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Beyond Stalingrad: Manstein and the Operations of Army Group Don

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Sadarananda, Dana V. *Beyond Stalingrad: Manstein and the Operations of Army Group Don*. New York: Praeger, 1990. 165pp. \$42.95

The general consensus among the German generals whom Liddell Hart interviewed after World War II was that Field Marshal Erich von Manstein had proved the ablest commander in their army and the officer most preferred for the post of army chief of staff. That assessment is shared by Dana Sadarananda in *Beyond Stalingrad*.

In his attempt to fill a void in the literature about the Eastern front, Sadarananda has concentrated on the crisis that confronted the German high command following the encirclement of von Paulus's 6th Army at Stalingrad. The author has characterized the ensuing campaign in southern Russia during the winter of 1942-1943 as one of the three land campaigns—the others being the German approach toward Moscow in 1941 and the Anglo-American invasion in 1944—that dramatically altered the course of the war. In addition, he has clearly demonstrated that failure to stem the Russian tide after Stalingrad would have resulted in the immediate collapse of the entire Eastern front.

Relying on primary German sources ranging from personal memoirs and war diaries to operational reports of division through army group levels, Sadarananda concludes that without Manstein the German military position in the

Soviet Union would have collapsed in 1943 instead of 1944. Only through the decisive and dynamic leadership of Manstein were the Germans able to regain the initiative and stabilize the front that had been ruptured by the loss at Stalingrad. Manstein's great victory, culminating in his famous "backhand blow" that regained Kharkov, restored the Donets River line, the approximate position the Germans had held in the summer of 1942. Fortunately for the Allies, Hitler failed to grasp the true genius of Manstein and relieved him of command in early 1944.

What makes this work so interesting is the author's perceptive analysis of both the political and military challenges confronting Manstein when he assumed command on 27 November 1942. Despite the encirclement of von Paulus at Stalingrad by several Russian armies, and Hitler's incessant interference with operational planning, Manstein quickly grasped the initiative; by skillfully employing his reserves and shifting units he managed to destroy the principal combat elements of five Soviet armies. Russian losses in the final month of Manstein's campaign totaled over 600 tanks, 1,200 field pieces, and 46,000 dead. Manstein's achievement was even more astonishing since he fought at a 7:1 numerical disadvantage. It was military genius in its purest form.

If there is a criticism with the book, it lies with the author's almost exclusive reliance on German sources. The result, naturally, is a decidedly pro-German outlook—yet it is

virtually impossible to study Manstein's counteroffensive without acquiring a profound admiration for Germany's finest strategist. Additional maps and an order of battle would also have greatly facilitated the reader's comprehension of the campaigns that Sadarananda describes in detail.

However, despite these criticisms, *Beyond Stalingrad* makes a valuable contribution to the historiography of World War II. Although some readers may find the cost of the book prohibitive, Sadarananda admirably succeeds in his quest to stimulate interest in discovering the individual engagements and operations conducted on the Eastern front.

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Showalter, Dennis E. *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1991. 419pp. \$42.50

Dennis E. Showalter, professor of history at Colorado College, has provided a competent, engaging, and often incisive examination of the first major battle of World War I. In four distinct segments, Showalter has examined the diplomatic failures that led to war; the initial orders of battle, deployments, and skirmishes leading to the Battle of Gumbinnen; the successes and failures which permitted the German double envelopment at Tannenberg; and the consequences of that German victory.

Almost a third of the book is devoted to an examination of the origins of World War I. It is not an original examination, neither is it seriously flawed. The title of Chapter 3, "War Finds A Way," aptly captures the difficulty one encounters when assigning blame for its outbreak. Although the author acknowledges Austria's desire for war with Serbia, he is a bit too sympathetic towards the former. Showalter has, correspondingly, little sympathy for the Fritz Fischer school of thought, which primarily assigns to German designs the blame for altering the European balance of power. Consequently, Showalter ignores the German "blank check" which emboldened Austria-Hungary, and has underemphasized the former's desire to neutralize Russia before she grew too powerful. Knowing quite well that a rout of Serbia by Austria would demolish Russia's stature as a great power, Showalter nevertheless places primary responsibility on Russia for the outbreak of war.

Narrowly speaking, Showalter is correct to cite Russia's mobilization for the outbreak of World War I. But Russia mobilized because its leaders thought war was inevitable and, given the cult of the offensive in the context of a short war, attempted to defend itself as completely as possible. If Russian mobilization automatically brought Germany into the war, so too did implementation of the Schlieffen Plan (especially the attack on Belgium) guarantee Great Britain's entry and, consequently, world war. Great