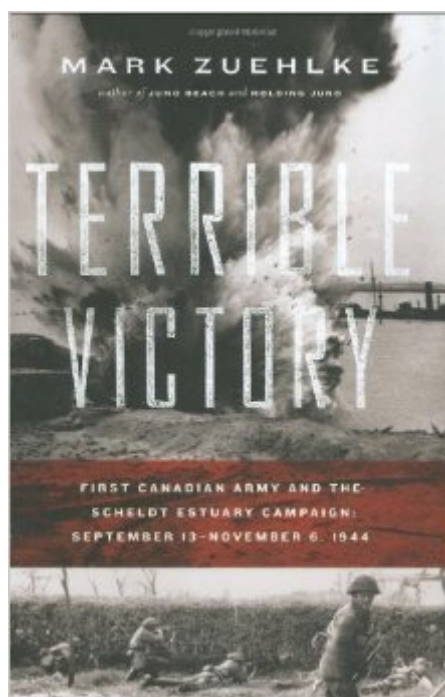


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Terrible Victory: First Canadian Army And The Scheldt Estuary Campaign: September 13 - November 6, 1944



Synopsis

On September 4, 1944, Antwerp, Europe's largest port, fell to the Second British Army and it seemed the war would soon be won. But Antwerp was of little value unless the West Scheldt Estuary linking it to the North Sea was also in Allied hands. In his greatest blunder of the war, Field Marshal Montgomery turned his back on the port, leaving the First Canadian Army to fight its way up the long coastal flank. By the time the Canadians and others serving with them reached the area, it had been transformed into a fortress manned by troops ordered to fight to the death. Crushing the Nazi defenders required all of the Canadians' courage, endurance and skill. The battle that raged until November was Canada's bloodiest of World War II, costing more than 6,000 casualties.

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Customer Reviews

Mark Zuehlke's "Terrible Victory" is a tribute to the Canadians who bravely fought in the confusing Scheldt Estuary Campaign. The complex campaign took place in the low soggy border country of Belgium and The Netherlands in the fall of 1944. By then, Operation Overlord was four months old, 21st Army Group had reached the Dutch border in their drive towards the Rhine. Monty's front lines stretched from the Belgian coast through the potential supply port of Antwerp. Like much of Canadians fighting, these battles have dropped out of memory because no one wanted to be painfully reminded -- especially the First Canadian Army veterans. In his panoramic new history, Mark Zuehlke describes the battles while saluting its neglected fighting men. He tells us how, in the beginning, they had to limp along the dike tops with multiple handicaps -- rudimentary training, poor

equipment and few supplies -- which threatened to stall the offensive like the mucky ground that sucked down their men and vehicles. They had to close ranks when few replacements were available. And they had to make do with picked over supplies while Monty redirected fresh convoys for his own Rhine campaign. Denied a promised paratrooper drop on key islands, the Canadians, Mr. Zuehlke argues, were over matched by near-impossible challenges in what has been termed a sideshow by some military historians. Mr. Zuehlke relates these events in his enlightening new book. It's a lengthy history of the confusing conflict, which all began with the obvious need to open more supply ports. Mr. Zuehlke asserts that no one dared order Monty to make the critical port of Antwerp his main priority; He had his eye on a more glorious prize -- the Rhine crossings.

This work is a difficult and detailed slog through the nightmare of opening the Scheldt Estuary by the 1st Canadian Army so the port of Antwerp could be utilized. The large amount of detail and the constant swinging back and forth between operations and locations make this work difficult to follow, particularly since the maps are inadequate and many sites mentioned in the text are not to be found on the maps. I give this work five stars minus for the excellence of narrative coverage with only somewhat usable maps and difficult reading. All that being said, this book should be on the shelf of every historian interested in World War II. Please permit me an aside before continuing. As the author said, the Scheldt Battle was probably the biggest and most egregious of Montgomery's blunders in a career of operational failures. As in all of Montgomery's battles, he mainly depended on colonial/commonwealth troops to do the heavy lifting while minimizing British casualties. If one looks hard at El Alamein, his only true victory, British troops were the minority of his attacking forces. Evidently this was because he held the same opinion as General Alan Brooke, namely that British troops and their leadership were inferior to the Germans (see this discussion in Andrew Roberts; "Masters and Commanders.") The other primary reason for using Commonwealth troops wherever possible was because England had not been able to replace its manpower in the field since 1942 and its army was a "wasting" asset. That did not slow down the British high command from seeking control of operations for personal and national glory, however.

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