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In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir Of The Eastern Front (Modern War Studies) (Modern War Studies (Paperback))



Synopsis

In the hell that was World War II, the Eastern Front was its heart of fire and ice. Gottlob Herbert Bidermann served in that lethal theater from 1941 to 1945, and his memoir of those years recaptures the sights, sounds, and smells of the war as it vividly portrays an army marching on the road to ruin. A riveting and reflective account by one of the millions of anonymous soldiers who fought and died in that cruel terrain, *In Deadly Combat* conveys the brutality and horrors of the Eastern Front in detail never before available in English. It offers a ground soldier's perspective on life and death on the front lines, providing revealing new information concerning day-to-day operations and German army life. Wounded five times and awarded numerous decorations for valor, Bidermann saw action in the Crimea and siege of Sebastopol, participated in the vicious battles in the forests south of Leningrad, and ended the war in the Courland Pocket. He shares his impressions of countless Russian POWs seen at the outset of his service, of peasants struggling to survive the hostilities while caught between two ruthless antagonists, and of corpses littering the landscape. He recalls a Christmas gift of gingerbread from home that overcame the stench of battle, an Easter celebrated with a basket of Russian hand grenades for eggs, and his miraculous survival of machine gun fire at close range. In closing he relives the humiliation of surrender to an enemy whom the Germans had once derided and offers a sobering glimpse into life in the Soviet gulags. Bidermann's account debunks the myth of a highly mechanized German army that rolled over weaker opponents with impunity. Despite the vast expanses of territory captured by the Germans during the early months of Operation Barbarossa, the war with Russia remained tenuous and unforgiving. His story commits that living hell to the annals of World War II and broadens our understanding of its most deadly combat zone. Translator Derek Zumbro has rendered Bidermann's memoir into a compelling narrative that retains the author's powerful style. This English-language edition of Bidermann's dynamic story is based upon a privately published memoir entitled *Krim-Kurland Mit Der 132 Infanterie Division*. The translator has added important events derived from numerous interviews with Bidermann to provide additional context for American readers.

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Customer Reviews

Firstly, before launching yourself into this excellent book please take the time to read the introduction by Dennis Showalter as it will help explain the style of writing to be found in this book. The book was originally written for the survivors of Bidermann's regiment and division, not for the general public. Bearing this in mind you will have a better understanding and feeling for the author's account of his experience of fighting on the Eastern Front during WW2. At times you might find the narrative old fashioned and even cliched but this is definitely not the case, it has to be taken in context of when and why this book was first written. This is a great story, on par if not better than Guy Sajer's 'Forgotten Soldier'. This is a combination of a combat history of the 132nd Infantry Division and the author's role and experiences in the fighting on the Eastern Front. The author, Gottlob Herbert Bidermann, won two Iron Crosses, the Crimea Shield, the Close Combat Badge, the German Cross in Gold, the Gold Wound Badge (wounded five times), the Honour Roll Clasp and the Tank Destruction Badge. What is remarkable is that the author survived five years of combat on the Russian Front fighting in Crimea, Leningrad and later in the Courland Pocket. I found his stories about his early years fighting with an anti-tank section using the Pak 37 "doorknocker" very interesting, I had always believed these weapons to be next to useless on the Russian Front however I was surprised. You can trace the change in the author from a novice who still cared about human beings, even his enemy to one whom has been brutalised by warfare to a point past indifference to death and destruction.

Much has been written about the Wehrmacht, discussing strategies, campaigns, results and commanders; less has been written about the common German soldier in W.W.II. In this extraordinary book, Gottlob H. Bidermann narrates his experience in the 132 Infantry Division on the Eastern Front from June 1941 to May 1945 followed by surrender and internment in Russia until the summer of 1948. He was commissioned and received officer training in 1943

but continued to be assigned to the 132 Infantry Division. Bidermann's memoirs were written for and distributed to the survivors of his regiment and division, and originally were not for general audiences. Derek S. Zumbro, a US Naval officer and friend of the Bidermann family, was given a copy of his memoir in 1985 by Bidermann which Zumbro translated; the memoirs were published as the book *IN DEADLY COMBAT*. The text is basically an accurate chronology of the events Bidermann personally experienced on the Eastern Front. Daily death, suffering and destruction was encountered and the author states "We tended our wounded, buried our dead and moved forward to the next encounter, knowing that eventually, we would meet the end of our journey". He later notes "Most of us owed our lives to the skill and self-sacrifice of others in our company, many of whom were no longer with us." It is interesting to read the author's personal reactions to brutal combat. He relates how his training and discipline gave him life-saving split-second reactions when face to face with the enemy. While generally not critical of German combat general officers, many of whom he admired, like the common soldier in all armies he "called it like was".

This is a very interesting and quite different approach to experiencing the events of the second world war. It is interesting in the fact that it tells the story of a German Division from the perspective of the members of the Division, and does so primarily for the benefit of those members rather than for the public at large. So, this then is a fascinating if somewhat oddly focused study of the war along the eastern front from the viewpoint of the German foot soldier. It is often frightening and revealing, especially when one considers the fact that the author actually survived over five years of combat. So, although the writing style is a bit stiff and belabored, it is well worth the effort. This is the story of an "average" foot soldier involved up to his muddy ankles in the most outrageous and provocative battles in modern history. This is truly a story for the record books, one told with honesty (at least from the author's perspective), and one deserving of your time and study. Imagine slogging through the heat and rain and mud and snow and ice of the campaign into and then through Poland and Russia, and retracing mile by mile, yard by yard, foot by foot as the Russians relentlessly push the 200 divisions of the German Army slowly and painfully back from all of the gains, inflicting murderous tolls along the way. The portrait given is one revealing the levels of hardship, depravations, depravities, and extreme experiences of a common soldier involved in the most terrible and hard-fought campaign of World War Two, Operation Barbarossa.

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