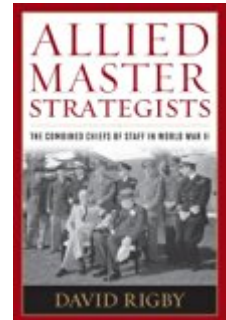


David Rigby. *Allied Master Strategists: The Combined Chiefs of Staff in World War II.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012. xvi + 270 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61251-081-1.



Reviewed by Mark Montesclaros

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One of Winston Churchill's more ubiquitous quotes is, "There is only one thing worse than fighting with Allies, and that is fighting without them." Indeed, many recent works on World War II have included this observation, including Rick Atkinson's *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (2013) and William Manchester and Paul Reid's *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Defender of the Realm, 1940-1965* (2013), the third volume of the biography of Winston Churchill. While these and other books may allude to the difficulty of working with coalition partners, David Rigby makes this issue his sole focus and places the Allied master planners, the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), at the forefront of a new study. In doing so, Rigby adds depth and context to an understanding of this organization so vital to Allied victory in the Second World War. The author is a textbook editor and adjunct history instructor at colleges and universities in the Boston area.

Rigby takes a thematic approach to his subject, beginning with biographical sketches com-

prising a "who's-who" of the CCS, followed by some organizational detail on its inner workings. While these initial chapters may seem pro forma, they provide the key to understanding what made the CCS tick and help explain why the organization was so successful. Rather than presenting mere factual details, Rigby catalogs personal strengths, weaknesses, and idiosyncrasies that bring the CCS to life, as opposed to a faceless bureaucratic entity.

One cannot help be impressed by the all-star lineup of military leaders on both sides—such seminal figures as Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King for the Americans, and Army Chief of Staff General Sir Alan Brooke and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal for the British. Of note, Rigby highlights the personal affinity between Marshall and Field Marshal Sir John Dill, head of the British Joint Staff Mission in Washington DC. Although not technically a member of the CCS, Dill was instrumental in maintaining sound U.S.-British relations during the war, even when

other CCS members were at odds. Interestingly, Dill got along much better with the Americans than he did with his own prime minister, Winston Churchill. As the author later shows, informal relationships like these were just as crucial as formal bureaucratic ties in sustaining the CCS during some harrowing times.

After providing this contextual basis, Rigby effectively argues that the CCS was instrumental in achieving Allied victory in World War II, and that the structure and personality of the organization was such that it was able to withstand internal dissent and disagreement in order to forge a clear path ahead. This basic theme permeates the book and is its driving force. The author's admiration of the CCS rings clear and is interwoven into each subsequent chapter.

This is not to say that the CCS did not operate without some fits and starts. Indeed, Churchill's observation on "the trouble with Allies" is a parallel theme in the book. To exemplify this, two chapters cover the most contentious issues in the Allied coalition relationship, among them the general conduct of the war in the Pacific (especially given competing interests and the "Germany first" strategy) and the highly controversial operation later known as Overlord—the invasion of France. Rigby does a masterful job simplifying these issues, as well as the CCS members that personified them—Marshall championing Overlord, and his nemesis and counterpart Brooke advocating for peripheral operations in lieu of a risk-laden cross-channel attack. The author also details the many challenges encountered by the CCS, as each staff had to deal with inter-service rivalries, civilian masters, and, of course, multinational partners. This narrative alone makes for an intricate and fascinating read.

Despite these struggles within the Allied camp, they were nothing compared to those experienced by the Axis leadership. Rigby devotes a particularly noteworthy section of his book to a contrast between the CCS and its Axis "counter-

part." He effectively demonstrates the stark differences between the functioning CCS and the near negligible cooperation between the German, Italian, and Japanese triumvirate. The Germans, as an example, failed to notify either partner about their invasion of Russia in June 1941, arguably the most far-reaching decision they made in the war. Even at its worst, the CCS never approached the total lack of strategic vision and coordination exhibited by the Axis. Rigby uses this contrast to underscore the CCS's functionality and effectiveness, reinforcing his thesis.

The author devotes the remainder of the book to other challenges the CCS faced; he includes chapters on how the chiefs interacted with civilian decision makers, dealt with problematic subordinate commanders in the field, and handled such thorny new issues as industrial production and wartime diplomacy. The author handles these deftly, choosing his vignettes and examples carefully. In particular, Rigby does a superb job detailing the British chiefs' epic struggles with Churchill over military strategy, contrasted by the relatively benign environment that the Americans' Joint Chiefs of Staff enjoyed in their dealings with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

One of the strengths of Rigby's book is that it provides valuable context that helps frame the environment in which the CCS operated. For example, he never forgets the Russian contribution to overall victory in Europe, and notes that even when the Anglo-American chiefs argued mightily over the scope and timing of Overlord, their Soviet partners were doing the bulk of the fighting and dying against Germany on the eastern front. Rigby also provides depth and nuance to the enigmatic Soviet relationship with the CCS, revealing some interesting detail on U.S. difficulties in working with the Russians on a day-to-day basis, as seen from the perspective of the U.S. military attaché in Moscow.

In addition, the author effectively captures the ebb and flow of U.S. versus British influence

within the CCS. While the British may have held sway early on in the relationship, clearly the reins of control shifted to the Americans as the United States began to project the preponderance of force, not only in the Pacific but in Europe as well. Rigby effectively describes this relationship in his narrative of the seminal wartime conferences and multiple but perhaps less-known CCS deliberations over wartime strategy.

There are some minor differences one might have with Rigby's work. Some readers, for example, may disagree with the author's initial characterization of Churchill as a "highly intrusive arm-chair strategist" (p. 146). While Rigby later details the contentious relationship that Brooke had with Churchill, he has a tendency to favor Brooke's viewpoint as the correct one. This tends to marginalize Churchill and his right to delve into any matters he saw fit to as prime minister, as well as his ability as a grand strategist. In another section dealing with German atrocities perpetrated on the Russians along the eastern front, Rigby seems to assign blame to the British CCS for the delay in Overlord: "Yet Churchill and Brooke were content to let them [the Russians] wait for the second front" (p. 136). The author provides no context on what the Allies knew about Nazi atrocities on the eastern front or whether that factored at all in their deliberations on European strategy.

These nitpicks, however, do not detract from the overall strength of Rigby's book or the contributions it makes to our understanding of the complexities of solving complex problems within a coalition framework. Because multinational partnerships will mark future operations more and more, the observations and insights provided by Rigby can only gain in significance. Accessible, well researched, and including extensive notes and a detailed bibliography, the book is highly recommended to students of World War II, coalition warfare, strategy and policymaking, and civil-military relations.

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