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D-Day

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Book

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Published to coincide with the 75th anniversary, this tells the story of D Day partly through the eyes of twenty real life participants, whose experiences are used to provide insights into aspects of the invasion. There is a good range amongst the twenty, from front-line soldier to back-room boffin. Most are on the Allied side, but the Germans are represented by two field marshals and a bewildered guard taken prisoner in one of the first actions of the invasion. There are four women, among them intrepid war correspondent Martha Gellhorn and a French aristocrat, Brigitte de Kergolay, whose chateau is requisitioned first by the Germans and then the Allies. There is a good balance, too, between these individual experiences and a general account of the invasion and its aftermath. However, it's a book which doesn't live up to its promise. It cheats a little in its presentation. This, I imagine, might have something to do with the costs of doing it properly. So, while the book promises us individual accounts, there is nothing in quotation marks. The author speaks for everyone. Each participant is introduced in a box on the top left hand corner of each double page spread, with a photograph. Sometimes these photos are obviously of the persons themselves: from a personal album or, for the field marshals, a more official source. But sometimes you have no idea if the person concerned is in the photograph accompanying the account of the role they played. Is Helen Denton one of the typists in her photograph? Is Helmut Roehmer one of these German prisoners of war? The reader has no idea, since the text is silent. And why is Martha Gellhorn accompanied by Japanese military here? The reader will never know.

Much of the text is in quite small print found in boxes dotted about the double page illustrations by Alexander Mostov. And, while I can understand the problems there might be in illustrating accounts of war, these almost caricature human figures seem particularly inappropriate, a strange accompaniment to photographs of the actual actors in the event.

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