



# Endkampf: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich

*Stephen Fritz*

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At the end of World War II, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, fearing that retreating Germans would consolidate large numbers of troops in an Alpine stronghold and from there conduct a protracted guerilla war, turned U.S. forces toward the heart of Franconia, ordering them to cut off and destroy German units before they could reach the Alps. Opposing this advance was a conglomeration of German forces headed by SS-Gruppenführer Max Simon, a committed National Socialist who advocated merciless resistance. Under the direction of officers schooled in harsh combat in Russia, the Germans succeeded in bringing the American advance to a grinding halt.

Caught in the middle were the people of Franconia. Historians have accorded little mention to this period of violence and terror, but it provides insight into the chaotic nature of life while the Nazi regime was crumbling. Neither German civilians nor foreign refugees acted simply as passive victims caught between two fronts. Throughout the region people pressured local authorities to end the senseless resistance and sought revenge for their tribulations in the "liberation" that followed.

Stephen G. Fritz examines the predicament and outlook of American GI's, German soldiers and officials, and the civilian population caught in the arduous fighting during the waning days of World War II. *Endkampf* is a gripping portrait of the collapse of a society and how it affected those involved, whether they were soldiers or civilians, victors or vanquished, perpetrators or victims.

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