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General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman

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BOOKS REVIEWS

A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

“Three Formidable Commanders”

Lieutenant Colonel Cole C. Kingseed, U.S. Army

Cray, Ed. *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990. 847pp. \$29.95

Schaller, Michael. *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989. 320pp. \$22.50

Truscott, Lucian K. *Command Missions: A Personal Story*. Calif.: Presidio, 1990. 570pp. \$24.95

HISTORIAN MARTIN BLUMENSON calls the generation of American World War II commanders the most formidable array of warriors in our history. In recent years, there has been a veritable avalanche of publications commemorating the accomplishments of the commanders who guided the great armies and navies to victory in this century's bloodiest conflict. These three biographies examine the phenomenon of wartime command and provide an intriguing perspective of leadership from the regimental command team level to the most senior echelons of command in the U.S. Army.

Few names are so revered in the annals of American military history as that of George C. Marshall, army chief of staff throughout the war. In *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman*, Ed Cray has produced the finest single-volume, full-length portrait of one of this country's most distinguished

soldiers. *General of the Army* is a stocktaking, in the author's words, recalling the man and his accomplishments.

Cray portrays Marshall as an ambitious officer, yet one who believed that the office should seek the man and not the man the office. Marshall's early career was undistinguished but lit by flashes of brilliance—at Leavenworth where he graduated first in his class in the Infantry and Cavalry School in 1906, and in the Philippines where then-Lieutenant Marshall directed the movement of 17,000 men during the Batangas maneuvers of 1914. However, it was not until World War I that Marshall emerged as one of the army's most promising young officers.

Marshall's true genius was for organization. He rapidly caught the attention of General Pershing, first as the G-3 of the 1st Division, then as the understudy of Fox Conner, Pershing's operations officer. By Marshall's own admission his greatest contribution of those years was planning the concentration of American forces for the Meuse-Argonne offensive. His subsequent duties included those of aide to Pershing, deputy commandant of the Infantry School, and finally chief of staff of the army in 1939. Cray also credits Marshall's reorganization of the Department of State and the foundation of Nato as crowning achievements in a long and distinguished career.

What makes *General of the Army* so appealing to a broad range of readers is the author's balanced treatment of his subject. Obviously a Marshall admirer, Cray also documents Marshall's outspoken criticism of Pershing's staff in World War I, criticism that probably cost him the position of chief of staff of a division early in the war. Also, while army chief of staff in November 1941, Marshall discounted the role of seapower in countering an expected Philippine invasion, preferring instead to rely on strategic bombing as the most effective deterrent against Japanese aggression. One month later, he was roundly criticized for not keeping his deputies (principally General Short of the Hawaiian department) abreast of deteriorating relations with Japan.

Still, it is difficult to read Cray's biography without gaining a profound admiration for one of the most superb generals and statesmen this country has ever produced. If the author errs at all, it is in his assertion that the appointment of Eisenhower to command Overlord denied Marshall his rightful place in history. No single individual in uniform did more than Marshall in winning the war. His contribution to the war effort lay in his complete mastery of the complexities of waging global war. Perhaps former secretary of war Henry Stimson best summed up Marshall's value when he informed him, "I have seen a great many soldiers in my lifetime and you, sir, are the finest soldier I have ever known."

Far less flattering than Cray's portrayal of Marshall is Michael Schaller's harsh treatment of MacArthur in *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General*. Focusing almost exclusively on MacArthur's post-1935 career, Schaller sees his subject driven only by his repressed ambitions, manifested in service abroad (principally

in the Philippines and Japan) and in an insatiable desire for a political career that would culminate in the White House.

Schaller consulted numerous primary and secondary sources, and acknowledges his debt to D. Clayton James, Carol Petillo, Richard Rovere, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., all of whom have examined MacArthur in some detail. Schaller draws heavily upon James's three-volume biography and Petillo's psychological study of the general of the army.

What is disappointing about this critical biography is that the author's obvious disdain for his subject permeates the entire book, which as a result does not give the reader a balanced assessment of the controversial general. Anyone familiar with MacArthur's career will readily concede that the general was egotistical and convinced of his own intellectual superiority and military genius. Unfortunately, Schaller portrays his subject as virtually devoid of any redeeming qualities. For example, MacArthur's brilliant performance in World War I is dismissed as "premeditated bravery," though he earned seven silver stars. In fact, his superintendency of West Point, where he introduced academic reforms, brought his alma mater into the twentieth century.

The author rightly criticizes MacArthur for not deploying his air force in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, but Schaller goes so far as to give MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area of operations as a case where domestic American politics triumphed over sound military strategy. Roosevelt allegedly gave MacArthur a base in Australia that became the nucleus of the general headquarters of the new Southwest Pacific theater, that would allow him to return to the Philippines despite his disastrous war record.

Schaller does not confine his criticism to World War II. He attempts to debunk the "heroic myth" of MacArthur's rebuilding of Japan, and views the occupation as only a stage MacArthur used to achieve wider recognition. On the Truman-MacArthur controversy that justifiably led to MacArthur's relief, the author insinuates that the general forced the president to relieve him so he could at least be assured a martyr's mantle in one final attempt to grandstand before the American public. Discounting MacArthur's repeated warnings against getting involved in a major land war on the Asian mainland, Schaller even attributes this country's disastrous Vietnam policy in part to MacArthur's inflammatory anticommunist rhetoric and actions of the 1950s. Such an assertion is highly questionable.

In short, according to the author, MacArthur's legacy ultimately must be judged a failure. MacArthur was nothing more than a flamboyant, egotistical, and jealous opportunist who knew little about Asian realities and not much more about American politics. Still, the reader is left feeling that somewhere in a military career that spanned half a century MacArthur must surely have made at least a few contributions: to allied victory in three wars and to the advancement

of peace in postwar Japan. You will have a difficult time finding those achievements in these pages.

Not all the American commanders who rose to prominence in World War II had Marshall's and MacArthur's combat experience. Such was the case of Lieutenant General Lucian Truscott, whose 1954 autobiography, *Command Missions*, has been recently reprinted. Prior to the war, Truscott had never heard a shot fired in anger.

His career during the interwar period was typical for a regular army officer. A product of the army's institutionalized education system, Truscott graduated from the last two-year course at Leavenworth in 1936. Assignment to the General Staff in 1941 brought him into contact with Eisenhower, who was chief of staff of IX Army Corps. In April 1942, Eisenhower and Marshall selected Truscott to join the staff of Louis Mountbatten, who commanded the Combined Operations Headquarters. Subsequent assignments included command of a regimental combat team as part of Patton's Western Task Force during the Torch invasion, command of the 3d Division and VI Corps under Mark Clark in Italy and Alexander Patch in France, and finally of the Fifth Army in northern Italy.

What makes *Command Missions* so entertaining and appealing to the military community is the author's unique perspective, gained from command assignments from regiment to army level. Every phase of war experience contributed to Truscott's military education and his development as a battle leader. Truscott notes that during the invasion of Africa battles were won by a series of small unit actions sparked by some courageous and energetic spirit who was not necessarily the designated leader. Truscott also finds that most initial battle reports were highly inaccurate, and that the mental and physical strain of war had debilitating effects on untrained soldiers.

Truscott's observations of combat are as applicable to the small unit leader as they are to divisional commanders. Battle experience taught him the necessity of personal reconnaissance; that inadequate training methods and poor leadership result in tactical defeat; and that successful commanders must display a spirit of confidence regardless of the dark outlook in any given situation. Most importantly, Truscott concludes that the American soldier demonstrated in World War II that, if properly equipped, trained, and led, he had no superior among the armies of the world.

Command Missions is much more than flag waving. It is a testimony to the dedication and professionalism of a superior combat commander and the soldiers he led from the beaches of North Africa to the foothills of the Alps. If his autobiography affords some pleasure to those who served with Truscott and contributes to the recognition due the American soldier for his achievements, the author has achieved his purpose. But of far greater significance, Truscott has provided future generations of leaders some tools for successful command.

World War II was indeed an era of giants in our history. Unfortunately, few of that splendid generation of warriors remain. We regret their passing, but can take some consolation that recent histories and biographies, such as these, refresh our memories of the soldiers, sailors, and airmen whose successes both sustained us during the war's darkest hours and brought us victory in this century's greatest conflict.

Rogers, Paul P. *The Good Years: MacArthur and Sutherland*. New York: Praeger, 1990. 181pp. \$49.95

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur is the only American senior commander of World War II who has been increasingly subjected to severe criticism by historians. Eight books in the 1980s condemned his leadership in 1941-1945, while his high-ranking colleagues largely escaped the wrath of critical scholars. However, three of his wartime staff officers have written in support of him. Paul P. Rogers, who was the main stenographer for both MacArthur and his chief of staff, Lieutenant General Richard K. Sutherland, has written an insightful account of the relationship between the two men from September 1941 to January 1943.

The Good Years covers the period from the frantic preparations of MacArthur's Philippine command for the imminent Japanese invasion to the bloody, disappointingly prolonged Papuan campaign. Says Rogers, "Sutherland's career followed the path of Greek tragedy. An initial elevation with MacArthur reached an apogee of pride with a fracturing of personal relations and a final disintegration of his potential." Ironically, during the

dark period of Bataan, Corregidor, and Buna the two generals enjoyed their best personal and professional ties.

Rogers, a retired professor of economics and insurance at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, arrived in Manila in the early fall of 1941 as a twenty-one-year-old private and was assigned as stenographer to Sutherland and MacArthur. He was promoted to master sergeant in March 1942 and was the only enlisted man who left Corregidor with the MacArthur entourage that went to Australia to form the nucleus of the general headquarters of the new Southwest Pacific theater. In early 1945 Rogers was promoted to warrant officer. By then he had earned the favor and trust of not only MacArthur and Sutherland but also a number of other generals at GHQ, and he had long functioned as the office manager and principal steward of MacArthur's and Sutherland's files.

One of the most useful portions of his book is the appendix. It is a careful description of the so-called MacArthur Files. These comprise the high-level documents in the MacArthur and Sutherland papers located in the MacArthur Memorial and the National Archives that relate to MacArthur's