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An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943 (review)

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ground forces anywhere in the Second World War” (p. 292). One of these battalions was the 2d Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who lost 224 men (plus 192 in Japanese POW camps). Jonathan Moffat and Audrey Holmes McCormick have done a very detailed history of the battalion’s experiences in *Moon over Malaya*, which in some ways complements the detached professionalism of Warren’s narrative. Like many regimental histories, the story is often overburdened with details and anecdotes, but certain key points emerge clearly enough. The Argylls’ driving, charismatic commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Ian MacAlister Stewart, was perhaps the only unit commander in Malaya Command who had trained his men, largely prewar regulars, to a standard of mobility and aggressiveness comparable to that of the Imperial Japanese Army (winning, in the process, a reputation among senior officers as a crank). That even the Argylls were surprised on occasion by the speed with which the Japanese moved is a measure of how ill-prepared most of Malaya Command was for the tactical tempo of its opponent. The account of the fighting on Singapore Island (by which time the Argylls had absorbed the Royal Marine survivors of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*) is a worm’s eye view of the disintegration of Percival’s command. The stories of the ensuing three-and-a-half years in Japanese POW camps are a reminder of the incredible resilience of body and spirit that extreme situations can evoke in some—as well as of the power of unit loyalties.

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An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942–1943. Vol. 1 of the “Liberation Trilogy.” By Rick Atkinson. New York: Henry Holt, 2002. ISBN 0-8050-6288-2. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Sources. Index. Pp. 681. \$30.00.

Operation TORCH has never glowed so brightly. Rick Atkinson, former assistant manager at the *Washington Post* and a Pulitzer Prize winner, has written an engrossing narrative of the action in North Africa from the initial planning to the final victory in Tunisia in May 1943. While his emphasis is on the American army, the author includes trenchant comments about the British, French, and German forces and their commanders. Atkinson has an impressive command of words, a flair for simplifying complex issues, and a vast reservoir of information. For the sake of readability, footnote numbers are omitted, but the innumerable sources are easily accessed page-by-page following the text.

This is a popular and very readable history. For those who swear by the U.S. Army’s official “Green” books (to which Atkinson gives “special recognition” on p. 655), it should be pointed out that *Army at Dawn* differs notably from George Howe’s *Northwest Africa* (Washington: GPO, 1957) in its ability to bring people, issues, and events to life. Atkinson’s vignettes, with shrewd eye-witness quotes, give the reader some unusual insights into

personalities and they help explain a number of the campaign's early failures. He pulls no punches regarding rivalries among leaders and he has some refreshingly frank comments about Anglo-American mutual disdain. The Tunisian campaign brought forth many changes of strategy and much replacement of commanders, matters that Atkinson handles judiciously, placing blame among many, as well as on inexperience and confusing chains of command. He excels in sensitive coverage of events—for example, animating the formulaic “heavy casualties” with vivid pictures of hopeless attacks, senseless slaughter, and the agony of dying men.

While unquestionably well informed on global grand strategy, Atkinson minimizes war problems as viewed from Washington or London. At the Casablanca Conference he depicts Eisenhower, tired and unsure of himself, vying with the well-prepared British chiefs over objectives and means, but presents little on Churchill and Roosevelt who, after a meeting, “blessed the agreement and returned to their cocktails” (p. 289). But his conclusions on Casablanca, while brief (pp. 297–99), convey the essence of the new American-British relationship and the leaders' uncertainties—“the compromises at Anfa had been greased with ambiguity.”

Atkinson is not trying to cover everything that happened in North Africa—the book is essentially an accolade to the American army and its commanders, evolving from untried and naïve in November 1942 to hardened, blooded veterans six months later. “No soldier in Africa had changed more—grown more—than Eisenhower” (p. 533). “Troops had learned the importance of terrain, of combined arms, of aggressive patrolling, of stealth, of massed armor. They now knew what it was like to be bombed, shelled, and machine-gunned and fight on” (p. 537). This is a fascinating work which any reader can enjoy, and professional historians will find perusal of it eminently worth their while.

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American Airpower Comes of Age: General Henry H. “Hap” Arnold’s World War II Diaries. Edited by John W. Huston. 2 volumes. Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air University Press, 2002. ISBN 1-58566-094-9 and -093-0. Photographs. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xix, 568/xviii, 440. \$47.00.

“Hap” Arnold was the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF) during World War II and the only American airman ever to wear five stars. Although biographies of Arnold have appeared, his papers in the Library of Congress have been underutilized by scholars, due largely to their poor organization and indexing.

Major General “Jack” Huston, a retired head of the Air Force History Office, alleviates this problem by editing and annotating Arnold’s wartime