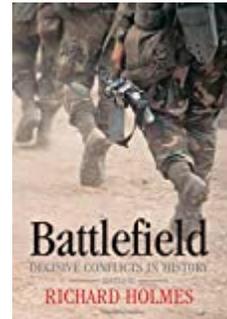




Richard Holmes, Martin M. Evans, eds. *Battlefield: Decisive Conflicts in History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 429 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-280653-6.



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An Encyclopedia for Non-Specialists

It is a well-known secret that authors and editors have little or no control over the titles their publishers choose. That is likely the case with *Battlefield*, since the strength of the volume is in the chapter introductions rather than in the very brief descriptions it offers of some 300 battles. In other words, what makes this volume worthwhile is not its descriptions of what transpired on any one “battlefield,” but its discussions of the technologies and techniques that open each chapter, and thus each phase or era of warfare. These discussions, which range between six and seven pages, may not necessarily present new information, but they would prove handy for use in any survey course. Some, such as chapter 3, “The Renaissance to the French Revolution,” even include a brief mention of relevant historiography. In this chapter, for instance, the military revolution debate is touched upon, but only a few of the major contributors—such as Michael Roberts, Geoffrey Parker, and Jeremy Black—are mentioned; others, such as Clifford Rogers, are not. The chapter introductions are also complemented by a “Further Reading” section, which will be helpful for students and non-specialists.

The volume is reasonably organized into nine chapters: “The Ancient World”; “Medieval Europe”; “The Renaissance to the French Revolution”; “Nineteenth-Century Europe”; “World War I”; “World War II”; “The Americas”; “Asia and the Middle East”; and “Africa.” As the chapter titles reveal, the volume is decidedly Eurocentric, although clearly more expansive than Archer Jones’ monumental *Art of War in the Western World* (1987). Moreover, as one might expect in a work that covers 300 battles in just over 400 pages, the battles themselves are not presented in any detail. However, they are arranged in rough sequential order, making it possible to follow the twists and turns of major conflicts, and in some cases even individual campaigns. That trait places it qualitatively a level above a standard encyclopedia of battles, and it is more user-friendly than R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor Dupuy’s *Encyclopedia of Military History* (1986). Readers will, however, come across an occasional theme that needs updating, such as the editors’ reference to the Schlieffen plan. Scholarship has moved so quickly and broadly on this issue (with the promise of more to come), even since the book’s appearance in hardcover in 2006, that what is mentioned in that particular

reference is wholly insufficient. Nonetheless, despite the inevitable minor flaw or two, the volume is a useful tool for any student and military historian.

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