



In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat

By Rick Atkinson

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"A beautifully written and memorable account of combat from the top down and bottom up as the 101st Airborne commanders and front-line grunts battle their way to Baghdad.... A must-read."?Tom Brokaw

For soldiers in the 101st Airborne Division, the road to Baghdad began with a midnight flight out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, in late February 2003. For Rick Atkinson, who would spend nearly two months covering the division for The Washington Post, the war in Iraq provided a unique opportunity to observe today's U.S. Army in combat. Now, in this extraordinary account of his odyssey with the 101st, Atkinson presents an intimate and revealing portrait of the soldiers who fight the expeditionary wars that have become the hallmark of our age.

At the center of Atkinson's drama stands the compelling figure of Major General David H. Petraeus, described by one comrade as "the most competitive man on the planet." Atkinson spent virtually all day every day at Petraeus's elbow in Iraq, where he had an unobstructed view of the stresses, anxieties, and large joys of commanding 17,000 soldiers in combat. And all around Petraeus, we see the men and women of a storied division grapple with the challenges of waging war in an unspeakably harsh environment.

With the eye of a master storyteller, a brilliant military historian puts us right on the battlefield. In the Company of Soldiers is a compelling, utterly fresh view of the modern American soldier in action.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The advent of embedded reporters in the opening days of the 2003 US war on Iraq meant a more direct and personal point of view than battlefield coverage has historically offered. Rick Atkinson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *An Army at Dawn*, an account of combat in North Africa during World War II, traveled with the 101st Airborne Division of the US Army from its deployment out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky through its entry into Baghdad. The result, *In the Company of Soldiers*, is a thoroughly engrossing look at the strategies, personalities, and struggles of waging modern warfare. Much of Atkinson's focus falls on the division's leader, the hugely competitive and charismatic Major General David Petraeus, who seems to guide his troops through Iraq by sheer force of will. Atkinson devotes most of his time to the senior commanders, but the loss of the G.I. perspective, while disappointing, is outweighed by Atkinson's access to the minds of the brass who must navigate an Iraq whose citizens were not nearly as happy as military planners had hoped and who offered resistance in ways other than what the Americans had prepared for. While plenty has been written about the American military effort in Iraq, Atkinson's perspective, combined with a direct, economical writing style, allows him to present sides to the war not often seen or considered: long periods of waiting punctuated with mad scrambles to apply gas masks, fretting over how to pack all necessary supplies into tiny kits, dealing with dust storms that can ground state of the art attack helicopters, and reading the irreverent yet shrewdly observant graffiti left by American soldiers. *In the Company of Soldiers* lionizes the American military officers but it neither condemns nor offers unqualified praise to the US effort in Iraq. Indeed, the disturbing omens of chaos hinted at soon after the invasion began in the spring of 2003 would come into sharper relief when the book was published a year later. --John Moe

From Publishers Weekly

A Pulitzer-winning Washington Post correspondent and military historian gives the best account yet to come out of the Iraq War, chronicling the unit in which the author was embedded, the 101st Airborne, or Screaming Eagles, and particularly its headquarters. This inevitably puts much emphasis on the division commander, the intense, competitive and thoroughly professional Maj. Gen. David Petraeus. But no one is left out, from General Wallace, the gifted corps commander, to a Muslim convert and the victims of his ghastly but little publicized fragging incident at the opening of the war. The narrative covers this large cast from the division's being called up for the war at Fort Campbell, Ky., through to the author's departure from the unit after the fall of Baghdad. Through the eyes of the men he associated with, we see excess loads of personal gear being lugged into Iraq and insufficient supplies of essentials like ammunition and water (the reason for the infamous "pause"). We see sandstorms and the limitations of the Apache attack helicopter, and understand the legal framework for avoiding civilian casualties and "collateral damage," and much else that went right or wrong—in a manner that is antitriumphalist, but not antimilitary. The son of an army officer and thoroughly up to date on the modern American army, the author pays an eloquent and incisive tribute to how the men and women of the 101st won their part of the war in Iraq, in a manner that bears comparison to his Pulitzer-winning WWII volume, *An Army at Dawn*. Superb writing and balance make this the account to beat.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—Atkinson takes the long view of history and blends it with a journalist's acuity for telling detail to create a narrative that is rich in immediacy, yet seasoned with thoughtful analysis. In the spring of 2003, the author accompanied combat units to Iraq. He spent two months embedded with the 101st Airborne

Division's headquarters staff, sharing their daily experiences from initial deployment out of Fort Campbell, KY, to overseas staging areas in Kuwait, and ultimately bearing witness to the unit's march on Baghdad. His view of the war was from a vantage point that permitted scrutiny of strategy, planning, and decision making at the senior command level. Atkinson's portraits of military leadership are compelling, balanced, and nuanced; they reflect professionalism, a keen sense of responsibility for the 17,000 lives in the command, and constant reevaluation of optimal deployment of the unit's assets. The author draws upon his notes from the frequent battle update briefings he attended with the HQ staff, material from personal interviews conducted in the field, and supplementary data from "after action" reports to which he had access following his return to the States. This is a candid, well-paced work by a writer with an appreciation for the region's culture and geography, foreshadowing the challenges of U.S. presence "in a country with five thousand years' experience at resisting invaders."—*Lynn Nutwell, Fairfax City Regional Library, VA*
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Users Review

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