

ORDER IN CHAOS

The Memoirs of General of Panzer Troops Hermann Balck

Hermann Balck, edited and translated by David T. Zabecki and Dieter J. Biedekarken, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 2015, 578 pages

FIGHTING THE COLD WAR

A Soldier's Memoir

John R. Galvin, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, 2015, 568 pages

Certain distinguished senior military leaders tend to be overlooked by historians, resulting in public unfamiliarity with these soldiers. This is unfortunate, since some of these leaders have been hugely influential through their service during particular wars or conflicts—and within their countries and their armed forces. Their accomplishments and their influence should be known and appreciated by far more people.

What are the reasons for this oversight? For some, it may be that these leaders were simply overshadowed by their peers, perhaps due to personality, flamboyancy, or politics. For others, it may be that their most important contributions were achieved in a period that historians tend to overlook. And for yet others, perhaps their disdain for self-promotion facilitated the oversight. Finally, it may be due to historians' personal biases toward certain leaders.

Over the years, I have enjoyed debates with friends on the topic of which leaders have been slighted by historians—and the reasons for these oversights. Two leaders

I always bring up in these conversations are former U.S. Army Gen. John "Jack" Galvin and former German Gen. Hermann Balck.

I argue that Galvin's impact during the final years of the Cold War was unparalleled. Yet, as the years have passed, so has interest in the Cold War. As for Balck, I consider him to be one of the elite battlefield commanders of World War II. And yet, he is overshadowed by numerous World War II commanders from his own army: Rommel, Guderian, Kesselring, and Manstein.

Because of this relative anonymity, it is appropriate that the books *Order in Chaos: The Memoirs of General of Panzer Troops Hermann Balck* and *Fighting the Cold War: A Soldier's Memoir* now provide a concise biography on each leader. In *Fighting the Cold War*, we learn that Galvin, who graduated from West Point in 1954, served throughout a sterling career with the Army that spanned nearly forty years. His first two decades of service included two tours of duty in Vietnam, where he eventually served as a battalion

commander in the 1st Cavalry Division. He also served in a variety of staff positions, many of them in Europe, which greatly benefited him in the latter years of his career.

During the 1980s and the early 1990s, Galvin served in a succession of commands that were all important in the prosecution of the Cold War. He commanded the 24th Infantry Division, 1981–1983; served as the commanding general of VII Corps, 1983–1985; commanded U.S. Southern Command, 1985–1987; and culminated his career as commanding general of United States European Command and NATO supreme allied commander, Europe, 1987–1992. Those who served in the armed forces during this period know the tremendous effect Galvin had throughout the Cold War.

Balck began his service in the German army in 1913. As one might expect, his formative years as an officer were spent on the World War I battlefields. During the Great War, he led soldiers as a platoon leader and company commander, where he earned numerous decorations. His performance clearly impressed his superiors, as he was one of the only four thousand officers selected to continue service in the German army following the war.

Balck gained acclaim as a commander during World War II. He began the war as a lieutenant colonel in command of a rifle regiment. By the end of the war, he had risen to the rank of general der panzertruppe (lieutenant general) in command of a German army group. It was on the Eastern Front that Balck developed a reputation as one of his army's most exceptional battlefield commanders. In fact, some of his own peers—and several U.S. Army general officers—considered Balck the best field commander in the German army. He is one of only twenty-seven German officers to receive the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds (awarded for extreme battlefield bravery or outstanding military leadership).

Balck was, unquestionably, one of those aforementioned officers not seeking self-promotion. Following the war, he made no effort to publicly address his battlefield experience or accomplishments. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the U.S. Army was conducting a debriefing program of captured German senior leaders, Balck refused to participate. Finally, from 1979 to 1980,

Balck discussed his experiences with representatives of the United States. The results of these discussions were significant; they eventually found their way to the classrooms of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and greatly influenced U.S. Army airland battle doctrine.

The stellar military careers of both men call for further study by military historians. Perhaps the recent release of the memoirs of these compelling men by the University of Kentucky Press will serve as the initial step in making further study a reality.

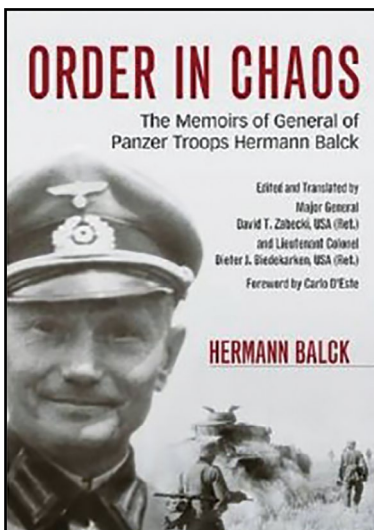
The two books share three main characteristics. First, each is superbly written in conversational style. Both authors are highly adept at reliving events and telling stories and vignettes. These characteristics make each book extremely readable and

engaging. An interesting note is that neither memoir was crafted with the assistance of a ghost writer, which so many authors use today.

Second, each of these memoirs was years in the making. A recent trend I have observed is for senior officers who decide to write their memoirs to publish their reflections soon after retirement. This is clearly not the case with Galvin or Balck. Galvin's memoir was published some twenty years after his retirement from the U.S. Army, and Balck's volume was released in Germany in 1981, more than three decades after the end of World War II. And, it was another three and a half decades before Balck's memoirs were translated into English and published in the United States.

Third, both authors include much detail, considering that the events they address took place so long ago. Galvin was able to recall these events through his use of thousands of note cards he accumulated during his service. As events transpired, he would compose his notes on the cards to keep a record he could revisit in the future.

For Balck, it was the use of the comprehensive journals he kept during his military career. Perhaps the greatest challenge Balck faced was keeping the journals intact through the years. Before World War II, Balck personally preserved his journals. During World War II, however, he had to send his completed journals back from the field to his family who, in turn, stored them in



various locations to ensure they would not be destroyed or confiscated. To further complicate his record-keeping challenges, Balck was forced to keep his last six months of journals in his own possession during his captivity after the war. He managed to save the journals by covertly passing them to his wife during her visits, who then smuggled them out of the prison. Once released, Balck was reunited with the journals and began work on his memoirs.

Finally, unlike many memoirs I have read, I cannot detect any overt agendas on the part of either author. Unfortunately, some military memoirists' purposes seem deceptive, either masking a veiled campaign of self-promotion in which the pages strive to enhance the author's achievements, or functioning as a forum to degrade others or downplay the accomplishments of peers. It is refreshing that I found neither tendency evident within these volumes.

While these memoirs share some exceptional characteristics, the volumes are certainly distinctive from one another in that they differ in focus, perspective, and, obviously, the time periods and conflicts they address. These differences benefit and appeal to different reading audiences.

The title of the Galvin memoir will not mislead readers. For the entirety of his military career, Galvin was part of the force dedicated to "fighting the Cold War," and he reflects on his role in this fight. In a career as long as his, there is much to reflect on, such as leading soldiers at every level of command and serving in Vietnam.

Although Galvin's story is engaging throughout, it is his reflection on time spent as the commander of U.S. Southern Command, and as the commanding general for U.S. European Command and NATO's supreme allied commander, Europe, that I find particularly fascinating. He provides a unique perspective that includes candid thoughts on his personal engagements with leaders such as Ronald Reagan, George H. Bush, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Colin Powell. He also addresses the numerous events

that occurred while he commanded Southern Command, such as the unrest in Panama, El Salvador, Honduras, and Colombia. As commanding general for U.S. European

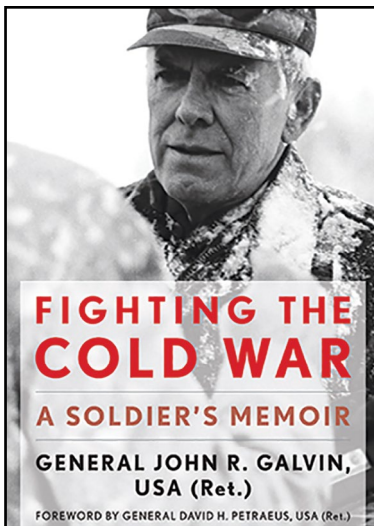
Command and NATO's supreme allied commander, Europe, he dealt with key issues such as nuclear and conventional arms-control talks with the Soviet Union, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and the rescue of the Kurds following the first Gulf War.

Balck's *Order in Chaos* is an incredible surprise for those seeking fresh discussion on World War I, the interwar years, and World War II. His reflection on World War I is, as one would expect, heavily weighted to his platoon- and company-level experiences. Interestingly however, following his years of reflection, Balck also provides

his thoughts on the strategic and political aspects of World War I, which are thought-provoking.

It was with much anticipation that I began reading Balck's account of World War II, and I was not disappointed. Balck, who commanded units from regiment to army level during the war, provides vivid accounts of the battles and campaigns in which he led armored forces. His recounting of events is aided tremendously by the twenty superb maps included in his book. He discusses strategy, his decision-making process, the challenges of command, and the human dimension of war. As with his World War I discussion, he shares his opinions on various topics. I found these pages absorbing.

Order in Chaos and *Fighting the Cold War* are two of the best memoirs I have read. Both are superbly written, highly detailed, and, together, provide brilliant perspectives and background on the major wars waged from World War I through the first Gulf War (sans the Korean War). Perhaps equally as important, the memoirs provide readers an opportunity to begin to develop an understanding and an appreciation for two overlooked senior military leaders. Perhaps their own words will provide the spark to encourage further study of Galvin and Balck. ■



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