

REVIEWS

The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force by Martin van Creveld, Public Affairs, A member of the Perseus Books Group, NY, 2002, 448 pp., \$17.00 (soft cover).

In *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force*, Israeli academic Martin van Creveld provides the reader with a detailed understanding of the development and nation-building role of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) during the 20th century. He begins from the IDF's earliest roots as loosely organized Jewish Defense Groups that were formed to protect Jewish settlements in Israel when it was part of the Ottoman Empire prior to World War I. He then traces these defense groups through the interwar years of British rule, the underground struggle against the British toward the end and following World War II, and then the formation and employment of a regular Israeli military force during the 1947-1949 War of Independence. Following the War of Independence, he covers the subsequent wars fought with Israel's neighbors and the ensuing developments that transformed the IDF from an improvised military force into a lethal modern combined arms force. For each of the military operations, van Creveld demonstrates the operational set of units and their scheme of maneuver with uncomplicated maps. Additionally, he prefaces each chapter with a photo to convey the chapter's theme. Van Creveld presents a well-researched and documented academic work that accurately portrays the strategic circumstances facing Israel and the development of its military forces for the better part of the 20th century.

Transitioning from conventional to unconventional operations, van Creveld leaves the reader with some of the dilemmas facing a modern military force in dealing with an unconventional civilian *intifada* (uprising) in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in the 1990s. Unfortunately, as an academic, van Creveld primarily deals with the sociopolitical aspects of the IDF's handling of the *intifada* and almost none on the tactics, techniques, and procedures the IDF developed as a result of conducting these types of operations.

The Sword and the Olive is an excellent resource for the military historian, student, or researcher interested in the personalities, intrigue, and challenges surrounding operations and developments within the IDF at the strategic and operational levels. For academic research, van Creveld's book is an excellent resource and the list of extensive sources in his notes pages are a gold mine for anyone doing research work on the evolution of the Israeli state, the wars it has fought, and the culture of its military. In the area of national military strategy and doctrine, the book demonstrates the development of conventional weapons and tactics, the impact of the unconfirmed introduction of nuclear weapons on the strategic environ-

ment in the Middle East, and the nation-building role of the IDF.

For the ground tactical military officer interested in gleaning tactical maneuver warfare and military operations other than war lessons learned, there are some, but you have to take time to wade through a lot of information to pull out the nuggets of what has historically worked for the IDF. A book that I would recommend for this type of reading is written by retired IDF Lieutenant Colonel David Eshel titled *Chariots of the Desert: The Story of the Israeli Armoured Corps* (ISBN 0-08-036257-5). Even though published in 1989, Eshel's book is more geared for military professional reading and does a much better job of focusing on what the military professional wants to know: *Bottom-line, how did the Israelis employ firepower, maneuver, and flexibility to defeat better-equipped Arab forces?* Eshel answers this question with an easy to read book, written by a military professional, backed up with lots of pictures and maps.

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America's Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi's 1972 Easter Offensive by Dale Andradé, University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 2001 (originally published in 1995 by Hippocrene Books, Inc., as *Trial By Fire: The 1972 Easter Offensive, America's Last Vietnam Battle*), 551 pp., \$24.95.

In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson ordered a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. Johnson, stung by the Tet Offensive, domestic opposition to the Vietnam War, and the overshadowing of his domestic programs, bought into the idea that somehow the Communists might respond to his magnanimous bombing halt by ending their war to reunify Vietnam. He was wrong. Just as the Nazi's would not be appeased in the 1930s, Communists were not appeased in the 1960s. Four years after the bombing halt, Hanoi launched a full-scale invasion designed to conquer South Vietnam.

Several elements converged between 1968 and 1972 that made the Easter Offensive possible. The first was Nixon's victory in the 1968 election. Nixon ran on a platform that promised an end to the Vietnam War. He took steps to train and equip the South Vietnamese to handle the war in a process called *Vietnamization*. At the same time, North Vietnam built up their forces and logistic support apparatus in preparation for what the Communists called the Nguyen Hue Offensive. This offensive, known as the Easter Offensive in the United States, began on 30 March 1972 with a massive artillery barrage targeting Quang Tri Province.

Andradé is a historian with the U.S. Army Center of Military History and author of two previous books on Vietnam. He uses an extensive collection of interviews and reports from participants on both sides. The narrative tells the compelling story that, unlike most other books about the Vietnam War, gives the reader insight into the little known lives of North Vietnamese soldiers. The story of the Easter Offensive is one of character and occasional cowardice on the part of South Vietnam's infantry, armor, aviation, artillery, and logistics soldiers. From the American point of view, it is the story of an advisory effort that frequently made Americans the virtual commanders of South Vietnamese units.

The U.S. Army assigned soldiers to advise and bolster South Vietnamese units according to their tactical specialty. Unfortunately, regardless of the bravery of South Vietnamese soldiers, their officers were frequently incompetent, corrupt, or both. Advisors had to cope with Vietnamese commanders that were more worried about the political machinations of Saigon than about prosecuting the war. Many advisors found themselves saddled with counterparts that refused to fight and planned to surrender in the face of opposition. In some cases, the presence of American advisors was the only thing that stopped South Vietnamese units from surrendering or running. Many advisors were not successful and had to be extricated under fire or were forced to escape and evade the enemy. Over 100 Americans died during the offensive.

The author tells many detailed stories of the gallant American advisors. Any reader looking for examples of American heroism should read this book just for these examples. Out-numbered and usually operating alone or in very small numbers, these soldiers epitomized all that is good in the American soldier.

One of the most interesting of these advisors was neither a soldier, nor technically an advisor, in the purest sense. John Paul Vann, Vietnam veteran and retired Army lieutenant colonel, returned to the war as a civilian. After a series of jobs, Vann eventually became the senior man in the Second Regional Assistance Group. Designating this unit as a group, rather than as a command, enabled a civilian to run it. Vann had a military assistant who commanded the military on paper, but, in truth, Vann is probably the only civilian in American military history to command troops in combat. The story presented of this controversial figure is representative of the entire Vietnam experience and is well worth the time that it takes to read. A study of this man reveals all that was right and wrong with the Vietnam War. Only Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie* surpasses Andradé's sketch of Vann.

The Easter Offensive was America's last Vietnam battle, but the battle did not slow down the process of ending America's par-

ticipation in the war. Even as the battle raged and men died, American combat power was drained from the country. The exodus of troops continued unabated throughout 1972, leaving just a few units to Vietnam. The Offensive failed from a combination of Communist ineptitude and massive aerial retaliation. That retaliation, including tactical air by fixed wing and rotary aircraft, countless B-52 Arc Light strikes, and attacks on the North Vietnamese homeland, ended the Offensive

and brought the Communists to negotiate. Those negotiations resulted in 'peace with honor' for America, but guaranteed the ultimate Communist victory in Vietnam.

America's Last Vietnam Battle is an excellent read. The narrative is smooth, organized, and professionally documented. In fact, if a reader is searching for a point of criticism, one will find it in the documentation. A reader who follows the endnotes will dis-

cover at least one chapter where the notes in the text do not coincide with the endnotes. This discovery, however, detracts not one iota from the value of the book. Hopefully, future editions will correct this mistake. That minor flaw notwithstanding, soldiers should add *America's Last Vietnam Battle* to their Vietnam collection.

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