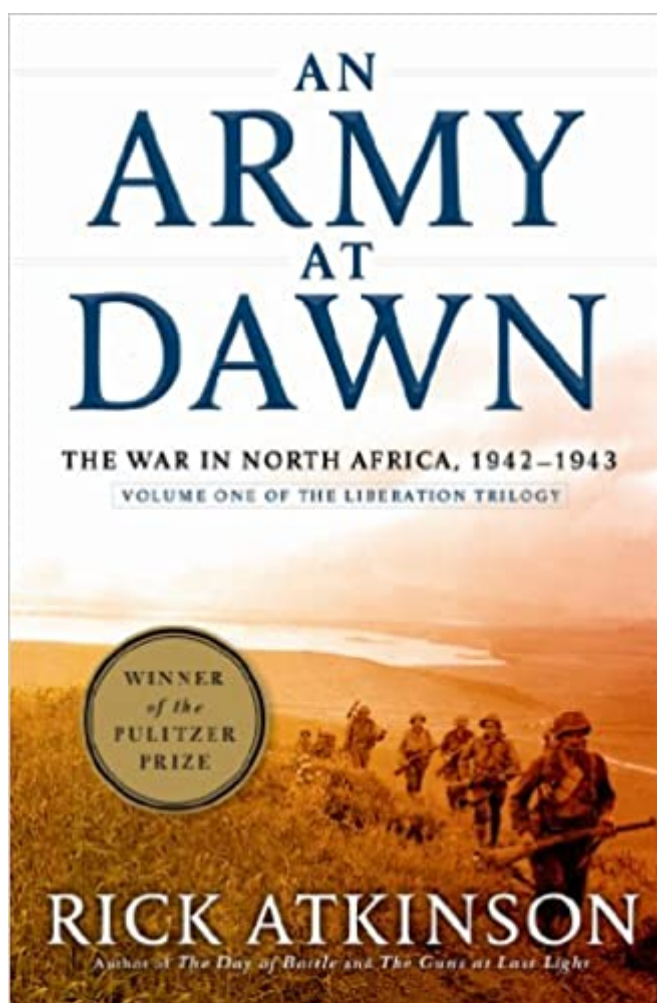


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# An Army At Dawn: The War In North Africa, 1942-1943 (The Liberation Trilogy, Vol. 1)



## Synopsis

**WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE AND NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER**In the first volume of his monumental trilogy about the liberation of Europe in WW II, Pulitzer Prize winner Rick Atkinson tells the riveting story of the war in North Africa. The liberation of Europe and the destruction of the Third Reich is a story of courage and enduring triumph, of calamity and miscalculation. In this first volume of the Liberation Trilogy, Rick Atkinson shows why no modern reader can understand the ultimate victory of the Allied powers without a grasp of the great drama that unfolded in North Africa in 1942 and 1943. That first year of the Allied war was a pivotal point in American history, the moment when the United States began to act like a great power. Beginning with the daring amphibious invasion in November 1942, *An Army at Dawn* follows the American and British armies as they fight the French in Morocco and Algeria, and then take on the Germans and Italians in Tunisia. Battle by battle, an inexperienced and sometimes poorly led army gradually becomes a superb fighting force. Central to the tale are the extraordinary but fallible commanders who come to dominate the battlefield: Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, Montgomery, and Rommel. Brilliantly researched, rich with new material and vivid insights, Atkinson's narrative provides the definitive history of the war in North Africa.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 681 pages

Publisher: Henry Holt and Co.; 1st edition (October 2, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0805062882

ISBN-13: 978-0805062885

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.1 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 1,069 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #70,397 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in [Books > History > Africa >](#)

[North Africa](#) #41 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Africa](#) #137 in [Books >](#)

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## Customer Reviews

In *An Army at Dawn*, a comprehensive look at the 1942-1943 Allied invasion of North Africa, author Rick Atkinson posits that the campaign was, along with the battles of Stalingrad and Midway, where the "Axis ... forever lost the initiative" and the "fable of 3rd Reich invincibility was dissolved."

Additionally, it forestalled a premature and potentially disastrous cross-channel invasion of France and served as a grueling "testing ground" for an as-yet inexperienced American army. Lastly, by relegating Great Britain to what Atkinson calls the status of "junior partner" in the war effort, North Africa marked the beginning of American geopolitical hegemony. Although his prose is occasionally overwrought, Atkinson's account is a superior one, an agile, well-informed mix of informed strategic overview and intimate battlefield-and-barracks anecdotes. (Tobacco-starved soldiers took to smoking cigarettes made of toilet paper and eucalyptus leaves.) Especially interesting are Atkinson's straightforward accounts of the many "feuds, tiffs and spats" among British and American commanders, politicians, and strategists and his honest assessments of their--and their soldiers'--performance and behavior, for better and for worse. This is an engrossing, extremely accessible account of a grim and too-often overlooked military campaign. --H. O'Billovich

Atkinson won a Pulitzer Prize during his time as a journalist and editor at the Washington Post and is the author of *The Long Gray Line: The American Journey of West Point's Class of 1966* and of *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War*. In contrast to *Crusade's* illustrations of technomastery, this book depicts the U.S. Army's introduction to modern war. The Tunisian campaign, Atkinson shows, was undertaken by an American army lacking in training and experience alongside a British army whose primary experience had been of defeat. Green units panicked, abandoning wounded and weapons. Clashes between and within the Allies seemed at times to overshadow the battles with the Axis. Atkinson's most telling example is the relationship of II Corps commander George Patton and his subordinate, 1st Armored Division's Orlando Ward. The latter was a decent person and capable enough commander, but he lacked the final spark of ruthlessness that takes a division forward in the face of heavy casualties and high obstacles. With Dwight Eisenhower's approval, Patton fired him. The result was what Josef Goebbels called a "second Stalingrad"

I purchased Rick Atkinson's "Army at Dawn" and the other two titles in his Liberation Trilogy after hearing him impressively lecture about the most recent book in the trilogy, "The Guns at Last Light." Atkinson is among that rare breed of historians who are also talented writers; it is one thing to know history and lecture about it. It is quite another to have the ability to bring it to life on the printed page. Atkinson excels as both researcher and story teller. "Army at Dawn" history lesson is laden with anecdotes, and a reader can only pause now and then to marvel at the the time, effort, and execution that Atkinson implemented to enlighten readers in this text and in the trilogy mates that

succeeded it. A professional military historian may find fault with "Dawn," but for us non-professionals, the book is a fascinating read, laced with stories about the American military personalities of the day and the ordinary foot soldiers and tankers, but doing so without ever losing sight of the underlying theme: the initial involvement of American military forces in North Africa in the early days of World War II. A note of caution: Rick Atkinson is an excellent wordsmith, and his vocabulary is exceptional, yet never used glibly or gratuitously. Still, a reader of Atkinson's trilogy would be well advised to keep a dictionary by the bedpost, because his prose brings powerful expression to the English language as well as to American military history. You can choose to dismiss his prose as overkill, or you can choose to treat it as an expression of a man's exceptional vocabulary; I rarely encountered a page that didn't offer up at least one "new" word. I chose to accept the Atkinson Word Challenge, and I spruced up my own vocabulary in the process.

An Army at Dawn by Rick Atkinson is a phenomenal read presenting the battles for Africa during WWII. Military history is not my forte but Atkinson brings battles to life from numerous angles. Obviously, he discusses battle strategies from the perspective of both the Allied and Axis armies. He reviews Allied leaders in detail for both their flaws and what made others successful, particularly Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, Montgomery, and many officers of lower rank. There is an effective use of quotes from letters and other documents from the allied troops sent home, plus personal letters sent by officers to home or to one another. There is a liberal use of quotes from Patton for his colorful use of language, both oral and written. One of Atkinson's best accomplishments is his ability to remove the fog of war delivering a narrative that is easy to follow and very engaging. One recommendation is to have a dictionary nearby when reading. Atkinson introduced new words to my vocabulary more than any author I have come across.

Atkinson is a gifted writer with a talent for presenting WWII combat in blunt, unadorned prose faithfully describing the chaos, terror, emotional shock, pathos and savagery of each battle. As an additional bonus, the author focuses on the ordinary American infantryman and the American home front, two heroes often given short shrift in WWII non-fiction books. Using his talent for almost lyrical prose, Atkinson can make you experience the frustration, fears and hopes of ordinary soldiers fighting desperate battles - the sense of stark realism is tempered by his compassion for ordinary soldiers attempting to follow orders, orders both foolish and brilliant. Atkinson also acknowledges our debt to the American home front which produced an abundance of weapons, supplies and food which powered not only the American forces but the Brits, Russians, Chinese and Canadians on

various fronts. His description of a small Iowa town receiving a blizzard of "We regret to inform you" telegrams from the War Dept. after a single, bloody battle conveys a sense of the shock and despair experienced by the town's residents upon learning that many of their sons had died in combat - a truly moving depiction of the grief shared by a close knit community of average Americans. However, Atkinson shares an obsession held by many historians. He drags the reader through the childish politics of the North African war, the oft told tale of the Darlan incident, the juvenile antics of Churchill and Roosevelt touring the countryside after their self serving conference in Casablanca and the feud between British and American generals detailing the Brits' national inferiority complex over American efforts to assist them and the American's unwarranted feelings of inferiority toward a British military who retreated in France, were hastily evacuated, had their capitol city thoroughly bombed, surrendered an impregnable fortress in Singapore and after many initial failures finally managed to stand up to the Germans in Africa. If you're looking for a Homeric tale of heroes like Achilles and Hector - only with Eisenhower and Montgomery playing the hero role then this isn't the book for you. Atkinson is unimpressed with our various Great Men but he consistently tries to be fair in his criticism of their faults. Overall, an excellent WWII history with the exception of tedious political squabbles.

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