



Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich

Joachim Fest, Margot Dembo (Translator)

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Fest describes in riveting detail the final weeks of the war, from the desperate battles that raged night and day in the ruins of Berlin, fought by boys and old men, to the growing paranoia that marked Hitler's mental state, to his suicide and the efforts of his loyal aides to destroy his body before the advancing Russian armies reached Berlin. *Inside Hitler's Bunker* combines meticulous research with spellbinding storytelling and sheds light on events that, for those who survived them, were nothing less than the end of the world.

Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich Details

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From Reader Review Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich for online ebook

Irfan says

Utterly depressing and haunting read about the final days of Hitler's regime focusing on himself and select few confidantes who stayed by his side to the very end. The most astounding thing is how the Nazi regime continued to work at maximum power (with whatever dwindling resources it had) to the very last hour, ensuring murder and destruction to the very end.

Hitler is the very embodiment of hubris and arrogance, refusing to believe that he has lost even when the entire city and final bastion of his government, Berlin, is totally surrounded and facing certain capitulation. He continues with his lengthy monologues (to whoever can bear to listen) like an Alzheimer's stricken uncle trying to make sense of his world. He continues to scoff himself with cake and dinners at his eating quarters. He continues to tirade and scream at anyone within earshot, which consist of the downcast eyes of men and women secretly unable to comprehend how a man so deluded still thinks he is in charge.

We see the deaths of Goebbels and his family, the raucousness and hedonism which overcomes men and women who know death is closing in and have nothing to live for anymore, we hear Hitlers final monumental outburst to his generals and see the last disgraceful rats leaving the sinking ship before the death of the ultimate wizard whose demise was like a spell being broken over a ruined and butchered nation.

Maggie says

The reconstruction of events that played out in the dying days of the Nazi Regime is gripping to say the least. Joachim Fest was born in 1926 and grew up in the family of an anti-Nazi father. He would have witnessed Hitler's rise to power through the eyes of a child; the transition into war when he was a young adolescent and finally, he was a young adult when it all ended in an inglorious defeat.

At the end he was a prisoner of war in France, having enlisted in the Wehrmacht in December 1944, at the age of 18, mainly to avoid being conscripted into the Waffen SS. After the war ended, he studied law, history, sociology, German literature, and history of art at the University of Freiburg, in Frankfurt am Main and in Berlin. (Information taken from Wikipedia)

His portrayal of Hitler and the other main players, Goebbels, Himmler, Bormann and the like, has the reader constantly questioning how people could fall under the spell of such a nihilistic and cruel imperative.

Fest, through fastidious research, photos, references to actual communications and eye witness accounts, tries to answer these questions. Firstly, he sets the scene of life in the bunker as the Russians advance and how those living there dealt with their last 14 days. There were secretaries, drivers, cooks, medical staff, radio operators – many ordinary people rubbing shoulders with Hitler and the high ranking military.

As an observer, it is hard to understand how many people were fooled by Hitler's delusion, that all would be well as reinforcements were on the way to save them from the enemy. Whether Hitler believed this construct simply because he said it so often that he had moved too far from the truth, or whether it was simply to rally the troops, we will never know. The brutality of his thinking and total lack of caring for the German people

who fought his war, however, becomes apparent when he discusses with Speer what should happen if the war is lost:

... on March 19, 1945, "in an icy tone of voice," he had said to Albert Speer, "If the war is lost, the people will also be lost. There is no need to be concerned about the essentials the German people would need to survive at even the most primitive level. On the contrary, it is better to destroy these things, to destroy them ourselves. Because the [German] people have proved they are the weaker ones, and the future belongs exclusively to the stronger people in the East. Besides, after this struggle, those who are left will only be the inferior ones, for the good have fallen." Chapter 6 pg 130

There were the courageous ones who stood up to Hitler and others who followed blindly not daring to consider the brutal truth. Alcohol was the only comfort they had. There was drunkenness and debauchery, often alongside soldiers and civilians who were either desperately injured or lay dying in the vaulted rooms of the bunker.

Then there was Himmler, thinking he could broker a peace agreement with the West and was planning to ask the Americans for weapons to use against the Red Army.

.....he [Himmler] told those around him, already wondering whether a bow or a handshake would be more appropriate when he met with Eisenhower. Chapter 3, pg 69

It had me thinking about what I would do in a situation of war and treachery. Would it be fight or flight, kill or be killed? Would deluded thoughts be the only thing that kept me going and is that what we call hope? I also thought that if someone had written this story as pure fiction I would find it implausible making it all the more shocking.

I sought this book out through our local library after watching an SBS dramatisation based on Fest's version of events. I am pleased I did, because there are additional chapters that could not be covered in a TV drama. In the book Fest also explores philosophy behind the actions of Hitler and his henchmen and provides the background and historical facts in order for the observer to complete the picture.

Although written in German and translated to English, it is a very readable style and I am sure the translator, Margo Bettauer Dembo, contributed to this. Fest's writing is succinct and, along with his use of photos, has packed a great deal of factual information in 173 pages. He also provides a detailed bibliography and index for the ease of the reader.

Roger says

Is this the definitive book about the last few weeks at the heart of Nazi Germany? Perhaps so. Joachim Fest has gathered together information to present the chaotic and mad last days of Hitler's life, as Nazi Germany's final collapse happened above him as the Soviet Army subjected Berlin to its final torture and execution.

Fest has described day-by-day the last three weeks of Hitler's life, and *ipso facto* the life of the Third Reich, with all the insanity that was entailed in that, and has also posed some historical-philosophical questions on why it had to be that way.

The story of the final weeks in the Bunker is well-known, and Inside Hitler's Bunker adds to Hugh Trevor-Roper's classic The Last Days of Hitler with information that has come to light since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Where this book is interesting is in Fest's thinking about why it had to end as it did. His theory is that the Führer always had, if not a death wish, a desire to destroy. This desire led him, and by extension the Nazis, to always have an enemy to destroy, and when the enemies began to prevail, he moved his desires onto the German people, wishing them to be exterminated as they had proved themselves the "weaker" race.

Fest uses as evidence for his theories the fact that Hitler always sought out enemies to destroy, and when the Germans had taken over other countries he ensured that peace was never made with the populace - an example is the Ukraine, where the population was initially inclined to side with the Nazis, before their depredations turned the people against them.

The desire to crush his enemies became twisted into a desire for Germany to die in flames as they lost the War. Fest mentions that several times Hitler had the potential opportunity to come to terms with enemies during the War, but spurned them all. His infamous "Nero" order - which was in the main ignored - showed him to be completely without feeling for "his" people. In fact Fest shows that much of the last few weeks of Hitler's life was the story of him sacrificing everything for his own glory, initially in an effort to turn the War around, and when the final realisation of defeat had set in, in an effort to have the most Wagnerian of endings that he could.

These musings are worth considering, and while not explaining completely the insanity that was Hitler's reign, add to the picture of how such a disaster could come about.

If you want to know what happened in the bunker, this is probably the best book to read.

Recommended.

Check out my other reviews at <http://aviewoverthebell.blogspot.com.au/>

Alexis Ohanian says

I get a little nervous when a "history" book (at least, that was the section it was in) doesn't have any endnotes or footnotes. I get more than a little nervous when the explanation given by the author is essentially "lots of the accounts contradicted one another, so I didn't want to confuse you, the reader, by including citations".

Granted, the scene in Hitler's bunker in those final months of the war were confusing to say the least. But throw us history majors a bone here, Herr Fest. Much of the history written on these waning hours in the heart of the Third Reich has largely been based on the diary of one of Hitler's personal secretaries, Traudl Junge. These women were in the end the few who Hitler still believed hadn't betrayed him -- he'd wished he had generals with such resolve and loyalty. Needless to say, his paranoia and delusion had hit their apex at this point.

Fest does a good job storytelling, but things get ugly when he begins to inject his own psychoanalysis of the Führer. Two entire chapters were frustratingly speculative and appear to contradict most of the historical research I have seen (it was only a matter of time before my history major would start to pay off). And all

without any citation. Granted, I haven't read Fest's biography of Hitler, so he has the authority, I just wish he had the evidence, too. Ultimately, these flaccid chapters weakened what was otherwise a fine read.

The film *Der Untergang* [the Downfall:] was based largely on *Bis zur letzten Stunde* (Junge's published diary) and does a fantastic job conveying (so well, it'll make you uncomfortable) what those final months in the Berlin bunker must have been like. Rent the movie, skip the book.

PS. It's not a great first date flick

Bryn Young-roberts says

If you've seen the film *Downfall* (based on Fest's work) or read any other piece of literature about Hitler's final hours then this book has nothing to offer. However if you know very little about the matter then this is the perfect vehicle into the world of 1945 Berlin. More suited to casual readers than historians as it doesn't feature any footnotes or endnotes, *Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich* is as entertaining as it is informative. Joachim Fest is probably Germany's most popular Third Reich historian, and has a knack for acknowledging humour in some of history's darkest moments (in particular, the episode of a Russian poet falling out of a closet with a crash and casually walking away without anyone commenting on the matter during Nazi / Soviet peace negotiations comes to mind).

Chiefly covering events that occurred in the bunker I feel the book detours too often and too far into being a piece about the Battle for Berlin (which would be fine if it were not for the book's title and the fact there are many great books about that already available offering much more detail).

Although leaving him open to criticism, Fest has bravely (or lazily?) decided to present 'his' version of events inside the bunker based on testimonies that he feels fit best rather than presenting us with all the infinite possible variations based on numerous conflicting accounts. If this were a definitive tome for use by historians it would be unforgivable, but as an 180 page introduction to the subject for those with a passing interest it helps make sense of a very confusing black spot in 20th century history.

Kathryn says

I thought the movie "The Downfall" was excellent, so thought this book might be also, since the movie was partly based on this book. But the book was disappointing. For one thing, I felt like I had walked into a discussion already underway, with no one explaining the things you had missed. It assumed you already knew all the players involved, and the basic plot. Sometimes captions to pictures explained who some of the people were, but not others, and left you to guess which was which. For another, one of the things I liked about the movie was that it showed you the human, the emotional, side of the people involved, providing some depth in its analysis, instead of just focusing on the battles, which is the part of history I have always disliked the most. The book, however, spent a lot of time discussing the movements of the various armies, in which I have little interest. The only person I would recommend this book to, would be a student of history of the Third Reich, someone who is already familiar with that part of history. Then it might be interesting.

Joeri Ryckaseys says

Een zeer intrigerend document over 's werelds meest bekende dictator.

Ik vind het boeiend hoe men, zelfs op het einde, nog bleef vasthangen aan het charisma van Hitler ook al was deze zelf erg ziek en slecht te been op het einde van z'n dagen. SS bleef hondstrouw terwijl anderen van de Wehrmacht de overgave bepleitten om het zinloze verlies van mensenlevens en soldatenlevens te sparen. Hitler had in het begin van z'n carrière al gezegd dat het alles of niets wordt. Ofwel de totale overwinning, ofwel het totale verlies... en bij totaal verlies zouden ze alles met zich meenemen. Want als ze verliezen dan betekent dat dat het Duitse Volk het niet gehaald heeft en aangezien de Wet van de Sterkste altijd blijft gelden dan moet ook het Duitse volk ophouden te bestaan.

Het is des te verbazender dat men deze man bleef volgen. In tegenstelling tot bijvoorbeeld de Romeinen, Napoleon en andere veroveraars had Hitler geen plan voor "na de oorlog", hij wilde blijven het conflict opzoeken. Hitler was ook een 'adrenalinejunk' volgens mij.

Op het einde voor z'n zelfmoord zou Hitler gezegd hebben dat hij er spijt van heeft dat hij zo genadig was tegen zijn tegenstanders en tegen de Joden. 'dit komt ervan als je te goed bent voor de wereld'... hij voelde zich verraden door zijn generals en zelfs door het volledige Duitse volk...

Joachim Fest heeft op zeer vlot leesbare wijze de laatste dagen van Hitler en het Duitse Rijk in beeld gebracht. Hoewel we ongeveer een idee hebben van de zelfmoord van Hitler en Eva Braun, en wat met hun lichamen gebeurd is, toch blijft het in een mysterie omhuld.

Joachim Fest maakt ook de kritische bemerking dat net door dat mysterieuze einde, Hitler blijft verder leven in de geesten. En hoe meer tijd er verstrijkt na de verschrikking van het Nazirijk, hoe groter de populariteit van Hitler opnieuw wordt... een duidelijke waarschuwing naar de toekomst toe.

Lobstergirl says

It's somewhat surprising that the precise events and situations inside Hitler's bunker in April 1945 are so hard to pin down with complete accuracy. Eyewitnesses who walked in on the bodies minutes later couldn't even agree on whether Adolf and Eva Hitler were found together on the same sofa after committing suicide, or Eva was in a separate chair. Fest does a good job reconciling multiple accounts, and specifies where he isn't certain. This book certainly puts to rest the notion that the Soviets could have done an autopsy on Hitler's corpse, as the only thing left of him (besides ashes) in May 1945 was his dentures. (Eva's lower bridgework was all that remained of her.) So the fantasy that a Soviet autopsy revealed only one testicle (if you want to read all about it, *Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil*) is proven wishful thinking.

It almost seems crass, given the death Hitler visited upon Europe, for me to note the little details such as how Hitler gave a cyanide capsule to his beloved dog Blondi - because he didn't want Blondi to become a trophy for Soviet troops, and also he wanted to test the type of capsule he would shortly be using himself - and then sent an officer to put bullets into Blondi's five puppies. Then there are the six Goebbels children, quickly poisoned by their mother and Hitler's personal physician; only one, the oldest daughter, appears to have

resisted, given the bruising on her body. Magda Goebbels had linked her own and her children's fate to Hitler's in the final days, and had at the last minute begged him to leave Berlin so that she and the children could leave and be spared, too, but Hitler refused. Mrs. Goebbels wrote in her suicide note:

Our glorious idea is in ruins, and with it everything I have known in my life that was beautiful, admirable, noble, and good. After the Führer and National Socialism, the world won't be worth living in, and that is why I have brought the children here. They are too good for the life that will come after us, and merciful God will understand if I myself give them deliverance.

Hitler himself in the waning days was by turns angry, volatile, apathetic, suffering tremors of his hands and legs which he tried to hide from onlookers, as he insisted German troops fight on even though all was lost. He took the time to have Eva Braun's brother-in-law briefly court-martialled and shot (the court-martial wasn't even allowed to conclude, once Hitler discovered that the man had known Himmler was making surrender overtures to a Swedish diplomat), even as Braun asked that his life be spared since he had a newborn child. He drew up political and personal wills, expelling Göring and Himmler from the Nazi Party for their last-minute betrayals. He declined to flee to his alpine fortress, preferring to end everything in Berlin. He was insistent that his and Braun's bodies be burned completely, having just learned what disgraces were wrought upon Mussolini and Clara Petacci. He sat silently and stared at his favorite portrait of Frederick the Great. And he ate cake: vast amounts of cake.

Diana Garzón says

Este año tomé un curso sobre el auge y la caída del tercer Reich, en el cual el profesor mencionó y recomendó varios libros, películas y otros documentos relacionados con este hecho histórico. Uno de los libros que recomendó fue este, que tiene una adaptación cinematográfica que también recomendó, pero aún no he visto.

El hundimiento es la narración de los últimos días de Hitler y de los días posteriores a su muerte, basado en los testimonios de quienes los vivieron con él. Es un libro que muestra algo de su naturaleza irracional, de su paranoia, de su desconocimiento de la situación real y de sus ansias de destruirlo todo; es también un libro en el que se evidencia que en los últimos días de una guerra la consigna es "sálvese quien pueda", porque reinan la confusión y la locura.

En el libro se hace referencia con frecuencia al hecho de que durante las guerras, una serie de personas en un lugar muy alejado del campo de batalla (y de la realidad) toma decisiones que al final van a afectar especialmente a quienes sí están en ese campo de batalla. Y en este caso en particular, el problema no era solamente que las decisiones tomadas en el búnker estuvieran alejadas de la realidad del campo de batalla, sino que se basaban en las fantasías que Hitler había construido en su cabeza.

Este es un documento muy interesante y bien escrito sobre el fin de una era que gustará a todos los amantes de la Historia.

Más en: <https://vistoleidohecho.com/>

Charlie says

Not sure if I should rate this book as a 2 or 3 or 4. So, I hit the middle -- a 3. It's my first real honest to goodness read on the Last few days of Hitler and that's why a 3.

The author, Fest, seems to put together a good account of what MAY have happened inside the Bunker. Who is really telling the TRUTH when it comes to these Nazis trying to make account of what REALLY HAPPENED?? There apparently was extreme tension the last few weeks in the Bunker, UNDERSTANDABLY since the Russians were practically on their doorsteps, literally.

I would recommend for you to read several books on the Last Days of Hitler and draw your own conclusions. That's what I intend to do. This book, however, is a good one to start with.

Daniela says

Foi interessante ver um lado depressivo de Hitler, mais uma faceta de uma mente doentia.

Conrad says

Reading too many books about Hitler threatens to plant one in the demographic of middle aged American white guys who go to Pennsylvania wargame cons in full Waffen gear, then go home to have their wives put on dirndl and spank them. I am not a part of that demographic (...though I've played more rounds of Europe Engulfed than is probably healthy). This is for work. This. Is. For. Work.

So there are a few brands of German writing about the war. There's the Sebald-style, revisionist, it's-time-to-look-at-this-with-clear-eyes-also-it-wasn't-my-fault thing. There's Gunter Grass: how-awful-this-was-for-everyone. And there's Fest, who (you might have seen this coming) goes for I'm-so-objective-I-can-even-relentlessly-chide-my-own-people-for-their-fuckedness-see-see-SEE?!

There isn't much new material here that I can discern - he draws heavily on Hugh Trevor-Roper, which he excuses by saying that Trevor-Roper was closer in time to Nazis who took interviews. This is partly plausible, because if one thing is clear about the final days of the Reich, it's that the German bureaucracy and Hitler's own inner circle had quit taking careful notes, leaving the bunker itself as a bit of a black box: no information out, and not much going in. He also draws on Hitler's own body man, whose name I forget, and Traudl Junge, who were both there and seem to have misremembered surprisingly little.

But there isn't anything here to surprise anyone who's seen "Downfall," which I believe drew on Fest's work. In fact, the book is so plainly derivative that I'm not sure it's worth reading. Fest perpetuates the myth that Hitler's death room smelled like "bitter almonds" due to the chemical Eva used to kill herself - in fact, the poison doesn't smell like that at all, so if you were so inclined, you could perform a little amateur historiography just by tracing that minute piece of bullshit.

On one hand, it's satisfying to read about the quick collapse of the German military structure and the interesting ploys everyone tried to escape to friendlier turf. There are some pleasing anecdotes here, like how just before the Red Army came in, Berliners would walk by each other whistling a tune the lyrics of which

translate to "After all, it's not the end of the world..." Then there's the ghoulish, like Goebbels' wife playing solitaire in her room after killing her own children. And maybe I'm about to throw in my lot with the reenactment crowd and start buying fake used daggers on Ebay, but I find the stuff about Hitler's affect the most interesting. He rants! He raves! He eats cake! More cake! He suddenly gets all sullen. Oops, no more Führer! I mean, what could possibly be more interesting than the emotional state of someone who has just locked down a string of evil acts that's earned you and your people the universal horror and derision of the rest of the world to last until the end of time, someone who's done something that'll be remembered for its sheer insanity for as long as there are words to tell of it? I'm not sure it's really possible to generalize about the worst tendencies of human nature from the account of Hitler's blaming, scapegoating and paranoia in these last days, but it sure is tempting.

One complaint I have about most Hitler work is that historians have a hard time avoiding this tone of "...and of course Hitler reacted to the news of his brother-in-law's escape to Austria or whatever in the most childish and ludicrous way possible..." Why, we might ask? Because he's Hitler! is the standard answer. No one has ever been more thoroughly psychoanalyzed without the benefit of an actual analyst than Adolf, but a lot of that work doesn't end up on the page. Kershaw does this, too, and when I'm done reading his book I'm going to discuss it more there. But it's not enough to only say that Hitler was an emotional wreck all the time and a cranky piece of shit who blamed everyone else for his monumental failure. I'm not sure it's ever helpful to say that, in fact, because it doesn't do anything but confirm what we all think we know from watching movies dating back to *The Great Dictator*. It's worth explaining why he fell prey to these habits of mind; why he was always blaming other people; why he felt so chronically betrayed.

Lord Zion says

Interesting account of the final days of the Third Reich which easily conveys the stark, oppressive mood within Hitler's bunker; the hopelessness of the situation along with the bizarre fanaticism of his closest officers.

As there is no 100% accurate account of exactly what happened, the author has used the information provided from the most reliable and closest sources. We are left with a wholly believable representation which carries a lot more weight than the numerous conspiracy theories that abound.

Would recommend to anyone with an interest in the Second World War.

Ian "Marvin" Graye says

I find Impossible Germany to understand.
Unlikely Japan, more too.

"Impossible Germany
Unlikely Japan
Wherever you go
Wherever you land

I'll say what this means to me
I'll do what I can
Impossible Germany
Unlikely Japan

The fundamental problem
We all need to face
This is important
But I know you're not listening
No I know you're not listening

If this was still new to me
I wouldn't understand
Impossible Germany
Unlikely Japan

But this is what love is for
To be out of place
Gorgeous and alone
Face to face

With no larger problems
That need to be erased
Nothing more important
Than to know
Someone's listening
Now I know
You'll be listening"

Lyrics courtesy of Wilco

Jimmy Osorio says

Simplesmente não gostei. Uma escrita enfadonha, e que no final, percebemos que a maioria dos relatos podem não ter exactamente do modo que ele escreve, são suposições de ralos recolhidos por outros autores e correcções de outros livros, no entanto permite entender o maquiavélico que era Hitler, e que a sua missão não era construir um Novo Mundo como outros ditadores, mas sim destruir tudo por onde passava. Um livro recomendado apenas a quem queira conhecer os últimos dias, mas não crie grandes expectativas.
