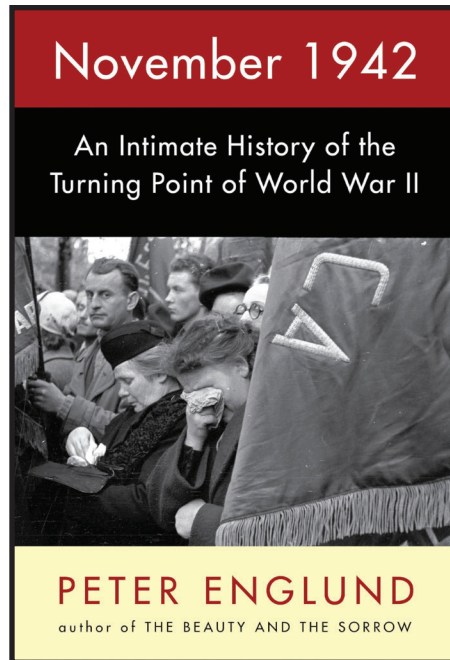


and the national zeitgeist of the war. This excellent microhistory provides scholars with details on soldier motivations, and complex wartime relations between soldiers and civilians. For the general reader, the diary provides a human connection to the war. Frank Pearce is not a poet, a crusader, or a great man of history. Yet he, like so many others, answered their country's call to arms, and for this reason, this frank account of the conflict deserves a place on bookshelves.

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Note

1. In 1940 the National Guard retained square divisions which incorporated an engineer regiment in its table of organization. When converted to the triangular division the engineer regiment was minimized to a battalion. The Texas-based 36th Infantry Division retained the 1st Battalion, 111th Engineer, reflagged as the 111th Engineer Battalion.



NOVEMBER 1942: AN INTIMATE HISTORY OF THE TURNING POINT OF WORLD WAR II

BY PETER ENGLUND

Alfred A. Knopf, 2023
Pp. xvii, 467. \$32

REVIEW BY NATHAN J. HOLCOMB

Peter Englund's new book, *November 1942*, a work of military and social history, examines the Second World War in personal detail, using a cast of forty characters whose voices lend a critical human element to the conflict. Englund received a PhD in history from Uppsala University in 1989 and is a member of the Swedish Academy, which regulates the Swedish language and selects recipients for the Nobel Prize in Literature. This book was translated from Swedish by Peter Graves, an honorary fellow at the University of Edinburgh following his retirement, and the recipient of several prizes for his translations. Previously, Graves translated Englund's 2011 book *The Beauty and the Sorrow* (Knopf, 2011), a similar personal history approach to World War I.

Rather than a traditional examination of the Second World War's turning points, Englund chose to focus on those who lived through it, and how they experienced the selected month. The forty individuals are mostly obscure, but several were famous authors: Ernst Jünger, Vasily Grossman,

Vera Brittain, and Albert Camus. None of his cast of characters are generals or politicians; the highest-ranking soldier is a Japanese destroyer captain. Twenty-two are civilians, and fourteen are women. Englund's selection of his cast covers all major theaters of war, as well as the German, British and American home fronts, and occupied areas in the Soviet Union, China, Paris, and Brussels. Several characters are near each other, for example, Japanese troops Tameichi Hara and Tohichi Wakabayashi are in proximity to Americans John McEniry and Charles Walker on Guadalcanal. It is unlikely these characters exchanged fire with each other. A few noncollective stories are also present: the completion and early reception of the American film *Casablanca*, and American *Liberty*-class ship S.S. *James Oglethorpe's* launching from Georgia's newly built shipyards in Savannah. Each character left behind a diary or memoir, which became Englund's primary sources.

Through the narrative, Englund divides the book into four parts: "November 1–8," "November 9–15," "November 16–22," and "November 23–30." There are no chapter divisions, each character lends their experiences that day, if available, and then all move on to the next day, and so on. Through this enormous tapestry of different voices, experiences, and ideologies, each person is a fully realized character. Englund's writing throughout the book is a masterpiece of historical storytelling. The reader experiences the war, but also the character's anxieties and dreams, the indignities they suffer, as well as the small comforts that lend them the strength to continue. Englund freely borrows from other parts of their memoir or other sources to fill in contextual gaps, as well as from secondary literature. He makes assumptions, based on the character's actions or mental state and the surrounding context, and states when he does so.

A few themes are present in all accounts. Because many characters are not frontline troops, Englund brings the immediacy of the conflict to each story. This may sound obvious to history consumers: the author directly ties Willy Peter Reese's experiences fighting near Rzhev, Russia, to the conflict. Less obvious is Dorothy Robinson, a homemaker on Long Island. However, Robinson's son is serving, her

daughter is married to another service member on the West Coast, and she has to navigate and adapt to a new reality of rationing and blackouts. The least likely character, French author and philosopher Albert Camus, lives under German occupation and his ambition to return to Algeria is frustrated by Operation TORCH.

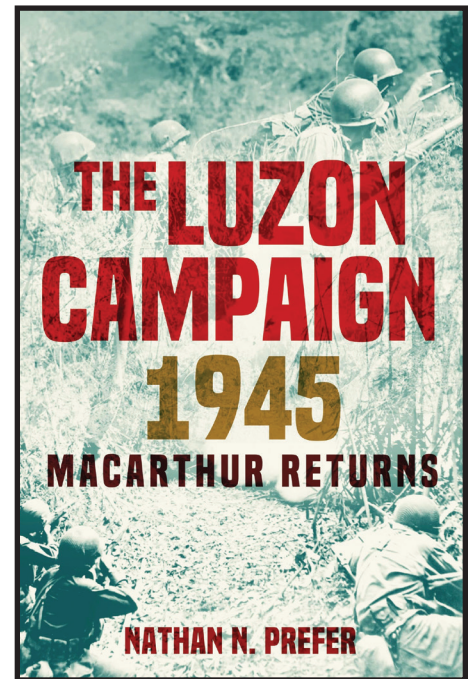
Another present theme is endurance. Enthusiasm for war and combat is completely devoid from every character. Conspicuous bravery is also almost entirely absent, save for two incidents: Soviet infantryman Mansur Abdulin saves a colonel near Stalingrad, and Kurt West, a Swedish Finn, recaptures a Finnish position seized by Soviets near Leningrad. German World War I memoirist Ernst Jünger, whose books described animal-like ferocity in combat, also rejected such an approach to this war. All view the conflict as a task to complete, a job to do and then return home. Rather than courage, this requires emotional and mental fortitude to get through the day, or the hour, or the minute. Several characters' ordeals require endurance above and beyond the ordinary needs. Jechiel Rajchman, a "Death Jew" at Treblinka extermination camp in Poland, endures sadistic SS guards, yet volunteers for several gruesome tasks: first shaving the heads of arriving victims, then pulling gold caps from their teeth. He escaped during a 1943 uprising. A world away, Mun Okchu, a Korean comfort woman to Japanese soldiers in Burma, survives the indignities of her rock-bottom social position in a strange land. Although *November 1942* features the turning point in the war, it would be years for it to conclude. Aided by their endurance, more than thirty people featured in the book survived the war.

As Englund observed in his introduction, it is impossible to cover all demographics and experiences of World War II. He gives considerable time to major operations taking place at Stalingrad, North Africa, and Guadalcanal. However, this comes with a trade-off; he underrepresents several regions in the narrative. Although he gives treatment to the experiences of Black Americans in the Georgia shipyards, Africans themselves are left out. So, too, are Indians and Southeast Asians. Besides the United States, the Americas are underserved; there are no Canadian or Brazilian accounts. Englund includes two accounts from China: Ursula Blomberg, a

Jewish refugee, and Zhang Zhonglou, but combined they receive minimal narrative space. Elites are shunned, but including a lower-level factory manager or diplomat also would lend an interesting perspective. There is always the question of sources and translations in these underexamined regions, but the narrative would be well served with these additional viewpoints.

In sum, *November 1942* is a thorough examination of the Second World War, deepening our understanding of the war's turning point as people experienced it. So often, accounts of the conflict focus on generals and politicians, and the individual's lived experiences get swept along and aggregated in the larger story. Englund's project places that perspective first, with first-rate writing that reads more like fiction than academic history. This approach can also be applied to other complex topics to return the individual to the fore. It is a welcome addition to World War II scholarship, a wonderful piece of literature, and deserves a place on bookshelves the world over.

Nathan J. Holcomb is a graduate student at Murray State University, concentrating on twentieth-century U.S. history. His research interests focus on the relationships between the state, the military, and the population. He currently works as the human resources manager at Buckeye Gymnastics in Columbus, Ohio.



THE LUZON CAMPAIGN, 1945: MACARTHUR RETURNS

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

Casemate Publishers, 2024
Pp. ix, 307. \$37.95

REVIEW BY ROBERT D. SEALS

In September 1944, pugnacious U.S. Navy Admiral William Halsey Jr. proposed landing directly on Leyte in the Philippines the following month. Approved by the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, the plan was thought to be brilliant because the Japanese would have to split their forces in the Philippines and it would perhaps force the Japanese Combined Fleet to come out to meet the threat in a decisive naval battle. With the Leyte campaign, General Douglas MacArthur was finally able to return to his beloved Philippine Islands, but after Leyte, what next? For the Southwest Pacific Area Commander, the next target in 1945 was the largest and most important island in the commonwealth, Luzon. Now, almost eight decades later, Nathan N. Prefer tells us a familiar story with his latest book *The Luzon Campaign, 1945: MacArthur Returns*.

Prefer's book seemingly aims to "fill [a] historical gap" because "few studies of that battle [campaign] have been produced" and they are rather "histories of incidents" within the Luzon campaign (1). Additionally, the author believes