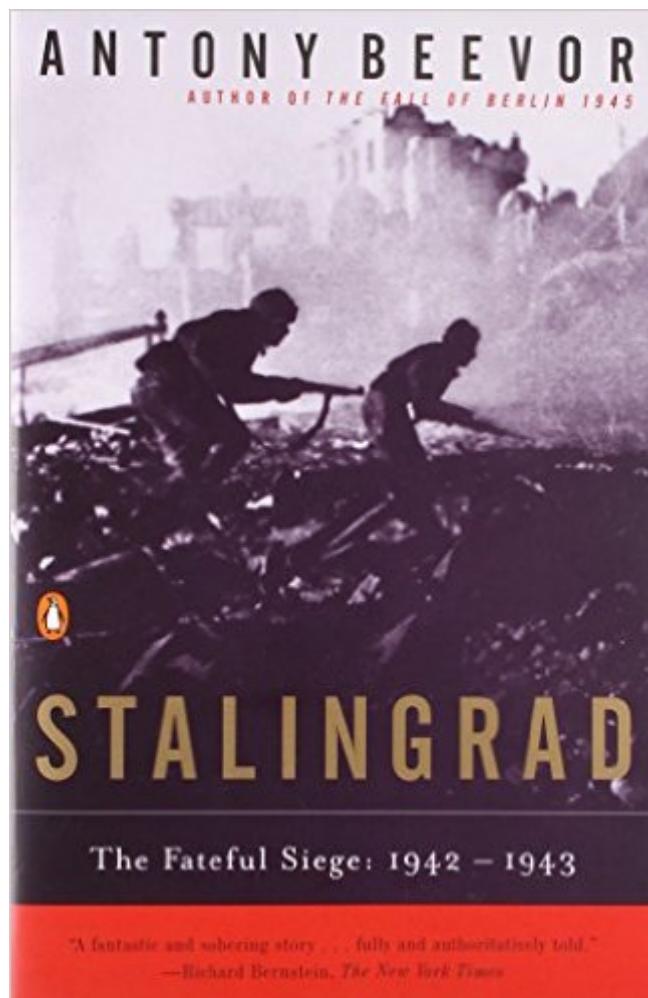


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Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943



Synopsis

The Battle of Stalingrad was not only the psychological turning point of World War II: it also changed the face of modern warfare. Beevor's latest book, *Ardennes 1944: The Battle of the Bulge*, is now available from Viking Books. Historians and reviewers worldwide have hailed Antony Beevor's magisterial *Stalingrad* as the definitive account of World War II's most harrowing battle. In August 1942, Hitler's huge Sixth Army reached the city that bore Stalin's name. In the five-month siege that followed, the Russians fought to hold Stalingrad at any cost; then, in an astonishing reversal, encircled and trapped their Nazi enemy. This battle for the ruins of a city cost more than a million lives. *Stalingrad* conveys the experience of soldiers on both sides, fighting in inhuman conditions, and of civilians trapped on an urban battlefield. Antony Beevor has interviewed survivors and discovered completely new material in a wide range of German and Soviet archives, including prisoner interrogations and reports of desertions and executions. As a story of cruelty, courage, and human suffering, *Stalingrad* is unprecedented and unforgettable.

Book Information

Paperback: 528 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; 1st edition (May 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140284583

ISBN-13: 978-0140284584

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.2 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (508 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #71,709 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #106 in Books > History > Military > Strategy #131 in Books > History > Asia > Russia #144 in Books > History > Europe > Germany

Customer Reviews

This book by noted writer Antony Beevor joins three others that are essential English language "classics" on Stalingrad. These important books are John Erickson's "The Road to Stalingrad: Stalin's War with Germany" and Joel Hayward's "Stopped at Stalingrad: The Luftwaffe and Hitler's Defeat in the East 1942-1943" and Earl Ziemke and Magna Bauer's "Moscow to Stalingrad: Decision in the East". Beevor has used all three and produced a work that is the least academic but arguably most exciting of all. He has also used Manfred Kehrig's "Stalingrad: Analyse und

Dokumentation einer Schlacht" which is not available in English --- sadly. Beevor also uses the latest research on the Soviets, including the books by David Glantz. He paid researchers to translate unpublished Soviet documents, which also enrich his text. The book is clearly an excellent overview of the efforts put into winning at Stalingrad by both sides. As scholars have noted in learned articles, Beevor ignores airpower and only deals sketchily with strategy, but his narrative of the human experience of warfare is more than compensatory.

I first read this book during the summer of 1999 and had never heard of the author beforehand. I took to him immediately and experienced considerable difficulty putting Stalingrad down. I usually read three or four books at a time but could not with Stalingrad as it became my sole concern until it was finished. Beevor makes use of outstanding primary source materials and his narrative technique makes one feel as if you have secret access to the innermost recesses of the minds of Chuikov, Paulus, Zhukov, von Manstein, and, of course, Hitler and Stalin. It reminded me of the old PBS documentary, "Battleground" for the way in which it flowed. Buy it, I guarantee you won't regret it.

Several months ago, I reviewed (5 stars) a novel entitled WAR OF THE RATS, ostensibly based on the factual battlefield achievements of the real-life, Soviet Army master sniper, Vasily Zaitsev, during the German siege of Stalingrad during World War II. Wishing to learn more about this horrific struggle, I sought out this book, STALINGRAD, a narrative history of the fight authored by Antony Beevor. STALINGRAD begins, as it must, on June 21, 1941 with the launching of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union by three Army Groups - North, Center and South. Beevor first summarizes from a wide perspective Army Group Center's attack on, and repulse from, Moscow, and Army Group South's surge towards the Volga River and the Caucasus Mountains. Then, the focus is narrowed onto the Sixth Army's and Fourth Panzer Army's drive to Stalingrad and the Volga in the summer of '42. The last three-quarters of the volume then limits itself to the Stalingrad siege, the Soviet counterattack on, and encirclement of, the Sixth and Fourth Panzer armies, their subsequent subjugation, and, finally, the fate of the 91,000 Germans taken prisoner. The main characters of the drama are all brought onto the stage: Hitler, Paulus, Schmidt, von Richthofen, Stalin, Zhukov, Yeremenko, Chuikov, and Rokossovsky. This is a very reader-friendly account for the simple reason that the author supplies enough information, including maps, to keep the narrative moving along without getting bogged down in the minutiae of minor troop movements and a superabundance of unit designations. He's also included (in the paperback edition) two

adequate sections of photographs - always a much appreciated touch. The volume met, if not exceeded, my expectations, and I learned a lot. During the Siege, there was desperate heroism on both sides. But, it was also war at its most brutal in ways too many to recount. I shall finish with two excerpts, both regarding war prisoners, first from the Russian viewpoint, then the German." 'When the (German) retreat started on 20 November, we (Soviet POWs) were put instead of horses to drag the carts loaded with ammunition and food. Those prisoners who could not drag the carts as quickly as the Feldwebel wanted were shot on the spot. In this way we were forced to pull the carts for four days, almost without any rest.' ""Anger at the (prison camp) conditions led to (German) prisoners scraping handfuls of lice off their own bodies and throwing them at their (Soviet) guards. Such protests provoked summary execution."

Having read many works concerning Stalingrad, I suspect that we may be approaching the point where a definitive, detailed, multi-volume history of the great battle could be possible. Indeed, this should probably be attempted before the surviving veterans all pass on. That being said, this is a very acceptable single volume account of the Stalingrad campaign. It compares favorably with Craig's work, *Enemy at the Gates*. One of the strengths of Beevor's work is his view of the Russian side of the struggle. This is attained through access to now available Soviet archives. It is also attained through the greater willingness of Russian veterans to speak of their experiences without the distorting rhetoric often associated with The Great Patriotic War. The candid discussion of desertion and outright collaboration on the part of some Russian soldiers forms one of the most interesting aspects of this book. Likewise, the fate of approximately 85,000 German soldiers who entered Soviet captivity never to return is treated with even greater detail than that revealed by Craig. Again, I suspect that Beevor enjoyed access to records-- and candor-- that Craig and earlier writers did not. While I do not completely agree with all of Beevor's conclusions, he makes a convincing case for the primary responsibility of Paulus for the destruction of the Sixth Army through failure to maintain an uncommitted panzer reserve in the late fall of 1942. This failure on the part of a commander is too often ignored in works which blame the destruction of the Sixth Army on Hitler's "stand fast" order and von Manstein's failure to send a "breakout" order. Students of the campaign should add this volume to their library.

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