

BOOKS

Tanks For the Memories by Aaron C. Elson, Chi Chi Press, Hackensack, N.J., Phone: 1-800-807-TANK. 1994. \$10.00.

Walk into any bookstore in the U.S. and you will find an almost overpowering number of Vietnam "I was there" books detailing life as an infantryman, Marine, or Long Range Patroller. Some books about the Gulf War are beginning to appear. All of these books detail what war feels like to the participant who fights dismounted. You will look hard and unsuccessfully for a book about fighting from armor, from the viewpoint of the tank crew. Recently, a new book, *Tanks For the Memories*, was published that talks about tank warfare in World War II. It is hard to get by the title, as it is a classic pun, detested by most tankers, but it is a must read for any tanker, and should be purchased by all libraries near an armored unit.

The book is a work of love by Aaron C. Elson. Mr. Elson's father was a replacement officer assigned to the 712th Tank Battalion in World War II. He served from June to December 1944 in the 712th before being wounded and evacuated. While Mr. Elson's father would tell stories about World War II, Aaron Elson could not remember them. After his father died, Elson began to attend reunions of the 712th Tank Battalion Association. He began to record what members of the battalion told him about the battalion. The story is not complete because he normally recorded information only from veterans of A and C companies.

The 712th Tank Battalion was an independent tank battalion, not permanently assigned to any division. During the Normandy invasion it supported the 90th Infantry Division and the 82d Airborne Division. Later it worked with the 8th Infantry Division before returning to attachment with the 90th, with which it stayed for the remainder of the war. It was the seventh tank battalion to land at Normandy, but the first to land with virtually all of its equipment. Units in the battalion won three Distinguished Unit Citations.

The book is organized chronologically, with individual members of the battalion saying what they did before, during, and after a battle. The book includes acts of heroism as well as the mundane and sometimes funny facts of life as a tanker. In one case he tells how a tank came to participate in a friendly fire incident; in another, what it feels like to have a mine go off under your tank. There are some grisly parts, like having to clean out a tank after it was hit, incinerating the crew in a fire of 100-octane gas. The gore is not there to shock, but rather as a discussion of what it was like to fight in a tank battalion from Normandy to a concentration camp in Germany.

Tanks For the Memories contains few details about the strategy of World War II. It does contain some tactical insights, but it is mainly a story about how a unit really functions in wartime. There is a monument to the 712th outside the Patton Museum at Fort Knox. On the monument are 97 names listing all but one of the men killed in action in the battalion. You may compare this list of casualties with that of the Gulf War and realize that this was indeed a battalion that was in a hard-fought war. Their story is one well worth reading.

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Red Army Tank Commanders: The Armored Guards by Richard N. Armstrong, Schiffer Publishing Ltd., Atglen, Pa., 1994. 475 pages. \$24.95.

This book is comprised of six individual essays on the combat careers of Soviet tank army commanders (Katukov, Bogdanov, Rybalko, Lelyushenko, Rotmistrov, Kravchenko) during World War II. Each essay makes for fascinating reading concerning the personality, command style, and operational perceptions of the Red Army's leading World War II tank army commanders. The author is well qualified to write on this subject, given his expertise in Red Army operations and military history, and has gathered an impressive collection of Soviet sources.

This work represents a significant contribution to armor scholarship for two reasons. First, it approaches armored warfare on the Eastern Front from the Soviet commander's perspective. This is a subject usually given to a German bias. Second, it addresses the evolution of armor doctrine during the course of a war — a doctrine based on prewar theoretical concepts which, unlike those which developed in Germany, were unable to fully mature in a peacetime environment.

In each essay, the commander in focus is seen developing his operational skills by means of a trial and error process with ever-increasing forces (e.g. brigade, corps, army) under his command. The outcome of this process held the life of the individual Soviet tanker in the balance. The Soviet penchant for night operations and ability to quickly recover and repair damaged tanks to sustain operations represents two lesser themes which also run through many of these essays.

Detractions from this exceptional work are relatively minor and specifically concern technical mistakes regarding German weaponry. But overall, *Red Army Tank Commanders: The Armored Guards* is a first rate work which not only explores a little-known subject area, but the process of doctrinal change, a relevant topic in light of

current issues (e.g. non-Western military environments vs. traditional battlefields, advanced technologies and unmanned AFVs, and budgetary constraints) facing U.S. Army doctrine today.

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Armored Forces: History and Sourcebook by Robert M. Citino, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn. 1994. 328 pages. \$75.00.

For a book with such great potential and promise, *Armored Forces* by Robert Citino is an extravagantly priced, myopic failure. Touted by the publisher as a "teaching tool and reference guide for teachers and students of military history, history buffs, and professional soldiers," this book just does not measure up to its goals, its claims, or its price. It will be especially disappointing to readers who know anything at all about the development and history of armor.

The author, Robert Citino, is a university-level associate professor of history with two previously published books to his credit. However, his credentials for writing this book are obscure and may explain this book's lack of depth and detail. His writing is clear and succinct, but his research and presentation are sadly incomplete for a book which claims to be a "sourcebook."

Armored Forces is organized into four major sections — armor history, bibliographic essays, biographical profiles, and appendices. Citino's recreation of armored forces history is textbook material, dry and unleavened, without the power and drive that armor deserves. He does hit some bright spots in his discussions of armor history personalities such as Hart, Swinton, Lutz, and Fuller ("All of Fuller's books are written with the intention of annoying someone."). Citino's early history of armor in the Great War is the best-balanced, best-supported and most interesting. As Citino moves through the interwar years, World War II, and into modern tank warfare, he seems to lose steam or interest. For example, although published in 1994, well after the Gulf War, Citino devotes only four paragraphs to the greatest modern tank battles since Kursk. His synopsis of tank battles in the Iran-Iraq War is credible, but to virtually ignore armor in "Desert Storm" is to ignore the present and future of armored forces. Technical information is also thin and sketchy, and again only four paragraphs are provided for discussion of modern tank ammunition and armor design. Hardly a comprehensive approach to a subject of such vast scope and detail.

As with his armor history, Citino's appendices are weak and poorly presented. The brief chronology of important dates is basi-

cally filler material of little value. The other four appendices are supposed to list tanks by country of origin corresponding to Citino's four phases of armor history. However, these lists are gravely incomplete, clearly listing only tanks of accepted prominence or appeal, omitting many and removing any possibility of this book's acceptance as a "sourcebook" for armor. The author omits the French CharB and the H-35, the Italian L/3 and M/11, the Czech LT35 (also known as the German PzKpfw 35), the U.S. M24 Chaffee, M22 Locust, M48A3 (the armor workhorse of Vietnam), M103, and M551 Sheridan, as well as many others. Additionally, with a wealth of marvelous photos easily available for such a book, Citino uses only six photos of World War II tanks, all too conveniently obtained from the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum. No maps and few charts complete the book's lack of format and research support.

Despite its major weaknesses, this book does have its good points. For the serious student, avid reader and lover of military history, Citino's bibliographic essays are the highlights of his book. He has compiled a superb collection of recommended readings of books and articles on armor operations in combat, tank development, employment doctrine, and armor personalities. Without a doubt, these bibliographic essays are the best, most useful, and interesting parts of this book. The biographical profiles also deserve favorable mention. Citino has provided capsule profiles of 42 men who contributed to the development and employment of armored forces from the early days to the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Surprisingly, nobody makes the list after that, but you will read of the famous (Patton, Guderian, Rommel) and refreshingly, the not-so-famous (H.G. Wells, Percy Hobart, Oswald Lutz). But, even these two well-done sections cannot breathe life into this book.

Armored Forces does not match its claims; it is neither a convincing history nor a comprehensive sourcebook on armored forces. Most any of the armor books by Kenneth Macksey, John Batchelor, and R.M. Ogorkiewicz are far better and more complete.

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Vietnam POWs Tell Their Story by Zalin Grant, De Capo Press, New York. 1994. \$14.95.

Powerful — is the single most appropriate word to describe Zalin Grant's *Survivors*. This is one of those rare compelling works that you truly can't put down because it will haunt you until you pick it up again.

Originally published in 1975 by Norton, this is the story of nine American soldiers and pilots captured during the Vietnam War and held under the most hideous of conditions until repatriated by the Paris Peace Agreement of 1973. This is a story told in their own words through interviews conducted by the author soon after these men returned to the United States. It is their own words, their own emotions, their own pain that makes this book so evocative.

In this latest edition, Grant has written a new introduction primarily to fill in some of the details in the strange case of Marine PFC Robert Garwood. Garwood was a turncoat who played a major role in the torment of these prisoners in the early years of their captivity in South Vietnam. The details of his story didn't become available until his repatriation and subsequent court-martial in 1979. Even today, the Garwood case remains enigmatic.

Aside from the easy flow of these stories from these former POWs, what is most intriguing about the book are the lessons that keep leaping off the pages. The lack of preparation these young men had for their ordeal is stunning. Neither their service nor their society gave them the necessary informational tools to deal with the situation in which they found themselves. They were almost completely ignorant of their society's goals and agenda in fighting an Asian land war. At the tactical level, they didn't know their objective; they didn't know their commander's intent. They didn't know where they were on a map. They were denied the fundamental tools needed to resist an enemy if captured, and in short order, they were psychological victims of a system that controlled every aspect of their lives.

Given the information vacuum prior to capture, it is easy to understand how they broke down. The brutality of the Vietnamese POW system was complete. The young, the confused, and the desperate were not difficult to ensnare. They broke down mentally and physically, and ultimately they became pawns of the North Vietnamese penal system — only the very senior Air Force and Naval pilots retained their sense of purpose. The junior enlisted were left to flounder for more than five years. Eventually, most succumbed to enemy coercion or outright joined the "Peace Committee."

To military leaders, the failure to provide these men with a reason for fighting and a reason for resisting seems unconscionable. More than that, it seems impossible that American units could be so mentally unprepared to take to the field. We pride ourselves in keeping everyone informed, passing the details of combat operations down to the lowest level. What this book drives home is the cost of failing to do so.

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Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943

by Jacques Semelin. Translated by Suzan Jusserl-Kapit. Greenwood Publishing Group Inc., Westport, Conn. 1993. 216 pages. \$55.00 hardbound/\$18.95 paperback.

The author examines an interesting proposition: that a society has the capability to defend itself AFTER occupation. Moreover, by developing such a capability a country can actively dissuade aggression because the potential occupier realizes that the gains will not be worth the price.

By examining the German occupation of Europe, Semelin develops several models of civilian resistance. This resistance is NOT to be confused with armed resistance, such as occurred in France and other occupied countries. Instead, it consists of maintaining the national and cultural institutions of the society against the occupier, resisting collaboration that supports the occupier's goals, and maintaining national identity until the occupation ends.

He examines several instances where such resistance succeeded, and others where it never materialized or failed. He also identifies several key attributes necessary for a successful civilian defense. Key among these is a society committed to its national identity. Those countries that most successfully defended themselves against the Nazi occupation did not have a lot of division at home. On the other hand, those that were least able to resist were the societies having divisions that the Germans could exploit.

Semelin also identifies three screens that "protect" the society against the occupier. The first is an established government that does NOT collaborate. Another is public opinion that can be mobilized to resist. Finally, the third screen is composed of social networks which can serve as support and communications structures.

The book itself is a detailed intellectual analysis of this topic. As such, it is not much use to military art. However, from a grand strategy viewpoint, it offers some very valuable insights. Moreover, in today's complex world of nuclear powers, where the weapons of choice may no longer be military but political (terrorism, economic blackmail, development of internal dissent), the same elements necessary for civilian defense are the ones needed against these political attacks. Social cohesion, identification and support of one's culture and government, networks of support, all provide the societal structure to resist such pressures. Consequently, this book should be read by policy makers and theorists interested in international defense in the nuclear age.

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