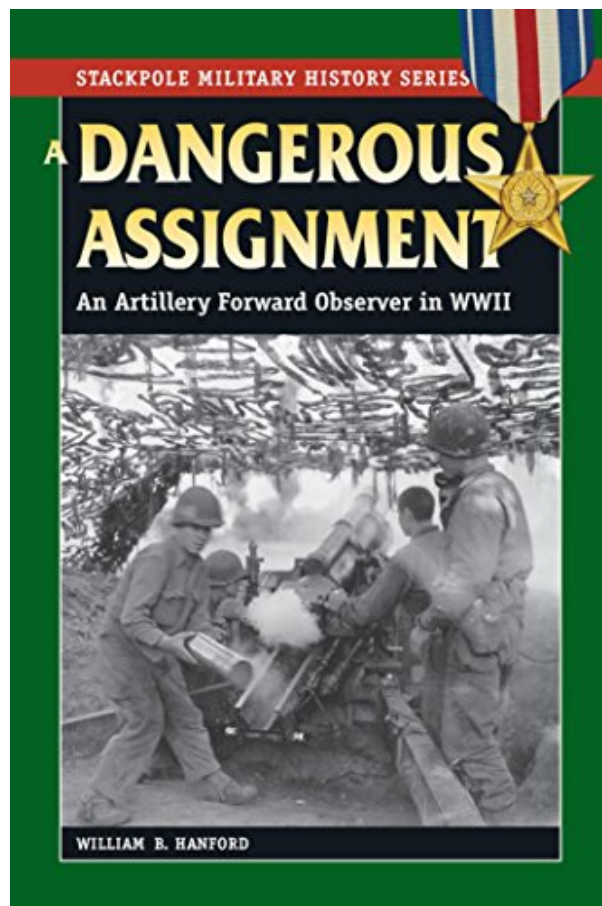
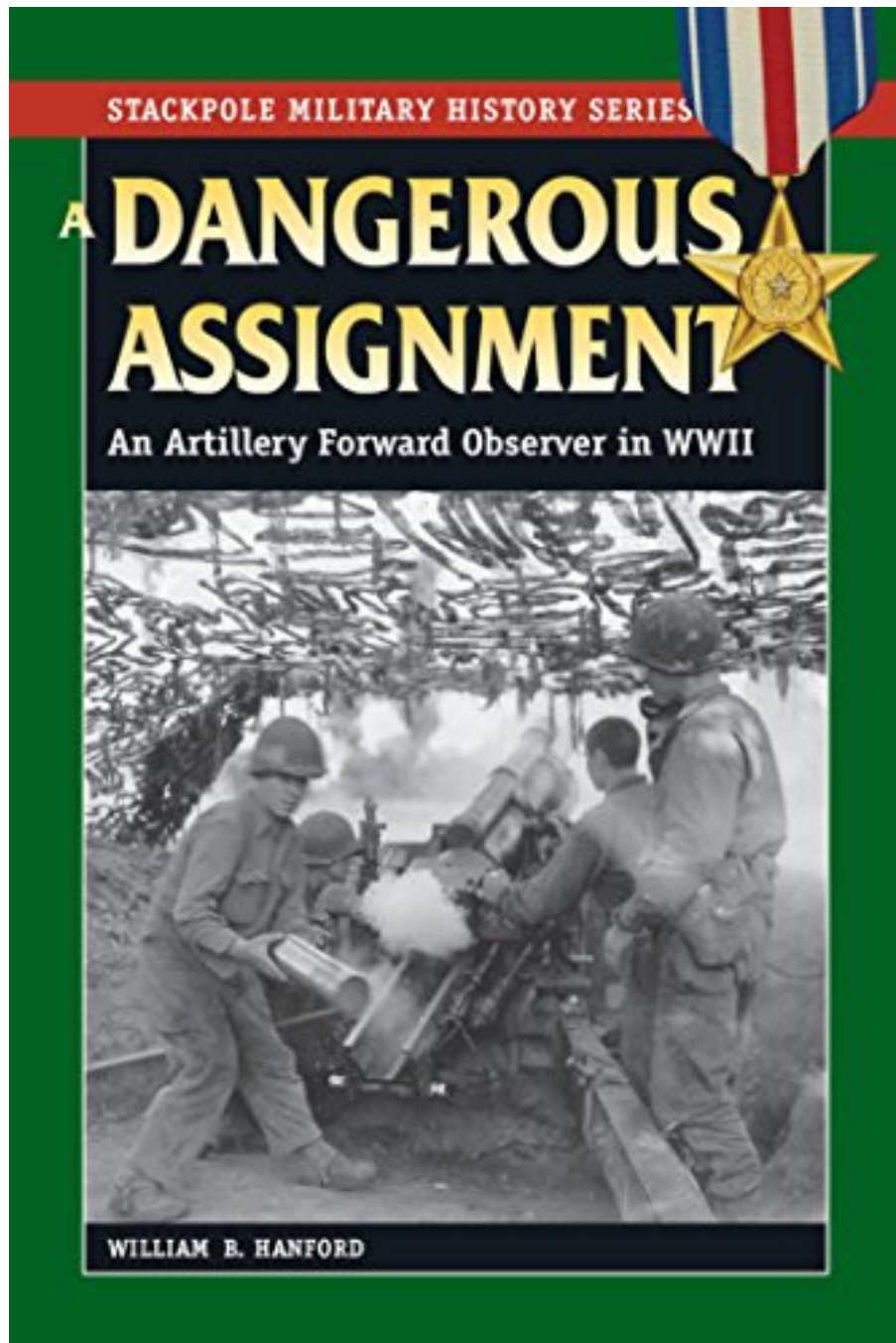


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An excellent firsthand account

By Ipsissifex

An excellent firsthand account, well written. I read this because my father was a forward observer and was with the 4th Division on D-Day. I wanted to gain an understanding of what life as a forward observer was like since I could never get anything much out of my father who is now deceased. I believe this book provided that.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Dangerous Days

By John E. Larsen

The author served with the 928th Field Artillery Battalion of the 103rd Infantry Division, fighting in the Vosges, Ardennes and Siegfried Line battles and on into Germany. His particular role is as radioman for Forward Observers and he subsequently sees a lot of action in the front line.

He is the first to admit that his role is not as consistently dangerous as that endured by the infantry but he does make quite a bit of the danger (hence the title I suppose). Indeed, his best friend is his unit's first fatality and it was interesting to read how this was met by a green unit. He is quite cynical it must be said but there is often a lot to be cynical about in the way armies do things. In any case, this allows him to explore one of his recurring themes, the relationships between officers and enlisted men and more specifically, the quality of his officers. While some were excellent, he also encounters glory-hounds, incompetents and outright bastards. The pressures of war and the hierarchal structure of the army (and society it came from) contribute to this but Hanford has a sense of grievance stronger than most veteran authors writing of similar experiences.

As for combat, Hanford is not called upon to use his rifle but he is shelled extensively, including by his own unit! It is estimated that artillery inflicted half of the casualties in WW2 and Handford's account spells out what this meant. The strongest section for me, was his account of supporting the G/411th Regt in its attacks in the Haardt Mountains against fixed defences. Machine gunners firing from strong bunkers, snipers and

ground expertly exploited by the defenders shred the attackers, yet they are continually ordered to try again. It is sobering stuff.

In addition to Handford being spared such frontal assaults, he and his section also get a lot more time in billets. Often the residents are still on hand and he has considerable exposure to ordinary people. There are some interesting stories here, both in France and Germany. In the later, he sees some remarkable things at the end of the war before being transferred and shipped home for service against the Japanese. Fortunately, the war ends and he returns to civilian life. The last chapter or two cover his post war life, with some news on the lives of his war-time comrades.

This is a solid piece of war writing. Handford seems to have been part of the ATSP and is an educated writer. There is some dry humour at times and a distinct cynical tone regarding some facets of his service (but I can only remember one mild mention of politics, so I am not sure what those other reviewers are reacting to - I am not an American though, so maybe I'm missing something). Handford's story is interesting but, as terrible as his war was, it points to the even greater danger and discomfort of being in the infantry. In comparison to the many other memoirs I have now read, I give it three stars. It is certainly a worthwhile read (I rate hard) but have a look at my lists for others which I think are stronger.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Bill Hanford Brought Back Vivid Memories

By Richard

Being a teen age Sgt. WW-2 forward observer, it brings back vivid memories. Very much true to life and what we fought for, and what is being scoffed away in this day and age by senseless self-serving politicians. Read it and maybe you can realize what boys did to become men if not overnight, at least in a matter of weeks and with no thought for 'what's in it for me.!' I bought extra copies for circulating copies for the survivors of our old 294th FAOB unit. All who have read it are highly impressed.

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