



Moment of Battle: The Twenty Clashes that Changed the World

By James Lacey and Williamson Murray

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Since the release of Edward Creasy's *The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World in 1851*, we have seen many books published tied to that basic theme. Ensuing authors have put their own twists to Creasy's original idea. These variations have included the selection criteria of battles, number of battles selected, the detail of scholarship, and the focus of the book. A few of these volumes have been on par with Creasy's seminal book while many others have fallen significantly short. One recent release that is clearly comparable with Creasy's is the outstanding *Moment of Battle* by James Lacey and Williamson Murray.

Within *Moment of Battle*, acclaimed authors Lacey and Murray have selected 20 battles in history they believe have or will have the most long-term impact on the course of history. The battles selected range from Marathon in 490 B.C. to the 2003 seizure of Objective Peach in the race for Baghdad. In between, there are many battles readers will be quite familiar with (Vicksburg, Marne, Midway, Kursk, Normandy) and some that are not so recognizable (Zama, Adrianople, Yarmuk, Annus Mirabilis).

Obviously, the authors' selection of battles will not make everyone happy. The authors are not under any pre-conceived notions that there will not be some consternation from some readers. In their introduction they state, "There will be those who object to our selection of decisive battles, an inevitable reality for those who write military history. In fact, the authors are more than willing to admit that a number of important battles are deserving of consideration." Most of readers' objections will likely focus on the Western flavor of the battles and perhaps the long-term or even short-term significance of Objective Peach. (The authors justify this selection at the beginning of this chapter.)

Of the battles chosen, the authors use the same basic formula to achieve their objectives. It begins with an introduction of the period and events that led to the battle. With this foundation set, Lacey and Williamson concisely detail the execution of the battle. This in turn leads to the most valuable portion of the volume — the "what-ifs." What if the battle had ended differently? What would the consequences have been for each side in the short term and long term? Would there be dramatic changes economically, politically, militarily, and even in regards to religion? The authors superbly provide their alternative endings, but more importantly, provide readers much to think about.

As highlighted earlier, authors Lacey and Murray have established sterling reputations. Lacey is known for his books on the Iraq War and his book on Marathon and its long-term impact (which is certainly the basis for one of chapters in *Moment of Battle*). In regards to Murray, he is a prolific writer who has crafted a large and highly praised body of work.

Certainly, many potential readers of *Moment of Battle* will have previously read one of his prior volumes. The area where their talents truly stand out is their ability to crisply summarize the battles themselves. In a minimum of pages, they are able to articulate the highlights of every battle.

I believe their summarization provides readers with a good working knowledge of each battle. Thus, in roughly 20 pages they are able to execute the aforementioned formula for each battle. These 20 pages enable readers to consume *Moment of Battle* in the chunks they have time for. The only negative I found within this book is the scarcity of maps. Each battle contains one map at the beginning of the discussion. Being one who believes maps add significant clarity to an author's text, this was a disappointment. I believe the addition of some more maps and even an "alternative ending" map for each battle (answering a what-if) would have been added value.

Will there be future books published along these lines? There should be little doubt on this. However, I believe *Moment of Battle* is clearly a mark on the wall for these future authors. Its concise and informative summaries of the 20 battles selected will benefit every general reader of military history. Its ability to make readers think will be of valuable to the more seasoned reader as well. In total, Lacey and Murray have crafted a volume which you would expect from these two celebrated authors — entertaining, informative, and thought-provoking.