

# Reviews

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***From Victory To Stalemate: The Western Front, Summer 1944***, C.J. Dick, Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2016, 1,465 pages with maps, photographs, footnotes and bibliography, \$30.52.

***From Defeat To Victory: The Eastern Front, Summer 1944***, C.J. Dick, Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2016, 1,354 pages with maps, photographs, footnotes and bibliography, \$39.93.

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Former British army officer, historian and accomplished author C.J. Dick presents a two-volume work on the operational art of warfare. These works explain why and how the Allied forces of World War II conducted military operations in the closing days of the conflict. Volume 1 deals with the Western Allies – the United States, Great Britain and Canada – and their military operations in France from June to September 1944. Volume 2 addresses the Red Army's actions along the Eastern Front in Summer 1944. The author's purpose is to "put forth broad arguments about the conduct of the war at the operational level – the handling of armies and army groups by both the Western Allies and the Red Army in contemporaneous campaigns."

The two-volume set follows staff-ride methodology by "setting out the operational-strategic context, examining the situation at the start of each operation as perceived by the commanders tasked with its execution, outlining their plans, discussing developments at key points during the evolution of the operation and decisions made in consequence, and evaluating the results and assessing the generalship involved."

These works are not analytic descriptions and discussions of a given battle; rather the author presents event summaries that set the stage for his analysis. He places heavy emphasis on the least understood and most vital subject of logistical planning and support. In developing his theme, Dick reviews the principals of war, the effect of prewar doctrine and the educational background of the principal Allied leaders.

As the Western Allies entered World War II, they were "more tactically than operationally minded: they were happier when directing set-piece battles and relying on superior firepower than when conducting inherently less controllable operations that emphasized superior mobility to outmaneuver the enemy into a position where his destruction became certain."

Alone among the Western Allied leaders, GEN George S. Patton practiced the operational art. The author defines this method of warfare as "the sequencing and synchronization by theater, army group and armies of a series of operations and battles conducted by subordinate formations." He further states that "the skill of the operational-level commander lies in using deception, interdiction, operational maneuver, logistic resources and carefully orchestrated battles to structure a successful campaign."

As the author presents his arguments for developing and practicing the operational art, he provides insights on the principles of war, the challenges of command and importance of a staff, and the chain of command in the Allied Expeditionary Forces along with American, British and Canadian approaches to war. Given this solid foundation, subsequent chapters provide insights into the accomplishments, shortcomings and failures of the Allies as they conduct military operations against the Germans in France.

Dick's insightful review of the battles and operations include discussions on the first seven weeks of actions following the successful landing in Normandy, the planning and execution of the breakout from the beachhead and the frustrating Battle of the Falaise Gap. With each battle, the author emphasizes that Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery, leading the British 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, and LTG Omar Bradley of the U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, "tended to exercise tight supervision and control, allowing little room for creativity." Dick notes that several subordinate army commanders "accepted this as right and proper." However, Patton "was inclined to interpret his orders as creatively as possible, exercise initiative and exceed the goals set in his mission."

While the campaign in Western Europe was successful, the author points out that "the campaign became one of hasty improvisations, and these were not always based on a holistic appreciation of the situation and its possibilities. As a result, battles were not always purposefully sequenced and synchronized, and some were fought unnecessarily. The desirability of maneuver in place of attack was frequently ignored, and the dividends to be

gained from deep operations were generally passed up in favor of a risk-averse, security-first approach to the exploitation of success.”

Throughout his analysis, Dick emphasizes the failure of logistical planning, execution and leadership as the reason for the strategic pause in Allied forward movement by September 1944. The early seizure, for example, of the port of Antwerp was not exploited by securing the Scheldt Estuary passage. The tremendous expenditure of men and materiel by the Canadian army to clear the passageway is relayed in vivid prose by the author. The same holds true for his disdainful remarks on the American Service of Supply system and its leader, LTG John C. Lee.

Whereas the first volume critiques the Western Allied leadership’s strategic and operational approach as they executed their mission to “enter the continent of Europe and undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces,” the second volume concentrates on the Soviet methods of warfare.

The author is well-versed in Soviet military doctrine and procedures, having been a senior lecturer and director of the Soviet Studies Research Center. In Volume 2, the author discusses the “Soviet articulation, acceptance and practice of the ‘operational art’ which distinguished the Red Army’s performance in Summer 1944 from that of the armies of the Western Allies. From the standpoint of military art, this conditioned the Red Army’s comparative success.”

Appreciating that readers may lack an understanding of the structure of the World War II Red Army, Dick provides a detailed guide to Soviet military terms and organizations. Given this foundation, he moves onto to discuss Soviet doctrine before 1944. As he states, “The initial period of the Great Patriotic War cruelly exposed the unrealistic expectations and deficiencies of the Red Army, from leadership through doctrine and organization, equipment and training to deployment.” How Joseph Stalin and his military subordinates reversed this trend so that by 1944 they were masters of the battlefield is clearly brought out by Dick.

The author definitively explains through historical examples the Red Army’s “optimal mix of firepower, mobility and staying power to achieve given operational objectives.” Charts and tables are presented to support these conclusions.

Given the Russians’ deep reserve of manpower and materiel, they “displayed a growing superiority in the conduct of the operational art, which often rendered the adroitness of German units and minor formations inconsequential as they were swallowed up in vast operational catastrophes.” As he reviews the major clashes between the Russian and German forces, one is left wondering how the Germans managed to delay the Soviets for even a brief period of time.

It is worth noting that the author does not compare the Western Allies and the Soviet approaches to warfare. As with any competent war-college instructor, Dick presents his analyzed data that one is free to accept, modify or reject. These two volumes are designed to make the reader think about the manner in which warfare has been and should be conducted. They are impressive works which demand a prominent place in any professional reading library.

**RETIRED COL D.J. JUDGE**