

Together We Stand
North Africa 1942-1943: Turning the Tide in the West by James Holland.
Harper Collins 2005

Together We Stand is a monumental and minutely detailed history of a brief but crucial period during the Second World War during which after a bitter struggle the Allied forces were victorious over their Axis enemies.

It is a tale of two halves: of defeat and incompetence and of inspired leadership and victory. What is common to both is the incredible heroism and determination of the soldiery, and the awesome sacrifice they made in pursuit of the Allied goals.

James Holland divides his history into four sections: Nadir, Coming Together, Advance and Retreat, and Shoulder to Shoulder, detailing the way in which an apparently rampant and all-powerful Axis force under the leadership of the almost mystical Rommel was ultimately contained, tamed and beaten. He tells it through the eyes of its Allied participants, officers and squaddies, gunners and foot soldiers, air aces and intelligence operatives, naval crews – above and below the water - and special ops men. The vibrancy of his writing makes the reader feel present as the events unfold, most particularly in attacks on relatively small strategic objectives which resulted in huge losses of life.

He also describes the swirling currents at the top, tensions between senior British officers, between them and their American counterparts, predictably perpetual problems with the French and the aligning of goals between the political leadership on both sides of the Atlantic.

Above all though this is not so much a story of battles as of human beings caught up in a horrible conflict in an utterly un-giving region of the earth; it is a tale of courage and sacrifice, an inspirational tale, and as fine a piece of military historical writing as one could wish to read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh