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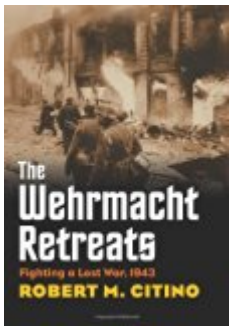

Robert Michael Citino. *The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War, 1943.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012. xxviii + 410 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1826-2.

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1943 is not a year widely discussed for its military history, overshadowed on one hand by the German defeats at El Alamein and Stalingrad in 1942 and the dramatic events of 1944, on the other. However, in this book Robert Citino, an expert on German military history, gives some scale to the multitude of German setbacks as well as examining their military thinking during this time. Focusing on the year widely regarded as the "other side of the war's turning point, this book is his second that looks a critical year of the war (the first being *The Death of the Wehrmacht: The Campaigns of 1942* [2007]).

Essentially an operational history, this book is structured around the key events of that year. It begins with the Allied landing in North Africa, shifts to the eastern front and Field Marshall Erich von Manstein's Kharkov operation, returns to the German defeat in North Africa, and then covers the Kursk Offensive, the Allied landing in Sicily, and the response of Army Group South to the Soviet counteroffensives at Orel and Belgorod. The last chapter covers the Allied landing in Italy and the beginnings of Field Marshall Albert Kesselring's defensive operations. Citino focuses on the commanders--hence the chapter titles incorporating the names of Manstein and Kesselring--but does much to question their legend and exploits. By critically examining these campaigns, he illustrates one of central points of the book: that throughout 1943 there was no place on the Nazi map that did not present them with a serious problem. It is fascinating to consider the multiple problems the Nazi leadership were confronted with during this time. The author picks three particular periods--October 23 to November 23, 1942, July 5 to July 12, and September 1 to September 9, 1943--to illustrate the complexities and vast nature of the difficulties the Wehrmacht faced. Citino reviews each campaign in easy-to-read detail and the descriptions of the various campaigns and operations are lucid and well written.

The author tries not to take any historical assertions about the key operations for granted but reinforces three main themes: that the success of the Allied campaign in North Africa was not a fait

accompli; that the battle of Kursk should be considered the final break-down of the Kesselschacht operation; and that Kesselring's reputation as a master of defense needs reassessment. In relation to the first chapter of the book, his assessment of the state of the U.S. Army upon its arrival in Europe does much to contextualize the campaign in North Africa and shows one of the glimmers of hope the Germans must have been counting on (especially during the Kasserine Pass). The sections on the eastern front begin with von Manstein's efforts to restore the front after the debacle of Stalingrad, the battles for Kharkov and Kursk, and finally the German withdrawal to the Dnepr River. Citino spends some time questioning the aura placed around the German commanders, in particular the view that von Manstein was a military genius. Essentially he argues that von Manstein should have recognized the futility in terms of the entire war. He blames him for what became the debacle at Kursk (for the tactics used and suggesting the offensive in the first place), accounting for it within the "Prussian-German" military culture of which Manstein was a member. Citino is critical of the overall importance of Kursk, especially the climactic clash of armor at Prokhorovka (suggesting that it did not take place).

It is worth remembering that, for all von Manstein's importance to this volume, shortly after the period examined in this book he was actually sacked by Adolf Hitler (March 31, 1944), and never re-employed. The final chapter concerns the Allied landings in Italy and the perilous moments of the Salerno landing, and deconstructs the myth of the defensive skills of Kesselring. Here Citino argues that the high cost and the geography of the land both contributed to making a more realistic assessment of his abilities. In addition, the author blames Kesselring for suggesting to Hitler a defensive line beginning below Rome (as opposed to Rommel's suggestion, which was to defend solely the northern part of Italy) in the first place, as well as for the whole futile campaign. This underpins the overall theme of the book, which is developed in the conclusion: that with the total senselessness of the struggle, the German officer corps was willingly and thoughtlessly taking part in a "death ride," leading to their own destruction and that of the German people (pp. 283-284).

Citino has a particular interest in and often refers to what he calls the "Prussian-German" military tradition and, as he sees it, the failure of the officer corps to register the hopelessness of the war situation by 1943. I do find this an interesting theory as it represents an attempt to account for the compliance of the army in Hitler's war in terms of a pre-existing condition and attitude. Citino's theory is that the operational side of the Wehrmacht through 1943 can be explained more in terms of sticking to a Prussian-German military tradition. Essentially he is talking about a tradition that did not know when to quit, one that emphasized mobile warfare, that could not adapt as easily to defense, but most importantly one that found war with a numerically superior enemy a comfortable challenge rather than a reason to seek a political end to a conflict. In the book's preface, Citino discusses the role of the individual in history and different theories pertaining to Nazi Germany. He identifies in relation to Holocaust scholarship what are known as the intentionalist (that a plan for the extermination of the Jews existed from the beginning of the Third Reich) and structuralist (that there was no plan but things developed as they went) theories. Explaining these theories in the footnote, he mentions the work of the American historian Daniel Goldhagen as representing the intentionalist side of the argument. Goldhagen's argument was that the German people participated in the Holocaust because they were what he termed pre-programmed, "eliminationalist" anti-Semites, meaning that since the time of the Reformation and Martin Luther, Germans had been unconsciously educated to hate Jews and wanted to murder them.

After reading Citino's book I cannot help but find a parallel between Goldhagen's theory about the Holocaust and his own pertaining to the Prussian-German military culture. Both argue that aspects of German behavior (the Holocaust and the "fight to the end spirit") in Nazi Germany were due to longer-term factors that were cultural and ingrained. Citino argues that, despite the deteriorating war situation in 1943, the German army and officer corps did not consider surrender or other alternatives because of their adherence to the Prussian-German military tradition. Instead it pursued a long and useless struggle until total defeat in 1945. It must be said that historians have ultimately considered Goldhagen unsuccessful in explaining the Holocaust in these terms. The major difference between these two theories, however, is that whereas Goldhagen believed that German anti-Semitism was entrenched, Citino believes the officer corps had a way out, the opportunity for a different outcome. In the preface he states, "For all the importance of these cultural preconditions, however, they do not add up to anything approaching historical inevitability. The historical actors may feel and assume certain attitudes, often unconsciously, but they still have lives to live, choices to make, and actions to undertake" (p. xxiii). Therefore, the failure of the officer corps lay in their inability to break the shackles of tradition and recognize the uselessness of the war. If Citino thinks this tradition was that easy to shake, was it that powerful in the first place?

Linking this to centuries of military culture and tradition is thought-provoking, but then again, it does not acknowledge the impact of Nazism had on the German military. How do phenomena such as the disgraceful treatment of Russian POWs or the military's participation in various war crimes or the nature of military justice in Nazi Germany (cowardice in battle or desertion attracted brutal and summary justice, 22,000 soldiers executed for cowardice or desertion by the Nazis compared to 48 in the First World War) fit into the Prussian-German military culture? This is of import as it was from 1943 that military justice became increasingly radicalized. Citino does mention that "thousands of soldiers were shot," but only in passing (p. 280). These aspects are not linked in any wider sense to the Prussian-German military tradition. What role did duress play with army commanders after 1943? He mentions the "bribes" many commanders took, but he also acknowledges that before the Soviet offensive at Orel, General Rudolf Schmidt, commander of the 2nd Panzer Army, had been relieved of his command because of comments he had made in letters to his brother, who had been recently arrested (p. 213). Commanders and members of the officer corps who had come to the realization (many in 1943) that Hitler needed to be killed are only given a single sentence: "and a small number decided to kill him" (p. 281). Again, these factors in the German way of war were largely unique to the Second World War, so how does Citino reconcile this with his Prussian-German tradition? Or does he mean that this tradition was only relevant in terms of operational history?

Maybe the author believes that the Nazi regime brought out this Prussian-German military tradition more pronouncedly than under the Second Reich, and that this explains why its officer corps behaved as they did during 1943. In describing the motivation of the high command and the officer corps to keep fighting a lost war, it would have been worthwhile to explain how they passed this motivation on to their men. Subordinate commanders like Field Marshall Günther von Kluge or Colonel-General Walter Model and various corps and divisional commanders--the High Commands Operations Department as well--are mentioned but only in minor detail. Citino debates the nature of the strategic thinking (or lack of it) amongst the Nazi leadership but more particularly what individuals like Kesselring and Manstein thought they could do about it. To say that senior commanders like Manstein and Kesselring reflected the values

of the whole army is one thing but this needs to be proven.

As an operational history this book is very well researched, explaining key details in an easy-to-read format. I am not quite as enthusiastic about the fictional vignettes of the thinking of Hitler or Field Marshall Friedrich Paulus. The maps are welcome but are lacking in scale and more detail and features. The sources are mainly German, U.S., and British but are varied and contain useful additional commentary and information. Citino certainly shows his tremendous depth of understanding of these operations and this particular period of the war is fascinating as it covers the time that the Wehrmacht forever lost its initiative. The book is informative, well written, and thought-provoking. I recommend it to anyone interested in the eastern front and the Mediterranean theaters in 1943. Underlying are some provocative ideas about what motivated German commanders and the officer corps but I would have appreciated some elaboration, and closer attention to field officers, front line commanders, and so on. I am wondering if Citino will write another book on the 1944/45 period and what line of argument he will take. Will he argue that this period simply represents the logical extension of the Prussian-German military tradition--the continuation of the "death ride"--or rather a grotesque manifestation of the predominance of Nazi values in the military? If and when it does come out, I will be very interested to see it.