



Forgotten Voices of the Second World War: A New History of the Second World War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Were There

Max Arthur, Imperial War Museum (Contribution by)

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The Imperial War Museum holds a vast archive of interviews with soldiers, sailors, airmen and civilians of most nationalities who saw action during WW2. As in the highly acclaimed "Forgotten Voices of the Great War", Max Arthur and his team of researchers will spend hundreds of hours digging deep into this unique archive, uncovering tapes, many of which have not been listened to since they were created in the early 1970s. The result will be the first complete aural history of the war. We hear at first from British, German and Commonwealth soldiers and civilians. Accounts of the impact of the U. S. involvement after Pearl Harbour and the major effects that had on the war in Europe and the Far East is chronicled in startling detail, including compelling interviews from U. S. and British troops who fought against the Japanese. Continuing through from D-Day, to the Rhine Crossing and the dropping of the Atom Bomb in August 1945, this book is a unique testimony to one of the world's most dreadful conflicts. One of the hallmarks of Max Arthur's work is the way he involves those left behind on the home front as well as those working in factories or essential services. Their voices will not be neglected.

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From Reader Review Forgotten Voices of the Second World War: A New History of the Second World War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Were There for online ebook

Mary says

Although important and very personal, I prefer to read a more fluid account using examples of personal accounts rather than it all being told through personal accounts. All should be read in conjunction with one another.

John Houlihan says

A fascinating and insightful first-person account of the second world war, mainly told from a British perspective, although there are contributions from other nations. If you want to truly understand a period in history, there's no substitute for hearing from the people who lived through it and there is probably no more extraordinary time in the past 100 years. This diverse selection of voices was drawn from the Imperial War Museum archives and ranges from 39-45 and covers all theatres, from the home front to the far east, as well as all the major battles, from the phoney war to the final occupation of Germany. A unique and memorable record, it offers anecdotes and testimony which range from the interesting and intriguing, to the amusing, to the truly horrifying. A must-read for students and scholars of the second world war.

Alex says

Moving, insightful, immediate.

Elizabeth says

I enjoyed this in parts--the section on the Normandy landings was fab. But overall I found that despite over 300-some "contributors," there is only ONE "voice" that emerges, which is that of Max Arthur, who put the book together. Every speaker sounds the same. Many of their stories are moving, but they do not come across as individuals (despite the insertion of the word "wee" instead of "little" here and there to indicate Scottishness).

Also, because the overwhelming majority of the contributors are British soldiers and airmen, the stories told are mostly of combat. There are scarcely any tales of civilian life, resistance, hiding, the concentration camps, the Eastern Front... The atomic bombings of Aug. 1945 are represented solely through the eyes of one British radio operator who happened to be in Nagasaki at the time. An interesting viewpoint, but it seems like this really deserves a bit MORE. A nurse, a teacher, a Japanese pilot, maybe? Don't their voices count? Throughout the book, I can't recall any Russians or Burmese represented, despite the detailed descriptions of the Far Eastern theater of war. Elsewhere we find a sprinkling of Americans and Poles and maybe one or two French/Italians--maybe one Japanese. The occasional token appearance of 1) a civilian girl or 2) a German

pilot is jarring and tantalizing and frustrating all at once. WHERE ARE THE OTHERS??? Isn't this supposed to be a catalogue of "forgotten" voices? What are Edward Ardizzone and Lord Louis Mountbatten doing here? Um, hello, I know who they are.

Now, we all know that I am prejudiced Flygirl-wise, but I think a case in point is the single contribution recorded here (on p. 473, after the war is over), of Margaret Gore of the AIR TRANSPORT AUXILIARY--ie, a woman who was one of some not-quite-200 female ferry pilots in Britain and the ONLY women pilots flying with the Western Allies. Here's the sum total of her "forgotten voice" as quoted in this volume:

"I think that in Britain, the black market had undermined people's honesty, and I think as a society, we were much less honest afterwards. I think it all started because we did scrounge petrol and nylons, and extra butter and so on. I think it all started in the war."

Now, CALL ME BIASED, but I think that a female ATA Ferry Pilot might actually have a More Interesting Contribution to make to a book titled "Forgotten Voices of the Second World War" than 50 words grumbling about her perceived postwar dishonesty in British society.

(Ironically, Lettice Curtis's book about the women of the ATA is called The Forgotten Pilots.)

Martha says

An amazing book of World War II made up of the personal experiences of ordinary men and women from around the World- woven together in one book, and very moving. I enjoyed the different voices from all over the world...too often what I get to read is all American!

Belle says

This isn't as thorough as Forgotten Voices of the First World War (also compiled by Max Arthur.) The reason being that there were such numerous and varied campaigns during the WW2 that there's just too much information for only one book. It often felt that some aspects were not given enough pages. There was so much more that should have been included in more depth and because of this I think it would have been much better for this book to have been split into two books, one for the western campaign and one for the eastern campaign. I've certainly been left wanting to know more about quite a few aspects and would have liked to have heard from a few more voices. The Atomic bombing for example seemed to be very sparsely covered. It felt like a bit of an abrupt rush at the end.

The other slight issue with this book (compared to the WW1 book) is that warfare had changed so much between the two World Wars and as such equipment, weapons and terminology was much more complicated. Often I had no idea what all the terminology meant in this second book, which did affect the flow of my reading and overall understanding; whereas the first book was much more simple to understand and as such I was able to read it without needing a break. Both books were extremely moving but this second book was more so due to the cruelty detailed.

Despite these flaws I would still recommend this second book - although - if you're going to read only one of these Forgotten Voices books then without a doubt the WW1 book is the far better choice; not only because

it is more thorough; with less jargon but also because it's a much smaller book, so it's easier to carry around.

Andrée says

Very bity as some quotes are barely 4 lines long. So a dip into (toilet?) book rather than something to get lost in. One chapter for every year of WWII but so many 'voices' (including German) that overall it's a rather incoherent patchwork. Some great tales that it's impossible not to like this book but ultimately not a keeper

Louise says

History is so often about the choices made by the "great men" this book reminds us that war involved entire nations.

M says

A nice collection of "quotes" and first person accounts of WWII organized along the timeline of the war. The weakness was that there may not have been enough background information if the reader was not already well aware of the events of the war.

Robert Hepple says

Forgotten Voices of the Second World War draws on the vast collection of interviews of many individuals giving their experiences of the Second World War, with selected transcripts arranged in annual sections covering each year of the war with a brief overview of the events at the start of each section to place the transcripts in context. Because they are sourced from the IWM, there are omissions – the Eastern Front and the Pacific theatres are not featured, whilst non-British accounts are pretty rare all round. The various accounts included are pretty amazing, covering all sorts of memories, from a young woman's experience of the Blitz to a soldier describing the killing of Japanese prisoners – the accounts have a non-pc rawness at times which makes them so much more personal. Very enjoyable.

Matt says

Follows the same format as the other "forgotten voices" very interesting book and covers allies and axis stories along with military and civilian tales. Charts the war from beginning to end in all theatres, well worth a read.

Peter says

An interesting alternative to traditional historical accounts focusing entirely on the accounts people who were there. A bit like an anthology of the stories your grandparents used to tell.

Human interest is central then, and there are some amazing individual stories here that read together paint a realistic picture of the war; a picture of ordinary people caught up in the grand sweep of history and so also the consequence of other peoples decisions-no grand heroic airbrushed then but stories;memories and accounts, of suffering yes, but the also incompetance, innocence, inexperience,good fortune, comradeship, endurance, survival and simplicity. What often comes across is the emotional dimension; the contradiction of men for whom involvement meant obeying orders and duty rather than personal politics or hatred.

This sis a book with an overtly English emphasis. Consequently there are far to few accounts from other nationalities who were equally involved.

A very worthwhile read

Anneleen says

Nederlandse titel: "Vergeten stemmen van de tweede wereldoorlog"

KEVIN says

Present day keyboard warriors should read this collection and take note. There is a price to pay for going to war and these men and women paid it.

Reds_reads says

Part of a series of 'Forgotten Voices' books, this one covers the Second World War. All of the books are selections of transcripts of voice archives held at the Imperial War Museum in London. I have seen another review that criticised the book for giving little coverage to certain events, or for recording mostly the voices of Commonwealth soldiers and I do feel the need to defend this book against that criticism. This is, after all, compiled from the archives at a museum focussed on the Commonwealth forces, not American, German or Japanese forces.

I do feel however that this book felt less satisfactory than others in the series. The voices themselves are are fascinating and lively as ever. They describe the events they endured in such vivid detail that the reader is left in no doubt how horrific their experiences were. It is a sobering read.

I think the reason I found the book less satisfying was the subject matter itself - British and Commonwealth forces fought in so many campaigns - Europe, North Africa, Burma against different enemies, in wildly different conditions and using such different tactics that the subject feels too big for one book. And I haven't even mentioned the naval battles, the battle of Britain or the mass bombings of German cities, the Blitz, the Holocaust, codebreaking or the Burma railway. I could go on. Very few events get lengthy treatment and so I was often left wanting more.
