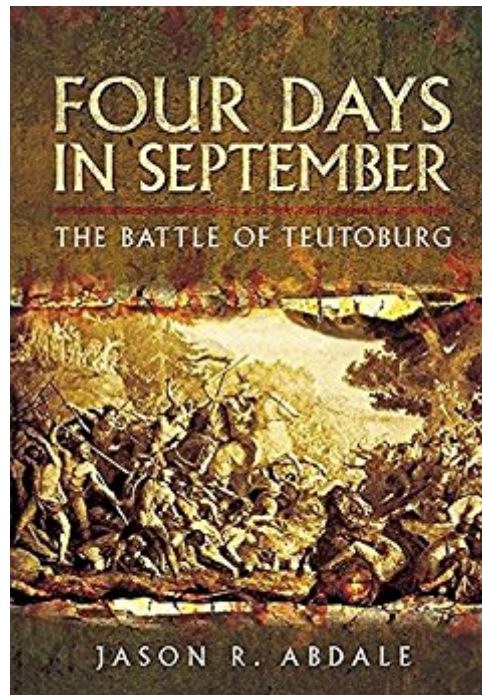


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# Four Days In September: The Battle Of Teutoburg



## Synopsis

For twenty years, the Roman Empire conquered its way through modern-day Germany, claiming all lands from the Rhine to the Elbe. However, when at last all appeared to be under control, a catastrophe erupted that claimed the lives of 10,000 legionnaires and laid Rome's imperial ambitions for Germania into the dust. In late September of 9 AD, three Roman legions, while marching to suppress a distant tribal rebellion, were attacked in a four-day battle with the Germanic barbarians. The Romans, under the leadership of the province's governor, Publius Quinctilius Varus, were taken completely by surprise, betrayed by a member of their own ranks: the German officer and secret rebel leader, Arminius. The defeat was a heavy blow to both Rome's military and its pride. Though the disaster was ruthlessly avenged soon afterwards, later attempts at conquering the Germans were half-hearted at best. *Four days in September* thoroughly examines the ancient sources and challenges the hypotheses of modern scholars to present a clear picture of the prelude to the battle, the fighting itself and its aftermath.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a good overview that covers a lot of ground in addition and beyond the battle itself in a bit

less than 220 pages of main text. This is partly reflected by the chronology presented upfront and which starts in 46 BC with the birth of Varus, the Roman general and governor who was defeated and killed at Teutoburg up to 21 AD, twelve years after the battle and the year where the Germanic warlord Arminius was assassinated. Included in the book is a nice set of maps which, in addition to the inevitable map of the Roman Empire also includes one of Germania, three of the supposed march of Varus (1) and on the running battle itself (2) and one last one on the distribution of artifacts found at Kalkriese Hill. Two additional elements are worth noting at the outset. One is that this is the second and revised edition of *Four Days in September*. While the first edition suffered from masses of typos, this has been corrected in the present edition which is also written in a rather easy to read style. Another is that the rather shortish bibliography contains an interesting mix of references: primary sources in translation and secondary sources in the form of books and academic articles but also a whole set of web references available online. With regards to the book's contents, several strongpoints come to mind. One is that the author spends quite a bit of space to put the battle into context. This represents more or less the first half of the book, with over hundred pages split up into five chapters. The first two present an overview of Rome and its Empire and of Germania and Germanic tribal societies, their ways of life and their political organisation. Including in the later is an interesting overview of Germanic warrior ethos and the role of the Germanic warlord. He was something of a 'ring-giver' who attracted followers through successful warfare and the associated plunder that he would redistribute. Contrastingly, failures lead to the rapid unravelling and shrinkage of his warband and generally his rapid and violent demise, with what happened to Arminius after Teutoburg being a rather good illustration. Chapters three and four concentrate on the two protagonists 'Varus and Arminius' each with his chapter presenting, analysing and discussing their respective backgrounds. As other authors have done before, Jason Abdale demonstrates that Varus was far from being the inexperienced and incompetent Governor that he was portrayed to be ex post. Moreover, he was also close to Augustus, one of his entourage and a trusted and experienced operator, as shown by the increasingly important positions that he held as Governor prior to becoming that of Germania. The fifth chapter concentrates on the Roman efforts to Romanise Germania prior to AD 9. Following in the footsteps of others, the author demonstrates rather convincingly that the Romanisation process was pretty well advanced by the time of Arminius' revolt. Both the Cheruscan prince and his brother (who remained faithful to the Romans both before and after Teutoburg) served as commanders of auxiliary cavalry units and had campaigned in Pannonia as part of Tiberius' army. Interestingly, the brunt of the burden to romanise the future province situated between the

Rhine and the Elbe was born by Tiberius's younger brother Drusus (the father of Germanicus who inherited the title that Drusus had earned by his victorious campaigns). Chapter six is about eighty pages long and is entirely devoted to the battle itself – the "Four days in September". The narrative is interesting and both largely plausible and largely believable. There are however two points which seemed to be somewhat questionable in my view. One is the author's conclusion that the Roman force was relatively small, with a range of at least 7000 to 13000 at most. Most of the author's arguments to justify such large numbers although we know that three legions, six cohorts of infantry auxiliaries and three cavalry regiments revolve around the idea that all of these units were understrength and perhaps considerably. The author becomes however less convincing when suggesting that the effectives of each of the three legions during the campaign may have been half or even one-third of the theoretical strength (over five thousand each). This is because the author uses the known breakdown of a Roman double-sized cohort manning one of the forts on Hadrian's Wall. In particular, some of the unit's strength records have somewhat miraculously survived. These do show that only about a third of the unit's theoretical strength was actually garrisoning the fort, with the rest being on various secondments, including as guards to the Governor. However, the records also show that the largest portion of those on secondment were in fact garrisoning another fort along the Wall and that when both garrisons are added up, the total available for delivering on the unit's core duty (i.e. garrisoning) represented more than half of the total theoretical numbers and perhaps even as much as two thirds. If these proportions were to be carried over to the Teutoburg Roman forces, then these might have been somewhat more numerous than the author's estimate and somewhere between 10000 and 13000. The second point that is somewhat disputable has to do with the reconstruction of the four days of doom and fighting. The author seems to concede attacks, when the army was caught in the open and in marching order between the two ridges of hills, into a single day. This is despite the distances that the force had to cover to reach the northern ridge, despite the fact that their progression would have been slow given the state of the paths, despite the baggage, carts and numerous camp-followers that clearly must have considerably slowed down the long column and despite the heavy rain that would have transformed the paths into quagmires and the advance into a gruelling nightmare. On balance, and although both the author's theory and the one presented here are no more than mere guesses, it may seem more reasonable to assume that the Romans took more than a day to cross the first ridge and reach the second one. It also looks rather odd to assume that after the failure of the organised attempt to break out; the Germanic force essentially failed to pursue the remaining fugitives for a whole day and then caught

up with them easily and quickly, as if they had made very little progress. The series of bloody and gruelling clashes and the analysis of Arminius's plan and attacks and how Varus, although taken by surprise, attempted to counter them, are remarkably well told. The last chapter "more than thirty pages - refers to the aftermath. On the Romans' side, these include the immediate and somewhat panicky reactions, in particular in Rome itself, once news of the scope and implications of Arminius' crushing defeat became public. They, however, also include Germanic reactions, as many chieftains raised large numbers of fighters. The main consequences of the four days' gruelling were political. Never entirely Romanized, the large bridgehead was slowly annihilated. The main legacy item, however, is that the Roman never again tried to subdue the whole of "Magna Germania" and quietly dropped the project and ended the siege. All in all, a remarkable book which I will rate at five stars, despite my little reservations mentioned above

Out standing! Truly well written book.

As one of the worst defeats ever suffered by Rome, the battle of Teutoburg Forest is one of the most important battles of the Ancient World in seeing that it stopped Rome from trying to conquer Germania. When it comes to books on this battle, there are four that I am aware of: Peter Well's *The Battle that Stopped Rome*, Adrian Murdoch's *Rome's Greatest Defeat*, Michael McNally's *Teutoburg Forest AD 9* and finally, this one which I did not even know existed until I learned about it from another reviewer. I purchased this book at once to compare it to the other books on the battle, which I have read. This has to be the best one. While Well's book focused on the battle's impact after it was fought, and Murdoch's was largely on the prelude, this covers both the Roman-Germanic conflicts in the 1st century AD, with a chapter devoted to the Roman commander Varus and the Germanic commander Arminius, and a long chapter on the battle itself. The author believes the battle was four days long, while Wells claimed it lasted only one day and both Murdoch and McNally accepted the most common view of three days fighting. There were several maps of the battle, showing the Roman movements through the area as the Germanic warriors attacked them. The last chapter covers the aftermath of the shocking defeat, including the impact the news had on Augustus, and the battles in Germania that followed afterwards as the Romans did their best to avenge the defeat. If you are interested in the battle but only want one book on it, this is it. If you want this one and one of the others I mentioned, get McNally's. He wrote it in Osprey's Campaign series and while it is brief at 96 pages, it is an informative account of the battle and the artwork is

superb. I loved this book, and anybody who likes Roman military history should add it to their collection.

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