

# Book Reviews

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***Sherman: The M4 Tank in World War II*** by Michel Esteve; Oxford, United Kingdom: Casemate Publishers; 2020; 248 pages including maps, photographs, appendix; \$42.

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In 1940 the United States possessed 464 tanks. As the nation ramped up for the coming conflict, annual tank production of the interim M3 tank was about 300 per year. In his book on the development and employment of the M4 series Sherman tank, retired French armor officer and author Michel Esteve undertakes the task of explaining how the United States went from producing less than 1,000 tanks per year to constructing more than 30,000 within two years.

Given that there were five basic models of the tank and many variants, the task of describing the basic vehicle and alteration to armament, engines, transmissions, radios and crew training is a daunting undertaking. To adequately address these issues, the author organized his book into 13 chapters that cover the growth of the Sherman tank from concept to the battlefield use. Colored photographs, diagrams and charts support each chapter's topical area. Each chapter relies on field, technical and ordnance supply manuals as a foundation for explaining a particular aspect of the Sherman's career in World War II and other conflicts.

The United States produced close to 50,000 Sherman tanks before the end of their production life. The basic chassis system was employed to add mobility to a variety of other military vehicles such as artillery pieces, tank destroyers and recovery vehicles. As Esteve explains, the United States initially desired to develop three categories of tanks: light, medium and heavy. In 1941, the Army planning board decided to produce only light and medium tanks. Although several heavy tank prototypes were developed, none saw battlefield service.

Each tank prototype was initially designated "T" followed by its place in a given numerical sequence. The Sherman program began in September 1941 as the T6 project at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, MD. Upon acceptance by the Army, the Sherman acquired the designation of M4. Esteve covers the production aspect with a chart displaying the principal variants and the number produced by one of the 10 manufacturing firms, along with other data for each model.

Cross-sectional profiles of the basic Sherman M4 permit a better understanding of equipment and control locations. Overhead colored plates address the various hull types, hatch locations and comments on the differences and unique characteristics of each model. The author also explains the field-expedient use of more armor and crew installed protective measures. While each model was an alteration of the previous one, emphasis was placed on retaining common parts and sizes.

This common manufacturing method, for example, allowed the Sherman to mount five different turret configurations that initially carried a 75mm main gun, with later models boasting a 76mm, then 105mm main gun using the same turret-ring mount. At one point, the M4A3 chassis even carried a 90mm system originally intended for tank destroyers. Each of the various turret configurations is detailed by clear overhead and side-view color plates. Also, Esteve details the operation of the complex turret-stabilization system in understandable terms by relying on photographs and diagrams to supplement the text.

Other areas that the author addresses include a detailed discussion on crew personal weapons, main-gun ammunition and machinegun configurations. A series of colored plates detail six types of driver instrument panels, along with the various ammunition storage configurations found in the Sherman tank.

No discussion of this instrument of warfare would be complete without addressing routine operational maintenance and resupply efforts. Esteve covers crew tasks that include pre- and post-operative checks for the tank, repairs performed by the crew and servicing responsibilities. Esteve devotes considerable space to the logistical support provided by the famed Red Ball Express, along with the various types of recovery vehicles designed to support field operations.

Adapting the basic Sherman design to battlefield requirements witnessed the Sherman employed in several unique roles. These included rocket-launching platforms, engineer bridging vehicles, mine-clearing, flamethrower versions and amphibious tanks. The latter were principally developed by the British prior to the Normandy landings to provide direct and indirect fire support to landing troops. These vehicles were known as duplex-drive Shermans. The success and failure of these particular vehicles are examined and detailed by the author.

The United States also supplied their allies with tanks. About one third of the produced vehicles were supplied to allied nations under the American Lend-Lease Program. Details of how the program worked are explained by Esteve. Organizational charts for American, British, French and Soviet tank units are presented, complemented by photos and national identification systems.

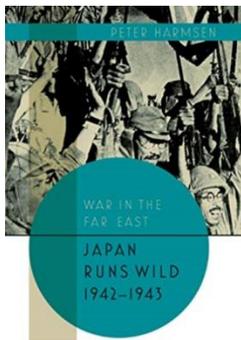
This is a superbly organized, well-written, detailed history of the Sherman tank. Maneuver leaders will benefit from reading about the Sherman as an example of creating a system adaptable to worldwide battlefield conditions, the importance of common component design and the value of user feedback.

COL(R) D.J. JUDGE

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***War in the Far East: Japan Runs Wild 1942-1943*** by Peter Harmsen; Haverton, PA: Casemate Publishers; 2020; 217 pages with notes; \$22.85.

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***War in the Far East: Japan Runs Wild*** is undisputedly one of the most enjoyable books I have read in some time. How enjoyable was ***Japan Runs Wild***? I bought the companion volume ***War in the Far East: Storm Clouds over the Pacific 1931-1941***.

Harmsen has done a masterful job with his work on the Pacific War here. It would be easy to dismiss this work, thinking it is some thin book with an axe to grind on a facet of the Pacific War. Instead, the book is an intellectual treat, as it may be the best abbreviated coverage of this period of the war in the Pacific I have encountered to date.

Harmsen has sure feel for the material and leaves no gaps. It shows that he did his homework by using resources such as the U.S. Marine Corps History Division, the Naval Institute and the Naval History and Heritage Command. I've worked with these folks

before, and the fact that Harmsen reached out to them indicates he was endeavoring to deliver more than a shelf-filling book.

The book picks up where ***Storm Clouds over the Pacific*** left off: the Japanese offensive against the Western Powers in the Pacific has been unleashed. We begin with the doomed Force Z and ADM Tom Phillips, to whom Harmsen is perhaps more charitable than most reviewers are in his conduct with Force Z. But Phillips and his attitude would easily be at home in any armor battalion, for he was ready to go hunting and bring destruction upon his nation's enemies, even if the odds might feel long. Harmsen in four pages neatly details the destruction of Force Z and the magnificent seamanship of Captain Bill Tennant of ***HMS Repulse***, who skillfully evaded many torpedo attacks, that Harmsen's book will be my go-to quick source for the near future. Moreover, Harmsen neatly encapsulates other battles in the same fashion, getting to the gist with detail enough to satisfy the military-history reader.

Harmsen ferrets out different facts that might have been unknown to the reader. For example, I was unaware that the Japanese suffered a major defeat in this period where they ran wild against the Western Powers, losing the Battle of Changsha in early 1942 in China.

Harmsen neatly dissects how these spectacular and almost-too-easy victories led Japan into a strategic stupor, not really certain what to do next. In fact, Harmsen takes up an interesting thesis that much of what Japan did after defeating the British in Burma was defensive by nature, that an offensive mindset was no longer so much in evidence. Had they been thinking offensively, he argues, the Japanese would have pushed farther in their attack against Colombo and perhaps taken the British out of the war in the Pacific and Asia. Therefore both Midway and Guadalcanal take on a different hue in terms of Japanese strategy for these two key battlespaces, that they were really defensive battles and operations.

Yet I think Harmsen does his reader the greatest service by bringing to light the year 1943 in the Pacific, a year that has been in the shadows, as there was no Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Marianas Turkey Shoot or Leyte Gulf. His telling of

the battles around Buna, the Bengal Famine and Tarawa is riveting. But his astute observations of strategy from Yamato's 1943 I-Go air offensive that led to his death to Halsey listening to his staff and adopting an island-hopping strategy that would leave Japanese garrisons to wither and die on the vine gives one a nuanced perspective of how each side saw how their respective wars were changing and needed to be fought. Ironically, the War Plan Orange plans advocated island-hopping but seemed to have been overlooked.

In perhaps the most startling material, Harmsen details how dissent was tolerated in Japan to a degree one would never have suspected, in ways that were unimaginable in Nazi Germany or Stalin's Russia – one only has to think of the arrest of a young artillery officer by the name of Alexander Solzhenitsyn as Berlin is poised to fall.

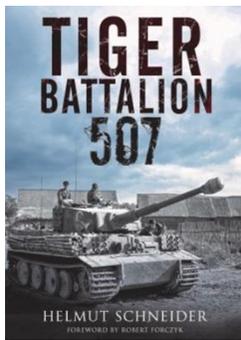
So if you know little about the Pacific Campaign of World War II, this is a perfect entry point. If you are well-versed in this period, be prepared to be pleasantly surprised by the new facts and observations Harmsen has culled for your reading pleasure. Well researched, great notes and a lively writing style, covering both the tactical to strategic fields, makes this a winner of a book.

**DR. (LTC) ROBERT G. SMITH**

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***Tiger Battalion 507***, edited by Helmut Schneider; South Yorkshire, United Kingdom: Greenhill Books; 2020; 288 pages including maps, photographs, appendix; \$32.95.

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During World War II, the U.S. Army sponsored heavy-tank designs as part of its overall production strategy. While several prototypes were produced, none ever made it into combat operations. By contrast, the German army produced six tank variants culminating in the creation, manufacture and deployment of two heavy-tank models. Designated Panzer Kampfwagen VI (PzKpfw VI) or Armored Fighting Vehicle 6, they are better known as the Tiger I and King Tiger tank. At the time, they were battlefield monsters that caused a great deal of justifiable consternation to the Allies.

Deployment of the Tiger I tanks began in 1942 against Allied forces in North Africa and Russia. By the conclusion of hostilities, the Germans had fielded 15 heavy-tank battalions. Three were assigned to the elite Waffen SS, while the remaining 12 were organized to support the German army. Tiger Battalion 507 was assigned to the German army and formed in October 1943. As with the other units, this battalion contained three tank companies of 14 tanks each, plus three battalion-level command tanks, for a total of 45 vehicles. A sizeable maintenance element, along with a reconnaissance and medical platoon, rounded out the formation.

Assigned to the Russian front, the battalion began its combat operations against the Russians in March 1944. They continued to be shuffled about the Eastern Front in a vain attempt to stem ever-increasing Russian offensive operations. They did well. Over a three-day period in January 1945, for example, the battalion was credited with destroying 136 Soviet tanks.

In the concluding days of the war, the battalion found itself assigned to the tank training area in Paderborn, Germany. Here it fought a large tank action against elements of the American Third Armored Division. A footnote recalls that a member of the battalion had the dubious distinction of killing the commanding general of Third Armored Division, MG Maurice Rose, during this engagement.

At war's end, the unit was disbanded and its members scattered throughout Germany. In 1982, former members of the battalion met and decided to publish their exploits. Relying on personal recollections, military files and individual diaries, editor and former Tiger Battalion 507 member Helmut Schneider went about the task of publishing a record of the battalion's activities. Schneider enlisted in the German Army in 1941 and trained as a tank driver. He witnessed his first combat action in southern Russia, serving as a driver and gunner prior to being selected for training on the Tiger tank.

Schneider and his fellow contributors posted their recollections in a series of entries. Their comments on Russian anti-tank weapons and mine warfare are restricted to observing that these weapons caused many casualties and disabled many tanks. A variety of photos display German tankers receiving awards, on leave in one of the occupied countries of Europe or pulling maintenance on the Tiger.

The commentaries and associated photographs on maintenance are impressive. The Tiger weighed some 57 tons combat-loaded. It was a complex weapon system. Repair work required a secure location for troubleshooting the tank. Obviously, given the speed of the Russian assaults, these secure locations were few and far between; thus many Tigers were abandoned to the enemy. The book contains many photos of recovery efforts on disabled tanks.

Highlighted in the recollections by the battalion members is the tendency of the Tiger I to throw its track. This was a major shortfall of the Tiger design. The Tiger I wheel system contained eight road wheels per side. The road wheels overlapped each other. This configuration made the track susceptible to throwing track in soft ground. Mud and snow would build up between the wheels and the track and disable the tank. Given the extreme Russian weather conditions and almost non-existent road system, adverse weather conditions were the norm. In this environment, these heavy tanks became moving pillboxes, unable to move quickly. The tank's traction system and weight worked against rapid formation movements and lessened the system's impact on combat operations. Unfortunately, the recollections of the former battalion members mention this deficiency only in passing. A detailed text on the Tiger tank is required to appreciate this deficiency.

While a superb translation from the original German text, the book lacks a great deal of background information that would enhance understanding on the employment of the tank. An introductory section, for example, on the Tiger tank system would have established a basis for understanding the technical aspects of the system.

Maps are often of poor quality and fail to show friendly and enemy movement. While an interesting look at a heavy German tank battalion, there is little here to attract or enhance a maneuver leader's appreciation of tank warfare during World War II.

COL(R) D.J. JUDGE

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***Treat 'em Rough! The Birth of American Armor 1917-20*** by Dale E. Wilson; Haverton, PA: Casemate Publishers; 2018; 214 pages; \$44.30 hardcover or \$10.99 Kindle.

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Dale Wilson's reprise of his history of the birth of American Armor is a handsome addition to the bookshelf of any Cavalry and Armor enthusiast, and includes something for everyone in the profession of arms. Whether the reader is looking for a tactical military history that brings out the nature of war and the character of warfare in World War I; case studies in the difficulties of aligning doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities (DOTMLPF) of an emerging martial capability; or old-fashioned stories of ingenuity and proactivity in young leaders, this book provides much in only 214 pages. The true historian, however, may be disappointed in the subject matter and in the endnotes of each chapter, but would appreciate its aesthetics.

Wilson presents *Treat 'em Rough!* in two parts. The first chronicles the DOTMLPF challenges faced by the U.S. Army as it attempted to integrate the newfangled tanks into warfighting. The second part tells the story of how American units employed light and heavy tanks in the closing campaigns of the Great War.

Part I begins with good-news stories of ingenuity and determination despite challenging circumstances, then tells a bad-news story (that would surprise few in the profession today) of bureaucratic bumbling. The good-news portion tells how the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) established schools for light and heavy tanks in Europe and in the United States. It first contextualizes the AEF's interest in the tank, and how and why the AEF should adopt the new capability.

Wilson quickly brings George S. Patton Jr. into the picture, who was an ambitious Cavalry captain on the AEF staff. The foundational Chapter 1 tantalizes Armor fans with the story of Patton's personal witnessing of the Battle of Cambrai (the first great tank assault), his first encounter with noted British military theorist J.F.C. Fuller, and with a summary of Patton's comprehensive and prescient report, "Subject: Light Tanks," which included his original six tasks for tanks.

Chapters 2-4 present the reader with an outstanding account of how the Army struggled to incorporate new capabilities. Wilson begins Chapter 2 by stating: "On Christmas Eve 1917 the AEF Tank Corps was a woeful force

indeed, consisting as it did of just three officers: [COL Samuel D.] Rockenbach, [CPT] Patton and [1LT Elgin] Braine. The task facing them was monumental.”

The chapter justifies this preamble by addressing how these leaders (mainly Patton) developed the school and the force. It is a case study in DOTMLPF development worthy of a Fort Leavenworth classroom, with challenges ranging from negotiations with the French over land allocation for the American school to how to train soldiers and maintain discipline at a tank school that had no tanks for its first three months of existence. After a narrative of the development of tactics, Wilson ends the chapter with Patton’s departure for the front.

Chapter 3 does the same for the American Heavy Tank School (also named 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Center) in Wool, Great Britain. Lacking a source like Patton for the heavy tanks, Wilson provides a less-robust treatment of the subject and its history. Its brevity also reinforces Wilson’s point that the United States’ relationship with British was in general more positive than that with the French. While LTC Conrad Babcock, the school’s commander, dealt with animosity between the British and American soldiers, the positive organizational relationship resulted in the British spoon-feeding the Americans in heavy-tanks concepts. Wilson argues, though, that the Americans did engage in rich dialogue with the British as they refined their doctrine, but he disappoints a little by choosing not to expound on this dialogue.

Chapter 4 completes the collection of DOTMLPF case studies with the tank schools in the United States. The second of three stories of disciplined initiative in young leaders comes out in how CPT Dwight Eisenhower, only three years out of West Point, established the Tank Corps training center at Camp Colt on the Gettysburg battlefield grounds in Pennsylvania. Young leaders will find in this chapter anecdotes on discipline and ways to create esprit de corps in an organization seeking an identity. Further, Wilson tells the story of how Eisenhower responded to the “Spanish Flu” epidemic in a location that was bringing together men from throughout the country.

While Chapters 2-4 are the “good news,” Wilson’s greatest success in *Treat ‘em Rough!* is found in Chapter 5, where he tackles the bad-news conundrum of how the United States failed to produce a single tank that saw action in World War I. Entitled “Tank Production: Made the American Way” (perhaps tipping a hat to Wilson’s dissertation adviser, Russell Weigley), the chapter follows a young officer’s travails in trying to break through stiff Washington, DC, bureaucracy.

Braine’s experience in spinning up American military/industrial energy is best characterized by one of the many anecdotes from Wilson. In it, Braine experiences a month-and-a-half delay on getting tools for the new tanks in a comedy of administrative errors, including redrawing the required tools three times. Wilson’s damning account also includes evidence that the Washington bureaucracy intentionally misled the AEF leadership about the tank-production progress, with embarrassing results for the AEF and its relationship with its Allies. He also presents a strong case that Washington lost time in tank production due to its support for an inferior tank design by Ford Motor Company, despite Pershing’s express wishes.

The inauspicious performance of America’s military/industrial mobilization resulted in only three battalions capable of engaging in battle out of 30 authorized for the AEF by August 1918.

Wilson’s Part II brings the reader forward from the generating force to the operational force by recounting the actions of the AEF’s tanks (supplied by Allies) in the Western Front of World War I. Mirroring Part I, he first tells of the actions of the 326<sup>th</sup> and 327<sup>th</sup> Light Tank Battalions, and then 301<sup>st</sup> Heavy Tank Battalion.

Wilson’s Chapters 6-8 describe how the AEF light tanks factored into the impressive execution of the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives. The history is compelling, with examples that accentuate the principles of mission command in effective leadership, battlefield ingenuity and valor. They include good maps to assist the reader in keeping up with the exciting play-by-play.

While Patton’s actions dominate the narrative, Wilson includes the personal experiences of a number of other officers and men (many of them retrieved from Patton’s papers). It also includes valuable stories of how friction behind the forward line of troops, such as detraining operations in heavy rain, logistics and movement to the line of departure, can affect operations.

Historians will be slightly disappointed by Wilson's Patton-philia, and with the fact that the 2018 publication introduces nothing new to the historiography. It retains the same preface from GEN George S. Patton IV from the original publication by another press more than a decade earlier. Furthermore, the enthusiast will likely already have *Camp Colt to Desert Storm: The History of U.S. Armored Forces* (University Press of Kentucky, ed. Hoffman, Starry 1999), which includes Chapter 1 authored by Wilson, effectively summarizing this book.

*Treat 'em Rough!* remains, though, the strongest single DOTMLPF and tactical military history book on the birth of Armor in the U.S. Army. Wilson, along with historian Timothy Ninninger, continue to stand out in helping understand why the development of tank tactics was doomed from the start for the United States, as is evidenced by America's absence in seminal books like Williamson Murray and Alan Millet's *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*.

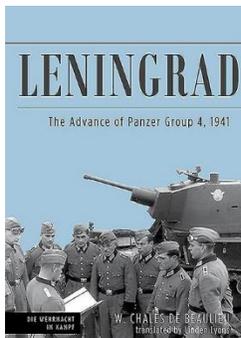
On top of all of that, the hardcover is great. It is the texture of a rugged Army "green book," with the old "Treat 'em Rough!" poster in color. I commend it for this journal's readership.

LTC ANDREW P. BETSON

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***Leningrad: The Advance of Panzer Group 4, 1941*** by W. Chales de Beaulieu; Havertown, PA: Casemate Books; 2020; 216 pages including maps and appendix; \$31.71.

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By the end of 1940, Germany had conquered all of Europe. With England tottering on the brink of defeat, Adolf Hitler turned his eyes toward conquering Russia. In his view, "You only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down." The attack upon the Soviet Union was designated Operation Barbarossa. From March until June 1941, an immense effort was undertaken to position some 140 German divisions for the attack. The German High Command placed this enormous force into three army groups: Army Group South, Army Group Center and Army Group North.

Army Group North, commanded by Field Marshall Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, was tasked with seizing the Russian city of Leningrad. To attain its objective, the Army group would have to move some 500 miles from its start point to seize the city. The three subordinate armies of the Army group consisted of two infantry heavy armies and one armor heavy force designated Panzer Group 4. This force was under the command of Colonel-General Erich Hoepner. Their combat performance is the subject of this book by the group's chief of staff, GEN W. Chales de Beaulieu.

This is the first English translation of the original 1961 German edition describing the combat actions of Panzer Group 4 from June to September 1941. Based on personal observations, war diaries, operational orders and after-action commentaries, de Beaulieu explains that the Army group formed its three subordinate armies into a wedge-shaped formation wherein the two infantry heavy armies would move astride the tip of the wedge formed by the armor heavy Panzer group.

Panzer Group 4 contained two corps. The XXXXI Corps, under the command of GEN Georg-Hans Reinhardt, consisted of 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Panzer Divisions, 36<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Division and 269<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The XLI Corps, commanded by GEN Erich von Manstein, contained 8<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Motorized Infantry Division and 290<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Both 269<sup>th</sup> and 290<sup>th</sup> were regular infantry divisions with limited motorized capabilities.

The Germans launched their three Army groups into battle June 21, 1941. The author's commentary on the flow of the battle as the Panzer group initially advanced against light resistance toward the Dvina River contains observations on enemy resistance, friendly logistics, weather and terrain. The seizure and defense of vital river crossing sites, dependence on using existing roads and the impact of determined Soviet counterattacks is fully explained by de Beaulieu. The restrictions on maneuver and massing of German forces due to the fragile road systems, adverse weather conditions, crossing of many marshes and wetlands is thoroughly reviewed by the author.

By late July, the Panzer group gained favorable high-speed armor terrain. However, as the author clearly states, the effects of personnel and equipment losses impeded the group's ability to take advantage of the terrain. The seizure of Leningrad, the original operational object of Army Group Center and specifically Panzer Group 4, was

never realized. Here the author falls short of fully explaining why this objective was not seized. De Beaulieu implies that the Army group commander voluntarily shifted forces from the panzer to his other subordinate commands.

In fact, the Army group was under intense pressure from the German High Command to send forces south to Army Group Center for its drive on Moscow. Von Leeb had to squeeze forces from his structure to aid this effort. His Army group would not seize, but rather would encircle, Leningrad. Sending forces south to Army Group Center was a futile effort. Given the poor road system, appalling supply situation and Russian resistance, lateral movement by the Germans was extremely restricted. The result was that the drives to Leningrad and Moscow both failed by the end of 1942.

This is a book well worth the time to study. While an excellent translation, the text requires a research effort prior to reading. The author consistently identifies, for example, Russian tanks as Joseph Stalin (JS) rather than Kliment Voroshilov (KV) tanks. The JS tanks were produced in 1943, while the KV I and II engaged the panzer group. Appreciating the capabilities of these tanks will provide a better understanding of the delays caused by formations armed with these tanks. Another research effort includes an initial scan of the book's German-language organizational charts and maps, which necessitates consultation with a suitable translation process to fully understand what follows in the text. Also, a quick review of the 1941 organization and equipment of German infantry, motorized infantry and panzer divisions facilitates the comprehension of the panzer group's composition.

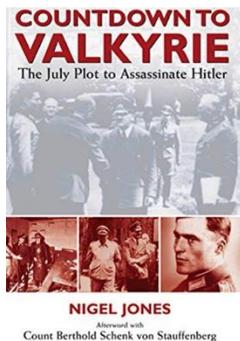
With prior preparation, this book yields many examples and lessons-learned for maneuver commanders in such areas as air support, logistics, defense of bridgeheads, movement across wetlands and interaction with higher headquarters.

COL(R) D.J. JUDGE

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***Countdown to Valkyrie – The July Plot to Assassinate Hitler*** by Nigel Jones; Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers; 2019; 320 pages; \$19.95 (soft cover).

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In 2008, actor Tom Cruise brought Count Claus von Stauffenberg and the July 20 Plot to the silver screen with the film *Valkyrie*. The movie, which received praise for its historical accuracy, depicts the major events of the bomb plot to assassinate German dictator Adolf Hitler at his forward headquarters in East Prussia. Readers keen to learn more are highly recommended to purchase a copy of Nigel Jones' book titled ***Countdown to Valkyrie – The July Plot to Assassinate Hitler***. Jones, a familiar name given his previous work with the BBC and *History Today* magazine, provides a detailed and engaging account of the conspiracy.

As expected, Jones chronicles Stauffenberg's formative childhood experiences to understand his motivation in joining the conspiracy and taking a central role in the bombing attempt. The book's early chapters also provide background context explaining Hitler's entry into German politics, consolidation of authority and emergency-powers decree, and relations with the Wehrmacht's senior leadership. He further examines several earlier attempts to remove Hitler by the Valkyrie conspirators or other would-be assassins seeking an end to the Fuhrer's reign of terror.

In the book's third act, Jones presents the events leading to and occurring July 20 in a highly detailed, minute-by-minute account of events across Nazi Germany from Paris to Rastenburg.

A notable first found in ***Countdown*** is the primary-source information provided by Stauffenberg's eldest son, Berthold, who met with Jones for an extended interview. In a brief afterword, Strauffenberg continues the family story detailing their post-World War II lives.

The book contains many black-and-white photographs and an annex of biographies of the major figures involved in the plot. Readers seeking to explore the book's locations in Berlin or elsewhere may wish to use the two-page site guide with information on the Bendlerblock, partially destroyed Wolf's Lair or the Stauffenberg family's summer home.

There is a vital lesson to be learned from this tragic story. At its core, ***Countdown*** is a strong reminder to professional soldiers of the dangers of blindly following orders that are patently illegal, immoral or unethical. Time and again, the Wehrmacht's senior leadership hid behind their personal oath to the Fuhrer despite his

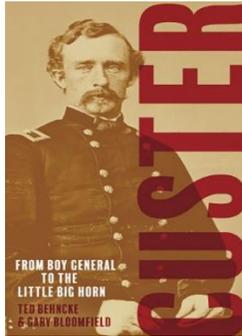
unspeakable – and well known – evils against humanity. We may speculate as to what might affect Hitler’s removal from power *might have made* upon the outcome of World War II and post-conflict Europe. What is *undoubtedly certain*, however, is had the Wehrmacht acted sooner, Hitler’s death would have saved innumerable lives otherwise sacrificed to cowardice, inaction and fear.

LTC CHRIS HEATHERLY

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**Custer: From the Civil War to the Battle of the Little Big Horn** by Ted Behncke and Gary Bloomfield; Havertown, PA: Casemate Books; 2020; maps, photographs, bibliography; \$34.95.

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The life and exploits of George Armstrong Custer have been the subject of many books and films. Was he a courageous, knowledgeable leader or an attention-seeking, irresponsible individual? Did he lead the men entrusted to his care to certain death at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in June 1876? The answers to these and several other questions about Custer are the focal point of Ted Behncke’s and Gary Bloomfield’s collaborative work on this complex man.

Exploring Custer’s developing years, the authors examine his upbringing in Monroe, MI. A prankster and attention-seeker, Custer gained entrance to the U.S. Military Academy in 1857. As the authors note: “The question was not ‘Was George Custer ready for West Point?’ but rather ‘Was West Point ready for the antics of George Custer?’” During his stay at West Point, Custer amassed a tremendous number of demerits and was ranked 34<sup>th</sup> of 34 men in his class. However, with the advent of the Civil War, Custer was allowed to graduate in June 1861.

He entered combat with 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment during the Battle of Bull Run in July 1861. From that time onward, there were few battles conducted in Virginia or the surrounding areas in which he did not participate. The authors detail his impressive record of achievements, where he was recognized as an officer who always led from the front, cared for his men and displayed audacity and courage in combat. These laurels won him favorable press reviews, many of which are displayed in the text. His heroic actions also brought him to the attention of senior Union field commanders.

As noted, “his stamina was boundless, and while others were ready to drop, he was itching to fight.” These characteristics, along with his enviable combat record, led to Custer attaining the brevet rank of brigadier general at age 24. Placed in command of the Michigan Brigade, he led them into battle as part of the Union Cavalry Corps during the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. Relying on period newspaper reports and personal recollections of his subordinates and commanders, the authors detail his employment of cavalry against Confederate forces. By 1865, Custer was a major general of volunteers and commanded a division of cavalry in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. He ended the war by witnessing Lee’s surrender at Appomattox.

Mustered out of the volunteers in 1866, he was appointed a lieutenant colonel in 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. The authors explain in detail the combat prowess and capabilities of foes he would face. The Plains Indians fought to retain control of their land against the encroaching flood of settlers from the East. The authors examine the cultural differences between the Indian nations and the U.S. government officials sent to negotiate an end to hostilities. Misunderstandings caused confusion to reign, resulting in continual clashes.

Pitted against the “finest light cavalry in the world ... the Army failed to recognize this or adequately respect [its] foe, and, as such, it was inevitable a disaster would occur.” Outlining the moves of the post-Civil War Army, the authors focus on the quality of recruits manning 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, the rate of desertions and disciplinary problems that drove Custer into a state of depression. Also, the long separation from his wife caused Custer to commit several personal and professional missteps that resulted in his courts-martial and suspension from the Army.

Despite these serious setbacks, Custer’s luck held and he is recalled to active service in pursuit of tribes that have departed the reservation. When Custer deploys 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry along Montana’s Little Big Horn River, he is at the pinnacle of his military career. The narrative describes his approach march to the Indian encampment, the organization of Custer’s force, the logistical tail of both Custer and the Indians, along with Custer’s offensive concept. In a clear and concise manner, the authors explain the battle’s dynamics and result. Several previously held beliefs regarding the employment of Custer’s force are challenged by the authors.

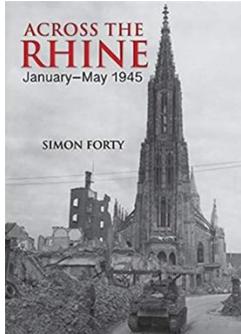
This is a book worthy of review and discussion by maneuver commanders. The lessons brought forth regarding cultural differences, appreciation of enemy capabilities, force structure and political guidance are well covered. Custer's command style, interaction with his officers and ability to determine at a glance a battlefield opportunity merit attention. So also are his failure to perform adequate reconnaissance, mass his forces and thoroughly explain his tactical concept to his subordinates at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Custer's personal and professional traits, shortfalls and abilities will command the attention of maneuver leaders.

COL(R) D.J. JUDGE

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***Across The Rhine: January-May 1945*** by Simon Forty; Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers; 2020; 192 pages including maps and photographs; \$20.22.

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In February 1944 GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower received a strategic directive from the Combined Chiefs: "You are hereby designated as Supreme Allied Commander of the forces placed under your orders for operations for liberation of Europe from Germans. Your title will be Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force." With his impressive title also came a complex and demanding task: "You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces."

To accomplish his mission, in June 1944 Eisenhower successfully landed Allied forces in Normandy. After fighting their way out of the Normandy bridgehead, the Allies formed three Army groups. The British under Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery formed 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian and 2<sup>nd</sup> British Armies under his command. Later, he would also receive the Ninth United States Army for operations west of the Rhine River.

GEN Omar Bradley assumed control of 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group. He had under his command the First and Third United States Army. The Ninth Army would return to his control prior to the conclusion of hostilities in May 1945.

After the August 1944 invasion of southern France, GEN Jacob Devers commanded 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group. Devers retained control of the Seventh United States Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> French Army for the rest of the war.

The author provides a detailed account of the establishment of each Army group, along with commentaries on their commanders.

Ablly supported by Allied air forces, this immense organization moved steadily but surely across Western Europe and into Germany. British author Simon Forty details the various major military operations conducted to attain Eisenhower's strategic directive. Using period maps, original and current photographs, Forty recounts the movement of Allied forces across Europe. Details on the campaigns conducted across France, Belgium and Holland lay the foundation for the author's commentary on operations performed once the Allies crossed the Rhine River.

Forty highlights major combat events on the west side of the Rhine River starting with Operation Market Garden, the Allied ground and airborne invasion of Holland in September 1944. This operation demonstrated to the Allies that "the ragtag German forces showed remarkable resilience and determination. ..." This same degree of resilience is detailed by the author as he delves into the penetration of the German West Wall defenses in the areas of the Reich Wald and Huertgen Wald areas. The drives into these two forested areas cost the Allies more than 50,000 casualties.

Adding to the Allies' mobility frustrations, the German counterattack in the Ardennes region stopped all Allied movement toward the Rhine in December 1944. Period photographs of the appalling weather and terrain conditions faced by all three Allied Army groups is presented in a summarized fashion by the author.

Steady Allied offensive operations, however, move the three Army groups to the edge of the Rhine River by March 1945. The unforeseen but fortuitous seizure of an intact bridge at Remagen, Germany, by the First United States Army allowed the Americans to occupy and expand their bridgehead on the east bank of the Rhine. By late March, all three Army groups crossed the river and established bases aimed at encircling the industrial heart of Germany's Ruhr River Valley. Forty provides organizational charts depicting the structure of the defending German forces, a

biography of each major German commander, details on the Allied river-crossing engineering efforts and an in-depth discussion on the British-conceived and -executed immense ground and airborne Rhine crossing.

In addition to describing the major Allied operations in support of a steady movement to the Rhine and beyond, Forty also provides observations on the Canadian efforts to clear the Scheldt Estuary, which allowed free access to the port of Antwerp, GEN George S. Patton's operations in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, and Patton's failed attempt to liberate Allied prisoners in the famous Hammelburg Raid, along with the British success in freeing the Netherlands from German occupation.

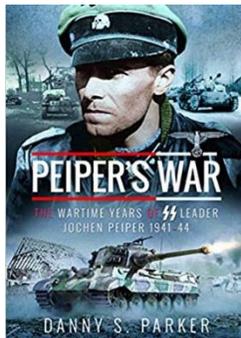
Forty has made an impressive attempt to address almost a year of intense combat by the Allies in Western Europe. In performing this task, he provides summarized interpretations of some of the most complex and confusing engagements ever fought. Maneuver commanders will benefit from his study of various aspects of these battles. However, his work should be viewed as a fast-reading review of the immense effort expanded by the Allies to attain their strategic objectives. Leaders should use the book as a basis for future study and discussion. It is well worth the time and effort to read.

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***Peiper's War: The Wartime Years of SS Leader Jochen Peiper 1941-44*** by Danny S. Parker; Havertown, PA: Pen and Sword Books Ltd.; 2019; 620 pages including maps, photographs, footnotes and bibliography; \$42.95.

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British author Danny S. Parker presents the third in his four-volume work on the life and exploits of Schutzstaffel (SS) COL Jochen Peiper. Peiper was known as a “handsome Aryan prodigy, a witness to the inner workings of the Nazi elite, Waffen SS warrior. ...” While better known for his actions during the Malmedy Massacre, this subject will be addressed in the fourth and final book in Parker's series. In this work, the author focuses on Peiper's actions from 1941 to 1944.

Peiper was born in 1915 to a middle-class German family. His father fought during World War I and later became an ardent anti-Semite and member of the National Socialist Party. Peiper's father encouraged his two sons to join the Nazi Party and pursue a military career. In 1933, Jochen followed his older brother into the Hitler Youth program. As soon as he was able, Jochen volunteered for the SS cavalry. As Parker relates, Peiper soon attracted the attention of the SS leader, Heinrich Himmler.

By 1938, Peiper was a card-carrying member of the Nazi Party and assigned to the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH), a military formation that would expand to become one of the elite units within the German army. The author details Peiper's assignment as an adjutant to Himmler. It was an unusual assignment, with Peiper retaining his assignment in the LSSAH while assigned to Himmler's staff. As part of his routine duties, he visited various concentration camps and execution sites with Himmler. By 1939, Peiper was quickly becoming Himmler's closest aide and accompanied him on all official functions. By the end of the war, he possessed an extensive knowledge on the incarceration and execution of various people caught up in the German war machine.

Parker exhaustingly reviews Peiper's exploits during the 1940 invasion of France. Eager to prove his tactical abilities, Peiper returned to the LSSAH as a company commander. His audacious attack on a French position resulted in an award of the Iron Cross. Promoted to Himmler's first adjutant, he was fully aware of the plans for the elimination of Europe's “undesirables” and the invasion of the Soviet Union. The details of the conferences he attended outlining the Nazi plan for treating the population of the conquered territories is often repulsive and painful to read. The collective lack of compassion or understanding of the destruction brought to their fellow human beings is fully laid out by the author.

Detached from Himmler's entourage once again, he returned to the LSSAH, where his exploits often included a host of warcrimes. By September 1941, for example, Peiper was advanced to battalion command. In this position, he rescued an encircled German division in Russia. Under adverse weather conditions, Peiper's battalion successfully established a corridor that saved the bulk of the division. However, his triumphs were marred by his criminal action when he entered a village shortly afterward where 25 Germans had been killed. “Peiper ordered

the burning down of the whole village and the shooting of the inhabitants,” Parker wrote. His battalion soon acquired a reputation as the “blowtorch battalion.”

The appalling Russian winter forms the backdrop for the author’s detailed description of Peiper’s combat actions attacking Kharkov and later in the Battle of Kursk. Although he distinguished himself while participating in the largest tank battle of history, the Germans were unsuccessful in eliminating the Russian salient at Kursk. Following the loss, the LSSAH was withdrawn to Northern Italy, where it viciously suppressed several local uprisings.

Re-equipped, the LSSAH departed Italy for Russia in November 1943, with Peiper assuming command of 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzer Regiment. Lacking experience in the employment of armor, Peiper’s command style, aggressive and without regard for casualties, reached its limits. Headlong attacks without proper reconnaissance led to heavy losses in men and materiel. As the author notes, “The word “caution” did not exist in the Peiper lexicon.”

How Peiper fares during the rest of the war and his post-war activities are the subject of Parker’s fourth and final volume in the series.

This is a well-researched work with detailed footnotes. The photograph section is invaluable in appreciating the destruction wrought by Peiper in Russia and Italy. Maneuver commanders seeking to understand, however, the tactical movements of Peiper’s force will need to consult other works on a particular battle. This work is not a detailed book of tactics. It is recommended for commanders because it exposes Peiper’s callous indifference to the suffering of innocent civilians, disregard for the rules of warfare and the rights of prisoners, and an appalling insensitivity to the destruction wrought by his actions. In short, a maneuver commander will leave this work with a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices of those who fought to destroy Nazi Germany.

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## **Acronym Quick-Scan**

**AEF** – American Expeditionary Forces

**DOTMLPF** – doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities

**JS** – Joseph Stalin (tank)

**KV** – Kliment Voroshilov (tank)

**LSSAH** – Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler

**SS** – Schutzstaffel