



To the Last Man: A Novel of the First World War

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Jeff Shaara has enthralled readers with his New York Times bestselling novels set during the Civil War and the American Revolution. Now the acclaimed author turns to World War I, bringing to life the sweeping, emotional story of the war that devastated a generation and established America as a world power.

Spring 1916: the horror of a stalemate on Europe's western front. France and Great Britain are on one side of the barbed wire, a fierce German army is on the other. Shaara opens the window onto the otherworldly tableau of trench warfare as seen through the eyes of a typical British soldier who experiences the bizarre and the horrible—a “Tommy” whose innocent youth is cast into the hell of a terrifying war.

In the skies, meanwhile, technology has provided a devastating new tool, the aeroplane, and with it a different kind of hero emerges—the flying ace. Soaring high above the chaos on the ground, these solitary knights duel in the splendor and terror of the skies, their courage and steel tested with every flight.

As the conflict stretches into its third year, a neutral America is goaded into war, its reluctant president, Woodrow Wilson, finally accepting the repeated challenges to his stance of nonalignment. Yet the Americans are woefully unprepared and ill equipped to enter a war that has become worldwide in scope. The responsibility is placed on the shoulders of General John “Blackjack” Pershing, and by mid-1917 the first wave of the American Expeditionary Force arrives in Europe. Encouraged by the bold spirit and strength of the untested Americans, the world waits to see if the tide of war can finally be turned.

From Blackjack Pershing to the Marine in the trenches, from the Red Baron to the American pilots of the Lafayette Escadrille, *To the Last Man* is written with the moving vividness and accuracy that characterizes all of Shaara's work. This spellbinding new novel carries readers—the way only Shaara can—to the heart of one of the greatest conflicts in human history, and puts them face-to-face with the characters who made a lasting impact on the world.

To the Last Man: A Novel of the First World War Details

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Alexw says

Gripping account of the horrors of World War 1. From Black Jack Pershing who was the US Commander to a doughboy in the trenches and 2 airplane fighter pilots, the story wove facts of actual people in the war with brilliant dialogue. Was sad to finish the book.

One of the top 5 books in 2016 for me-highly recommended if you want to know about how the politics of fighting the war and the tremendous physical and mental pain that the soldiers went through. The afterword about how their lives played out was chilling !!

Kate says

Jeff Shaara has done it again, bringing the intensity of war to a immediacy that gives the reader the sense that they are right there: in the trenches, marching to the assaults on German lines or in the air battles over allied or enemy territory. This is achieved by narrowing the cast of characters to a few commanders and a few Marines or Airman whose stories he crafts extremely well.

He also covers the politics of war and the general inability of those who sit in the seats of power to grasp the needs of the fighting men on the front...the logistical nightmares that lead to unnecessary deaths that seem to reoccur in all wars.

I was aware of the difficulties that Gen. Pershing had with both allies and their respective governments, but in less detail. I found it interesting that Pershing's hero was Grant who Lincoln promised would not allow interference in the prosecution of war, and that Pershing found an equal to Lincoln in this matter, with Wilson protecting him from the interference of Washington politics and desktop Generals.

Sadly it seems that every war fails to learn the right lessons from the previous war and embraces all of the wrong lessons. This can be seen in the unprecedented slaughter of over one million men thrown against the new machinery of war: machine guns, heavy artillery, mortars and hand

grenades in a mindless war of attrition. We see it in the inability of some General Staff to appreciate the aeroplanes and tanks that were to become the major machinery of the next war. France ignored the young DeGaulles' Treatise on tank warfare placing all of their defensive strategy on the Maginot line discounting that unwieldy tank who they could not see as a tool of war, the Germans would show them in the Blitzkrieg that led to the fall of France just what tank brigades covered by air power could do. The U.S. General staff completely discounted both tank and air power making no effort to develop the very weapons which the outbreak of WWII would leave us scrambling to bring up to the state of the art weapons. We took the wrong lesson of WWII thinking we could bomb the Viet Minh into submission with our extraordinary air power and failed to learn the lessons of Vietnam in the error we made in not understanding the concept of a counter insurgency which we carried into Iraq with Shock and Awe and the hubris that created another counter insurgency. We make the same logistical errors over and over both in readiness and in wartime. It is not that we do not have brilliant military commanders, but that the politics of Washington normally supports the ones who tell the politicians what they want to hear and punish those who speak out against their stupidities. We build and foist weapons systems on the arm services they don't want, because lobbyists can convince congress that the weapons they are pushing will create jobs for their constituents, with no regard to what the services want or need. Sad that we cannot learn.

This is an excellent read which finally gives credit to the quieter warriors who generally are disdainful of hubris, boasting publicity seekers, and unearned grabs for glory...praising men like Lufberry and the other

quiet men that bring us victory.

Brian says

One of the things I most appreciate about Jeff Shaara is the organization and alternating point of view that he uses in all of his novels. It allows the reader different perspectives, and allows the author to cover more ground with the ability to "location hop" with ease. When one is writing about war, this is a handy tool to have at one's disposal. When you are as uneven a writer as Mr. Shaara, it is a necessary one.

"To The Last Man" starts off with an engrossing chapter depicting a new English recruit arriving at the front lines in Belgium in 1915. It literally starts out with a bang and quickly draws the reader into the text, and the war. Most of the first third of the book is from the perspectives of Baron Ricthofen (later the Red Baron) and Raoul Lufbery an American pilot in the Lafayette Escadrille. I easily confess that I liked Mr. Shaara's focus on the aerial war for much of the novel. Other reviewers have been greatly bothered by it. He portrays aerial warfare, and its birthing pains as a means to make war, with skill and suspense and I sailed through the first part of the text. Occasionally he waxed a little too philosophic for my taste with the musings of Baron Ricthofen, but I quickly forgave the flourish, and to Shaara's credit, I have vivid images of these two aviators in my head, and that is a result of his creation on the page.

Unfortunately historical novelists are limited by history, and these two pilots did not survive the war. Upon their deaths Shaara all but abandons the aerial war, and the last part of the book is divided between American infantryman Roscoe Temple, and General "Black Jack" Pershing. The chapters from Temple's perspective are engaging war writing, and also informative, as the historical Temple had the unfortunate luck to be in the front lines at many of the big battles that the American troops participated in. However, Shaara focuses a lot of time on the behind the scenes maneuvering between the Allies, and the politics that are always a part of war. The bad news is that he has no skill doing this. He is out of his element, and it shows. His rendering of Pershing and the political and military leaders of the war are tone deaf and didactic. Shaara's Pershing does not talk, he pontificates, and as a result the reader quickly comes to loathe him. His inclusion in the novel seems only to me to make the point that the Allies would not have won without American intervention. With his tin ear for realistic dialogue anyway this was a dangerous ground for Shaara to explore, and I don't think he succeeded.

Still, despite the characterization of Pershing, (and the grinding halt his chapters bring the novel to) and some historical inaccuracies in the novel's Afterward, I enjoyed the text. At times I really loved it.

Mr. Shaara is a decent and prolific historical novelist, and I will continue to read his works.

Greg Pettit says

I enjoy historical fiction and I've always been fascinated by the first World War, so I thought this book was tailor-made for me. Unfortunately, it came across as a little too dense and not as engrossing as it should have been.

The author follows the careers of several real-life personalities through the course of the war to describe different aspects of it: Ricthofen (the Red Baron) and Lufbery (of the Lafayette Escadrille) to portray the air war; Ludendorf and Pershing provide details of the German strategy and growing American involvement; and Temple, a private in the Marines for the American perspective of ground combat. I liked that decision over all, because it provided a lot of different perspectives on things. However, it didn't always work for me.

In particular, the last third of the book really bogged down. Going into the novel, I was most interested in the air aces, but by this point they're both dead. I had become very interested in the details of gearing America up for war, and the extensive planning and politicking necessary to get it done, but by this point that's mostly accomplished. So the last part of the book covers Temple and the horrors he experiences in combat. Although this was probably designed and written to be the most exciting part of the novel, to me it was the least interesting.

Still, it was a good book and provided a good overview of many facets of the war. The writing felt a little thick at times, but it was just a style I had to get used to. I liked that it gave life and personality to these historical figures, but there are other straight historical accounts that I have found more compelling.

Stuart Lutzenhiser says

World War I was a war of "too much". Too many people died for too few reasons from too many countries. Why the author would want to add to this by writing a book trying to cover too much ground is beyond me. He does try to focus on a few people, much like in the Civil War novels. However, instead of just one battle (Gettysburg) or one campaign in the war, he spreads his novel over almost the entire breadth of the war - which leaves the book long and disjointed. The Kindle version that I read also didn't help by having odd typo problems that I'm convinced were fixed in the printed edition. The critical last few months of the war, as seen by a US Marine Private was jarring as it moved from early September to early October then back again before moving forward. This, it turns out, was from a series of typos that said September when it was really October. Seems like a minor nit - but in a war that ends in November (spoiler!), the difference between September and October is pretty important. Anyway - I gave it low marks as it didn't really work for me because the author bit off way too much material and thus I never felt like he had done any justice to the people or the events that he was writing about. A Cliff Notes version (in the form of a novel) of World War I. If this is your goal, then this is your book.

Rick Boyer says

My goal in reading this book, was to gain a bit more of a general understanding of WW I. I want to study this war in more detail, because my knowledge and understanding of it is very limited. I like Shaara, and I figured that this would be a good place to start. And it was. Beautifully written in the style that Shaara uses so well: history written like a novel/a novel written like history.

The book doesn't cover the whole war, just the main conflict on the Western Front between Germany and France/Belgium. But there is certainly enough there to give one the basic gist of what was going on, and how it all came to be. I now have my bearings enough to start looking into some straight history on this conflict, in order to study its specific aspects.

I certainly gained a greater appreciation for the horror, devastation, and heartache of WW I.

Jeff Shaara continues to be one of my favorite authors; and I look forward to reading more from him in the future.

Joseph says

To the Last Man, by Jeff Shaara is the semi-fictional account of several men in World War I. The book covers two main three main areas of the war. The Lafayette Espadrille and The Red Baron, General Pershing, and a Marine; Private Roscoe Temple.

The first section of the book lays the ground work and the second section brings the air war into play. The air war is covered from the point of view of French born America Raoul Lufberry telling the story of the Lafayette Espadrille and Baron von Richthofen telling the German side in alternating Chapters. The writing compelling, telling both personal thoughts and giving an history of events and information on the planes. It is easy to forget you are reading a novel and not reading a memoir.

In the middle of the second section General Pershing is introduced and becomes part of the alternating chapters. His story continues into the third section which primarily covers Private Roscoe Temple. As much as I am a sucker for Biplane stories in World War I, this Marine is much more taken in by Shaara's story of Pvt. Temple. First, Shaara does what few people outside of the Marine Corps do, and that is capitalize the "M" in Marine. Secondly, every story I heard from bootcamp was in the book "Retreat, hell we just got here." to the Marines at Belleau Wood and the renaming of the woods in their honor. Shaara does a wonderful job of capturing the Marine spirit in the book. Everything from Marines complaining they are issued army uniforms without a Marine insignia bravery in battle. Pvt. Temple is a filler in a army squad that is mostly gunned down. The army sergeant wants the squad to hold their position because there are too many Germans to fight. Pvt Temple speaks up that if there are to many Germans we need to fix that. The sergeant is taken back and assumes Temple is an officer. Temple replies " I'm not an officer, just a Marine."

Overall a great read.

Mike says

Can't rate a book about two aviation heroes less than **4 Stars**. Four historic characters form the backbone of the story: Manfred von Richthofen, Raoul Lufberry, John "Black Jack" Pershing and Roscoe Temple (a Marine rifleman). Shaara weaves an excellent story around these figures and you get an understanding of what they must have dealt with. Really liked the flying history and gained new respect for those aviators. Pershing's story was interesting and you will understand why the AEF was so determined to keep the American Army together, the Brits and French desperately tried to get the Americans to fill out their ranks. Temple's story was ground-level, no big picture, just bloody fights. Excellent history with just a little fiction thrown in. Liked it.

Jason says

Shaara takes his father's formula from *The Killer Angels* (the same formula he's followed throughout his writing career) and tells the story of World War I from the points of view of its major players: The Red Baron, Pershing, the common foot soldier in the trenches, the American pilots who volunteered to fight in the French air force. It's dense, and not everyone will appreciate the minute attention to detail Shaara observes, but this is the book where he seems to have found his own unique voice, even as he still follows his father's novel-writing formula. He is currently at work on a World War II trilogy, the first of which (*The*

Rising Tide) has been out for a few months. But to truly understand the political landscape that led to WW II one MUST understand WW I, and this is a great place to begin. See also The First World War: A Complete History by Martin Gilbert and/or The Guns of August (Non-fic Pulitzer Winner, 1962) by Barbra Tuchman.

On my second reading now, and it holds up pretty well. There's so much content that it's almost like reading it for the first time, as I had forgotten so much of what happened because, frankly, there's a LOT that happens. Having done some studying on this part of history over the past year I feel I understand the context much better, so maybe that's why it seems to be sticking better this time around. I think I'll add a star to my review from last time.

Zee Ashworth says

The disclaimer should read "sucker for historical fiction." I found this book to be packed with historical detail, but not historically overwhelming. This is a book about the men who fought the "war to end all wars" -- from both sides of the trenches. Have you always wanted to know about the Red Baron (and wonder why Snoopy has a fixation)? Have you wondered about Pershing? (probably not... who remembers these days?) The Sopwith Camel? the fly-boys of the Lafayette Escadrille? Here are riveting answers -- laced with emotion and the reality of what I've always considered the most stupid of stupid wars.

However, that said (the stupid part), I learned quite a lot about how PR began to frame the public view of war; how early fighter pilots thought about engaging the enemy; how the US was ill-prepared for entrance and fought a battle of national identity against the Brits and French, who wanted to merely add the American soldiers to men already mired in muddy trenches.

My grandfather fought in tanks in France and returned from WWI. I have his helmet, many pictures, and his diary which is in code (and I can't read it... drat!). I've always been attracted to this war -- questioning and wondering about events and men, death and survival, nations and generations lost.

Jeff Shaara creates a world of personal interaction, getting into the heads of the "real" characters Red Baron and Pershing, and several amazing fictitious characters who seem so real we should be able to find their names in the history books.

I switched back and forth from listening to an excellent narrated version to reading the big book -- doing time on the treadmill (hey! we're just finishing a harsh winter in Vermont) one day, and sitting with a cozy dish of popcorn and a warm blanket the next. I read myself to sleep each night and couldn't put the book down for long without wanting to pick it up again, to discover what happened next, even though I knew the ending before I started.

Josh says

If you like historical fiction, Shaara is the man. Pershing, the Red Baron, and a host of other historical figures are depicted. I really enjoyed this one.

"The numbers tell the tale. In four years of the most brutal combat the world has ever seen, nearly ten million men die on the battlefield or in the hospitals nearby. The cost in human life can be translated to the loss of

more than five thousand men *every day* the war was fought. Thus an entire generation of young men is erased from the future of humanity.

In the United States, the cost of the war is horrifying in its own way. Over fifty thousand men die, a number that pales in comparison to the losses of the other major participants. But the American deaths occur in the relatively brief period from May to November 1918. The number is eerily similar to the losses suffered in the Vietnam War, losses that occur over a period of *fourteen years*

If the United States army had not arrived when it did and had not fought the way it did, the Allies would have lost the war."

Alex says

I'm sure many Gods and Generals fans will disagree with me, but I truly believe this to be Jeff Shaara's finest novel to date. Although the first two thirds can be more on the educational side with less action, the fact that he spent any time at all on early aviation is extraordinary. As my dad was a pilot, I find the incredible achievements of the Red Baron awe-inspiring, for such primitive planes. The first American combat pilots were required to use machine guns placed on the roof so as not to disturb the propellers.

It only gets better as the focus changes from the air to the ground. As everyone begins to die around the main character, you really get a fell for what it was like for the WW1 soldier.

Trina says

Plods along like a history of WWI. For that, you're better off with *Guns of August*.

Brendan Hodge says

Shaara has made his name writing well researched novels dealing with America's military history, starting with his prequel and sequels to his father's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Killer Angels*. In *To The Last Man*, Shaara turns his attention to World War One. He has four main characters: American Raoul Lufbery who volunteered to fly planes with the French air service before America came into the war; German pilot Manfred von Richthofen better known as the Red Baron; General John Pershing, who led the American expeditionary force when the US entered the war; and Private Roscoe Temple of the US Marine Corps. All of these are real historical characters on whom Shaara clearly did his research.

The structure of the book can be a little odd. It breaks into two halves, with the first half almost exclusively dealing with the air war and the two flying ace characters. The second half deals with the last year of the land war from a primarily American perspective. As such, this is very much an American view of the war, even though we have some French characters in Lufbery's sections and of course we get a German view in the chapters dealing with the Red Baron.

The writing is competent throughout, but I didn't find myself deeply emotionally invested in the characters. I wanted to find out what happened to them, but somehow I never felt that extra bit of immediacy which makes you shrink away as the character suffers, and hope at ever turn that good things will happen to the

character.

However, I didn't dislike any of the characters and this is a good, workmanlike effort bringing a little known period of American history to life. I could wish for a novel that dealt with the war more widely, rather than a strictly American view, but that would simply be a different novel.

If I could do fractions, I'd rate this 3.5 stars, but I'll round up to 4 for the historical effort put forth and the fact that the characters do seem individual and detailed even if I wasn't emotionally invested in them. They are certainly not mere placeholders or ideological pawns.

Bethany says

Only Jeff Shaara can take a possible info-dump and mold it into a gripping and captivating novel. *To the Last Man* recounts the experiences of American and German troops in the air, the trenches, and command during The Great War. We intimately follow "Black Jack" Pershing, an American Marine in the trenches, the Red Baron, and American pilot Lufbery to develop a better understanding of the real plights and thoughts of those involved in the War to End All Wars.

I cannot express this enough, I respect this work with every fiber of my being. Shaara researched each of the men this novel follows extensively. It shows. The images created are so vivid. I've yet to read a historical book that has put me into the the shoes of the men who have experienced the event discussed like this. Shaara uses just enough creative liberties to make this novel read just so, but does not sacrifice historical accuracy in the slightest. It is absolutely wonderfully written.

That being said, one star is missing from this rating. This star was taken away because a book this stupendous can afford to be rated more critically. The missing star is due to a craving left unsatisfied within this novel. I understand that Shaara writes his novels to put American history in the limelight, but I so wish that some of this novel followed a German foot soldier. The chapters dedicated to The Red Baron were phenomenal, but they did not shed very much light to what the life of the common soldier would have been like. There is a lot of war for Shaara to have packed into one book, but I wish it would have been slightly longer in order to expand the experiences the reader walks through. I never thought I'd say that a 600+ page book wasn't long enough. If that isn't testament to how beautifully this novel was done, I don't know what is.

I can't recommend this novel enough. I enjoyed every moment of this read, and if you are also a history buff, I know you will too.
