



Terror Flyers: The Lynching of American Airmen in Nazi Germany

by Kevin T. Hall.

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In *Terror Flyers*, military historian Kevin Hall (Ruhr-Universität Bochum) offers a well researched and detailed study of incidents of *Lynchjustiz* (lynch justice) against US airmen in Nazi Germany during World War II. Earlier literature long ago identified the violence against some US Air Corps crew members who were forced to bail out over Germany. Hall uses several new sources to prove the number of such cases was much larger than previously thought, with a focus on the culpability of both civilians and the National Socialist regime:

Lynchjustiz initially occurred as a spontaneous response to the devastation caused in a context of total war, with known cases beginning in the summer of 1943. The air war, compelled by the radicalization of Nazi atrocities, removed any form of security on the German home front. By the following summer, of 1944, the Nazi regime took advantage of German citizens' plight in enduring the overwhelming and ever more lethal air war that erased all physical and psychological boundaries. As a new element of total war, the regime sought to harness the outrage of the German population by condoning and permitting Lynchjustiz. (16)

Each of the book's six thematically arranged chapters centers on a specific thesis. Chapter 1 examines the various treatments received by downed airmen. These ranged from good treatment by helpful civilians and the underground to mistreatment, torture, and murder. Quotations from firsthand US Air Corps Escape and Evasion Reports are powerfully affective. They are complemented by actual German photographs taken at the time airmen were captured. The inclusion of plentiful visuals throughout adds greatly to Hall's narrative.

Chapters 2-4 concern the theme of *Lynchjustiz* in Nazi propaganda; the history and escalation of the practice during the war; and a statistical analysis of the postwar trials of so-called "lesser" German war criminals held in Dachau (1945-48). Hall researched the German satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch*, among others. Chapter 2 includes more than twenty often disturbing war-time cartoons sharply critical of the US government and American racism. This dehumanizing of the enemy fostered the civilian population's willingness to accept, and even take part in, lynch justice.

Chapter 5 builds on the evidence presented in chap. 4. Specifically, it concerns twelve individual examples of *Lynchjustiz*, pieced together from archives and postwar trials of Germans accused of mistreatment or murder. Hall's use here of real examples, with many photographs, moves the story of lynching from the statistical to the personal. For example, a photograph of Capt. Chester Coggeshall Jr. and his P-51 Mustang fighter intensifies Hall's account of the Air Corps pilot's death (16 Apr. 1945) in a small town in Bavaria:

Slightly wounded, Coggeshall climbed out of the wreckage, hoping to evade capture; however, members of the local Gendarmerie and military personnel immediately captured him. He was then escorted to the courthouse of Freilassing. When he arrived, the mayor and Ortsgruppenleiter [local group leader], August Kobus, denied Coggeshall first aid treatment. Kobus then informed the individuals present that he had orders from the Kreisleiter [district leader] of Berchtesgaden, Bernard

Stredele, to “finish” any flyers captured in the area. Shortly thereafter, in the early evening, Coggeshall was placed in a car—guarded by two German soldiers—and taken out of town by Kobus. As they reached the woods outside of Freilassing, Kobus shot Coggeshall twice in the head. (200–201)

In his final chapter, the author places his research in a larger historical perspective. Since the 1990s, historians' have shifted focus to the actions of individuals as the best way to grasp the nature of Nazi violence, be it directed at downed airmen or civilians in Eastern Europe. Hall identifies the main arguments in the literature and shows how his study fits this approach.

Researchers will welcome the extensive collection of sources included in *Terror Flyers*. Besides an index and bibliography that includes US and German archival sources, there is a twenty-five-page appendix of wartime German documents, with translations and photos of the originals. A second appendix contains Nazi newspaper articles (with translations) on reports of American “Luftgangster” attacks on civilian areas—a way to rationalize lynch justice.

Historians working on this subject will appreciate a fifty-plus-page appendix of the postwar Dachau trials that involved lynch justice. Names of crew members and planes, missions, and locations are matched to the dates and outcomes of trials of those Germans held accountable. This makes for shocking reading. I was surprised to learn that dozens of Germans were convicted and executed for their actions.

Kevin Hall has shed new light on the extent of *Lynchjustiz* and the Third Reich's encouragement of murderous acts; he humanizes that story with new source material, including personal accounts and photographs. Although *Terror Flyers* will best serve historians working on its subject, graduate courses focused on human behavior in wartime would certainly benefit from reading it. I recommend it highly.

1. See, e.g., Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (NY: HarperCollins, 1992) or Daniel J. Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (NY: Vintage, 1997).