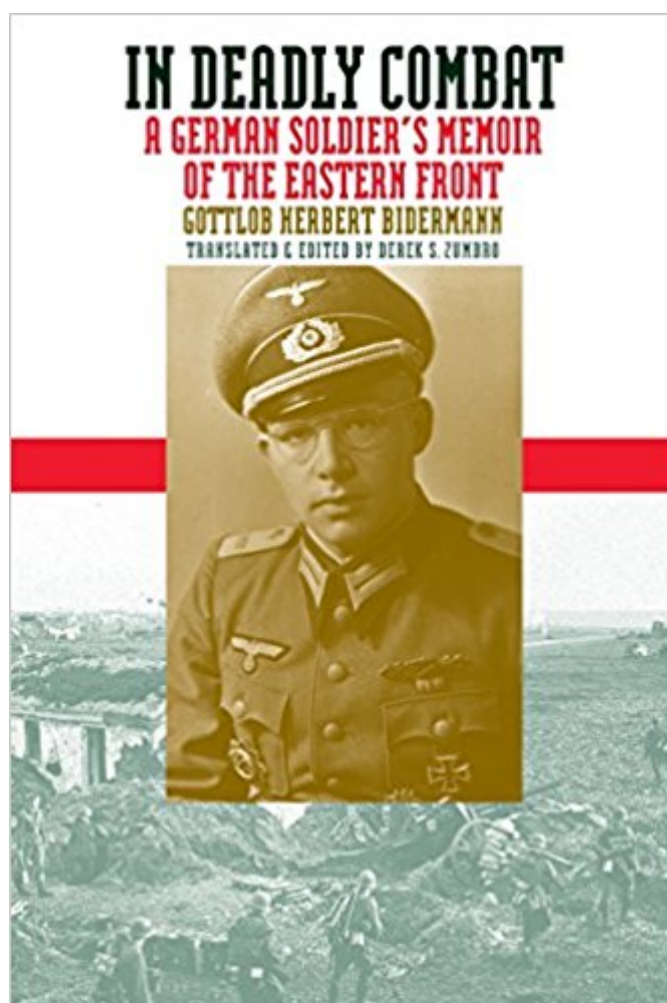


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# In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir Of The Eastern Front (Modern War Studies (Paperback))



## Synopsis

In the hell that was World War II, the Eastern Front was its heart of fire and ice. Gottlob Herbert Bidermann served in that lethal theater from 1941 to 1945, and his memoir of those years recaptures the sights, sounds, and smells of the war as it vividly portrays an army marching on the road to ruin. A riveting and reflective account by one of the millions of anonymous soldiers who fought and died in that cruel terrain, *In Deadly Combat* conveys the brutality and horrors of the Eastern Front in detail never before available in English. It offers a ground soldier's perspective on life and death on the front lines, providing revealing new information concerning day-to-day operations and German army life. Wounded five times and awarded numerous decorations for valor, Bidermann saw action in the Crimea and siege of Sebastopol, participated in the vicious battles in the forests south of Leningrad, and ended the war in the Courland Pocket. He shares his impressions of countless Russian POWs seen at the outset of his service, of peasants struggling to survive the hostilities while caught between two ruthless antagonists, and of corpses littering the landscape. He recalls a Christmas gift of gingerbread from home that overcame the stench of battle, an Easter celebrated with a basket of Russian hand grenades for eggs, and his miraculous survival of machine gun fire at close range. In closing he relives the humiliation of surrender to an enemy whom the Germans had once derided and offers a sobering glimpse into life in the Soviet gulags. Bidermann's account debunks the myth of a highly mechanized German army that rolled over weaker opponents with impunity. Despite the vast expanses of territory captured by the Germans during the early months of Operation Barbarossa, the war with Russia remained tenuous and unforgiving. His story commits that living hell to the annals of World War II and broadens our understanding of its most deadly combat zone. Translator Derek Zumbro has rendered Bidermann's memoir into a compelling narrative that retains the author's powerful style. This English-language edition of Bidermann's dynamic story is based upon a privately published memoir entitled *Krim-Kurland Mit Der 132 Infanterie Division*. The translator has added important events derived from numerous interviews with Bidermann to provide additional context for American readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Firsthand perspectives of German WWII infantrymen are rare, as respected historian Dennis Showalter (Tannenberg: Clash of Empires) points out in his excellent introduction. Bidermann, who is an 18-year-old private in the 132d Infantry Division at the beginning of this memoir, takes us through the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, passage across the Dnieper and southern steppes, battles in the Crimea, engagements in northern Russia and retreat through Riga to the Baltic. He retrospectively reviews historical records and sketches the daily happenings and ambience of his unit in a matter-of-fact and unpretentious--yet invariably proud--tone. The translation is direct and generally graceful, sometimes lyrical. Retired Navy SEAL Zumbro, who has translated German accounts for the Eisenhower Center of the University of New Orleans, has translated and expanded Bidermann's 1964 private German publication, utilizing the same preserved documents and retrospective interviews from other members of the 132d. Before war's end, the unit was cut off in Courland, though Bidermann claims it was "never defeated in open battle." After surrender in 1945, the remnants of the division were held in extended captivity. The Wehrmacht subculture, which Bidermann describes but does not connect back to the Reich's atrocities, was compulsively "professional," with loyalty to fellows its all-consuming central ethic. This ethic seemingly sustained these soldiers through continual dire peril of body and soul. Some did survive. B&W photos. History Book Club selection. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Since 1945, the front-line realities of Germany's Russian war have been submerged under so much myth that a book like this represents a welcome reality check. The 132nd's story, and Bidermann's, are part of the 'master narrative' of a 'demodernizing' Wehrmacht, whose men held against unbelievable odds and in the end were sacrificed to one of history's most purely evil causes. It is a story worth

making available to American readers." —Dennis Showalter, author of *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* "Stands head and shoulders above the many other books in this genre.

Bidermann's style is crisp, succinct, and lucid and Zumbro has done a great job of translating." —David Glantz, coauthor of *The Battle of Kursk* and *When Titans Clashed*

I found Lt Bidermann's accounts of the 132 Infantry Division and participation with the 436 Inf Regiment as informative as it was entertaining. I must admit I had little historical knowledge of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern front aside from Von Paulus' 6th Army in Stalingrad. I found this more personal "soldier's" account to be humanizing. As I began to understand their loyalties to Germany and to each other my respect for their professionalism grew.. My thoughts often drifted between Lt. Bidermann and his comrades; of the sacrifice that they had made and the anticipation of those yet to come. I came away with a deeper understanding of the bravery and commitment from originally fighting Bolsheviks to eventually attempting to protect Germany. From seemingly indefensible position in the Courland Pocket they managed the unthinkable against overwhelming odds. And as a Professional Soldier Bidermann seems to bear no ill will towards his adversaries on the field. Of course his dislike for political types regardless of nationality was entirely a different matter. .  
Excellent Read!! appreciate Derek Zumbro's efforts in bringing this "soldier's story" to light.

Unlike so many memoir writers, the author does not exaggerate his role in a war or compliment himself. If the reader didn't know the background, he or she would find it hard to believe that Bidermann was an oft-decorated, five times wounded soldier. He served in a straight infantry division on the Eastern Front throughout the Russo-German War. Early in the memoir, he describes passing by a large German war cemetery from the Eastern Front of World War One. Perhaps it was a harbinger of things to come. This fellow was not in a flashy unit, but his well told story is valuable precisely for that reason. He fought from Crimea to Leningrad and places in-between. east and west.

I bought this book for an older friend of mine. He is 87 and of German Descent. His brother was killed in the battle of Stalingrad during the second world war. He had a copy of this book previously but some one borrowed it and did not return it. He mentioned this to me in a conversation that included the sad situation of losing his brother during the second world war. How could I not buy him this book. In a sense it reunites him with his long lost brother, knowing what he might have gone through during the ordeal of the battle of Stalingrad. If we can remember the past, perhaps we can

learn from it. There are no good or bad in a war, just the unfortunate. Regards, Darian Paganelli

This memoir is well written and does not compare to some of the more gory eastern front memoirs that I have read in the past. Lt. Biedermann often shares his beliefs and also political explanations as well as his assessment of the history of how the war evolved through the years. It is detailed, but does not go into some of the more graphic explanations of other eastern front memoirs that make you visualize exploding bodies etc. It is a good read and structured. It does not always go straight into actions, but also explains the life of a German soldier and the comradeship through the early and later years of the war. As with all memoirs you have to ask yourself if all memories are fresh enough in his mind when he wrote about his accounts. But sometimes details are necessary to throw you into the action and to make the reader understand the hardship that these guys went through.

Extremely well written - must have been hell on earth fighting so far from home, supply & manpower problems - against overwhelming odds (the whole world). What struck me was the American support, very early in war, for the Soviets. German soldiers were very professional!

Military memoirs can be a tricky thing, based upon how long after the event they describe that they were written, any agendas the author may have and how the memoirs were edited. In *Deadly Combat*, written by German army veteran Gottlob H Biedermann was written in the 1950s after the author had returned from three years in the Soviet gulag. Although the memories were still fairly fresh, no doubt the years of malnutrition had an impact on the author's ability to recall certain details or episodes - this appears sporadically throughout the book. It's not immediately apparent that the author has any real agenda, although throughout he is only willing to point fingers at the Soviet enemy, various Nazi big shots including Hitler, and the Western Allies. The editing, done by American military veteran Derek S. Zumbro, is good in most appears, but lags at one point in the center. Biederman's memoirs depict his unit, the 132. Infanterie-Division in three set-piece battles: the Crimea in 1941-1942, Leningrad in 1942-1943 and Courland in 1944-1945. The book benefits from the author's rise through the ranks from enlisted to junior officer during the course of the war and his participation on the Eastern Front from July 1941 to May 1945. Such accounts are rare, particularly from front-line soldiers. Overall, *In Deadly Combat* is a very good memoir - with a few odd exceptions - that offers considerable insight into the German perspective of East Front combat in 1941-45. The book begins with the author's unit marching into the Ukraine in July 1941. Initially,

he is an enlisted man in charge of a 3.7-cm Pak gun in a regimental-level anti-tank unit. I thought that the book started a bit too abruptly, with no mention of the author's background or even hometown (later revealed to be Stuttgart) and he does not provide much information on his peers until the last page of the book. It would have been useful if the editor had provided some of this in his introduction, since people seem to come and go in the narrative without much context. The author sees sporadic action in the pursuit across the Ukraine, but then things shift into high gear when he reaches the Crimea. Here, the author was involved in the first assault on Sevastopol, the counterattack at Feodosiya, the fighting around Kerch and the final assault on Sevastopol - all very good material. The author generally maintains a first-person narrative format in the Crimea section, but sometimes starts slipping in information he gathered from post-war secondary sources, such as technical information on the Karl and Dora heavy artillery pieces - information he clearly did not know in 1942. On another occasion he discusses Stalin's pre-war purges, which were also outside his purview. Nevertheless, the Crimea section was a satisfying, if not always insightful, read. Around August 1942 the author was selected for officer training, but he provides almost no detail on this, which is a pity. It is often argued in history circles that German officer training declined quickly after 1941 and Bidermann could have provided interesting perspectives on this. The second section of the book covers the transfer of the author's 132. Infanterie-Division to the Leningrad Front in September 1942. However, the author missed much of the Leningrad action because he was in France in an officer training course, so this section shifts to a very high-level coverage of events, rather than the first-person style used in the Crimea. The Leningrad section was disappointing and the period from January 1943 to June 1944 is covered at a much quicker pace, with the emphasis on repeated Soviet attacks that are defeated one after another. Frankly, the editor really needs to re-work this middle section because it flows poorly and doesn't mesh well with the rest of the book. The third section covers the author's last year of the war and his unit's ordeal in the Battle of the Courland Pocket. This section was easily the best and it is clear that the author's memories were sharper here. There are some excellent combat vignettes in this section, including the author getting surprised by Soviets while sleeping and later, knocking out a Soviet tank with a Panzerfaust. The author also had a number of interesting experiences in the last few months of the war, such as being given a rare furlough in December 1944 and crossing the Baltic on a fishing boat to return to Germany. At the end, the author surrenders with his unit in May 1945 and spends more than three years in Soviet prison camps before returning to Germany. The author himself is an elusive character throughout the book. I had the impression he was a decent front-line officer who had the respect of his troops, if not always his superiors. He frequently criticizes Hitler and the Nazis,

although he does not reveal until the end of the book that his father was a police official - meaning that the criticism was likely retrospective. As a number of reviewers have already mentioned, Bidermann says that he never saw any mistreatment of civilians or prisoners. I'm willing to take him at his word, but he later criticizes the Nazis for harsh measures in the East so if he was unaware of atrocities, why bother condemn the Nazis for them. I don't think the author was covering up anything, but he appears to block out anything that would make the Wehrmacht look bad. Overall, In Deadly Combat should be taken as an honest effort to provide a first-person perspective of the German experience on the Eastern Front in 1941-45. It does have some flaws, but admirably conveys the emotions of a valid combat memoir.

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