



The War in the West: A New History Volume 2, . the Allies Fight Back 1941-43

James Holland

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In the second volume of his acclaimed new history of the Second World War, James Holland examines the momentous turning points of 1941–1943: Hitler’s invasion of Russia; America’s entry into the conflict; the devastating Thousand Bomber Raids over Germany; the long struggle in the deserts of North Africa; and the defeat of the U-boats in the crucial Battle of the Atlantic.

As in his first volume, *Germany Ascendant*, he interweaves his account of the well-known events of the period with the personal stories of individuals caught up in them - on all sides. Through interviews, letters, diaries and reports, he allows us to see the war not just from the perspective of politicians, military commanders and strategists, but also through the eyes of civilians bombed out of their homes, resistance members stranded in the frozen Norwegian winter, sailors risking their lives in the Atlantic convoys, German aces striving for supremacy in the air, and ordinary soldiers battling for survival in the scorching sands of Libya.

He also looks behind the scenes at the all-important ‘machinery’ of war: the manufacturing, farming and vital supply lines that underpinned the entire conflict and ultimately determined its course. From the battle fronts on land, sea and air, to the streets, fields and factories of Britain, America and Germany, he paints a dramatic and compelling portrait of these pivotal years when the tide began to turn.

Combining his own research with only recently accessible archive material, Holland looks afresh at this cataclysmic conflict, reassessing long-held views and challenging conventional assumptions. The result is ground-breaking history that redefines the war in the West and makes us think again about the events that shaped our modern world.

The War in the West: A New History Volume 2, . the Allies Fight Back 1941-43 Details

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Mark says

The second volume of James Holland's three-volume history of the "the war in the West" begins where the first one, *The Rise of Germany* leaves off, with Germany launching Operation Barbarossa, their massive invasion of the Soviet Union. It's a fitting starting point, as it means an adjustment to Holland's coverage of the war. Holland's series is best described as "the war the British waged against Germany," as it concentrates against the campaigns waged by Britain and her allies against the Nazi regime. This made the first volume a straightforward account of the main theaters of the war in Europe from September 1939 to June 1941, which covered all of the key events involving the major combatants.

Though the focus of Holland's coverage remains the same, the parameters of his subject have changed in this volume. The opening of the Eastern Front heralded a widening of the war, with Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union followed less than six months later by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and their conquest of the European colonies in Southeast Asia. To his credit, Holland does not neglect this, as throughout the text he acknowledges how the developments in these theaters impacted the Western campaigns. Yet even by addressing events in those theaters in passing only there are points at which Holland's narrative seems on the verge of slipping from his control, as the sheer scope of what he is covering -- which includes the campaigns in North Africa, the Atlantic, and in the skies of western and central Europe, as well as the economic context of the war effort -- often forces him to bounce around to address developments in multiple theaters. To his credit, Holland manages to stay on top of it, yet the disjointedness of his narrative compared to the previous volume is more evident.

Nevertheless, this shouldn't overshadow the overall merits of Holland's book. Overall he maintains the high quality of description and deft interweaving of analysis with personal narratives that capture the individual experiences of a vast war. That he will conclude his series in the third volume while offering the same degree of detail as he did about the North Africa campaign for the invasions of Sicily, Italy, and France, as well as the increasing bombing campaign and its collective toll upon Germany is an open question, yet one the answer to which I already look forward to reading.

Steve Switzer says

Excellent as good as volume 1 and that s saying a lot

Interweaving personal accounts with lucid analyses of he action he creates a vibrant living experience for the reader unlike any other account i have read.

Also focuses on the operational aspects to an unusual and enlightening degree

Recommended

Jonathan Schwab says

A good read, though without the crisp writing and narrative of the first.

The whole book felt more like a late draft instead of a final edition. The content and structure were there, but

the arrangement felt a little clunky at times, and the writing seemed to be hamstrung by poor editing throughout.

If you can, I would wait for the second edition. A thorough re-edit would do wonders for this book.

Gram says

An immensely readable history of the years 1941 to 1943 during which time the Allies fought back against the Axis powers in various parts of the world.

In a broad sweep, James Holland's 2nd volume in this series switches from Hitler's ill-advised invasion of Russia to the entry of the USA into the conflict and the defeat of the U-boats in the Battle of the Atlantic to the massed British and American bomber raids over Germany and the key battles in North Africa which saw the defeat of Germany's favourite general, Erwin Rommel.

Along the way, there are insights into the lives of "ordinary men" fighting to defeat the Nazis along with those fighting for "The Fatherland" - fighter and bomber pilots, sailors and U-boat crews, tank crews and infantrymen. My favourites were the Bowles twins - brothers who explained they couldn't remember a single word of a rousing speech made to them by "Old Blood and Guts" himself, General George Patton. It's refreshing to note that many men on both sides of the conflict paid little attention to rousing speeches by senior military officers. They knew what really mattered in any battle came down to whether they lived or died.

Despite the constant switches in action to various theatres of the war, Holland manages to keep the story on course, pointing up interesting arguments such as how vital supplies and supply routes on land or sea were to a nation's war efforts. He gives lie to the myth of the superiority of German armed forces and their weapons. And he's not afraid to lay blame at the door of the Allies' senior military officers and government officials whose actions led to needless suffering and death of their own people. A terrific insight into some of the most vital actions of the Western Allies (hence the series title "The War In The West") as the fortunes of the Second World War swung away from Hitler's Germany. Highly recommended.

Mike says

Another great volume, convincingly arguing that Germany was more or less on the downward slope by 1941/2, and giving much attention to the Atlantic U-Boat raids and the theatre in North Africa, both of which tend to be neglected against the more pivotal campaign in the USSR. It doesn't change or understate the latter's importance, but the focus on the less talked about aspects of the war is appreciated. Looking forward to the third instalment.

Jonathan says

James Holland continues his superb narrative of the Second World War in western Europe, the Atlantic and North Africa. Unlike most works on the topic, Holland pays close attention to the economic aspects of the war, such as the various countries' industrial and agricultural policies, as well as how they managed (or didn't) their manpower, shipping, raw materials and relations with their allies. His treatment of the war in the

Western Desert is especially good for its portrayal of how the air forces fought. Like most British authors, he has his favorite generals in the desert; his choice is the little known Taker of the 4th Indian Division. His emphasis on the Uboat vs convoy struggle in the Atlantic is also timely. All in all, not only a fine history but a ripping good read as well. Not to be missed for WWII fans.

Bruce Cook says

This is an excellent book. I seem to be a World War II history buff, as I have read a lot of books about World War II. One of my favorites was the first volume in this series by the author, *The Rise of Germany*, and so, when this took became available in the States, I just had to have it. I ordered it on the day it became available, in October 2017 and I have just finished it. What is so appealing about the way this author writes about the war in the West? It is not a detailed account of each battle, although it does address the battles, both in terms of what happens and the decision making or lack thereof that went into the battle plans. The author freely expresses his opinion as to whether a war leader is effective or incompetent, and can be very critical when leadership is poor or a leader is completely out of his depth.

It is very good, though, in painting an overall picture of all the factors in play in what was going on in the West, from Germany's attack on Russia (although that is in the East and only peripherally a part of this book), to the victories of the Allies in North Africa and in the Battle of the Atlantic, including the strategy involved, the resources, the decision making, the interplay of leaders and other factors at play. And it does this from all sides, although mostly from the primary parties at play - Great Britain, USA and Germany. The decision making inside Russia is not really a part of this book, but the fact there is a lot of what was going on inside Germany during this period of time is very enlightening.

The other thing that makes this an excellent book is that the experiences of individuals involved in the war effort and brought into the story and integrated very well into what was happening at the time, including the perspective of soldiers from USA and Great Britain, but also individual Germans, leaders, generals pilots, those in charge of industrial output, and more. It brings the war down to a very personal level and makes the story moving and very personal.

If I was to criticize anything in the book it would be the large number of times where he shows that Germany was having its internal problems as well as the Allies. Of course they were, and it is very good to point that out, but the frequency of discussing the problems Germany was having, and even had at the outset of the war to some extent, makes one wonder how the Germans made it as long as they did before they were defeated. Clearly the author had no high opinion of Hitler as a war leader. Maybe some light will be shed in the next volume as to how Germany held out as long as it did, and how it continued to inflict setbacks on the Allies, such as the Battle of the Bulge. But that is a minor criticism, and overall I am sure pretty accurate. I highly recommend this volume and the one that preceded it for an excellent very readable account of the war in the West.

Mark says

FOUR AND-A-HALF STARS. As in the first part, James Holland has written a fascinating account of the *The War in The West*, not only facts and figures but personal recollections and the importance of manufacture and supply of weapons and armaments.

A recommended read, can't wait for the third and final volume.

Fernando D says

Massive but entertaining read

Not for the faint of heart! Holland builds on his successful first volume on the War in the West to deftly weave in historic events, human drama and enough tactical and technical detail to satisfy just about any aficionado of WW2. All of this is the necessary "entertainment" to tell the true story of how Allied (and Soviet) production buried the Axis under an implacable and ever-expanding wave of steel, armaments and fuel. Holland clearly enjoys telling this story the most - and it is an under-appreciated chapter of Allied victory - but he clearly recognizes that no one will read a book about production alone; and he realizes that it would be as wrong to focus exclusively on the operational level as other works have erred in focusing exclusively on the strategic or tactical levels. Holland attempts to tell "the whole story" - is it any surprise that he requires three massive tomes to do it? But be warned: you may soon find yourself overwhelmed as you attempt to follow the stories of twenty or thirty individuals as they live out their experiences across the Western Theater of war between 1941 and 1943. It will become confusing: but then, that was the reality of the war. It was a massively confusing and often impenetrable chaos, not the neat lines and convenient dates we learn in schools or the History Channel. It is no wonder that even the best

J W says

The first volume of this history was extraordinarily good and made me look at WWII in ways I had never considered.

While only a keen amateur, I would certainly consider it one of the leading revisionist works in the field. The second was also good, but failed to reach the heights of the first, if only because (completely understandably) the rationale and approach of the first is continued with little development in the second. It is difficult to criticise the author for this, it is the basis of his approach, but it simply got a little predictable. While the first book made me reconsider the importance of the Battle of the Atlantic, the second's detailed reporting on shipping statistics on a monthly basis left me a little fatigued.

The issues he identified in the first book, from weaponry design to oil reserves, are more important than ever before at this stage of the war than previously and so they are repeated.

The enhanced scope of the conflict also leaves coverage of some areas seem a little threadbare.

It's a great book, and I eagerly anticipate the third, but this did not reach the heights of the first.

Russ says

after reading volume 1 of this series, I immediately went out and bought volume 2, having been massively impressed. This has continued and I'm looking forward to volume 3. This is very well written and an interesting take on what is probably the most documented historical event ever. The only niggle I have, and it is only a niggle, is that the author's decision to only focus on the second world war in the West, ie Western Europe, has been too difficult - events in the West are constantly affected by events in the East (Germany is ground down by its efforts on the Eastern Front) and the Far East, so these events do have to be referred to, but this is done in a cursory fashion before returning to the narrative, and may be they should be covered in more detail - i'm still really wanting to get hold of the next instalment.

Manchester Military History Society (MMHS) says

James Holland's second revisionist volume of the War in the West 1939-45.

James Holland again has avoided repetition of previous accounts of this period and delivered a fascinating and thought provoking book that covers not just the political, but also the economic and social aspects.

I did find this volume flowed a little less smoothly than the previous, but despite that there's much to get your teeth into. Holland argues convincingly that Nazi Germany was a busted flush by 1941 without the resources or a clear plan of how to continue the war over such a vast geographical area with a German army built for short campaigns close to the Fatherland.

Again he has unearthed some never before seen personal accounts that really add to our knowledge. For example some rarely heard voices of the Italian Army in North Africa.

This is a thought provoking book that challenges many preconceptions about the war and comes to some controversial conclusions.

Recommended.

I received this book for free from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

Jon says

The second volume continues te style of the first with the TV style cliff hangers at the end of many sections which as I said about the first book can be a bit repetitive and irritating as we already know the answer to most of these cliff hangers. Despite this the book is a very good and eat read history 'light' book. The characters develop almost like in a novel and you are made to care about them - which I liked. Overall very good book and I'm looking forward to the third installment.

Urey Patrick says

Holland presents a Cliff's Notes version of WWII history focussed on the predominantly on the North African campaign, secondarily on the battle of the Atlantic, and some assorted lesser events along the way such as the raid on the heavy water facility in Norway and an overview of the British bombing campaign fleshed out with a prodigious number of human interest stories along the way. No mention of substance of the Pacific War at all, the war in the East, Stalingrad -- It is an interesting and engaging history albeit frequently mundane. Many of the human interest stories, most of which involve recurrent individuals, do not advance knowledge of the war or understanding of the dynamics and factors. For example, the chapter on the USS Reuben James briefly describes the sinking then segues into an extended narration of the relatively ordinary service of the actor Douglas Fairbanks aboard a destroyer in the Atlantic. He does that throughout the book - Albert Martin, a rifleman in the Eighth Army in North Africa is recurrently brought up, although to no great point. A combat pilot's war fatigue is described. He includes people from both sides - a U-boat

Captain, Luftwaffe and RAF pilots, a destroyer captain, individual Italian servicemen, a British housewife. It is an interesting device, but often adds little to the history being narrated - overdone in my opinion.

On the other hand, Holland is fascinating when he describes and explains the technologies in play - tanks, ASW tactics and weaponry, radar, bombers... this is great stuff, and much of it fresh and all of it revealing. He is equally adept at describing command issues - personalities, conflicts, personal strengths and weaknesses. This too is a valuable and compelling contribution to the history of the time. Holland argues - with merit, I think - that Germany had no chance to win the conflict. Germany lacked resources, flexibility of command and governmental institutions, leadership, technology and design... all the things that are necessary to win a modern global conflict. He contrasts Germany's strengths, weaknesses and flaws with those of the Allies (US and UK in particular) and concludes that the final result of the war was essentially foreordained. The wonderful historian Victor Davis Hanson has recently published a book "The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won" that extensively documents and argues exactly that at far greater length and in more extensive detail than Holland - they are in agreement. I strongly recommend both books!

Sam says

So far my personal favourite series of books when it comes to the broad history of the western sphere of the Second World War. Holland brilliantly discusses the three levels of conflict required of modern war, tactical, operational and strategic, and expertly discusses how competently each nation was able to engage on every level. I particularly enjoyed the large chapters dedicated to the North Africa campaigns, which are often dwarfed by the concurrent Eastern Front.
