

Rückzug: The German Retreat from France, 1944 by Joachim Ludewig,
edited by Major General David T. Zabecki.
University Press of Kentucky 2012.

Rückzug is part of the University of Kentucky's Foreign Military Studies series and is a work of impeccable scholarship on the collapse of Nazi rule in France following the Allied landings on the Normandy Beaches in June 1944.

Joachim Ludewig, a civil servant at the German Defence Ministry and an officer in the German Army Reserve, divides his study into three sections, the sub-sections of which then analyse specific dimensions of the theme. The three parts are: The Initial Situation Facing OB West in the Middle of August 1944: The Situation in Northern France and the Allied Landings along the Mediterranean Coast; From the Retreat of the German Army in the West to the Climax of the Crisis: Combat Operations from August 20 to September 4, 1944; Developments from the Climax of the Crisis until the Transition to Positional Warfare in the West: Combat Operations in September 1944.

In spite of the fact that Rückzug has nearly a hundred pages of notes and no less than twenty five maps this is by no means a dry academic text, indeed in view of the dramatic and crucial events that it describes it could never be so.

The surrender of France was, for Hitler, one of his most important strategic achievements, and the loss of France was a very severe blow; this no doubt accounts for the order he gave to destroy Paris as part of the French retreat, an order that Dietrich von Choltitz, the Wehrmacht Commander in Paris, chose to ignore.

Rückzug describes an essential phase of the Second World War and in the 69th anniversary year of the D Day Landings acts as a powerful reminder of a series of devastating events that marked the beginning of the collapse of Nazi rule in Western Europe. It is a book for scholars and lay readers alike.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh