

BOOKS

German Battle Tactics on the Russian Front, 1941-1945 by Steven H. Newton, Schiffer Military/Aviation History, Atglen, Pa., 1994. 272 pages. \$24.95.

After World War II, as part of a U.S. Army program, captured German officers wrote accounts of their experiences on the Russian front. Not only was this motivated by an interest in learning more about German methods, but also to learn, from a "Western" perspective, Russian combat methods and conditions. Some accounts were extensively reworked or consolidated by American historians, the result being some 20 booklets published in the 1950s by the Department of the Army as the German Report Series. These dealt with specific topic areas, such as night combat, terrain factors, tank maintenance, airborne operations, rear area security, and small unit actions. They were subsequently republished by the Center of Military History in the 1980s.

Much material remained unpublished, however, and Dr. Steven Newton, Associate Professor of History and Political Science at Delaware State University, has performed a valuable service in making some original accounts available now to the general reader. There are ten accounts of specific engagements, most by division and corps commanders, spanning the Russian war from 1941 to 1945. The XXXXI Panzer Corps chief of staff relates the drive on Moscow, the 253d Infantry Division commander discusses the counterattack at Kharkov in 1943, and others present corps- and division-level actions on the Volkhov, and the relief of encircled units at Kovel and Vilno in 1944.

Most of the essays had apparently been translated hurriedly by U.S. Army junior officers with faulty knowledge of the German language and German military organization and terminology. Dr. Newton has re-edited these, adding clarifying footnotes after each selection; for example, XXXXI Panzer Corps Chief of Staff Hans Röttiger had no use for the new corps commander, Walter Model, and refused to mention him or his decisions. Dr. Newton is also conscious of the self-serving interests of some of the German authors, writing as captives of their American opponents, from placing blame on (the dead) Hitler or on others, to Gustav Höhne insisting that his 8th Jaeger Division would never consider evicting Russian peasants from their huts in the dead of winter, but rather shared billets with them.

One encounters useful insights into operations under the extreme conditions obtaining in Russia, many to be recognized by those familiar with the German Report Series. These include letting engine motors idle frequently in winter, as the antifreeze was inadequate, and not oiling machine guns, for the oil would congeal, but rather firing occasional bursts. "Winter roads" were created, packed down by tanks, leaving paved roads unused in winter; they would

crack in extreme cold and break up, and were better left protected by a blanket of snow. Iced ski trails were used for troop movements because it was impossible to move through the deep, powdery snow. Soldiers sheltered in platoon tents on fir boughs, with trench stoves heating at each end. Admonitions about logistics shortfalls when units were frequently reassigned, and maintaining traffic control points with towing services at a distance from river crossings to prevent congestion at bridge sites, are well-taken advice.

Dr. Newton is a career Army National Guard NCO, and both his Introduction, "The German Soldier's War in Russia," and the dust jacket description, are correct in emphasizing that too little is known of unit operations at a low level, or of the experiences of the individual *Landser*, the German soldier. These ten essays do provide some sense of this, though only in a most general way. The accounts are at corps and division level, and do not deal with battalion, company, and platoon-level actions, as in CMH's DA Pam 20-269, "Small Unit Actions During the German Campaign in Russia," where 2d Battalion defends at Verkhne-Golubaya, or Captain Viehmann's company recaptures Hill 747, or a main supply route is blocked by a Russian KV tank. (Analogous American studies include the river crossing at Arnaville, or the tank-infantry team of B Companies at Singling.)

Some of the selections conclude with analyses, as lessons learned, but the focus is narrative, rather than topical. While aspects of relief operations, or operations in snow or mud can be deduced, the strength of the narratives is to provide details about the battles themselves. Topical areas like arctic or anti-partisan (*guerrilla*) operations are not included, nor are small-unit concerns like rations, weapons effectiveness, or coordination of supporting fires.

Maps with division-size symbols help clarify actions, though these are digitized, computer-generated maps, and all roads and river-lines are jagged. Orders of battle are given at the ends of chapters. These are useful references, though often not necessary to the text. In Rendulic's account of Army Group South in Austria in 1945, the OBs of the U.S. 65th, 71st, and 80th Divisions are listed, including all battalions, yet the divisions themselves are hardly mentioned in the text. Five pages of German OBs and nine pages of Soviet and American OBs, with some 60 clarifying footnotes, are again a useful reference, though unrelated — nor even known — to Rendulic.

Dates of rank and positions held by the German authors are listed in the appendices, as are also explanations of German corps organization and unit strength estimations. There are no illustrations, though Russian front images are familiar to most readers. The text print is clear and readable, but unfortunately marred by numerous typographical errors. The strength of the book is not insight into the experiences of the German *Landser*, nor analyses of tac-

tics and conditions in Russia, but rather additional narratives and details of engagements on the Eastern Front, whose immensity still engenders awe on the part of students of military history today.

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Landing Zones: Combat Vets From America's Proud, Fighting South Remember Vietnam by James R. Wilson. Duke University Press, 1990. 341 Pages. \$5.99, paperback.

Literary critics argue that among the characteristics of the literature produced by modern Southerners are a tragic sense of life and a deep-rooted sense of the interplay of past and present. They would not be disappointed in this dark anthology of the Vietnam War remembered, but a reader led on by its subtitle to expect a unique Southern perspective on combat in Southwest Asia will find instead a predictable collection of frustrated veteran accounts. Unlike the Civil War, the entire nation suffered the angst of the Vietnam defeat, and the Southerners who served in disproportionately higher numbers than their geographical peers returned to take their place in a homogeneously disenchanting national chorus. This is a collection of accounts of Vietnam veterans who happen to be from the South and not a key to Southern character, culture, or courage.

As a collection of Vietnam veteran accounts, it does deserve praise for the heterogeneity of its voices. James R. Wilson interviews representatives of all services (to include a Red Cross "Donut Dolly"), all races and genders, and all ranks, from General Westmoreland to enlisted man Leo Spooner, Jr. The 24 accounts span ten years of the conflict and reflect operations in all military regions of the country. Given the vast representative range Wilson seems to have set for himself, he has succeeded remarkably well, and there are some exceptional oral histories. Colonel Benjamin H. Purcell's narrative of his prisoner of war experiences is free from that veneer of regenerative propaganda that creeps into so many POW accounts. The women's stories are fresh because their voices have been ignored so long. Roosevelt Gore's objective but emotionally compelling account of racial discrimination rivals the best narratives in Wallace Terry's *Bloods*, but as in many Vietnam narratives, self-analysis turns too quickly to self-pity.

It is a cliché to say that when and where you served in Vietnam determined what kind of a war you saw; there was not one Vietnam experience but over two-and-one-half million individual experiences. This anthology supports the cliché. However, Wilson tries to pull those experiences together with a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) thread: the majority of the veterans

he talks to suffer from some sort of PTSD, and it is that common theme that gives this collection the self-absorbed, self-pitying tone that marks too much Vietnam literature.

For better or worse, last century's proud, fighting South was certainly more stoic in its suffering.

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Ostfront 1944, The German Defensive Battles on the Eastern Front by Alex Buchner. Schiffer Publishing Ltd., Westchester, Pa., 1991. \$29.95.

On this 50th Anniversary of D-Day, in the United States, we focus on the events of the Western front. However, battles also occurred on the Eastern front that were immense in scale and are little known to us. *Ostfront 1944* is an outstanding account of those battles from the German perspective. The author, Alex Buchner, is a German Army veteran and was wounded three times during the war. He ended the war an Oberleutnant and company commander.

The book specifically deals with a series of defensive battles that occurred from January through August 1944. The author selected and described battles that resulted in the isolation of German units and their subsequent attempts to escape. Included are Cherkassy, Ternopol, the Crimea, the destruction of Army Group Center in White Russia, and the destruction of Army Group South Ukraine in Rumania. All of these battles were major defeats for the German Army. Two of them ended in the annihilation of entire field armies and casualties that rivaled or surpassed Stalingrad.

What is particularly striking about these battles is the rapidity with which they occurred. The Soviet offensive in White Russia began on 22 June, the anniversary of *Barbarossa*, and was complete by June 28. When it was over, Army Group Center had ceased to exist. The Germans lost all the Third Panzer Army and the Fourth Army as well as most of the Ninth Army. They lost seven of nine corps and 28 of 34 divisions, a total of 350,000 men. These are losses on a scale scarcely imaginable in the U.S. Army.

This is not merely a story of armies, corps, and divisions. Alex Buchner starts at the macro level and then narrows his focus to individual leaders and soldiers caught in the maelstrom. When you read about the escape from Cherkassy or the attempted evacuation of the Crimea, the impact of the statistics is minimal compared to the harrowing accounts of the survivors.

He also gives a glimpse at the ferocity of combat in the east and the efforts of German soldiers to escape from the Russians. Examples include Unteroffizier Diercks and

Oberleutnant Steinmeyer. Diercks wandered over 650 kilometers in 49 days from the pocket at Bobruisk. Oberleutnant Steinmeyer of the 161st Infantry Division traveled and fought over 570 kilometers in 32 days to escape the Russian encirclement in Rumania. Then there were those not so fortunate. In the Crimea,

"General Gruner, commander of the 111th Infantry Division, walked toward one of the Russian tanks to surrender. The tank opened fire, killing the general. Then, as so often the case with the Soviets, the officers and highly decorated soldiers were led away from the others. This was followed by shots and screams. The remaining Russian auxiliaries were lined up on the cliffs and shot."

A further indication of the scale and ferocity of the fighting is the simple statement regarding the 206th East Prussian Division. Every one of its 12,000 soldiers, from the commanding general to the last grenadier, were missing in action at Vitebsk July 18, 1944. There were no survivors.

Ostfront is primarily a story about soldiers. You will not find in-depth discussions and analysis about various aspects of German defensive tactics and doctrine or Soviet offensive methods. The reader will gain a great appreciation for the ability of the Russians to mount major offensives, seize and retain the initiative, set the tempo of operations to isolate, encircle, and annihilate the German defenders. The Russians learned the hard lessons of 1941 and '42.

I highly recommend this book to all members of the combined arms team. Alex Buchner vividly illustrates the awesome combat potential of the Russians and the extreme cost of failure associated with combat against them. This is a lesson that we should not forget because of the breakup of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, this is a story that is little known or understood in the West, and may dispel some of the "Wehrmacht Envy" currently in evidence. In our rush to downsize and reshape the military, the stories of the survivors should remind us of the terrible realities of combat.

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Timelines of War: A Chronology of Warfare From 100,000 B.C. to the Present by David Brownstone and Irene Frank. Little, Brown and Company, Boston, Mass., 1994. 29.95.

One of the most common tasks I've had in the past five years as the history instructor in the Armor School has been to provide answers to fairly simple questions about military history — who, what, or when. I wish I could have had this reference tool for the past five years. If you're looking for a detailed narrative history of warfare, seek another source. *Timelines of*

War is a reference aid. This book is laid out in a tabular form, which makes comparisons between developments and activities in the various regions of the world easy. It provides sufficient information on technology, diplomacy, economics, personalities, and events to provide an idea of where to go for further information. Its entries are detailed enough in themselves to refresh memory and bring back information an absent-minded instructor has forgotten.

The Dupuy's Encyclopedia of Military History has been the standard work of this nature in the past. Timelines will not replace it entirely. However, I found the side-by-side arrangement of regional developments to be more useful and interesting than the Dupuy's area-by-area chronology.

A work of this scope, especially a reference work, is bound to have some errors, minor usually and occasionally major. But with the exception of a few typos and fewer differences in interpretation of some events or developments, I was not able to discover any on my first read through.

I would heartily suggest its purchase to serious researchers and instructors. And, I would urge everyone who seriously thinks about war and its evolution to become familiar with it as a research tool; know where it is in the library and how to use it.

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How to Locate Anyone Who Is or Has Been in the Military by LTC Richard S. Johnson (Ret.). MIE Publishing, San Antonio, Texas, 1993. 246 pages. \$19.95.

Ever ask yourself, "What ever happened to SFC Doe, my first platoon sergeant?" This little book can show you the way to find him. It is a collection of every possible means of using scarce information to find friends, relatives, you name it. All you need is a little persistence and patience. LTC Johnson has included toll-free telephone numbers, addresses of the military worldwide locators, VA agencies, etc. The best recommendation I can give is that I am trying to get in touch with an Academy classmate, using the book as a guide. At a cost of \$3.50 and a stamp, I hope to soon be writing to my old roommate.

LTC Johnson received higher praise than my poor pen can produce. He is specifically mentioned in LTG (Ret.) Hal Moore's book, *We Were Soldier's Once...and Young*. LTG Moore used LTC Johnson to find soldiers that fought in the battles in the Ia Drang Valley. This effort made a real contribution to both military literature and history.

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