

Dunkirk Defeat Was a Factor in Final Victory

Dunkirk: From Disaster to Deliverance, Battleground Europe Series, by Patrick Wilson, Combined Publishing, Conshohocken, Pa., 1999, 192 pages, maps, photographs, bibliography, index, ISBN 1-58097-046-X, \$16.95 (paper).

On 5 June 1940, as the last of 338,226 defeated British and Allied soldiers escaped continental Europe through the French port of Dunkirk, Winston Churchill held no illusions. "We must be very careful not to assign to this the attributes of a victory," he warned. "Wars are not won on evacuations." True enough, yet because it made further resistance to Hitler possible, the "Miracle of Dunkirk" — Operation Dynamo — quickly assumed some of those attributes and has retained them. In this latest of the *Battleground Europe* series, Patrick Wilson not only demythologizes the Dunkirk experience but provides an up-to-date, well illustrated, and easy-to-follow battlefield guidebook.

Readers not already familiar with the events of May and June 1940 will find enough historical background on the Phony War and Case Yellow in the opening chapter. Here, Wilson's myth-busting sometimes relies on German commentaries, for example, Heinz Guderian's view of the much heralded British stand at Calais as irrelevant to the action at Dunkirk. Next comes a three-chapter recapitulation of the fighting along the escape corridor and on the perimeter, in which Imperial War Museum Sound Archives interviews of Dunkirk veterans figure prominently. Only with the strategic and operational contexts set do we see the Dynamo evacuation, first from the beaches east of Dunkirk and then from the eastern mole at Dunkirk harbor. A separate chapter focusing on the Royal Navy's perspective emphasizes the immense logistical problems.

Although Dunkirk was not a tanker's fight, *ARMOR* readers will appreciate this book's numerous glimpses of leaders under stress. Lord Gort made the "miracle" possible in the first place by withdrawing his British Expeditionary Force to the coast on his own authority rather than reinforce a doomed French army. Over the next two weeks, as infantry platoons along the escape corridor fought from encirclement and depleted battalions hunkered down on the perimeter, few expected a successful evacuation; when the BEF deployed to France, there had been no contingency plan for one. Once the need became apparent, Churchill predicted that only 30,000 soldiers would escape. And if many of those soldiers hoped that they would be the lucky ones, all knew the defeat was a certainty. In these

circumstances, many officers and men rose to the challenge, as the mythology of Dunkirk has long held, but others — not all of them French or Belgian — "lost it." In numerous cases, officers averted mass panic only by shooting disobedient troops and, as the BEF boarded ships for home, beach masters sometimes shot combat arms officers who attempted to rush the gangplanks ahead of their men.

Readers wishing to track down the author's sources will have trouble with his partial citations. Also, because this history book is also a guidebook, a few current full-page color maps would have helped. Those shortcomings aside, however, Wilson has provided a brief but well-balanced history, and one that makes the wages of poor discipline and poor planning abundantly clear.

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Panzertaktik: German Small-Unit Armor Tactics by Wolfgang Schneider, translated by Fred Steinhardt, J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing, Inc., Winnepeg, Canada, 2000, 512 pages, 600+ black and white photographs, with maps and diagrams, \$85.00 (hardback), ISBN 0-921991-52-5.

Panzertaktik is a large book covering a broad topic — German armor tactics at battalion level and below during World War II. The author organized the book along the same lines as our *FM 71*-series of tactics manuals, with chapters covering the offense, defense, unit movements, and reconnaissance, as well as command and control, logistics, and training topics.

Each chapter contains a brief introduction of the topic, followed by a detailed description of formations, tactical principles, and common phases of that type of mission. Several maps or sketches of German battle plans reinforce the tactical doctrine described in the text. The sketches are annotated in German, with English captions. Numerous photographs follow each chapter, again with English captions describing a tactical point of emphasis.

The book accomplishes its mission of describing German small unit armor tactics. It clearly explains the "how-to" of small unit operations. But it does not back up the textbook-style descriptions with examples of these tactics in use. Each sketch describes a tactical plan, but does not show the results of the execution of that plan, or

the things that went right and wrong with the particular implementation of armored tactics. The reader must refer to other sources for examples of these tactics in actual use.

The highlights of this book are the numerous photographs at the end of each chapter. They show German tanks and soldiers in action, with a caption describing what is right or wrong with the scene displayed. For example, a photo of a tank column approaching a burning village includes in the caption "Tanks have no business there!" (p. 53) The author does not, however, consistently identify the equipment, unit, or operation shown in each photo. The foreword does state that the book assumes that the reader understands German ranks and vehicle terminology.

This book provides an excellent background on German armor tactics at battalion level and below. It adds a valuable theoretical background to the existing works describing specific battles or units. The many photographs of tanks and soldiers in action also make this book worthwhile to modelers and anyone interested in a close-up look at the German Army in World War II.

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Men of Steel, I SS Panzer Corps, The Ardennes and Eastern Front, 1944-45 by Michael Reynolds, Sarpedon, New York, 1999. Maps, Acknowledgments, Preface, Guide to Abbreviations and German Words, Author's Note, Appendices, Bibliography, Index, 354 pages, \$27.50.

Men of Steel, by Michael Reynolds, is the second in a series of books about the 1st SS Panzer Corps and its subordinate units, the 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions. The book focuses from the Battle of the Bulge until the end of the war. Reynolds also dedicates a chapter to the leaders of the units after the war, to include captivity and war crimes trials. As both books have related subjects, Reynolds covers some of the same topics from the previous book. With this book, Reynolds completes, within limits, the history of the 1st SS Panzer Corps.

Reynolds draws on Allied and German accounts to detail the actions of the corps from the Bulge to the end of the war. He includes a guide to abbreviations and German names to assist the reader. In the second half of the book, which concerns

combat against the Soviets, he uses comparable unit size designations to provide a clear force comparison. For example, the Soviet First Guards Tank Army (Corps) relates the size of Soviet units to German units. There are numerous maps and photos throughout the book. Many of the photos are from the author's personal collection and show most of the senior leadership mentioned in the book. The maps are more like illustrations, consolidated at the end of the book. This arrangement makes for awkward reading, if one refers to the maps as they apply to the text. Reynolds also uses official unit histories, personal diaries, and other historical references to complete this work.

The strengths of this book are obvious. Reynolds has done an excellent job of recounting the history of not only the 1st SS Panzer Corps, but the two subordinate divisions as well. He meticulously details the unit strengths and activities by cross checking his sources and getting the right information. Along with this attention to detail, Reynolds sorts through the sources and determines what actually may have occurred if events are unclear or information conflicting. He also corrects any mistakes in his sources or personal accounts, revealing a much more realistic account than most previous works. While sorting through these sources, limited more so on the Eastern Front, he maintains fairness toward the units. He mentions the atrocities of individuals or leaders. He does not ignore the war crimes committed by the leaders and units. This approach leads to a stark, telling account of the awesome challenges faced by a unit in continuous combat on two fronts in the final months of World War II.

The only real shortcomings in this book stem from the arrangement and use of the maps and some speculation forced by source limitations. The maps, despite an apology from the author, are all at the end of the book. This forces the reader to flip from his reading to reference a map. Also, the maps are numbered and arranged chronologically. However, in some instances the references in the text do not follow the numerical or chronological sequence, making visualization even harder for the reader. The other shortcoming comes from the nature of the book itself. The author had already covered the corps' Ardennes history in a separate work. Yet, he dedicates half of the book to this same campaign. The only new material that comes from this effort, are a couple of corrections from the previous account or new source information. The book at this point feels more like a supplement than a new work. The second half of the book regarding the Eastern Front suffers severely from a lack of information from both combatants. Reynolds works very hard to give as complete an account as possible, but the lack of information leaves the reader wanting more detail. He does not have enough informa-

tion to provide a detailed account comparable to the Bulge portion of the book.

I recommend this book to all readers. Reynolds provides great insight into a unit fighting in terrible conditions. He manages to take the unit strengths and weaknesses and presents them in such a way that readers can feel the desperate situation of the 1st SS Panzer Corps at the end of World War II. Despite the stated shortcomings, his history still opens up new facts about the last months of the war outside of Germany. *Men of Steel* completes his series on the 1st SS Panzer Corps, not by breaking new ground, but by completing the story he started in his first book.

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Providence Their Guide, The Long Range Desert Group, 1940-45 by Major-General David Lloyd Owen, CB, DSO, OBE, MC; Leo Cooper, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Great Britain; 2000; 238 pages, \$36.95 (hardback).

First published in Great Britain in 1980 by George G. Harrap & Co., this is a revised edition 2000 imprint of Pen & Sword Books, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 2AS, Great Britain.

As the title indicates, the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) existed from June 1940 until August 1945. The book covers the organization and operations of the LRDG during its limited life span in the Mediterranean theater during World War II. A very special force, its very specialization led to its short history. This story of its life, almost a legend, tells in a straightforward manner the invaluable, often heroic, seldom widely recognized, service rendered to the British commands that it served.

The book also tells of the fate that can befall such a specialized organization. Once it fulfilled its original mission, as the LRDG certainly did in a superb manner, to radically change its basic organization and mission was not an easy task. Particularly if the higher command echelons fail to understand its capabilities and limitations.

The concept for such an organization was that of Major (later Brigadier) Ralph Bagnold, a British officer with extensive experience and knowledge of the little known African deserts. In the Mediterranean theatre of World War II, both friendly and enemy land forces operated relatively close to the coast of Northern Africa, avoiding the vastness of the deserts to the south. Bagnold's concept, in brief, was that a long-ranging reconnaissance force could take advantage of the unused desert areas to travel deep into the enemy rear to keep the British command informed of what the Italians (and later on the Germans) were doing and cre-

ate a threat to their lines of communications. General Wavell approved Bagnold's ideas in June 1940 and directed that he be given full support and a free hand in the formation of the units for this mission.

Bagnold developed four fundamentals for the formation and operations of the LRDG units: the most careful and detailed planning, first class equipment, a sound and simple communication system, and selected high quality personnel. The total authorized strength was 25 officers and 278 other ranks. Approved in June 1940, the first reconnaissance patrols departed in September 1940. The patrol structure — personnel, equipment, and general operating techniques — are covered in the interesting Chapter 2 of the book.

Operational patrols are covered in Chapters 3 through 11. Their wide-ranging travels covered areas of Egypt, the Sudan, Libya, Chad, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Tunisia. Operating initially from Egypt, forward bases were established at various times at Fayoum and Siwa (Egypt), Kufra (with Free French help) and Jalo in Libya, and Zella and Hon in Tripolitania. At times the patrols operated as far as 800 miles behind enemy lines. In fact, the base at Kufra was 800 miles from Cairo. Record patrols were one of 2,500 miles and another of 3,500 miles total travel.

With the end of German resistance in North Africa in 1943, the original role of the LRDG was no longer valid. The change in role was a major one. The unit was to be reorganized in small elements capable of operating on foot for a distance of 100 miles behind enemy lines while accomplishing their reconnaissance mission. They would carry a ten-day food supply and their communications equipment on their backs. New training was required, including mountain crafts, skiing, parachuting, and the German and Greek languages. Numerous changes in personnel were required by this mode of operation. The LRDG adventures and misfortunes in the new role are covered in Chapters 12 through 20.

The first operational missions were involved with the Aegean Campaign of September-November 1943. The LRDG now started moving by sea rather than sand. Island hopping from Castellarosso to Leros to Calinos, the unit there received, on 3 October, orders to attack, using locally obtained boats, to recover the island of Cos on which the Germans had landed in force. Cos was some 30 miles long and the LRDG numbered less than 300 men. These orders were soon cancelled, and the LRDG returned to Leros Island. From here, patrols were sent out to various islands to report on enemy air and ship movements. Next, the unit was ordered to retake a small island called Levita, supposedly held by a few Germans. Limited to a force of 50 men for this operation, only eight were recovered with the Germans still holding the island. On 12 November the Germans landed on

Leros and five days later were in complete control. About 70 LRDG personnel escaped from the island after the surrender.

In December 1943, the LRDG was reorganized again as two squadrons, each of eight patrols of one officer and ten men. Unit training began in January 1944, to include small boat handling, mountain warfare, and parachuting. These were initially to be employed in Italy. By late February, 1944, the unit had been moved to Italy. After a number of operations in support of Eighth Army had been planned and then cancelled, the LRDG became associated with Force 266, an organization coordinating support for the partisans in the Balkans. The first operational patrol went out in May to the Corfu area. Patrol missions ran the gamut from location and destruction of a radar site, with Royal Navy assistance, to arranging support for partisans. Operations continued successfully in Yugoslavia, the Dalmatian Islands, Albania, Istria, and Greece until the Communist influence in the partisan units began to interfere with the patrols, even to the extent of arresting members under various pretexts. By late April 1945, the patrols were all withdrawn, except for one in Istria which remained to the end of the war.

As the war was about to end in May 1945, Allied Forces Headquarters in Italy recommended the LRDG go as a unit to the Far East. On 16 June, the War Office requested it be returned to England as a unit, regroup and have leave. But less than a week later, the War Office ordered the unit disbanded.

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War in the Pacific: Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay, edited by Bernard C. Nalty, Technical Advisor: Russ A. Pritchard, Salamander Books Limited, London, 2000, 304 pages, \$27.96 online.

The attack on Pearl Harbor and VJ Day are defining dates in American history. This book acts as a perfect starting point to understand the importance of these dates and the intricacies of the battles between them. The authors explain the origins of the Pacific conflict from an American perspective, illustrate the battles with some detail, and explain Japan's capitulation. This volume is also a good reference for those who are more familiar with the subject.

Because the book does not contain any form of reference notation, readers may assume that it is not a scholarly work. On the contrary, the historical basis of this book is very sound. The authors of the chapters are reliable and, in most cases, acclaimed military historians. The editor and author of five chapters, Bernard C. Nalty, is a member of the Office of Air Force History and a former member of the

Marine Corps Historical Branch. Russ A. Pritchard, the technical advisor, serves on the Board of Governors for the Civil War Library and Museum and is a consultant for the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond. Furthermore, there is a substantial bibliography of solid sources, although most of them are not primary in nature.

There are 116 color illustrations and 214 historical photographs — each one appropriate and of high quality. The maps are exceptionally useful and plentiful throughout the book as are the historical photographs and illustrations. There are also numerous pictures of individual equipment with a corresponding description; thus, the reader can visualize the appearance of the soldiers, sailors, and airmen of all belligerents. As a whole, the graphic aids really make this book.

Most one-volume histories are rarely worth owning; however, this book is an exception. Whether you are unfamiliar with the war against Japan or you want to know what the U.S. rifle Model 1903A1 used at Guadalcanal looked like, this book is well worth having in your professional library.

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Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War by Joseph G. Dawson III, University of Kansas Press, Lawrence, Kan., 1999; xii & 325 pages; \$35.00.

What is so significant about a book that focuses on the exploits of one volunteer colonel and his regiment of Missouri volunteers during the Mexican War? Colonel Alexander Doniphan's campaign through Colorado, New Mexico, and Old Mexico is not the most widely known exploit in that conflict, and it did not include trials and tribulations that are exceptional in the annals of military history. But Joseph G. Dawson, Associate Professor of History at Texas A&M University, is correct in emphasizing the significance of this small campaign. In *Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War*, Dawson relates the story of this forgotten campaign. It is not, however, through a one-dimensional narrative that the author captivates the reader. The modern military officer will find Doniphan's actions enlightening and his ideas relevant to present-day concerns. This campaign not only provides a lesson in the ingenuity and determination of a committed commander, but, more importantly, demonstrates the importance of a strong relationship between professional military leaders and volunteer force commanders in developing a successful civil-military operation.

The title of the book is somewhat misleading in that this is not solely the story of

Doniphan on campaign, but the story of the operations of the 1st Missouri Regiment. Doniphan led the regiment, to be sure, but Dawson focuses more on the unit and the integration of volunteer soldiers into the regular army apparatus. While there were problems during the service period of these troops, such as lack of discipline and problems with local authorities, Doniphan and his subordinates must be commended for curbing any serious breaches of discipline. Doniphan's mutually respectful relationship with his immediate commander, Brigadier General Stephen W. Kearny, contributed to success in maintaining discipline. Kearny was quite willing to give his subordinate wide latitude in commanding his troops, while Doniphan was eager to learn from his professional superior. Dawson writes that Kearny served as Doniphan's "tutor and mentor as well as commanding officer," and exerted a "positive influence on Doniphan's military service."

Study of the campaign also contributes to the understanding of civil-military affairs at a time when the concept was unknown. As Dawson notes, "no one in the 1840s could call Doniphan's experiences textbook examples of military government because they were the earliest of their kind and predated the textbooks." The critical importance of a just and fair military government was apparent as Doniphan led his small army through a number of hostile towns, such as Santa Fe, El Paso, and Chihuahua City, which needed to somehow be pacified and negated as a potential threat to American interests. The best example of Doniphan's work in this regard is his creation of the Kearny Code of military law for occupied territories, which "formed the foundation for the [New Mexico] territory's transition to democracy."

There are few faults in this work, none of which detract from its overall worth. The one map of the entire campaign is very basic, and has minor discrepancies with dates and locations. Also, there is little examination of Doniphan's leadership in battle. These, however, are tangential issues to the ultimate importance of this man and his campaign. Dawson articulates and relates the challenges of leading a volunteer force, the importance of good civil-military relationships, and the problems of setting up successful military governments throughout a long military campaign. By analyzing Doniphan's campaign in this light, one both arrives "at some conclusions about how America won its first overseas war and how Mexico lost half of his dominion," and learns how American professional soldiers can work with their counterparts called up in time of crisis.

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Software

Steel Beasts by eSim Games. Price \$39.95 plus shipping. (For more information, a demo, or to order, go to www.esimgames.com).

System Requirements: 266 Mhz Pentium, 32 MB RAM, 2MB SVGA card, 220 MB available hard disk space, Mouse, CD-ROM, Microsoft Windows 95 or Windows 98 installed, Microsoft DirectX version 7.0 (or better) installed. Joystick recommended, but not required. Network card or modem required for multiplayer.

Reviewer's Platform: Celeron 466 Mhz, Windows 98, 128 MB RAM; Voodoo 3 2000 Video card; 24x CD-ROM.

For those of you who have been searching for a realistic, challenging, useful, and detailed PC-based tank simulator, your search is over. The game is Al Delaney's *Steel Beasts*, currently available exclusively online at www.shrapnelgames.com. Buy it now. You will not be disappointed.

Steel Beasts allows the player to command (and gun) from both the M1A1 and the Leopard 2A4. The game accurately models both the obvious and the subtle differences between the tanks so well that the in-game differences are not just cosmetic. The two steel beasts prove to be vastly different, and require different tactics for success — not to mention different gunnery and threat detection techniques. Both tanks are a joy to play, as each has been lovingly detailed by real-world tankers who know and love their respective tanks.

Players will command either (or both) of these types of tank in single missions which range from platoon- to battalion-size. The simulation models the gunner's control panel (with working switches), GPS, unity sight, and GAS (both sabot and HEAT reticles); and the GPSE (periscope on the Leo) and TC's position (buttoned and unbuttoned) for each of the tanks. Neither the driver's nor loader's stations are modeled. Exterior views are available for all friendly vehicles, the list of which is pretty inclusive, and growing steadily with each patch. Except in certain scenarios, the player can command all friendly vehicles, but currently the only interior positions modeled are for the Abrams and Leo.

In practice, players will spend a good deal of time at the powerful map screen setting waypoints and watching the developing tactical situation as spot reports come in. When designating routes for friendly units, a variety of command features allows you to order units to move at various levels of aggression; to set default reactions to contact; and to set speeds, formations, and spacing. A good example would be a route where you set the unit tactics to SCOUT. In this mode, the selected unit (whatever its composition) will move slowly along the route, stopping periodically to scan from the halt. The unit will not engage enemies with

direct fire unless they are themselves engaged; rather, upon enemy contact, the unit will seek a turret-down position and call artillery on the enemy unit — all without further orders from the player. At long last, computer-controlled units can be trusted to react intelligently and thoroughly according to the orders you give them.

A powerful "triggers" feature further allows you to pre-plan responses for your units based on enemy or friendly actions, locations, damage levels, composition, disposition, or strength. In the rough equivalent of sending out a code-word on the FM, you then only need to activate the trigger to have your selected units take any of a series of actions. The customization available means that with a little effort, you can practically give your AI an OPORD — and expect them to follow your orders effectively.

Gunnery plays out very well and, true to form, *Steel Beasts* gunnery is hyper-realistic. Round trajectories, ranges, and efficacy vary by type, and seem to be accurately modeled in all respects. One nice feature of the gunnery is a palm switch button: M1A1 gunners actually must dump lead between engagements, or accuracy will degrade, just as it should. Other subtle touches are equally nice: when in the gunner's seat, you must manually switch between Sabot and HEAT if the computer-controlled TC designates a new ammunition type.

Edward Williams deserves recognition for his work on the *Steel Beasts* sounds. Inside the tank, you will hear the turbine whine; the TIS clack; the turret brake squeal with sharp maneuvering; the hydraulics kick in appropriately; the breach slamming shut and open; AFTCAPs clanging around; and rounds impacting the tank. When the TC reloads his .50 after firing a box of ammo (yes, 100 rounds each), you will clearly hear each and every step in the reloading process, even the box of ammo being sprung open. AI gunners and TCs call out proper fire commands and procedures: and they won't just say "FIRE!" or "ON THE WAY!" either. You will hear them announce "GUNNER SABOT TANK!" or even "GUNNER HEAT TANK, FIRE, FIRE SABOT!" as well as "CALIBER FIFTY!" and "TC COMPLETE!" When you are on the move, the TC actually issues abbreviated fire commands. And by the way, there is a delay between the flash of a weapon firing and the sound of it going off. As you can imagine, all of this makes the immersion factor in *Steel Beasts* go through the roof. No tank sim has even come close to this level of detail and excellence in sound.

Steel Beasts includes several features tankers have always dreamed about in a tank sim. For example, the drivers are actually intelligent: they can automatically seek out hull-down positions; they will automatically conduct berm drills while you engage enemy vehicles and move out of

the beaten zone of artillery strikes (No, I am not making this up). Forests consist of individual trees that can be, well, driven through, adding a hefty dose of realism to the virtual world. Vehicles which skyline themselves will be more easily spotted by AI gunners. Artillery includes smoke, HE, ICM, and FASCAM; players can easily make fire missions point or area targets. Damage modeling is sophisticated and thorough: if you lose your hydraulics, you must put the FCS into manual and repeatedly tap the arrow keys to move the main gun, simulating turning the manual cranks. Finally, and you may not have always dreamed about this one, infantry in *Steel Beasts* are both useful and dangerous. Hard to spot and bearing some dangerous weapons, they can really ruin your day.

Multiplayer tanking also reaches new levels in *Steel Beasts*. Not only can you and your buddies play as wingmen: one of you can gun while the other plays TC in the same tank. Other options include head-to-head (M1/Leo vs. OPFOR, or M1/Leo vs. M1/Leo) or even "death match" in arena-like maps. By far, I most enjoyed multiplayer games where one player acted as CO (with his own track, of course) while others commanded platoons and sections of that company/troop/team. Players can even send graphic control measures to the other players for some truly realistic interaction. LAN and Internet play are possible for a large number of players; and net play is rock-steady, even over phone lines.

OK, so it's not perfect.

Steel Beasts currently does not support air units of any type. Frankly, you won't miss them (I usually pretend that budget restrictions have grounded all aircraft). Anyway, future editions of the game may include air units. There is no campaign mode, the inclusion of which might have been nice, but the stand-alone missions are much more detailed and creative as a consequence. Also, some people complain about the graphics and, admittedly, they are a little blocky. Yet the overall effect looks and feels so real that you probably won't mind at all. All in all, however, the shortcomings of this game are minor in contrast to the outstanding virtues in gameplay and realism.

In short, *Steel Beasts* belongs on every tanker's PC. Unlike previous civilian tank simulation offerings, *Steel Beasts* even has solid training value for gunners and TCs (anyone else kind of tired of COFT?) as well as for platoon-, company-, and troop-level tactics training. Add to all of this an incredible mission editor that allows for custom map and scenario building, and you have the tanker's dream for a PC tank simulation.

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