

REVIEWS

SGT York: His Life, Legend and Legacy by John Perry, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997. 349 pages. \$16.99, hardcover.

Often our most enduring military heroes are the most unlikely men. Sergeant Alvin C. York, an uneducated Tennessee mountain boy, became America's most famous and most popular war hero of World War I. He was also a conscientious objector. This latest book by Tennessee author John Perry explores in painstaking detail every aspect of York's life before, during, and after The Great War.

Perry has written numerous books on sports, politics, and religion. Here he takes on the saga of Alvin York, immortalized for many Americans by Gary Cooper, the star of the 1941 hit movie, "Sergeant York." Perry, however, is less interested in York's wartime exploits than he is in York the man, before and after the war.

In just over three hours of combat during the Battle of Argonne Forest in October 1918, Sergeant York earned the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross, and he captured the hearts of patriotic Americans for decades after.

As an NCO, York was quiet, soft-spoken, and a crack shot. Friction and bad luck put York and his platoon behind German lines on a flanking maneuver where enemy machine guns chopped up the Yanks. With the survivors pinned down, York returned fire with his rifle and pistol, killing over two dozen German soldiers. Six of the enemy fell to pistol shots as they charged York with fixed bayonets. He also captured 132 Germans, including three officers and a battalion commander.

But, as Perry points out, York's greatest enemies were not the Germans. Before the war, York was a wild, hard-drinking, fighting mountain boy with little regard for the future. His sudden devotion to his church changed all that. The church prohibited war and killing, so York faced a real dilemma when drafted in 1917. He actually sought to avoid service by his genuine claim as a conscientious objector, but finally reconciled that this war was justified because its goal was peace.

After the war, honors, praise, and money were heaped on the war hero, providing a great opportunity for this kind of simple man. He devoted his life to a dream — to build a school in the Tennessee mountains, so poor, rural children could get the education he was denied as a youngster.

Sadly, his fame after the war brought out legions of unexpected enemies. As money poured in for his project, the naive, trusting York found himself surrounded by sharks, shyster businessmen, self-serving politicians, and greedy friends and strangers. Despite his grand intentions and untiring determination, York made many mistakes, finally losing the school and nearly losing his farm to creditors and the IRS. Even his wartime buddies grew jealous of him and began to circulate rumors, trying to discredit his heroism and smear his reputation.

Through it all, York retained the quiet dignity of a hero and the American public never lost faith in "the greatest civilian soldier of the war." Perry devotes only 15 pages to York's fight against the Germans in 1918; the rest of the book tells of his moral and financial battles before and after he won the Medal of Honor. York was a great military hero for his battlefield courage, but he was also an exemplary civilian hero for his generosity and unselfish efforts to bring education to children in desperate need. Perry's skillful work here proves that "true stories, well-written, are the best stories of all."

COL WILLIAM D. BUSHNELL
USMC, Retired
Sebascodegan Island, Maine

Inside the Great Tanks by Hans Halberstadt, Windrow & Greene Ltd., 5 Gerrard Street, London W1V 7LJ, England. 128 pages, hardback. Price £25.00, U.K.; \$39.95, U.S. (From publisher direct, including postage, credit cards accepted) ISBN 1 85915 014 4.

Few people outside the armor community have the opportunity to examine armored vehicles in detail. There are some, however, who have, and a select few even own their own collections of historic tanks. One such person is Jacques Littlefield, and he has allowed some of his vehicles to be photographed for the rest of us.

This book is very much a celebration of tanks and tankers. Some idea of what it is like to be a modern crewman on an M1 Abrams and an account of tank layout and design, illustrated by close-ups of suspension systems and engines, forms an introduction to the main business. In that, a dozen vehicles from World War II up to almost the current date are depicted, outside and in. The presentation is rounded out with two modern tanks not (yet!) in the Littlefield collection. Many of the subjects will be familiar to *ARMOR* readers, from WWII-era M4A1 Sherman and M5A1 Stuart tanks, M3A1 scout car and the M2A1 and M16 half-tracks, post-war M37 Howitzer Motor Carriage, late 1960s M551 Sheridan, and the two still-serving 'guests,' the M60A3 Patton and the M1 Abrams. Balancing these are the wartime British Matilda, Czech/German Hetzer tank destroyer, and Russia's T-34-85, plus the latter's more recent T-55 and T-72.

The main features are explained, with road tests showing how each performs. The book also includes veterans' accounts of their use in combat. The main coverage is photographic, with superb color photos throughout, showing each tank outside and in, all shown in a state which will gladden the heart of any top sergeant. Take care to read the captions and the text; there is much to be learned there, and the balance of words and images is well done. For an outsider, this is a good introduction to the enclosed world of the tanker. For the veteran, there's a chance for nostalgia, and for

the serving crewman a depiction of their world contrasted with that of an earlier generation. Presentation is second to none, and while some subjects are not strictly tanks, they are all classic armor. Well worth seeking out.

PETER BROWN
Dorset, England

Kursk: Hitler's Gamble, 1943 by Walter S. Dunn, Praeger Publishers, Westport, Conn., 1997. 216 pages, \$57.95.

While many of us are well-read in the military history of World War II, few of us know much about the war fought on the Eastern Front between the Germans and the Soviet Red Army. What we did know was derived from Western, mostly German, sources. The fall of the Soviet Union lifted the veil of secrecy on Soviet archives, and we can expect in the future a more balanced, more informed treatment of this part of the war's history.

Walter S. Dunn's *Kursk: Hitler's Gamble, 1943* is a new contribution to our understanding of the vicious war fought between the Wehrmacht and Red Army. Dunn specifically chronicles the Kursk campaign in the summer of 1943, which was the last major offensive undertaken by the Germans on the Russian Front. This campaign is of special interest to Armor soldiers because of the central role played by armor on both sides. Although frequently referred to as a "battle," Dunn points out that Kursk was really several distinct battles fought over a huge area, involving several armies on both sides, over several days. An operational history of the campaign, Dunn's book is the first to make extensive use of Russian archival material.

Operation Citadel, the German operations plan, was designed to simultaneously attack both shoulders of the large Soviet salient centered on Kursk. The Germans hoped to pinch off and destroy a large part of the Red Army, shorten their lines and regain the initiative after their debacle at Stalingrad. Dunn points out that this plan was in danger from the beginning for a number of reasons, not least of which was superior Soviet intelligence of German intentions. While other Western historians have argued that the Germans failed in part because of Hitler's refusal to release reserves (this supposedly related to the Allied attack in Sicily), Dunn argues that the Germans failed principally for other reasons. Hitler interfered, but to postpone the operation, to allow more time for new German tanks and replacements to reach the field, and to allow the transfer of several divisions from France. While this greatly strengthened the Wehrmacht, the Red Army overmatched these efforts with its own massive reinforcement and rebuilding efforts. Dunn gives appropriate credit to the Lend-lease program, in helping the Soviet build-up, but the lion's share belongs to Soviet industry and organization. The end result of the delay was a German Army actually weaker relative to the Soviets.

Particular strengths of Dunn's work are his discussion of the strategic situation following Stalingrad and leading up to Kursk, and his detailed order of battle for both sides. Dunn also explains the Soviet system of defense, which played such a crucial role in slowing the Germans' initial assault. Despite their early successes, the Germans never succeeded in penetrating the Soviets' series of defensive lines quickly enough to cut off the Red Army units in the Kursk salient. These units fell back in good order to the next defensive line and had the advantage of interior lines of communication that permitted rapid reinforcement. The German reinforcement of their successes never kept pace.

While Dunn's account of these battles is commendable from an operational perspective, the human element is noticeably lacking. Readers will not find much human drama or pathos of war in these pages. As a result, we are given the facts, and many new bits of information at that, but not much insight into or appreciation for what the participants were thinking or feeling at the time.

Dunn's work suffers from two other serious flaws: the lack of photos and the lack of maps. This may be related to the cost of the book, as either or both of these would have significantly added to an already high cost. While we are all supposed to be too sophisticated to need pictures, a small visual gallery would have added to this book, especially when the pictures (even of the Eastern Front) are readily available. The total absence of maps is more serious; Dunn's narrative is filled with unfamiliar place names and readers can easily lose track of units and their movements. Many soldiers, who want to understand the terrain and the flow of the battle, will miss those maps.

Dunn has contributed significantly to the history of World War II by tapping new sources and reexamining the operations of this important, but unfamiliar campaign. Serious military scholars and wargamers interested in the Eastern Front will revel in the amount of detail here. However, more casual professional readers (and that includes most of us), looking for an understanding of the battles of Kursk, may do better by reading a more accessible work, such as Martin Caidin's dated, but still interesting *The Tigers Are Burning*.

LTC STEVEN C. GRAVLIN
Inspector General, USA TACOM
Detroit Arsenal, Warren, Mich.

To Hasten the Homecoming: How Americans Fought World War II Through the Media by Jordan Braverman, Madison Books, Lanham, Md. 1996. 276 pages, \$24.95 (hard cover).

Much has been written about World War II: the battles, the generals, the various theaters of operations, and the requisite summary of equipment used. So another book about World War II would not necessarily pique

someone's interest. But, this is not another book about World War II, and it is not a book about the battles. Nor is it a book for those looking for answers to strategic or tactical questions. Clausewitzians can search elsewhere for their cup of "On War."

No, this is a book about the other theater of operations — the home front, fought in a global information environment of vacuum tubes, newsprint, and newsreels.

Jordan Braverman takes a unique look at how Americans fought World War II at home. How did America live through those tumultuous years? While the conflagration was raging in the Far East, while the V2s were buzzing over London, what was Smallville, U.S.A. doing?

Braverman's Smallville setting is Lorna Road, Mattapan, Massachusetts.

Lorna Road could be any road in any town in America. But, it was the author's road for this war. He provides insightful information about the attitudes of those at home and what people were doing to help the war effort. He notes that, in 1944, our schools financed 2,900 planes, 33,000 jeeps, 600 amphibious jeeps, and 11,600 parachutes, the financing coming from the sale of stamps and bonds to school children across the country.

Braverman describes the different aspects of the media and how that media transmitted information to its various publics. He describes the fighting, not in the foxholes but within struggling government agencies such as the Office of War Information in a country struggling to determine how or what information to provide the public.

A 1942 poll revealed that Americans knew very little about the war. Almost fifty percent said they did not know why the war was being fought, and nearly a third would negotiate peace with Germany. It was through the radio, music, theater, books, cartoons, and advertising that America lived the experience of World War II. It was through these media that the U.S. government brought the war to the home front and informed that fifty percent.

To Hasten the Homecoming, is a book worth reading, a book worth keeping.

BENJAMIN B. SANTOS
LTC, Armor
Public Affairs Officer
III Corps and Fort Hood

Patton's Ghost Corps: Cracking the Siegfried Line by Nathan N. Prefer. Presidio Press, Novato, Calif., 1998. 233 pages, \$24.95.

An appropriate subtitle for this book could be "Lest We Forget," as readers are reminded once again of the unparalleled heroism of American troops in World War II Europe. In the midst of an ongoing debate among historians concerning the fighting ability of WWII American soldiers, military historian Nathan N.

Prefer recounts, in vivid detail, the success of American G.I.s.

The author's mission is twofold, on the one hand challenging historians — Europeans mainly, but not exclusively — for their tendency to concentrate on the most popular and costly battles or campaigns of the war. However, Prefer concedes that these studies are valuable in learning the abilities of soldiers. Secondly, he warns historians that to focus only on the major battles gives rise to an inherent danger of writing that the Americans fought well only when they had overwhelming materiel superiority. In fact, there were other, lesser known battles, not as well studied, covering actions when American G.I.s fought on relatively equal terms with the enemy and prevailed. The Saar-Moselle triangle is a case in point.

In December, 1944, General George S. Patton turned the Third Army north to attack the massive Nazi advance through the Ardennes in what has come to be called the Battle of the Bulge. Left behind was a single corps, MG Walton H. Walker's XXth ("Ghost") Corps, which was immediately faced with the daunting task of defending what had been the entire Third Army front line. The "Ghost Corps" was then called upon to attack and dislodge the Germans from their strongly prepared positions along the fortified Siegfried Line, ultimately opening the door into Germany for the Allies.

The XX Corps manned the line with only a minimum of troops and equipment to perform its mission. The part of the line they faced was known to the Germans as the Orschotz Switchline, while the Americans called it the Saar-Moselle Triangle, the title given for military purposes to that strip of Germany lying between the Saar and the Moselle rivers.

The top of the triangle was formed by the juncture of the two rivers. The western line of the triangle was the Moselle; the eastern line the Saar. Extending 19 miles from top to bottom, the triangle was 10 miles wide at the base. The terrain enclosed within the area was rugged and heavily wooded. The elevation at one point at the base of the triangle was 1,300 feet, and there were few roads suitable for the offensive use of armored columns. This uninviting area, however, was of great military importance in the plans of XX Corps. The Saar-Moselle Triangle was Germany's main line of resistance. Above the triangle lay the city of Trier, a key communications center. Trier guarded the Moselle Corridor, an important pathway to the Rhine River.

The author draws extensively on primary and secondary accounts of the action to take the reader down to squad, and often individual, level. The accounts tell of those men who distinguished themselves and fought under indescribable hardships, not only against the enemy, but against the record-breaking cold and other adverse weather conditions, which also restricted air support in addition to causing many non-battle casualties.

The XX Corps' struggle in the Triangle and its success in piercing the Siegfried defense is

in itself a compelling argument that the American soldier was the equal of his opponent, with or without the materiel advantage so often cited as the reason for his victories.

Prefer's *Patton's Ghost Corps* makes a valuable contribution with other books that reexamine the roots of American victory in Europe in 1945, not to the discredit of a valiant opponent, but rather to the recognition of the dedication, determination, motivation, and intestinal fortitude of the trained American soldier. Prefer has worked the less-plowed ground which is fertile territory for additional studies of the lesser-known battles that display different conditions than those most commonly studied.

DENVER FUGATE
Radcliff, Ky.

The View from the Turret: The 743d Tank Battalion During World War II by William B. Folkestad, Burd Street Press, Shippensburg, Pa., 1996. 146 pages, \$24.95 hardcover.

While many of us are familiar with the exploits of the tank battalions organized within armored divisions in World War II, less known are the sacrifices of the men of National Guard tank battalions that supported the infantry divisions. The 743d Tank Battalion was one such National Guard battalion. It supported the 1st, 29th, and 30th Infantry Divisions at different times during World War II. It was the first tank battalion to land on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. In fact, the 743d was the only full-strength tank battalion to land on the beach that day. Throughout those crucial first days, the companies of the 743d supported both the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions.

Although Mr. Folkestad has not previously published a work of military history, he provides an insightful view into the lives of the men in this tank battalion from their training in England before the D-Day assault, to the police actions that followed the war.

The View from the Turret is an extremely well documented book that includes personal recollections from over fifteen 743d survivors, as well as official after-action reviews.

The author skillfully weaves the stories of the men into each chapter. Mr. Folkestad developed each chapter from the major actions and battles that the 743d fought, and the chapters frame each of the personal accounts. The major drawback to the book is that without a good personal or historical perspective of the battles about which Mr. Folkestad writes, readers can get somewhat confused. One of the book's few inadequacies is the lack of maps. There are only two maps that aid the reader in maintaining his bearings in the 743d's fight across Europe. It was extremely distracting to turn to one of these maps to find where the town of Masta was in relation to the town Stavelot, only to find that the map didn't have a "Masta" on it. I quickly resorted to my *U.S. Army in Action* series books for a better overview of the campaign.

The View from the Turret is an easy read. It took me two days of late-night reading to get

through this well-written work, but I'll warn you: the book is hard to put down. In the end, the personal accounts of the 743d survivors made me feel very fortunate to have recently commanded an Abrams company. I now fully realize that my predecessors of 1942-45 in their Grants, Chaffees, and Shermans fought in significantly outgunned and under-armored tanks.

CPT JOSEPH C. HOLLAND
Ft. Knox, Ky.

The Trophies of the Red Army During the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945; Volume 1- Antitank rifle, Aircraft machine Guns and Assault Rifles by Yu. A. Natzvaladze, translated by Igor F. Naftulett, Land O'Sun Printers, Inc., for the Champlin Fighter Museum, 4636 Fighter Aces Drive, Mesa, AZ 85215. 223 pages, \$49.50.

The Fighter Aces Museum has published what it hopes will become the first volume of a series of books on the contents of the collection of historical weapons of the Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Troops in St. Petersburg, Russia. The majority of weapons in the book were collected on battlefields, shortly after the shooting stopped, by teams from the museum. Countries with weapons in the collection include Russia, Germany, the Soviet Union, Finland, Japan, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, and the United States.

This initial volume has three chapters covering antitank weapons, aircraft machine guns, and assault rifles. Future volumes (if the first is successful) will cover magazine rifles and carbines, semi-automatic pistols, sub-machine guns, semi-automatic rifles, light machine guns, heavy machine guns, unified machine guns (guns that can be used as light or heavy machine guns), hand grenades, combat pyrotechnics, revolvers, and protective equipment. For most weapons there are both photographs and illustrations with explanatory notes. At the end of each chapter is a short description of each weapon covered. The body of the text describes the weapons and lists the operating characteristics, such as weight, length, range, and armor penetration (where applicable) in both the metric and English systems of measurement.

The coverage of antitank weapons begins with the 13.35mm Mauser 1918 turnbolt rifle and extends to the X-7, the first antitank guided missile, ready for production in late 1945. Included are rifles, antitank hand and rifle grenades, recoilless guns, antitank rockets, tapered-bore cannons, remote-controlled tracked vehicles and incendiary bottles. Particularly impressive is the detailed information on mass production of the incendiary bottles, known in the West as Molotov cocktails. Equally as good is the chapter on aircraft machine guns. The ingenuity of weapons designers is noteworthy, but not as relevant to readers of *ARMOR*.

The chapter on assault rifles begins with a discussion of the 1916 6.5mm Fedorov "ma-

chine" rifle, the first assault rifle used in combat. In 1919 the Fedorov was first called the "avtomat," the Russian term for assault rifle. The Fedorov avtomat was withdrawn from service in 1928, when the decision was made to standardize on 7.62mm rifles. Coverage of assault rifles used or experimented with in World War II is very extensive and useful to a historian of assault rifles. Since the AK-47 is a post-war weapon, it is not covered, although some competitors of the AK-47 are.

Overall, while the extent of the detail is excellent, possibly the most exhaustive in a single volume currently available, there are a few translation problems. Readers should know that a "cumulative" projectile is a shaped charge projectile. A "propulsion" projectile has a rocket, while a "dynamic propulsion" weapon is a recoilless gun. This book should be purchased by all libraries serving a military clientele. Individuals aspiring to serious knowledge of weapons development should also purchase this book.

GERALD A. HALBERT
Earlsville, Va.

Panzerjäger: Tank Hunter by William B. Folkestad, Burd Street Press, Shippensburg, Pa., 1997. xi + 117 pages, maps, photographs, \$24.95.

Of the 145 divisions earmarked for Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, a full 112 were neither mechanized nor motorized. For them, towed antitank guns, or *panzerabwehr kanonen*, provided the principal organic direct fire defense against enemy tanks. In *Panzerjäger: Tank Hunter*, William B. Folkestad (Central Washington University) relates the experiences of Bernhard Averbek, who served as a *PaK* crewman and gun commander in the East from February 1942 to October 1944 and, later, on the Western Front.

For readers whose understanding of German doctrine is limited to its innovations — *auftragstaktik*, *schwerpunkt und aufrollen*, and the like — Averbek's tale supplies a badly needed glimpse of the German Army's less innovative aspects: linear tactics, inflexible command and control, obsolescent weapons, and small unit leaders who are unwilling to exercise initiative. When Averbek arrives at the front, the only available trucks are captured ones and, even when adequately supported, the *panzerjäger kompanie's* six firing sections can rarely be used to their best advantage because only the company commander has a radio.

Several shortcomings detract from an otherwise engaging story. The narrative, based entirely on oral and taped interviews, is transcribed without the benefit of an editor's explanatory remarks or footnotes; this format may prove problematic for readers less familiar with the "big picture" in Army Group Center's area of operations. A more comprehensive map, an index of place names, and a brief list of more broadly focused related works — those of Ziemke, Glantz, and Carell for instance—would have helped set the context as

well. The reader will also notice some technical and copy editing errors, e.g., a German infantry battalion with thirteen companies (p. 20), "Nissan huts" (p. 103), Soviet "222 mm guns" (p. 49), and a "railway station teaming with soldiers" (p. 45).

Its flaws notwithstanding, *Panzerjäger* should prove an eye opener for anyone whose understanding of the Russian Campaign begins with Guderian and ends with Manstein.

JOHN DALEY
Pittsburg, Kan.

Strike Swiftly! The 70th Tank Battalion from North Africa to Normandy to Germany, by Marvin Jensen. Presidio Press, 1997. 368 pages, \$24.95.

Tank combat in northwest Europe continues to attract the interest of past and current members of the Armored Force. Perhaps we remain fascinated by how brave men in desperate situations, using second-rate equipment, managed to win and survive while fighting an army that wrote the book on armored warfare.

This book helps fill the gap which exists in our understanding of the missions and utilization of American separate tank battalions during WWII. That gap exists primarily because of the focus on division and regimental combat — separate tank battalions, crucial to many in-

fantry fights, were by their very nature and utilization a different breed of cat. Their operations are usually buried deep in the details.

The author served as a cook in the 70th, and this lends an interesting perspective to the book. He unabashedly admits to being glad that he was not a tanker, and he acknowledges the hardship and danger for those who were. In his admission, he provides a vehicle for realizing that in modern armored combat, it's not just the tankers and accompanying infantry who are at risk. The soldiers who drive the LOGPACs forward and those who recover damaged tracks under fire (usually without a FIST team or any direct fire support handy), also take risks and share the dangers on the modern battlefield.

The 70th Tank Battalion is a great unit about which to write, a memoir writer's dream. Founded in 1940, simultaneously with the creation of the Armored Force, this separate battalion saw action in all the great campaigns in Africa and Europe, save Italy. These tankers fought in Tunisia, Sicily, Normandy, the Huertgen Forest, the Bulge, and Germany. A review of this battalion's history is a walk through the great American battles against the *Wehrmacht*.

For those tankers who cringe at the thought of cross attachment to an infantry battalion within their own brigade combat team, imagine the dilemmas faced by the leaders of the 70th. These armor leaders were required to some-

how control and support a tank battalion which had its companies dispersed across an entire infantry division sector, generally operating with one tank company attached to each infantry regiment. The role of tanks in the direct fire support of infantry, a frequently overlooked though crucial task in wooded and urban terrain, jumps out of this book. AGS anyone?

At a time when we measure our deployments in six month blocks, and spend incredible amounts on supporting our families and communities, the reader will think about a battalion which deployed in early 1942 and returned when the war in Europe ended, a period of over 3 years. While the turnover rate was high, many of those soldiers who initially deployed with the battalion remained with it throughout the war. In recognition of how our Army has changed in that regard, you will find no large sections discussing family support groups here.

This book is a good read, but do not expect a scholarly history on separate tank battalions or tank doctrine. The maps are sketchy, and the sources fairly general. What this memoir does provide, however, is a wealth of anecdotes and a gut feel for the stresses, dangers, and costs of heavy combat, something at which the after action-reviews and training at our CTCs can only hint.

KEVIN MCKEDY
LTC, Armor
USAREUR/7A