

# Reviews

## Giving Forgotten Commanders Their Due

**Patton's Peers: The Forgotten Allied Field Army Commanders of the Western Front, 1944–45.** John A. English. Stackpole Books. 368 pages; maps; black-and-white photographs; index; \$27.95.

By **COL Cole C. Kingseed**  
U.S. Army retired

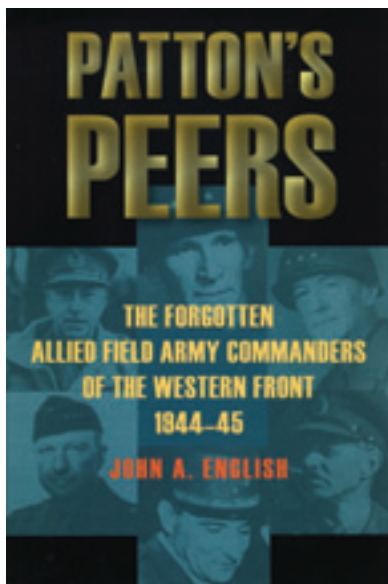
In the last two years of the European war against the Third Reich, seven Allied field armies bore the brunt of the fighting on the Western Front. Of the commanders of these forces, only GEN George S. Patton Jr., U.S. Third Army, remains a household name 64 years after the cessation of hostilities. The remaining six: GEN Henry (Harry) Crerar, First Canadian Army; GEN Miles Dempsey, British Second Army; GEN Courtney Hodges, U.S. First Army; GEN William Simpson, U.S. Ninth Army; GEN Alexander Patch, U.S. Seventh Army; and GEN Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, French First Army, have been relegated to the footnotes of history. In an effort to correct this imbalance, John A. English has produced a masterful account of army-level command in *Patton's Peers*.

English is a veteran military historian who served 37 years in the Canadian Army. He has taught at Queen's University and the U.S. Naval War College, and his previous works include *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign*, *Marching Through Chaos* and *Lament for an Army*. His *On Infantry*, the story of infantry combat in the 20th century and its impact on the major conflicts of our time, has long been recognized as a military classic.

In assessing the effectiveness of Patton's peers, English notes that all had similar backgrounds with respect to training and education. Each commander had compiled a distinguished record of war service in World War I. All served in the shadow of more illustrious predecessors before assum-

ing army-level command in the next world war. In addition, all their appointments to senior command "depended on chance and patronage as much as military ability."

Then, as today, it was the responsibility of field army commanders to execute broadly stated tasks or missions assigned by group commanders. "Army-level responsibilities included determining objectives and priorities, developing plans and concepts of op-



erations, and assigning achievable objectives to corps along with adequate resources to attain them." According to English, during the campaign of northwest Europe, none of the army-level commanders, as individuals, were indispensable since "the general staff system was designed to compensate for a commander's shortcomings, and a good staff could rescue a mediocre commander."

Of the commanders who led field armies on the Western Front in 1944–45, GEN Dempsey was the youngest and longest continuously serving field commander. Landing in Normandy on June 7, 1944, Dempsey directed the operations of the British Second Army for the remainder of the war. A modest man, Dempsey oversaw the fighting around

Caen and in one week raced his army 250 miles to the east once the German line of resistance collapsed in August, outpacing even Patton's Third Army. Dempsey's textbook crossing of the Rhine in Operation Plunder in March 1945 served as his finest military offensive of the war.

As First Canadian Army commander, GEN Crerar was ever conscious that he followed in the footsteps of GEN Sir Arthur Currie, who led the celebrated Canadian Corps to victory in World War I.

The least resourceful of the army-level commanders in Europe, Crerar liberated the Channel ports, but he was fortunate to have in his service LTG Guy G. Simonds, Canada's most exceptional field commander, who successfully opened the Scheldt Estuary to shipping following the capture of Antwerp. Later in the war, Crerar directed nine British divisions and his own Canadian divisions, approximately half a million troops, in the Battle of the Rhineland.

Of the Commonwealth and French commanders, English gives highest marks to GEN de Lattre, who displayed great personal courage and inspirational leadership in carrying out such assigned tasks as reducing the Colmar pocket and crossing the Rhine River.

More than any other national commander, de Lattre viewed himself as the representative of his country more than the commander of one of its armies. The French zone of occupation that resulted at war's end "largely reflected the imprint of French boots already planted firmly on the ground."

ARMY readers will undoubtedly be more interested in Patton's American peers. Here, English sees more differences than similarities. GEN Hodges, commanding the U.S. First Army, does not fare as well as his contemporaries. Hodges served as then-LTG Omar Bradley's deputy commander on D-

Day. "A [GEN George C.] Marshall man among Marshall men," Hodges was a micromanager who lacked confidence in his corps commanders with the exception of VII Corps commanding general J. Lawton Collins. Given Hodges' lackluster performance in the fighting in the Huertgen Forest and the opening stages of the Ardennes Offensive, English states emphatically that Hodges' reputation as Eisenhower's "scintillating star" is totally unwarranted.

Ninth Army commander GEN Simpson, on the other hand, emerges as "the most forgotten American field army commander of the Western Front." Simpson received his position because Marshall wanted to assure generals who trained large formations back in

the United States that they would not be excluded from leading field armies in combat. More competent than Hodges, English contends, Simpson remained in the shadow of the British too long because Army group commander Bradley assigned him to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group for much of the fighting in northwest Europe.

**T**hen-MG Alexander Patch, who commanded the Seventh Army, replaced Patton once Eisenhower transferred Patton to the United Kingdom in the spring of 1944. Patch, a veteran of the Pacific Theater, commanded a coalition army of American and French troops in the invasion of southern France in August 1944. Too closely as-

sociated with the Mediterranean Theater and with GEN Jacob Devers, whom Eisenhower detested, Patch never gained entrance to Operation Overlord's inner circle. Despite his success in eliminating the last big German offensive of the West in the close-quarters fighting of the Vosges region of southern France, Patch was largely forgotten and emerged from the war as the "most underrated general of the war."

In the final analysis, English gives these less heralded commanders their due.

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## ***Varied Fare***

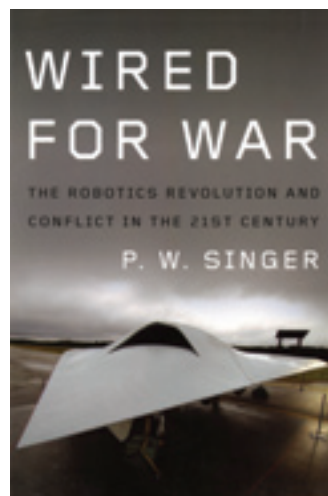
**Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century.** P.W. Singer. *The Penguin Press.* 499 pages; black-and-white photographs; index; \$29.95.

Engineers at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory frequently offer a well-worn adage of modern research: "The problem with change is that things are different afterwards." Looking at the military robotics revolution now unfolding within and around the U.S. military, few would doubt that it represents one of the greatest changes of our time. And while many may embrace some of the early elements of that revolution, only a minuscule percentage have taken the time to study that change and speculate on how things might be different in the "afterwards" to come.

Fortunately, an excellent introduction to that study and speculation is now available in P.W. Singer's *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*. Including an understated acknowledgment that "war just won't be the same," Singer provides an extremely readable reference that attempts to recognize and convey the significance and potential ramifications of

the expanding robotics revolution.

The story is told in two major sections. A foundation section provides a history of robots and robotics as well as a look at some of the recent and emerging technologies that are facilitating the application of these systems



for today's military and setting the stage for broader applications tomorrow. Based on that foundation, Singer then explores aspects of the resulting change, identifying a wide range of ethical, legal and psychological issues surrounding robotics.

For example, after arguing that it is robotics and not network-centric warfare that serves as the true cornerstone for today's revolution in military affairs, Singer then builds on that think-

ing to offer a "wide variety of new questions, concerns and dilemmas that will ripple out beyond the confines of the battlefield." While the combat exigencies of arming today's generations of unmanned aerial systems may cause some to ignore these longer-term considerations, Singer convincingly makes the case that many of these somewhat esoteric issues must be addressed as part of today's planning, development and fielding processes.

Serious military readers might be tempted to dismiss the significance of the book because of its periodic flippant readability (Who really cares if Singer believes that Ewoks and Jar Jar Binks "are to blame for the ruination of the *Star Wars* franchise"? or its occasional lightweight treatment of some military applications (the frequent referencing of counter rocket, artillery and mortar [C-RAM] ignores the most critical software and integration issues in favor of calling its limited Phalanx engagement component "R2-D2 in Baghdad"). The majority of the military coverage and discussion is superb, however, offering an excellent and long-overdue starting point for the critical robotics discussions, debates and decisions that need to take place today and continue into the future.

—Scott R. Gourley

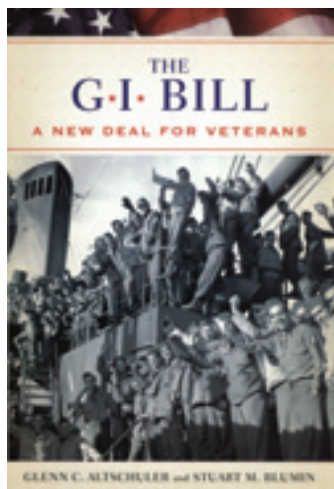
### The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans.

Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin. Oxford University Press. 246 pages; black-and-white photographs/illustrations; index; \$24.95.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, is often credited with the late-20th-century booms in college matriculation and home ownership, even with the overall success of the "Greatest Generation." On a mission to "take the bill outside of its shrine," *The GI Bill* succeeds in presenting a more balanced appraisal of the groundbreaking legislation, which authors Glenn Altschuler and Stuart Blumin dub the New Deal for veterans.

Thoroughly researched (and with many nods to Suzanne Mettler, author of *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*), *The GI Bill* methodically examines every aspect of the act, from inception to passage. A discussion of the veterans' assistance bills passed after the Civil War and World War I provides stark contrast to the generosity of the 1944 act. Best

known for its college allowances, the bill offered a variety of other benefits, not all of which were as successful—the sub-college training programs intended for



those pursuing vocational education proved susceptible to graft, and in the early days of the bill, the VA home loans it sponsored required monthly payments much too high for the average veteran.

Altschuler and Blumin also assess the racial and gender biases of the bill's

effects. The GI Bill itself was remarkable in its inclusion of *all* veterans, among them African-Americans and women. In practice, however, it was generally difficult for black veterans to obtain home loans, and female veterans accepting education benefits were not offered dependent allowances, as were men.

Despite its flaws, the bill allowed unprecedented funding for unemployment, housing, education and training. "By 1950," Altschuler and Blumin write, "the U.S. government had spent more money to educate veterans than it had on the Marshall Plan." Indeed, veterans' education benefits have never been so comprehensive in all the years since.

In presenting "the larger story of the GI Bill and its role in the shaping of postwar America," *The GI Bill's* clear-eyed narrative balances the heady encomiums of recent years and provides an informative, thorough account of "a remarkable response to a critical moment in the nation's history" against which many measure the present.

—Sara Hov

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