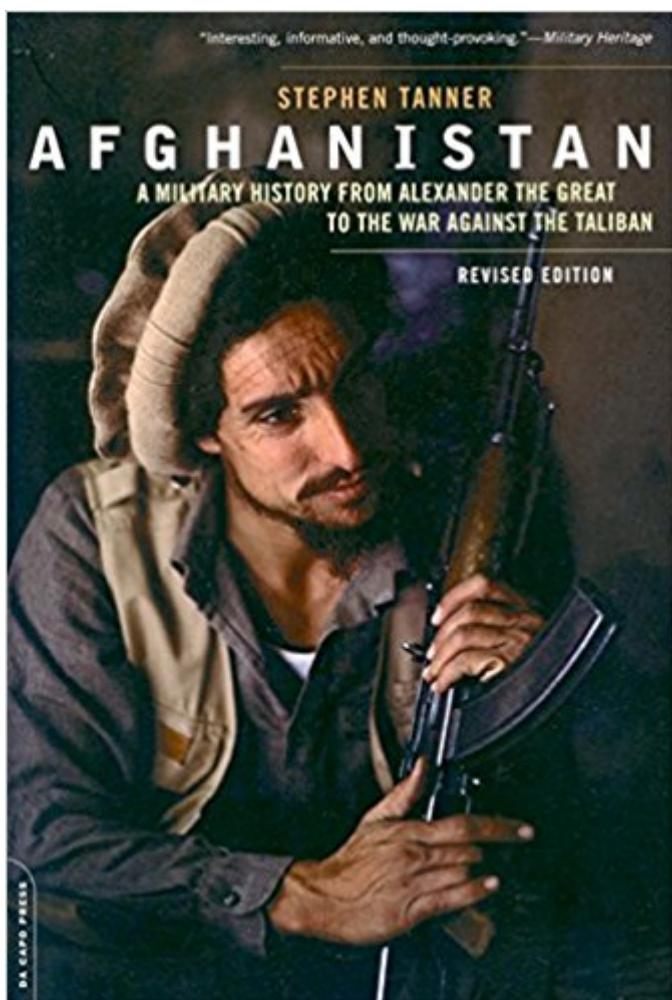


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# Afghanistan: A Military History From Alexander The Great To The War Against The Taliban



## Synopsis

For over 2,500 years, the forbidding territory of Afghanistan has served as a vital crossroads for armies and has witnessed history-shaping clashes between civilizations: Greek, Arab, Mongol, and Tartar, and, in more recent times, British, Russian, and American. When U.S. troops entered Afghanistan in the weeks following September 11, 2001, they overthrew the Afghan Taliban regime and sent the terrorists it harbored on the run. But America's initial easy victory is in sharp contrast to the difficulties it faces today in confronting the Taliban resurgence. Originally published in 2002, Stephen Tanner's Afghanistan has now been completely updated to include the crucial turn of events since America first entered the country.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

HistoryWire.com, 5/18/09  "In an age in which events in the Middle East threaten increasingly to spin out of control, few books could be as timely as this history of Afghanistan."  The Middle East, June 2009  "Illuminates the broad historical context into which our forces have been drawn"  [A] carefully researched account. 

Stephen Tanner is a New York-based military historian who has written several highly regarded books, including *Epic Retreats: From 1776 to the Evacuation of Saigon*.

This book is a must read for those who are interested in Afghanistan's war torn history or for those who find themselves deploying to Afghanistan as a civilian or member of the armed forces. The

book is well-written, well-researched, and very detailed giving outstanding insight into the culture of the people as well as the mistakes that those who have tried to conquer Afghanistan made. The book does not just inform the reader on Afghanistan but ties in other areas, both ancient and present, that have affected Afghanistan. The only drawback to this book is that it is very easy to get lost in the names of the key players and the names of the ancient areas, especially if you are not familiar with these areas before picking up the book. I think it helps to have an ancient map next to you so that you can follow where Alexander and the Mongols were maneuvering. There are maps in the book but it is difficult to have to keep going back and forth from the map to the page you are currently reading (especially on a Kindle). Finally, the author ends the book with a piece of advice about his opinion on what needs to be done in order to restore peace to Afghanistan. This book was worth picking up and I enjoyed reading it.

Lengthy, but full of information. Great read if you are looking for a background of Afghanistan. Really gives in depth context of the country and the culture.

The problem with military histories, as with action films, is that they tend to be tedious--endless accounts of blunders, bloodshed and futile justifications for the worst impulses of human history. This book sends one clear message though--"Don't mess with the Afghans--it's like trying to kiss a rattlesnake." The baddest conquerors in ancient history from Alexander the Great to Ghengis Khan all crashed on the rocky island of Afghanistan. For me the book was personally meaningful in that one of the many actors on this crowded stage was Sir William McNaughton--my Grandfather nine generations past. He was like Hunter Thompson hanging with the Hells Angels--well-meaning, clueless and tragic-comic. Unable to comprehend the brutish intrigues of the Afghans, who understandably hated their invaders, McNaughton, the British, the Russians and now, the USA, became fatally enmeshed in wars they had no business fighting. Low-rent or not, the Afghans, like the Swiss, want to be left alone. We are and should be leaving soon--let's invest our capital there and enjoy the new ski lodges that are sure to pop up.[After a stop at the tourist beaches of Vietnam on the way!] A good read--lean and mean, like the Afghans!

History books can be extremely boring, all dates and names jumbling into a brain-numbing mess. Tanner's work is a happy exception. Starting with Alexander the Great and moving to the early days of the America's entrance in the war, Tanner walks the reader through a land where the geography and culture, more than any other place, change the rules of warfare. It was fascinating, to see how

the land shaped events, to see how men and empires suddenly change course when confronted with the rugged, harsh ways of Afghanistan. I found this book enthralling and I highly recommend.

No one can hope to understand the conflict in the Middle East, specifically Afghanistan without first reading this astounding historical tome by Stephen Tanner. The first thing I have to say is the rare combination of historian and writer makes this work easy to read and very difficult to put down. Stephen Tanner takes us right back to Alexander The Great, Genghis Khan then through to modern America and it's continuous bungling of the Middle East conflict. If only President Bush had read the history of the Middle East before pursuing blindly the rhetoric in his mind, we probably wouldn't be in such a mess today. And yet, the author stays quite unbiased in his storytelling, except when necessary. This book should be in every high school in America definitely, and possibly in all schools around the globe. This is the book I've been wanting to read since September 11.

This is a very thorough and interesting study in the military history of Afghanistan. It's easy to read and keeps your attention. Unfortunately, Mr. Tanner begins to foreshadow his conclusions when he refers to Jimmy Carter as a "brilliant intellectual." Toward the end, he combines a shallow, ham-handed version of the *casus belli* for the U.S. war in Iraq with a correct analysis how the Iraq effort took potential resources away from the Afghanistan effort, which is a little disappointing. If not for these flaws, I would have rated it a 5-star. Overall, it is a very good book and worth the read. In particular, I found the statement from John Keegan very telling. According to Keegan, "...foreign efforts to remold the government of Afghanistan have invariably failed" but, "straightforward punitive expeditions were successful on more than one occasion."

## EXCELLENT BOOK.

Great read, very historically correct and informational. A must read for anyone that will be visiting Afghanistan on official business (fightin in the war) or if you are just generally interested about the land where empires go to die. Highly recommend

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