

Scientists Against Time: The Role of Scientists in WWII

H. A. Feiveson

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Scientists Against Time treats with awe the monumental undertakings, creativity, commitment, cooperation, and selflessness that went into World War II's scientific missions, making every discovery memorable.

Knowing that Hitler was defeated doesn't dampen the suspense that vibrates through H. A. Feiveson's *Scientists Against Time*, a look behind the battle lines at the science that helped win World War II, and at the men and women who made it happen.

Based on a series of lectures that Feiveson delivered at Princeton, the book examines the technologies that led to crucial World War II victories. A helpful timeline of the war is included, predating Pearl Harbor and tracking Hitler's occupation of Europe. Maps of Europe and Asia show Hitler's formidable domination, and the equally extensive reach of the Japanese empire. An introductory chapter provides a succinct overview of the theaters of war, from the 1930s through to the Japanese surrender.

The meat of the book comes in six chronologically arranged chapters, each of which focuses on a battle or campaign in which science and technology played a crucial role. These include the Battle of Britain and the battle against German U-boats on the Atlantic; improved radar played a role in both. The successful hack of the Germans' Enigma code is covered, as is the strategic bombing of Germany that was made possible by the development of planes that could fly long distances without refueling.

Also included are the atomic bomb, which brought a final end to the war, and the myriad technologies that made D-Day possible. Each chapter functions independently, is succinct, and is well-explained. Occasionally, the math and science are overly intricate for general audiences, but such instances are brief, rare, and do not impede the larger picture. The book does an especially good job of putting events and inventions into context, taking the time to explain what both sides were trying to accomplish, what they expected the enemy to do, and making it clear why things we take for granted today represented game-changing breakthroughs back then. Chapters conclude with summaries and bibliographies.

Interesting facts are presented throughout, such as that penicillin, still in the experimental stages when the war began, became a secret defense that saved millions of lives. Human interest stories abound, including one about men from occupied Norway who risked their lives to deprive Germany of the heavy water needed to develop an atomic bomb. Even coverage of familiar events like D-Day yield surprises, such as the invention of a fictitious British "Fourth Army" as an Axis decoy.

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SUSAN WAGGONER (July 16, 2018)

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