

# Book Reviews

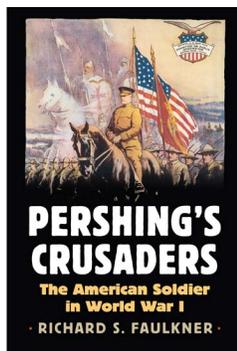


## ***Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I***

By Richard S. Faulkner

Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017, 758 pages

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)  
Rick Baillergeon



As you might expect, the recent 100th anniversary of the start of World War I has spurred the release of many books tied to the war. Some of these are commemorative in nature while others strive to add to the body of knowledge. However, I believe none will be more important to our understanding of the U.S. Soldier during WWI than Richard Faulkner's *Pershing's Crusaders*. It is unquestionably a book which will be of huge benefit and appeal for years to come.

Within *Pershing's Crusaders'* pages, Faulkner focuses solely on the doughboy. The author addresses this focus in his initial chapter with readers. He states, "This book attempts to be a 'travel guide' to the Soldiers' experience as well as an 'anthropological' study of their world and their world views." They combine to produce a volume which clearly highlights what it meant to serve as a doughboy in the Great War. Let me address each of these below.

As a "travel guide," Faulkner takes readers through a doughboy's entire World War I experience. He systematically and seamlessly moves through a doughboy's induction into the Army through the end of the war and the demobilization process. In between, he discusses Soldiers' training in the United States and abroad, their deployment overseas, and obviously, their combat experience. There are very few aspects of a doughboy's day-to-day life that Faulkner does not explore.

As outstanding as the travel-guide treatment is, I found the author's anthropological study superior. Faulkner delves into the human dimension of the doughboy as well as any historian I have read. Within this discussion, he superbly analyzes many facets of this human dimension. These facets include a doughboy's motivations, his feelings toward the Army, his allies, the enemy he is fighting, and most importantly, his fellow doughboys. He also addresses a doughboy's thoughts and emotions on combat. Faulkner's ability to articulate this in written words is impressive since this is a significant challenge for any author.

I believe there are three key factors which make *Pershing's Crusaders* such a superb book. First is the exhaustive research Faulkner has conducted in the development of the volume. You just don't put together a book of this magnitude

and subject matter without extensive research. For the author, that meant "...squirreling away soldier accounts, documents, and records" for more than 20 years. It is supplemented with unit histories and unpublished manuscripts. This research is clearly on full display within the pages of *Pershing's Crusaders*.

The second factor in the volume's success is the outstanding readability. At first glance, you could be deterred from reading this because of its sheer size (well over 700 pages); however, these pages turn very quickly. Faulkner writes in a very conversant style, and his words also exhibit the passion he has for his subject matter. This conversational writing style and passion combine to engage a reader from the book's beginning until its end.

Finally, Faulkner has inserted numerous photos throughout the volume. These pictures are from his own collection, which as mentioned earlier, he has collected over the course of two decades. What makes them even more beneficial is his decision to craft a detailed caption underneath each. Faulkner's photographs are very valuable in telling the story of the doughboy.

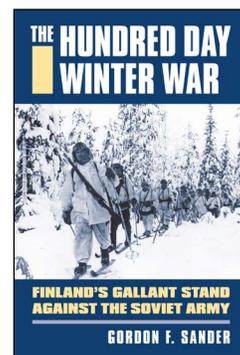
In summary, other wars each possess that seminal work which provides readers with a true understanding of the Soldier who fought in that particular conflict. However, WWI did not have that volume until now. Faulkner has filled that critical void with *Pershing's Crusaders*. It provides readers with an appreciation and knowledge of the doughboy unlike any other book published in the past. It is a special book which is a valuable addition to the scholarship of the Great War.

## ***The Hundred Day Winter War: Finland's Gallant Stand Against the Soviet Army***

By Gordon F. Sander

Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013, 402 pages

Reviewed by Maj Timothy Heck,  
U.S. Marine Corps Reserve



The Finnish-Soviet Winter War of 1939-40 holds a special place in modern military history. The war, lasting a little more than three months, has been the subject of a disproportionate number of books given its length. Furthermore, an aura of myth surrounds it. The war has the drama of David versus Goliath, complete with diplomatic machinations, foreign volunteers, and an adoring press corps looking for excitement as combat between Germany and the Allies was at a standstill. Finland, it seemed to contemporary journalists and commentators, was not just another Poland

which would be quickly swallowed by its larger neighbor. Finland's defensive war against the Soviet invaders thus took on a significant role in popular memory and in the following months as both Axis and Allies reacted to the conflict. Gordon Sander's comprehensive history of the war expands beyond traditional narratives of hopeless and inept Russians being cut to ribbons by a handful of Finnish troops in arctic forests. Against this mythical backdrop, Sander weaves social, military, diplomatic, and cultural history into *The Hundred Day Winter War*, giving life to the complex interplay of national and international politics that drove the war.

For the military reader, Sander's analysis of Finnish defensive operational maneuver against a numerically superior foe is insightful. The treatments of the battles around Suomussalmi are Sander's best combat writing. These battles, which saw an undermanned and underequipped Finnish force trap and nearly annihilate two Soviet divisions, are presented as "a classic military double victory with few if any precedents in the history of modern warfare." While the sections on Finnish attacks against Russian troops do read like the traditional narrative of "ghosts on skis," Sander does cover small unit tactics, logistics, and the impact of combat on the Finnish soldiers in the protracted battles. Sander's inclusion of the human element strengthens the narrative and helps demystify both the Finns and the Soviets. Readers looking for a more analytical approach to the battle should see Allen F. Chew's *Fighting the Russians in Winter: Three Case Studies*, issued by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College's Combat Studies Institute in 1981.

Sander briefly covers the Red Army's evolution during the course of the war. Initial Soviet failures were rectified and incompetent commanders, mostly junior officers before the purges of the late 1930s who suddenly found themselves regimental and division commanders, were relieved and some executed. The battles around Suomussalmi led Stalin to continue the war "after the requisite period of retraining and reorganization," including the appointment of Semyon Timoshenko as the commander. Under Timoshenko's command, the Red Army adapted and changed its tactics to become an army that was indeed capable of learning from past mistakes. As a result, the Soviets were able to break the Finnish defensive positions and destroyed the nation's ability to fight.

Sander is unabashedly pro-Finnish in his writing and use of sources. This said, he does attempt to explain Soviet intentions and political vision for the conflict in balanced terms. He was able to locate several Soviet veterans whose stories are included. Overall, the lack of Soviet equivalence or parity in writing does detract from the balance of the book though, as the subtitle implies, Finland is the hero of Sander's narrative.

Overall, Sander presents a history of the war using a plethora of primary and secondary sources in a clear manner. The book is largely a social history of the war heavily influenced by his journalist sources, but military readers will benefit from its expansive scope and well-written sections on military operations.

**Ardennes 1944:  
The Battle of the Bulge  
By Antony Beevor  
NY: Penguin Books, 2006,  
451 pages**

Reviewed by 1stLt Walker D. Mills,  
U.S. Marine Corps

The Battle of the Bulge, known to the Wehrmacht as Operation Autumn Mist, was the Germans' final major offensive of the Second World War. Hitler himself planned an operation intended to seize the port of Antwerp and cleave the Allied Western Front in two. The German divisions were able to achieve complete surprise and penetrate more than 40 miles into the Allied front before they were halted just short of the River Meuse in what became their "last gasp." In his new book *Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge*, Antony Beevor narrates the story of the battle from all perspectives — general, private, German, and American. The book is a masterwork and a must read for anyone who has interest in the battle itself or World War II. Beevor again proves himself a master of the operational-level saga, a treat for the reader from start to finish.

*Ardennes 1944* is Beevor's ninth book and a worthy inheritor of his legacy of prize-winning World War II writing. Beevor has won major awards for almost all of his previous works. He shows us again that he can take a well-known story, Hitler's desperate gamble over the Christmas of 1944, and make well-researched history page turning. The book lacks a little of the cataclysmic nature inherent to some of his previous work like *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943* and *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, but Beevor keeps the reader from noticing.

Emboldened by success on the Western Front, the Allies moved quickly across northern France to the German border after breaking out of Normandy. Allied intelligence predicted little to no possibility of a German offensive; in late August of 1944, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force G-2 published an analysis that said, "The August battles have done it, and the enemy in the West has had it." Hitler had other plans, however. In September, he summoned his top generals to brief them on an upcoming offensive. The plan was to smash the Allied lines in the Ardennes sector in order to break through to Antwerp. He predicted the ensuing disaster would create "another Dunkirk" and strain the Anglo-American alliance to the breaking point. Preparations were made in almost total secret and went undetected by the Allies. Most German officers were not briefed on the plan or even the objectives until hours before the offensive was to begin.

The offensive achieved nearly complete surprise at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. The initial thrust threw some Army units into headlong retreat south toward the River Meuse. But slowed by weather, poor roads, and lack of fuel, the German divisions were unable to exploit their initial success. The Americans were able to use their immense logistics capacity and herculean motor-lift capacity

