

Book Reviews



Fangs of the Lone Wolf, Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars, 1994-2009

By Dodge Billingsley
with Lester Grau

England: Helion & Company,
2013, 208 pages

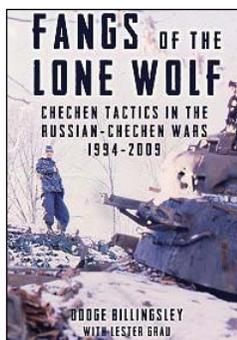
Reviewed by 1LT Wesly McCullough

The Russians have given our military a lot of lessons learned on the modern day battlefield. For example, we have learned a lot about our enemies in Afghanistan from the Russian fight against the Mujahedeen. The Russian-Chechen Wars from 1994-2009 are another Russian battle that we can take many lessons learned from and apply it to modern-day counterinsurgency operations. *Fangs of the Lone Wolf* by Dodge Billingsley gives a unique perspective into this war by taking firsthand accounts of the conflict from the point of view of the Chechen combatant. They do this by not focusing on the geopolitical situation in the conflict but instead on the actual fight between Russian and Chechen forces. Although there are many differences between the Russian-Chechen Wars and what we face in Afghanistan, there are still many valuable points that can be taken away from this book.

This book is a fantastic venue for leadership professional development (LPD) because it is written into short vignettes that discuss an aspect of the war between the Russians and the Chechens. These subjects range from all aspects of armed conflict such as attacks, raids, and the defense of lines of communication. All of the vignettes also have very easy to read graphics to illustrate the particular battles and give the reader a great picture of how each event took place. Billingsley is able to capture the way a force structured very similar to our enemy operates and some of the common tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that they use. This alone would be a valuable lesson to learn for leaders across the Army regardless of branch or rank.

Another great aspect of this book is that the author does not just focus on what the Chechen irregular forces did; he also covers how the Russian forces conducted the war. This book highlights the importance of synchronization and the use of combined arms in the counterinsurgent fight. There are many examples in the book where the Russian army would not coordinate fires and maneuvers and this caused either a delay or a failed mission on their part.

I would strongly recommend this book for combat arms Soldiers of all ranks. It is a fascinating book that is written from a very unique perspective and sheds light into how organized and well-prepared irregular forces are on today's complex battlefield. The way that Billingsley captures the essence of this war is incredible and is a worthwhile read for any rank or military occupation.



Marshall and His Generals, U.S. Army Commanders in World War II

By Stephen R. Taaffe

Lawrence, KS: University Press of
Kansas, 2011, 427 pages

Reviewed by Chris Timmers

They are all here — the key generals of the European and Pacific theaters of war... the names you know (MacArthur, Eisenhower, Patton, and Bradley) and the names you don't (Courtney Hodges, Walter Krueger, Alvan Gillem, and Troy Middleton).

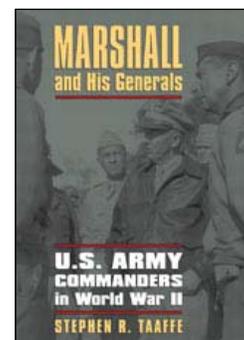
With more than 500 footnotes derived from 14 archives and more than 200 primary and secondary sources, author Stephen Taaffe has assembled an impressive bibliography. When we read that Fifth Army commander Mark Clarke was a prima donna or that many high-ranking officers found George Patton both flamboyant and profane, we believe it given the quality and depth of Taaffe's research.

In selecting generals who would command hundreds of thousands of men, Marshall didn't seek the most intelligent officers, nor even those with the most combat experience (Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and Willis Crittenger had no combat experience whatsoever). He regarded integrity, sense of duty, enthusiasm, and a can-do attitude as far more important attributes in a general.

Nonetheless, as Taaffe shows, not all of Marshall's choices were first rate. Generals are humans, too, and a number of them were more interested in advancing their careers before prosecuting the conflict and seeing a quick and successful outcome. Clark's obsession with personal glory led him to defer pressing retreating German forces up the boot of Italy in favor of entering Rome as a conquering hero. In so doing, he allowed German forces precious time to regroup, re-supply, and dig in.

And as bright as Douglas MacArthur was, he failed to move his air force from the Philippines after learning of the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor the day before. On 8 December 1941, Clark Field (Manila) was attacked by the Japanese and its fleet of aircraft destroyed. No less than historian Samuel Eliot Morison opined: "If surprise at Pearl Harbor is hard to understand, surprise at Manila is completely incomprehensible."

Taaffe tells a story in very readable prose. His thumbnail biographies of the generals and their lives after WWII are both informative and, in some cases, moving. The men who wore four stars in the war did not exactly come home to lives of idyllic pleasure. And he offers contrasts between what we think we know of these men and what they achieved. For example, everyone knows of George Patton's successes leading the 3rd Army ("Patton Dashes Across the Rhine" read a headline in *Stars & Stripes* on 23 March 1945), but how many Americans know of Courtney Hodges,



whose 1st Army took more ground, secured more villages, and suffered more casualties? My guess: not many.

As comprehensive, as thoroughly researched, and as easy to read, how could this book have been better? Maps. Taaffe has two by my count — one showing southern England and northern Europe, the other depicting an overview of the Battle of the Bulge. But none show the other major battles in Europe or any of the battles in the Pacific. I agree this book is about generals and “generalship.” But sooner or later when discussing generals in a wartime scenario, maps of major campaigns become indispensable. Of particular surprise was an absence of maps of two major operations: Overlord (June 1944) and Market-Garden (Sep 1944). And Operation Varsity (March 1945), the largest single day airborne (parachute and glider) operation in history, isn’t even discussed.

But don’t let that stop you; *Marshall and His Generals* should be required reading for any officer who aspires to someday wear stars.

Stalin’s General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov

By Geoffrey Roberts

**NY: Random House, 2012,
377 pages**

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Rick Baillergeon

The man. The myth. The legend. In the past, much has been written in regards to Soviet General Georgy Zhukov in each of these aspects. However, the past several decades have seen very little published on Zhukov. This is intriguing for two reasons. First, during this period, vast amounts of previously unavailable material tied to the Soviet World War II efforts have been released from the Soviet archives. Second, there has seemingly been a recent resurgence in the publishing of World War II-related books and specifically, biographies on the war’s leading figures.

Author Geoffrey Roberts has seized an opportunity to release a much needed new biography on Zhukov entitled *Stalin’s General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov*. In a relatively short volume, Roberts has written a very focused discussion of Zhukov. Those seeking a detailed analysis of every battle fought on the eastern front will not find it in this book. What they will discover in Roberts’ pages is perhaps the best personalization of Zhukov that any biographer has captured.

Within his volume, Roberts states, “The Zhukov legend has continued to grow in post-Soviet times. But new sources of evidence make it possible to disentangle the seductive myth from the often ordinary reality and to truly capture the complexity and contradictions of a man who rose from peasant poverty to become a great general and a hero not only to the Russian people but to all those who value his incomparable contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany.”

Roberts meets the challenge of providing readers a concise, superb understanding of Zhukov because of several factors. First, he benefits from his expertise in 20th century Soviet history, which includes publishing six previous books in this genre (volumes

on Stalin, the Soviet entry into World War II, and the Battle of Stalingrad). Second, Roberts has done an excellent job of culling the new material tied to Zhukov and determining what readers would find beneficial. Finally, the author stays on task throughout the volume and does not stray into areas that previous books on Zhukov have focused on.

I believe readers will find three relationships which Roberts’ emphasizes within the book particularly beneficial in understanding Zhukov. These are: Zhukov’s relationship with his family, Zhukov’s complicated relationship with Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev, and finally Zhukov’s relationship with history. In each of these, Roberts provides details and analysis previously missing in prior studies of Zhukov. Let me elaborate on each of these relationships below.

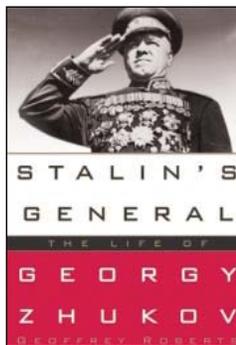
Of all the above relationships, clearly the one least addressed by historians is Zhukov’s relationship with his family. Roberts utilizes numerous newly found resources to aid in painting this picture. Within this image, he discusses many events and facets of his family life including details on his marriage and eventual divorce to his first wife, Alexandra; his affair and the death of his second wife, Galina; and his relationship with his children (sometimes rocky). Roberts provides a rare glimpse into a side of Zhukov most of us have overlooked or erroneously believed somehow did not exist.

Any author writing a biography on Zhukov would be remiss if he did not address his relationships with Stalin and Khrushchev. Clearly, each of these was far more complex than the average reader assumes. Additionally, they did not end up well for Zhukov (dismissed by each). Roberts dissects these relationships (in particular with Stalin) very effectively.

I believe Roberts is at his best when he discusses the battle Zhukov fought in his later years in his attempt to revive his legacy and rebuild his reputation. In particular, two areas stand out in this discussion. First, he provides significant background on the events leading to Zhukov being essentially written out of the Soviet history of World War II for many years. Second, he presents in-depth analysis on the subsequent steps Zhukov took to regain his position in the Soviet record. The key action being the writing of his memoirs, in which Roberts seeks to separate fact from fiction within Zhukov’s pages.

I have found that most military biographers find it difficult to remain relatively unbiased in their analysis of their subjects. Many tend to be too lavish in their praise while a smaller percentage utilize their volume to attempt to tarnish the achievements and performance of their subjects. I believe Roberts has strived to be as balanced as possible. Readers will not mistake Roberts’s great respect and admiration for Zhukov within his pages. However, they will find that the author is also highly critical of Zhukov’s decisions and some of his traits.

In conclusion, those desiring significant detail on the battles of the eastern flank would be far better served with a David Glantz book. Others seeking a biography focused more on Zhukov the general should obtain volumes written by Otto Preston Cheney or William Spahr. However, those who want an excellent foundation on beginning to understand Zhukov must read *Stalin’s General*. Unquestionably, Roberts has chipped away at the myth, verified parts of the legend, and most importantly, captured the man.



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