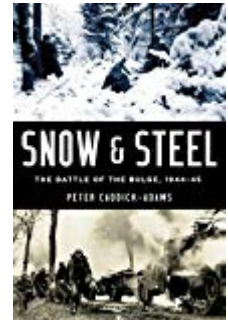


Peter Caddick-Adams. *Snow and Steel: The Battle of the Bulge, 1944-45.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 928 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-933514-5.



Reviewed by Kevin Hymel

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On December 16, 1944, three German armies burst out of the Ardennes forest along the border of Belgium and Luxembourg and drove a wedge in the American lines. Through heavy snowstorms and fog, German forces clashed with the Americans in a series of battles soon thereafter referred to as the Battle of the Bulge. The month-long campaign tested the Americans as never before, and they came out victorious. British historian Peter Caddick-Adams's book on the battle, *Snow and Steel*, is a triumph of research and narrative.

The author delves into a thorough examination of the events, people, and motives for the campaign, not reaching the commencement of the battle until page 265, but the information is important and satisfying to anyone wanting to understand Adolf Hitler's last gasp to win World War II in the west. Caddick-Adams provides full biographies of the German army commanders from Adolf Hitler to the division commanders—and sometimes a few echelons below. Of particular interest is Hitler's (and subsequently the German

people's) belief that Wagnerian music harkened to folklore about the strength Germans derived from their country's dark forests, and a belief that Germany had their enemies right where they wanted them once they entered the German lair.

While most historians refer to the German code name for the operation as *Wacht am Rhein* (Watch on the Rhine River), a defensive-sounding title to prevent the Allies from concluding this was an offensive operation, Caddick-Adams reveals that Hitler actually changed it two weeks before the campaign to *Herbstnebel* (Autumn Mist) as a swipe at his generals who wanted a smaller attack. Caddick-Adams uses the *Herbstnebel* title throughout the book.

There are too many battles in this book to be easily categorized, yet Caddick-Adams does an excellent job of following each and their contributions to the larger campaign. As the narrative develops, Caddick-Adams reveals the winners and losers on both sides of the battle line. For the Germans, Hitler is the biggest loser, not just because

he dashed Germany's youth in a hopeless cause, but because he denied his generals any kind of reconnaissance to prepare the battlefield in their favor. A perfect example of his paranoid desire for secrecy was Operation Stosser, a parachute drop behind American lines to secure bridges for the onrushing panzers. Caddick-Addams compares the night drop conducted in a blinding snow storm, with some paratroopers who had never jumped out of an airplane before, with pilots they did not know, and given only a week to prepare to the American airborne divisions who trained for six months before their D-Day drop. Operation Stosser was doomed before the planes left the ground.

Otto Skorzeny's Operation Greif met with more success. His commandoes, who spoke English and wore American uniforms over their German ones, penetrated the American lines and wreaked havoc tenfold to their numbers. Rumors of their presence spread through the American ranks. Allied commanders, most notably General Dwight D. Eisenhower, were virtual prisoners in their headquarters as MPs guarded them against assassination at a time when they should have been touring the troops. The author reveals that the real tragedy of the mission was American soldiers' shooting of many of their own over fear that any soldier with an accent or wearing enemy equipment was a German commando.

The book also reveals the strengths and weaknesses of Hitler's three army commanders. General Sepp Dietrich, commanding the 6th Panzer Army, comes off as an amateur who was in over his head. The author illustrates his lack of formal command staff training, quoting an officer who claimed "He'd say 'you attack this, you that, and then sort it out'" (p. 238). Not exactly a technical battlefield genius. General Hasso-Eccard Freiherr (Baron) von Manteuffel, commanding the 5th Panzer Army, does come off as an intelligent, professional soldier. He defied orders by scouting the American lines prior to the launch. He also

changed the time of his artillery barrage to catch the Americans while they were groggy, and bounced searchlights off low-hanging clouds to illuminate the battlefield. Poor General Erich Brandenberger, commanding the Seventh Army, had the thankless task of defending the southern flank of the offensive. He rightly worried that General George S. Patton's Third Army would quickly counterattack his penetrations, but received only a handful of armored vehicles, which had little chance against Patton's armored divisions.

Eisenhower emerges as the Allies' biggest winner. He correctly interpreted Hitler's opening moves as a major counteroffensive and immediately maneuvered reserves into the fray. He also nudged General Omar Bradley, the 12th Army Group commander, to deploy two armored divisions to cut the Bulge's waist—something that would end their long friendship. Finally, Eisenhower made the hard decision to put Field Marshal Montgomery in control of the northern section of the Bulge, taking it away from Bradley. While some historians argue this was a mistake, Caddick-Adams sides with Eisenhower's decision, mostly because Bradley was out of touch with General Courtney Hodges's First Army. Where Eisenhower had previously been accused of holding the reigns of his armies too loosely, he commanded this campaign with a tight grip.

Of Eisenhower's lieutenants, Patton comes out on top with his quick thrust north and relief of Bastogne, as well as his vision to cut off the Bulge at its base, even though Bradley forbade it. Caddick-Adams includes an interesting story about the importance of Patton insisting his officers wear their ranks on their helmets. The general also contributed to naming the campaign, telling reporter Larry Newman how the Germans attacked and how the Americans reacted. Newman used Patton's words for his next article, calling it for the first time the Battle of the Bulge. General Courtney Hodges, the First Army commander, is almost a nonfactor in the campaign be-

cause of his lack of action, not to mention his lack of presence on the battlefield. Bradley comes out poorly. He does not recognize the German attack and chafes under Eisenhower's correct handling of the campaign. He also seems petty when he denies Patton's request to cut the Bulge off at its base after the relief of Bastogne, instead wanting to cut it off at the waist in order to regain control of Hodges's First Army

The book is at its best when Caddick-Adams offers his own insights on the battle or explodes a myth or two from his own extensive research, like the famous one concerning an infantryman with the 106th Infantry Division who refused to surrender and fought a lone battle against the Germans in the forest. Caddick-Adams proves he did not exist. Usually, the use of the first-person voice in a history book is a drawback, but it works here. Caddick-Adams interviewed veterans and walked the battlefields, giving him an insight other books and articles lack. He gives an added depth by explaining memorials and chance encounters with warriors from the old battlefield.

One might expect a British author approaching the Bulge to argue that Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery saved Americans with his masterful leadership, just as most Americans are quick to point out his shortcomings. Caddick-Adams strikes an excellent balance, writing as a professional historian who has weighed all the information, not as a national defending one of his own. Montgomery did perform well, yet his unwillingness to rush to the offensive, or act as a team player constantly grated on Eisenhower's, and the American commanders', nerves.

The book's weaknesses are few. Caddick-Adams claims that the 7th Armored Division was "newly arrived" to the front, while it had been on the front since August and contributed to closing the Falaise Pocket (p. 392). The author also claims that General Jacob Devers attended Eisenhower's December 19 conference at General Bradley's Luxembourg headquarters (p. 406). He did not,

but Patton did contact him the night before and made sure Devers could cover his southern flank if he turned north to relieve Bastogne. While the book does an amazing job incorporating so many stories, it would have been nice to see a paragraph or two about the daring jump made by the 101st Airborne Division pathfinders—the famed Filthy Thirteen—into surrounded Bastogne to deliver communications and signal equipment for future airdrops.

The book extends past the end of the war. The author explores the campaign's influence on succeeding campaigns. Tactics such as the use of surprise, commandoes behind the lines, and an armored thrust were considered by Winston Churchill after the war to attack the Soviet Union as early as December 1945, and were used by the NATO Allies in response to a Soviet Bulge-like strike through the Fulda Gap and in Egypt and Syria's surprise attack (with the help of German advisors) on Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Caddick-Adams also explores the historiography of the campaign, explaining the slew of books and movies that followed, particularly the first books: S. L. A. Marshall's *Bastogne: The First Eight Days*; Robert Merriam's *Dark December* (1947); and Charles B. MacDonald's *A Time for Trumpets*. The movies included 1949's *Battleground* and 1965's *Battle of the Bulge*, which was so bad even Eisenhower, in his retirement, denounced it. It would have been nice if he had included *Patton*.

The reader almost gets the feeling that other historians urged Caddick-Adams to write this book. His knowledge of the battlefield, combined with the plethora of personal interviews with players from both sides, created such an expansive personal understanding of the campaign that it seems almost wrong for him not to finally put it all (or at least most) down on paper. We are lucky he did. *Snow and Steel* is one of the most thorough tellings of the Ardennes Campaign and deserves a place on any historian's shelf. It is a mag-

nificant achievement of research, oral history, and staff ride experience.

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