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Review of *Fire and Steel: The End of World War Two in the West* by Peter Caddick-Adams

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community and how public perceptions of the army changed because of the brutality in the last year of the war.

Violence in Defeat is a tremendously useful study because few others look into this aspect of war on German soil, highlighting German on German violence and making it stand apart from the more widely covered Soviet on German violence, or the widespread racist violence already present. One weakness is that it only focuses on East Prussia and doesn't include other parts of Germany effected by the same issues, however, this might well be necessary due to the sheer scope of the conflict.

Violence in Defeat is an impressively researched study and would be a great aid for military historians looking into conditions on the Eastern Front in the final year of the war, as well as looking into how an army traumatised by years of brutality and merciless war acted towards its own people once it was back on home soil. Historians studying the German Home Front, as well as *Volkssturm* actions on the Eastern Front, would benefit greatly from looking into Willems' study as these topics are covered in great detail.

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Peter Caddick-Adams, *Fire and Steel: The End of World War Two in the West*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. Bibliography, Index, xxxv + 464 pp, 6 maps. ISBN: 978-0190601867 (hardback). Price £30.40.

This is the third and final volume of the author's magisterial narrative history of the last year of the war in the West, and it offers a useful corrective to popular perceptions that from early 1945 the conflict 'was all over bar the shouting'. Large parts of the German armed forces were ready, indeed eager, to fight for their homeland as it was assailed from West and East by Allied forces. This volume concentrates on the West and the western allies struggle to bring the war to an end. The final hundred days of the war were momentous and challenging, and Caddick-Adams reminds us that the Rhine offered a formidable obstacle for the Allied armies seeking to get into the heart of Nazi Germany. For the tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians the outcome of the war, and their personal futures, hung in the balance until the last possible moment.

REVIEWS

Caddick-Adams brilliantly captures the growing unreality of the war as the sense of an imminent end to the war collided with the uncovering of forced labour and concentration camps, the diehard fanaticism of the SS, and the willingness of the regime to see Germany consumed in a *Götterdämmerung* of party, state and people.

In many ways, from the standpoint of academic history, this is a story that we are more than nodding terms with, but it is the strength of the author's writing that he brings it alive in a particularly visceral and clever way, so that we feel it and engage with it in a profound and insightful way. This is intelligent history that engages the reader emotionally and intellectually, including a rather charming sense of the author crafting the narrative, and whose expertise is evident on every page. Most military history takes few prisoners in throwing around military terms and unit details ('abbreviations' and 'military algebra' as Caddick-Adams labels them) but this volume is exemplary in going out of its way to educate and guide the reader before the narrative unfolds. His personal knowledge of the battlefield adds a further layer of authority to his analysis of the events of almost 80 years ago.

So how, beyond breaking the fourth wall and engaging the reader directly, does Caddick-Adams craft his narrative? Firstly, there is the depth of his research. My first 'wow' came with the list of sources – both primary and secondary. The last months of the war offer a large historical canvas to fill but the author has more than equipped himself with the materials to fill it in with marvellous levels of detail. At one point I was intrigued by a minor comment about the volume of papers being burnt at the I.G. Farben Haus in Frankfurt in 1945. Checking the footnote, I was pleased to find that Caddick-Adams had provided no less than three separate sources should I wish to follow it up. His vignettes of particular engagements are similarly backed by multiple references to a range of different sources which allow him to comment on the action from a variety of levels and perspectives. It is compelling – it is authoritative – it is clever. And significantly Caddick-Adams maintains this depth of detail as he charts the war from the perspective of a variety of hierarchical levels: from the average infantryman in the foxhole, the General in his command vehicle and the *Führer* in his bunker. Caddick-Adams carries through the potential complexities of shifting through these levels with a dexterity and sureness which most of us can only envy. It is a lengthy narrative, but he guides the reader gently and expertly, providing signposts and connections as the Allied armies push deeper into the heart of Germany.

Six maps and numerous photographs add to the utility and attractiveness of a book aimed at the general reader of the Second World War, which offers those of us in the trade some exemplary lessons in writing, structure and engagement of the reader. This is a big book, but great value for money. It is a worthy final tome in the end of war trilogy by a researcher and writer at the top of his game.

Serhii Plokyh, *Nuclear Folly: A New History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. London: Allen Lane, 2021. Notes, Bibliography, Index, 464pp. + 17 Plates. ISBN 978-0241454732 (hardcover). Price £25.

On 27 February this year, the Reuters news agency reported that President Vladimir Putin had put Russia's nuclear deterrent on high alert 'in the face of a barrage of Western reprisals for the invasion of Ukraine'. Whilst many commentators saw this as dangerous rhetoric rather than a statement of intent, for others it invoked memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. It is now sixty years since this dramatic nuclear stand-off between the great Cold War powers brought the world to the brink of a global catastrophe. President John F Kennedy's famous 'turn back the ships' ultimatum – issued to the Soviet Union's Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, as a last resort – was a moment of high-drama which still resonates with people today. The historiography of the Cuban Missile Crisis is voluminous and tends to coalesce around an analysis of Kennedy's thought processes and decision-making as he moved towards this final act of brinkmanship. This is partly because of the easy access to archival material and first-hand accounts in North America and, until recently, a deficit of source material from the former-Soviet Union. There is also a continued fascination with a young President whose potential was dashed by his assassination in December 1963. More recent publications such as Michael Dobbs' book *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev and Castro on the Brink of War* (Cornerstone, 2008) which drew on Soviet as well as American accounts have broadened the discussion. And, in this, his latest book, Cold War scholar Serhii Plokyh has used a rich source of Ukrainian sources to go even further – bringing fresh insights and an alternative view to the whole topic.

The book runs through the events leading up to and including the Cuban Missile Crisis in chronological order, examining the escalating tensions and the interplay between key decision makers and advisors. Whilst the unfolding drama on the island of Cuba takes centre stage, the crisis is appropriately contextualised in that the author explores other factors which influenced decision at the time. The placement of nuclear missiles in Turkey by the USA was a particular concern for the leadership of the Soviet Union who considered themselves to be at a disadvantage because of the perceived imbalance in intercontinental nuclear missile capability. Khrushchev was keen to