

REVIEWS

Interactive Books:

Different Choices, Different Outcomes

Combat Team: The Captains' War by John F. Antal, Presidio Press, Novato Calif., 1998. 370 pages, \$17.95 (paperback).

Combat Team is John Antal's third release in his series of "interactive fiction" books. Like a "choose-your-own-adventure" book, each one is divided into numbered passages; at the end of each numbered passage, the reader is presented with two or three choices to make. Each choice leads to a different numbered passage, and, ultimately, to a different outcome of the story.

In *Combat Team*, Antal puts the reader in the position of a new company team commander during a fictional high intensity conflict in northeast Asia, similar to Korea. The reader is faced with the challenges of taking command and fighting his unit in restricted mountainous terrain. Most of the book's choices revolve around these two themes.

The book is undeniably enjoyable. Once Antal throws the reader into the scenario and the choices begin, the book becomes quite personal. From the very first choice, how to deal with a less than cooperative executive officer, I was determined to successfully accomplish the assigned raid mission the first time through. Dying repeatedly, however, is a much more likely outcome as the author has built only one path that leads to decisive victory. Antal has also added historical quotes at the beginning of each passage to make the book even more enjoyable.

Although *Combat Team* doesn't allow for choices where I would have done things differently than the book's main character, there are enough choices at critical junctures to keep the reader's mind perking and to allow for several significantly different results to develop. In this regard, the book is a good tool to stimulate some critical professional discussion about tactics in restricted terrain. At the end of the only path that leads to mission success, Antal provides his perspective on the lessons of the Korean War and how they apply to our tactics in restricted terrain today.

While *Combat Team* may not be rocket science, it is a great departure point for examining the way our Army should fight at the most critical level — the company — in tough terrain. It effectively bridges the historical gap from the Korean War to today, and shows intimately how old lessons learned the hard way still apply to our high-tech battlefield. This, I

think, is the book's greatest strength: the way Antal gets the reader quickly thinking by placing him in the decision-making hot seat, and then leaves his stimulated mind with plenty of food for thought for further contemplation and discussion. Plus, it's just plain fun to read.

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Alamein to Zem Zem by Keith Douglas, Chilmark Press, New York, 1966, 152 pages.

There are few books available that describe in detail what it was like to live and fight from armored vehicles during the Second World War. This is one of them. Keith Douglas was a 24-year-old lieutenant who studied literature at Oxford before joining a tank regiment of the Notts Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry in 1940. He eventually found himself serving in a meaningless position on a divisional staff. He essentially left his post and set out to find his regiment, six days after the epic battle of El Alamein began in October of 1942. The book describes his actions as a tank platoon leader as he fights from El Alamein to Tunisia.

Douglas has been described as "the most considerable poet of the Second World War" and in addition to this work, wrote a number of poems reflecting on his combat experience. He wrote this book while recovering from wounds in 1943. Sadly, Douglas did not survive the war and was killed on the second day of the Normandy invasion during a reconnaissance behind enemy lines, for which he was mentioned in dispatches. He certainly would have contributed more to the world of literature had it not been for his untimely death. Fortunately this work remains.

It is written in "a highly charged, violent descriptive prose, powerfully contrived but sufficiently serious to convey the humor, the pathos and the literal beauty of that dead world of tanks, sand scrub and human corpses." Douglas has a keen eye for detail, and his descriptions of life in a tank regiment are both interesting and recognizable to the modern tanker. Countless hours were spent on the endless detail of living on an armored vehicle. The crew performs maintenance, cleans weapons, checks radios, and cleans personal gear. The highlights of the day are found in

the preparation of meals and the infrequent socialization between members of the unit. These moments are interrupted by the sheer terror of combat.

Douglas is completely candid about his emotions as a young and inexperienced leader. He feels the fear of facing the test of battle, but admits to desiring action in order to become initiated into the group of veterans. In his first action, Douglas performs bravely, but makes many mistakes. His many descriptions of desert tank battles are highly informative and reveal an environment of friction and confusion. Douglas describes one action. "*By shouting directions to my driver above the noise of the engine (internal communication having broken down with wireless) I was able to move my tank, using dips in the ground, to within about 660 yards of the telegraph poles, and saw that two or three Mk. III tanks were in support of the guns. When I had seen as much as I could, I turned my tank and moved back into Edward's little wadi, where I dismounted and ran across to his tank. I made two of these journeys, and Edward passed back my news to the regiment over the air. Each time I dismounted I still skidded about on the metal of the tank, the soles of my boots being covered with half-congealed blood from the pool in the bottom of my turret. Flies hung above the tank in a cloud.*"

The narrative continues bringing the reader along as this one tank regiment works its way along the coast of North Africa. Casualties continue to mount daily and Douglas loses friends and comrades he hardly knows. One is amazed at the tremendous morale of these men. For all the gravity of the general war situation, there seems to be little to depress their spirits. Although there are times of extreme fatigue and fear, they are able to face every morning, refreshed at the simple things such as a hot cup of tea or a fresh meal. They find strength in their bonds of comradeship and purpose. For these reasons alone, I recommend the book for its study of the human nature of combat. Additionally, the detailed descriptions of tank action provide a visceral experience for any combat leader. Douglas describes another action. "*As we passed behind the Grant, laboring in second gear, a 50mm shot came through the side of our turret with an immense clang. The tank stopped and rolled back a few yards. My first sensation was that the whole turret had collapsed inwards on us and was pinning us in. I couldn't open my eyes, the right side of my face seemed to be*

very sore, and there was a small pain in my left leg. I heard the Corporal say: 'Get out, sir, we've been hit' as though from a long way off, and simultaneously I was able to move, as if the voice had broken a spell. I climbed out on to the back of the tank, with earphones still on and the microphone dangling on my chest. I was able to open my eyes for a second, but they closed themselves and tears poured out from under the lids. I realized the wireless was still working, and said "King Five, my horse has copped it."

Although this work is apparently out of print, it might be found in military libraries and used book shops. I found it in the small library at Fort Irwin. It will certainly add to the professional experience of any mounted warrior who is interested in the experiences of combat. Technology might change, but the taste and feel of combat will remain very recognizable.

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TANK ACES - From Blitzkrieg to the Gulf War by Lt. Col. George Forty MBE FMA, published by Sutton Publishing Ltd, Phoenix Mill, Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 2BU England. ISBN 0 7509 1447 5. 200 pages, hardback. UK price £19.99

In two previous books — *Tank Commanders, Knights of the Modern Age* in 1993 and *Tank Action, From the Great War to the Gulf* in 1995 — retired RTR officer and Tank Museum curator George Forty examined armored warfare firstly from the level of senior commanders and in the second case by detailing specific actions from a variety of campaigns. Here he looks from a different viewpoint, that of great individual commanders.

This description applies in two ways. We have senior and middle-ranking officers who by their leadership and example led their forces to perform great feats, and we have individuals occupying the commander's position in the turret who was what the air arms would call an ace. In some cases, both definitions of 'great commander' apply, with individuals who would normally be some stages removed from the front line being drawn to combat as individuals. Forty is quick to point out that, unlike the fighter pilot, a tank commander must be part of a team to have any form of success.

Given these parameters, the combat records of 28 aces are examined using examples from several nations in various conflicts. In each case, the men concerned were awarded a variety of military honors, details of the awards and criteria for which are included. Those chosen for inclusion will include many who will be familiar to *ARMOR* readers, certainly those in the Americans sections, as names if not as colleagues. Those of allies such as Britain and former enemies such as Germany will perhaps be less well known, the single Polish commander perhaps not at all, those Russians maybe, the Israelis may fall into both categories, but those from India and Pakistan will be almost certainly new to you.

The campaigns where these men made their mark also cover areas which are well known and obscure. The World War II era deals with Europe, North Africa, and Russia, while the post-war conflicts include Korea, several Middle East and Indo-Pakistan conflicts, Vietnam, and finally Desert Storm. In most cases, protagonists from each side are included, though regrettably accounts of Egyptian and Syrian participants have eluded the author.

The appeal of this work will vary as to whether you are a veteran seeking accounts of those you served alongside or against, or as inspiration for yourself and those currently alongside you to show what may be termed 'armored spirit.' On its own, or in conjunction with the earlier books, you will find much to provoke thought here. Enough details of campaigns and equipment is provided to set the scene, together with photographs of both those honored here and their mounts and campaigns. Enjoy this book at whatever level you relate to.

PETER BROWN
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Secret Kubinka, privately published by Fraser Gray, text by Richard Stickland. ISBN 0 9532013 0 9. 44 pages, many black and white photos. UK price 9.99 pounds.

There have been various reports on Kubinka since it became known in the West. Some have been good, like their 'own' book which suffers mainly from being in Russian to Russian standards of production — despite that, mine is in regular use — to the Cecil book which I have and which stays on the shelf where it belongs. There are still areas which are not well-covered though, and this book helps fill in gaps.

As well as the collection of historical vehicles for reference purposes, Kubinka is also the location of the main AFV testing facility in the CIS. It is not surprising, therefore, that many unusual one-off adaptations find their way into the 'museum' collection, though many of these are not on full-time display. Reports of what wonders there were have ranged from M1 Abrams to Ramm Tigers, but neither are included here and may only ever have existed in the imaginations of those who wished them to be there.

What is covered is an array of vehicles which show insights into Soviet designs. Here are variations on T-64, T-72, T-80 and even older T-55 with Czech updates and Russian add-ons and T-62 with active armor, showing development trends which made it into production and some interesting 'dead ends.' There are also BMP-1, BTR-60 and -70 — including one with an 85mm gun! — a searchlight carrier and a BRDM-2 missile vehicle.

In some cases, the vehicles can be identified, but in others an air of mystery still remains. What we have here is a good photo study using large, clear photos with detailed and informative captions, which deserves a place in the collection of anyone interested in

modern Soviet/Russian AFVs. Look out for in through specialist retail outlets.

PETER BROWN
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American Army Doctrine for the Post Cold War by John L. Romjue. Military History Office, TRADOC, Fort Monroe, Va. 160 pages.

Why did the Army replace AirLand Battle doctrine only two years after its success in Operation Desert Storm? These and other questions are answered in Mr. Romjue's latest installment of the TRADOC Historical Monograph Series. As Chief of the TRADOC Military History Branch, Mr. Romjue is in a unique position to report on Army doctrine development as it occurs.

The book is logically arranged, beginning with an introduction by the author that states his thesis: "What were the questions and issues revolving around the rapid replacement, less than two years after its resounding success in the desert war, of the Army's recognized and successful fighting doctrine — the well known AirLand Battle?" Chapter one is a primer on 20th century U.S. Army doctrine development, focusing on Active Defense and AirLand Battle.

Chapters two through five introduce the new concepts of the 1993 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*, and trace the development of the new doctrine through an imaginative Army-wide consulting, or conferencing, technique that ensured the new doctrine included thoughts from a range of sources. Here you can find the origins of battle space, battle command, Operations Other Than War (OOTW), the new tenet of versatility, battle functions, and other new doctrinal concepts. Finally, a chapter-by-chapter overview of the new FM. Chapter six is an assessment of FM 100-5, focusing on the development of Force XXI, the concept of attacking simultaneously in depth, battle command and battle space, and digitization.

American Army Doctrine for the Post Cold War is well-written, documented, and thought-out. Its information is understandable; however, I would not recommend it as an addition to the average company grade officer's or soldier's library. It goes beyond understanding the mission and intent two levels up. Chapter one, a great essay on doctrine, should be required reading at the Officer and NCO Advanced Courses. The remainder of the book is a must-read for senior leaders or managers in the art of staffing major doctrinal or procedural changes in a large organization. The vision and ability of General Franks, the TRADOC commander at the time, is a lasting impression left by this book.

Available only on request from the TRADOC Military History Office, *American Army Doctrine for the Post-Cold War* should be acquired by the Armor School and Armor Center Library as a primary source for instruction and research.

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