

THE HUMAN FACE OF WAR

Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge

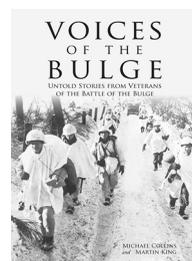
By Michael Collins and Martin King

Reviewed by Colonel James R. Oman, USA Ret., Director, Senior Service College Fellowship Program, Defense Acquisition University, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland

The exceedingly popular genre, characterized by a collection of veterans recounting their personal experiences accrued during the course of a particular operation or campaign as exemplified by *Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge* is clearly coming to an end. The US Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that 740 World War II veterans perished on average each day in 2011. Stated another way, approximately 270,000 veterans are believed to have died in 2011 with a projection of 248,000 or 679 veterans expected to die per day in 2012. At the end of World War II, there were 16 million members in uniform. At the beginning of 2012 these numbers dwindled to an estimated 2.9 million survivors, with the youngest in their mid-80s. I suspect this epic tome represents one of the last of its kind as the relentless passage of time silences their once vibrant voices.

Authors Martin King and Michael Collins spent more than a decade conducting interviews, walking the ground throughout the Ardennes region, and completing their research. The data they collected would become the *Voices of the Bulge*. Their work provides fresh insight into this massive, pivotal battle that was fought throughout Belgium from the middle of December 1944 through the end of January 1945. King is a military historian, serves as a lecturer, and is a consultant for the History Channel. He currently lives in Belgium. Undoubtedly, his many visits to the battlefield as a tour guide for groups of veterans, military members, dignitaries, and the like have deepened his understanding of the ebb and flow of the battle as well as contributed to his extensive research. Collins lives in Connecticut, serves as a historical interpreter and museum staffer for the Veterans Research Center and four museums. Collins also has a familial tie to the battle through his grandfather who fought in World War II while serving as a member of Patton's Third Army within the European Theater of Operations. The motivation to see where his grandfather fought inspired him and his parents to visit the Ardennes in June 2006. As luck would have it, their tour guide was King. The seeds planted during this chance meeting inspired a partnership that flourished and produced this epic tale. Their work honors those who did not survive the conflagration as well as veterans living and deceased.

The massive German counteroffensive, code name Wacht am Rhein (Watch on the Rhine), is often called the Von Rundstedt Offensive or the Ardennes Counteroffensive; however, it is most commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge by Americans and the British. This operation represented Adolf Hitler's strategic gamble to reverse Germany's fortunes and stave off defeat by fracturing and destroying the Allied forces advancing from the West. Hitler struck through the Ardennes



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for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was his hope to replicate his earlier successes, specifically those events that occurred in May 1940, when a similar dash led to the capitulation of France and the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from the Continent. Germany would throw more than 200,000 soldiers assigned to 14 infantry and five panzer divisions into the fray. These forces were supported by more than 1,600 artillery pieces and nearly 1,000 tanks as they attacked westward across an 80-mile front. Ultimately, more than 600,000 American soldiers would be involved in the ensuing response that unfolded over the upcoming thirty plus days. The US forces would sustain nearly 90,000 casualties—killed, wounded, and missing. The Battle of the Bulge was the largest operation, with the most casualties, in the long history of the US Army.

Collins and King recount day-to-day actions, reactions, and responses. They begin with the opening German salvos on 16 December 1944 as the Germans attacked across the weakly held Belgian front and conclude with the reduction of the Bulge and stabilization of the front at the end of January 1945. The vast majority of the book is focused on the first twelve days of the battle. The authors use a variety of sources to recount the daily operations and allocate one chapter for each day of the battle through 27 December 1944. The recollections, vivid accounts, and dramatic descriptions of the fighting provided by the veterans, more than 60-plus years after the fact, indelibly illustrate the highly personal human dimension and lasting impact on each participant. The accounts come primarily from US Army soldiers, both enlisted and officers; a handful of Belgian civilians; and a few German soldiers. The manuscript concludes with a brief review of events from 28 December 1944 through the end of January 1945, a time frame which the authors aptly call “The End Game.”

Prominently featured in the book are numerous firsthand accounts shared by a diverse collection of veterans, many of whom demonstrated extraordinary feats of courage, as they fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Several of these veterans are Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) James “Maggie” Megellas, who fought as a member of H Company, 3rd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in Italy, Holland, Belgium, and Germany, and is recognized as the most decorated officer in the history of the Division; Francis Curry, a Medal of Honor recipient and a member of the 30th Infantry Division who was recognized for his heroic stand near Malmedy on 21 December 1944; and Ted Paluch, who as a member of the 285th Field Artillery Battalion was one of a mere handful of survivors from the infamous Malmedy Massacre, to name just a few.

Adding to the richness of the *Voices of the Bulge* are the more than 90 black and white photos taken at the time of the fighting or in its immediate aftermath, five detailed maps, and several biographical sketches. One relatively unique feature is the inclusion of a 47-minute DVD that accompanies the book. The DVD highlights Paluch, Megellas, Curry, and several other veterans and provides the “voice” to go along with their stories and pictures found within the text.

While the events of the Battle of the Bulge have been examined and written about by many, Collins’ and King’s approach of having veterans share their highly emotional experiences both honors and records the

deeds of their service as these members of the Greatest Generation fade onto the pages of history. As such, *Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge* is worthy of a thoughtful read.

What It Is Like To Go To War

By Karl Marlantes

Reviewed by Henry G. Gole, whose biography of Colonel Truman Smith, the military attaché in Berlin, 1935-39, to be published in the Spring of 2013 by the University Press of Kentucky

Karl Marlantes wrote the bestseller and prize winning novel *Matterhorn*, based on his experiences as a Marine Corps platoon commander in a rifle company in Vietnam in 1969-70. In his nonfiction, *What It Is Like To Go To War*, he takes his readers back to that time and place and to the four succeeding decades in which he examined his conscience and came to terms with killing and reentering civil society. This absolutely unique and lucid personal account and analysis will be read with profit by scholars, general readers, and most particularly, by veterans of close combat.

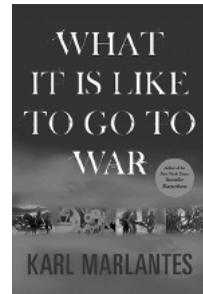
Note that Marlantes is very specific in defining just what he means by “close combat”: close enough to throw a hand grenade at a foe or to fire a rifle at another human being the shooter can see. Clarity on this point is important to him and essential to the book. Laymen tend to lump all Vietnam veterans in one heap. Those who have engaged in close combat do not. In a “combat zone” there are relatively safe places. A rifle company is not one of them.

The author is qualified by experience, education, temperament, and skill as a writer to make penetrating observations. Many are graphic, bold, and shocking. Some are erudite; some are ethereal; all are worthy of careful consideration.

Maturation from the late 1950s and into the 1960s cultivated two strains in his personality constantly visible in his writing. One is an intellectual appetite fed in his Yale and Oxford years and demonstrated on almost every page of the book. The other is an aspiration to join King Arthur’s court of noble men—or to accompany Don Quixote on a quest—manifest in both his choice of military service and his display of courage in Vietnam.

He tells us that he wrote the book to come to terms with his experience of close combat. That could have been accomplished in a personal journal, but he believes he might help other combat veterans “integrate their combat experiences into their current lives.” He also thinks he might provide young people contemplating joining the military “with a psychological and spiritual combat prophylactic, for indeed combat is like unsafe sex in that it’s a major thrill with possible horrible consequences.” (He is too wise to expect young men to read and heed his advice.) Finally, he wants policymakers to know what they are asking of the young.

His method is to reflect on a point important to him, to illustrate it with an anecdote or a combat experience, and to mull it over in sparkling prose that has the reader hanging on every word. His chapter headings



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