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D. K. R. Crosswell. *Beetle: The Life of General Walter Bedell Smith.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010. xvii + 1070 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2649-4.

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Ike's "Hatchet Man" Emerges from the Shadows

No reader will ever again be able to think of Walter ("Beetle") Smith, General Dwight Eisenhower's chief of staff, as a bit player during the war in Europe. The result of nearly three decades of research in an impressive number of archival collections, Crosswell's analysis of Smith's contributions to the Anglo-American strategy for the European campaigns comes very close to being a day-to-day chronicle of the war on the western and Mediterranean fronts.[1] The book is so detailed that even avid readers of the popular narratives of World War II will find it a challenge to slog through all of the information as the American and British commanders tussle over a the best way to frame a strategy for defeating Hitler's armies. But for patient readers, especially scholars of the war, the findings are well worth the effort to study this biography.

Although the work covers his entire life, Smith's career in World War II is by far the main focus, taking up almost 80 percent of the text. His pre- and postwar activities are summarized, but not examined in the same minute detail as his activities from 1935 to 1945. Born in 1895, Smith was not a product of West Point. His military career began as an enlisted man in the Indiana National Guard. Because of his incisive mind, capacious memory, and attention to detail, he qualified for officer training as the U.S. Army expanded in 1917. After serving as a lieutenant in the trenches, where he was wounded, he continued on in regular service after the war with a position in military intelligence on the General Staff; early on, he demonstrated that he could be trusted to organize vast amounts of information and sustain an almost inhuman workload. His talents and tremendous work ethic eventually caught the attention of George Marshall, an association that would make his career (and, over time, ruin his health).

Working as one of Marshall's chief aides after the latter became Army Chief of Staff in 1939, Smith proved so reliable, and discreet, that he soon was acting as liaison with the White House. Smith, by then a colonel, was handling some of the most important tasks of the early months of the war–organizing the Arcadia Conference, where the early Anglo-American framework for coalition warfare was hammered out, and building the structure for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Eisenhower, another of Marshall's protégés, insisted on having Smith at his side when he left for Great Britain in June 1942. Smith remained with Ike as his chief of state for the remainder of the war.

The Eisenhower-Smith relationship, and how this influenced the strategy of the western Allies in Europe, is the heart and soul of Crosswell's study. By closely examining the records of Ike's various wartime headquarters (ETO, NATOUSA, COSSAC, and finally SHAEF), Crosswell makes a sizeable contribution in linking the all-important issue of logistics to the course of Allied strategy. Time and again, the supply question narrowed the options that the British and Americans could choose in attacking the Nazis' European bastions; serious scholars have understood this already, but Crosswell spells it out in marvelous detail. The logistical aspects related to securing a lodgment in Normandy (D-Day), and the subsequent campaign in France, are particularly well explained, and should influence new studies in the future.[2]

He also highlights the quiet contributions that Beetle Smith made to the design of the strategy, and the consistent, vital role he played in conveying the strategy to the various commanders who would execute it. Since the emerging strategy for Hitler's defeat was the result of tricky and often acrimonious negotiations between the two western powers and their armies and commanders, Crosswell takes pain to show how Smith, despite his reputation for irascibility and toughness, managed to handle the touchy egos of the likes of Montgomery, Alexander,

Patton, Mark Clark, and a host of others. These revelations place Smith in a different light from previous works, and help explain why Smith was chosen after the war to act as both head of the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union.

Not every historian is likely to accept all of Crosswell's findings concerning Smith, perhaps most especially in his portrayal of Eisenhower. Noting from the first page that he has found Smith to be "much more than advertised, and his boss, Eisenhower, considerably less" (p. 1), Crosswell paints Ike as frequently indecisive, anxious to avoid confrontations, moody, and happy to toss the tough jobs to someone else. To cite but one of many examples, Crosswell criticizes Eisenhower for dithering and "obfuscat[ing]" after the Kasserine disaster, and waiting too long to replace General Lloyd Fredendall until prodded by Smith (pp. 390-392). In this and many other parts of the narrative, Smith is presented as the officer who acts decisively, and Eisenhower as the man who consistently trims his sails and spends too much time fretting over his image back home. While Crosswell offers compelling examples to support his view of Eisenhower, other scholars will likely to take issue with some of what he writes.[3] But this is only to be expected, because Crosswell has in this book taken a new look at the manner in which the Americans and their British allies conducted the European campaign. In doing so, Crosswell has added to a growing body of works that reexamine the capabilities of the Allied top leadership.[4]

Because Crosswell chose to summarize the other parts of Smith's life with far less context and detail, the book will be of lesser value to scholars who may have hoped to learn much more about Smith's postwar careers as diplomat and as head of the CIA for three years–there are barely five pages given over to his part in encouraging coups in Iran and Guatemala, for example (pp. 50-56). But there can be little doubt that *Beetle* will be welcomed by scholars as a major contribution of the study of the war in Europe. The book will have significant influence on the next generation of serious study of the Second World War.

Notes

[1]. Crosswell, who holds a chair in Military History at Columbus State University in Georgia, published an earlier version of the study two decades ago: *The Chief of Staff: The Military Career of General Walter Bedell Smith,* Contributions in Military Studies (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991). The new work is considerably more detailed.

[2]. Detailed logistics studies for the American forces in the war are limited; for one of the excellent ones, see Robert Coakley and Richard Leighton, *The War Department: Global Logistics and Strategy, 1943-1945* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1989).

[3]. Contrasting interpretations of Eisenhower's handling of Kasserine are presented in David Eisenhower's similarly large biography of his grandfather, *Eisenhower at War, 1943-1945* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 206-07; and Stephen Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012), 172-75.

[4]. Among such recent works are Andrew Roberts, *Masters and Commanders: How Four Titans Won the War in the West, 1941*-1945 (New York: Harper, 2009); John Rickard, *Advance and Destroy: Patton as Commander in the Bulge,* American Warriors Series (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011); Stephen R. Taafe, *Marshall and his Generals: U.S. Army Commanders in World War II* and (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011). A full biography of General John C. H. Lee, the officer in charge of the U.S. Army's Services and Supply operations for the entire European Theater of Operations (ETOUSA), is still a major gap in the literature of the war.

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