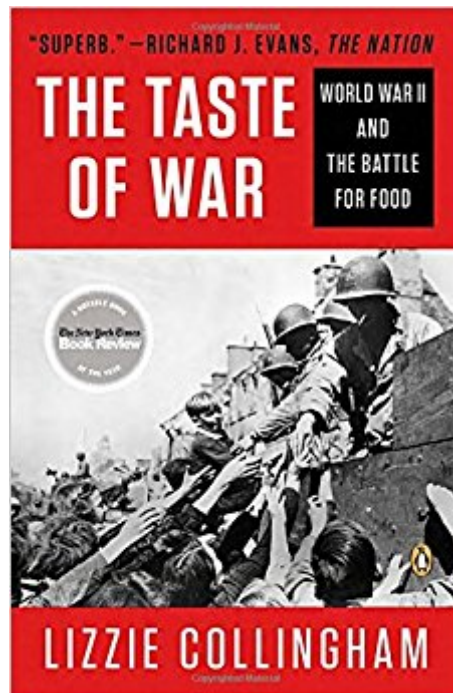




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# Taste Of War: World War II And The Battle For Food



## Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book of 2012 Food, and in particular the lack of it, was central to the experience of World War II. In this richly detailed and engaging history, Lizzie Collingham establishes how control of food and its production is crucial to total war. How were the imperial ambitions of Germany and Japan - ambitions which sowed the seeds of war - informed by a desire for self-sufficiency in food production? How was the outcome of the war affected by the decisions that the Allies and the Axis took over how to feed their troops? And how did the distinctive ideologies of the different combatant countries determine their attitudes towards those they had to feed? Tracing the interaction between food and strategy, on both the military and home fronts, this gripping, original account demonstrates how the issue of access to food was a driving force within Nazi policy and contributed to the decision to murder hundreds of thousands of 'useless eaters' in Europe. Focusing on both the winners and losers in the battle for food, *The Taste of War* brings to light the striking fact that war-related hunger and famine was not only caused by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, but was also the result of Allied mismanagement and neglect, particularly in India, Africa and China. American dominance both during and after the war was not only a result of the United States' immense industrial production but also of its abundance of food. This book traces the establishment of a global pattern of food production and distribution and shows how the war subsequently promoted the pervasive influence of American food habits and tastes in the post-war world. A work of great scope, *The Taste of War* connects the broad sweep of history to its intimate impact upon the lives of individuals. Â Â

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Ambitious, compelling, fascinating." [• THE GUARDIAN \(UK\)](#) "Every now and again a book comes along that transforms our understanding of a subject that had previously seemed so well-worn and familiar. That is the measure of Lizzie Collingham's achievement in this outstanding global account of the role played by food (and its absence) during the Second World War. It will now be impossible to think of the war in the old way." [• Richard Overy, LITERARY REVIEW](#) "Fascinating... After this book, no historian will be able to write a comprehensive history of the Second World War without putting the multifarious issues of food production and consumption centre stage." [• Andrew Roberts, FINANCIAL TIMES](#) "Lizzie Collingham's book possesses the notable virtue of originality... [She] has gathered many strands to pursue an important theme across a global canvas. She reminds us of the timeless truth that all human and political behaviour is relative." [• Max Hastings, THE SUNDAY TIMES](#) "An important, original contribution" [• Booklist](#) "A definitive work of World War II scholarship." [• Kirkus](#)

Lizzie Collingham is the author of *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj* and *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*. Having taught history at Warwick University she became a Research Fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge. She is now an independent scholar and writer. She has lived in Australia, France, and Germany and now lives near Cambridge with her husband and small daughter.

I concur with the author's premise that the role of food in war has been largely overlooked by historians. My own research focused on the U.S. Food Administration in World War I and thus I eagerly purchased this study, especially since it received many positive reviews. I offer a contrarian review to those that offer such praise. It is a very tough book to read and I doubt that many made it through each and every page. It contains a lot of interesting and important information, but falls short in several respects: 1) the author it tries to cover too much ground and in doing so is very shallow in many sections; 2) It is literally all over the map - in one section you will travel to a variety of locations impacted by the war and flit back and forth between years and events, including the pre and post-war periods. An overarching summary, including maps and charts, of the pre-war production and flow of food (wheat, sugar, and meat) would have helped immensely; 3) The final

section of the book includes advocacy for some sort of world council that supersedes national governments to control the production and distribution of food to overcome what the author perceives as two major problems - 1) climate change (I assume caused by global warming) and 2) over consumption in the United States and some other western societies. I do not know why such advocacy is included in a book about food in World War II, but as stated earlier, this book is all over the map. To support this contemporary recommendation the author refers to World War I (not II) and claims that the world learned then that free markets don't work during wartime in regard to food production and distribution and therefore links that conclusion to our current situation (global warming/climate change). The problem with this assertion is that it is simply not accurate. During World War I, the Wilson administration and the U.S. Food Administration (led by Herbert Hoover) did not supersede the free market because it wasn't working properly. Instead they did so because they and others assumed it would not fulfill wartime demands. That is a difference with an important distinction. Food prices began to rise sharply in the United States as a result of a worldwide crop failure in wheat in 1916 due to poor weather (not caused by global warming). The 1915 wheat crop in the United States entailed a record setting yield by a large margin (exceeding domestic requirements by 66 percent). The prior record was set by the 1914 crop. But Hoover blamed the price spikes in that occurred following the poor crop of 1916 on speculators and succeeded in replacing the system that existed with one controlled by the U.S. Food Administration, which was formally created in August 1917. But in 1917 the United States wheat crop once again fell well short of expectations as demand for the crop soared. And yet all demands (for the Allies and well as domestically) were met in 1917-19 because of stockpiles from the 1914-15 crop years, when the government did not control the markets. Facts are funny things. Historians can use all of them, some of them, and even pick and choose the ones that support their attempt at advocacy. In my opinion all too often historians cross the line into advocacy. This book includes a mixture of high quality research and advocacy. The result is that it falls short of expectations. A better focused and organized effort, without the advocacy, would have hit the mark. Adam Tooze set the standard in this regard with his masterful study of the Nazi economy - *The Wages of Destruction*. This book falls well short of that mark.

A very readable book that describes the nutritional lives of Americans, Europeans, Asians, and Australians before, after, and particularly during World War II. Food systems as an important cause of the war. Food extraction and distribution reflecting different ideologies, with unexpected impacts on the ability to wage war. And, of course, food distribution (and lack of distribution) as a weapon of

war. The book is very successful at taking the scattered facts that are widely known about WWII, and placing them into an interesting, coherent narrative -- a story in which the food supply was both the basis of and the outcome of power. This is certainly not the book for you, if you seek a full accounting of the important battles. It is also not the book for if you prefer your war stories as simplistic myths about heroism. But read the book, and you will never think of lend lease the same way again... nor the holocaust... nor rationing... nor military rations... nor Hitler's attack on the USSR... nor the Marshall Plan... nor the use of the atomic bombs... nor our contemporary idea of good nutrition. Further, whether you are a liberal or a conservative, you will find yourself nodding knowingly at certain passages, reinforced in your worldview... only to find that same worldview undermined a few pages later. You will also come away with a new understanding of why America and western Europe came out of the war with contrasting sensibilities regarding the proper role of government. All in all, this is the best history book I have read in years.

It is said that armchair generals discuss strategy and tactics while real generals discuss logistics. This book discusses food and logistics as the engines which produce so much suffering in times of war, and which are such driving factors behind military strategy and the decisions to fight wars. I recommend it. If you are like me, you've read countless biographies about the persons behind WWII, and countless more about the battles. If you are ready for a wholly new twist, read about the role that the quest for food played in WWII. This exhaustively researched and well documented history will open your eyes to new motivations for conquest and expansion, and the role which racial identity played in deciding who was to be fed, and who was to be starved. The lessons are surprisingly current as well. While reading it I couldn't help but think about the United States in the second decade of the 21st Century, and how our supply lines and resources are balanced on the head of a pin. I began thinking "what if this happened here?" What would I do to survive. Could Americans survive a disruption of our fuel supply, which would disrupt our food supply, and ultimately our ambivalence about life. Could we survive long without electrical power, fresh water piped into our homes, and air conditioning (and electric heat). Nicely written and chock full of facts.

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