

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.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-108-96586-6 — On a Knife Edge
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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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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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 a department of the University of Cambridge.

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Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108965866

DOI: 10.1017/9781108966313

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This is a translated publication of *Auf Messers Schneide: Wie das Deutsche Reich den Ersten Weltkrieg verlor*,
 written in German by Holger Afflerbach and published by C. H. Beck in 2018
 (ISBN 9783406719691)

First published in English by Cambridge University Press in 2022

First paperback edition published 2024

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Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow, Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Afflerbach, Holger, author. | Buckley, Anne, 1967– translator. | Summers, Caroline,
 translator.

Title: On a knife edge : how Germany lost the First World War / Holger Afflerbach, University of
 Leeds ; translated by Anne Buckley and Caroline Summers.

Other titles: Auf Messers Schneide. English | How Germany lost the First World War
 Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Series: Cambridge
 military histories | "This is a translated publication of *Auf Messers Schneide: Wie das Deutsche Reich*
den Ersten Weltkrieg verlor, written in German by Holger Afflerbach and published by C.H. Beck in
 2018 (ISBN 9783406719691)." | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021052135 (print) | LCCN 2021052136 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108832885
 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108965866 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108966313 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: World War, 1914–1918 – Germany. | Germany – History – 1918–1933.

Classification: LCC D531 .A6413 2022 (print) | LCC D531 (ebook) | DDC 940.3/43–dc23/eng/
 20211105

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021052135>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021052136>

ISBN 978-1-108-83288-5 Hardback
 ISBN 978-1-108-96586-6 Paperback

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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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