

ON A KNIFE EDGE

Was the outcome of the First World War on a knife edge? In this major reassessment of German wartime politics and strategy, Holger Afflerbach argues that the outcome of the war was actually in the balance until relatively late in the war. Using new evidence from diaries, letters and memoirs, he fundamentally revises our understanding of German strategy from the decision to go to war and the failure of the western offensive to the radicalisation of Germany's war effort under Hindenburg and Ludendorff and the ultimate collapse of the Central Powers. He uncovers the struggles in wartime Germany between supporters of a compromise peace and hardliners who wanted to fight to the finish. He suggests that the German leadership was not nearly as committed to all-out conquest as previous accounts argue. Numerous German peace advances could have offered the opportunity to end the war before it dragged Europe into the abyss.

Holger Afflerbach is Professor of Modern European History at the University of Leeds. His previous publications include a biography of Erich von Falkenhayn, and a study of the Triple Alliance.

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ON A KNIFE EDGE

How Germany Lost the First World War

Holger Afflerbach

Translated by
Anne Buckley
and Caroline Summers



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Dedicated to my grandfather, Antonio Saviano (1900–1943), medical doctor, car buff, bon vivant. He was too young to volunteer for the First World War. To do so, he falsified his birthdate, supposedly to escape a seminary, and fought then until the end of the war in the Italian Army.

The English version of this book has a second dedication – to my friend, Professor Francis Roy Bridge, Professor Emeritus of International History at the University of Leeds, who helped me to adapt the German version of the book for the British reader.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in the endnotes are as follows:

Abbreviations for published sources are explained in the Bibliography. For example: RA V, is listed as RA (= Reichsarchiv), *Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918*, vol. V.

Archives:

ASSME: Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Rome

BA/MA, Freiburg: Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau

BA, Koblenz: Bundesarchiv Koblenz

BHStA, Geh HA: Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Geheimes Hausarchiv, Munich

BHStA, KA: Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Munich

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