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## On to Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander 1943-1946

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tive illustration of different approaches to historical analysis can be seen in the way *Elusive Victory* and *The Israeli Army* tell the story of Generals Tal and Yoffe during the first 3 days of the 1967 war).

*Elusive Victory* remains dispassionate throughout and thus will never rival the sheer verve of Chaim Herzog's magnificent *War of Atonement* or Shabtai Teveth's *The Tanks of Tammuz*. Because of its broad perspective, *Elusive Victory* cannot provide the detail of either of these works. While Herzog and Teveth describe the tactical war, a detailed picture of men directing combined arms formations and strategists trying to orchestrate a campaign in the heat of combat, *Elusive Victory* provides the "aesthetic distance" that can allow for a measure of synthesis and final understanding of the actions hidden by the press of immediacy.

In his attempt at synthesis and understanding, Dupuy does not force his own conclusions on the reader. He presents sufficient information, plans, orders-of-battle, hardware, and events so that the reader can arrive at independent conclusions. In at least one instance, I found myself in marked disagreement with a conclusion reached by the author, using the information provided in the book. This says something about the scholarly integrity of the author; Dupuy presents the information available and not just the data that drive his own conclusions. For this reason alone the book recommends itself as the one book, if one must content himself with only one, on the Middle East wars for a personal reference library.

The book has flaws, however. It is apparent that this book was pushed to press prematurely. For whatever reasons, commercial or otherwise, that Harper and Row or Dupuy allowed this to happen, a serious disservice was done the book. Rampant editorial errors and inanities nearly caused me to "write-

off" this book; no doubt many readers will not persevere. The fact is that they should not have to persevere. The "high seriousness" of the discipline demands that this sort of sloppiness not be permitted. For example: In Figure A-1, p. 623, a table listing engagements in the 1967 war, columns for the Sinai Front and West Bank Front are reversed. On p. 327, the date "mid-1957" should read "mid-1967," an error probably made clear by its context but, nevertheless, an error. A ludicrous error in captioning a photograph, made more so because the photograph is included in an expensive advertising brochure, gives us an Israeli F-4 "Phantom" fighter-bomber listed as an "Egyptian Mig-19 over the Sinai Desert." These kinds of errors exist throughout the book, none serious but all disconcerting.

Graphics can provide a great assist to an author who is describing a battle. While graphics can be expensive to produce, they are invaluable to a reader trying to follow a narrative. Many of the maps in *Elusive Victory* are good, but some are so cluttered as to be nearly hopeless. All could be improved. When a reader must pay \$25 for a book, he expects attention and care to be paid to details.

Despite the flaws, I would recommend purchase of this book. No other book provides so complete a picture. Though the errors are distracting, none should lead a careful reader astray.

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Major U.S. Army

Gavin, James M. *On to Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander 1943-1946*. New York: Viking Press, 1978. 336pp.

General Gavin's book provides an unusual look at World War II, its commanders and leaders and their relationships. It chronicles the role of the famous 82nd Airborne Division and

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provides an interesting perspective on Allied policy and tactical doctrine in defeating the Axis powers. Sections of the book deal successively with the landing in Africa, Italy, and Normandy, followed by chapters on Arnhem, the Winter War, and finally the capture and occupation of Berlin.

Two characteristics of the book overshadow all others. First is the criticism offered by Gavin of senior general officers in the European theater of operations. Second is his apparent preoccupation with disputes between the military leaders of Great Britain and America during the conduct of the war.

Gavin commanded a regiment as a lieutenant colonel at age 35 and was a brigadier general in command of a division at 37. By his own admission, he had a fondness for surrounding himself with commanders and staff officers who were, like himself, relatively young. Perhaps these facts offer some background for the criticisms Gavin made of many senior officers, particularly General Eisenhower. Gavin differed with Eisenhower on a wide variety of subjects, among which were the manner in which Ike handled the most well-known British field commander, Field Marshal Montgomery, the delicate balancing act between U.S. political requirements and Allied military needs, and Allied pursuit of the Germans in the late summer of 1944. Gavin's conviction is that the war could have been concluded by the fall of 1944 had the Allies more aggressively pursued the Germans in the summer and early fall and Eisenhower's handling of this delicate matter has been the subject of much second-guessing. To Gavin's credit, he points out both sides of the question but nonetheless comes down hard on Eisenhower primarily because of the additional casualties suffered by the Allied failure to conclude the war in 1944.

Political considerations and American-British relationships played

key roles in deciding who would make the major military effort to end the war and where it would be in the months subsequent to the Normandy landings. Both General Patton and Field Marshal Montgomery were clamoring for a chance to spearhead a thrust into Germany, but there just weren't enough resources to equip and supply both. Another disagreement between the author and Eisenhower was the importance of the German capital of Berlin. In the absence of guidance from the State Department, Eisenhower downplayed the strategic value of Berlin, citing the public reaction to expected American casualties as his justification for not pressing to reach Berlin ahead of the Russians. This policy was in direct variance with that of the Soviets, who challenged their two senior commanders on the Eastern Front to compete in a race to see who could reach Berlin first.

Furthermore, Gavin felt that Eisenhower's headquarters was located too far to the rear of the frontlines to "smell the gunpowder" and for that reason, he (Eisenhower) was not aware of the real situation as he should have been. This contrasts with Gavin's own credo of marching toward the sound of the guns. He frequently conducted recon patrols, walked the frontlines, and in general ensured that he was often located in forward areas where he could be seen by his troops and directly influence action taking place.

It is very difficult for a major nearly 38 years old to criticize General Gavin, especially in light of all his accomplishments subsequent to World War II, and the fact that he was commanding a division in combat at the age of 38 doesn't make the task any easier. Nonetheless, it seems that General Gavin confuses the tactical battlefield and its requirements with the necessities of commanding at the strategic level. While Gavin, given his organization, its needs, its mission, and his style of setting the example for others certainly benefited

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from the "follow me" style of leadership, to place the commander of all Allied forces in Europe in a similar environment would have been to court disaster. While General Eisenhower may have sacrificed the smell of gunpowder, he undoubtedly gained a perspective not available to his frontline commanders. Gavin either disagrees or feels that the perspective gained was not worth the reality lost.

The second thread of continuity in the book is the relationship between the two major Allies, America and Great Britain. Gavin sympathizes with the British view that as they had been in combat approximately 2 years longer than the Americans, their opinions should have been given additional weight, and more of their commanders should have been in charge of Allied efforts. At the same time, he takes a rather parochial view of why Americans commanded most of the large units in the war in Europe. The main reason was that the American public preferred to have their men fighting under American generals; on a more narrow line of thought, because America put most of the troops in the field, America provided more of the commanders of those troops. It seems a paradox that General Gavin criticizes General Eisenhower for his handling of the political situation between British and American commanders, draws a bead on the proclivity of the British to look out for their own interests, and questions why the Americans did not take more advantage of their greater combat experience. The fact is that the situation was very political; although the world was locked in what was virtually a life or death struggle, there were many fundamentals of social psychology involved, i.e., individual socialization, group pressure, organizational essence, etc. Defeat of the Axis was important, but so was the preservation of "the organization" and it appears that Gavin frequently sought instances of disagreement of British

self-righteousness in order to support his point of view.

Two aspects of Gavin's style of writing are particularly pronounced. First, he pulls no punches. He describes things as he saw them as a regimental and division commander. If that view did not agree with the view from higher headquarters, so be it. Secondly, there is inordinate use of the pronoun "I", particularly in the vignettes of paratroop landings behind enemy lines and their striving to accomplish their assigned mission in the face of determined enemy resistance. It almost seems, at some points, as though there was only General Gavin and his paratroopers, with no subordinate commanders or staff in support. It seems unusual for a general officer to devote his energies to such low-level tasks, but in airborne operations there may very well be a special necessity for whomever is on the scene to take charge and take action. Nonetheless, more generous use of the pronoun "we" would have eliminated a distraction.

Other aspects of the book are equally interesting. Among them are the descriptions of the fog of war and its effect upon the outcome of the engagement. The book details several instances where if one commander or another had been able to sweep away the confusing elements and determine the true situation, the course of a particular battle, or even in some instances, the war itself, might have been altered. Closely related to this topic is the effort made by commanders on both sides to understand their opposite number—his personality, training, culture, background, tendencies, etc. Gavin cites several cases where such comprehension led to victory, or lack of it contributed to defeat.

The effect of logistic support after the summer of 1944 is discussed time and again. Because the Normandy landing and subsequent operations met with much greater success than anticipated,

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logistics for Allied forces became a tremendous problem. As Allied armies surged toward Germany, logistic support could not keep pace. The advance was required to slow down. Shortages accentuated rivalry between Patton and Montgomery and increased the pressure on General Eisenhower. It also reduced his options, to a certain degree, for pursuit of the Germans, and eliminated the chances of ending the war in 1944.

A final point of interest is Gavin's practice of consolidating the lessons learned from each combat jump throughout the war in anticipation of being able to benefit from them during the next engagement. As soon as his unit was withdrawn from the frontlines, he ensured that intensive training was initiated to prepare for the next operation.

In summary, General Gavin writes with an interesting style and relates incidents heretofore untold. His perspective is unusual by today's standards, and his tendency to speak with candor is refreshing as well as enjoyable. The book reads very easily and quickly.

Although the author had 35 years to reflect upon the events about which he wrote, the book does confirm that when one is so close to the action and so much a part of it, it is difficult to step back and take a totally objective view.

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Grayson, Benson L. *Russian-American Relations in World War I*. New York: Ungar, 1979. 151pp.

In *Russian-American Relations in World War I*, Benson Lee Grayson serves up a thin slice of diplomatic history that lacks texture and has little taste. Pithy is the most charitable word I know to describe the narrow interest of this short litany of diplomatic exchanges and foreign policy decisions. Relations with the United States were a secondary concern of Tsarist Russia and remained

so for most of the period of World War I, on which this book concentrates. Relying on published memoirs, cables, and unpublished State Department files, Grayson discusses the outbreak and progression of the war from the Foreign Ministry/Embassy point of view. While this is certainly a respectable approach, it is a very limited one that reveals little more than the subtle, stumbling cat and mouse games of our early envoys who often lacked the political sensitivity and intuition that such a job demands. Behind their morning coats and proper demitasses, U.S. Ambassadors were hard charging, but often their demarches were in the wrong direction, guided by dated information and driven by personal ambition.

U.S. diplomatic efforts throughout the period were concentrated on developing economic/commercial ties with Russia, promoted primarily by banking and industrial concerns in the United States anxious to find new markets. Interestingly, these efforts failed largely because of America's strong human rights stance with respect to Russian treatment of Jews (the so-called passport dispute), the isolationist policy that America adhered to with dedicated tenacity, and Wilson's avoidance of any pursuit that might jeopardize the nation's neutral position. A long series of U.S. and Russian diplomats were unsuccessful in bringing about formal ties and attempts at any kind of rapprochement were never considered a priority issue. Two underlying themes stand out in this otherwise monotonous account. Of interest to any historian is the curious ethnocentrism that colored our relations with Russia then and pervades them today. As French Ambassador Paléologue observed, Russians regarded America as a "selfish, prosaic and barbarous nation, without traditions or dignity, the natural home of democracy and the natural refuge of Jews and nihilists"; Americans thought of the Empire as reflecting "simply the