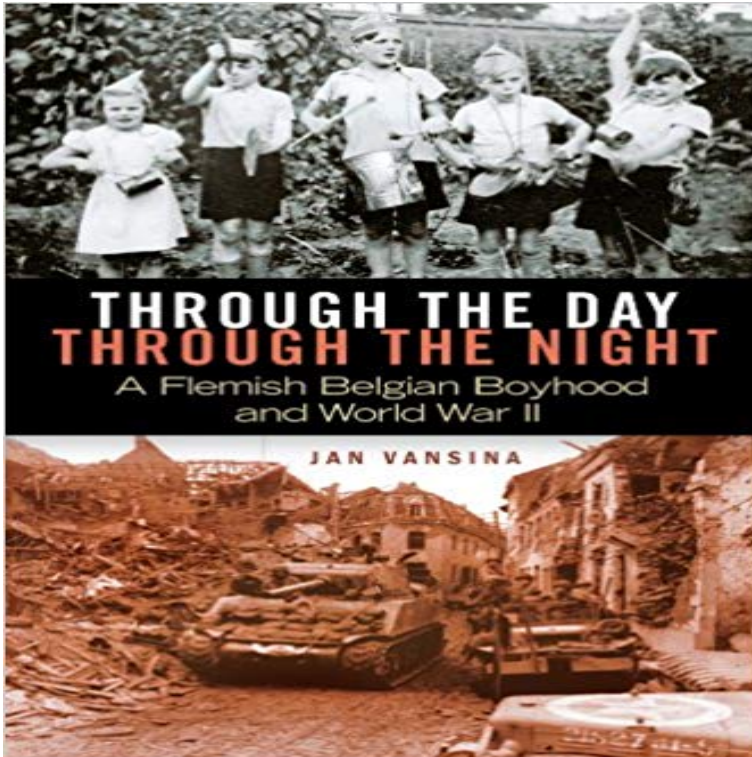


Through the Day, through the Night: A Flemish Belgian Boyhood and World War II



One of twelve children in a close-knit, affluent Catholic Belgian family, Jan Vansina began life in a seemingly sheltered environment. But that cocoon was soon pierced by the escalating tensions and violence that gripped Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. In this book Vansina recalls his boyhood and youth in Antwerp, Bruges, and the Flemish countryside as the country was rocked by waves of economic depression, fascism, competing nationalisms, and the occupation of first Axis and then Allied forces. Within the vast literature on World War II, a much smaller body of work treats the everyday experiences of civilians, particularly in smaller countries drawn into the conflict. Recalling the war in Belgium from a child's-eye perspective, Vansina describes pangs of hunger so great as to make him crave the bitter taste of cod-liver oil. He vividly remembers the shock of seeing severely wounded men on the grounds of a field hospital, the dangers of crossing fields and swimming in ponds strafed by planes, and his family's interactions with occupying and escaping soldiers from both sides. After the war he recalls emerging numb from the cinema where he first saw the footage of the Nazi death camps, and he describes a new phase of unrest marked by looting, vigilante justice, and the country's efforts at reunification. Vansina, a historian and anthropologist best known for his insights into oral tradition and social memory, draws on his own memories and those of his siblings to reconstruct daily life in Belgium during a tumultuous era. Best Special Interest Books, selected by the American Association of School Librarians Best Books for General Audiences, selected by the Public Library Reviewers

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