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David Stafford, *Endgame, 1945: The Missing Final Chapter of World War II*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007. Pp. xix. 581. ISBN 978-0-316-10980-2.

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In chess, the endgame attracts its own small legion of specialists. With fewer pieces left on the board and one's king sallying forth from behind its protective redoubt of pawns, the margin of error for each new move becomes increasingly small, even as the moves themselves become both more constrained and more predictable. Successfully checkmating an opponent's king or driving him into an untenable position leading to resignation or unconditional surrender is the ultimate goal.

As a metaphor for war, chess is evocative yet also misleading, a fact clearly illustrated by David Stafford in *Endgame, 1945*. Beginning his account in April 1945 and covering the next three months of the war and its aftermath in Europe, Stafford stresses that this war did not simply end with the toppling of Germany's "king," Adolf Hitler, or the capture of various major or minor pieces like Benito Mussolini. Nor in this "endgame" did events become any simpler or the moves more predictable, as confusion and near anarchy reigned.

Indeed, a theme that emerges in Stafford's account is that the Allies were far better prepared to win the war militarily than to deal with its chaotic aftermath, although here they might be excused because of the unprecedented magnitude of the problems they faced. Stafford, in short, provides a salutary reminder that VE Day in May 1945 hardly marked the end of European conflict—or for that matter the hatreds Nazism had created or given free rein.

Stafford forthrightly admits that his account is both impressionistic and selective. He divides it into four parts: (1) Friday, 20 April 1945, marked by Hitler's birthday in the Führer-bunker; (2) 20–30 April 1945, a period of bitter fighting leading up to Hitler's inglorious suicide; (3) Hitler's death to VE Day, a week marked by both posturing and fighting/suicide pacts by Nazi dead-enders as well as further tragedies; and (4) VE Day to Potsdam, when the enormity of the task of rebuilding shattered cities and lives became apparent even as Allied cooperation gave way to intense competition and harsh recrimination.

For students of World War II, Stafford tells mostly familiar stories, but he tells them well. His recounting of British and American reactions during the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Ohrdruf, Wöbbelin, and other concentration camps is especially harrowing. The horrifying portrait of National Socialist Germany is all the more disturbing because of Stafford's restraint. He largely allows his subjects to express their shock and outrage at the abominations they witnessed.

A British commando, Bryan Samain, is one of Stafford's witnesses. Three years earlier, in 1942, this "skillful young Army killer" had been a fresh-faced teen extra in the feel-good film, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. Now, as he watched thousands of displaced persons stagger past him, Samain witnessed a new, horrifying, reality: "Every time they met us they cheered us in a dozen different tongues, and when we looked at them closely we saw they were little

more than walking skeletons, with ribs protruding pitifully from the flesh, faces lined and haggard, and eyes that told of a hundred sufferings” (17).

With respect to the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, Stafford captured the almost unimaginable experiences of young medical students deployed from Britain to help care for the sick and dying: “As the students moved through the huts, women clutched at their sleeves in desperation, crying out ‘*Herr Doktor! Herr Doktor!*’ and telling them their pitiful stories: ‘My mother and father were burned in Auschwitz’; ‘My husband was flogged to death by the SS’; or, they asked them pleadingly, ‘Will I ever be beautiful again, *Herr Doctor?*’” (86).

A man with few illusions about the nature of the enemy he was facing was the New Zealand-born and Oxford-educated Geoffrey Cox, an intelligence officer fighting against the Nazis in Northern Italy in 1945. On the outskirts of Padua, he wrote to his wife that: “I find my contempt for the raw material of the German race grows as they keep docilely obeying the orders of a corrupt and beaten regime. Day after day I interrogate scores of young [Germans] whose minds have been shut to any fresh thought but Nazi obedience since Hitler took over. They are the most degenerate spectacle I have ever encountered” (168).

The events of April and early May 1945—Himmler’s betrayal of Hitler, Hitler’s suicide, and Göring’s vainglorious posturing—may have helped to break the spell of unquestioning obedience. But in other cases, unrepentant Nazis simply raced like rats to escape from a sinking ship, sometimes bartering jewels for peasant clothing in improvised attempts at disguise. Others put more elaborate exit strategies into action: at the Baltic seaside resort of Travemünde, a motorboat was intercepted as it tried to slip away. On board, the British “found a German major-general who admitted he was off to Scandinavia with his staff of officers, his mistress, a large stock of cigars and thirty bottles of Kummel liqueur” (286).

As the Allies worked to restore order after VE Day (and as Soviet troops continued to wreak a terrible vengeance on their erstwhile German conquerors), the search went on for Nazi loot, Nazi killers, and Nazi collaborators. Stafford concludes his account on a worrying note—the refusal of nearly all Germans, even non-Nazis, to admit any personal responsibility or culpability for the crimes of National Socialism. Indeed, a few prominent Germans, such as Cardinal Josef Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, were so blind as to declare that the Anglo-American occupation regime was “scarcely different from a totalitarian state”! With notable understatement, Stafford concludes that “This was an astonishing claim given all that had happened in Germany over the previous twelve years, and a dismaying indicator of how little had been learned from the Hitler years” (506–7).

Written with verve, Stafford’s unsparing account of the evils committed and death toll inflicted even by a checkmated Nazi Germany is a powerful reminder of the character of Hitler and his criminal regime—a character reflected most accurately by the murderous sheen of the SS Death Head insignia.