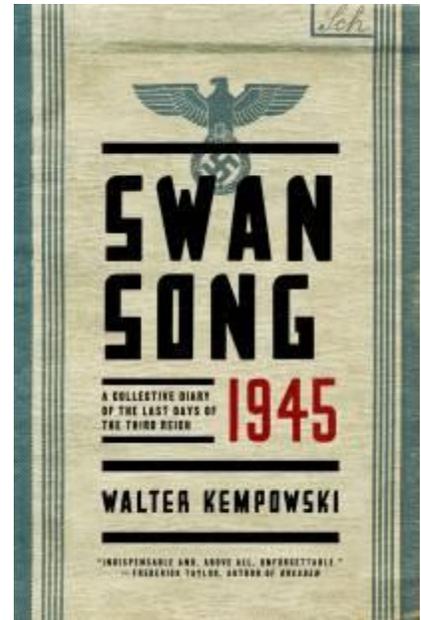


Swan Song 1945: A Collective Diary of the Last Days of the Third Reich

By Walter Kempowski
(W.W. Norton & Company, 2015)
479 pages

Many know my fascination with books concerning the Holocaust and Nazi Germany before and during World War II. I found this book, purely by accident, and it is a profound book about the ending of the war.

Swan Song 1945 is a collection of writings, letters, thoughts and reflections on specific days at the end of the war. It focuses on the events of Friday, April 20th, Wednesday, April 25th, Monday the 30th of April and the day Germany surrendered, May 8 and May 9, 1945.



It spans the thoughts of people across the political, social, religious, national and global spectrum. It is a series of writings about memories that reflect the experience and the thoughts of those last days. It contains writings from Hitler (hiding in the bunker and planning his suicide) to members of the German army and military branches. The book also records thoughts of prisoners of war (from both sides of the conflict) as well as individuals who suffered the concentration camps as people oppressed simply because they were Jews. It contains messages from American, British, Russian, French, Scandinavian and other political leaders during these critical days.

It is written in such a way that the reader is drawn into the narrative and often surprised by the thoughts expressed. It is eye-opening, sometimes shocking, emotionally moving and surprisingly human in its scope and storytelling. I was profoundly dumbfounded by the persistent delusion of Hitler in the bunker and the average German who professed no knowledge of what was taking place in their name.

It was a great read for those who love history and desire to see the impact of historical events in the lives and in the minds of those who experienced those days.

Michael Wieck was born in 1928 and was 17 in 1945. He was a German-born Jew from a well-known family of musicians and survived in Königsberg and immigrated to Berlin in 1948. He writes about the last day of the war in a very prescient way – one that was incredible in his insight. He provides both a critique of the reasons for the war and the fear of the recovery of Europe. He is quoted as saying:

Racial mania and claims to domination had provoked a backlash that could not have been more destructive. The upshot of the dream of a world-dominating Greater Germany was Europe in ruins with a vastly enlarged sphere of influence for the Soviet Union. (p. 337-338)

Kempowski's work is an important read for anyone who wants to gain insights from the people who lived through the end of horrific days. I encourage anyone to read it – but to do so with Kleenex close by and a willingness to remember.