

Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney H. Hodges and the First US Army. By William C. Sylvan and Francis G. Smith, Jr., John T. Greenwood, ed. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008. 575 pages. \$50.00. **Reviewed by Colonel (Ret.) James R. Oman**, Director, Senior Service College Fellowship Program, Defense Acquisition University.

Normandy to Victory is a must-read for serious students of military history, particularly those interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the US Army in World War II, its role in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) in general, and specifically the critical contributions made by the 1st US Army. Most assuredly, readers will recognize the often-cited and more familiar title of this work, the “Sylvan diary.” Until the release of John T. Greenwood’s edited and retitled work, the Sylvan diary was available to a limited audience, specifically those individuals who were conducting in-depth research since only the original and two copies existed.

As the senior aide and principal author, Major William C. Sylvan was responsible for capturing and transcribing significant events in the war diary he kept on behalf of General Courtney H. Hodges, the commanding general of the 1st US Army. Major Sylvan was assisted by Captain Francis G. Smith, Jr. As Greenwood notes, while Sylvan and Smith prepared the initial draft, Hodges maintained control over the content by reviewing and approving their collective work before entries were finalized.

John Greenwood is uniquely qualified to serve as the editor for the Sylvan diary. He has not only produced a masterful publication in *Normandy to Victory* but also is singularly responsible for giving new life to the manuscript by moving it from the restrictive domain of the researcher into a much wider readership within the general public. As demonstrated throughout the volume, Greenwood effectively uses his 36 years of experience as a military historian in combination with his unequaled skill as a researcher and author.

When one thinks of the ground campaign and the accomplishments of the US Army in the ETO during World War II, the 3d Army and its commander, General George S. Patton, quickly come to mind. The association of General Hodges as the commander of the 3d Army, preceding General Patton, is a connection often not made. Yet this was the case when Hodges handed over command of the 3d Army and became deputy commanding general of the 1st US Army, a position he held for seven months. On 1 August 1944 with the activation of the 3d Army on the European continent, General Omar N. Bradley stepped up to become commander of the 12th Army Group, and Hodges replaced Bradley as commander of the 1st US Army.

While Hodges and the 1st Army never received the fame, press, and accolades that Patton and the 3d Army garnered, nonetheless their collective accomplishments are every bit as impressive. An examination of the panoramic accounts found in *Normandy to Victory* is especially illuminating and succinctly makes the case. The entries begin at the port of Plymouth, England, on 2 June 1944, several days before D-Day, and end on 7 May 1945 with the announcement from Bradley of the unconditional surrender of all German forces in Europe. Between these bookends, Sylvan and Smith, from their exclusive position and proximity to Hodges and other senior leaders, capture insightful conversations and record unique perspectives as well as document the many mundane activities of a commander in the field. Equally noteworthy are their entries that describe the major operations of the 1st Army as it fought across France, through northern Europe, and into Germany.

Greenwood has aligned the daily entries into nine chapters that provide a chronological and logical arrangement, following the operational framework used by 1st Army to document its movements. The chapters begin with the invasion of France in June 1944; include Operation Cobra and the breakthrough at St. Lo, exploitation of the St. Lo breakthrough, battle of Germany, German counteroffensive and the drive to the Roer River, crossing the Roer, crossing the Rhine, the exploitation of the Remagen bridgehead; and conclude with final operations in April and May of 1945. Greenwood's use of this framework is especially helpful in understanding the 1st Army's operations and activities in the larger context of their multiple roles and actions within the ETO.

Normandy to Victory is first and foremost a terrific book that provides new insight into the relatively overlooked 1st Army and the significant role played by its commander, General Hodges. It is therefore a welcome addition to the body of literature associated with World War II. Yet it is significantly much more. Sylvan and Smith's diary entries and Greenwood's excellent editing have produced a superb work which provides a window into the human dimension of war, command, and leadership at the strategic level. The underlying theme is that the vagaries of combat require strong leaders who are capable and comfortable in making tough decisions. Decisions that are made in dynamic situations consistently distinguished by an absence of fact predicated on an incomplete picture, and often culminating in unpredictable outcomes.