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"The Paris Game: Charles de Gaulle, the Liberation of Paris, and the Gamble that Won France (Book Review)" by Ray Argyle

Emanuele Sica

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Ray Argyle, *The Paris Game: Charles de Gaulle, the Liberation of Paris, and the Gamble that Won France*. Toronto: Dundurn, 214. Pp. 488.

De Gaulle was certainly one of the most important, if not the most, important political figure in modern France and as such has enjoyed several biographies, among which stands Jean Lacouture's monumental opus *De Gaulle*, published in three volumes between 1984 and 1986.¹ Ray Argyle's book thus treads well-known grounds, but is an interesting and enjoyable read marketed for a public audience.

The Paris Game, a clear hint at the Great Game played by Russia and Britain during the nineteenth century, deftly moves between the biography of Charles De Gaulle, his military and political career, and the intricate political web in the Allied camp during the Second World War. Indeed, even though the book spans the whole life of General De Gaulle, *The Paris Game* chiefly focuses on the Second World War, with only a few chapters devoted to his political career in postwar years.

A key theme informing this work is arguably the fractious, and at times openly hostile, triangular relationship between English Prime Minister Winston Churchill, American President Franklin Roosevelt and De Gaulle, since June 1940 the leader of the France Libre, the political organization in exile fighting the Axis Powers. The caustic diatribes between the witty and boisterous Englishman and the opinionated French were legendary, well encapsulated in Churchill's furious remark: "He thinks he's Joan of Arc, but I can't get my bloody bishops to burn him."² The problematic relationship almost reached a point of no return when, on the eve of D-Day, De Gaulle refused to endorse the message Eisenhower would broadcast before the attack that failed to mention even the mere existence of the French government in exile. To make matters worse, the General was

¹ Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, (3 volumes): 1 — *Le Rebelle (1890-1944)*, 2 — *Le Politique (1944-1959)*, 3 — *Le Souverain (1959-1970)*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1984, 1985 et 1986. The English version was published in two volumes by W.W. Norton in 1991 and 1993.

² Cited by Richard Vinen, "Take a Frenchman, an Englishman and then...", *Times Higher Education*, 22 December 2006, accessed 22 August 2016, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/take-a-frenchman-an-englishman-and-then/207280>. article.

the last speaker after all the other representatives of the other Allied governments and right after Eisenhower's speech (pp. 208-210). De Gaulle's refusal threatened to tear apart the coalition but eventually the situation was defused when his inspirational speech beamed the dawn of the attack and gave a rally cry to French resisters and civilians to help the Allied invasion.³

The frantic period before D-Day highlights also the clear distrust of President Roosevelt concerning General De Gaulle. Argyle shows with admirable clarity that from the onset of the occupation of France, the Roosevelt administration frowned upon De Gaulle, deemed a conservative military with little political following. For this reason, until November 1942, the United States maintained a diplomatic relationship with Vichy, the pro-Nazi collaborationist regime in France. The American administration's distrust of the Free France is evident on the effort of sidelining De Gaulle even for Operation Torch, by seeking at first the services of the head of the French Navy, Admiral François Darlan, and later on the help of another former Vichy official, General Henri Giraud (pp. 171-173; pp. 187-188). Eventually, Roosevelt had to relent, as Darlan's untimely death and Giraud's lack of charisma projected De Gaulle as unrivalled leader of the French Resistance.

The Paris Game should not be solely read as a work on Allied diplomatic history. The book also delves into De Gaulle's private sphere, his strong familial bonds, especially with his beloved daughter Anne, who was born with Down syndrome, and his son Philippe, who participated as a junior officer in the Free French Naval Forces in the Battle of France (1944-1945). Argyle succeeds to humanize General De Gaulle, who had been often stereotyped as an extremely cold and distant political figure, also by showing his sincere appreciation for those who had risked their lives during the German occupation years for sheltering downed Allied pilots or helping the Maquis (p. 217). While the author is an admirer of De Gaulle's work, a feeling he declares straight from the introduction, his work is well-researched and avoids the pitfalls of a hagiographic account. Of particular

³ De Gaulle and Churchill's stormy relationship should not make us forget that the two men deeply respected each other, acknowledging their respective political roles as beacons of hope for the fight against the Axis forces. In November 1958, upon De Gaulle's insistence, Churchill was invested with the *Croix de la Libération*, one of the top honors awarded for men and women whose deeds were significant in the Liberation of France during the Second World War.

interest for Canadian readers is Argyle's effort in meshing into the story Canadian politics, as in the case of the dichotomy between the French Canadian support for Vichy and the more pro-Allied English Canadian stance (pp. 170-171). My only criticism of the book is the presence of several typos (some downright glaring such as the misspelling of "Churchill" p. 72) that could have been easily picked out by a more thorough copy editor. These shortcomings should not detract from the value of *The Paris Game*, a welcome addition on one of the architects of the Allied victory in the Second World War.

EMANUELE SICA, *ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE OF CANADA*