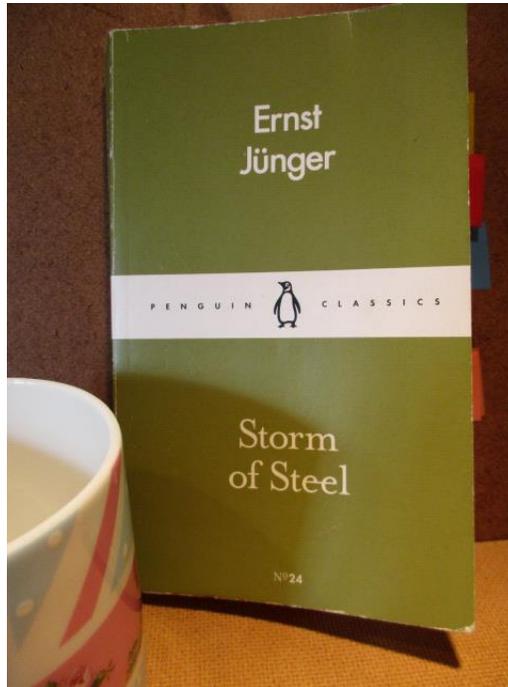


Storm of Steel

By Rod Fraser



YOU MAY RECALL in an earlier book review, I mentioned a World War One memoir written by Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), a German officer who told of his war experiences on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918.

His memoir, *Storm of Steel*, was one of the first

books published after the war, largely because German soldiers (unlike their British counterparts) were permitted to write and retain notes of their war experiences while fighting in the trenches.

The first edition of his book was little more than Jünger's unedited diary which he privately published in 1920. It was then revised substantially in 1924 for a new publisher. Most other accounts and novels of the war (particularly those published in English) came later. Some of the best were published in the late 1920s.

This memoir is most often compared to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, written by Erich Maria Remarque, in that both were written by German soldiers, but there are a number of differences.

For example, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was a novel, written by a pacifist, while Jünger's memoir is quite the opposite. Jünger had the personality and temperament of a warrior. In 1913, at the age of 17, he travelled to Verdun to join the French Foreign Legion. His father, disturbed at this news, used his influence to bring him home. The following year, Jünger volunteered in the 73rd Infantry Regiment of the German Army, shortly after the start of the First World War.

Jünger was lightly wounded in April of 1915. He

described it as follows,

"... I saw that a needle-sharp piece of shrapnel had given me a flesh wound [in the thigh], though my wallet had taken the brunt of it.... Two weeks later, my wound was healed [and I returned home for a short leave to recuperate]."

It was during leave home that his father suggested Jünger consider officer training. He applied, was sent on a six week course and left with the rank of Ensign. Most of the training involved learning to "move across terrain in small groups."

In November of 1915, Jünger was promoted to Lieutenant. As a platoon leader, he gained a reputation for initiative in offensive patrolling and reconnaissance. But it was not all action and terror. Here is an anecdote where Jünger described a quiet time in the trenches,

"And so our days passed in strenuous monotony... Often I would sit with a feeling of cosy seclusion at my table in my little dugout ... drinking a cup of tea, smoking and reading, while my orderly busied himself at the tiny stove and the aroma of toasting bread gradually filled the air.... Then I would take my notebook out of my map pocket and jot down the salient events of the day."

In all, Jünger participated in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the Battle of Cambrai in 1917 and the Spring Offensive in 1918, as well as numerous smaller actions and patrols over four years of war. He was wounded numerous times and received the Iron Cross and the Pour le Merite for bravery.

Jünger describes his final wounding during the Spring Offensive of 1918,

“In mid-jump over a slightly better-made trench, I felt a piercing jolt to the chest—as though I had been hit like a game bird. With a sharp cry that seemed to cost me all the air I had, I spun on my axis and crashed to the ground...”

This wounding finished Jünger’s participation in the war. He spent the remainder of 1918 in a military hospital recovering from his wounds, then served in the German Military Defence Forces after the war, returning to civilian life in 1923.

Although Jünger’s memoir celebrates the life of a warrior, he was never a member of the Nazi Party. He became a Captain in the German Army during the Second World War, but was stationed in Paris in an administrative position. He had a slight involvement in the plot to assassinate Hitler, but he was so peripheral to the event that he was merely dismissed from the army in 1944.

Jünger lived to the age of 102 when he died in 1998, an old revered person of letters who had witnessed most of the meaningful events of the twentieth century.

Although I hope my readers find this review interesting, if I were to make a choice, I would pass on this book and readily turn to *All Quiet on the Western Front*. On the whole, it is more interesting and a better read.

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