

Reviews

Hitler's Ardennes Offensive: The German View of the Battle of the Bulge, Danny S. Parker, editor, London: Greenhill Books, 1997; reprint by First Skyhorse Publishing, 2016, 264 pages, \$14.95.

The first printing in 1997 of this book was advertised "as a unique work giving unparalleled insight to the German view." There is little in the 2016 reprint to qualify it as insightful or unique. Parker's editing lacks analysis, and he merely stitches together the reminiscences of the senior German officers who planned and executed *Wacht am Rhein*. (Their views are now readily available from other sources.) Parker apparently assumed that the casual reader could draw his own conclusions about the complexity of corps- and army-level operations by solely examining the German perspective of this campaign.

This work won't satisfy the curiosity of accomplished military historians. Parker's introductions to each section are short biographic sketches and mile-wide but inch-deep summaries of the officers' recollections. His endnotes after each introduction are more valuable than his text; the lack of a bibliography reflects Parker's lack of scholarship. It is inconceivable that there are only two maps, one depicting the German operational plan and the other describing the general traces of each German division's axis of advance. Parker shortchanges the professional soldier by not including a systematic battle analysis and detailed maps depicting the ebb and flow of the campaign. There is much to learn about the operational level of war from the Ardennes Offensive. Unfortunately, Parker fails to synthesize the thinking of the German generals into a coherent examination of how the German army practiced the operational level of warfare during the closing months of World War II.

The quality of the detailed after-action reports, questionnaires and interviews of the German officers is the result of the professionalism and diligence of COLs William A. Ganoe, S.L.A. Marshall, Harold Potter and MAJ Kenneth Hechler, the transcribers and translators from the European Theater of Operations Historical Section. The German officers' responses to questionnaires and interrogatories are incisive and professional rather than self-serving.

The exception is shown in the transcript of the interview of SS Sixth Panzer Army commander SS-Oberstgruppenfuhrer Josef "Sepp" Dietrich, which exposed his effort to hide the truth. With the SS considered a war-crimes organization and the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials looming, Dietrich attempted to distance himself from Hitler by claiming that at the Dec. 12, 1944, commanders' conference, he advised Hitler that the offensive was unworkable. Dietrich struggled to deny any knowledge of the Malmedy Massacre, yet he stated he directed an investigation of the event.

It was a stretch to consider Dietrich a professional military officer; as late as 1934 he was merely Hitler's driver.

Six weeks before the offensive, Hitler personally assigned Generalmajor Fritz Kramer as the SS Sixth Panzer Army's chief of staff. Kramer was a highly regarded regular-army officer who a month before the attack assumed responsibility for final planning. Kramer describes how the emphasis on operational security denied the Germans the opportunity for detailed reconnaissance of the front-line disposition of allied units.

Sixth Panzer Army commander General der Panzertruppen Hasso von Manteuffel considered the leadership and the quality of German soldiers inferior to those who invaded France in 1940. With most units undermanned and lacking enough material, they were unable to affect a speedy exploitation of the armies' initial penetration of the Allies' defenses. He criticized the Supreme Command's unwillingness to consider the Allies' ability to rapidly respond to the initial attack.

Seventh Army General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger's recollections do well in reflecting American forces' dispositions, capabilities and conduct of combat operations. His written recollections serve as a standard for battle analyses. Today's commanders and staff officers can learn much from how he established operational security and conducted operational planning.

Gunther Blumentritt in his critique of the Ardennes operation unambiguously concludes that by December 1944 Germany had lost the war, although it was still fighting virtually everywhere in Europe. Allied airpower's destruction of Germany's industry and infrastructure rendered it incapable of offensive operations.

The German officers were unanimous as to why the offense failed. From the start, Germany lacked adequate ground forces and air parity. Shortages of petroleum products, transportation vehicles, engineer equipment and spare parts hindered the German army's ability to exploit its early successes after its initial attack. The sole advantage of surprise was lost because of the Allies' greater mobility, combat power and leadership's flexibility in hastily strengthening its defenses, followed by rapidly counterattacking the enemy's flanks. The Germans believed that the failure of the Ardennes Offensive was preordained because Hitler and his sycophants Keitel and Jodl were wishful amateurs who were unable to execute a complex military operation on faith alone.

RETIRED LTC LEE F. KICHEN

U.S. Army