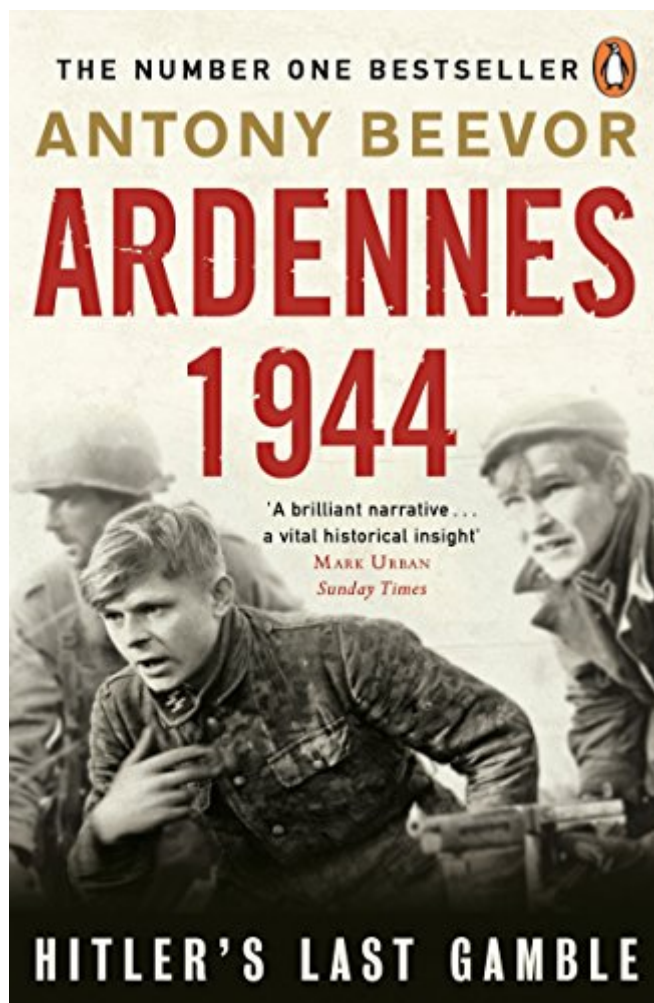


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Ardennes 1944: Hitler's Last Gamble



Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *Stalingrad*, *Berlin* and *D-Day*, Antony Beevor's *Ardennes 1944: Hitler's Last Gamble* tells the story of the German's ill-fated final stand. On 16 December, 1944, Hitler launched his 'last gamble' in the snow-covered forests and gorges of the Ardennes. He believed he could split the Allies by driving all the way to Antwerp, then force the Canadians and the British out of the war. Although his generals were doubtful of success, younger officers and NCOs were desperate to believe that their homes and families could be saved from the vengeful Red Army approaching from the east. Many were exultant at the prospect of striking back. The Ardennes offensive, with more than a million men involved, became the greatest battle of the war in western Europe. American troops, taken by surprise, found themselves fighting two panzer armies. Belgian civilians fled, justifiably afraid of German revenge. Panic spread even to Paris. While many American soldiers fled or surrendered, others held on heroically, creating breakwaters which slowed the German advance. The harsh winter conditions and the savagery of the battle became comparable to the eastern front. And after massacres by the *Waffen-SS*, even American generals approved when their men shot down surrendering Germans. The Ardennes was the battle which finally broke the back of the *Wehrmacht*.

'Revealing, profound and thoroughly unputdownable, *Stalingrad* is an extraordinary achievement which transcends its genre' Vitali Vitaliev, *Daily Telegraph* (on *Stalingrad*) 'This brilliant storyteller. . . makes us feel the chaos and the fear as if every drop of blood was our own: that is his gift. It is much more than just a humane account; it is compellingly readable, deeply researched and beautifully written' Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Spectator* (on *Berlin*) 'This is a terrific, inspiring, heart-breaking book. It makes the argument all over again that the world would be an infinitely better place if it didn't keep producing subject matter for military historians: but as long as it does, we can rejoice that at the top of that profession is Antony Beevor' Sam Leith, *Daily Mail* (on *D-Day*) 'His book is the definitive history. This is World War II as Tolstoy would have described it - the great and the small' Gerard DeGroot, *Washington Post* (on *The Second World War*) Antony Beevor is the renowned author of *Stalingrad*, which won the Samuel Johnson Prize, the Wolfson Prize for History and the Hawthornden Prize for Literature, and *Berlin*, which received the first Longman-History Today Trustees' Award. His books have appeared in thirty foreign editions and sold over six million copies.

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Customer Reviews

This is one of the best books that I have read on "The Battle of the Bulge." It does a nice job of laying out the preliminaries, as Adolf Hitler contemplated a grand offensive to turn the Third Reich's fortunes around. It did not work--and the book notes why it did not. Lack of fuel for the tanks, lack of focus on the ultimate goal, wasting too much energy on taking Bastogne, and so on. . . .The volume outlines the bravery of American troops who were overwhelmed at the outset of the unexpected offensive. They slowed the advance of the Panzers and allowed American forces to join the fray--from the two airborne divisions assigned to come into play and a segment of George Patton's army and the annoying "Monty" with British forces. The story of this book is the tenacity and bravery of both German and American/British forces. The Germans took heavy casualties as they advanced; the Americans tenaciously fought back, using bazookas and other weapons against the impressive German tanks. The book details appalling episodes (such as the wanton killing of American troops at Malmedy and American reprisals against Germans who tried to surrender). As William Sherman once said: "War is all Hell" (or something close to that). The book also explores the politics of the Allies--with Monty striving for advantage and Dwight Eisenhower trying to keep matters under control. The tensions among Omar Bradley, Monty, and Eisenhower is nicely depicted. But the detail in telling the story of the different armies--American, British, and German--is the centerpiece of this story. Readers will learn a great deal about the actuality of the struggle--and the usual Hitlerian ineptitude that blunted the German initiative. A good read. . . .

more of what I expected from Antony Beevor's writing. He is extremely detailed on military matters without going too deeply into a shot-by-shot coverage. The scope in this book is much more compressed than any other of his I've read, with at least 1/3rd of the chapters covering individual days between December 21stish to December 26th, before resuming the usual thematic scheme rather than strict chronological coverage. I'd gotten used to hearing personal stories from Hitler and the Wehrmacht and SS point of view with books like *The Fall of Berlin 1945*, and was slightly disappointed that there was a lot less of that in this book. Instead, there's a focus on a great deal of US generals and commanders, sometimes with highly similar or unremarkable names, and almost no pictures of them among the picture-sections to be able to distinguish between them. Meanwhile, Wehrmacht and SS generals Sepp Dietrich, Hasso von Manteuffel, Model, Kokott, and Peiper all get pictures. Unfortunately, (perhaps as a result of the highly compressed nature of the offensive) there is a lot of repetition and overlap in several of the chapters, including some pseudo-spoilers about the fates of certain regiments and divisions being completely wiped out, only to have them show up a hundred pages later fresh into battle. Descriptions of certain army groups and movements start to blur together and it becomes impossible to keep track of what's happening. At least the SS and Wehrmacht divisions are fewer in number or have nicknames attached to them like "Führer Begleit", "Hitler Jugend", "Das Reich", "Hohenstaufen", while the same handful of German divisions are constantly in use, like the 3rd Panzergrenadiers, the 26th and 560th Volksgrenadiers, and the 2nd SS Panzer division. Some situations seem to not be given the appropriate coverage or tone by the author, such as the incident with Montgomery's assuming direct control over US armies in the northern shoulder and the ensuing backlash, which is treated as just another series of events by the author, yet is later described as being somehow the most catastrophic incident to the Allies, which some people believed would've caused the Western Allies to completely split apart. Another minor issue I have is with the map placement. Since so many chapters go over individual days, you are always having to go back several dozen, then several hundred pages to find the maps, separated by location and sometimes by different army movements. The worst part is some of the maps cover events unfolding over a period of 5 or more days, and are placed right at the beginning of a chapter well before you're even aware of what the map is depicting. There are two such maps devoted solely to the encirclement and destruction of a single US division which is here and gone in the first half of the chapter, and then only one map covering the Kampfgruppe Peiper advance and the locations of places like Stavelot and St Vith, which is then referred to dozens of times for the next 200 pages. Much more than his other books, this is one where you have to pay lots of attention and

most likely take notes since you're unlikely to read through it all in one session

To my mind, Antony Beevor's greatest strength as a writer is his unerring ability to walk the fine line between taking the academic view of the "serious historian" and the more populist style of such authors as Stephen Ambrose. "Ardennes 1944" also walks this line well. It takes the reader into the freezing foxholes and shell-scrapes where Allied and German soldiers huddle, tired and hungry, waiting to fight off the next attack. Then we're with the generals, men such as Patton, Bradley, Montgomery, not to mention Eisenhower and Hitler. Beevor lays out the causes and motivations behind "Hitler's last gamble" at the beginning of the book, and then we get to sit back and watch the dominoes falling. We see the Americans, British, and other allies taken off-guard by the German surprise attack; see Patton's Third Army rush to reinforce the besieged airborne forces struggling to hold on to Bastogne; and then watch the offensive falter, die, and fall prey to the inevitable Allied counter-attack that finished off Hitler's last hope for stalemate in the west. The book runs to around 370 pages of actual historical narrative, a decent length which means that none of the combatants get short shrift. The chapters are broken down on a day-by-day basis, following the events of the battle chronologically. Beevor's style can occasionally be a little on the dry side, yet the book is never dull. Very much recommend for those interested in the events of World War II.

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