

James R. Arnold. *The Battle of the Bulge: Hitler's Last Gamble in the West.* Westport: Praeger, 2004. 96 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-98261-4.



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Pretty Pictures and Popular History

Based on previous works which include *US Commanders of World War II* and *Into the Reich: Battles on German's Western Front 1944-1945*, prolific author James R. Arnold has written a popular account of the Battle of the Bulge. The author succinctly describes Hitler's final offensive in the West, and his text includes excellent color maps and a wealth of pictures garnered from a range of archival collections. Unburdened by scholarly apparatus, Arnold uses the memoirs of General Omar Bradley, Warlimont's *Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-1945*, and a short list of secondary sources to produce a readable account on the Battle of the Bulge.

Arnold does not waste time placing his story in context. A two-page summary of the military situation on the Western Front in 1944 introduces a detailed discussion of opposing forces and the weapons carried by individual soldiers. Photographs of tanks and a description of equipment are followed by a blow-by-blow description of the fighting that, on occasion, extends down to the company level. The author emphasizes combat from the American perspective but does not neglect Joachim Peiper's massacre of American prisoners

near Malmedy during the advance of the First SS division. Description of actual battlefield events appears to be based on official military histories published by the United States government. Arnold does not consult the Militaergeschichtliches Forschungsamt's recent, multi-volume study of the German army during the Second World War.

Arnold's story ends as quickly as it begins. After describing initial mistakes made by American commanders and heroic defensive stands made by American troops around Bastogne, the author summarizes counterattacks mounted by General George Patton's Third Army and concludes with a four-page (including pictures) "Assessment" of the Battle of the Bulge. Aside from the heroism displayed by individual American units and a facile summary of the opportunities that German commanders missed, readers can only wonder why the Allies won or speculate about institutional considerations and strategic factors that contributed to the Axis defeat.

Arnold's approach may delight amateur historians who are familiar with the campaign in the West, but it will provide neither students nor scholars with insight.

A remarkable lack of context makes the work unsuitable as an introduction to the subject. Students can only wonder why several Allied commanders believed the war was all but won in Fall 1944. The author does not analyze supply shortages that undermined the German offensive or reveal how logistical difficulties first hampered Allied defensive efforts and later caused disagreements among senior Allied generals.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then this is indeed a valuable work as it includes superb maps, many archival pictures, and a few colorful paintings. Students would be better served by consulting the relevant sections of general works like *A World at Arms* by Gerhard Weinberg or *A War to be Won* by Williamson Murray

and Allan Millett.[1] Specialists may wish to examine the most recent edition of *Hitler's Last Gamble* by Trevor Dupuy.[2]

Notes

[1]. Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History or World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[2]. Trevor Dupuy, *Hitler's Last Gamble: the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

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