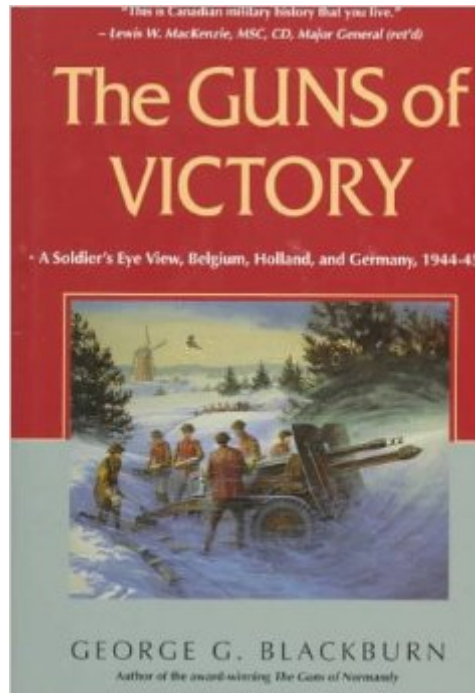


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The Guns Of Victory: A Soldier's Eye View, Belgium, Holland, And Germany, 1944-45



Synopsis

For the Canadian Soldiers who lived through the momentous battle for Normandy in the summer of 1944, it was inconceivable that the conflict in Europe could continue for another eight long months. The war was won, they thought, and to win it they had been pushed to what seemed like the limits of endurance. But ahead lay not only an enemy with no thoughts of surrender, but also appalling battle conditions reminiscent of the legendary miseries of Passchendaele. This much-anticipated sequel to *The Guns of Normandy* picks up where its critically acclaimed predecessor leaves off, and it continues in the same absorbing, startlingly vivid style. After the battle for Normandy, Blackburn's 4th Field Regiment, with the rest of 1st Canadian Army, is called upon to pursue the enemy through the flooded Low Country, clearing the Scheldt estuary – “a task equal to that of D-Day” – and opening the port of Antwerp to allow for the huge influx of supplies necessary to press on against the German forces, now fighting with mounting desperation and ferocity. After enduring the worst winter in local memory, and spending yet another Christmas far from home, in the spring of 1945 the Canadians are thrust into the crucial Battle of the Rhineland, which will eventually allow Allied forces to plunge into the heart of the Reich. When victory comes, it is with no sense of triumph over a vanquished foe, but with the profoundest relief that this most terrible conflict in history is finally over. Told with Blackburn's now trademark sense of drama and eye for detail, this story of the desperate struggle for Europe becomes as large as life. It should fully establish Blackburn as the author of an acknowledged classic on the Second World War.

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Customer Reviews

Although hardly a scholar in the field of military history, I certainly have a keen interest in it. One of my favorite sources of information is John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* in which he explains combat experience from the perspective of those who were directly involved at Agincourt (1415), Waterloo (1815), and the Somme (1916). According to the first-hand accounts on which Keegan relies, films such as *Paths of Glory*, *Pork Chop Hill*, and most recently *Saving Private Ryan* probably offer about as realistic a visual account as is possible. However, as Ken Burns demonstrated when calling upon various sources for the narrative of his television series on the Civil War, first-hand accounts have unsurpassed authenticity and credibility. For that reason, I hold George Blackburn's work in such high regard. In each of his three volumes based on his own experiences with the Canadian 4th Field Regiment during World War Two, he enables his reader to know precisely what he was thinking and feeling as well as what he was encountering during the Normandy Invasion, during the Battle for the Rhineland, and then during the final months of the war. In this volume as in *The Guns of Normandy*, Blackburn brilliantly uses two strategies to present his narrative: the present tense (to invest the material with immediacy) and the second person voice (to engage his reader in each situation, albeit vicariously). This volume offers so much technical information but always within a human context. For example, consider this brief passage in which Blackburn explains the symbolic importance of guns (as opposed to rifles) which bears striking resemblance to the importance pilots assign to the carriers on which they and their squadrons are based.

In this, the concluding chapter of Canadian war veteran George G. Blackburn's superb three-volume eyewitness history of our northern neighbor's involvement in the war in Europe, we find a truly stunning successor to the previous two volumes. As with "The Guns Of Normandy" volume, we discover a masterful narrative punctuating the combination of dramatic life and death struggles contrasted with moments of drumming ennui or utter despair. For the Canadian soldier on the ground, the several months following the heroic and costly landing on D-Day were seemingly a coda, a time that seemed unreal because while they had the enemy on the run, the remaining elements of the *Wehrmacht* fought savagely and well in the ensuing period of time. So, although many of the allies felt it was all over but the shouting, especially after the re-taking of Paris and much of France, as Blackburn shows us from the ground grunt's view, it was anything but over and done with. This volume picks up the narrative thread where the previous volume left it, with the much-vaunted Canadian 4th Field Regiment ordered in to relentlessly pursue the Germans as they retreated through the treacherous topography of the flooded French area known as the 'Low Country'. As the pursuit ensued, the soldiers began to reach the limits of their physical and

emotional endurance. And the battle as it unfolded before them promised no respite from the hellish demands posed by an enemy with no real thought of surrendering or fleeing.

And a stirring tale it is! In a magnificent trilogy by a former junior officer in the Canadian Royal Artillery, George Blackburn records his experiences as a Forward Observation Officer (FOO), and those of the Canadian 2nd Infantry Division in general, in World War II's western European campaign. The first book, *WHERE THE HELL ARE THE GUNS?*, covers the training in Canada and England of Blackburn's unit, the 4th Field Artillery Regiment, from its formation in 1939 to June 1944. The second book, *THE GUNS OF NORMANDY*, describes the 4th Field's actions in support of the 2nd Division in northern France from early July 1944 to its arrival at the Seine River in late August. This final installment, *THE GUNS OF VICTORY*, chronicles the advance from the Seine into the Third Reich via the Benelux countries to VE-Day, May 8, 1945. Should you read this series, you will, like me, come away with a heightened and supreme regard for the valor of the Canadian Army from D-Day to the end of the war and the value of massed artillery to the combat efficiency and survival of infantry units. Blackburn's personal account is perhaps the best description of men in modern war that I've ever read. The author's narrative is not a detached one. He brings you along into the mud, cold, rain, fatigue, terror, devastation, and apocalyptic arty barrages of the conflict's leading edge. There are too many excellent passages to enumerate, but I shall give two examples. At one point, Blackburn's observation post is in a Dutch windmill on the very border of Germany. As the Army brass plans the advance into the Reich, the author's vantage point becomes widely heralded as having the best view of the ground to be fought over, and to it, as if on pilgrimage, come the high and low, including Lt.-Gen.

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