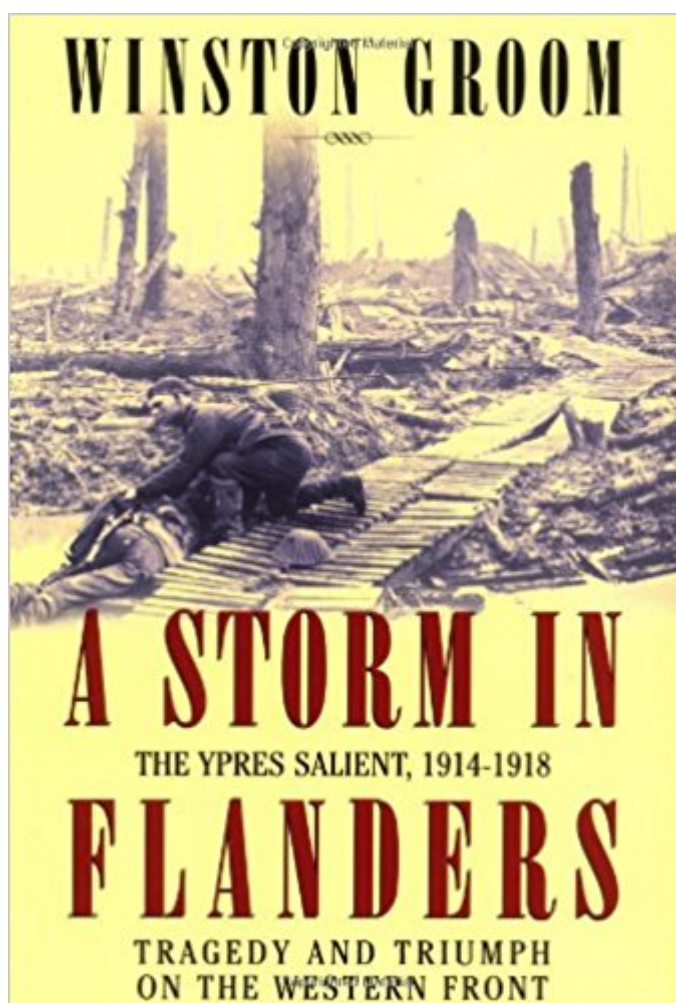




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# A Storm In Flanders: The Ypres Salient, 1914-1918: Tragedy And Triumph On The Western Front



## Synopsis

Forrest Gump and Shrouds of Glory established best-selling author Winston Groom as an electrifying writer and narrative historian. Now, in *A Storm in Flanders*, the Pulitzer Prize nominee visits the bloody four-year-long Battle of Ypres, a pivotal engagement that would forever change the way the world fought -- and thought about -- war. Groom describes how the quaint medieval Belgian town of Flanders -- following the dreams and schemes of the stubborn "butchers and blunderers" who commanded from afar -- became the most dreaded place on earth, a "gigantic corpse factory" where hundreds of thousands of men died for gains that were measured in yards. In 1914, Germany launched an invasion of France through neutral Belgium -- and brought the wrath of the world upon herself. In accessible prose, Groom presents Ypres as the centerpiece of World War I, with all of its horrors, heroism, and terrifying new tactics and technologies. Ypres is where some of history's most hideous weapons were unleashed and refined: poison gas, tanks, mines, air strikes, and the unspeakable misery of trench warfare. The battle's unprecedented horrors inspired some of the most compelling and enduring artistry of the war: from Remarque's classic novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* to the haunting poem that came to symbolize war, "In Flanders Fields," composed in the heat of battle by John McCrae, a grieving Canadian surgeon. Ypres was also the battleground of young soldier Adolf Hitler, whose experiences in Flanders, Groom argues, set him on his fateful path. Groom's story comes alive with the heart-wrenching journal entries of the men who fought on the grisly front lines, and is illustrated with breathtaking photographs published here for the first time. A gripping drama of politics, strategy, and human heart -- of the struggle for survival and victory against all odds -- *A Storm in Flanders* is a powerful work of military history.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 272 pages

Publisher: Grove Press; 1 edition (May 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0871138425

ISBN-13: 978-0871138422

Product Dimensions: 9.3 x 6.2 x 1.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 95 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #718,440 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 in Books > History > Europe > Belgium #1125 in Books > History > Military > World War I

## Customer Reviews

Novelist Winston Groom (Forrest Gump) brings his considerable skills as a storyteller and researcher to this gory tour of "the most notorious and dreaded place in all of the First World War, probably of any war in history." The Ypres salient, a small, hilly section of Belgium, witnessed the wholesale destruction of the old British professional army, "the Old Contemptibles

Groom wrote Forrest Gump, but this is no whimsical novel. Here, he studies World War I's infamous Battle of Ypres. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

I decided to buy this book after reading the author's Vicksburg. Let me begin by making two points. First, even though I have lived for a long time in the USA, I am originally from Canada, where campaigns like Ypres, have a real presence. Consequently, for many Americans, Ypres is a historic footnote. Groom does a great job of making it readable and real for his target audience - the American reader. Second, Groom appears to be taking on the mantle of being the historic writer whose works are highly readable. He seems to be in the mold of Bruce Catton (the author who has become the benchmark for readable history, thanks to his work on the American Civil War - e.g., *Terrible Swift Sword*) and Pierre Burton (the Canadian author who made Canadian history real and exciting for many Canadians - for example, read his book on Vimy Ridge). That is, his work is well grounded on research but his ability to make war and battle highly readable and interesting is noteworthy. Overall, this is a very good book. It gives you a sense of the horror of this campaign and of the quality of the men who commanded the forces. It is an easy book to read but also one that frustrates and angers the reader as they find out about the quality of leaders such as Sir Douglas Haig. This is also a book that does give the reader glimpses into the Germans - something that is not frequently done in books such as this. A good book, easy to read, highly recommended.

Excellent writing and vivid portraits of men lost in one of the most confusing and brutal campaigns of the First World War. The descriptions of the men their stories and the heroism displayed on the battlefield is very emotional and grips the reader to the core with experiences in Flanders, Passchendaele, and others that set the table for the beginning, middle and end of trench warfare on the Western Front. Groom does a wonderful job at capturing this experience without bombarding you with too much detail. Like he states in the beginning, this book is intended for the World War 1 Amateur historian (Americans) who came late in the conflict in 1917. For me, this proved to be an eye opening history of the cruel horrors of world war one, the brutality of chemical/modern warfare,

and a warning to solve all conflict peaceably.

A well written account that opened a window onto the experiences of my grandfather, who spent the year of 1915 in Flanders Fields. The letters that my grandfather composed for my grandmother have become lost. It is, after all, almost 100 years since these events unfolded. I did not meet my grandfather, who died in 1945 of the effects of severe head wounds suffered in the trenches in the Ypres Salient on December 28, 1915. However, this book conveys to me the attitudes and spirit of those millions of young men who were lost, in a way that the revisionist views that appeared in the 1930's and later can not. My mother told me that her father was proud of his contribution, that he was proud of his commanding officers and that he was proud of the Second Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry in which he served as a subaltern from February 1915 until June 1919. This book by Winston Groom, although written quite recently, gives, in my opinion, a very well balanced point of view. I advise readers and students of history to pay attention to this volume and compare it to others written while the events were still immediately in the minds of the authors. Examples being "The Last of the Ebb", "Twelve Days on the Somme" by Sidney Rogerson and General Jack's Diary, 1914-1918.

Winston Groom is the novelist who gave us *Forest Gump*, a fact I was not aware of when I opened this book. I had no expectations of any type of storytelling. *A Storm in Flanders* does a great job of laying out what transpired over the Ypres battlefield over 4 years. Groom links the writings of many soldiers (primarily from the Allied side, but he makes an effort to get something from the Germans, as well) to events, and we get to follow these men through their service in the salient. I've always found this area of the fighting to be tremendously heartbreaking, and Groom lays out exactly why, even in the fighting of Verdun for the French and the Somme for the British, Ypres (particularly Third Ypres), holds a special place for the British. Groom brings this all together as he closes the book superbly.

A gem, from beginning to end. Begins with a history of this war-torn region that reads like a short story, and a crystal-clear geographical depiction of the literal ground on which these men fought. So a few pages in, you feel as if you've witnessed history in real time, which sets the stage for the battle that set the course for much of the Great War. There's the novelist at work here, but it's pure history, tragic and beautiful.

Finally, a popular account that allowed me to make some sense of the endless fighting at Ypres! The reader will not find accounts of which unit did what at what time during the many attacks and counter attacks but that does not detract from the value of this book. Moreover, the battle picture is painted in broad strokes with enough personal stories to drive home the special degree of hell that was Ypres. There is enough detail, supplemented by some amazing pictures, to enable the reader to grasp the ebb and flow of the action. Ypres was more than a series of almost unending battles, it became a synonym for hell itself. Groom's book explains how and why in a most readable manner.

Winston Groom's books on history are some of the best I have read. Storm in Flanders brings WWI to life. In all his books he relies heavily on first hand accounts. He also paints scenes describing actions at the individual level bringing the surrounding action to life.

A superb book on the fighting in the Ypres Salient during WW1. I visited there several years ago and had no idea of the carnage that had taken place there. This book helped fill in many of the blanks that existed from the questions I had after my one day there.

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