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In Defense of the Public Liberty: Britain, America, and the Struggle for Independence—from 1760 to the Surrender at Yorktown in 1781

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Gimbel, John. **The Origins of the Marshall Plan.** Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976. 344pp.

This book could more accurately (though less succinctly) have been entitled *The Effect of French Germanophobia on the American Decision to Implement the Marshall Plan.* It is not, as its title implies, a comprehensive and balanced account of how that initiative came about. Both in this book and in his previous one—*The American Occupation of Germany: Politics and the Military* (1968)—Gimbel has firmly maintained that France, not the Soviet Union, constituted the major obstacle to four-power agreement on the postwar treatment of Germany, and hence must bear substantial responsibility for what now appears to be the permanent partition of that country. Gimbel extends his analysis in this book to assert that the United States proposed the Marshall Plan in the spring of 1947 as a means of countering French objections to the rehabilitation of that part of Germany occupied by the British and the Americans.

Gimbel's argument revolves around the unwillingness of the French to accept any substantial revival of German industry for fear that it might later be used to start a new war. Hence, the French opposed efforts by British and American authorities to put their zones on a self-sufficient basis; French resistance took the form of a refusal to cooperate in the establishment of central four-power agencies for the administration of that defeated country. By 1947, Gimbel asserts, both the British and the Americans had agreed that they would have to allow a level of German industry roughly equal to what had existed in the mid-1930's; as a sop to France, though (and to prevent the possible collapse of the French Government), the Americans came up with the idea of a long-term aid plan for Europe as a whole which would "dovetail" with their plan for the rehabilitation of Germany.

This is an intriguing argument, but a narrow one: What is missing from it is a sense of the larger context in which these decisions were made. French obstructionism over Germany would not have seemed so ominous to the Americans had it not been for fear that the Russians would benefit from it by seizing the opportunity to act unilaterally in their occupation zone. Nor does Gimbel's account convey the danger American officials saw in a general European economic collapse—a real possibility in the spring of 1947—which might tip the balance of power on the continent in the Russians' favor. Gimbel's emphasis on Franco-German issues is not inconsistent with these larger concerns, but it does tend to obscure the broader context in which the decision to implement the Marshall Plan was made.

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Griffith, Samuel B. II. **In Defense of the Public Liberty: Britain, America, and the Struggle for Independence—from 1760 to the Surrender at Yorktown in 1781.** Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976. 725pp.

This new history of the American Revolution has many merits, but two are most noteworthy. First, a great deal of attention is paid to the political events that from 1763 to 1775 marked a growing exasperation on both sides of the Atlantic. Second, there is a conscious pursuit of a balanced viewpoint. The result is a history that reveals the combination of logical reasoning and ignorance that led the British Government to persist in its American policy as well as the sense of righteousness felt by the Americans (who complained much of taxation but paid very little) as they confronted the ominous new trend of British policy. In the armed struggle that ensued, the belief of the Americans that their cause was just, whether seen

in terms of their prior experience under colonial government or in terms of their understanding of the British constitution, was a powerful factor in sustaining the struggle in its darkest hours and ensuring the rejection of British peace proposals. Because this book treats not only the war, but also the cause which brought it on, it is truly a history of the Revolution. The war was indeed undertaken "in defense of the public liberty," and the implication of the book's title is that the military history of the struggle ought to be seen in this light.

The overall plan of the book therefore seems admirable, and because it views things from many sides it has a great advantage over the common run of histories of the American Revolution. Unfortunately the plan is not fully carried out. Regarding the British side, it is carried out fairly well. The British fought to preserve imperial authority and maintain a mercantile system that was believed to be of prime importance to British power. The author effectively exposes Britain's military predicament. Although he relies heavily on the views of George III and Lord North, that works out all right because, while it is true that George III remained "hawkish" long after his subjects had lost enthusiasm for subduing the Americans, it is equally true that Lord North's persistent negativism was well in advance of popular opinion. North apprehended that the British people would quickly tire of the enterprise when it became obviously difficult and expensive. Taken together, then, and with due allowance for timing, the views of these two men (and the author calls on many others to speak as well) do expose the tensions that underlay Britain's commitment to the armed struggle.

Both the king and North believed in the necessity of a rapid, massive military strike to knock out the Continental Army and nip the Revolutionary epidemic in the bud. Practically everyone in the British Government agreed with this broad line of strategy—even though it was one that could not draw effectively upon Britain's well-known financial and naval advantages. Thus the fact that the American war was born of revolution gave it a peculiar shape and invited a British response that could not use Britain's most obvious military assets. The chosen strategy also encouraged British generals to gamble for quick results. Thus Burgoyne and Cornwallis exposed themselves to great risks —of course the risks proved greater than they anticipated because of things they did not know—and although these risks proved to be unwise, and were probably needless, it should be remembered that they were of a sort that the overall strategic plan implied. However, the general whose situation called for the greatest boldness—in whose hands lay the only real chance for success—did not gamble: Sir William Howe's caution ruined the policy of quick pacification; yet quick pacification was the sole rationale for the chosen line of strategy. In this way the book enables us to understand the basic reason for British failure; placing Howe's conduct in context, it exposes its colossal fatuity.

What the book does not reveal is the reason for American success. Indeed, most of what the author presents on the American side of the military struggle can only be used to explain American failure—Washington's early blunders, his difficulties in obtaining supplies from a feeble Congress, his ragged and ill-fed troops, rampant peculation by American contractors for army supplies, generals who were jealous (Horatio Gates) or unreliable (Harry Lee), forces based heavily on militiamen who were both untrained and unwilling to remain with the colors for more than a few weeks, and countless other glaring weaknesses of the Revolutionary war effort. He correctly exposes the romantic nonsense about coolheaded country-bred riflemen mowing down the pretty ranks of red-coated heavy infantry. (It is

indeed a common feature of American historical ignorance to read the Battle of New Orleans back into the American Revolutionary War.) But in view of all this one comes away from the book thinking that the Americans on the whole did very little to win this war for themselves, and really succeeded only because the French had an interest in the outcome and the British were pitifully inept at both strategic coordination and logistical preparation.

There is much to be said for the negative approach to the study of warfare, especially 18th-century warfare, but in this case some very important matters have been left out of the account, or rather not given their proper weight. The trouble with the book is that it does not study the war as a revolutionary war; it studies it as a conventional war. In so doing the author deviates from what seemed at the outset to be his purpose, and thus lets slip the opportunity to show a very important process: how political circumstances shaped Revolutionary America's military liabilities and assets during the war for independence.

What we get instead is the war as seen by generals. Washington wanted recruits, supplies, honorable rewards and incentives for officers, and other ordinary requirements of regular armies. The reader is made to feel that he should have gotten them; of course he did not. But he won. Somewhere out there in a shadowy land which the author's narrative only dimly illuminates lay the resources of victory. If Congress could not raise money, then perhaps money was not the American key to success; if militia forces came and went, perhaps that is one thing that made them so vexing and dangerous to the British; although Americans had difficulty getting suitable travelling and reserve victuals, such as salt meat, perhaps their victualling problem was nevertheless not nearly so serious as that faced by the British, whose efforts to obtain food and fodder from local sources were continually frustrated by Revolutionary activists. (On the serious operational consequences of British supply difficulties there is some good recent scholarship, the most immediately relevant book being Arthur Bowler's *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America;** the book is listed in the bibliography, but appears to have had scant influence on the text.) The author's occasional references to American financial difficulties are good for color, but of little value for historical understanding. The Loyalists appear but fitfully (theirs is *not* one of the points of view exposed by the book), yet British strategy, as the author knows, was substantially based on them after 1778.

The author's narrative stops at Yorktown, without postcript, leaving numerous puzzling matters unexplained. Therefore, because it mainly presents a field commander's view of the war the book does not achieve the highest aim of military history. And because the narrative—which stays close to the chronological line, with frequent shifts of scene, especially toward the end—stresses events in the field, it tends to reinforce an idea that this reviewer believes to be false, namely that the outcome of the war was determined by a combination of turns of fate and admirable (or deplorable) instances of military conduct.

About 12 years ago Piers Mackesy published *The War for America.* That book delineated clearly and in detail, really for the first time, the overall shape of the war as seen by the British. (Before that the most intelligent study of this sort was a brief article by William B. Willcox in the *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review.) In Defense of the Public Liberty* also makes sense of the British side; we still await a book that makes sense of both sides.

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*Reviewed, Fall 1976

Whatever its shortcomings as military history, this book has much merit as political history, for it manages to do something that is treacherously difficult. It manages to portray the Revolutionary movement with all its blemishes, and the American heroes with all their warts, yet does so without demeaning them. In other words it avoids both Panglossian patriotism and muckraking sensationalism. The Revolution's leaders come off these pages as fallible human beings who had to work with fallible, weak, and sometimes corrupt "helpers," and in that regard their achievement seems all the more worthy of our respect.

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Halsey, William F. and Bryan, J., III. **Admiral Halsey's Story.** New York: Da Capo Press, 1976. 310pp. Merrill, James M. **A Sailor's Admiral: A Biography of William F. Halsey.** New York: Crowell, 1976. 271pp.

Admiral Halsey's Story, as some of us aging sailors will recall, was first published in 1947. The present volume, coming out nearly 30 years later, is an unabridged republication of the first edition and represents a contribution of the Da Capo Press to the reprint series entitled: *The Politics and Strategy of World War II.*

Looking back over the years, one is tempted to ask if the book might have taken on a different emphasis had Admiral Halsey waited, let us say, another 5 years before writing his story; whether or not he might have become more analytical about that long, grueling naval war in the Pacific of which he shouldered so much of the prodigious burden of combat. If we should succumb to the temptation of asking such a question in the first place, we would no doubt quickly recognize its futility. Any delay in the writing of the book, for the purpose of refining judgments or clarifying perspectives, might very well have deprived the narrative of its spontaneous realism and, most important of all, the Halseyan charisma that flows, often boisterously, from the admiral's personal thrust and sense of immediacy. What we did not get was a strategic study in wartime naval operations. Instead, we got a rich portrait of a tough man of the sea. The book is pure Halsey—the personal yarn of a seagoing, fighting admiral who was forthright, honest, often brilliant, sometimes rash, but who possessed above all else, a natural modesty that enhanced his uncommon valor.

It would not be entirely fair to give "Bull" Halsey (as the wartime press loved to call him) all the credit for the quality of the chronicle he left to naval history. He was fortunate in choosing as his collaborator Lt. Comdr. J. Bryan III, USNR, an established writer as well as a naval officer who had flown combat missions from carriers and shore bases, and who was highly qualified to assist "the old man" in playing the unfamiliar role of autobiographer. It is to Bryan's lasting credit that he not only kept himself entirely out of the text, except for a few brief editorial comments, but that he was able to immerse himself so well in the admiral's idiom that the reader can feel Halsey's presence on every page. Bryan's Introduction, the only place in the book where we are conscious of him, is a delightful but all too short characterization of the admiral, with well-chosen anecdotes that deftly extol Halsey's heroic stature and human warmth.

On the very first page of *Admiral Halsey's Story* we are reminded that the book is not an autobiography, but a report. "Reports," says the admiral, "are the only things I know how to write, since half my time in the Navy has gone to preparing them." Yet, as much as Halsey may have wished to confine himself to "official form," he continuously creates for the reader that