some truth in such aphorisms; it’s just that in this volume, well-worn platitudes are subjected to a good road test. Historically, we learn, being a Pittsburgh sports fan has meant having to endure long seasons of hapless sports franchises that nonetheless managed to instill a die-hard loyalty.

It’s a lesson that emerges clearly in Richard Peterson’s account of his street urchin-like existence in the 1950s. Relying on street smarts, Peterson managed to take in every sports team Pittsburgh had to offer — in one case, from a concealed perch on top of a Forbes Field concession stand, in another, from the hole in the roof of the old Duquesne Gardens. By the time Pittsburgh emerged from its perennial loser cocoon in the 1970s, the author had moved on and could only watch its teams by satellite. “The irony of watching Pittsburgh sports on television is that the great Pirate and Steeler Teams of the 1970s ... loom small in my mind’s eye.” By contrast, “those Pirate rinky dinks and the same old Steelers still seem as large as life ... the closest thing I had to heroes in an otherwise drab-blue-collar world.”

One of the most satisfying contributions is Chris Elzey’s account of the Pittsburgh Pipers, the city’s short-lived ABA franchise. In recounting the team’s 1967 season, Elzey carefully constructs a social-historical narrative that sets the Pipers’ championship year against the backdrop of increasingly tense race relations, which culminated in the 1968 race riots following the King assassination. Even as the franchise advanced to the ABA finals, there were lots of empty seats. Poor attendance was blamed on the riots, which were literally outside the door of the Civic Arena in the Lower Hill. The local paper blamed the Pipers’ disappointing fan base on the city’s innate racism. Regardless, the rarely heard story of the Pittsburgh Pipers suggests the sorts of insights that can be derived from looking at the city’s sports failures and in what it collectively failed to embrace.

As with any collection, there are some near and broad misses: a chapter that tempts with the promise of exploring Pittsburgh’s football tradition slips instead into a chronology of interscholastic leagues. And while the subtext of race relations is given plenty of attention, the impact of social class and ethnicity is played with too light a touch. Most readers are familiar with the story of racial exclusion and integration, but what about the impact of the city’s myriad white ethnic groups on the contours of Pittsburgh sports? One need look no further than the fan groups spawned by the 70s Steelers: Franco’s Italian Army with its red, white, and green flags and helmets, or Jack Ham’s fans flying a huge “Dobra Shunka” banner (Polish for “the Great Ham”).

Most of the contributors write neither as complete insiders, nor as outsiders. Some are permanent expatriates; some are newcomers eager to connect to their adopted hometown; still others, like Laurie Graham, who writes of her distantly inherited attachment to the Pirates, are somewhere in between. For all the holidays, Pittsburgh’s teams offer a window on the soul of the city. The perspective offered in this collection also underscores another truism, often amidst the relentless mass marketing of pro sports today. Professional sports may be all business, but teams are themselves more process than product, a continually evolving stew of colorful players, coaches, owners, and most importantly, loyal and wonderfully human fans.

**The Long Road: From Oran to Pilsen. Oral histories of World War II, European Theater of Operations**

Edited by David Wilmes. (Latrobe, Pa.: St. Vincent College Center for Northern Appalachian Studies, 1999). Illustrations, 386 pp., $28 hardcover

Books about World War II keep coming, even though the war ended 56 years ago, and a generation of Americans has grown to adulthood scarcely knowing who was fighting whom. Two kinds of history dominate the flow: those concerned with the big picture, and those concerned with the life, and often death, of the men who did the fighting.

More of the latter — personal and small unit histories — are being published these days. World War II vets know they won’t be around many more years, and they have an urge to tell it like it was while they can.

The Long Road, based on interviews with 28 U.S. Army Ground Forces vets from central and Western Pennsylvania, falls into the personal history category. All participated in battles that destroyed the Nazi and Italian Fascist war machines in Western Europe and the Mediterranean theater in 1943 – 45.

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**Curt Miner, Senior Curator, Political History and Popular Culture, State Museum of Pennsylvania**
Most of the stories are 20 pages or less in length. Whether due to editorial oversight or the simple need of plain men to write and speak plainly, the style throughout is based on the simple declarative sentence. Anything that might appear emotional, philosophical, or contemplative is out.

Numerous photographs of the contributors and their buddies taken in wartime are included in the book, along with drawings of weapons and cartoons illustrating incidents in the stories.

Thirteen of the vets interviewed served in infantry battalions, six in the artillery and motorized cavalry, the rest in medium tank and combat engineers. In other words, they were at or near the front.

Unlike the general run of WWII memoirs, The Long Road includes recollections of getting into the Army; enduring training; occupying the towns and homes of a vanquished foe; and coming home to loving families who generally hadn’t a clue about what their darlings had experienced. The veterans have almost as much to say about training and behind-the-lines Army craziness as about the suffering at the front.

This is not to imply that the book does not include a large dose of battlefield death and destruction, gore and agony. As ever, it is the GIs in the infantry rifle companies who endure the worst conditions at the front, experience the most terror, and suffer the largest number of dead and wounded.

"I became hardened to the sight of the dead," said one ex-infantryman. Another remembered "the whole German Army" coming at his company in the Battle of the Bulge, shooting his buddies in their foxholes as they rampaged through the company’s position. A third told how his captain was shot dead as he tried to negotiate a surrender. The men of his company took revenge, killing their German prisoners, one of whom had shot the captain.

Among the most interesting recollections are of combat and post-combat experiences in Germany. The German Army fought fiercely on its own turf. Some of the deadliest (and least known) battles of the European war took place on German soil in the closing months.

As American soldiers captured and occupied countless German cities and towns, mass starvation threatened. The Long Road’s contributors do not hide the seamiest side of things. More than a few American soldiers looted their way across Germany. But the GIs’ treatment of the occupied female population was nowhere near as bestial as one or two of the contributors to The Long Road assert. Chaplains and senior officers made sure of this, as did the many decent officers and men in the ranks. True, fraternization, as it was called, was rampant. The young women of Germany were demoralized. Huge numbers — in the millions — had lost boyfriends and husbands in the war. The bumptious, happy-go-lucky, a bit crude but attractive Americans swarming across the land were considered more of an opportunity than a threat. In short, they could provide food stolen from mess halls and supply dumps, cigarettes, and other nice things. In the long run, who knew, they might be seduced into marriage and escape from the wasteland Germany had become. One of the introductory essays in the book asserts that during the occupation “venereal disease, rape and adultery were common…. Western culture revealed a shameless primitivism." This is mostly nonsense. V.D. took a toll, but was not “common." Rape was rare. As to the slap at Western culture, we’ll let that now commonplace academic cliché stand, if it can.

One of the vets compared his homecoming with that of the poor men who returned from Vietnam 25 years later. "Almost every vet I knew was a hero. But the boys who went to Vietnam were called baby-killers. People had the attitude: ‘It isn’t brave and patriotic to fight for your country.’" Same boys. Same hardships and terror. Different time. Different nation.

Joseph C. Doherty wrote “Pittsburgh’s Checkered Soldiers,” the story of the 99th Infantry Division, in the Fall 2001 Western Pennsylvania History.

READERSREPLY

Dear Editor,
My reaction is WOW. That WOW is for the summer issue of the magazine. It really hit me in all the right places. It is the best issue that has been put out in too long a time. The articles hit me in many of my interests. A great job.

Even if just the Isaly’s story had been in the magazine, I would have been happy. My first 20 years were in Pittsburgh (1926 – 1946), and Isaly’s was high on my favorites list. I used to live in Point Breeze. On many occasions I went to the movies in Homewood, and then, on my way home, I would stop at Isaly’s on Homewood Avenue for one of those towering cones. It was great, a fond memory of mine.

The current Klondike bars are good, but not as good as the ones Isaly’s sold. Later, while at Carnegie Tech, I would walk to Isaly’s nearby, sort of their headquarters since the building was large, and indulge myself while walking back to campus. Thank you for bringing those memories back.

Also, I grew up on Duquesne, Iron City, and Tube City beers, so it was nice to revisit their places of origin.

Reading about the Meadowcroft site was fascinating, too. I finally found out something about it after hearing about it for a long time.

A fine, fine issue. I love it, and I do hope that you receive many more notices from members stating that it hit the spot.

John W. Carlson
Beavercreek, Ohio