

BOOK REVIEWS



Soissons, 1918. By Douglas V. Johnson II and Rolfe L. Hillman, Jr. Texas A&M Press, 1999. 213 Pages. Maps, Index, Bibliography. \$24.95. Reviewed by Colonel Christopher B. Timmers, U.S. Army, Retired.

From 18 to 22 July 1918, 12,000 soldiers and Marines were killed, wounded, or listed as missing in action in an offensive that essentially sealed the fate of the German army and, by extension, signaled the end of the First World War.

Detailed analyses can be found of almost any battle in any war in history. *Soissons, 1918* has all the detail that passionate historians could ask for, but it has something more going for it: Added to the scholarly prose of historian Douglas Johnson is the down-to-earth writing of the late Rolfe Hillman, Jr., who retired from active duty as an Army colonel in 1972. We read in the second chapter that only two-thirds of the 28th Infantry Regiment's strength would be attacking over the battle sector's worst terrain. Such was the planning of the inadequately informed and unseasoned regimental staff. But we also read that "Staff officers working in near vacuums are dangerous to the health of infantry soldiers." This line could not have been written, with all due respect, by Dr. Johnson. It could only have been written by Colonel Hillman, a man who had commanded men in battle. Happily, such observations are liberally sprinkled throughout this work, not with a sense of sarcasm but out of a devotion to the truth.

For those who generally do not care much for the study of World War I, this book is a very readable primer. The organization of Army regiments, brigades, and divisions is discussed in detail (and a side note, companies could contain up to 250 men). It was common for battalions to be commanded by majors or even captains; regiments, as some will remember, were led by colonels, and brigades (as the title suggests) by brigadier generals. Modern military historians may be surprised to learn that an infantry division in the field consisted of more than 28,000 men, commanded by a major general, and that he not only had to provide rations for this large number of troops but for more than 2,000 horses and mules as well.

Our Marine Corps friends will also find something to their liking. At *Soissons*, the 4th (Marine) Brigade (5th and 6th Marine Regiments) were attached to the Army's 2d Division, and they acquitted themselves in fine leatherneck fashion. And the AEF units in this action could be considered a truly international formation: The first Moroccan Division was attached to XX Corps with its compliment of Foreign Legionnaires, Tirailleurs, and Zouaves.

I have found only one defect in this book: The maps are either hard to read or drawn in such a fashion that they do not exactly match the description of the flow of battle. Still, with effort, they can be understood, and this flaw—when weighed against the larger virtues of detail, narrative, exhaustive references, and appendices—is rather piddling stuff. Even if you are not an aficionado of World War I, this book should find space on your shelf.

Semper Fi—Vietnam: From Da Nang to the DMZ, Marine Corps Campaigns, 1965-1975. By Edward F. Murphy. (Originally published in 1997.) Presidio Press, 2000. 356 Pages. \$19.95, Softbound. Reviewed by Dr. Joe P. Dunn, Converse College.

More than 500,000 Marines served during the six years of combat operations in Vietnam. At the war's high point in 1968, more than 25 percent of the U.S. Marine Corps was stationed in Vietnam. The 13,070 killed in action and 88,630 wounded constituted a casualty total greater than the Corps suffered during World War II. The Marines fought a variety of wars under a wide range of conditions, including well-known battles at Con Thien, Chu Lai, Hue, Khe Sanh, Operation Dewey Canyon in the Da Krong Valley, and Dong Ha, as well as the daily treks "humping the boonies" in the jungle. They also developed the quite successful Combined Action Platoons, which served as models for later pacification and Vietnamization.

Military historian Edward Murphy—author of a three-volume series on Medal of Honor recipients in three wars and the very fine history of the 1967 battle of Dak To in the Central Highlands—offers the first one-

volume popular history of the entire time the Marines were in Vietnam. The book's time span covers the landing of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 9th Marines, on 8 March 1965 at Da Nang through the ending of Marine combat operations in May 1971, the advisory role to the South Vietnamese Marine Corps after that, to the departure of the last eleven marines of the U.S. Embassy security guard detachment.

The book is a well-written, lively, informative narrative that pursues the theme that the Marines fought honorably and well in a war without a strategy for victory.

Popular military histories serve a valuable function as they make important events accessible to the general reader. Several popular histories of Marine activities in individual battles, campaigns, or periods—especially those by Eric Hammel, Keith William Nolan, and Robert Pisor—are available, but Murphy's contribution provides the comprehensive account previously missing. It matches similar popular accounts of the U.S. Army's role. This is a book that both experts and novice students will enjoy.

General Matthew B. Ridgway: From Progressivism to Reaganism, 1895-1993. By Jonathan M. Soffer. Praeger, 1998. 246 Pages. \$59.95. Reviewed by Colonel Cole C. Kingseed, U.S. Army.

Few American generals have compiled military records as distinguished as that of General Matthew Ridgway. Commander of the 82d Airborne Division and the XVIII Airborne Corps in World War II; Commander-in-Chief, Far East in Korea; and Supreme Commander at NATO, Ridgway established himself as a leader of remarkable talent, in both the martial and the political areas. This book, the first full-length biography of this exceptional soldier, reflects social scientist Jonathan M. Soffer's empirical findings that Ridgway represented an ideology that favored the build-up of a state-controlled military-industrial economy through deficit spending. Although such an approach may be satisfying to organizational theorists, it leaves the average reader trying to discover the real Ridgway and his rightful place in history.

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"Lee's Miserables," in imitation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*.

Power's work is much more narrowly focused than Wiley's studies, since he examines only the fighting men in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and only during the last part of the war, from May 1864 through the surrender at Appomattox in April 1865. His study of the Confederate fighting man, both officer and enlisted, in Virginia during those months provides a sense of immediacy and openness of experience seldom seen in Civil War histories. The author relied solely on the first-person accounts (primarily letters and diaries) that the soldiers wrote during those 11 months, not at some later time after the war, when most Civil War reminiscences were penned.

Power provides an excellent, well-written summary of the campaigns fought during this period. Interspersed with those strategic and tactical foundations are the thoughts, experiences, and expectations of the Confederate soldiers fighting under Robert E. Lee in the remaining months of the Confederacy's existence. Power allows the men to speak for themselves and conveys to the reader through their words what it was like to "be there" in the ranks on the battlefields of Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor and the trenches of Richmond and Petersburg, and when the flags were furled for the last time at Appomattox.

This history is recommended for anyone who wants to know more about the thoughts and actions of the fighting man of this era, particularly in an army that faced increasingly heavy odds against it in men and materiel. Hopefully, similar studies will be written in the years to come on other parts of the Civil War and how those soldiers compared to the soldiers of Lee's army.

***The Paratroopers of the French Foreign Legion: From Vietnam to Bosnia.* By Howard R. Simpson. Brassey's, 1997. 162 Pages, Photographs. \$25.00.** Reviewed by Michael F. Dilley.

In 1945, while he was in Marseilles, waiting to be transferred from the recently concluded war in Europe to the still raging war in the Pacific, Howard Simpson had his first contact with the *Legion Etrangere*—the French Foreign Legion. Over the next 50 years, he had many encounters with the Legionnaires, particularly with the men of the parachute battalions. In 1994, after finishing his book *Dien Bien Phu: The Epic Battle America Forgot*, he decided to write a history of just the parachute forces of the Legion. The result, *The Paratroopers of the*

French Foreign Legion: From Vietnam to Bosnia, is as much a personal homage to the unit and its men as it is a unit history. It is well worth your reading time.

As the Legion is organized today, it consists of several regiments of Infantry, Cavalry, and Combat Engineers, but there is only one regiment of paratroopers—the *2eme Regiment Etranger Parachutiste*—commonly referred to as the 2nd REP. In 1948 the Legion established the first of several parachute battalions (called BEPs, after the French acronym). These battalions were designed for use overseas, as was the Legion itself. There have been several organizational changes over the years, caused as much by politics as by military necessity; the 2nd REP is now the Legion's only remaining parachute unit.

The regiment is composed of five combat companies, a support company, and a special long-range reconnaissance detachment of 25 Legionnaires. Each company has a specialized area of expertise, from mountain operations to urban combat. There is no battalion element in the organizational breakdown; it goes from regiment to company. Today, the regimental headquarters is at Calvi, on the island of Corsica. Several of the combat companies are deployed to various places in the world.

In addition to his personal research and research in the French national and Legion archives, Simpson spent several weeks at Calvi learning about the regiment firsthand. The commander gave him free rein to go anywhere in the regiment and talk to anyone, and he was accepted by the paratroopers. Simpson interweaves the history of the regiment with his personal experiences in observing these soldiers in garrison and training. The result is a dramatic, easy-to-read but hard-to-put-down book. Mixed in along the way, Simpson explains the history and politics of the Foreign Legion, including several historical encounters with the enemies of France. The most detailed historical portion deals with the 2nd REP operation in 1978 in Zaire, rescuing American and European hostages of Cuban-led insurgents. He also discusses the traditions of both the Legion and the 2nd REP.

This is Howard Simpson's 14th book; he has written fiction and non-fiction, detective stories, and military histories. He is a former member of the U.S. Foreign Service, serving as U.S. Consul in Marseilles three times. He has been a war correspondent and a lecturer at advanced military and diplomatic schools. From all this, he brings a different but very interesting perspective to the history of a unit of elite warriors. I rec-

ommend this book, especially to students of 20th Century military history.

***The Bill Walton 3D-CD Project.* A CD-ROM produced by Dan Shelley. \$35, U.S. postage paid to anywhere in the world. Order by e-mail: dshelley@ddddesign.com.**

Anyone interested in stereo photography will find this CD-ROM interesting and fun.

Bill Walton, formerly a photographer for the Public Affairs Office at Fort Benning, Georgia, is a long-term champion of stereo photography. Several years ago, he created the book *Back to Basics: Infantry One Station Unit Training in 3-D*, which contains 75 black-and-white stereo pairs of infantry soldiers in initial training at Fort Benning. This CD includes many more images taken during the creation of the book as part of a historical collection of more than 1,000 modern stereo pairs and anaglyphs.

It is DOS/WIN, MAC, and UNIX compatible. A lorgnette viewer and a pair of anaglyph glasses, required for viewing in stereo, are included with every copy. The only system requirement is that you have an Internet Browser and can display at least 256 colors at 800x600 screen resolution.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

***The Memoirs of an Artillery Forward Observer 1944-1945.* By James Russell Major. Sunflower University Press, 1999. 152 Pages. \$18.95, Softbound.**

***Death Valley: The Summer Offensive, I Corps, August 1969.* By Keith William Nolan. Originally published in 1987. Presidio, 1999. 352 Pages. \$18.95, Softbound.**

***Into Cambodia.* By Keith William Nolan. Originally published in 1990. Presidio, 1999. 496 Pages. \$18.95, Softbound.**

***Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign.* U.S. Army War College Guides to Civil War Battles. Edited by Leonard Fullenkamp, Jay Luvaas, and Stephen Bowman. University Press of Kansas, 1998. 482 Pages. \$39.95, Hardcover; \$17.95, Softbound.**

***The Biographical Dictionary of World War II.* By Mark M. Boatner III. Hardcover edition published in 1996. Presidio, 1999. 736 Pages. \$24.95, Softbound.**

***Iron Knights: The United States 66th Armored Regiment.* By Gordon A. Blaker. White Mane Publishing (P.O. Box 152, Shippensburg, PA 17257), 1999. 411 Pages. \$39.95.**

***Beyond the Paths of Heaven: The Emergence of Space Power Thought.* By The School of Advanced Airpower Studies. Air University Press (Maxwell AFB, Alabama), 1999. 572 Pages.**

***Six Armies in Tennessee: The Chickamauga and Chattanooga Campaigns.* By Steven E. Woodworth. Hardcover edition published in 1998. University of Nebraska Press, 1999. 257 Pages. \$14.95, Softbound.**