

**David Mitchelhill-Green. *Fighting in Ukraine: A Photographer at War; Rare Photographs from Wartime Archives*. Pen & Sword Military, 2016. Images of War. 176 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Appendix. Bibliography. £14.99, paper.**

**T**his book is one of several that David Mitchelhill-Green has written for the extensive Images of War series. It is part of a category of books on the “Eastern Front,” where the fiercest fighting took place during “the bloodiest war in history” (157). This category includes titles on the Nazi retreat and defeat, armour, and Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler. The title here refers more to the geographical territory of Ukraine than it does to a de facto or de jure country and its people. The Crimea is included, being part of Reichskommissariat Ukraine under German occupation. This historical documentation in the form of photographs is presented from the German point of view. The photographs are the professional work of Walter Julius Grimm, a conscript in the German army.

The author’s commentaries show a fairly good awareness of Ukrainian sensibilities, including the information that “[i]n April 2015 a new law was passed by the Ukrainian Parliament to refer to the ‘Great Patriotic War’, as it was known in the USSR, as the Second World War” (140). The reader should look for Ukrainians in the margins of these pictures—for example, the curious and attentive children watching the military funeral procession of a high-ranking officer (153), the “peasants” shining the black boots of German soldiers at railway stations (94), and individuals standing on roadsides (121). Regarding these roads, Mitchelhill-Green provides the following quote: “Not all these men have looked into the white of the enemy’s eye, but every one of them, riflemen and gunners, anti-tank gunners and sappers, wireless signallers and riders, but above all the drivers of the wagons and lorries have fought against the country’s neglected roads as though they were dangerous enemy weapons . . .” (119).

The book *Fighting in Ukraine* has a very specific target audience for its commentary, which includes discussion of variations in military uniforms, camouflage, dog tags, and military honours, as well as details about vehicles. The latter descriptions give information about the importance of Ford and General Motors technologies, the kinds of fuels that could be used in engines, and the difference between good maps and poor-quality maps—poor maps causing entire units to become lost, “which led to missed objectives, excessive fuel use and unnecessary vehicle wear” (10).

After Operation Barbarossa began in June 1941 and the Nazis entered Ukraine, there were no longer any illusions that they were allied with any sector of Ukrainian society. “[T]he only person who is leading the struggle is the führer, and there are no Ukrainian allies,” Stepan Bandera and other

members of the Ukrainian National Committee were told in Kraków on 3 July 1941. "It is entirely possible that the Ukrainians themselves are enthusiastic and feel themselves to be our allies. Nonetheless, within the scope of state and legal terminology, we are not allies; we are conquerors of the Soviet-Russian territory" (my trans.; Kul'chyts'kyi 15).

Regarding military honours in the book under review, one caption states that "[i]t was not until mid-1944 that Soviet volunteers were eligible to wear German awards" (159). The reference is presumably to the Division Galizien, which was formed from the Ukrainian population; granted, members of the Division renounced their Soviet citizenship or understood it in name only. Petro Tsisars'kyi in his memoirs, *Zhorstokyi chas: Spohady*, writes about receiving such medals (first- and second-class silver combat medals) when he was with the Fourteenth Fusilier Battalion (Tsisars'kyi 134). Mitchelhill-Green writes that "the opportunity to harness the Ukrainians' deep-seated hatred of the Soviet system was essentially squandered" (9).

A detail from German manuals, about securing terrain in which "a sector can be about twice as wide for defence as for attack," and another handbook entry, describing how defence against attack "may require the use of natural barriers such as rivers, swamps and steep slopes" (144), provide a lesson in military history for us to understand in 2019 and beyond. We may see, then, why the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the volunteer battalions were so upset by orders to withdraw by as much as four kilometres in such places as Stanytsia Luhanska and Zolote in eastern Ukraine. They had built up those defences over an extended period of time, only to have to retreat into open fields.

Interestingly, the author, in his introduction, quotes Hitler, who described the Soviets as "an ideological enemy" (6). Critics of the current capitulation policies regarding the Donbas make a somewhat similar warning about Vladimir Putin and Russia when faced with the argument of arranging for peace at any cost on account of people's "exhaustion from the war." Russia does not need Ukraine as a geographical territory, the argument goes, but Ukraine is needed to legitimize the idea of the Great Russian Empire. This is what makes the current situation regarding front-line positions so dangerous for Ukraine's future. Several pictures of Donetsk and of the "massive steelworks" (113) established in 1872 by Welsh businessman John Hughes remind the modern reader that if the Germans called this the "pearl of the Soviet Ruhr" (113), then not only would the Soviets fight for it in the 1940s, but Russia could be expected to steal it from independent Ukraine.

I can see one more way in which the content of the book *Fighting in Ukraine* compares with the facts relating to the current Russian invasion of Ukraine. It contains a quote about the perils of occupation, which occur

because “one often attains one’s greatest strength in the heart of one’s own country, when the enemy’s offensive power is exhausted, and the defensive can then switch with enormous energy to the offensive” (168). Such is the epitaph that one hopes for when the end of the Russo-Ukrainian war will be remembered with decades-old archival photographs.

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#### Works Cited

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