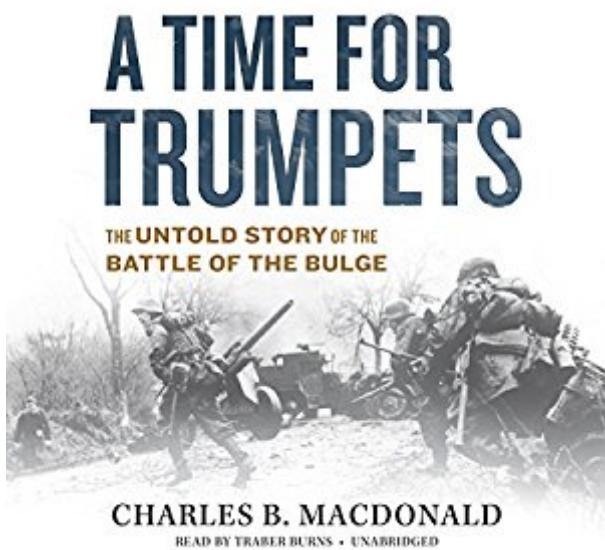


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# A Time For Trumpets: The Untold Story Of The Battle Of The Bulge



## Synopsis

On December 16, 1944, the vanguard of three German armies, totaling half a million men, attacked US forces in the Ardennes region of Belgium and Luxembourg, achieving what had been considered impossible - total surprise. In the most abysmal failure of battlefield intelligence in the history of the US Army, 600,000 American soldiers found themselves facing Hitler's last desperate effort of the war. The brutal confrontation that ensued became known as the Battle of the Bulge, the greatest battle ever fought by the US Army - a triumph of American ingenuity and dedication over an egregious failure in strategic intelligence. *A Time for Trumpets* is the definitive account of this dramatic victory, told by one of America's most respected military historians, who was also an eyewitness: MacDonald commanded a rifle company in the Battle of the Bulge. His account of this unique battle is exhaustively researched, honestly recounted, and movingly authentic in its depiction of hand-to-hand combat. Mingling firsthand experience with the insights of a distinguished historian, MacDonald places this profound human drama unforgettably on the landscape of history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is considered one of the four great books on the Battle of the Bulge. The others are John Toland's *Battle*, Hugh Cole's official US Army History: *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge* and John Eisenhower's *The Bitter Woods*. I have read all but Hugh Cole's book and will review each of them. If one wants to know what was happening at the individual soldier's level, this is the book. Charles B. MacDonald fought in the Battle of the Bulge as a company commander and wrote his personal account of the European Theater of War, *Company Commander*. He knows what it was like to fight

in that bitter cold battle with units widely spread out. MacDonald was at the critical Elsenborn Ridge in the North and helped prevent the Germans from spreading and enlarging the Bulge. His book takes you into action with the sometimes ragtag groups of units that fought overwhelming forces. In some cases platoons of around 20 men fought battalions of 500 and larger. This detail requires the reader to really look at the many included maps to keep track of this battle that stretched almost 80 miles from north to south. While the other books mentioned above have details of individual soldiers fighting, this is the most extensive. It is about twice the size of John Toland's book. MacDonald builds on and cites the earlier books by Toland and Eisenhower. Because his book came out around the 40th anniversary of the Bulge he was able to incorporate the information released on the German Enigma intercepts. While this information builds on how the Germans conducted the deception that led to the Bulge, it does not greatly change anything previously known. It is interesting, though. What did the intelligence officers really know? Because MacDonald concentrated on the soldier level so much he does not concentrate as much on the senior leadership level as Eisenhower. He does have some telling comments on the issue of Field Marshall Montgomery's belief that he should take control of the entire ground battle from General Eisenhower, the overall commander. MacDonald generally demolishes Montgomery's arguments. MacDonald also does not spend much time on the strategic context, before or after the battle. If you are looking for the best book on the Battle of Bulge that gives you the view of the battle from the soldiers' level and someone who was there, *A Time for Trumpets* is the best book.

On December 16, 1944, elements of four German armies -- 14 infantry and five panzer divisions in all -- attacked part of the American First Army along an 80-mile front along Germany's border with Belgium and Luxembourg. The sudden and unexpected counteroffensive hit the Americans in an area the Allies thought would be a nice, quiet sector for combat-weary divisions to rest and refit while green divisions fresh from the States could be acclimated to life on the line: the dark and deep forests of the Ardennes. Planned and ordered by Adolf Hitler himself, this massive onslaught was launched with one objective in mind: penetrate the American lines, pass through the "impassable" Ardennes Forest, cross the Meuse River, and capture the vital port of Antwerp. At the very least, the Allied supply situation would deteriorate enough to slow the Anglo-American advance to the Reich's industrial heartland by a matter of months and buy time for Hitler and his tottering empire. At the very best, a German victory would split the Grand Alliance in three, trap the Anglo-Canadian 21st Army Group on the northern sector of the front, and the Führer could attempt to convince the Soviets that further fighting was useless now that the Western Allies had been defeated at the

Reich's very doorstep. For a few snowy, foggy, and bitterly cold days, things seemed to be going Hitler's way. Caught off-guard by the sheer size of the counteroffensive, hampered by bad weather which prevented Allied air power to provide ground support to the tankers and infantrymen along the front, confused and misdirected by a small number of English-speaking German commandos wearing American uniforms, and, at some points along the 80-mile "Ghost Front," isolated, outnumbered, and forced to surrender, GIs fought a seemingly losing battle against hundreds of thousands of German soldiers. But even when some units panicked or were overrun, many American soldiers -- sometimes in dribs and drabs -- stood fast and delayed the enemy, giving Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Allied Supreme Commander, and his generals valuable time to plan a riposte and turn what seemed to be a disaster into a strategic opportunity. And sure enough, after a month's of heavy fighting in the awful cold of a European winter, the German counteroffensive was slowed, halted, and gradually pushed back to where it had started. The late Charles B. MacDonald, one of America's premier military historians and himself a company commander in the Ardennes campaign, captures the chaos, misery, bravery, and drama of the U.S. Army's largest battle in history in *A Time For Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge*. The author of such acclaimed works as *Company Commander* and *The Mighty Endeavor*, MacDonald uses his skills as a writer and his knowledge of the infantryman's combat experiences to paint a vivid picture of Hitler's last gamble to gain even a temporary victory in the West and the efforts of over 600,000 U.S. and several thousand British troops to contain the salient or "bulge" that gave the Ardennes counteroffensive its popular moniker. *A Time for Trumpets* not only covers the well-known episodes of the small teams of German soldiers wearing American uniforms (they actually did very little material damage, but their very existence caused jumpy GI's to quiz each other about baseball teams, state capitals, even popular singers and bandleaders), the heroic stand of the 101st Airborne at Bastogne and the infamous Malmedy massacre, but delves into the Allies' biggest intelligence failure of the war and the bitter recrimination between British and American commanders when Eisenhower placed the northern half of the "bulge" under the command of Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery. Attention to detail is also given to the German high command's reluctance to execute Hitler's plan by the letter, knowing in their professional soldiers' hearts and minds that the Nazi dictator was overreaching. Despite the complexity of the battle, *A Time For Trumpets* is highly readable and engrossing. There are helpful maps and many pages of photos to help the casual reader keep his or her bearings in this sprawling month-long battle, and the various appendices are valuable tools that illustrate the composition of a standard U.S. infantry regiment and the various Orders of Battle for the Allied and German forces engaged in the Battle of the Bulge.

While MacDonald is no Ambrose when it comes to personal stories and oral histories of the individuals who fought in the great battle, he nevertheless lends organization to explaining what happened during the chaos of the Battle of the Bulge. He divides the German offensive into three geographical areas and discusses in great detail the chronology of events in each sector. This book uses many maps depicting local areas under discussion. While the descriptions are well worthwhile and do not bog down, MacDonald tends to emphasize the REMF's decisions and commands rather than those in the foxhole. As a company commander during the bulge himself, Mac still is able to lend acute authenticity to this retelling of the Bulge, sprinkled somewhat with Ambrose-esque vignettes of local action. One should read this book first, and THEN go on to read "A Blood Dimmed Tide" as this book gives an excellent overview of the entire event.

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