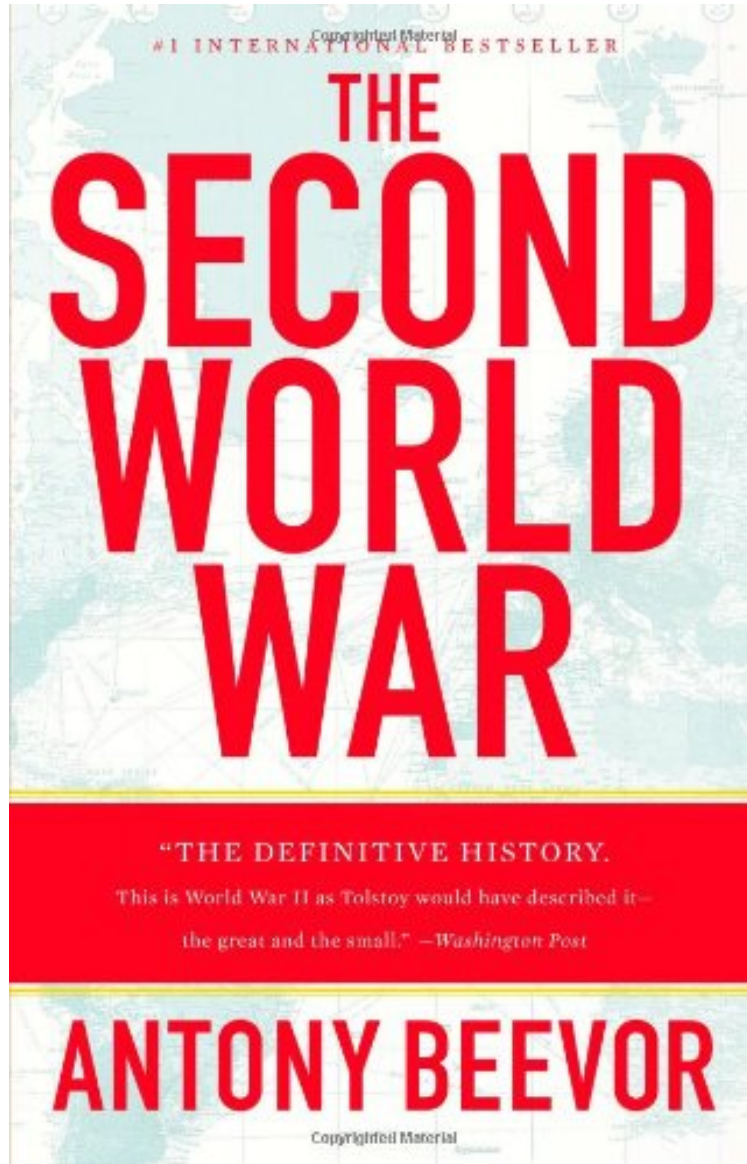


[FREE] The Second World War

## The Second World War

*Antony Beevor*

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**Antony Beevor : The Second World War** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Second World War:

290 of 294 people found the following review helpful. This book vs "Inferno" by Max Hastings...By LakeThere are two interesting recent books out that detail the vast scope of WWII. I've bought both (and read other histories of the war), and can give some details as to their differences. This book is a typical descriptive historical narrative of the war.

It is great single source for those who haven't read a comprehensive history of it. It fairly and with good balance describes the political background and military events and while the writing is somewhat prosaic it is not 'dry', and it gives a well detailed overview of the events. Hastings book "Inferno" (published in Britain as "All Hell Let Loose") carries with it a lot more personal observations from diaries, letters, etc of the participants, and clearly is written with the authors own subjective interpretation or points of view on the events, rather than being a pure description of the historical events. The writing is more elegant and provocative, as befits the journalist background of the author. If one has no knowledge of this titanic struggle I would start with Beevor's book so as to capture the events and timelines as they historically occurred, written in a very readable manner. On the other hand if one is familiar with most of the history I would recommend Hastings' book as a source of opinionated (but supported) insight, along with the many descriptions of the war by participants that are included in his narrative and relate to the historical events. Both are excellent in their own ways. They provide: 1) in the terms of Beevor's book a well written and accurate single volume historical description of the war and 2) in Hastings a more 'op-ed' description with personal stories of the conflict that he has derived from letters, diaries, interviews etc. 275 of 289 people found the following review helpful. A panoramic tale of woe and triumph from a master historian By Ashutosh S. Jogalekar The sheer immensity of the Second World War is even now, after more ink has been spilt on it than on almost any other event in history, almost impossible to grasp. The war affected countless people in every conceivable small and big way, it changed the fate of innumerable nations and set the tone for issues with which we are still grappling, and it showcased the very best and very worst in human nature. Very few historians are capable of capturing this epic panorama of tragedy and triumph on paper. Happily for us, Antony Beevor is one of those chosen few who can. In the past few decades he has established himself as a war historian of the first rank. This volume can be seen as the culmination of a stellar career during which he has introduced us to the very nature of war and its human elements. Beevor's sweeping, magisterial account of this great conflict excels in three ways that are characteristic of his past scholarship on D-Day, Stalingrad and Berlin. Firstly, Beevor delivers the raw strategic and historical facts with a relentless, crisp pace, covering all major events, participants and theaters of war. The history is informed by a treasure trove of material cited in the notes, including personal sources such as the invaluable diary of Soviet correspondent Vasily Grossman. There are 50 chapters and the title of each chapter reflects the one or two key events narrated in it. The brevity of the chapters makes the book accessible and great for bedtime reading. A particular skill of Beevor's is in condensing the most important information in relatively brief paragraphs. Rather than provide separate extended quotes from the prime participants, he excerpts these quotes within the paragraphs. Even a book that is 800 pages long cannot possibly spend too much time on every single event; Beevor understands this and is remarkably facile at saying much in a minimum number of words. It's also worth comparing this volume with the acclaimed recent book by Max Hastings. Hastings's is more of an on-the-ground perspective detailing the travails and triumphs of ordinary people. Beevor's is a higher-level account that nonetheless includes enough personal details to bring out the brutality of the war. Both are outstanding. Unlike many other works, Beevor begins his story not with the traditional German invasion of Poland in 1939 but with the Soviet defeat of the Japanese in Manchuria one month earlier. In fact one of the major strengths of the book that sets it apart from many other volumes is its constant focus on the conflict in the Far East between Japan, China and the Soviet Union whose origins preceded European events. This theme surfaces regularly in the book as it should since the Japanese invasion of China, as exemplified by the horrific Rape of Nanking, was as momentous for the future of the war as anything else. Along the same lines, while Beevor does cover major battles in Europe and the Pacific like the Battle of Britain, France, El Alamein, Stalingrad, Pearl Harbor, Normandy, Italy, Midway and the U-Boat conflict with verve and clarity, he also has separate detailed chapters on (relatively) minor but still key war zones like Egypt, Greece and Burma. An especially rousing story is of the small Finnish army virtually demolishing the overwhelmingly large Soviet forces at the start of the war through guerrilla warfare. Large, clear maps displaying movements and sites of major battles accompany every account. Descriptions of weapons systems, code-breaking and terrain-specific equipment all benefit from Beevor's concise style. In chapters on the Holocaust and Soviet purges, he chillingly documents the incalculably horrific crimes of the twentieth century's two genocidal tyrants, Hitler and Stalin, even as he does not fail to detail their shrewd genius in manipulating human beings and events. Stalin especially clearly comes across as an egomaniacal but calculating strategist who ensured his share of the postwar spoils during meetings with Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta, Tehran and Potsdam. Secondly, just as he did in past works, Beevor is remarkable at documenting the human element in the war in all its terrifying cruelty and redeeming glory. All the horrors of the war are on full display here; the NKVD murdering its own people by the hundreds of thousands, the Japanese mutilating Chinese women with bayonets, the cold killing soldiers so swiftly that they resembled grotesque ice sculptures, the citizens of Leningrad eating their own children in the face of desperate starvation and madness, Russian soldiers raping every female between eight and eighty after "liberating" Berlin, and of course, the systematic, industrialized mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust. One of Beevor's more gruesome new revelations is the rather widespread practice of cannibalism among the Japanese, with both the local population and POWs being consumed to various extents throughout the Pacific occupation. Another particularly disturbing and startling fact which I was not aware of concerns horrible experiments with biological agents performed on American POWs by Japanese doctors, often with

fatal results. The disturbing thing is that Douglas MacArthur granted immunity from prosecution to these doctors in the hope that they would provide detailed records to the Allies. This story only drives home the fact that the war which Beevor writes of was unimaginably horrific and blurred moral boundaries, and particularly because it is unimaginably so, the passage of time should never blind us to it. While many deeds in the war were undoubtedly immoral, ambiguous morality was also a constant theme, whether it concerned MacArthur's behavior or the strategic bombing of German cities. We are still debating these issues. But there are also acts of incredible altruism described in here; ordinary Germans sacrificing themselves to protect Jews, hopelessly outnumbered Jews rising against monstrous despots (as in the Warsaw uprising), and people transcending religion, class and political sentiments to save the lives of total strangers. These accounts are accompanied by characteristically vivid - and at times amusing - character sketches which concisely showcase the essential qualities of major participants; for instance, Chamberlain is out of depth with his "winged collar, Edwardian mustache and rolled umbrella". All major human alliances, including the famously successful relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt, are chronicled with wit, compassion and insight. Another of Beevor's talents is in conveying the sheer absurdity and surreal nature of war; for example there's Hermann Goering complaining about the price of shattered glass panes during Kristallnacht, and the French gingerly broadcasting a song named "I will wait" even as German forces amassed across the border in plain sight in 1940. Most emblematic of how downright bizarre war can be is the story of a Korean private named Yang Kyoungjong who was captured and conscripted successively by the Japanese, the Soviets and the Germans. Finally, Beevor does a stunning job at giving us an idea of the sheer irrationality and utterly brutalizing nature of war and how it changes everyone and everything. Fifty or sixty years after the fact, the Second World War appears like a series of rationally realized if tragic incidents culminating in the victory of good over evil. It's accounts like this that dispel that illusion and tell us that so many events were just based on good or bad luck. But in concluding this magisterial narrative, Beevor leaves us with the caveat that in the irrationality of war lies hope, the possibility that things could have been different had people acted just a little differently. In case of the Second World War that would have translated to France, Britain and the United States recognizing Hitler's ominous and growing power in the 30s and banding together to stop him. Of course it is convenient to conclude this in hindsight, but it still makes a case for always being alert in recognizing the wrong turns that human nature can take. Indeed, Beevor reminds us in the end that "moral choice is the fundamental element in human drama, because it lies at the very heart of humanity itself". This is a lesson we should remember until the end of time.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Significant Strengths, Significant Weaknesses By Dr. Philip J. Kinsler

No author writing about WWII can cover the entire conflict in one volume without choosing to emphasize certain material and paying less attention to other material. After all, Churchill took many volumes to discuss his experiences and points of view. Having read enormous amounts of WWII material over 50 years, here are what I feel Beevor chose as emphases and which led to both the strengths and weaknesses of the book.

Strength-- the detailed descriptions of the China-Japan conflict with more attention paid to it than in other one volume works...Strength-- An attempt, though overdone and repetitious, to discuss the use of rape and the casualness of killing civilians by all armies and at different intensities. War dehumanizes. Strength-- Chapters on the Shoah (Holocaust) by shooting and by gas as two different and differentially organized events. Strength-- Use of statements by common soldiers about what their experiences were on the different fronts. This is also a...Weakness-- vastly overdone quotations from ordinary soldiers about their experiences. How many times did we need to hear about lice and trench foot? Once was enough and other instances could have been referenced to one original description. Repetitive and overdone. Weakness-- Horrendously judgmental character sketches of the major players written in a couple of sentences with no backup. Weakness-- Overly focused on British activities. Weakness-- Presentism-- Judging the events of the past using perspectives unknown at the time of the events. Weakness-- Beevor just does not like Churchill and commits character assassination at every opportunity. One wonders if he even read Churchill's memoirs of the war to discover his thinking. Weakness-- Writing Roosevelt off as a naive lightweight. Weakness-- the maps, oy vey, the maps. Beevor commits the sin of using maps that often do not have the units he writes about in the text present on the maps. He regularly makes statements like "it was obvious that General X had to attack on the line from A to B without either town on his maps. Frustrating! Weakness-- Assuming that the US lack of desire to make troop movements to attempt to block the Red Army were silly and naive and the Cold War was the result. As the Italy campaign showed, attacks from the Mediterranean theatre might never have ended the war. And Russian troops had orders to start WWII if we tried to take Berlin. Worth reading for its scope and unique contributions just don't swallow the human judgments and one liners about people's characters as gospel.

A masterful and comprehensive new chronicle of World War II, by internationally bestselling historian Antony Beevor.

Praise for THE SECOND WORLD WAR: "[Beevor's] book is the definitive history. This is World War II as Tolstoy would have described it - the great and the small."?Washington Post" Antony Beevor's The Second World War is simply the ultimate Second World War history: it brings these vast events to life, from high strategy to suffering humanity, from the dictators to the ordinary soldier."?Simon Sebag Montefiore, Daily Telegraph" A powerful narrative

of World War II...a gripping account...Beevor's trademark...is the use of eyewitness testimony to deliver haunting particulars."?Richard Toye, New York Times Book "Ever present is Beevor's skill in blending the strategizing of military chiefs with the ordinary soldiers they ordered about. . . Few will match his masterly overview, and no one will be unmoved by the ordeals and achievements that he so powerfully describes."?Globe and Mail"The Second World War is a comprehensive capstone...a page-turner...[and] a kaleidoscope of individual experiences in a context of continuous choices...[Beevor's] command of a comprehensive spectrum of sources enables him to present the war from the perspective of its participants...Beevor brilliantly shows, at all levels, that WWII defies easy generalization."?Publishers Weekly"Beevor has delivered an epic, brilliantly researched work on the defining event of the 20th century... his new research and his pitch-perfect narrative represent a truly astonishing display of art and craft... This book, which crowns Beevor's distinguished and bestselling career, is one of the nonfiction events of the decade and for this reader, is by far the best nonfiction of 2012 to date."?Stephen Frater, author of Hell Above Earth, Sarasota Herald-Tribune"In this kaleidoscopic, one-volume account, a prize-winning historian shows his eye for telling anecdotes, his command of myriad facts, his sharply evocative prose and his skill at conjuring the big picture."?New Orleans Times-Picayune"Anyone looking for a comprehensive military history of the Second World War that combines high strategy and politics but also takes full account of the war's human dimensions need look no further."?Winnipeg Free Press"A general history of the war needs to embrace this variety of experience and capture the interplay between the momentous events unfolding on different continents and the high seas. Antony Beevor effectively meets this challenge. A former British army officer and author of admired works on Stalingrad and the Allied invasion of Normandy, Beevor is a gifted writer who knows how to keep a good story rolling. . . The brutality and courage of individual soldiers and civilians emerge in Beevor's powerful accounts. . . Beevor's book is a pleasure to read and an example of intelligent, lively historical writing at its best."?The Financial Times"Every page is imbued with the sense that this man really knows what he is talking about ... Beevor's human and logistical capacities, in combination, inform the gripping accounts of some of the great set-piece confrontations that determined the outcome of the war."?Peter Clarke, The New Republic"Antony Beevor makes the reader believe in the impossible: that he could write a history of magisterial authority about the greatest war of modern times and do justice to the global reach of that war...."?The Washington Times"Readers who may instinctively recoil from another book about the worldwide turmoil of 1939-1945 would be unwise to ignore this one. . . Always at ease with the conduct of battle, Beevor displays his grasp of the German Army's professionalism and tactical skill at all levels of command, as well as Stalin's metamorphosis from paranoid political tyrant to master of history's most enormous battlefield. . . Once action is joined and false assumptions are exposed, Beevor is ruthless in dissecting them, whether featured in the fortunes of friend, foe or - despite their grit and resolve - in our own armed forces."?Michael Tillotson, The Times"Brilliantly written...Beevor's account [is] incomparably vivid...[a] magnificently readable book."?The New York of Books"You feel yourself being carried along on the narrative flow, channeled this way and that through the pools and rapids by Beevor's expert helmsmanship. As we have come to expect from the author, great events are leavened by telling vignettes and anecdotes."?Patrick Bishop, Standpoint"An outstanding example of narrative history at its best, at once scholarly, enlightening, entertaining and thought-provoking."?The Tablet"Everything is pared down to serve the relentless thrust of his storytelling. The result is a magnificent performance - true excitement from one page to the next delivered in faultless prose. . . Beevor offers superbly vivid accounts, often with tiny details that will surprise even those who gorge themselves on shot and ball histories."?Christopher Silvester, Daily Express"The chapters on the Nazi-Soviet war find Beevor at the top of his game, in command of a huge range of sources, with a fine eye for place and detail, deftly manipulating incident and character, and making effective use of soldiers' diaries and letters to create a vast human tapestry of war. The prose is relaxed and contains a spring in every paragraph. He excels too at grand strategy - as a diplomatic historian, he is a match for AJP Taylor. The conferences at Casablanca, Tehran, Yalta and so on, which can have their longeurs, here sparkle with wit and insight, especially into the behaviour of Stalin. There are revelations too."?Ben Shephard, Observer"This book is a perfect mixture of world history and human experience, unbiased and highly readable."?The Journal"Brocaded with details of the great campaigns and thoughtful explanations of Hitler's murderous belligerency, The Second World War is an absorbing, unsparingly lucid work of military history...exceptionally powerful."?Ian Thomson, The Spectator"Antony Beevor's remarkably informative and well-written book . . . Beevor's enormous strength is that he can sketch out complicated campaigns clearly. . . Antony Beevor has done splendid justice to this [the bombing of Germany] and to a very great deal else."?Norman Stone, Literary "A war epic close to perfection."?Mail on Sunday"The level of operational command, rather than grand strategy or the horrors of front line experience, shapes the magisterial narrative of the Second World War. Its military history is presented chronologically, with chapter titles which convey the simultaneity and interconnectedness of events in very different theatres. This is the place to begin if you need to get your knowledge of the war in order. Beevor is not afraid to quote the familiar when it is important or to let his favourite voices have their say but he also provides plenty of fresh insights for those who kid themselves that they know the story already."?Hew Strachan, Evening Standard"This is history writ large. . . unexpected vignettes linger in the memory."?Daily Telegraph"This memorable vignette is one of hundreds in Antony Beevor's utterly absorbing history of the Second World War. Beevor

is justly celebrated for recounting the human realities of war. . . Beevor is committed to telling the truth about war, with all its painful contradictions. . . Beevor does not flinch: this is as comprehensive and objective account of the course of the war as we are likely to get, and the most humanly moving to date."?John Gray, *New Statesman*"Judged against his own high standards of readability there is no doubt that *The Second World War* succeeds very well indeed. . . This is an immensely readable book, not least for the manner in which it blends together high strategy with the view from below. . . A masterful narrative history."?History Today "If you only know the outlines of World War II, I would very heartily recommend it."?Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic* "His monumental and magisterial history of the Second World War . . . Beevor is excellent at catching the individual in the flood tide of events. . . Few can match his superbly controlled narrative."?Sunday Express "With engaging prose and a remarkable ability to clarify and simplify massive and complex events, Beevor has once again demonstrated why he is a pre-eminent historian on the subject...the book is essential reading for anyone seeking to learn more about World War II and its consequences...[it] is always captivating and informative...It is hard to imagine how he will ever top this masterpiece of historical scholarship."?Army Magazine "The narrative never flags and the myriad pieces of this intricate kaleidoscope are pieced together with exemplary skill...This is a splendid book, erudite, with admirable clarity of thought and expression."?Roger Moorhouse, *The Independent* on Sunday Praise for *D-DAY*: "Glorious, horrifying...D-Day is a vibrant work of history that honors the sacrifice of tens of thousands of men and women."?Time "One of Beevor's strengths is his ability to describe the day-to-day experience of ordinary soldiers: the food, the weather, the smells, the humor, the fear. . . Perhaps this is what makes Beevor's *D-Day* such terrific reading. It details the shattering reality of D-Day and the months of savage fighting that followed instead of offering empty mythologizing. This is that rare hardcover worth your valuable attention and money."?USA Today "The first impression on seeing *D-Day* on the bookshelf might be a question, "Why yet another book on D-Day?" The answer comes through in the detailed research and exhaustive treatment of individual stories as the Allies lodged ashore and then advanced on that fateful day and after, all the way to Paris...For anyone with any interest at all in World War II in Europe, especially the time from the landings through the liberation of Paris, *D-Day* is the book for you."?Vice-Admiral Robert F. Dunn, *Washington Times* "This is a superb book and a model of the historian's craft. It stands as the best one-volume history of this decisive military engagement."?Christian Science Monitor "His account of atrocities on both sides, of errors committed and of surpassing bravery makes for excellent -- though often blood-soaked -- reading. Beevor gets better with each book."?Kirkus s "Beevor's history is becoming World War II's definitive account."?Minneapolis Star-Tribune "Beevor's book is a great look at how we think about "good" and "evil."?Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic* About the Author Antony Beevor served as a regular officer in the 11th Hussars in Germany. He is the author of *Crete-The Battle and the Resistance*, which won a Runciman Prize, *Paris After the Liberation, 1944-1949* (written with his wife Artemis Cooper), *Stalingrad*, which won the Samuel Johnson Prize, the Wolfson Prize for History and the Hawthornden Prize for Literature, *Berlin-The Downfall*, which received the first Longman-History Today Trustees' Award, *The Mystery of Olga Chekhova* and, most recently, the bestseller, *D-Day*. He lives in London.