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H-NET BOOK REVIEW

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J. E. Kaufmann and H. W. Kaufmann. \_Fortress Third Reich: German Fortifications and Defense Systems in World War II\_. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003. Maps, photographs, illustrations, tables, glossary, bibliography, index. xi + 369 pp. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 0-306-81239-8.

Reviewed for H-German by James V. Koch, Old Dominion University

Defending One's Way to Defeat

This book is about the fortifications, bunkers, flak towers, camouflage, and defensive systems utilized by the Germans in World War II. In contrast to a 1999 book involving one of the authors, which focused on specific countries, [1] this book is organized chronologically and traces the prewar development of German fortifications and defense systems and their subsequent enhancement during the war, wherever their location. The focus here is on Germany, while the earlier volume was organized by western European countries.

Kaufmann and Kauffman present the typical World War II historian with more than she is likely to want to know overall about German fortifications and defense systems in World War II, but perhaps less than she may wish to know about their specific aspects. For example, if one wants extensive details about the Westwall (Siegfried Line), then more detailed sources are available, such as Bettinger and Bueren [2]. The authors also fail to provide footnotes to buttress the points they make and do not offer a more precise guide to their sources. Thus readers are often left to guess about the derivation of data and material. The authors do provide a useful bibliography, portions of which they highlight with asterisks and other markers to note particularly worthy sources. However, typically absent are archival sources and similar original materials. At the end of the day, it is often unclear which sources the authors have relied upon for particular data and comments.

Missing as well is a significant discussion of the economic dimensions of Germany's war economy and the Third Reich's profligate expenditures on war goods of all types, including fortifications and defensive systems. Recently, the literature on such matters has expanded; it has become increasingly clear that momentous opportunity costs were associated with Germany's military expenditures in general and its spending on fortifications and defensive systems in particular. Late Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman's dictum, "There's no such thing as a free lunch" certainly applied to the German war economy in World War II. The authors do not highlight the painful choices--military and civilian--German leaders had to make in order to devote tens of millions of marks to the construction of fortifications and defensive systems.

Regardless of these omissions, this volume is the best overall survey currently available on the subject of German fortifications and defensive systems. Particularly well done, given the relative paucity of material on the subject, is the material dealing with Germany's Ostwall along the Oder River and Warthe River bend. This defensive position originally was designed to ward off

potential Polish incursions and later was central to Germany's attempts to stop the Soviet juggernaut in 1945. The authors also splendidly demonstrate how skillfully the Germans utilized foreign media to send deceptively strong messages about their defensive capabilities. The German propaganda machine mixed pictures, film, and leaks via military and diplomatic personnel with dexterity, carefully orchestrating visits by foreign personnel to generate exaggerated notions of Germany's defensive preparation. What is not clear is whether this propaganda actually influenced British, French or Soviet behavior between 1939 and 1941. The book also provides several useful lists that bring together otherwise disparate information. An example is a handy list of the Atlantic coastal fortresses the Germans developed in 1944, some of which did not surrender until the end of the war. Another instructive list catalogs the German underground factories, including the well-known underground missile assembly facility in Nordhausen.

While the book is uneven, sometimes great detail is provided. Exemplary is the datum that the Germans planted 8,501,225 mines in the West; similarly useful are discussions regarding the thickness and nature of the concrete in specific installations. Helpful illustrations often accompany these discussions. Even so, this is not a book about the Westwall, flak towers, or U-boat bunkers, per se. One must go elsewhere for more detailed presentations on such subjects.

This is not a book most German historians will choose to purchase, but it would be a fine source of information for most World War II historians. Relatively few individuals will desire more detail than it provides. Those seeking more information, however, often will find it difficult to determine the sources of the information provided in the book.

#### Notes

[1]. J. E. Kaufmann and Robert M. Jurga, *Fortress Europe: European Fortifications of World War II* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1999).

[2]. Dieter Bettinger and Martin Bueren, *Westwall* (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1990).

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