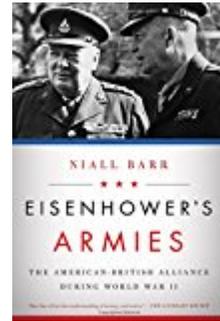


Niall Barr. *Eisenhower's Armies: The American-British Alliance during World War II*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2015. 545 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60598-816-0.



Reviewed by Richard Anderson (University of Kansas)

Published on H-War (July, 2016)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Niall Barr's stated purpose in writing *Eisenhower's Armies* is to trace the relationship between the US and British armies throughout the Second World War. He seeks to explain how the two armies "cooperated, learned from, and also, at times, ignored one another" and determine whether or not they were able to fight together effectively (p. 3). While much of what Barr writes about is well known to scholars of Anglo-American relations and the Second World War, his work does highlight some of the lesser-known mechanisms for cooperation between the US and British armies, making it a useful addition to the literature.

Barr's conclusion is that the the two armies were effective alliance partners: "Collaboration, not conflict, was the touchstone of this alliance. Even in the face of rivalry and suspicion, the American and British armies combined their efforts and won the hard-fought battles of the Second World War together" (p. 470). Barr's assessment, and the work as a whole, strikes a balance between scholarship that has supported the Churchillian "special relationship," the idea that United States and Britain worked well together because they were natural alliance partners, and scholarship that has emphasized conflict between the two nations in their interactions during the Second World War. Indeed, rather than engage in fur-

ther debate on the "specialness" of the relationship, he focuses on the functionality of cooperation between the US and British armies, an approach that is better suited to demonstrating how collaboration between the two actually worked.

To make his task more manageable, Barr restricts the scope of his analysis primarily to relations between the US and British armies in Europe and the Mediterranean. He effectively sets the stage by examining their relationship during the First World War. In his coverage of differences between the two over policies, such as amalgamation, one can see the roots of American views of the British as manipulative intriguers and British views of Americans as amateurs in need of mentorship. Barr also highlights how the massive casualties the British endured led British officers to adopt approaches to war designed to conserve lives while the Americans, having been in the war only a relatively short time, were less averse to risking heavy casualties. He is less successful in demonstrating the relevancy of the experience of the two armies prior to the First World War to their subsequent efforts at cooperation, noting that "the British and American armies had actually grown apart over the course of a century" after their encounters with one another during the colonial era and early 1900s (p. 39).

His treatment of collaboration prior to the entry of the United States into the Second World War provides tantalizing glimpses into some of the lesser-known mechanisms for Anglo-American cooperation. His analysis of the British Tank mission in Washington DC, headed by Michael Dewar, is particularly insightful, demonstrating how the United States and Britain began effective cooperation in tank research, design, and procurement in 1940. He also provides a useful overview of the various observer missions that the United States sent to Britain and the Middle East, showing that these groups forged some of the earliest connections between the US and British armies during the Second World War.

The remainder of his book will be familiar to most scholars of World War II; it consists largely of a narrative of the major planning and policy debates that took place between US and British military officials as well as an overview of the major campaigns the two nations conducted together, from the invasion of North Africa to the end of the war in Europe. He also devotes substantial attention to the conflicts that existed between US and British army officers, particularly Bernard Montgomery and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Barr puts his own stamp on this familiar narrative by paying particular at-

tention to the problems associated with conducting coalition warfare in Europe and the Mediterranean, highlighting the solutions the the two armies developed to work effectively with one another. Especially insightful is his analysis of the actions of key subordinates like Freddie de Guingand, Montgomery's chief of staff, as well as often overlooked commanders like William Simpson, commander of the Ninth US Army, in maintaining effective cooperation, in spite of the personality conflicts and competition over resources that threatened to undermine the effectiveness of the coalition.

Despite Barr's efforts to limit the scope of his work, his narrative boundaries are still too broad to allow him to examine many aspects of the Anglo-American military alliance in sufficient detail to adequately convey their significance to the reader. The observer missions the United States embedded with the British, for example, could be the subjects of their own books. However, Barr does provide an effective overview of Anglo-American coalition warfare as conducted by the US and British armies. *Eisenhower's Armies* would be a useful addition to any reading list concerning the Second World War or coalition war in general.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Richard Anderson. Review of Barr, Niall, *Eisenhower's Armies: The American-British Alliance during World War II*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. July, 2016.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=46141>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.