

A German Odyssey: The Journal of a German Prisoner of War, by Helmut Hörner, translated and edited by Allan Kent Powell. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1991. xii, 383 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$23.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY EDWARD J. PLUTH, ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY

Fifty years ago the world was in the midst of the longest and most destructive war of this century. Historians continue to examine the varied facets of this Second World War. One comparatively unexamined facet of that conflict is the prisoner of war experience. *A German Odyssey* makes an important contribution to that topic because it is based on the journal kept by Helmut Hörner, a soldier in the German army. His manuscript lay filed away until 1988 when Allan Powell, working on a history of German POWs in Utah, became aware of it and worked with Hörner on its publication. Powell occasionally and unobtrusively inserts helpful background material to provide a broader historical context for Hörner's experiences, but the book is primarily Hörner's account of his experiences from 1940 to 1948 as a front-line soldier and a POW in France, the United States, and England. Wounded twice on the Russian front and once in France, Hörner spent various parts of the years 1941 to early 1944 recuperating from his wounds. The bulk of the work focuses on the years 1944 to 1946, as Hörner relates his combat experience in the Normandy invasion, his capture, and his subsequent experiences as a prisoner of war.

Only one of the seven chapters, albeit a lengthy and valuable one, concerns his experiences as a POW in the United States (April 1945 to June 1946). Hörner was one of 371,000 German POWs interned in camps across the United States, including camps in Iowa and other midwestern states. During his fourteen months in the U.S., Hörner never resided in the Midwest, although he traveled through Nebraska, Iowa, and Illinois on his way from Colorado to Delaware in July 1945. Hörner and most of the other POWs were assigned to work camps where they helped local farmers, worked in canneries and other small industries, or cut timber. Hörner's experiences in both base and work camps are representative of those of most German POWs in the U.S. Readers of this book who remember or know about German POWs working or living in their communities will have their memories jogged. Those who are unfamiliar with the German POW experience will gain valuable insights into that facet of the war.

Powell aptly assesses the book as "a work of history and literature that [reveals] the thoughts, fears, and emotions of a common soldier" (xii). Hörner saw his journal as a means to preserve "how the little

infantryman, the courageous German soldier with all of his prerogatives, weaknesses, and errors, experienced, endured, and in nameless sacrifice to the terror of a horrible regime, the terrible conflict of total war, and the interminable suffering of imprisonment, has carried it all patiently to the edge of personal doubt" (364).

The book is a remarkable expression of that experience. It is a story of survival and adaptation to uncertain and shifting conditions. The reader gains insight into the inner dynamics of a POW camp and the day-to-day concerns and topics of conversation among the POWs. These range from the mundane to the philosophical. Comradeship is valued. Prisoners confront despair—or the barbed wire sickness, as Hörner calls it—as they worry about their families and their future and as they struggle to maintain pride in being German and a soldier in the face of a growing awareness of Germany's eventual defeat. There is the psychological interplay between captor and captive and among the prisoners themselves. The reader learns of the power of rumor to raise or, more often, lower morale. Hörner is powerful in his character studies of his friends and fellow prisoners and in the philosophical musings and insights he presents on a variety of issues from war and politics to the meaning of life itself. However, the author's extensive use of recreated or fictionalized conversations is distracting, and it is not clear whether Hörner revised or added to any of the observations he made when he originally wrote the manuscript in 1950. These minor aspects aside, this work is clearly a valuable addition to the literature on the prisoner of war experience in World War II.

History of Buena Vista College: Centennial Edition, by William H. Cumberland. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1991. ix, 406 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH F. WALL, GRINNELL COLLEGE

To mark the centennial of the college he served well for thirty-three years, William Cumberland has brought out a considerably enlarged revised edition of his *History of Buena Vista College*, first published in 1966. A review of that earlier edition in the *Annals of Iowa* (Winter 1967) noted that "Dr. Cumberland's book is an encomium to the college and the many persons who have supported Buena Vista during the past seventy-five years." This updated version is also an encomium, but it is much more than that, for along with warm praise and deep affection for the institution and the men and women who built and nurtured it, there is also gentle but pointed criticism for those who failed it during the many recurring times of need and distress.

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