

War's Little People

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Sponsored by Jay Sylvestre

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War's Little People

April 15th, 1938, Hamburg, the German Reich: Eight-year-old Han Ziyou twiddles with the fringes of his scarf as he shuffles behind John Rabe, his wife, and the disgruntled *Hauptmann* Klossner—painfully concealing a limp bestowed by a Japanese bullet—down the gangway of the British gunship *Bee*. Ziyou and Hans are not historical figures but characters I created to understand war's little people.

My father was a computer engineer by trade, but an oral historian at heart, breathing character into dead men and fallen civilizations. Instead of storybooks, he filled my childhood with tales from his family lineage, humorous historical hijinks, and armchair lectures on various political/philosophical concepts sliced down to toddler-sized bites. When I began regurgitating phrases—the simplest of stories—he taught me to ask questions. When I started to read, he encouraged me to answer my questions. While my father's stories sparked my love for history, reading gave me autonomy over it; I could delve deeper into areas of interest and develop my own beliefs.

As I furthered my study of history, I became engrossed by modern war. In my peaceful American childhood, I had numerous encounters with the domesticated breed of war: War films, victory parades, tank museums, etc. I grew accustomed and even fond of war. As I matured, my fascination with war evolved from one of glory disconnected from tragedy to war—especially total war—as an inevitable reflection of human nature. I was specifically interested in war as an activity of the individual. What convinces ordinary people who abhor violence in peacetimes to murder and sometimes torture strangers they hold no personal grievances against in times of war? How much blame should be attributed to the institution and how much to the individual?

Can people logically assess the validity of ideologies when everyone around them is under their sway? Or perhaps I am wrong to think about war through this lens, ask these questions.

To solve the mystery of war, in 11th grade, I began plotting a novel about the Second World War from the perspective of a Chinese orphan living in Germany— encapsulating the foreignness of my own perspective. In the past, I borrowed history books, watched YouTube videos, or read free PDFs, but after embarking on this endeavor, purchasing books became more convenient. Owning books allows me to annotate and review them as plot references anytime.

Steadily, I began to amass a group of history books, all bought second-hand, in person, and by opportunity. Second-hand books bought in person are substantially cheaper and of higher quality than what can be found online. Buying books by opportunity is an enjoyable side-effect of buying in person. Browsing shelves introduces me to new subjects, theories, and authors and allows me to sample books that catch my eye. I can find histories covering specific niches, completing my picture of Germany's war. I look for maps to understand battles and images of people, locations, and machines to inspire realistic details in my writing. Moreover, observing the peculiarities of old books introduced me to topics like foxing and edge-painting— my first foray into the book-collecting world.

At this point, I had moved from California to Washington D.C. for college at Georgetown University. A few blocks out Georgetown's main entrance is *The Lantern Bookstore*, which sells donated books at a steep discount to fund scholarships at Bryn Mawr College. I would visit the bookstore most weekends, either as a volunteer— pricing, shelving, and alphabetizing books— or as a visitor escaping the stress and loneliness of college. The other volunteers, all retired women from government jobs or academia, briefed me on the basics of the book trade— what Folio Society books were, how to protect pages from acidification, why some first editions are

extremely cheap, etc. It was here I defined my assortment of books as a collection. The books in my collection from *The Lantern Bookstore* include *Berlin Diary* (paperback), *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (Folio Society), and *Guns over Kigali*, which I was surprised to find Major General Henry Kwami Anyidoho's signature in.

Two of the books in the previous paragraph were written by William Shirer, an American war correspondent in Nazi Germany. Shirer is the only author I collect multiple versions of the same book. Originally, this was because I only annotated common editions but wanted clean pages to read without distraction. However, Shirer is special because he is instrumental in shaping my collection and my understanding of war and the individual. When I first explained my writing aspirations to my AP US History teacher in 11th grade, he told me to read *Berlin Diary* for a deeper understanding of German society. Instead, I gained a deeper understanding of how the individual reflects on themselves in relation to war. How much of what Shirer wrote was true vs what would sell to an American audience? Could American popular opinion have changed Shirer's original beliefs about the German people? Does deleting or rewriting entries praising Hitler make this account less authentic?

Time, societal taboos, desires, etc are important contexts of varying intensities that warp how individuals portray their true relationship with war. However, the reverse is also true: The context of experiencing conflict changes how one reflects on the world. This was when I began molding my books into a collection of war histories written by war's little people: The journalists, soldiers, and bureaucrats who fed the war machine— lives that don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. Every argument war's little people make is tainted by their experiences. When these perspectives are averaged together, perhaps there is a possibility of discovering a universal relationship between the individual and war.

I frequent estate sales because they are treasure troves for budgeters. All my books with intact folded maps are from estate sales. I even found a copy of B.H. Liddell Hart's *The History of the Second World War* originally from the library of the Executive Office of the President. I enjoy estate sales because they provide intimate impressions of the collector, shown through the subjects they collect, how they shelve their books, and what they add to their books. At the estate sale of a professor, every history book included multiple newspaper clippings from related events; he cared more for the substance of what he collected— knowledge— than the object itself. At the estate sale of a surgeon, all books were stamped with a custom-made seal with his name and PhD; his occupation was a major aspect of his identity. As for myself, I write my name, location, and date every time I purchase a book; preserving the histories of individual books for future owners is important to me.

Perhaps my most surprising and exciting find was a first American printing of T.E. Lawrence's *Revolt in the Desert*. Growing up, *Lawrence of Arabia* was my favorite film and I was obsessed with the Arab Revolt— even writing about it for my college application. I wanted a first American printing because of the unique prints of Arab leaders, the intricate folding map of the Hejaz, and the beautiful exterior design. Most importantly, I wanted to own a piece of his legacy. Lawrence is the most intriguing of war's little people for his contradictions. He willingly fought for a cause (British imperialism) he vehemently opposed before, during, and after the revolt. Was Lawrence too intelligent to hypocritically reconcile his morals with his actions that they mentally tore him apart?

I don't believe life is purely determined by chance, but chance often ripples into opportunities beyond what is envisioned. By chance, I discovered a copy of the Lawrence book at a local rare books store several years ago, but by choice, I rejected it over the price. By choice,

I visited the Georgetown Special Collections weekly to read their copy. By choice, I continuously searched every bookstore and estate sale I attended. By chance, I found a copy selling for \$10 at an estate sale with an original advertisement for the book and over a dozen newspaper clippings about the Middle East spanning from the 1930s to 1970s. By chance, my choice to inform the Special Collections curator about my discovery led him to invite me to write the semesterly Special Collections article comparing our versions, pay for my ticket to the Capital Rare Books Fair, and send me a link to this competition.

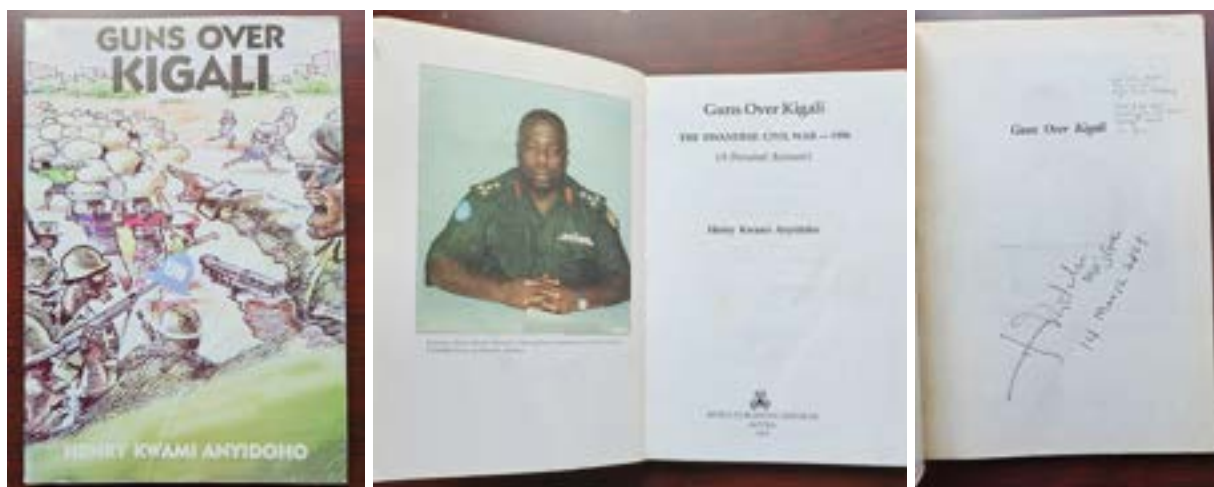
Book collections are extensions of the self, how one wants the world to perceive them, physical objects they find beautiful, the concepts that intrigue them, etc. My collection expresses my mind—the ideas that define me. The constant evolution and redefinition of my collection reflect my ever-changing worldview. Even if I will never fully understand my perspective, I have chosen to continue searching for answers—exploring the little peoples' histories until I can see war through the eyes of Ziyou. After all, chances are only enabled by choices.

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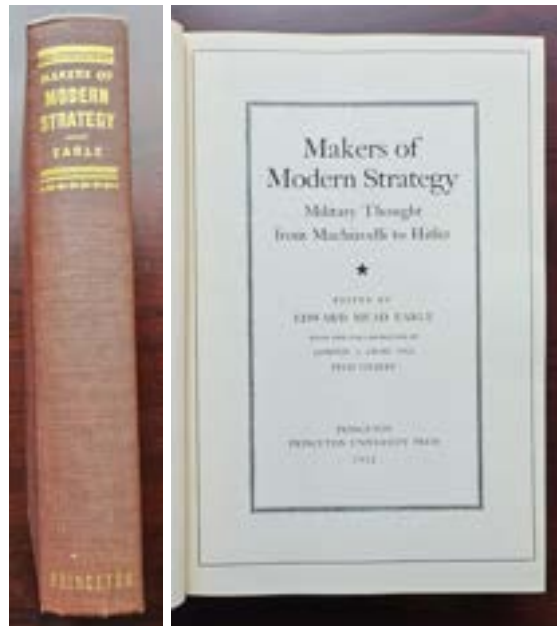
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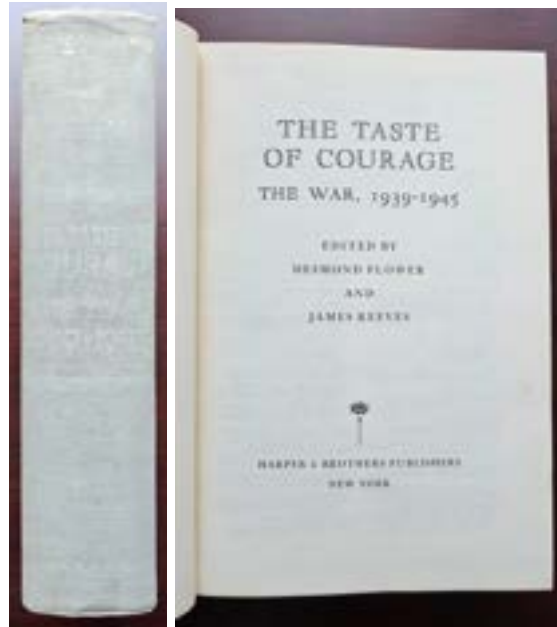
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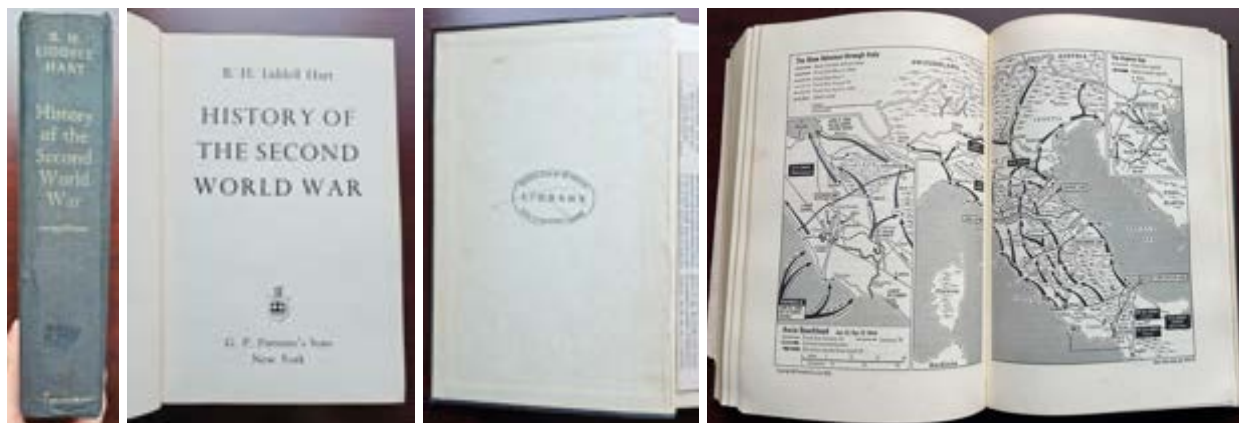
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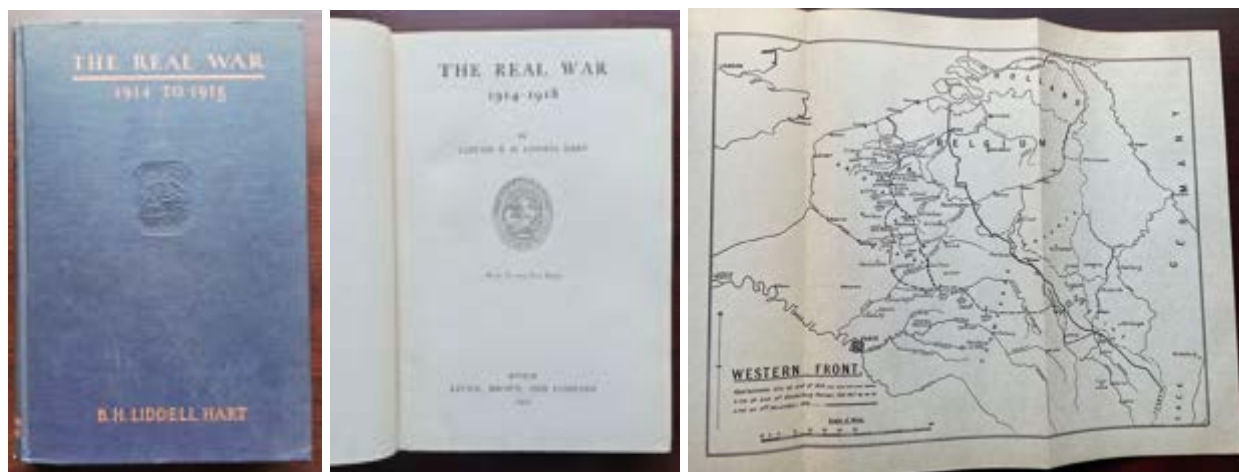
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Mason Jr served in the Marine Corps during WW2. History of how Germany rebuilt its Air Force into the power it was during WW2. Hardback. Include prints. 1st Printing.



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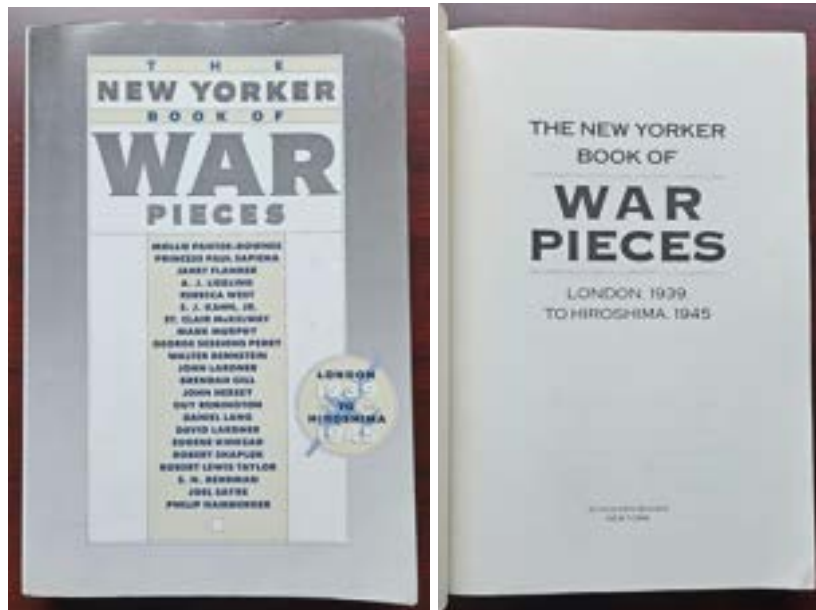
Moorehead was an Australian war correspondent famous for covering North African Front in WW2. History of the Dardanelles Campaign focusing on the British/ Commonwealth. Hardback. Dust jacket. Map of Eastern Mediterranean

between front paste down end paper and free end paper. Map of the Dardanelles between back paste down end paper and free end paper. Includes prints. 1st edition.



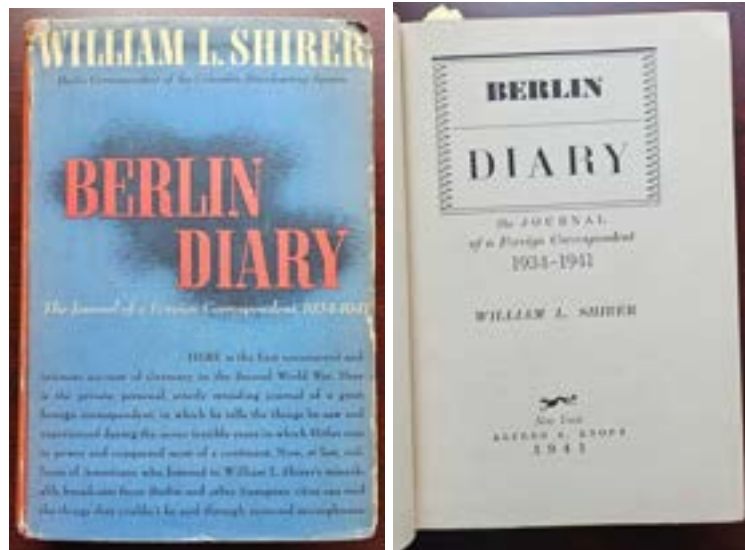
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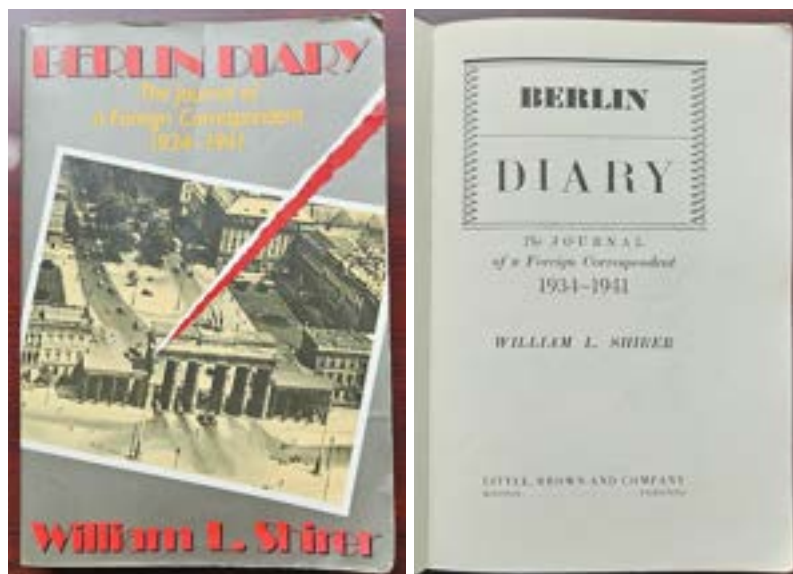
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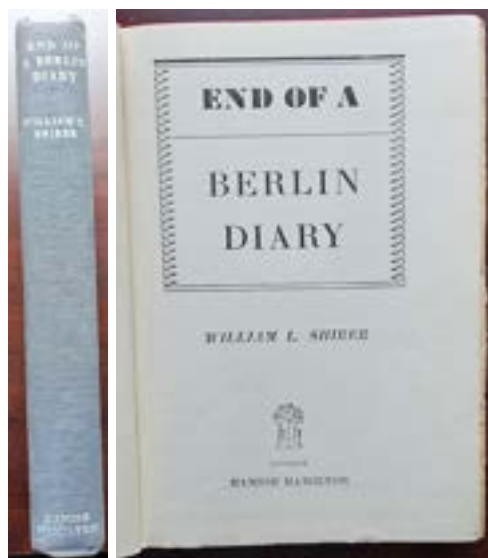
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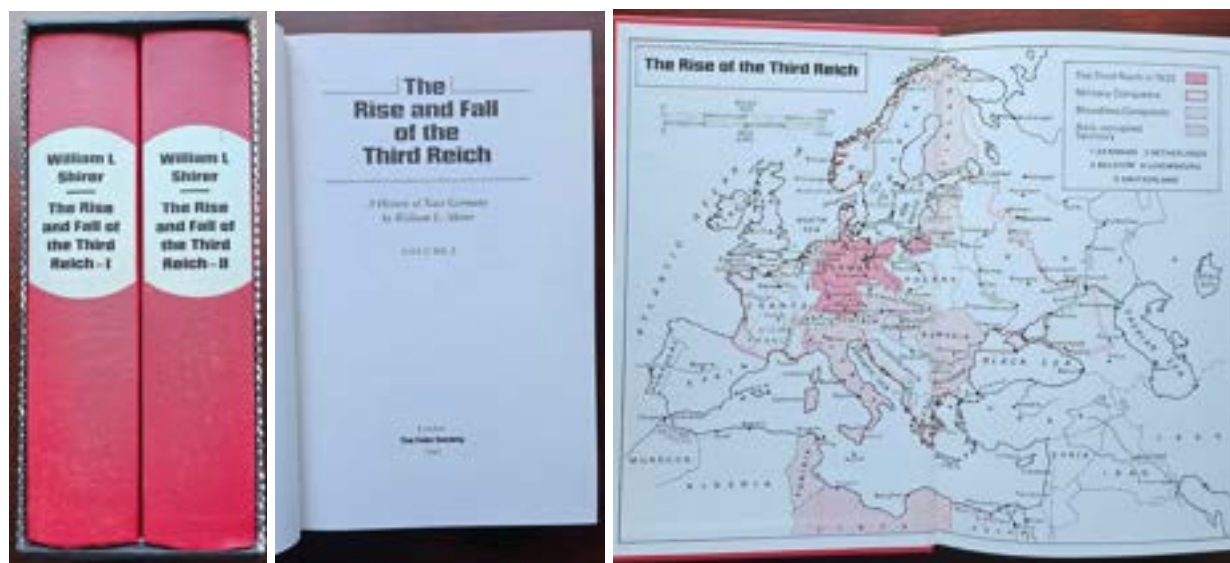
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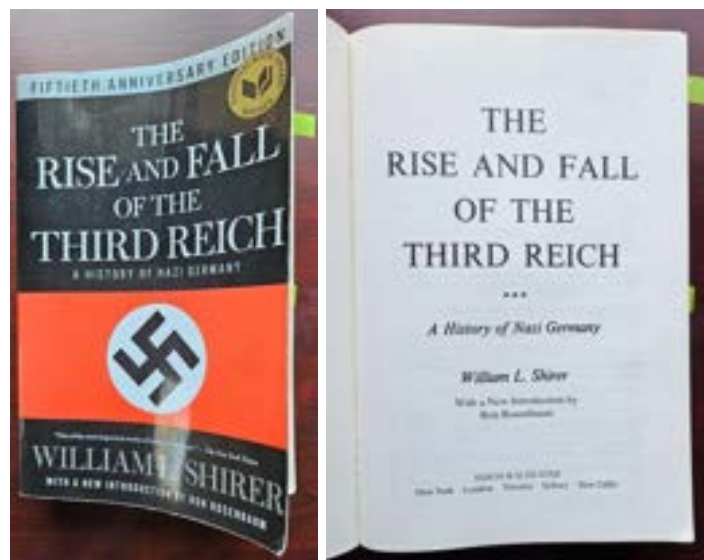
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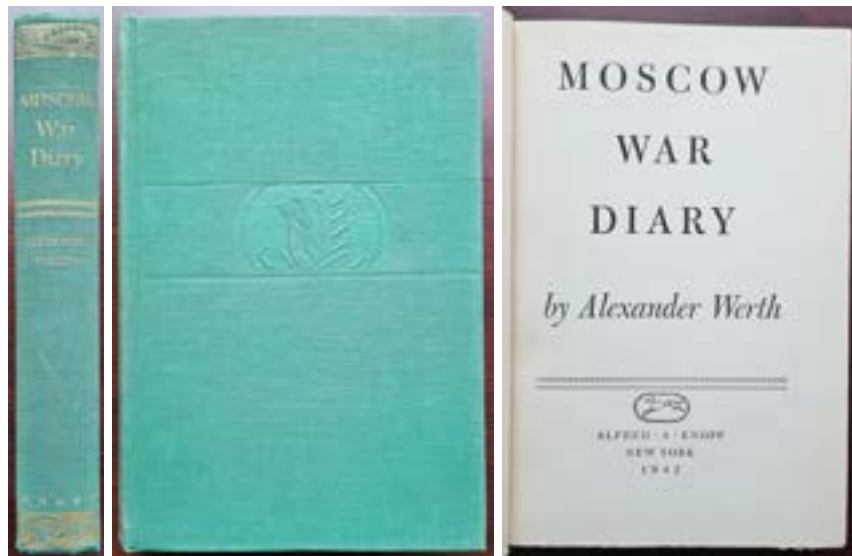
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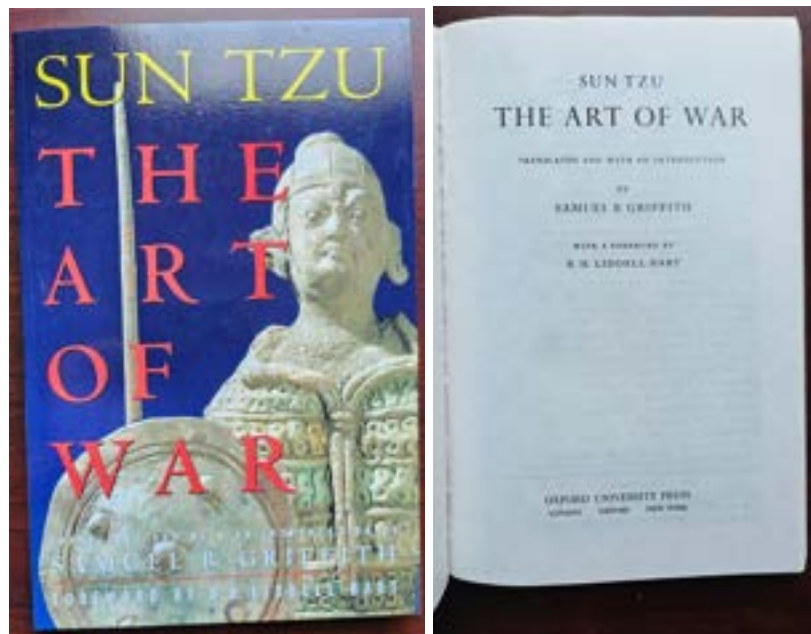
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Counter-offensive. Map of USSR between paste down end paper and free end paper. 3rd printing.



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Xunzi was a Wu general during the Warring States Period (China). Famous book on strategy. Softcover.



1. *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* 1st trade ed. (1935) by T.E. Lawrence, published by Doubleday, Dorian

Although it had been my dream to own this book since childhood, copies of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* are substantially harder to come by than *Revolt in the Desert*, Lawrence's abridged memoir about the Arab Revolt. The first time I saw a copy was at the Capital Rare Book Fair. Lawrence began writing *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* while advocating for an Arab state at the Paris Peace Conference. It was only meant to be published for friends and limited subscribers during Lawrence's lifetime; the first public edition was published in 1935, after Lawrence's fatal motorcycle accident. This book includes cartoon doodles of Lawrence's adventure between chapters, several folded maps, and many prints of leaders— all different from those in *Revolt in the Desert*. Moreover, I am interested in comparing and contrasting Lawrence's two memoirs. Based on the context, I expect *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to be a more honest and emotional account of Lawrence's experiences. My dream is to amass a collection of works written by Lawrence including *The Mint*, *Crusader Castles*, *The Home Letters of T.E. Lawrence and his Brothers*, etc. To me, T.E. Lawrence is the most fascinating historical figure I've ever read about because he is the only historical figure who feels equally mythic and human.

2. *Baedeker's Great Britain* 9th ed. (1937), published by Karl Baedeker

I developed an interest in maps at the Capital Rare Book Fair after visiting several booths and speaking with their curators. I learned about brands like Stanfords London— who were commissioned to draw war maps, cut into units pasted on cloth for easy folding— and Colton— who created maps that folded into little leather booklets. The brand I was most interested in is a German company called Karl Baedeker. Baedeker's guides are travel books interspersed with folding maps printed on custom-dimensioned pages. Among the map books I saw at the fair (Murray's, Ticknor's, etc), Baedeker's were the most elaborate and included maps ranging from major cities to landmarks. Specifically, *Baedeker's Great Britain* (1937) is a minor piece of WW2 history. A Nazi propagandist claimed Germany intended to bomb every cultural heritage site in Britain rated 3 stars on Baedeker's. This gaffe tied Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, who needed to portray German air raids as justified retaliation against British aggression. Thus, the raids in April and May of 1942 were titled Baedeker's Blitz.

3. *Berlin Embassy* (1940) by William Russell, published by E.P. Dutton

William Russell was an American diplomat working in the Berlin Embassy during the beginning of WW2. I want a copy of this memoir because of how outwardly similar it is to *Berlin Diary*. Both were published within months of each other by people in similar circumstances: Americans who were in the unique position to observe both the political elite and ordinary civilians. However, Shirer and Russell have completely different opinions on the German people. Shirer at best portrays the Germans at best as apathetic towards Nazi policies, at worst inherent warmongers due to their history and political/ philosophical culture. On the other hand, it's said that Russell— who worked in immigration— viewed a majority of Germans as victims of circumstance. *Berlin Embassy* will provide a more complete image of the German people during WW2.

4. *Tintin au Pays de l'Or Noir* (1950) by Hergé (Georges Remi), published by Casterman

My parents grew up reading Tintin and passed their love for the Belgian boy reporter to me. A masterpiece of political satire that boils down international relations for children, Tintin is a unique microcosm of the evolution of the Western European worldview throughout the 20th century. The 1950 publication of *Tintin au Pays de l'Or Noir* (Tintin and the Land of Black Gold), originally set in the British Mandate of Palestine, is partially a commentary on the conflict between Jews and Palestinians— which has currently resurged in headlines. In 1971, after the British government threatened to censure the release of an English translation, Hergé removed any mention of Palestine, deleted several scenes, and repainted all the British and Jewish characters as Arabs. The 1971 revision is the edition in print.

5. *Asterix et les Goths* (1963) written by Rene Goscinny, illustrated by Albert Uderzo, published by Dargaud

The French national identity— represented through the Gauls— is a major undertone throughout Asterix. The Gauls embody “liberté, égalité, fraternité” and courageously defend their free corner of Europe against Roman Imperialism. Furthermore, Asterix defines multiple European national identities from a French perspective— most interestingly the Goths, or Germans. In *Asterix et les Goths* (Asterix and the Goths), the Goths are depicted uniformly as violent, power-hungry, and uncultured. What’s interesting about this edition, is the heavy-handed, uncensored Nazi imagery: Swastikas, the reichsadler, red-white-black banners, etc. At the end of the comic, the Goths are divided into multiple kingdoms. In the greater context of history, I’ve interpreted this three ways: A simple joke about the Holy Roman Empire (unlikely). A cathartic revision of French national trauma from the recent German conquest and partition of France; Rene Goscinny’s Jewish identity strengthens this interpretation. A take on the prominent question in France at the time of how many Germanies should exist if the Cold War ended.

6. *Доктор Живáго* 1st Russian ed. (1957) by Boris Pasternak, published by Mouton

One of the books I collect multiple editions of is *Doctor Zhivago*; I own a 1st American edition and Reader’s Digest edition. A humanistic story about the importance of private life outside politics, what strikes me is the idea of literature as a political tool. Banned from publication in the USSR, *Doctor Zhivago* was first smuggled to Italy and published there in 1957. In 1958, the CIA executed the Zhivago Project, publishing 1000 Russian language copies of *Doctor Zhivago* through the Dutch publisher Mouton and distributing them to various embassies across Europe. These were discreetly distributed to Russian visitors to Western Europe, who would smuggle them back to the USSR. The results were astonishing: *Doctor Zhivago* became one of the most influential books of the 20th century and Pasternak won the Nobel Prize— succeeding at the US’ goal of humiliating the USSR.

7. *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1921) by C.M. Doughty, published by Boni & Liveright

This is a British travelogue and one of the earliest English works that extensively describe Bedouin life. Doughty was a major inspiration for T.E. Lawrence, who wrote the introduction to the 1921 edition. Moreover, many of the places Doughty traveled to are in

modern-day Saudi Arabia, which I had the opportunity to experience 200 years later in a student program. What was it like back then when the desert was truly free and destinations were less accessible? The combined volumes are in a beautiful blue book with two folded prints and a large colored map of Arabia tucked into a pocket behind the back pasted down end paper. I saw this copy for the first time at an old bookstore in Missoula, Montana.

8. *The Rape of Nanking* 1st ed. (1997) by Iris Chang, published by Basic Books

The Rape of Nanking was the book that mainstreamed the Nanking Massacre into the Western view of WW2 and made Iris Chang a minor celebrity as the champion/spokesperson for the victims of Nanking in the eyes of many. Unfortunately, Iris Chang committed suicide in 2004, solidifying her martyrdom to the Chinese community. Part of why this book is important to me is because it introduced me to the pre-WW2 Sino-German relationship, a major aspect of the novel I am working on. Of all the books on this list, this will most likely be my earliest purchase; at *The Lantern Bookstore*, there is a signed edition that I am waiting for to go on sale.

9. *This is Berlin* (2014) by William Shirer, published by Overlook Books.

This book is a compilation of William Shirer's broadcast speech transcripts. As mentioned in my essay, I specifically collect William Shirer as an author. Shirer's speeches are important because they can be compared against Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (secondary source), *Berlin Diary* (earlier memoir), and *The Nightmare Years* (later memoir) as an immediate primary source. Moreover, owning *This is Berlin* will complete my collection of Shirer's primary sources about Nazi Germany. Afterward, I intend to collect Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of Adolf Hitler* and *The Sinking of the Bismarck* to complete my collection of Shirer's works on WW2.

10. *Barrack Room Ballads* 1st ed. (1892), by Rudyard Kipling, published by Methuen

Rudyard Kipling (notably controversial) is one of my favorite war poets. *Barrack Room Ballads* is a collection that includes some of his most popular works, "Gunga Din," "Tommy," "Mandalay," etc. These poems are written with Cockney vernacular, a London lower-class dialect—commonly spoken by enlisted soldiers; as a kid, I used to read these poems to practice my "British accent." Moreover, what's so interesting about Kipling's poems is that their messages are never surface-level and can be interpreted in many ways. For example, "Tommy" can be seen as a critique of both society's treatment of veterans and veterans' behavior in society. "Mandalay" can be viewed through a sexual lens.

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