



The Battle of Alamein: Turning Point, World War II

By John Bierman, Colin Smith

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In this superb history, two seasoned journalists unfold the decisive campaigns of the desert war that began with the Italian invasion of Egypt in September 1940 and ended with the mass surrender of Axis forces in Tunis in May 1943.

Writing with great verve and style, John Bierman and Colin Smith create a stunning panorama peopled by some of the most glamorous, dangerous and mysterious figures in the war. At the center of this sweeping narrative stand two heroes, German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the notorious "Desert Fox," and the British Lieutenant General Bernard "Monty" Montgomery, whose showdown at the little Egyptian railway stop of El Alamein is one of the great moments in military history. Bierman and Smith have interviewed scores of survivors and tracked down hitherto overlooked primary sources to craft a historic narrative that reads like a novel. Here too is the remarkable true story of the shadowy Hungarian adventurer Laszlo Almasy, the prototype for the romantic English patient of Michael Ondaatje's novel.

Triumphant tactical warfare, an exotic backdrop, wrenching personal conflicts both inside and between the armies-*The Battle of Alamein* has it all. This is military history at its absolute best.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Bierman and Smith are, respectively, ex-BBC and ex-Observer correspondents currently based in Cyprus; they co-authored *Fire in the Night*, a biography of Orde Wingate. Despite its U.S. title (the book goes by a different title in the U.K.), their popular account covers the entire three-year North African campaign. The descriptions of the battles are well-crafted and easily accessible to the nonspecialist. The account of the battle of Alamein itself is only slightly more than 50 pages long, but the British defense against Axis tanks at "Snipe" (a code name for a crucial position) was one of its turning points, and is well described here. Major and minor personalities and fighting units come to life, among them the British Special Interrogation Group (a forerunner of the special forces) and the Axis spy Laszlo Almasy, whose exploits were very loosely adapted for the novel and film *The English Patient*. The authors' treatment of well-known figures, however, is fairly uncritical, especially when dealing with Montgomery, who looms large at Alamein. The book follows Axis forces as they retreat to Tunisia; British forces, along with American forces that had landed in Algeria and Morocco in November, fight them there together until their surrender in May 1943.

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From Library Journal

Alamein represented a turning point for the Allies during World War II. The battle was particularly significant to the British as the first and last victory of the war without significant U.S. involvement. Bierman and Smith, authors of *Fire in the Night*, provide a broad overview of the events leading up to the Battle of Alamein and a detailed description of the battle, the final victory of the Allies in Northern Africa. As journalists they bring the story to life using numerous interviews and personal accounts. The maps are easy to understand, and the photos provide a visual reference to the players, terrain, and events. Unfortunately, several chapters on raids, the battle for Malta, etc., interrupt the flow of the book while failing to provide sufficient explanation of their importance to the main event, Alamein. Recommended to libraries with large military collections.

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From Booklist

If one insulates the war in North Africa from the aggression of which it was a piece, the desert campaigns pitting Axis against British empire formations stand out for their relative civility. The Germans called it "war without hate," which was certainly not an appellation applicable to their war against Russia. But war it was, from Mussolini's invasion of Egypt in September 1940 through the Tunisian surrender of the Axis in May 1943. On the panorama of events, these authors lay an exceptionally fluid narrative that keeps pace with the rapid armored warfare it recounts. Invariably, the victor overextended his supply lines, and in these respites from the dramatic but horrific action, Bierman and Smith analyze the pertinent general's options to advance or retreat. What the eventual decision meant to the man in the tank or trench, on both sides, is seamlessly integrated with the view from headquarters. The command of the authors over their material ensures enlistment of WWII readers. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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