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**Tony le Tissier *The Siege of Kustrin 1945: Gateway to Berlin* Pen & Sword 2009
ISBN: 1 8488 40225 H/b £25**

Tony le Tissier, a former British governor of Spandau Prison, is developing a terrific series of books on the last desperate defensive battles that the Germans put up against a rampaging and vengeful Soviet army as it finally arrived in Germany from January 1945. In this he complements the work of David Glantz who gives us an ever increasing series on the great battles of the Eastern Front from the Soviet side.

Le Tissier makes excellent use of German testimony to give a vivid picture of a people plummeting to absolute defeat but who fought on anyway. To what purpose, we might well ask. Kustrin, just 50 miles from Berlin, was not put into a state of defence until 25 January. The Russian forward detachments arrived on 31st! (Incidentally, it is interesting to see how these forward detachments operated ahead of their main formations. Acting as something akin to a 'forlorn hope', they simply stormed down the main roads, getting the defences to reveal themselves by fire, and taking fairly heavy losses before coming to an abrupt halt at some bridge or river line.) Kustrin's garrison was a scratch built affair, until they were reinforced by 25th Panzer Grenadier Division and the re-born 21st Panzer division (of Afrika Korps fame).

The town proceeded to hold out for sixty days against elements of two Soviet armies, which were operating at the end of tenuous supply lines in the depth of winter. This precious time enabled the Germans to get on with the fortifications on the Seelow Heights and so delay the final assault on Berlin even further. To what purpose, we might ask yet again.

Of the 21,000 defenders, 5,000 were killed, 9,000 wounded and 6,000 captured. After the failure of a counter-attack to relieve them, the last 1,000 made an astonishing breakout to the west.

Excellent served by detailed maps, this is a valuable addition to any Eastern Front library.

John Lee

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