalistic assumption that 'the principal Allies' were entitled to determine policy separately and in private, whilst 'the lesser Allies' were expected to accept the decisions of their betters. The assumption was not widely challenged at the time, and has rarely been challenged since by historians. But it was to have some serious consequences. Though never formally recognized, it was embodied in the workings of the 'Big Three' to which Winston Churchill, in conscious imitation of the experience of his eighteenth-century ancestor the Duke of Marlborough, gave the grand title of 'the Grand Alliance'. The Allied cause was further complicated by the fact that most of its constituent members were caught up in their own tangled web of bilateral treaties, separate declarations, and subordinate alliances. All the 'United Nations', as they came to call themselves, were committed to cooperate in the struggle against the Axis powers. But they were not necessarily committed to defend or to assist each other. In particular, no mechanism was ever put in place to protect one ally from the depredations of another. Inter-Allied disputes that could not be readily resolved were usually deferred either to the intended post-war Peace Conference, which never happened, or to the United Nations Organisation, which did not open for business

until September 1945. On close examination, therefore, one can see that the ties binding different members of the coalition together differed widely in their nature and in their degree of commitment. The relations between Britain and the United States, for example, were largely conducted on the basis of mutual trust.

With the sole exception of the Lend-Lease Agreement (February 1942), there was no formal or comprehensive British-US Treaty. British relations with France still operated on the rather imprecise understandings of the old Entente Cordiale. British relations with the USSR, in contrast, were governed by the elaborate provisions of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty signed on 12 July 1941. Soviet-American relations were similarly regulated by an agreement signed the following year. Generally speaking, the Western Allies saw diplomatic treaties as a constraining influence that limited the otherwise boundless scope for initiatives. The Soviet Union looked at them from the opposite perspective. They saw treaties with Western capitalist powers as vehicles of convenience, which enabled them to practise cooperation on a temporary and precisely defined basis, but not to modify their essentially hostile and suspicious stance. The make-up and predispositions of the Allied coalition of 1939-45 were strongly influenced by its predecessor of 1914-18.

During the First World War, France, Britain, Russia, and the USA had dominated the group of 'Entente Powers' which had challenged German hegemony. During the Second World War, the legacy of the Entente coloured the natural sympathies and alignments of the next Allied generation. Germany was taken to be a unique, unparalleled threat. France, Britain, and America imagined themselves to be paragons of democracy.

The solidarity of the English-speaking world, re-established in 1917, was to be further strengthened. The Russians - as the Soviets were wrongly called - would be readily accepted as natural partners for the West, even though the old liberalizing regime of late tsardom had been replaced by a new totalitarian monster of far more sinister proclivities. The men who rose to leadership in 1939-45 possessed a mental map of the world which had been formed thirty, forty, or even fifty years before. Churchill, for instance, born in 1874, was a Victorian who was well into adult life before the twentieth century arrived. Politics for him was the business of empires and of a hierarchy of states where clients and colonials could not aspire to equal treatment. Stalin was only five years younger, Roosevelt eight. All of them were older than Hitler or Mussolini. Almost all the top brass of the Allied military - Weygand, de Gaulle, Brooke, Montgomery, Zhukov, Rokossovsky, Patton, but not Eisenhower - had survived a formative experience in the First World War. They had been left not only with a searing memory of total war between massed armies but also of a particular vision of the map of Europe. They had grown up to believe that if the layout of Western Europe was rather complicated, that of Eastern Europe was rather straightforward. They knew Germany's place on the map from the Rhine to the Niemen. They knew that to the west of Germany lay a clutch of countries: Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Switzerland. But they thought that to the east of Germany there was nothing, or at least nothing of importance, except 'Russia'. After all, in the world of their youth, the German and the Russian Empires had been contiguous. Warsaw, like Riga or Vilno, had been a Russian city. A true story nicely illustrates the mental maps that floated around in Western heads. One day in 1944 Gen. Montgomery met the commanding officer of the 1st (Polish) Armoured Division in Normandy for the first time. Looking for something to say, Montgomery asked him, 'Tell me, General, in Warsaw these days, do people speak Russian or German?' It was a blunder of capital proportions, equivalent to asking whether

French or Latin is the language of London. But it should not cause too much surprise. After all, when Montgomery was a young soldier, Warsaw was in Russia. He would also have known that the Germans had captured Warsaw in 1915 and had done so again in 1939. What was more natural than to think of Warsaw as a place contested by Russians and Germans? It would have been a very rare and erudite Westerner who knew that Poland had a longer independent history than Russia and traditions of freedom and democracy that were older than Britain's. For Western views of the nations of Eastern Europe, where they existed at all, often possessed a decidedly judgemental character. Winston Churchill, for example, divided the states of Europe unkindly into 'giants' and 'pygmies'. The giants were the Great Powers who had just fought the Great War. The pygmies were all those troublesome national states which had emerged through the collapse of the old empires and which had promptly started to fight each other. The dismissive approach to the New Europe was

thinly disguised. And it was accompanied by a tendency to classify the pygmies as one might classify children, into the nice and the naughty. Europe's new nations were pictured as nice in Allied eyes if, like the Czechs and the Slovaks, they had won their independence by fighting against Germany or Austria. If, like the Ukrainians or the Irish, they had gained it by rebelling against an Allied power, they were naughty, not to say downright nasty. In the case of Ukraine, which had carved out its own republic with German help, it was taken to be a fiction. States which had not obtained Allied recognition did not really exist. As for the Poles,

who had dared to assert themselves both against the Central Powers and against Russia, they could be nothing other than mixed-up problem children. They were pygmies pretending to be giants. Some Polish leaders, who had spent the Great War in St Petersburg, London, or Paris, were obviously sound enough. But others, like Marshal Pilsudski, who spent years in the Austrian ranks fighting against the Russians, were clearly unreliable. The fact that Pilsudski had spent the last year of the war imprisoned in Magdeburg, having refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the Kaiser, did not remove the suspicion that he was dangerously 'pro-German'. The Marshal was dead by 1939. But the alleged ambivalence of his legacy lingered on. After all, in 1920, he had defied good sense by defeating Soviet Russia in battle, and in the 1930s he had signed non-aggression pacts with both Stalin and Hitler. His doctrine of 'two enemies' was thought very eccentric. By Allied standards, it was hard to see what the Poles were playing at. The Allied camp evolved in several distinct stages. To begin with, in 1939, it consisted of just three states - France, the United Kingdom, and Poland. It did not include either Lithuania, whose port of Klaipeda (Memel) was seized by Germany on 23 March 1939, or Albania, which had been invaded and annexed by fascist Italy in April 1939, or indeed Finland, which was attacked by the Soviet Union in November. For Lithuania was coerced by Germany into the formal acceptance of its loss. The Italian annexation of Albania was recognized by France and Britain in a dubious diplomatic manoeuvre reminiscent of the recent Munich Agreement. And the Finno-Soviet conflict was brought to an uneasy close before any other states intervened. By Allied calculations, therefore, no significant breach of the peace occurred in Europe in 1939 other than the German assault on Poland in September. It was the Polish Crisis which brought the Allied coalition into being and gave it its first war aim. Poland had been allied to France since 1921, and to Britain by the Treaty of Mutual Assistance signed on 25 August 1939. Both France and Britain had publicly guaranteed Poland's independence on 31 March. So when the Wehrmacht poured over the Polish frontier at dawn on 1 September, the Allies possessed a clear *casus belli*. After the fall of Poland in 1939 and the fall of France in 1940, the Allied camp is often said to have been reduced to the grand total of one, namely Britain. This is hardly correct even if one discounts the great support of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, the involvement of India, and the growing band of exiled Governments, some of them with significant military contingents at their disposal. For the United States was not exactly neutral. Whilst officially pursuing a policy of non-belligerency, President Roosevelt embarked on a systematic programme of turning his country into 'the great arsenal of democracy'. Energetic efforts were made to strengthen America's military establishment, to expand industrial production, and to lay down a 'two-ocean navy'. Huge supplies and subsidies were shipped to Britain under the principle of Lend-Lease. Both the Destroyers for Bases deal and the Atlantic Charter were in place well before the USA itself took to arms. 1941 saw the Allied coalition transformed by three capital events. On 22 June, Nazi Germany invaded the USSR, thereby changing Stalin from Hitler's friend to Hitler's mortal foe. On 7 December, Japan bombed the US Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor, thereby destroying American isolationism at one blow. Four days later, in a gesture of encouragement to its Japanese partner, Germany declared war on the USA. From then on, 'the Grand Alliance' was in place. In the last phase of the war, as victory drew ever closer, any number of countries from Iraq to Liberia joined the Allied ranks. Former German allies such as Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Finland were forced to change sides. Former neutrals such as Turkey abandoned their neutrality. Finally, on 1 March 1945, Saudi Arabia boldly declared war on both Germany and Japan. Britain's role in this changing constellation was absolutely crucial, though not necessarily in the ways that many Britons imagined. Britain did not 'win the war'. But it did fight on the winning side and it supplied the third largest group of military forces within the Allied camp. Above all, it supplied the main strand of continuity in the Allied cause. It was the only one of the Allied principals to wage war against Germany almost from the start and right to the end. From Publishers Weekly

The Warsaw rising of 1944 not to be confused with the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943 pitted Polish insurgents of the Home Army against the Germans in a two-month battle that left the city in ruins. Almost as bitter are the historiographical controversies over the failure of the Allies, particularly the Soviets, whose army was idling nearby, to rescue the city. Davies (*Europe: A History*) offers an enthralling, impressionistic account of the uprising, highlighted by vivid reminiscences from Polish and German participants, but the bulk of this sprawling book is concerned with the political background and aftermath. Delving into the diplomatic wranglings between the exiled Polish government in London, the Western Allies and Stalin, Davies sides with the anti-Communist interpretation of the episode as the opening chapter in the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe. He denounces Stalin for deliberately allowing the non-Communist Home Army to be crushed, the Western Allies for acquiescing and British intellectuals for

toeing the Communist line on Poland, and includes a pointed litany of Stalinist crimes in post-war Poland.

Davies is correspondingly enthusiastic about the insurgents. He exonerates them of charges of anti-Semitism, reprints poems and songs about them and, working from iffy figures on German casualties, extols their combat prowess. Davies is persuasive on many points, and his somewhat romantic defense of the rising which failed in its objectives and triggered the German massacre of tens of thousands of civilians simply conveys its heroism, but may not convince readers of its wisdom. Photos. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.