

Reviews

The First Day on the Eastern Front: Germany Invades the Soviet Union, June 22, 1941 by Craig Luther; Lanham, MD: Stackpole Books (Rowman and Littlefield); 2018; 504 pages; \$23.76 hardcover.

Craig Luther has undertaken a bold task here in his effort to capture the first day of the largest land battle in history June 22, 1941: the start of Operation Barbarossa. Truly this was a day for the world to hold its breath, far more so than the later battles of Stalingrad or Kursk.

Luther's first venture onto the Eastern Front battlefield was his very readable tome on Army Group Center. (It is not an oxymoron to call that book both a tome and eminently readable, for it was both.) In that work, Luther implicitly perhaps saw the campaign of Army Group Center in Clausewitzian terms, that the war could only be truly decided along the axis of Army Group Center and the potential of its drive to destroy the heart of the Bolshevik regime by the capture of Moscow.

Here with ***The First Day on the Eastern Front***, Luther gives a broad panoramic snapshot of one day across 100 miles of the huge battlespace that would become the Eastern Front. Luther's book is the antithesis of Sun Tzu's overused aphorism of the highest skill being, in essence, avoiding the fight. Here Luther captures shock and awe, a shock and awe the likes the world had never seen and will unlikely see again except for a nuclear conflagration. What we have here is the brutal punch in the mouth, followed by a knee to the face or groin. There is little Jomini subtlety here.

Luther's approach here to writing on the first day of the invasion is both practical and sensible in that he goes from Army Group North to Army Group Center to Army Group South and their various sub-elements spearheading the invasion. ***The First Day*** neatly captures the dynamics of three widely varying terrain compositions facing the three Wehrmacht army groups and how that impacted the first day's fighting. There are two shared terrain characteristics that dominate the first day: 1) there were perhaps more rivers to cross than originally forecast and 2) the border defenses on certain axes of advance were more robust than scholarship has attributed. Generally, the scholars' concept has been that with the Soviet move to the west – thereby their various land acquisitions from September 1939 onward – meant that the new frontiers were poorly protected. Luther doesn't dispute that but notes that time and time again the Wehrmacht ran into defensive zones and field fortifications that were much stouter than previous works had noted. Now that was indeed fascinating.

If there is one other thing to note, the Germans discovered on the very first day that Russian roads, in a word, were non-existent in the Western European sense.

Everyone "knows" the broad outlines and the particulars of the opening moves of Barbarossa, but Luther's work, with his detailed research and drilling down into archives, will make the opening moves fresh and give the reader a sense of being there. Like in his Army Group Center book, Luther extensively mines unit journals of all sizes, as well as journals and letters from Wehrmacht members, Luftwaffe and the diplomatic corps of the various powers. Luther's writing allows him to weave together disparate strands without needing to be so heavy-handed or clumsy that he is forced to label parts of the book DIME-influenced (diplomacy, information, military and economics). But the reader will see the connection.

One could declaim that Luther's book has dull repetitiveness to it – that the tales of the first day, be they after-action reports, staff journals or personal reminiscences, become numbingly indistinguishable. In a factual sense, this bears a ring of truth, for many of the small-unit actions and Luftwaffe strikes flow into one another. Yet what Luther has shown is that despite the sameness, there were, first, appreciable differences in how the three German groups' events unfolded June 22, 1941. Second, these "repetitive" vignettes, multiplied by the hundreds to thousands, declaim why Luther chose this one day to detail, for this one day is the apex of modern warfare in scope, audacity and sheer numbers. This one day stands out like no other in military history. By the vast compilation of events, Luther has opened a window like no other in the works on the Eastern Front – and perhaps even in the writing of military history.

The part I like best in the book? The Day 1 air war, as this is the first book to talk about the Soviet reaction other than having their airfields shot up and planes smashed on the ground *a la* Pearl Harbor, or the oft-repeated vignettes of bomber formations being destroyed *en masse*. The conclusion that stands out here in the Wehrmacht journals and letters is this was a psychological shock to the Ost Front soldier when he had expected this foe would break soon as all the others did.

Luther has contributed mightily with this work to the war in the East. It is indeed a difficult book to put down. We as both an Armor community and those of us fascinated by the Eastern Front can but hope Luther turns his considerable talents to the Ukraine Campaign of 1941.

LTC (DR.) ROBERT G. SMITH

Spearhead by Adam Makos; New York: Random House; 2019; 341 pages; \$28 hardcover.

Can former enemies who faced one another in battle find forgiveness and closure at war's end? Adam Makos, author of New York Times bestseller ***A Higher Call***, examines this question in his latest offering titled ***Spearhead***. Makos answers this question through the story of two tankers – U.S. Army Pershing tank gunner Clarence Smoyer and German panzer crewman Gustav Schaefer – who began as bitter wartime enemies before becoming close friends in their final years. Rounding out the book are a host of supporting personalities including fellow Soldiers, Wehrmacht soldiers and German civilians.

Makos did his homework while writing ***Spearhead*** by incorporating many first-person interviews and primary research documents to weave a compelling tale covering the last months of World War II in Europe to the present era. The account contains many period photographs of the men and women profiled within its pages that put a human face on a terrible moment of human history. Makos includes several simple but useful maps that further enhance the storyline's tactical details.

Prospective readers should take heed, as this account is no sanitized vision of battle. The author does not shy away from revealing the true face of ground battle in unflinching detail. However, Makos frequently contrasts war's inherent brutality against the unexpected moments of man's humanity revealed in this story.

At its core, ***Spearhead*** is an engaging and highly detailed description of 20th Century warfare as told through harrowing moments of armored combat interspersed by the routine day-to-day life of Soldiers on the Western Front hoping to see the next sunrise. ***Spearhead***, however, is much more than just another book on World War II that is easily read and just as easily forgotten. What sets this work apart is Makos' examination of the bonds shared by all combat veterans as described through individual acts of mercy. If there is a lesson to be learned from this story, it is of the power of forgiveness and an unquenchable desire for reconciliation when the guns fall silent.

LTC CHRIS HEATHERLY

Ghosts of Fallujah by Coley D. Tyler; Athens, GA: Deeds Publishing; 2018; 201 pages with maps and photographs; \$19.95.

Coley Tyler links his personal experiences, observations and thoughts with precision in ***Ghosts of Fallujah*** to excerpts from Steven Pressfield's ***Gates of Fire***, which conveys the story of Spartan warriors who fought during the Battle of Thermopylae; his personal interactions with the late retired LTG Harold G. Moore and reading of ***We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young***; and his reliance on augmentation of facts and events documented by editor-journalist Matt McAllester, an embedded reporter with Task Force 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, during the Second Battle of Fallujah.

Tyler delivers an insightful and captivating perspective of his assignment as the battalion fire-support officer for Task Force 2-7 Cav (also known as the Ghosts), 1st Cavalry Division. His reflection on what motivated him as a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy; serve as a field-artillery officer in the U.S. Army; and select Fort Hood, TX, to serve

with 1st Cav Division as his first duty assignment describes a journey toward “duty, honor, country.” His portrayal of individual backgrounds, relationships and actions offer the reader an opportunity to associate with unit leaders and Soldiers. This accentuates the words and thoughts extracted from *Gates of Fire* and *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young*. Tyler’s assessment of unit achievements and individual displays of courage highlight the level of commitment required to persevere in a chaotic environment.

For Vietnam War veterans, military historians or occasional readers of military history, this report of the Second Battle of Fallujah may be reminiscent of the heavy urban combat that Soldiers and Marines encountered in the 1968 Battle of Hue City. That 30-day battle resulted in the defeat of an estimated 5,000 Communist fighters in the city of Hue, Vietnam. Tyler’s accounting of the planning, preparation and execution of the Second Battle of Fallujah (code-named Operation Al-Fajr or “the dawn”) from Nov. 7 to Dec. 23, 2004, during Operation Iraqi Freedom likewise depicts the synergy between U.S. Army and U.S. Marines Corps units against an Iraqi insurgency stronghold. The 2-7 Cav’s gallant contributions to Regimental Combat Team (RCT) 1 aided in defeating more than 3,000 opposing fighters and significantly degraded the Iraqi insurgency’s momentum in Anbar Province.

Tyler simplifies military jargon to allow a reader with no military experience or exposure to understand terms of references and language. He explains tactics, techniques and practices employed by platoon- and company-sized mounted and dismounted units to navigate through the confined environs of Fallujah, Iraq. He expounds on the success of integrated ground and air/fire support before and during ground assaults by RCT-1. He illuminates the ongoing command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance among maneuvering forces throughout the operation. He effectively communicates the words and reactions associated with commanders exercising the art of command and science of control during engagements to achieve the desired outcomes of the battle. His presentation of maps, photographs and timelines descriptively support the narrative about the importance of the Second Battle of Fallujah.

Ghosts of Fallujah is a recommended read for small-unit leaders and others seeking a short but entertaining non-fictional novel over a four-day weekend. This paperback book is a must-read while sitting on the back deck, turret or hull of an Abrams, Bradley, Stryker or Paladin – or in a foxhole, at the range or downrange.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

RCT – regimental combat team