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Frank Ellis, *The Stalingrad Cauldron: Inside the Encirclement and Destruction of the 6th Army*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2013. Pp. xiii, 542. ISBN 978-0-7006-1901-6.

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Research on the Battle of Stalingrad and its aftermath has burgeoned in the past fifteen years from both a classical military perspective and a cultural one that has located the battle's importance in the memory of the post-war German states.<sup>1</sup> Frank Ellis's idiosyncratic *The Stalingrad Cauldron* connects the diverse treatments of the battle and places it in the larger context of the Stalinist state. The book is effectively a collection of loosely related essays rather than one coherent narrative.

Two propositions underlie Ellis's presentation. First, that

recognition of the soldierly virtues of German 6th Army is perfectly in order. Indeed, such recognition is demanded by historical objectivity and fully consistent with it.... [T]hat 6th Army reached Stalingrad on the Volga, the start of Central Asia, was itself an outstanding military achievement, a brilliant demonstration of high-speed warfare, toughness, planning, and, to use the German word, *Daraufgängertum* (offensive, aggressive spirit). Encircled and in crisis, it adapted; its remarkable junior leadership achieved wonders of command and improvisation in appalling conditions that undoubtedly made it possible for 6th Army to hold out as long as it did. (450, 65)

To hammer home the role of the Wehrmacht's junior officers, Ellis includes a photograph of a square-jawed *Landser* (roughly, "grunt") at Stalingrad that "conveys something of the professionalism of German 6th Army and the exceptionally high quality of its junior leaders" (image 6). While such an interpretation of the picture may be questioned, the author's high evaluation of German tactical prowess during the battle is indisputable. But one also detects a reversion to the concept of an apolitical and professional Wehrmacht fighting the Red Army with goals quite distinct from those of the Third Reich's war of annihilation (*Vernichtungskrieg*) against the Soviet state and society. Thus, Ellis writes that the "German 6th Army was an accessory ..., an indirect instrument of murder" (450). This ignores the vast body of recent work demonstrating the Wehrmacht's *direct* participation in the *Vernichtungskrieg*.<sup>2</sup>

A second governing proposition of the book is that the terroristic nature of Stalin's Soviet state as manifested before, during, and after the Battle of Stalingrad somehow, by comparison, lessens the horror of the Wehrmacht's own brutalities. Thus, Ellis cites the *Holodomor* (hunger-extermiation) of several million Ukrainians in the 1930s, the murder of more than twenty thousand Poles in the early 1940s, and the rampant barbarism of Red Army soldiers during their conquest of Germany. His discussion of Stalin's Order 227 rightly shows that "the distinction between lawful and unlawful was irrelevant throughout much of the Soviet period" (32). This together with the NKVD's ruthless use of blocking units to keep Red Army men in the line confronted Soviet commanders at all levels with hard questions: "[should] they press home an attack and take huge losses, or ... withdraw and incur accusations of cowardice?" (42).

Chapters 2-4 make the case for German professionalism by reproducing reports and reminiscences of officers who participated in the defense of Stalingrad. These hitherto unpublished sources provide details of the 16th Panzer and the 94th and 76th Infantry Divisions' experience of and adjustment to the conditions of

1. See, e.g., Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege, 1942-1943* (NY: Viking Penguin, 1998); David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *To the Gates of Stalingrad: Soviet-German Combat Operations, April-August 1942* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2009), *Armageddon in Stalingrad: September-November 1942* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2009), and *Endgame at Stalingrad: Book One: November 1942* (forthcoming, 2014); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic* (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1999); and Christina Morina, *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2011).

2. Missing from the bibliography, among other valuable works, is Bernd Boll and Hans Safrian's seminal essay, "On the Way to Stalingrad: The 6th Army in 1941-42," in H. Heer and K. Naumann, eds., *War of Extermination: The German Military in the Age of Total War* (NY: Berghahn, 2000) 237-71, which examines 6th Army's direct involvement in Nazi Germany's ideological war in the east.

combat within the *Kesselschlacht* (battle of encirclement). Several key points emerge. First, after the encirclement was completed, German units suffered a steady decline in matériel, especially fuel, which severely limited their mobility and, thus, their ability to defend positions against Soviet attacks.

Although the winter weather of course affected the Red Army as well as the Wehrmacht, Ellis rightly notes that the combination of dwindling rations, widespread dysentery, limited shelter, and extreme cold especially taxed the German defenders. Manpower losses sapped each unit's ability to fight or perform other military tasks. The Wehrmacht's many wounded could not be evacuated and lay helpless in makeshift hospitals. Nonetheless, all three 6th-Army divisions used every means of maintaining their combat strength; the men of each, Ellis notes, claimed to have fulfilled their professional duty up to the very end. One officer even declared it "a falsification of historical truth to claim that the Stalingrad Kessel capitulated"; rather, the 6th Army simply "ceased to exist" (149).

This quotation exposes the drawbacks of uncritical reliance on Wehrmacht military records. For they not only document a given unit's daily activities, they amount to an evaluation of its officers. In light of this, it is no surprise that events reflecting unfavorably on commanders fail to appear in the official record. Lacunae in the reports also extend to Soviet civilians, who are virtually absent from the army's documentation of events. Finally, such sources present German units and their men in a heroic light, claiming that "military discipline and order remained intact in this noble division" (110), or that "the initiative, the willingness to make decisions, and the skill and boldness of the junior leaders alongside the quality, endurance and bravery of the troops were now more than ever decisive for the deployment of forces and for the outcome of the fierce battles" (135). Such portrayals of soldiers by their officers are understandable, but historians must approach them skeptically. Ellis, however, has failed to do so.

The remainder of the book (chapters 5–10) treats a range of issues, including sniper combat, recruitment of Soviet nationals for the German Army, German and Soviet espionage within the Stalingrad pocket, and German POWs in the Soviet Union. Ellis's discussion of Soviet deserters— even *after* the Germans had been encircled—is especially enlightening on the antipathy many Soviet citizens felt toward the Stalinist state. Contrary to popular perceptions, it was not only ethnic groups from the fringes of the Soviet Union that surrendered or deserted to the Germans: in at least one instance, Ellis shows that ethnic Russians constituted the largest group of Red Army deserters. He also explains how religion induced Muslim peoples of the southern USSR to join the Germans: "unlike their Soviet counterparts, who were hampered by the Soviet state's official and aggressive atheism, German officers and trainers were able to exploit the religious convictions of their [Muslim] trainees and win their confidence" (329). To claim that "the German approach was clearly working" in turning Soviet citizens against their government is overstating the case; more decisive was the failure of their opponent's approach. Still, Ellis properly underscores the Wehrmacht's flexibility in integrating disaffected Soviets into its ranks.

Ellis taps Russian archives for ground-level analyses of the intelligence war between the sides at Stalingrad. Because his sources are generally lower ranking Soviet intelligence officials, it is difficult to apply their conclusions to the Soviet Union as a whole. But the author does helpfully clarify the intelligence network the Soviets envisaged before the war and how it actually functioned during the conflict. Also described are German occupation policies: the registration and forced labor of the local population, the extensive plundering by individual German soldiers, and the violent reprisals conducted at the first hint of resistance. Ellis explicitly compares German with Soviet practices—"these sorts of filtering and selection measures bear a strong resemblance to those implemented by the NKVD during the Terror Famine and during the mass deportations from Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, the Caucasus, and the lower Volga" (365).

Again using Soviet archival material, Ellis covers German POWs in the USSR in the last section of the book. He discusses in detail the number of troops in Soviet captivity before their final repatriation in 1956, specifying the various industries and the agencies around Stalingrad where they labored. Soviet sources from the immediate post-Stalingrad period testify to the shocking mortality rate of these prisoners, though Ellis correctly blames both Moscow and Berlin. Soviet authorities saw little reason to treat their bitter ad-

versaries humanely in captivity and individual soldiers subjected them to what even Soviet sources call “savagery and sadistic treatment” (405). But, Ellis notes, the hungry, sick, and exhausted soldiers who had fought to the end “were victims of Hitler’s determination that German 6th Army resist to the last” (404). He concludes that “the overall German experience of Soviet captivity is another dreadful chapter in the suffering of World War II... [N]o nation’s soldiers should be the subject of punitive measures merely because they wore the uniform of a totalitarian regime” (418).

*The Stalingrad Cauldron* is both a compelling and a flawed book. Intelligent use of both German and Soviet archives has allowed Ellis to more precisely reconstruct events in the Stalingrad pocket, both on the battlefield and in the larger struggle for the loyalties of civilians and POWs. Recent historiography has perhaps overrated the Soviets’ tactical ability. Ellis, by contrast, stresses the German Army’s remarkable adaptability in the extremely difficult conditions of fighting at Stalingrad; he is right to see in this one explanation for German soldiers’ endurance during the remainder of World War II. However, he damages his larger argument by casting the Wehrmacht as an “indirect” participant in the war of annihilation, less culpable for its policies because the Soviets were still worse. No serious historian would claim that Stalin’s state waged a “clean” war against the Germans or treated the Chechens, Poles, Tartars, or other groups in an ethical manner. But the Nazis’ pitiless determination to murder millions of Jews and Soviet citizens through mass shootings, gassing, and starvation while laying waste to the USSR in its entirety are the incomparable atrocities of the Second World War.