

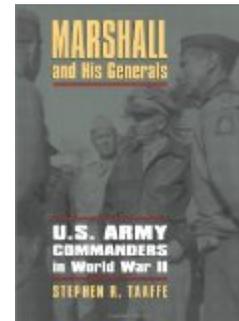


Stephen R. Taaffe. *Marshall and His Generals: U.S. Army Commanders in World War II*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011. ix + 426 pp. \$37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1812-5.

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Choosing the Right Generals

The U.S. Army's expansion during World War Two, from a small underfunded garrison to a colossal force that numbered eight overseas field armies, was a remarkable achievement. These new units required hundreds of generals who had to be promoted from the peacetime army. Though theater commanders often requested specific generals, the final responsibility for an officer's promotion was with the army chief of staff, General George C. Marshall. It was a duty that Marshall did not take lightly since soldiers' lives depended on promoting the right people to the right commands. A few of the officers Marshall selected for high commands, such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley, and George S. Patton, became legends; however, the majority of division, corps, and army commanders have been more or less forgotten. Nevertheless, it was these generals, chosen by Marshall, who achieved victory in World War Two.

Stephen R. Taaffe's excellent new book, *Marshall and His Generals*, examines how the army's chief of staff selected generals and how these officers performed in combat. The study begins in the dark days after the fall of the Philippines and continues through the surrender of Japan. Though Marshall's name appears in the title, the book is far from being a biography. However, Marshall is always in the background and the reader is left with the understanding of how his command appointments directly influenced the war. Eisenhower, MacArthur, Bradley, Mark Wayne Clark, and Patton are featured

prominently, but the majority of the work focuses on lesser-known army, corps, and division commanders. Indeed, the author has done a masterful job of combining numerous small biographies of U.S. generals around the narrative of World War Two. This of course limits the book to an exclusively American view, yet it should be remembered that Taaffe is writing about the U.S. high command, and the book should be judged on that rather than as a comprehensive history of the war.

As for historiography, Taaffe is an apologist for the U.S. Army's performance during World War Two. Many historians, and others (including the defeated enemy), have criticized the U.S. Army's fighting ability, claiming that low quality soldiers and strategically timid generals were compensated by America's massive material superiority and air power. Though Taaffe concedes that only a few U.S. generals were "brilliant," he argues that "dad [U.S.] army group, field army, and corps commanders been incompetent, it is hard to see how the United States could have helped to defeat the Axis" (p. 12). Taaffe notes that most U.S. generals were relieved because of promotion or illness and not because of failures in combat. When army politics and conflicting personalities are taken into account, Taaffe argues, only one U.S. general out of the thirty-eight officers who commanded an army group, field army, or corps were relieved for failures on the battlefield (p. 322). He also states that U.S. officers usually praised their subordinates' competence in official evaluations and in postwar memoirs. As for material su-

periority, Taaffe reminds readers that American supply was finite and had to be shared among the Allies (p. 12).

Marshall and His Generals is not a hagiographic account of U.S. Army leadership. Eisenhower had a temper, Bradley was cautious, Patton was overbearing on subordinates, Clark loved publicity, and MacArthur was publicity loving and overbearing. Likewise Taaffe does not gloss over the faults of U.S. corps and division commanders. Indeed, the author is often as critical of U.S. leadership as historians who argue that the war was won by American material superiority.

The author uses excellently both primary and secondary sources, relying heavily on General Bradley's second autobiography, *A General's Life* (1983). The general conceived the book after Eisenhower's and Patton's papers had been published, possibly in response to hurtful comments Patton had written about Bradley. In any event, Bradley's opinion of Patton changed from mild professional criticism to harsh personal indictments. *Marshall and His Generals* echoes many of Bradley's less

considered judgments, such as criticizing Patton's conduct in Sicily and minimizing his victories there (p. 328). It is also questionable how much of *A General's Life* is Bradley's opinion since he died before the section dealing with World War Two was completed by his ghost-writer.[1]

Nevertheless, *Marshall and His Generals* brings out many of World War Two's lesser-known American officers, while making a convincing argument that U.S. Army leadership was, if not brilliant, at least competent. Dedicated readers of military history tend to be partisan when debating the merits of their favorite general. Inevitably, some might feel that the author has denied giving their pet general the space or credit that he deserves. They may be right, but it is hard to imagine a book of this scope and size being more balanced or comprehensive.

Note

[1]. Omar N. Bradley and Clary Blair, *A General's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 11.

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