

H. Hodges and the First US Army. Diary maintained for Hodges by his aides Major William C. Sylvan and Captain.


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 ***Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney H. Hodges and the First U.S. Army. Diary maintained for Hodges by his aides Major William C. Sylvan and Captain Francis G. Smith, Jr (review)***

Harold R. Winton

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Harold R. Winton

Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney H. Hodges and the First U.S. Army. Diary maintained for Hodges by his aides Major William C. Sylvan and Captain Francis G. Smith, Jr. Edited by Jhon T. Greenwood. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky for the Association of the United States Army, 2008. ISBN 978-0-8131-2525-1. Maps. Photographs. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xi, 575. \$50.00.

Courtney Hodges remains perhaps the most enigmatic of the senior U.S. Army generals of World War II. He assumed command of the First U.S. Army just after the breakout from Normandy and remained in continuous command thereof during its active operations through V-E Day. This was the American formation that captured Paris, drove into Germany, fought the bloody battles in the Huertgen Forest, halted the ferocious German Ardennes offensive, reduced the northern half of the Bulge, captured the Remagen Bridge, encircled the southern half of the Ruhr Pocket, and linked up with the Russians at the Elbe. There is, however, no biography of Hodges, nor any readily available appreciation of the operational work of First Army.

Thus, the commercial publication of the war-time diary kept by two of Hodges's aides and long-known to military researchers is a most welcome event. The project was undertaken by John Greenwood, who until recently served as chief historian in the Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Army, and is a joint venture between the Association of the U.S. Army and the University Press of Kentucky.

The text is preceded by a short biographical sketch of Hodges and comprises nine chapters corresponding to First Army's major operations. Greenwood's editing is parsimonious yet quite helpful, restricting itself to obvious errors in the original text and the addition of over one hundred pages of factual notes describing personalities, units, weapons,

and events mentioned in the diary.

There are, of course, multiple problems of interpretation, mostly centered around Hodges himself. Was he the competent, "magnificently balanced" (p. 3) field commander depicted by Omar Bradley in *A Soldier's Story*; the admirable but overly conservative general described by James Gavin in *On to Berlin*; the unimaginative *bon général ordinaire* portrayed by Russell Weigley in *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*; or the aloof, too-quick-to-relieve perfectionist indicted by Daniel Bolger in "Zero Defects: Command Climate in the First US Army" (*Military Review*, May 1991)? The present work is an imperfect one with which to judge these issues. Nevertheless, attentive reading of the text, particularly when done in conjunction with other works such as David Hogan's *A Command Post at War*, can yield real rewards. During the frustrating fighting in the Huertgen, one can sense Hodges's palpable **[End Page 987]** displeasure at the worm-like pace of the American advance in the face of atrocious weather, terrible terrain, and skillful German defenses, never wondering whether the attacks should have been launched in the first place. And during the early days of the Bulge when American aircraft were all but grounded, one can discern the heavy reliance that senior American ground commanders had, by that juncture in the war, come to place on the air instrument. Furthermore, one gets a very useful sense of the inner workings of a major headquarters in time of war and the wide scope of a senior commander's ambit.

Thus, all engaged in this enterprise are due our thanks for having put an important and useful primary source in the hands of a wide circle of readers. **[End Page 988]**

Harold R. Winton
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the personal side of Crerar and those around him. He captures the charged atmosphere of the battlefield, high command and the political ramifications of it. This book is the definitive biography of Crerar to date, a 'must read' for those interested in Canadian military and political events of the Second World War.

Angus Brown

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

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