

REVIEWS

Siegfried: The Nazis' Last Stand by Charles Whiting, Cooper Square Press, New York, 2001, 312 pages, \$12.95

In the wake of a new surge of interest in World War II, brought about by recent popular war movies, military historian Charles Whiting has wisely republished an unabridged paperback edition of this book, originally published in 1982.

The Siegfried Line, or West Wall, as the Germans called it, enabled the Wehrmacht to prolong the war for six months and even to mount the Ardennes offensive from behind its cover. Whiting's account of the Allied advance into Nazi Germany focuses on the months from September 1944, when the Allies first attacked the Siegfried Line, to the Allied crossing of the Rhine in March 1945. During those seven months, the Third Reich's last line of defense halted the Allied advance and dragged the fighting out in the worst winter in European memory.

The author's introduction offers a thumbnail historical sketch of the origin and building of the Siegfried Line. A formidable barrier, it stretched the whole length of Germany's western frontier with France, Luxembourg, and Belgium, four hundred miles of concrete fortifications, to include rows of "dragon's teeth" antitank barriers, gun emplacements, and over a thousand bunkers. The West Wall was completed in 1940 and would lie dormant until 1944, when the Allies would attack and breach the line at a cost in American lives greater than the losses in Korea and Vietnam combined.

Whiting's narrative evokes the last ounce of drama from bitter, bloody battles through the "green hell" of the Huertgen Forest, the German counterattack in December that turned into the devastating Battle of the Bulge, and the battle of the Rhineland that followed as the Allies pressed into Germany. Whiting skillfully details the actions of Generals Eisenhower, Patton, Montgomery, Bradley, and Collins, and Field Marshals Model and Von Runstedt. However, the book is at its best when the author draws from the accounts of the small units and individual soldiers who fought and suffered through untold hardships in the kind of warfare which is no less difficult and essential, regardless of how seldom it reaches the spectacular.

The problems with the books are trifling, but noticeable. The editor missed some minor updates, like the sentence that places the building of the West Wall "40 or more years ago," when it is now more than 60 years. The epilogue notes that Patton crossed the Rhine "a little above Saarbrücken at Oppenheim," when in reality, the cities are 150 kilometers apart. Finally, one wonders why the author mentions or quotes Ernest Hemingway (at the time a correspondent for *Colliers Magazine*) no less than 36 times. None of the comments seemed to be particularly relevant to the narrative.

Apart from these minor errors, the text is as relevant today, perhaps more so, as it was in 1982. The book is well worth reading and will provide the uninitiated reader some insight about what real war is like.

DENVER FUGATE
Radcliff, Ky.

Half-Track – A History of American Semi-Track Vehicles by R. P. Hunnicutt, Presidio Press, Novato, Calif., 240 pages, \$80 hardback.

Richard Hunnicutt will be well known for his highly respected in-depth studies of American armored vehicles, and in this, his ninth work, he covers the half-track vehicles developed and manufactured in the USA from early experiments during World War I to the end of World War II. These early vehicles were basically trucks with the rear wheels replaced by a track unit. They were evaluated and bought in small numbers for artillery towing, and they paved the way for the best known of the genre, the armored types, developed from a wheeled scout carrier and produced in large numbers for U.S. and Allied forces.

While generally similar in overall appearance, they came in several varieties. The baseline models were the half-track cars used as scout and gun towing vehicles as well as personnel carriers. Within these overall parameters, there were two main series, one basically bolted together and used primarily by American forces, and their welded counterparts, which were mostly supplied under Lend-Lease. Distinctions were blurred, and there was a move to producing a universal design that could be modified as required so as to simplify and speed up production, though the move away from half-tracks to fully tracked vehicles meant that these types never entered service. Even amphibian versions were contemplated.

The ready availability of a reliable and robust chassis led to armed versions mounting antitank guns as tank destroyers, as extemporized self-propelled guns with heavier artillery pieces, and as anti-aircraft mountings with machine guns and automatic cannons in various combinations. All these types are described in detail; while the text may be fairly brief, the illustrations show all the many versions in great detail with hundreds of original black and white photos backed up with scale plans of each major version. As is the style of these studies, full specifications of each are also included, along with performance figures for the various weapons fitted and a small section of color photographs.

As this is intended as a technical study of the vehicles themselves, some details of their combat history is included, covering American use in WWII and Korea. This is understandable, but given their widespread

use elsewhere and many variations existing abroad — for example, the Israeli army used them for many different roles and may still have some in their inventory — it does limit what is otherwise a very comprehensive study and is not as detailed as that in earlier studies.

This is a minor consideration given all the good material that is included, and this will be the definitive reference book on the subject even though others exist. Mr. Hunnicutt sets the standard for such works, and this one will have its place alongside his previous volumes on any serious bookshelf. Such works appear expensive, but they contain such a mass of information and detail that they are very good value for money.

PETER BROWN
Dorset, England

The Battle of France, 1940 by Philip Warner, Cassell & Co., London, 2001, 249 pages, \$9.95.

Philip Warner is the author of 48 books, mainly on military history. He served in the British Army throughout World War II, primarily in the Far East. He has also served as a senior lecturer and head of communication studies at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

This is a republication of a book first available in 1990. It provides an overview of the Battle of France primarily from the tactical perspective, using survivor accounts and official histories to provide a good overview of the German conquest. The book is based primarily from the Allied perspective, but does delve into the German side. Warner's style, and the use of first-hand accounts, does much to describe the sense of confusion by the Allied high command and the despair of the French generals.

The book describes the French defeat in the usual terms: poor leadership by the high command, lack of battlefield understanding, poor morale and bad coordination between allies. However, Warner also describes the confusion on the part of the German high command. His description of the battle demonstrates how the Allies could have defeated the German invasion if they had better, more flexible leadership.

The inclusion of photos and maps does much to enhance his description of the campaign, especially for the battles at Arras and Dunkirk. Perhaps the best assistance provided in the book, however, is the order of battle included at the end. Along with the references, this provides a good source for anyone wishing to learn more about the battle.

Although I disagree with some of the author's conclusions, I would recommend this book to someone searching for a good introduction to the Battle of France. I would not, however, recommend using this book as a

sole source of information. That being said, it is a very good description of the capabilities of a mobile force, led by flexible commanders, against a mostly static defense.

SHAWN A. MCMANAMY
CPT, Armor
HQ, USAREUR

Allies, Pearl Harbor to D-Day by John S.D. Eisenhower, De Capo Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1982, 500 pages, \$20.00.

The author of *The Bitter Woods: The Battle of the Bulge*, John S.D. Eisenhower, follows up a great book on one of the most famous battles of World War II with another exceptional piece of work that focuses on the grand alliance that formed to embark on the greatest invasion the world has ever known. This alliance ultimately strangled Nazi Germany's grip on Europe and brought an end to the second world war.

This book cleverly weaves together the personalities and emotions of the many key players in forming and maintaining the alliance that would defeat the Axis. Eisenhower masterfully brings factual and well-researched information and dialogue into a literary story line of events that will sweep away the reader and make it almost impossible to put down. Some of our great historical figures, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, General George Marshall, and the author's father, General Dwight Eisenhower, come to life along with a large cast of other important, famous, or obscure individuals to provide first-hand insight to the drama that unified the powers of the world to stand against Hitler's tyranny.

Many scholars and students of the war focus on particular battles, strategies, or events of World War II and, like myself, have always taken for granted the great orchestration of voices and materiel that had to come together to forge this great Anglo-American military alliance. In this book, the author reminds and educates everyone of the enormous chain of events that had to occur and be put into place before the great plans could be executed in successful battle. Whether it was one of the many and often heated conferences between the heads of state, a convoy crossing the Atlantic, a secret landing party on the African coast for an all night meeting near Algiers, or the agonizing meetings over when to invade Normandy — the reader is constantly reminded of the fragile opportunities and fortunes that characterize the duties of statesmen and professional soldiers alike in alliance and war.

Winston Churchill once said, "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them." Eisenhower builds upon this statement to show how the final Allied strategy of encircling Europe and then invading the continent was a delicate compromise between the American preference for a direct blow against Hitler's Europe and the more cautious, "soft-underbelly" ap-

proach against an isolated and worn down Wehrmacht. Well-written and appropriately detailed with notes, maps, and illustrations to tell the tale of such a compromise, *Allies* is a tremendously satisfying book that is fitting for the library of any professional soldier or citizen who desires to know the story behind the story of allied success in World War II.

JIM DUNIVAN
CPT, Armor
Fort Knox, Ky.

The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Land Warfare: An Illustrated World View by Byron Farwell, W.W. Norton, New York, 2001. 900 pages, \$75.00.

Warning! The dust jacket and title page of this 900-page tome should carry a notice advising the prospective reader that once this book is opened, hours may fly by before the reader is able to extricate himself from the grip of its mesmerizing pages.

The late Byron Farwell wrote numerous informative, interesting, and entertaining books on nineteenth century military history topics, including *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*, *Mr. Kipling's Army*, *Eminent Victorian Soldiers*, and *The Gurkhas*. As a result of his decades of research and writing, Farwell identified five major developments of the nineteenth century that shaped the armies and the wars they fought in. The first is the dramatic increase in world population that permitted larger armies. Technological advances, especially during the last quarter of the century, resulted in more accurate and more destructive weapons. Third, the increased lethality of weapons caused the advantage in tactical operations to shift from the attacker to the defender. Next, military education and professionalism increased as the century progressed, and last, a rise in living, health, economic, and education standards resulted in higher quality enlisted soldiers. These five factors, according to Farwell, distinguished the nineteenth century as a watershed in the evolution of warfare.

These five factors are the themes behind this comprehensive, worthwhile, and fascinating one-volume encyclopedia illuminating all aspects of warfare of the significant nineteenth century. Alphabetically-arranged entries cover battles, campaigns, and wars; military terms, concepts, and tactics; and diseases, equipment, weapons, and generalship — from "Abatis" to "Zundnadelgewehr" — and just about everything, from the prominent to the obscure, and from the major to the minor, in between. This volume is also global in coverage, including conflicts and related issues from around the world. Entries vary in length from a few sentences to more than a page. Close to 1,000 maps and (usually contemporary) illustrations and photographs superbly augment the entries and text as a whole.

The Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Land Warfare is an indispensable reference work for the military scholar and the enthusiastic layman. It also permits the military professional to gain a much greater understanding of the development of the military art and to learn from the experiences of his forebears. There are nuggets of knowledge on every page, and one can literally become lost inside this book. This practical and interesting volume, appropriately the culmination of the highly successful history writing career of Byron Farwell, is highly recommended and is truly worthy of a large audience.

HAROLD E. RAUGH, JR.
LTC, USA (Ret.)

No Picnic by Julian Thompson, Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2001 (first published in 1985), 248 pages (contains maps, a glossary of British military terms and descriptions of the major equipment used in the campaign, authors preface and notes), \$9.95.

No Picnic, written by Brigadier Julian Thompson, the Commander of 3 Commando Brigade at the time of the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, gives a very personal account of his brigade, his concerns, and his part in a war fought by British forces some 8,000 miles away from their home base. This is not the book for those looking for strategic insight and for political questions to be answered. It is basically a soldier's tale. The frustrations felt by Brigadier Thompson have been felt, in one form or another, by commanders at all levels — the feeling that one's higher commanders do not have a feel for what is really going on, that the logistical plan for the operation is a conspiracy against the success of the mission, that the upper echelons of the chain of command is unclear and at times inappropriate. One could argue that the bigger picture is left unsatisfactorily examined. However, *No Picnic* does not pretend to give answers to the external concerns of the brigade commander, his staff or soldiers, although it does highlight some of the problems experienced. It is the story of a brigade's actions during a campaign and the parts played in it by the commander, officers, and soldiers of that brigade.

For anyone interested in the military academics, at the tactical level, of the mounting of an operation away from the home base, Julian Thompson highlights, by example, some of the fundamental truths of the profession of soldiering. The first chapter provides a good description of what constituted 3 Commando Brigade at the time, some of its personalities, and how it was alerted to the forthcoming operation. During the not unsurprising rush to recall personnel from leave, the sorting of rumor from fact, and the clarification of orders, Thompson places great emphasis on the well established, sound staff and planning procedures that we know today as the Military Decision-making Process and its constituent parts — the thor-

ough process involved in the evolution of an order, its issuing and ultimately its execution; the need for branch plans and flexibility; and the imperative of soldiers at all levels understanding the commander's intent. This last point is demonstrated by numerous descriptions of superlative actions and bravery performed by soldiers who understood the intent of the current plan: "All Commanding Officers had models made of the terrain, using whatever lay to hand — lumps of peat, pieces of canvas, rifle slings, and twigs — to assist in putting across their plans." Every element of the operation was rehearsed and rehearsed again. Detail, the commander's guidance and his involvement at all stages of the planning process were crucial to success. His descriptions illustrate how the commander was intimately involved in the building of the appropriate task organization of the brigade, placing the correct soldier with the correct skills and expertise in the right place at the right time. He describes how the staff pored over every scrap of intelligence, both about the enemy and the terrain (Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield). If there is any doubt in the mind of any military professional that sound and detailed planning — whether it is called the Military Decision-making Process or something else — can be cut short in the production of a base order, this book dispels that view. This precise planning does not preclude the need for quick assimilation of the facts, an assessment of the situation, and swift action during moments of contact or when faced with the unexpected. This point is illustrated many times in the book, with that action often being taken by the junior NCO or junior officer.

As with any modern operation, a single service does not act alone or in isolation. The three armed services of the British forces, the Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force, all played vital roles in this 'expeditionary' operation. The close interaction, coordination, and necessary understanding between all three services are superbly illustrated throughout, as is the combined arms battle. At the most basic level, he describes the importance of artillery, engineers, and helicopter support, and the ability of soldiers at every echelon to understand their workings. The fighting, he notes, "was conducted often at close quarters with grenade, rifle and bayonet and the 66mm LAW, with support from guns, naval gunfire, mortars, and machine guns."

Some may think that this is an academic study of the decision-making process, but nothing could be further from the truth. As stated earlier, this is a soldier's tale. From the outset of the book, it is felt that we are hearing from a commander who knows his soldiers well, understands their concerns, is fully aware of their capabilities and limitations, but accepts the realities of war in that ultimately soldiers are called on to fight and, if necessary, die. The battle for Mount Longdon, a night attack, is described as "a battle in which junior officers, NCOs, and private soldiers fought with courage, tenacity, and aggression." The vivid description of this battle demonstrates that decision-making

must be thrust down to the lowest level — that is, the junior NCO — and not kept solely as the preserve of more senior officers.

Descriptions of individual acts of courage, quite rightly, play a large part in the book: "Marine Curtiss trod on a mine which blew off most of his foot. Corporal Cuthell picked up Curtiss, a 15-stone rugby player, and carried him on his back out of the minefield." And the description of the actions of Sergeant McKay during the fight for Mount Longdon: "McKay continued to charge the enemy position alone. On reaching it, he dispatched the enemy with grenades... McKay was killed.... For this action he was awarded the Victoria cross, posthumously." Almost every page has tales of courage and valor and makes us hope that we would conduct ourselves in the same way given similar circumstances.

The role of the two armored reconnaissance troops, or platoons, of Blues and Royals (RHG/D), equipped with the (CVRT) Scorpion and Scimitar light tanks, cannot be ignored. They had to adapt their gunnery techniques to cope with a landing from the sea by practicing firing over the ramps of their landing craft, "the heaving vehicle decks presenting a very different proposition from the firing points at the tank gunnery ranges." There are many such references to the resourcefulness and spirit demonstrated throughout the campaign by the armor crews.

As well as being a very factual account of 3 Commando Brigade's part in the Falklands war, this book brings out lessons that we ignore at our peril. Thorough planning and staff work are what soldiers deserve and need in order to succeed. However, any campaign will fail without the professionalism and inventiveness of the soldier, instilled through discipline, thorough training, good leadership, and esprit de corps.

MAJ J.R. CHARLESWORTH
British Exchange Officer
Fort Knox, Ky.

The West Wall Series, Volume 3: Bloody Aachen by Charles Whiting, Combined Publishing, 2000; 155 pages, \$27.95.

The city of Aachen has a long history that dates back to the burial of Charlemagne in 814 and has seen the crowning of 28 Holy Roman Emperors. In the autumn of 1944, the 1st Infantry Division, "The Big Red One," fought against a fanatical German task force for two long months to gain the first foothold in Nazi Germany. The defense slowed the American advance and gave the Wehrmacht valuable time to prepare for their counterattack in the Ardennes. The importance of this battle will not be truly appreciated until its conclusion.

The battle was not a doctrinal, two-sided engagement but a 360-degree urban fight. Success was measured in meters and city blocks. Whiting breathes life into this multi-dimensional battle by weaving historical facts

from secondary sources and anecdotes from American and German forces and a sampling of the 20,000 anti-Nazi civilians that chose to defy Hitler and remain in the city (all primary sources). Several readable maps are used throughout the book showing the progress of the battle. This element is crucial for illustrating such a fluid and often confusing engagement. The author provides a limited bibliography and cites these references as they appear in the book. The majority of the information was derived from personal testimony.

The author, Charles Whiting, is Britain's most renowned military writer, with over 250 books to his credit. Having served in WWII in an armored reconnaissance regiment that was attached to the British and American forces, he provides unique insights that most historians fail to capture. *Bloody Aachen* is an excellent book and would make a fine addition to any cavalry, armor, or infantry soldier's professional library.

BRYANT LOVE
CPT, Infantry
Fort Hood, Texas

Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe Series

Several years ago, a friend suggested I watch a show on PBS. "PBS, what's he thinking," I wondered! However, that night, I met Richard Sharpe of the British Army, and I have been eternally grateful ever since. PBS aired an installment of Bernard Cornwell's Sharpe Series. Hooked, I would read every Sharpe book Cornwell issued and purchase the video collections. I rank the Cornwell's Sharpe collection with Anton Meyer's "Once An Eagle." Richard Sharpe is a soldier's soldier in the vein of Meyer's legendary protagonist Sam Damon.

Cornwell's protagonist, Richard Sharpe, begins life in a harsh manner, lacking a father and with a mother reduced to prostitution to survive. It's not long before he is orphaned and enlists in the army. Sharpe's well-chronicled career in the British Army begins in India, moves to Europe, and includes the battle of Waterloo.

What makes Sharpe worthy of a comparison to the legendary Sam Damon and such a compelling read or viewing experience? Sharpe rises from the ranks earning a battlefield commission in dramatic form. A consummate warrior, Sharpe, like Damon, is a natural leader who leads by example; Damon and Sharpe's soldiers are devoted to them.

Cornwell, a fan of C.S. Forester's Hornblower stories since childhood, sought a land alternative to the sea tales of Forester and Patrick O'Brian. After discovering the tales of Wellington's army in the Napoleonic wars, Cornwell gave birth to Richard Sharpe, a warrior without a title who works his way up from the street. Cornwell notes on his web site that he, "read all of Hornblower's books and wanted to read more, there were no more, and so I began reading the history

books and so discovered the tales of Wellington's army in the Peninsula."

Cornwell's historical fiction and depiction of Sharpe function as excellent sources of small unit leadership at its finest. Sharpe molds a lethal, loyal fighting team. Cornwell is superb in his descriptions of bloody battle scenes and his compelling fiction is well researched. Sharpe a consummate warrior and soldiers' soldier is also blessed with a certain appeal to the ladies, a fact he employs to his advantage. Strangely, this appeal to the ladies extends beyond the pages of the text as my wife quickly became addicted to the video versions chronicling Sharpe's adventures.

There are 17 volumes in the best-selling Richard Sharpe Napoleonic War series, the latest titled, *Trafalgar*. I recommend Sharpe and suggest joining him early in his adventures, either in Spain or India, give *Sharpe's Rifles* or *Sharpe's Tiger* a ride.

MAJ DAVE DAIGLE
ARMOR Staff

Briefly Noted

Although the nation is currently involved in a very different kind of war, interest still continues about the victory in the Gulf War over Iraq's occupation force in Kuwait. A useful building block for detailed study of this conflict is Thomas Dinackus's highly focused *Order of Battle: Allied Ground Forces of Operation Desert Storm*, which is now available in paperback, published by Hellgate Press. Dinackus, a retired cavalryman now serving as a trial attorney for the federal government, covers all U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and allied combat arms units down to their smallest entities, and non-combat units to the brigade/group level. But beyond that, this inch-thick research goldmine includes many, many additional charts and appendices, down to full-color reproductions of unit shoulder patches. \$17.95.

Another reprint worth having is *The American Arsenal*, a large-format reference book that was originally published during WWII as the official standard Ordnance catalog of U.S. equipment used in the war. The descriptions cover the obvious — like tanks, small arms, armored cars, and artillery pieces — along with artillery fuzes, mines, and shells. Each one- or two-page description accompanies photographs reproduced in that distinctive, highly air-brushed style popular in technical publications of this period. Former British Army master gunner Ian Hogg's introduction leads it off, followed by pages of facts, figures, weights, speeds, you name it. This would seem to be an invaluable aid to anyone studying the war who may not be familiar with the equipment, and even to modelers who want every detail to be correct. This \$30 paperback is published in the U.S. by Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, Pa.