

the construction of a dizzying maze of tunnels and caves which honeycombed key positions on the island. The underground defensive works offered Japanese troops a good measure of protection from American bombardment and were mutually supporting in case one position came under attack.

The new Japanese tactics came as a complete surprise to senior American officers at Peleliu, and as their men became mired down in rugged terrain on the island's central highlands, they had few fresh ideas. Major General William Rupertus, commander of the 1st Marine Division, insisted on aggressive direct attacks into the Japanese stronghold, with predictable results. Rupertus persisted under the notion that Japanese defenses would collapse under repeated attacks and had no idea how to adapt to changing enemy tactics.

Largely due to a lack of tactical flexibility in the senior command, Marine infantry suffered ghastly casualties. Not until October would American commanders fully understand that the Japanese were waging a grim battle of attrition and change their own approach accordingly. Increasingly, infantry attacks would rely heavily on overwhelming firepower including armour, artillery, and close air support. This measured, combined-arms approach finally reduced the island's Japanese garrison, and likewise reduced the numbers of American casualties.

Author Wheelan pens a riveting account of one of the Pacific Theatre's least understood battles. His research relies heavily on primary sources including official correspondence, after-action reports, and Japanese records; the text likewise includes numerous veterans' descriptions of the horrific fighting of the two-month-long battle. *Bitter Peleliu* consequently contains a judicious mix of scholarly analysis and riveting combat accounts.

As such, Wheelan's book will appeal to seasoned students of the Second World War as well as casual readers with an interest in military history. Although further research on the battle is undoubtedly in order, *Bitter Peleliu* constitutes a worthy contribution to the historiography of the epic war in the Pacific.

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Klaus Willmann. *Screams of the Drowning. From the Eastern Front to the Sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff*. Barnsley, S. Yorks: Greenhill Books, www-pen-and-sword.co.uk, 2021. xvi+192 pp., illustrations, notes. UK £19.99, US \$34.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-78438-598-9.

In *Screams of the Drowning*, Klaus Willmann tells the story of German soldier Hans Fackler during the Second World War. He also briefly sheds light on the sinking of the SS *Wilhelm Gustloff* during that conflict.

Willman opens with an exploration of Fackler's childhood and his take on

the events going on around him at a period toward the end of the Second World War. He then moves into an exploration of Fackler's training and indoctrination into the Hitler Youth, and his experiences on the Eastern Front. Following that, he explores trips to field hospitals and Fackler's eventual transfer and evacuation on the SS *Wilhelm Gustloff*.

This is not a technical examination of the strategy and tactics employed on the Eastern Front. Nor will readers find a deep analysis of battles and tactics. Hans Fackler's experiences do, however, provide a first-hand account of the average German soldier on the Eastern Front at war's end. For example, the discussion of disparities in equipment throughout the German Army, and the rapidly deteriorating situation at the front is both intimate and chilling. Although students of military history may not find anything particularly new or revealing in Fackler's story, those less familiar with the topic will find the book a readable introduction to the period while more advanced students will find it a solid piece of non-technical background to events on the Eastern Front.

Despite its vivid description of the Eastern Front, *Screams of the Drowning* suffers from a number of shortcomings. The events surrounding the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* may not be well known outside the context of maritime or military history, but the author only addresses it briefly. Within the confines of 192 pages, Fackler does not board the ship until page 105, the ship sinks six pages later and he is rescued by page 117. Of course, the actual sinking occurred quite quickly and a passenger below decks, like Fackler, would not necessarily be aware of the technical situation regarding the state of the ship or the nature of the attacks. Lack of access to such information accounts for the limited explanation of the sinking, not the author's inability or unwillingness to explore the facts. As a memoir, the text does not refer to primary or secondary sources, which limits the work as an academic resource. While the author does not draw direct conclusions, readers should cross-reference political or strategic comments against other sources for a more complete picture. Finally, it should be noted that this is a translation of a transcription of a memoir. Students who read this in the original German, may find additional context or nuance not present in the English transmission. Since the translator does note that some sacrifices and changes from the original were necessary, readers should remember that some things are lost in translation.

Screams of the Drowning offers an engaging account of one man's experience during the Second World War. While of limited academic value, the memoir does shed light on a little-known aspect of the war that students at all levels should find useful. Perhaps the questions it provokes will encourage further exploration of the war on the Eastern Front.

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