Book Reviews

***America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne, 1918*. By Robert H. Ferrell. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007, 195 pages, $29.95 (cloth).** Reviewed by LTC (Retired) Rick Baillergeon.

The numbers are staggering: 26,277 U.S Soldiers dead and 95,786 wounded in a battle extending 47 days and involving 1.2 million men. Yet, despite the shear magnitude of this battle, the brutal fighting in World War I's Meuse-Argonne has remained virtually ignored by military historians over the years. Author Robert H. Ferrell has finally filled this void with his superb volume, *America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne, 1918*. It is a book long required in the realm of military literature.

In the area of World War I history, Ferrell has established himself as one of today's foremost historians of The Great War. Past books such as *Collapse at the Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri/Kansas Division* and *Five Days in October: The Lost Battalion of World War I* were highly acclaimed by readers and critics alike. These volumes were characterized by exhaustive research, crisp, descriptive writing, and the ability to fully engage and inform a reader. His latest effort, *America's Deadliest Battle* shares each of these qualities.

Within Ferrell's pages, he details the planning, preparation, and execution of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) during the battle of the Meuse-Argonne. During this discussion, the author displays the unique talent to seamlessly shift between the operational and tactical levels of war (with additional discussion of the strategic situation). This enables the reader to put in perspective the actions at the foxhole level and its relationship to the higher levels of war. Most impressive is the author's ability to provide this to his readers in just over 150 pages. Ferrell is able to accomplish this by his mastery of the subject area and his aforementioned writing skills.

Obviously, as the book's title suggests the focus of the book is on the battle of the Meuse-Argonne. However, Ferrell does an excellent job of concisely outlining America's entry into the war and the days prior to the battle. This truly sets the conditions for the reader to better understand the performance of the AEF during the battle and puts the battle in perspective in the overall framework of World War I. Additionally, at the conclusion of the book, Ferrell provides analysis on what the battle meant to the thought process of military and civilian leadership in the inter-war years.

America's Deadliest Battle is not simply a rehash of the events comprising the battle or a play-by-play dialogue. Throughout his narrative, Ferrell interjects numerous instances of candid opinion and analysis on decisions, leaders, and tactics employed as they relate to the specific battle and to World War I as a whole. These include the following:

1) The Wilson Administration's performance in preparing the country for war.

2) The use of U.S. artillery in the Meuse-Argonne.

3) The AEF use of machine guns in the Meuse-Argonne.

4) The AEF's adaptation of tactics during the battle.

5) The U.S. military's ability to utilize lessons learned from the Meuse-Argonne in the upcoming years.

Strengths are numerous within *America's Deadliest Battle*. First, Ferrell includes 25 highly detailed maps to assist the reader in understanding the battle. The author inserts the maps to coincide with his subject material which is of great value and convenience to the reader. Second, Ferrell has included over 40 photographs complementing his words perfectly. Readers will find his photograph section to be well-thought out and of relevance to better understanding the Meuse-Argonne. Finally, the volume concludes with a highly detailed notes section. This section provides further detail to sources and gives refinement to points stressed in the book. This portion of the book is almost as beneficial to readers as the body of the volume.

It is hoped books such as *America's Deadliest Battle* will spark interest in not only this incredible battle, but in World War I itself. Unfortunately, it appears today there exists a relatively small number of authors and readers with an interest in the war. Truly, there is much to be learned from a battle and a war that exemplified the human dimension of war to such a great extent. Robert Ferrell is doing his part in opening this part of military history to a new readership.

***Red Storm Over the Balkans: The Failed Soviet Invasion of Romania, Spring 1944*. By David M. Glantz. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007, 448 pages.** Reviewed by LTC Michael A. Boden,

David Glantz, one of the leading scholars on the Second World War's Eastern Front, has published another fine study with his book *Red Storm Over the Balkans: The Failed Soviet Invasion of Romania, Spring 1944*. Here, Glantz analyzes a more difficult subject than many of his earlier works, as he attempts to make sense of the "forgotten" Soviet Spring 1944 offensives into Romania. They are "forgotten" because, as clear Soviet failures — tactically, operationally, and strategically — they have either been hidden from public view or misrepresented when discussed in the victor's accounts. Glantz cuts through the foggy historiography of these operations to give an accurate representation of the fighting on the southern reaches of the Eastern Front from April to June 1944.

During this period, following Soviet successful campaigns along the Black Sea and southern Ukraine during the winter, General I.S. Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front and General R. Ia. Malinovsky's 3rd Ukrainian Front conducted near-continuous operations from 8 April to 6 June, 1944, attempting to break German defenses and push into Romania. In all cases, these attempts were not only rebuffed, but soundly defeated by German

forces, and in some cases were driven back miles from their starting positions. The embarrassment of these operations led Soviet historians to downplay not only their significance, but also their relationship to the overall Soviet war strategy at this crucial juncture of the conflict.

Glantz emphasizes that, strategically, these were not minor, off-hand operations, but important offensives that, with Stalin's personal endorsement, were designed to break German resistance in Romania, a perspective directly contrary to prevailing Soviet historiography, which views the operations of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts during this period as minor, regional actions only. Tactically, Glantz illustrates clearly how and why German forces were able to defeat the Soviet advances. He conducts excellent analysis, most clearly indicated by his ability to merge Soviet unit histories, German unit histories, and other archival sources — all of which contain strong biases — into a coherent account of the fighting. Although he resorts frequently to lengthy excerpts from these sources, it is never without purpose, and his conclusions are sound and illuminating.

By studying these offensives, and placing them into the appropriate context of operations, the overall progress of the war on the Eastern Front becomes clearer, particularly in the confusion between the post-Kursk winter offensives and Operation Bagratian. Glantz's study is a welcome addition to the collection of work on the Eastern Front. Although most students of this theater will be unfamiliar with these battles, Glantz's account not only provides an excellent account, but demonstrates the relationships of these campaigns into the overall panorama of the Eastern Front.

***CHARGE! Great Cavalry Charges of the Napoleonic Wars.* By Digby Smith. Greenhill Books, 2007, 304 pages, $24.95.** Reviewed by Chris Timmers.

Cavalry, the old cavalry (the one with horses) always fascinated me as a boy. Seeing Errol Flynn or John Wayne in charge after charge, sabers level, grim determination etched in their faces, stirred my young heart. So when I finally went into the Army I choose … Infantry. It had occurred to me, sometime during high school, that the Army had dispensed with its horses many years ago. I adjusted my choice of branch accordingly.

But the horses are back! Thousands and thousands of them, and they are being ridden back into battle in the pages of Digby Smith's excellent book on cavalry actions during the Napoleonic campaigns.

Perhaps the most useful part of the book is the very first chapter in which Smith differentiates the types of cavalry at the time of Napoleon and explains their missions: Heavy Cavalry, Light Cavalry (Hussars, chasseurs a cheval), Line Cavalry (Dragoons, Carabiniers, etc), and Lancers (Uhlans). Just as interesting is his discussion of cavalry tactics. Although modern cavalry doesn't mount charges as in the 18th and 19th centuries, much of how modern cavalry is used mirrors how old cavalry was employed: reconnaissance, screening, flank security. And he is quick to debunk Hollywood images of cavalry:

"…cavalry regiments did not always move at a gallop. This would have exhausted even well fed, healthy horses within a very short time. Charges started off at a walk and only progressed through a trot to a gallop when within 200 paces of the enemy line."

The author then gives a very detailed treatment to 13 major campaigns of Napoleon, from Marengo to Waterloo. Unfortunately, two minor defects keep this book from being great.

First, on occasion, Smith goes into too much detail about the battle itself, or related topics, and spends too little time with the aspect of cavalry. There are sources he could have consulted which contain remembrances and opinions of Soldiers who fought in these battles and participated in the charges. He does, in the final chapter, quote from a letter written by a French cavalry officer (it goes on for 5 and a half pages) at Waterloo, but not much else.

Second, and more important is the quality of maps: they are inferior and too few. One cannot discuss battles like Austerlitz or Waterloo with *one map* as a reference. What would have been more desirable is for each battle, especially the larger ones like Waterloo, to have had at least two, or better, three smaller scale maps showing the movements of squadrons, brigades, and divisions as the battle progressed. Paging back and forth narrative to map and back is fatiguing and ultimately makes the reader lose interest. Less narrative, please, and more maps. Readers are smart enough to figure it out.

***U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976.* By Andrew J. Birtle. Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, 2006.** Reviewed by LTC (Retired) Albert N. Garland.

This is an outstanding U.S. Army official history, despite the many critics who continually argue that no official history can be a truly outstanding work of military history. One can turn to the Army's official World War II "Green Volumes" for what I mean.

As I said this is an official U.S. Army History Volume. It is one in a series of like volumes being undertaken by Dr. Andrew J. Birtle. This particular volume is his second in the series, while his third — U.S. Army Activities in Vietnam between 1961 and 1965 — is underway.

In his forward, the chief of Military History, Dr. Jeffrey J. Clarke, points out "the U.S. Army has been heavily engaged performing counterinsurgency and nation-building missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere." These and other like missions past and present, Dr. Clarke suggests, "have kindled a strong interest in the Army's past experiences in combating irregulars and restoring order overseas."

As a result, Dr. Clarke decided to put several of his historians to work in studying and writing about "the evolution of counterinsurgency and related doctrine in the U.S. Army."

In brief, then, the author "explains the past" and "helps understand the present." He emphasizes during the several periods covered by this volume how the Army continually changed its organization and doctrine "to suit civilian policy directives." Too, "the Army counterinsurgency and constabulary issues throughout the period."

There are many more strong points the author makes, and overall it is an official history that should not be overlooked by today's military members.

SGT Johnny R. Aragon

Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division wait for another CH-47 Chinook helicopter at a forward operating base in Afghanistan.

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