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John R. Walker, *Bracketing the Enemy: Forward Observers in World War II*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2013. Pp. xxii, 274. ISBN 978-0-8061-4380-4.

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John Walker provides both professional historians and casual readers with a narrative account of US Army forward observers in World War II in both the Pacific and Europe; he follows the activities of a single division in each theater, respectively, the 37th (1943-45) and the 87th (1944-45). A Vietnam veteran, Walker (PhD, Kent State Univ.) is the son of a World War II forward observer. There is thus a personal motivation behind his effort to clarify the crucial relationships of forward observers with infantry officers and their own field artillery battalions. *Bracketing the Enemy* usefully highlights a very specific part of the Army in World War II.

Walker has had to sift through many primary sources in order to tell his story as accurately as possible; to make his task more manageable, he concentrates on just two divisions—one from the Ohio National Guard and the other a “new division” in the parlance of 1943. In the absence of a consolidated set of papers to work from, he must deal with scattered and frustratingly spotty sources that are sometimes rife with errors. In this he is reasonably successful, but his book (originally a 2009 doctoral dissertation) does not reflect the relevant recent scholarly literature on his subject.¹ And, too, his treatment of forward observers in World War II would have benefited from a more systematic comparative review of their roles in World War I and the Korean War.

Walker’s sequencing of material early in the book is confusing. He begins with a preface previewing the book’s organization. Then come acknowledgements, a separate introduction giving a five-page digest of the history of field artillery that stresses the change from direct fire in the nineteenth century to indirect fire in the twentieth. We then get a twenty-some-page history of forward observers, from Napoleon up to the American entry into World War II, including a review of the pertinent secondary literature and the available primary documents. All in all, too much space is devoted to these rather complicated preliminaries.

The narrative proper begins in chapter 2 with a description of the mobilization, organization, and training of the 37th and 87th divisions. Walker enhances his discussion with some interesting photographs.² Chapter 3 segues into an (intriguing but not very germane) threefold comparative analysis of field artillery doctrine and practice in the American, Japanese, and German armies. Chapters 4-6 tell the story of the 37th division in the South Pacific, including its next-to-last battle—the reduction of Bougainville—and the assault made to clear the Japanese from Manila in the largest urban battle of the Pacific War.

The story shifts to the 87th division in chapters 7-9, covering its initial combat in December 1944, its part in the Battle of the Bulge, and its movement across Germany in spring 1945. In vigorous but sometimes confusing prose Walker describes the nature of ground combat in which forward observers were as much front-line troops as the infantry, as in this example:

When the enemy initially opened fire, the forward observer made an immediate request for a fire mission, but the first rounds fell short. He then asked for the fire to be lifted. [Lt. John] Long noted that next: “the battalion commander, thinking that this was a request by the enemy, asked him to authenticate, and because he didn’t know how (I am not sure a seasoned officer would know how), the battalion Commanding Officer would not

1. E.g., John K. Reith, *Patton’s Forward Observers: History of the 7th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, XX Corps, Third Army* (Richmond, VA: Brandylane, 2004), William B. Hanford, *A Dangerous Assignment: An Artillery Forward Observer in World War II* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2008), and William J. Kunz, *Third and Ten: A Field Artillery Forward Observer’s Account of Actions with the U.S. Army’s 3d Infantry Division during W.W. II* (Charleston, SC: Book Surge, 2009).

2. The one on p. 33, however, is so badly cropped as to make it unclear why it was included.

lift the artillery. I'm sure the Germans heard this transmission, so they continued the bombardment all night." He recalled that the forward observer was severely wounded in this action and probably did not survive. (118)

Walker is careful to judge incidents of friendly ("blue on blue") fire each in its own particular context.

After his chapters on the 87th, the author moves on, in chapter 10, to a rather disjointed discussion of forward observers awarded the Medal of Honor in World War II and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. Although the stories of these four men are fascinating, they seem a bit of an afterthought, falling between the body of the text proper and a final, summary chapter on the military effectiveness of combined arms combat in the Second World War. Finally, a brief epilogue brings the story of US Army forward observers up to date, with discussions of their equipment and their training for deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Walker certainly achieves his primary goal of telling the story of the heroism and sacrifices of artillery men in the role of forward observers in World War II. He adduces overwhelming evidence that their service was—in terms of casualties, battle stress, and the effects of more or less continuous combat duty—every bit as dangerous as that of any infantryman. These soldiers, like their present-day descendants, well deserved the awards (for example, the Combat Action Badge) that recognized their sacrifices (189–90).

Those charged today with educating field grade officers will find much extremely valuable material³ in the book, especially its analysis of developments in artillery since World War II, with extensive treatments of the doctrine, equipment, organization, training, and professional development of those who call for fire. One wishes the author had made as sophisticated an assessment of the conditions of serving as forward observers in the Second World War.⁴ However, John Walker is to be commended for adding another layer to our understanding of that war, beyond the biographies of senior officers and popular general histories.⁵

3. Including a most helpful glossary, with definitions of ranks, tactics, and technical terms ("abatis," "defilade," etc.).

4. Notable omissions in Walker's bibliography are Robert Sterling Rush, *Hell in the Hürtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2001), and Mark Reardon, *Victory at Mortain: Stopping Hitler's Panzer Counteroffensive* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2002).

5. There are a few proofreading errors, most conspicuously the misspelling of the name of the Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker, not "Schoonover" (189).