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*Blood and Steel, The Wehrmacht Archives: Volumes I Normandy 1944; Volumes II Retreat to the Reich: September to December 1944 and Volumes III The Ardennes Offensive: December 1944 to January 1945.* Edited by Donald E. Graves. Frontline Press: London: 2013.

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## Book Review

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Having reviewed Mark Reardon's *Defending Fortress Europe*, this reviewer was prepared for the concept of what Donald Graves attempted to achieve in this series by his judicious editing of the Daily Intelligence Summaries of the First Canadian Army. Graves was aided in his editing process as the land portion of the War in the West is easily broken out into four phases, three of which he covered with these three volumes. A planned fourth volume will encompass the endgame for the German Army in the West. Graves's work illustrates that the German Army was very meticulous in its staff work, understanding that no detail was too small and too insignificant to the German war effort. For the reader to fully grasp each volume, one almost needs to read all three together. These volumes are not studies of the campaigns, but do instead cast a revealing light on the German Army in these campaigns. These volumes cover official tactical doctrine, weapon instructions, letters and diaries captured by the allies, and Allied intelligence reports and summaries.

The Normandy volume was the least interesting personally, having read the Seventh Army's journal in *Defending Fortress Europe*. However, it is a miniature gamers and tacticians delight. Much of this volume's fifteen chapters are about tactical considerations, combat, and equipment observations, as expected. Much of this is standard territory. Graves included, though, chapters on tensions between the Wehrmacht and SS, logistical shortages in medical supplies, weapons and equipment in general, the German replacement system, and even pages on German soldier etiquette. He mentioned the fuel shortages that plagued the German Army once the strategic bombing campaign against oil plastered the refineries. He reminded readers that the Panther uses twice as much fuel as the Panzer III or IV, a reminder that logistics had to weigh heavily before any use of the Panther in combat. Repeatedly running through *Normandy 1944* is the German

healthy respect for Allied artillery and air support, with examples shown such as instructions on how to properly dig in horses for force protection. There is also a mirrored reaction, a disdain for the Luftwaffe—always seemingly in some other sector—and the German rationing of shells versus, in their worldview, the Allied firepower on demand. Yet running through much of the volume is a belief in German victory—and why not—as to think otherwise would be an admission the last five years were in vain, and never mind the increasing severity of punishments handed out for defeatist sentiments.



Figure 1. Atlantikwall Batterie, photographer Maier, c. 1943-1943, Bunde Archives.

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*The Retreat to the Reich* volume deals with, as Chapter One is entitled, “Stemming the Flood.” After the Allied breakout in Operation Cobra and their mad dash across France, the Wehrmacht was reeling in the West. After the Battles of the Falaise Gap, it appeared the collapse of the German Army was imminent. That this collapse did not happen is well detailed at the small-unit and personal level by the documents that Graves selected here. The overall outline of *Retreat to the Reich* is like *Normandy 1944*, but the Home Front and allied bombing now begin to figure prominently in the pages of the book. “The Diary of a Nazi Girl,” a series of captured documents, was in both content and purpose new and allows

readers to better understand the efforts that Hamas and Hezbollah today make in their indoctrination of the young. The chapter on desertion and discipline was a little surprising, as many accounts do not note that this was really a continuing issue, that the stiffening of the West Wall and the Rhine Barrier did not simply magically dissipate the sense the war was continuing to proceed in an unfavorable manner. Three facts stood out—the German claim that the Allies were using cement shells and that Americans tend to be very expert in their tossing of hand grenades. The third was that the 12th SS Panzer Division soldier strength was comprised mainly of eighteen and nineteen year olds, who made up eighty-two percent.

The *Ardennes Offensive* volume is easily summed by the exhilaration of the letter “We March,” the belief in impending victory that would turn the fortunes of war to the despair that Germany had shot its last bolt, summed up succinctly by “Everything looks hopeless” (p. 136). Graves focuses a deserved amount of attention on the quest for English speaking soldiers for Kampfgruppe Peiper—KG Peiper was to be the *schwerpunkt* for the Ardennes Offensive in an effort to breach the Meuse River—with his sort of loose format that replicates chapters in the previous volumes. He made the factual error in the use of Major Hal McCown’s (who retired as Major General) account as a POW with Kampfgruppe Peiper, listing him as from the 199th Infantry Division, as he was from the 199th Infantry Regiment of the 30th Infantry Division. However, the most engrossing document is the diary of Flak Sergeant Karl Laun, attached to Kampfgruppe Peiper. Laun, after breaking out of the pocket Peiper found itself in when it ran out of fuel, begins a period of “official” medical furloughs, using every means possible to stay AWOL by the use of documents either to receive medical care or to be transferred to it. Portions of his diary are among the most fascinating documents ever written. It is also interesting that the German telephone intelligence section intercepted a call between Field Marshall Model and his wife, where she advises him to come home and stop playing soldier. Model would commit suicide in April 1945 in the Ruhr Pocket rather than surrender to American forces.



Figure 2.

SS-Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, photo by Kurt Alber, c. 1943-1944, Bunde Archives.

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A caveat for Graves's work is small—but for a historian of his depth it is perhaps surprising that more thought was not given to the placing of the material presented in its bigger picture perspective. Unlike Reardon in *Defending Fortress Europe*, Graves does not preface chapters, instead relying on his brief introduction for each book. The reader would have been perhaps better served by a little more historical context throughout the book, as a little historical factual knowledge and perspective would have aided in tying together the many facets that Graves chose to present. The books also suffer from a lack of an index. Graves has done exceptionally fine work here, ensuring that there is a wide swath of interesting material to appeal to a wider audience than one might suspect from the dust jacket. It is highly recommended that readers tackle all three volumes published to date concurrently, as the totality of this efforts gives different glimpses into an army that while fighting desperately for its very existence, continues to grind on with its bureaucratic and administrative apparatus. In sum, it is fascinating material.