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Robert M. Citino. *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002. 372 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1176-8.

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I Learned From This Book

I can think of no higher compliment than that simple title. Although Citino's earlier works, *Armored Forces: A History and Sourcebook* (1994) and *The Path of Blitzkrieg* (1999) are decent and completely respectable offerings, it is this reviewer's opinion that *Quest for Decisive Victory* is his best work to date. Citino is a professor of European History at Eastern Michigan University, but if the quality of this book is any indication of his potential, before long he will be able to pick and choose his preferred location. This book is that good. (I was raised in Ohio and therefore quite naturally assume that nobody would actually choose to live in that state "to the north.") *Quest for Decisive Victory* is an analysis of not only field operations in wars over the course of more than forty years, it is an assessment of the assessments, a sort of military intellectual history. Potentially this could have been a bone-creakingly dry work, or one which devolved into an examination of arcane theoretical pigeonholes, yet Citino avoided both pitfalls. With clear and lucid writing he created a narrative which pulls the reader forward. This is no mean feat for an intellectual history.

Citino has no qualms about laying deep foundations for his fundamental thesis. The book opens with an account of the second century B.C., revolt led by Judas Maccabaeus against the royal army of Antiochus Epiphanas. Citino uses this passage as an exemplar of a model of operational-level victory in war that could be used to describe much of the history of war for the next 2,000 years. In his model this is a series of "assault-turning-pursuit" situations ending in a decision. But as he reminds us, the model breaks down in the late nineteenth century, thus forming the foundation of his inquiry; the doctrinal, organizational and technological search for an answer to the operational stalemate imposed by the ascendancy of firepower. Citino is careful to qualify his work. He notes that although the conflicts examined occurred around the world, from Korea during the Russo-Japanese War to South Africa during the Boer War, what he is examining are solely the effects of these conflicts upon the European "Way of War." With this disclaimer in place he proceeds to tear apart the operations and the "lessons" learned from those operations by the military establishments of the West, lessons that influenced how those nations envisioned and attempted to prosecute war. While he brings to light the moderately insightful nature of some few of these observations (but generally technologically unfeasible at the time they were made), and the merely misguided nature of a few others, Citino clearly demonstrates that several of these lessons were downright obtuse, though he readily cedes that hindsight is always 20/20. (The most obvious example is, of course, the "lesson" which European observers derived from the Russo-Japanese war, which was that infantry assaults worked, or as Citino put it, "Victory went to the side that attacked, that kept attacking, and that was sufficiently strong-willed to accept the inevitable losses caused by modern weaponry.")

Structurally, although Citino somewhat obviously had to devote considerable text to the First World War and the interwar period, the true value of this work rests

mostly beyond the confines of the European continent. Indeed this is one of the most interesting and engaging aspects of *Quest.* Here one may learn a great deal about the Boer War, the Russo-Japanese War, the Balkans War of 1912-1913, and the "interwar" conflicts in Ethiopia and Spain. The obvious benefit is that the reader gains a new appreciations for each which may take the average, or even the well-read student of history beyond a general understanding of the ebb and flow of each conflict and towards a more nuanced comprehension of the "lessons" derived from each, or not, by the major European combatants of two world wars. Indeed the book is masterful in its ability to consolidate a broad range of material and relate it to the eponymous topic.

Citino is not necessarily breaking a whole lot of new ground here on any one topic, and, of course, as with any work so broad, the primary source research is on the thin side. Nonetheless, he is breaking ground by bringing together a reconstruction of all of the influences acting upon professional military officers (and non-professionals as well) in the period. And, where most scholars addressing this topic confine themselves to the interwar period (or at most including the tail end of the First World War), Citino opens the window to a wider period, and rightly so. Historians' primary role is one of setting facts within context, and by providing a more detailed and broader context to the events of 1940, Citino helps raise our understanding considerably.

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