



BERLIN

THE DOWNFALL 1945

ANTONY BEEVOR

THE RED ARMY had much to avenge when it finally reached the frontiers of the Reich in January 1945. Political instructors rammed home the message of Wehrmacht and SS brutality. The result was the most terrifying example of fire and sword ever known, with tanks crushing refugee columns under their tracks, mass rape, pillage and destruction. Hundreds of thousands of women and children froze to death or were massacred because Nazi Party chiefs, refusing to face defeat, had forbidden the evacuation of civilians. Over seven million fled westwards from the terror of the Red Army.

Within the mass, individuals faced an arbitrary fate. Some suffered appallingly, others were saved by extraordinary chance. Soviet soldiers could show spontaneous generosity to German women and children as well as cruelty. This moral chaos was the outcome of a titanic conflict between two tyrants heedless of the lives of their followers. The Nazis sent fourteen-year-old boys on bicycles on suicidal attacks against Soviet tanks, and as the Red Army encircled Berlin, SS squads roamed the city, shooting or hanging any man not at his post.

Hitler, half-crazed in his bunker, issued wild orders, determined to bring down the Reich capital in the monstrous vanity of a personal *Götterdämmerung*. Stalin, meanwhile, was prepared to risk any number of his men to seize Berlin before the Americans. New documents from a Russian archive show for the first time that the Soviet leader had a particularly powerful motive.

Antony Beevor, using often devastating new material from former Soviet files, as well as from German, American, British, French and Swedish archives, has reconstructed the experiences of those millions caught up in the nightmare of the Third Reich's final collapse. *Berlin – The Downfall 1945* is a terrible story of pride, stupidity, fanaticism, revenge and savagery, yet it is also one of astonishing endurance, self-sacrifice and survival against all odds.

£25.00



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Antony Beevor

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Contents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
MAPS	xi
GLOSSARY	xxix
PREFACE	xxxiii
1 <i>Berlin in the New Year</i>	I
2 <i>The 'House of Cards' on the Vistula</i>	11
3 <i>Fire and Sword and 'Noble Fury'</i>	24
4 <i>The Great Winter Offensive</i>	39
5 <i>The Charge to the Oder</i>	56
6 <i>East and West</i>	77
7 <i>Clearing the Rear Areas</i>	96
8 <i>Pomerania and the Oder Bridgeheads</i>	115
9 <i>Objective Berlin</i>	136
10 <i>The Kamarilla and the General Staff</i>	148
11 <i>Preparing the Coup de Grâce</i>	165
12 <i>Waiting for the Onslaught</i>	173
13 <i>Americans on the Elbe</i>	190
14 <i>Eve of Battle</i>	206
15 <i>Zhukov on the Reitwein Spur</i>	216
16 <i>Seelow and the Spree</i>	234

Contents

17	<i>The Führer's Last Birthday</i>	249
18	<i>The Flight of the Golden Pheasants</i>	261
19	<i>The Bombarded City</i>	280
20	<i>False Hopes</i>	291
21	<i>Fighting in the City</i>	310
22	<i>Fighting in the Forest</i>	328
23	<i>The Betrayal of the Will</i>	339
24	<i>Führerdämmerung</i>	354
25	<i>Reich Chancellery and Reichstag</i>	370
26	<i>The End of the Battle</i>	386
27	<i>Vae Victis!</i>	406
28	<i>The Man on the White Horse</i>	421
	REFERENCES	432
	SOURCE NOTES	435
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	466
	INDEX	476