

Running Head: BOOK REVIEW

Book Review

"El Alamein: The Battle that Turned the Tide of the Second World War"

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The battle of El Alamein is important as it is recognized as the battle that changed the war. Winston Churchill said "Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein, we never had a defeat". Montgomery was the Allied General, who led the battle for North Africa from the 13th of August 1942.

Bryn Hammond has written and introduced a new view of this famous battle. He is the Head of Collections at the Imperial War Museum, a holder of a PhD in Modern History (Birmingham University) and his thesis mainly examined the tank warfare and its working with other forces in World War I. His study on the Battle of Cambrai in 1917 changed the accepted views on the mass use of tanks by stressing the successful use of artillery during the First World War. Hammond observes this well-discussed battle with a fresh approach; he assesses Montgomery's strategy in terms of his First World War experience. Hammond is solid in this field, therefore, he is convincing. The other strategy he uses is firsthand accounts of the great battle to highlight the sense of the conflict

Montgomery followed methods that had evolved in the British Army during the First World War. Montgomery's plan included a World War I technique in El Alamein (p.159). This

was his strategy to concentrate use of his artillery and infantry to create passages through which tanks could go through. Montgomery based his strategy on a combined arms approach, including static positions and maneuver warfare. Montgomery was used to this from World War 1, and Hammond points out most his commanders also had World War 1 experience (Hammond, 2012, p. 148). Hammond confirms the question about Montgomery's version of poor morale until he arrived, and the issue of how advanced was the British war machine of 1918, that was able to defeat the new Blitzkrieg warfare of Hitler.

Rommel had various problems in his supply situation, yet was still in a position to win. The deciding factor was the tactics used by each side. Hammond shows how Montgomery was flexible and responsive, and how he won. Some argue that if Montgomery used WW1 then the British Army was static. However, it is a controversial question. The British army in 1918 was far ahead in its tactics, and they were still superior in 1942 when applied. Hammond agrees there was a morale problem in the Eighth Army. However, Montgomery's use of massive firepower restored morale and his method became the foundation of operations for the rest of the war.

Hammond's use of firsthand accounts brings a life and authority to his book. Using quotes of men who were there, he brings life to the events and also confirms his points. Such as, Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson Smith of the 57th Anti-Tank Regiment, who said the morale improved after Montgomery's arrival (Hammond, 2012, p.111).

Carol Mather of the Eighth Army said the plans were familiar to them because they were from World War 1 (Hammond, 2012, p. 149). There are many others he uses carefully in context to show their viewpoints. To conclude, this book is well worth reading by anyone who has an interest in World War 2 and its pivotal battle as Churchill pointed out. On a personal level, I

found it argued well and convinced me that Montgomery's strategy was based in solid tested battle techniques of World War 1, combined with his personal abilities as a commander.

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References

Hammond, Bryn. (2012). *El Alamein: The Battle that Turned the Tide of the Second World War*.

Oxford: Osprey Publishing.

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