



# The Steel Wave

*Jeff Shaara*

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## **The Steel Wave** Jeff Shaara

General Dwight Eisenhower commands a diverse army that must destroy Hitler's European fortress. On the coast of France, German commander Erwin Rommel prepares for the coming invasion, as the Führer thwarts the strategies Rommel knows will succeed. Meanwhile, Sergeant Jesse Adams, a veteran of the 82nd Airborne, parachutes with his men behind German lines. And as the invasion force surges toward the beaches of Normandy, Private Tom Thorne of the 29th Infantry Division faces the horrifying prospect of fighting his way ashore on Omaha Beach, a stretch of coast more heavily defended than the Allied commanders anticipate. From G.I. to general, **The Steel Wave** carries us through the war's most crucial juncture, the invasion that altered the flow of the war and, ultimately, changed history.

## **The Steel Wave Details**

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Author : Jeff Shaara

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## From Reader Review The Steel Wave for online ebook

### Sam & Hilary says

I'd love to give this novel 5 stars, but I feel I should leave some room for better books to come. I only have two complaints. First, Shaara went into great detail of the planning and preparation of the D-Day invasion, unfortunately he didn't choose to spend much time on the actual beach landings. Secondly, no fault of Shaara's, but due to Pattons uninvolvedness of the D-Day invasion, his presence was missed in this story until the very end. I suppose that makes me want to read the 3rd book that much more.

From reading (and watching) Ambrose's Band of Brothers, I am somewhat aware of the 101st airborne's heroics. Similarly, The Steel Wave highlights what the 82nd airborne achieved further to the west.

Lastly, the book did a wonderful job of telling the story of Erwin Rommel. Unfortunately his lot in life was to be a terrific General underneath a delusional leader.

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### Victoria\_Grossack Grossack says

The Steel Wave is so realistic that I have to wonder if it is actually fiction. I suppose that Shaara decided to go for that classification to give him more leeway in creating thoughts and conversations of his characters. However, the attitudes and language and all the details appear incredibly well researched.

The book is about D-Day. Nevertheless, it starts before D-Day itself, covering a lot of the planning. I liked very much how the very first section covered a group of men several months before the actual event, going to the beaches to gather rocks and soil samples. A small episode, probably forgotten by most, in which the men were considered expendable – but necessary to make sure that the soil on the beach could actually support the landing craft. The book continues beyond D-Day, ending pretty much with the forced-suicide of Rommel.

Shaara takes care in presenting both sides. He also makes you feel, most of the time, what is so easily looked over by people today – that they really did not know who was going to win. All throughout D-Day, Eisenhower has a statement in his pocket – his prepared announcement if the invasion fails. It is a while before Ike can finally put that announcement aside.

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### Jason Golomb says

Author Jeff Shaara incorporates two real-life quotes in the early pages of his World War II novel, "The Steel Wave", that help set the tone for their respective country's approach, aims and well-known results:

*"In war, there is no prize for runner-up."*

U.S. General Omar Bradley

*"We Germans have far greater and more urgent duty towards civilization to perform...WE, like the Japanese,*

*can only fulfill it by the sword. War is a biological necessity."*

Friedrich Von Bernhardi

"Steel Wave" is the second in Shaara's World War II trilogy and it excites me on two levels. The first is that it's simply good story-telling. The plots move steadily and the battle 'ambience' is three-dimensional. The second is that Shaara's successfully managed to blend narrative and real-world history. I feel more knowledge about the time period, and my horizons are broadened, without feeling the damning weight of a very dense period in time.

Shaara does a capable job of describing the vibes and aura of war and how it encapsulates an individual: the smells, the sites, the emotions. The fictional Jesse Adams, a paratrooper who's dropped behind the German lines on D-Day, and who made his first wartime jump in Shaara's 'The Rising Tide', is about to step into the airplane that will introduce he and his unit to this phase of World War II: *"Across the field, the engines began to fire, a growing roar, and he put a hand out against the cold metal of the plane, and put his foot on the bottom step of the ladder. The engines had filled every space in his brain, no room for voices, for music or fears. He looked up, high overhead, and realized the sky had filled with stars. He stared for a brief moment -- cold perfection, vast emptiness -- then took another breath, touched the Thompson (machine gun) again, and pressed one hand against the reserve chute on his chest, and climbed up into the plane."*

D-Day is the center-point of the plot that provides focus for "The Steel Wave". The invasion at Omaha beach is told through the eyes of grunts on the ground (on both sides of the lines). The staccato narrative builds an undeniable tension, and evokes what can only be imagined for those of us who've never experienced something like it.

Shaara has an eye for the resource management conflicts that must face any scaled wartime effort, and the personalities and relationships that often drive decision making. World War II had a full slate of big personalities, ranging from the overstated arrogance of Britain's General Montgomery to the brashly outspoken U.S. General Patton. Many of these personality 'difficulties' drive smaller elements of the stories' plot, but Shaara certainly conveys that unique individuals and their respective relationships gave General Eisenhower more than a few tightropes to walk.

Through the stress and very real life-threatening fear that pervades the wartime experience, Shaara expresses how many soldiers could simply 'let go' even when given the chance. In an exchange with one of his men while recuperating in England, following 30 straight days in the field starting on D-Day, Adams discusses what's next:

*Unger nodded again. "Awful darned quiet in that barracks." He paused. "You think they'll send us to France again? I really wanna go back, Sarge. I think I miss it."*

*Adams absorbed the words, saw the dark in Unger's eyes. "That's it, kid. You miss it. So do I."*

Shaara's characterizations are not the strength of the book, but the plot and the seamlessly interwoven history and story-telling is what makes "Steel Wave" a terrific and edifying read.

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## Anne says

Having heard about the D-Day invasion all my life it was great to finally learn how it happened. I have

enjoyed many of Shaara's books and this is no exception. He does a great job of the "novelization" by looking deeply at the men and presents a good sense of their characters. It's not text book history but is still an excellent way to learn history.

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### **Zohar - ManOfLaBook.com says**

This is the second book of a trilogy by Jeff Shaara (the first being "The Rising Tide") of what's being called "fictional history". The topic for this book is the events leading up and after D-Day (January thru September 1944) seeing through the eyes of the aggressor (Eisenhower), the defender (Rommel), generals (Bradley, Patton, von Rundstedt) and an ordinary soldier (Sergeant Jesse Adams, a paratrooper of the 82nd Airborne.).

The beauty of these books is the way the author weaves the contrasting day-to-day activities of the people he writes about, how he gets into their mindsets and "dares" guessing what they were thinking through huge amounts of research.

Another interesting aspect of this book is how Mr. Shaara explores the political struggles that pulled at both sides. Eisenhower by trying to control his generals as well as appease politicians, while Rommel is trying to get Hitler to defend the whole coast of France while trying to remove himself from being implicated in the failed assassination attempt on the Fuhrer.

You don't have to be a history buff to love it because..it's not history but "historical"

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### **Rick says**

Good story about D-Day, its planning, execution and aftermath. Seemed a little drier than volume 1. Looking forward to volume 3.

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### **John says**

This is considered a historical novel because rather than being a history of the D-Day landings it focuses on some of the key participants and tells their story and conversations in a narrative format. But the author did his research and got the details right. The main characters it follows in alternating chapters are Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, Gen. George Patton, Sgt. Jesse Adams of the 82nd Airborne and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel for the German viewpoint. There are a few other characters included, but those are the primary characters featured. It was interesting reading about D-Day from their perspectives because rather than seeing the battle as history I was reading about it as a participant. It really felt as if the outcome was hanging in the balance. In fact, the Germans might well have won had not Adolph Hitler been such an incompetent leader who surrounded himself with yes men. I've read several previous histories of D-Day, but this book reviewed a lot of new information and new viewpoints. I especially liked hearing the different views on British General Montgomery. If you are looking for a detailed history of D-Day and the months following then you might look to the excellent history by Stephen Ambrose. However I highly recommend this book as an addendum to it. I think you will enjoy getting into the heads of some of the major players as well as it's slightly different perspective on the strategy of the generals on both sides of the battle.

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## **Dr T says**

This is a book of epic proportions - the epic story of the Allies landing in Normandy, and the epic size of the book (800pp). The Steel Wave covers the events leading up to the Normandy landing, the landing itself, and the aftermath as the Allies surge through northern France. The book is particularly strong in the way it presents all the complicated and often conflicting factors that went into this world-changing operation, both from the Allies and the German points of view. Shaara singles out various people at various levels of the operation, from Churchill and Eisenhower down to enlisted paratroopers on the Allied side, and follows Rommel's course on the German side. Shaara has done extensive research into the events of the time, and the military and political factors encountered. The result is an extremely readable epic that carries the reader through the events of that period in 1944.

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## **Paul says**

This book follows the author's "The Rising Tide," which I previously reviewed. The same general comments obtain here. This novel is largely about the invasion in Normandy, but covers considerable time both before and after 6 June 44.

Again, the characters include the high (Ike, FDR, Winnie) and the low (a German machine gunner, jump troopers with the 82d Airborne). Fortunately, in this story the good guys always prevail in the end, but there are many moments when one feels blessed that our opponents were led by a madman, rather than, say, Rommel.

A wonderful read if the subject holds even a scintilla of interest for the reader.

Again, as in "The Rising Tide," we learn in the epilogue the post-war stories of many of the characters.

I look forward to the next book in what I hope is a series of WW II books by Shaara.

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## **Frank says**

The second book in the World War II series gives us the build up into D-day and the aftermath in the battle in France.

You get the points of view of all the key players, Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, Rommel, as well as, paratroopers, such as Jesse Adams.

These soldiers are all real players, Shaara does a wonderful job interweaving their thoughts and actions throughout this story.

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## **Libby says**

I'm a Shaara fan because of the way he makes war personal. You feel like you know and admire and respect the main players in his books, and understand their motivations for the decisions they make. This book had none of that. Every character sounded the same to me--no personality. I also felt like there were a lot of boring details that made it hard to see the big picture of what happened on D-Day. It ended up being a hard book to get through for me.

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## **Steven Peterson says**

Jeff Shaara's father famously authored the historical novel, "Gettysburg." Since, fils has written a prequel and a sequel to his father's opus, as well as similar historical novels about the Revolutionary War, the Mexican American War, the First World War, and the Second World War. This is the second of a World War II trilogy, the first having focused on the American war in the Sahara. The focus here is D-Day.

Much has been written about D-Day—fictional and historical. Is there still room for yet another work? In this case, the answer is in the affirmative. Not that there is a great deal new here. One will read images and characterizations vaguely similar to other renditions of this bloody assault on Fortress Europe. But the end result is still capable of capturing one's attention.

As usual for this series of works, we see the invasion and its immediate aftermath through the eyes of several key figures—from the top leaders (Erwin Rommel among the Germans and Dwight Eisenhower) to lower level officers (such as General James Gavin to Captain/Major Edwin Scofield) to the foot soldiers themselves (such as Jesse Adams, Tom Thorne, and Wallace Unger). There are other characters well portrayed. One gets a sense of the raging but trapped general, George Patton, trying to behave for just one more chance at war and command—and, once unleashed, creating a picture of drive the defeat the Germans.

It is, perhaps, as a series of character studies of the cast here in the almost unbelievable Hell of combat that is the focus of the narrative. And there is humanness to that narrative that, ultimately, makes this a successful fictionalization of the desperate struggle at Normandy.

So, the tradition of the Shaara's—pere et fils, continues, with yet another solid historical novelization of war. A focus on characters, of course, means that much of the battle—outside their experience—goes unmentioned. In the end, though, a compelling piece of work.

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## **John Roadman says**

Another great Jeff Shaara novel. Really enjoyed this book. Was pretty shocked at the ending to find the main German character over the first two books was forced to commit suicide with a cyanide capsule for supposedly plotting to kill Hitler ( which he did not plot)!!!

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## **Linda says**

"I realized that the greatest drama here is not the event but the raw and frightening uncertainty for everyone involved." So states Jeff Shaara in his introduction to the second volume in his WWII trilogy, and wow, did he ever come through! Though the events of this horrendous war have been chewed over for more than half a century, Shaara brings a sense of immediacy to his recounting that stimulates genuine anxiety in the reader. He's definitely hit his stride as historical novelist, bringing together painstaking research with his considerable skills at dramatization.

The Steel Wave covers the period from January to September, 1944, beginning with the planning of D-day and ending with the Allies' success at driving the Germans from France. Shaara alternates between action scenes involving the fighting men and their generals, and strategic sessions involving the higher ups, most notably Churchill, Eisenhower, Montgomery, and Patton for the Allies, and Rommel for the Nazis. Even Hitler makes the occasional appearance. The author's admiration for Rommel, who fought with honor for his country while despising Hitler, is obvious, and probably justified. Similarly, Shaara illustrates the delicate balancing act performed by Eisenhower as he coordinated American and British staff officers and juggled American and British political demands. Having watched all the old WWII movies, it's easy to shrug off the Normandy invasion as perfectly planned and executed, but having read this book, your comfortable assumptions are blown to bits. Very little went as planned, and the men who fought this campaign carried on in the face of mind-boggling, unforeseen obstacles.

What Shaara does best is encapsulate the experience of the soldiers. As his father did in *The Killer Angels*, in which provided the most incredible description of an artillery bombardment that I've ever read, the son now does for Omaha Beach and its grueling aftermath. "... Screaming wails, the air above them ripped and shattered. The shells began to thunder above them, jolting him, the men tumbling again, more dust, the concrete shaking, deafening blasts. He lay flat, held his helmet to his head, curled his legs in tight, felt himself bouncing on the concrete, his hands hard on his ears, his brain screaming into the roar of fire, the terror grabbing him, pulling him into a complete and perfect hell." When these guys, those who survived the landing, hit the beach, they were soaking wet and really scared, and it's been said that men were dying at the rate of one every six seconds. And yet they prevailed, in the air, on the sea, and on the land, in the face of everything Rommel could throw at them.

The Steel Wave makes the battles, and those who fought them, come alive. No dry facts, maps, and figures here. We should not forget those who won this war, and those who read this book are in no danger of that.

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## **Dr. Michael Galvin says**

I enjoyed this book much more than Shaara's earlier WWII book. My criticism of Shaara (and this may be unfair) is that his dialogue does not ring true. If you've spent time in the company of men in either the military or on a sports team you know the language is much more colorful than Shaara portrays. Maybe he is trying to reach a broad audience and doesn't want to offend the more prudish reader or the very young but I find the lack of realistic dialogue a bit detracting.



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## **Rick says**

This is an excellent book. As with all of Jeff Shaara's books it provides the history through the words of those who lived it. His ability to build the events using historical documents from those who lived it makes his works come alive. I highly recommend this and any of Shaara's work to people who are interested in learning more about the various struggles our nation has been involved in.

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## **Jim says**

This is the second of Shaara's trilogy on WWII-ETO. His books are novels based on research and focusing on both the soldiers and the leaders, so we get a look at war from the top-and the bottom. This one covers the massive preparations for the D-Day landings, D-Day itself, June 6, 1944, and the Normandy Campaign which lasted into August of 44. The two soldiers that are in focus are a paratrooper and an infantryman who goes ashore on Omaha Beach on D-Day (both are based on actual persons). I would have liked to have seen more of the view of a German soldier. The two leaders focused on are Eisenhower and Rommel. Both men had a lot of problems to deal with and not as much freedom of action as they would have liked. But Rommel's situation was worse, far worse I think. He was under the orders of Hitler, a man increasingly detached from reality. We see Rommel--with great reluctance--get drawn into the conspiracy to oust Hitler from power and /or kill him. And in the end, it is Rommel who will die. Perhaps he should have been more actively involved in the plot...but he was a German officer right up to the end...

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## **Erik says**

Heh, I just noticed that I finished reading this book about the Normandy Invasion on D-Day.

I had more difficulty getting into this Jeff Shaara novel than I usually do. I think it is because I already knew a lot about the build-up to the invasion. Once D-Day rolled around in the book it got much better. Shaara does a good job describing battle scenes and also does a fine job going over the tactics of the commanders.

I actually felt sorry for the Germans near the end of the book, especially Rommel and Von Kluge. I grew to dislike Sgt. Adams, and General Montgomery and found a whole new respect for men like Eisenhower and Tedder.

Good book, not great but good.

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## **Suzanne says**

*"Dundee nodded, slowly, tried to see Henley's face, gone now, as though he never existed. The word came to him again, the word they all understood: expendable. He put his hand on his waist, felt for the pouch, the rocks. He pulled the pouch around in front of him, unfastened the strap, held it up. Mission accomplished. Those bloody engineers had better make some use of this. We lost a good man...for a bag of rocks."*

The second novel in Jeff Shaara's trilogy of World War II begins with a covert operation to survey the beaches of Normandy. It ends five months after the massive invasion that from land, looked like a Steel Wave coming in to shore. Continuing in the tradition of historical and storytelling excellence, Shaara relates the events of the beginning of the end of World War II.

As in his previous novel, *The Steel Wave* uses points of view from the generals on down to a sergeant. This gives the reader a good feel as to the strategy and the down-in-the trenches view of these battles of Northern France. One can appreciate Shaara's historical accuracy, as well as his gift of storytelling. If you're looking for good historical fiction, it doesn't get any better.

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## **Mr. Matt says**

In fiction the middle book in a trilogy often suffers. It is a transition from point A to point B. The first book introduces the crisis. In the second book the main characters suffer a set back. In the final book the crisis comes to a head and the good guys emerge victorious. This doesn't really apply to Shara's brand of historical fiction.

The Steel Wave, I think, will be the best of the three books. It is the tipping point. The Germans have been rocked back in Africa and Italy and are suffering in the East against the Russians. There is a sense, however, that the Nazis can still prevail. The loss of Italy is, in some ways, a benefit as they were, at best, a wash in terms of an ally. And the terrain of Italy is built for defense - rugged terrain, bad roads, lots of rivers. The Americans and British need to open up a second front. Somewhere the flood of mechanized tanks and trucks can create and exploit a breakthrough. In the Steel Wave, the reader gets a front row seat into D-Day, the invasion of France, and the subsequent struggle to escape the bocage country.

The Steel Wave also deals with the internal crisis of the Wehrmacht. Rommel and other German officers are increasingly disillusioned with a leadership that is not just out of touch but out right insane. Hitler lived in a Cloud Cuckoo Land where divisions of German troops waited to repel the allies. Entirely disconnected with reality, he ignores Rommel's reports that the divisions exist as a fighting force on paper alone. Exhausted by almost constant combat, their reserves of ammunition non-existent, and their armor destroyed by roving bands of allied fighters there is nothing left to throw at the Americans and British. Disillusionment ultimately leads to the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and Rommel's death.

In The Steel Wave Shara also addresses one of his real weaknesses. He focuses a great deal of the story on Adams, a sargeant in the 82nd airborne infantry. It is through his eyes that we see the horrors of dropping into occupied France, the disaster of fighting in the bocage country, and the utter exhaustion of 30 some straight days of combat. This turn was a good move. It personalizes the story. Sometimes reading Shara's works I get the sense that the books are neither one thing nor the other. They aren't historical narratives and they aren't straight up historical fiction. Both of these can be done very well. (See Shelby Foote's fantastic Civil War trilogy and just about anything Bernard Cornwell). Focusing on Adams elevates the story from the realm of snooze inducing stories of Eisenhower dealing with the political pressures to win the war now.

As I slog on into the next book, I suspect that the final book will be much weaker. The war is clearly ending. Germany is besieged from East and West. Allied bombers are devastating her cities and factories. The Wehrmacht is short of men and material. The officer corps is purged. I suspect the third book will have much less of the drama than the second.

Three stars out of five. If you enjoy your history you will like these books. If not, you should probably stay away.

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