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Review of *Eight Days in May* by Volker Ullrich (trans. Jefferson Chase)

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respectively. Impressively, the two air forces were operating aircraft from Toungoo only four days after its capture.

Notable in the text is the ability of the Indian Army of 1945 to form ad hoc mobile columns of tanks and infantry that encircled and reduced Japanese positions. The building of all round defensive boxes at night was a tactic retained from jungle fighting, but it was combined with a new mobile flexibility, and mobile artillery, to inflict disproportionately severe casualties on the Japanese. That new flexibility says much of how Slim's army had been transformed from the defeated army of 1942, or the victorious but defensive army of Kohima and Imphal in 1944. The authors quote Slim, 'my Indian divisions after 1943 were amongst the best in the world. They would go anywhere, do anything, go on doing it, and do it on very little.' Undoubtedly there is some hyperbole but much truth also. By March 1945 Indian Officers were commanding battalions and were present at senior level in brigade and divisional staffs. Earlier British prejudices and doubts were being overcome.

As the authors say, 'World War II turned a cautious embrace of change into a torrent of adaptation. By 1945 the Indian Army was a modern force in its equipment, doctrine and tactics', and the authors had by the end of the book answered the tests set for them with this review.

Sadly this book will not become the best seller it and the authors deserve, but scholars of the war in Burma and the Indian Army will find much of value in this excellent work.

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Volker Ullrich (trans. Jefferson Chase), *Eight Days in May*. London: Penguin Books, 2021. 271 pp. 1 map, 24 black and white photographs. ISBN: 978-0241467268 (hardback). Price £25.00.

There are few Second World War topics that have attracted more public interest than the death of Adolf Hitler in the Berlin *Führerbunker* on 30 April 1945. Although this was an iconic moment, marking the end of a twelve-year reign of terror, the Second World War in Europe rumbled on for a further eight days - a period fraught with uncertainties. It was during these eight days that Germany's transition from a Nazi state began and the fate of countless millions of people began to be settled. In a

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way, this is a book that the author simply had to write. His seminal two-volume biography of Adolf Hitler finished with something of a cliff-hanger – the *Führer* was dead but the war had not yet ended. So, what did happen in the *Third Reich* after Hitler's death but before the *Wehrmacht* supreme commander, *Wilhelm Keitel*, signed the instrument of unconditional surrender on behalf of a defeated Germany on 9 May? And, more pertinently, do the events which occurred during this period have enduring historical significance? It is the latter question which the author seeks to address.

Aside from the increasingly futile attempts by Grand Admiral *Karl Dönitz* to maintain a semblance of Nazi government in the Baltic town of Flensburg, it seems the whole of Europe was in motion. Countless millions of displaced persons, slave labourers, soldiers and homeless families found themselves in a world devoid of certainty and fraught with new dangers. Many individuals who were complicit in war crimes and other acts of brutality shed their Nazi credentials with remarkable alacrity, later assimilating themselves into post-war society. Others, within days of Hitler's death, were already working hard to bring back a semblance of normality - starting to forge collaborations and build institutions fit for the future and organising relief for those in need.

The chapters run in date order with each one covering a 24-hour period. For the *Wehrmacht*, it was a question of facilitating the movement of combatants westwards so as to avoid the daunting prospect of becoming Soviet prisoners-of-war. The author carefully describes how tensions between the Allied leaders were managed and resolved as the fighting ceased on various fronts and those involved in the subsequent negotiations sought to apply the principle of unconditional and contemporaneous surrender. For the civilian population in Germany, news of the death of Hitler was mostly greeted with a degree of apathy. There were exceptions of course - like the mass suicides in the East German town of Demmin. Perhaps the most tragic part of the unfolding drama was the movement of concentration camp victims and slave labourers in the face of the approaching Red Army. These death marches seem to have been organised by local functionaries rather than through any centrally coordinated plan and the antipathy of the local population must have made the ordeal even harder to bear for those who were unfortunate enough to be amongst the victims.

The unfolding dramas in Berlin and Flensburg make for compelling reading but it is the descriptions of what was going on elsewhere that may have the most currency for readers of military history. The end of Nazi rule in Holland, Scandinavia, Northern Italy and the so-called *Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia* brought a variety of challenges, and in many instances, further tragedies. The capture of some of the Nazi leaders who oversaw the brutal occupation and exploitation of erstwhile independent countries are covered in detail. *Arthur Seyss-Inquart*, *Vidkun Quisling* and *Hans Frank*

faced justice for their crimes - others were able to escape retribution. The re-emergence of pre-war democratic politicians and a new generation of leaders is documented throughout the text. The situation in Germany is particularly interesting and for this reviewer it came as a surprise that in the early days of Eastern Germany as a separate entity, it was social democrats who were in the ascendancy. This was to change of course, but the idea that puppet governments were immediately installed by the victorious Soviets is perhaps a misnomer. True intentions became clear within a few months, but during the initial period of occupation pragmatism trumped dogma.

Whilst this period of history has been covered before (for example by Michael Jones *After Hitler: The Last Days of the Second World War in Europe - 2015*, and in the memoirs of Walter Lüdde-Neurath: *Unconditional Surrender - 1950*), this authoritative account is particularly useful in that it presents a holistic and objective view of these tumultuous eight days. The author is adept in presenting the 'big picture' whilst holding the reader's attention with carefully chosen personal stories from friend and foe alike. The text is accompanied by detailed notes which in themselves demonstrate the extent and the quality of sources used. In May 1945, grand plans for the division of Europe were crystallised and the destiny of millions of people was determined. Erich Kästner, the renowned German poet and author, described the period as *the gap between 'no longer' and 'not yet'* - making the point that the stakes were particularly high in this short period of acute military, political and social turmoil. Clearly the death of Adolf Hitler was not the end of the story. This book is a timely reminder that the emergence of modern Germany was rooted in the dying embers of the Third Reich. Recommended.

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