

BOOK REVIEWS



Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot. By Howard R. Simpson. Brassey's, 1994. 193 Pages. \$24.00.

The French disaster at Dien Bien Phu must surely rank as one of the bitterest defeats in recent military history. In this superb assessment, Howard R. Simpson presents the events that led the French to undertake a static defense, describes the action itself in no-nonsense detail, and finally addresses the fate of those captured when the garrison fell.

This book stands out among the many accounts of the fall of Dien Bien Phu because its author had actually been there, as a photographer and combat reporter; he writes as one who shared the privations and risks with those who were later counted among the 15,000 men who were killed or taken prisoner.

At a time when we deplore the prospect of another Task Force Smith, we need to remember the costly lessons that are the legacy of Dien Bien Phu, for it was grievous miscalculation that contributed to both disasters. One of the most damaging ills that can affect a nation is the myth of invincibility, at whose roots lie the errors of arrogance, pride, overconfidence, and a belief in the inferiority of the enemy. Although the Legionnaires on the ground knew the tenacity of their enemy, those responsible for placing these premier units of the French Colonial Army in harm's way chose to ignore intelligence that could have averted the disaster.

This battle is counted among the decisive military engagements of history, not simply because of the numbers of combatants involved—many other battles were fought with far greater numbers—but because of its pivotal significance. Indochina was the last of France's great colonial possessions in Asia, and its loss set in motion the sequence of events that eventually led to the United States' ill-fated commitment to an Asian land war.

One thing that Simpson does particularly well is to take an honest look at the military expertise of the Viet Minh, recounting both their successes and their shortcomings. As the U. S. Army assumes greater responsibil-

ity for operations other than war, we too need to do our homework and take an honest look at potential adversaries. Sun Tzu may not have been the first to say "Know your enemy," but it sometimes seems—from the study of past military blunders—that he was the last one to follow that advice.

This is an exceptionally well-written, accurate, and readable book, and its selection as an AUSA Land Warfare Book is clearly justified in view of its value to the professional soldier, and indeed to anyone interested in the events that decide the life and death of men and nations.

Poles Apart: The Polish Airborne at the Battle of Arnhem. By George F. Cholewczynski. Sarpedon Publishers, 1993. 336 Pages. \$21.95. Reviewed by Major Richard Jung, U.S. Army.

Although the First Independent Polish Parachute Brigade has been mentioned in every major work on Arnhem and immortalized in the film *A Bridge Too Far*, little has been available in English on the unit and the fighting it saw during Operation MARKET GARDEN. Even less has been written on the high price the Poles paid in providing the only support the hard-pressed British "Red Devils" received during this bitter battle. The publication of *Poles Apart* finally fills this gap.

The Parachute Brigade was originally formed to provide the vanguard of Polish forces liberating their homeland from the Nazis. Theirs was to be "the shortest way back." Ironically, just as the Polish Home Army rose against the Germans, the brigade found itself committed to MARKET GARDEN.

As a result of detailed research and exhaustive interviews with participants, the author not only presents a moving narrative

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of the Brigade, down to platoon level, but also suggests, in the fate of the Poles and their commander, why no additional efforts were made to relieve the British at Arnhem. In addition, the book presents a microcosm of the experiences of all the Polish forces that fought in the West—in the Battle of Britain, at Tobruk, Monte Cassino, the Falaise Gap, and elsewhere.

The book's scope, beginning with the formation of the Brigade, is broad enough to show that the Polish paratroopers were far more important than their numbers would suggest. From the very beginning, when Polish instructors erected the first jump tower in Great Britain, to the closing moments at Arnhem as General Stanislaw Sosabowski fought alone to relieve the embattled British 1st Airborne Division, the Poles' contribution was undeniable.

Surprisingly, the author's use of the narrative format enhances, rather than obscures, tactical evaluations. A prime example of this is in the narrative presented by the survivors of the Poles' river assault, which evokes images of "living" map symbols. The 500 meters of marsh is not an open area on a map but a killing zone of knee-deep mud crossed by exhausted men carrying boats and 60 pounds of equipment apiece. At the end of the field, a small overflow dike is not a six-foot-high earthen embankment to be crossed under fire but an illusory shelter from incoming death that each wave of men sought before their final push into fast water and renewed risk.

Most readers know of the U.S. 82d Airborne Division's celebrated river assault at the Waal. But less known is the fact that the collapsible assault craft that survived that assault went up the road to the Poles. The Polish Parachute Brigade crossed without artillery support and had to carry their assault boats across half a kilometer of marsh swept by machinegun and artillery fire. Further, they had to climb a small dike before scaling the banks of the Driel to battle the swift-moving current, all while under continuous fire. A charge as desperate as that of the famed Light Brigade, this assault provided the only relief the British paratroops at Oosterbeek ever received.

The author's objectivity is evident in his candid portrayal of the Polish Brigade's less-than-diplomatic commander. In the discussions of the survivors, the book truly sets itself apart as one for the soldier rather than the armchair warrior. The author's descriptions are not bare statements of dates and data but vivid portraits of men under fire: It is hard not to be touched by the macabre humor of two soldiers who make grave markers for themselves in advance and update them each day they survive. And it is easy to visualize the flamboyant General Sosabowski, atop a "requisitioned" ladies' bicycle, literally leading British armored cars in an attack in support of his beleaguered troops.

Aside from the many tactical vignettes, the author also poses some interesting strategic questions: For instance, what if Sosabowski's urgent intercession for a division-scale crossing farther up the river had been heeded? According to a Waffen SS colonel who commanded one of the defending units, "such a crossing in this sector would have been a walkover." Most important for us today, the fate of our own Rangers in Somalia bears witness that the tactical lessons illustrated in this book are as relevant as they were 50 years ago.

The handsomely bound book, with its rarely published photos, captures the spirit that was recently celebrated on the 50th anniversary of MARKET GARDEN.

The War Against Germany: Europe and Adjacent Areas. United States Army in World War II. Center of Military History, U.S. Army. An AUSA Book. A reprint of the 1951 Edition. CMH Pub 12-3. Brassey's, 1994. 448 Pages. \$30.00. Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Albert N. Garland, U.S. Army, Retired.

In 1951 and early 1952, the Office of the Chief of Military History (OCMH), Headquarters Department of the Army—now the Center of Military History (CMH), HQDA—published three pictorial volumes to supplement the official narrative histories—the "green books"—then being written. As the Chief of Military History pointed out in his foreword to this book, "These volumes will preserve and make accessible for future reference some of the best pictures of World War II." This particular volume has been reprinted at least once before, in 1990 by the Abbeville Press.

The volume, divided into seven sections

arranged chronologically, covers activities in the European Theater of Operations from the build-up in the United Kingdom through V-E day. The photographs are accompanied by informative captions, and written text is kept to a minimum.

The intention at the time it was put together was to include photographs that illustrated "important terrain features, types of equipment and weapons, living and weather conditions, military operations, and matters of human interest." (All but one of the photographs in this volume were taken during the war by photographers from the various U.S. armed forces.)

OCMH was quite proud of its three volumes, as well it might have been. And I believe the people who worked on them would be proud of the job Brassey's has done in getting this reprint to the public. It certainly makes its appearance at an appropriate time and is most welcome.

Confederate Goliath: The Battle of Fort Fisher. By Rod Gragg. Harper-Collins, 1991. 343 Pages. \$25.00. Reviewed by Major Don Rightmyer, United States Air Force, Retired.

By December 1864 there was only one remaining seaport in the South—Wilmington, North Carolina—through which the Confederacy could receive many precious supplies and luxuries that Southern blockade runners were able to bring through the offshore cordon of watchful U.S. Navy ships.

Sitting several miles up the Cape Fear River, Wilmington was protected by a series of fortifications, the most formidable of which was the infamous Fort Fisher. The fort had stood as a silent unchallenged sentinel over the city throughout the war, although Union leaders had thought several times of mounting a campaign against it. In December 1864 and January 1865, that status changed.

The first campaign launched against Fort Fisher was a joint Army-Navy effort in December, led by Admiral David Dixon Porter and General Benjamin Butler. After an abortive attempt to destroy the fort by exploding a heavily laden powder boat nearby, the Navy warships mounted a massive bombardment, followed by a successful Army amphibious landing on the peninsula north of the fort. Because of a feud between him and Porter, however, General Butler insisted that the Army troops be withdrawn and returned to Virginia's Hampton Roads.

That was the final straw in Butler's checked Civil War career and, as a result, he was removed from command.

The second attempt to take Fort Fisher occurred two weeks later under the leadership of Porter and Army General Alfred Terry, a former New England lawyer. Following the greatest sea bombardment of the war, with 59 warships participating, Terry's Army forces as well as a 2,000-man naval brigade were landed. Within two days, the combined force successfully captured the legendary fort, which subsequently resulted in the surrender of Wilmington as well.

Confederate Goliath is an excellent history of one of the war's last major campaigns, which is little known to most people. The book, a very readable account of the actions from both sides, provides several good maps and other documentary references for further study of the battle for Wilmington. It offers a good look at a joint service effort in the U.S. military of the late 1860s.

Deception Operations: Studies in the East-West Context. Edited by David A. Charters and Maurice A.J. Tugwell. Brassey's (UK), 1990. 432 Pages. Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel Harold E. Raugh, Jr., U.S. Army.

Although not an actual war, a distinct rivalry and confrontation existed between the United States and the Soviet Union during much of the 20th century. This tension was heightened periodically by the frequent and calculated strategic deception operations of both East and West.

This volume, edited by two men who have written extensively on intelligence topics and low-intensity conflict, contains 16 well-researched and thought-provoking case studies of East-West strategic deception operations. The stated aim of editors David A. Charters and Maurice A.J. Tugwell in chronicling and analyzing these ploys is to improve knowledge in four principal areas: "the circumstances in which deception has been used; its results; the proclivity of the two political systems to use deception in international relations under conditions short of war; and the systems' relative vulnerability to such deception."

The case studies are of a uniformly high quality in both scholarship and writing. Each essay is interesting and insightful, but three are especially fascinating: "James Klugmann, SOE-Cairo, and the Mihailovich Deception," by David Martin, which ana-

lyzes the deception campaign that destroyed faith in Mihailovich and made inevitable the Allied policy shift in favor of Tito in Yugoslavia; "A True Picture of Reality": The Case of Korean Airlines Flight Number 007," by Tugwell; and "Nine Days in May: The U-2 Deception," by Charters. An excellent introduction and conclusion, combined with a detailed select bibliography, enhance the value of the volume.

The usefulness of deception depends upon perception. While the success of some of the strategic deception operations described in this volume is open to question, there is no doubt as to the success of the book as a whole. The editors and authors are to be congratulated for producing an excellent study on a timely subject.

Westmoreland: A Biography of General William C. Westmoreland. By Samuel Zaffiri. William Morrow, 1994. 502 Pages. \$25.00. Reviewed by Colonel Cole C. Kingseed, U.S. Army.

The popularity of General William C. Westmoreland has risen and fallen over the years with public reaction to the Vietnam War. Long criticized for the attrition strategy that produced the high casualties and that ultimately led to stalemate in South Vietnam, Westmoreland is now undergoing reassessment as the nation comes to grips with the most unpopular war in its history. In the first full biography of Westmoreland, author Samuel Zaffiri presents a sympathetic look at the controversial commander.

Relying extensively on oral histories, newspaper and periodical accounts, and personal interviews, the author portrays Westmoreland as a born soldier, destined to attain the upper echelons of Army command. Compiling a laudable combat record in World War II, he quickly came to the attention of airborne commanders Maxwell Taylor and James Gavin. Subsequent posts following the war included secretary of Taylor's army staff, commander of the 101st Airborne Division, and superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point. In 1964, at Taylor's urging, Westmoreland assumed duties as commanding general, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV).

Not surprisingly, most of this biography consists of Zaffiri's efforts to justify Westmoreland's battlefield strategy and to portray the general as a victim of the Johnson administration and Pentagon bureaucracy. Conse-

quently, neither the President nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff fare well in this account. According to Zaffiri, Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara never subjected their military strategy to critical analysis. Nor did the Joint Chiefs raise more than a token protest over a war that they were increasingly convinced was being mismanaged by the Johnson administration.

To his credit, Zaffiri also discusses the less-than-admirable side of his subject's personality. Creighton W. Abrams, for example—although he was Westmoreland's deputy—was seldom taken into Westmoreland's confidence and was also seldom allowed access to back-channel messages. Additionally, Westmoreland's penchant for surrounding himself with proteges from his airborne days often kept highly capable officers from rendering military advice and sound recommendations.

Westmoreland's controversial confrontation with CBS News over the documentary "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception" also receives ample coverage in this biography. Again, Westmoreland emerges as a hapless victim of a ruthless network and a less-than-competent legal staff. The book ends on a more positive note with Westmoreland serving as grand marshal of the Chicago Vietnam Veterans Parade in June 1986. But Zaffiri's claim that Westmoreland's popular reception in Chicago can be properly characterized as "revenge" against those who sought to damage his reputation is dubious at best.

In short, Zaffiri paints a too favorable portrait of his subject. More critical analysis of Westmoreland's leadership and an overall assessment of his contribution to the U.S. Army would have improved this narrative. A definitive biography of Westmoreland is still to be written, but Zaffiri has taken the initial step.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

Hidden Ally: The French Resistance, Special Operations, and the Landings in Southern France, 1944. By Arthur Layton Funk. Contributions in Military Studies, No. 122. Greenwood Press, 1992. 368 Pages. \$49.95.

The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan: Analysis and Chronology. By Tom Rogers. Greenwood Press, 1993. 256 Pages. \$55.00.

The U.S. Navy, the Mediterranean, and the Cold War, 1945-1947. By Edward J. Sheehy. Greenwood Press, 1992. 208 Pages. \$45.00.

The Last Kamikaze: The Story of Admiral Matome Ugaki. By Edwin P. Hoyt. Praeger Trade, 1993. 256 Pages. \$22.95.

At War in the Gulf: A Chronology. Arthur H. Blair. Texas A&M University Press, 1992. 144 Pages. \$9.95, Softbound.

The Ultra Magic Deals and the Most Secret Special Relationship, 1940-1946. By Bradley F. Smith. Presidio Press, 1993. 224 Pages. \$24.95.

The Search for Strategy: Politics and Strategic Vision. Edited by Gary L. Guertner. Contributions in Military Studies, No. 143. Greenwood Press, 1993. 328 Pages. \$59.95.

Cold War Analytical Structures and the Post Post-War World: A Critique of Deterrence Theory. By Cori Elizabeth Dauber. Praeger, 1993. 207 Pages. \$47.95.

Italian Prisoners of War in America 1942-1946: Captives or Allies? By Louis E. Keefer. Praeger, 1992. 195 Pages. \$49.95.

The Black Tigers: Elite Vietnamese Rangers and Their American Advisors. Compiled and edited by Command Sergeant Major Michael N. Martin and Lieutenant Colonel McDonald Valentine, Jr. Harmony House, 1993. 136 Pages.

Inventing the Future: How Science and Technology Transform Our World. By F. Clifton Berry. Brassey's (US), 1993. 224 Pages. \$19.95.

Daring to Win. By David Eshel. Sterling, 1993. 240 Pages. \$27.50.

Paying the Premium: A Military Insurance Policy for Peace and Freedom. Edited by Walter Hahn and H. Joachim Maitre. Contributions to Military Studies, No. 140. Greenwood Press, 1993. 208 Pages. \$49.95.

Military Helicopter Doctrines of the Major Powers, 1945-1992: Making Decisions About Air-Land Warfare. By Matthew Allen. Contributions in Military Studies, No. 137. Greenwood Press, 1993. 328 Pages. \$59.95.

Cavalry: The History of a Fighting Elite, 650 B.C.-1914 A.D. By V. Vuksik and Z. Grbasic. Sterling, 1993. 224 Pages. \$35.00.

Landing Zones. By James R. Wilson. Pocket Books, 1993. 340 Pages. \$5.99, Softbound.

Point Man: Inside the Toughest and Most Deadly Unit in Vietnam by a Founding Member of the Elite Navy SEALs. By Chief James Watson and Kevin Dockery. William Morrow and Company, 1993. 336 Pages. \$22.00.

Not by the Book: A Combat Intelligence Officer in Vietnam. By Eric McAllister Smith. Ivy Books, 1993. 214 Pages. \$4.99, Softbound.

Quang Tri Cadence: Memoir of a Rifle Platoon Leader in the Mountains of Vietnam. By Jon Oplinger. McFarland & Company, 1993. 220 Pages. \$17.95, Softbound.

Landing Zones: Combat Vets From America's Proud, Fighting South Remember Vietnam. By James R. Wilson. Pocket Books, 1993. 341 Pages. \$5.99, Softbound.

Franks Report: The Falkland Islands Review. By Lord Franks and others. Pimlico, 1993 (distributed by Trafalgar Square, North Pomfret, VT 05053). 105 Pages. \$19.95, Softbound.

Lee's Terrible Swift Sword: From Antietam to Chancellorsville: An Eyewitness History. By Richard Wheeler. Published in hard cover in 1992. HarperCollins, 1993. 430 Pages. \$30.00, Softbound.