



War to Make Peace: Machen Frieden

F.J.P O'Connell

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Irish writer F.J.P. O'Connell has compiled an impressive amount of information in his ambitious *War to Make Peace: Machen Frieden*, and for that he deserves respect and praise. Here, in one volume, is almost all of the who, what, where, and how of the Second World War, but precious little of the why. Nearly every paragraph is a new subject, and every sentence presents at least one fact, quote, or detail from the war. The difficulty most readers will have with his book is processing that material. There is simply too much presented in too tight a space for even the most ardent aficionado to digest.

The relentless presentation of information rarely lets up, yet there is not a single footnote for any of it. Perhaps this is because doing so would have doubled the size of the book (a large portion of the book is already devoted to an extensive eighty-page index). Quite surprisingly the bibliography holds fewer than one hundred entries, all of them books. There are no citations for internet, newspaper, magazine articles, official studies, or private papers. This limited source list and the absence of footnotes makes it difficult to treat O'Connell's work as truly scholarly, yet at the same time no historian could claim that the man doesn't know his subject.

He does present many unusual and lesser-known facts of the war, such as German naval intelligence chief Admiral Canaris talking Hitler out of Operation Tannenbaum (his planned invasion of Switzerland), or Gestapo chief Heinrich Himmler attempting to ransom Hungarian Jews for 10,000 trucks. But their value for historians, students, or the average reader is questionable, as O'Connell rarely bothers to explain these events or even put them in context. There is no exposition or grand picture here—just a lot of little pieces. For someone willing to take their time going through the book, however, there is much of interest.

O'Connell can do more than recite litanies of information, as is evident in three rather good chapters. One examines Adolph Hitler, who the author calls the “un-person.” He presents a brief psychological and medical investigation into what made the Nazi dictator tick. Another excellent chapter examines how war criminals were or were not brought to justice. And there is a good chapter in which O'Connell speculates on how the war would have changed if Fascist Spain had entered the war on Hitler's side: the results “would have seen the British Empire wobble,” he writes. O'Connell, however, is savvy enough to also report that no matter what additional successes the Axis could have scored, due to the Allies' lead in atomic weapons research “evil would have lost.”

O'Connell wraps up his book with citations from Leo Tolstoy, Edmund Burke, and Barack Obama, each noting that there is evil in the world and for it to flourish all good men need do is not take action to stop it. That is perhaps the lesson the author wants to convey when he quotes Winston Churchill: “an appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.”

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (December 16, 2011)

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