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James Holland. *The Allies Strike Back 1941-1943: The War in the West*, Volume Two. New York: Grove Press, 2017.

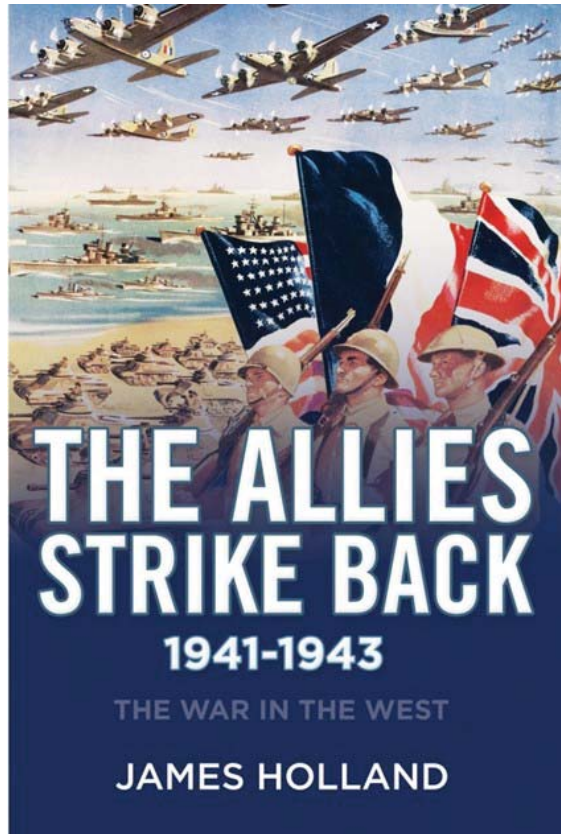
Book Review

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Just what the world needs, another book on World War Two serving as an anthology of sorts. Bookshelves and Amazon are littered with single to multi-volume works that if not turgid, offer little new in the way of scholarship or interest. The publicity for James Holland's *The War in the West* World War Two trilogy boasted that it is "the second world war as you've never read it before." Well, for many it will be just that. It is without reservation that this reviewer can say that Holland's works actually do meet this stringent test of "does the world need another such work." It is indeed needed and wanted—especially if it is the trilogy that James Holland is currently



writing. Holland's newest work *The Allies Strike Back* is that rare World War Two anthology that is indeed a page turner. The first volume, *The Rise of Germany, 1939-1941: The War in the West* was a very pleasant surprise indeed. This reviewer first became acquainted with Holland after reading his book, *The Battle of Britain: Five Months that Changed the World*. That was a more than pleasant surprise as it was more than simply a polished retread of the shopworn story of the

Battle of Britain.

As in *The Battle of Britain*, what Holland excels at is combining great storytelling with good, solid research. Holland's narrative is interspersed with numerous first person accounts that never threaten to overwhelm the main themes. His brilliant selection of these participants shed new light on how the war impacted the individual, from the North Atlantic, to the steppes of Russia, or the North African battle plain. Holland has six pages of principal characters. This reviewer researched one of Holland's many characters, the French film actress Corinne Luchaire who was reputed to be beautiful, but was also a collaborator (as was Coco Chanel). After the war, the French executed her father for treason and sentenced her to the *dégradation nationale*, which revoked her political, civil, and professional rights. The Chicago Daily Tribune noted her death by "BEAUTY CALLED A QUISLING NO.1 DIES IN FRANCE." It is those types of character thumbnails that make this truly a worthy read—it is not just about the Rommel's of the war. It is entertaining, and unlike the first volume *War in the West*, which had some small factual issues, *The Allies Strike Back* does not readily suffer from that pain. However, there are some errors. For instance, Holland called the HMS *Repulse* a *Renown*-class battlecruiser a battleship in his discussion of its sinking on 10 December 1941. He referred to Henry Stimson as the US Secretary of State for War when he was the Secretary of War and claimed that Rommel took command of the Deutsche Panzerkorps in February 1942 when it was 1941. The reader will be more than pleasantly surprised at Holland's treatments of Operation Barbarossa and in general the Eastern Front. Any more than a casual student of history knows how much archival material there is to draw upon, and with the temporary opening of the Soviet World War Two archives, the amount of material became much richer. Holland's overall choices draw upon enough of the familiar to allow the casual reader to know where they are at in the war, but he goes beyond that for the more serious student.

Fairly or not, many informed readers judge new works on World War Two by new material, as time after time authors present the same images of American soldiers trudging up the beaches at Normandy on D-Day. It is difficult to think that the work is not going to be in essence a retread when the photographs and maps are yawn inducing for having been used seemingly infinitum in other works. Although the maps and diagrams chosen by Holland are in shades of gray and white primarily, they are of great interest. Some of his diagrams include the Luftwaffe Air Defense in the West, types of merchant vessels, the Murmansk convoy routes, and how ASDIC worked with the Hedgehog U-Boat weapon. Each one merits comments. The location of flying schools AND night-fighting schools

are noted on the Luftwaffe map while the merchant vessel diagram allows readers to see the ship in their mind based on the author's handy reference chart. The Murmansk convoy route shows the mean ice pack limits (a search of other books with such a map did not uncover similar features), while the ASDIC-Hedgehog diagram allows the reader to grasp how the two systems worked together to hunt and kill U-boats. Holland's judicious use of facts like noting that in 1942, the Germans had seventeen different tank guns in production, illustrates his sense of how an economy of scale haunted the Third Reich in the war of the factories.

Holland states in his introduction, "There is not, however the space . . . to give the War in the East the detailed attention it deserves." This might give a reader the mistaken impression that Holland then in essence deals with the Eastern Front in an abstract manner. Far from it as Holland gives more time to it than was expected. More importantly, Holland briefly goes down the Third Reich War of Annihilation path in theory with its infamous "Hunger Plan," with modern facts elaborated on in greater detail in the popular work *Ostkrieg* and the official German History of World War Two, *Germany and the Second World War: Volumes IV and IV/I, The Attack on the Soviet Union*. This is not the clean Deutsches Heer (German Army) fighting the good war against Asiatic Bolshevism to defend the west, a popular myth the Germans somewhat successfully "sold."

What will really sell readers on the book, though, is the author's command of the newer facts. It is an established fact that to motorize the Heer for the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Third Reich stripped conquered Europe of its vehicles. By the end of 1940, France, the most motorized nation in Europe, was down to eight percent of its prewar vehicles. Context matters and Holland provides that repeatedly, such as letting readers know that the Heer was invading the Soviet Union—which was ten times larger than France was—with an Army that was only slightly larger. However, the book contains some European and British colloquialisms that might throw a reader off, such as the use of the term "metalled roads" (unsurfaced), or worth a "punt" (bet). Field Marschall Erhard Milch, often portrayed as a buffoon and out of his league, readers learn was the only senior commander who, when Operation Barbarossa was finally given the green light, ordered new woolen underwear, fur boots, and sheepskins for Luftwaffe personnel. If anything, a recurrent theme of Holland's is how well the Luftwaffe performed during the course of the war despite never getting an operational pause to catch its breath. Few readers realize that during the epic Battle of Moscow in 1941 thirty percent of Soviet tanks were British. Holland rightfully spans the European-centric view of the German military and its civilian leadership for its conduct of the Battle of the Atlantic. Holland goes into some detail that a U-Boat had been

successfully developed that could run underwater all the time, powered by hydrogen peroxide. This was a war game-changer, but the “Naval Staff demurred. The costs were too high; it might mean interrupting current U-boat production; and there was unease about its safety,”—this despite the fact that Allied airpower was now becoming a major factor in limiting U-boat operations.

Holland tells readers “Moscow was never bombed by anything close to a mass raid.” That is true within the context of what Germany would later endure from the RAF and the USAAF, but on 21 July 1941, the Germans bombed Moscow with 195 planes. His assertion that the “fully mechanized forces of the Deutsche Afrikakorps would have been worth its weight in gold on the Eastern Front” is perhaps an overstated claim. Military history gamers always consider that tantalizing “what if,” but invariably reach the conclusion that the vastness of the Eastern Front would have swallowed up the Afrikakorps in a way to make it moot. His argument that Japan needed to strike for the resources of the Far East (true), the best of which lay in the hands of the British (true), the US (?), and the Dutch (true) is perhaps off in its inclusion of the Philippines for resources.

Holland pays just enough attention to some of the war’s less glamorous aspects like the war of the factories, from American production snafus to the evacuation of much of the Soviet heavy industry in advance of the German Army. He talks not only strategy, but also about culmination points in terms of Clausewitz. He even mentions that the refrain of the common German soldier “If the Fuhrer only knew,” a shield of sorts for Hitler, was lost once he took over command of the Eastern Front.

Without question, Holland’s writing style is among the more engaging out there, drawing the jaded World War Two reader into this work. There is little question that both his narrative skills and his research are both top-notch. The real treat for the both the casual reader as well as acolyte of World War Two history is Holland’s astute eye for building new facts and analysis into a fresh revisionism of World War Two history that has had times almost approached insufferably unassailable myth. For readers who like fresh history with an abundance of new facts, this book should merit high consideration.