

**15 STARS: EISENHOWER, MACARTHUR, MARSHALL:
THREE GENERALS WHO SAVED THE AMERICAN CENTURY¹**

REVIEWED BY FRED L. BORCH III²

Like *Nineteen Stars*,³ in which author Edgar “Bo” Puryear examined the military careers of Eisenhower, MacArthur, Marshall, and Patton to see if there was a common denominator for outstanding leadership skills, author Stanley Weintraub compares and contrasts the careers of more “stars”—in this case, three men who held the super-rank of five-star general: Dwight D. Eisenhower, Douglas MacArthur, and George C. Marshall. Weintraub’s goal, however, is quite different. He seeks to show how the three most influential five-star generals in U.S. history had interlocking careers that spanned more than five decades, and how their combined efforts were critical to America’s victory in World War II and the rebuilding and re-integration of post-war Germany and Japan. Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Marshall, Weintraub maintains, “saved the American century.”⁴ It is a bold claim, and some might ask if it unjustly overlooks the contributions of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman in shaping the face of American history. Whether Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Marshall “saved” the American century is open to question, but *15 Stars* convincingly shows that these three Army officers had a truly remarkable impact on modern history.

More importantly, the book succeeds in demonstrating that the contributions of Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Marshall are best understood by examining their lives together, adding a texture and depth to each man that a stand-alone biography can only achieve with difficulty. In fact, Weintraub’s unique approach to examining how their lives were intertwined, and how that affected history, sets *15 Stars* apart from other recently published military biographies. Members of the Regiment who take the time to read this fine book will not be disappointed.

¹ STANLEY WEINTRAUB, *15 STARS: EISENHOWER, MACARTHUR, MARSHALL: THREE GENERALS WHO SAVED THE AMERICAN CENTURY* (2007).

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³ EDGAR PURYEAR, *NINETEEN STARS* (2003).

⁴ *Id.* at v.

Weintraub, a professor emeritus at Penn State University, is an accomplished author of biography and military history⁵ who writes clearly and succinctly. He makes Eisenhower, MacArthur and Marshall come alive.

MacArthur was senior to both Eisenhower and Marshall; he was the only four-star general and Army Chief of Staff in the early 1930s, while Eisenhower and Marshall were still mid-grade officers. After retiring, he took a job as “Military Advisor” to the semiautonomous Commonwealth of the Philippines, with the rank of Field Marshal and “a gold eleven ounce marshal’s baton” courtesy of Philippine President Manuel Quezon.⁶ In Weintraub’s view, MacArthur may have been a brilliant and able officer, but he was vain, pompous, and egotistical to a fault. Eisenhower, then a lieutenant colonel on MacArthur’s staff in Manila, was appalled at his chief’s personality. He recognized, however, that only “egotism [and] exclusive devotion to one’s own interests” motivated MacArthur.⁷ As then-Major General Enoch H. Crowder, who had once been an aide to MacArthur’s father and who had subsequently served as The Judge Advocate General in World War I, put it: “Arthur MacArthur was the most flamboyantly egotistical man I had ever seen—until I met his son.”⁸

MacArthur had an unbelievable public relations machine. In Weintraub’s view (shared by this reviewer), he took credit for the good and managed to deflect the bad. His failure to defend the Philippines after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was inexcusable, yet MacArthur managed to get a Medal of Honor out of it. His island-hopping strategy was the key to victory in the Pacific in World War II, and his bold, daring, and wildly successful amphibious landing at Inchon in 1951 continues to inspire students of military history. Yet, his Korean War race to the Yalu was ill-advised and his proposal for an air and sea bombardment of China’s industrial capacity to wage war even more foolish. As Weintraub details, MacArthur even sent Washington a list of thirty-four targets for atomic bombs.⁹ In the end, his own vanity—which manifested itself as insubordination to President Harry S. Truman—ended his career.

⁵ STANLEY WEINTRAUB, *11 DAYS IN DECEMBER: CHRISTMAS AT THE BULGE 1944* (2006) (This book was widely acclaimed.).

⁶ WEINTRAUB, *supra* note 1, at 92, 94.

⁷ *Id.* at 95.

⁸ *Id.* at 119.

⁹ *Id.* at 450.

If egotism was the hallmark of MacArthur's character, Eisenhower was totally different: flexible, genial, and unpretentious. Eisenhower accomplished what perhaps no other American general could have done by building a multinational force and leading it in the liberation of Europe. Weintraub recounts how Eisenhower not only had to fight Hitler, but he had to struggle with men like British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, who routinely attempted to undercut him and belittled him behind his back. Eisenhower also had to deal with Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who resisted the idea for an Allied landing at Normandy in June 1944 almost until the last. But Eisenhower held the Allies together until the end and, after serving as Army Chief of Staff, was elected President in 1952.

Marshall is the real hero of the book. Modest and self-effacing, he was the epitome of selfless service. Moreover, he was a brilliant strategist. He not only orchestrated the successful ground and air strategy that ensured Allied victory, but made sure that the Army had the requisite number of Soldiers and Airmen to achieve success. Weintraub argues that Marshall deserves credit for many of the achievements nowadays attributed to Eisenhower and MacArthur.

Secretary of War Stimson—and President Roosevelt—wanted Marshall to take command of Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Europe. Both knew that the man who commanded the largest combined operation in the history of war would probably be universally celebrated as a great hero. Roosevelt certainly saw it that way; he wrote to General John J. Pershing, then a patient at Walter Reed Army hospital, that “it is only fair to give George [Marshall] a chance in the field . . . I want George to be the Pershing of the Second World War.”¹⁰ The job was Marshall's for the asking, but he refused because he believed he was more valuable in Washington. Had Marshall decided differently, history would have been very different. There almost certainly would not have been a President Eisenhower.

But Marshall was utterly without ambition. He deplored the idea of “five-star” rank. He thought it was unnecessary. As he told an interviewer in 1956, “I didn't want any promotion at all . . . I didn't need it.”¹¹ Under pressure from Roosevelt and Stimson, however, Marshall finally accepted the rank of General of the Army.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 196.

¹¹ *Id.* at 279–80.

After the war, Marshall hoped to retire and spend the remainder of his days on his Virginia farm. His sense of duty, however, led him to continue to serve, first as Secretary of State (overseeing the “Marshall Plan” that rebuilt Europe) and later as Secretary of Defense.

One of the major strengths of Weintraub’s narrative is the manner in which he weaves facts and anecdotes into his narrative. More than a few show how the careers of Eisenhower, Marshall, and MacArthur were interconnected. For example, any of these three men might have led the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944, but Eisenhower got the job only because Marshall refused it. MacArthur wore all his ribbons on his uniform until he saw a photograph in the Australian press of Eisenhower in uniform with no decorations at all. MacArthur quietly stopped wearing his ribbon bars.¹² Eisenhower argued strenuously against awarding the Medal of Honor to MacArthur after the debacle in the Philippines in December 1941,¹³ yet Marshall personally drafted the citation for the medal and took it to Roosevelt for his signature, because Marshall believed it would “offset any propaganda by the enemy directed against [MacArthur’s] leaving his command and proceeding to Australia.”¹⁴

In addition to showing how their lives were intertwined, some of Weintraub’s anecdotes also give the reader insight into the character and personality of his subjects. For example, Eisenhower was a chain smoker and had a terrible temper. He also had an inappropriate relationship with his thirty-four year-old British civilian driver, Kay Summersby. General Omar Bradley referred to Summersby as “Ike’s shadow”;¹⁵ Summersby traveled with a dog named Felix, and on the dog’s collar was engraved: “This dog belongs to Ike and Kay.”¹⁶ Marshall intervened at least once to stop Eisenhower from favoring Summersby when Ike recommended her for a Legion of Merit. Marshall refused to permit its award.

MacArthur similarly had some character flaws. While Chief of Staff, the fifty-something MacArthur lived with his elderly mother at military quarters on Fort Myer, but he also kept an eighteen year old

¹² *Id.* at 117.

¹³ *Id.* at 57.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 58.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 146.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 409.

mistress at the Castleton Hotel on 16th Street in Washington.¹⁷ MacArthur made \$33,000 a year (plus a penthouse and expenses) while serving as the top military advisor in the Philippines¹⁸ and, while still on Corregidor in February 1942, accepted \$500,000 from Manuel Quezon as a gratuity.¹⁹ By contrast, Eisenhower diplomatically refused Quezon's offer of \$100,000 as a gift when he left Manila in December 1939.²⁰

Not surprisingly, MacArthur and Eisenhower did not like each other. MacArthur called Eisenhower "the best clerk I ever had," while Eisenhower once said that he had "learned dramatics under MacArthur."²¹

Only George Marshall seems to have been without fault. When he put on his fourth star as Army Chief of Staff on 1 September 1939, he made \$808.33 a month, plus \$2,200 a year in allowances.²² While this was sufficient and provided a comfortable life, it did not make him wealthy. Yet Marshall apparently did not care for gold, silver, or other riches. In the 1950s, Weintraub explains, Marshall was offered a million dollars "after taxes" by Henry Luce of *Time* and *Life* to write his memoirs. This was a huge sum at the time. Eisenhower and Churchill had already penned their books, and many others were cashing in on their wartime fame. But Marshall refused, saying to Luce, "You don't seem to understand. I am not interested in one million dollars."²³ Marshall also refused to serve on any corporate boards.

Weintraub's counter-factual musings—his "what ifs"—are thought-provoking. For example, he suggests that MacArthur might well have been President had he not rejected the opportunity to be the vice presidential candidate on a ticket with Republican Senator Robert Taft.²⁴ Weintraub reasons as follows: Taft was the front runner before the 1952 nominating convention, and MacArthur's name "might have swung the few votes necessary . . . to best Eisenhower in the early balloting."²⁵ It was a Republican year, as the Democrats had held the White House since

¹⁷ *Id.* at 79–80.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 95.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 77.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.* at 103.

²² *Id.* at 101.

²³ *Id.* at 469.

²⁴ *Id.* at 486.

²⁵ *Id.*

1932 and the country was ready for change after Truman and an unpopular war on the Korean peninsula. Consequently, despite Taft's "negatives as a campaigner," he might well have been elected (as his father had been in 1908).²⁶ As Taft died of cancer on 31 July 1953, six months after the inauguration, MacArthur would have been propelled into the Oval Office.

For all its positive attributes, Weintraub's book contains some factual mistakes. He seems unable to get military equipment right. For example, at one point he has MacArthur taking off in a C-54 Skymaster but landing in a C-121 Constellation. He also repeats the popular but erroneous myth that the Army's ubiquitous one-quarter-ton wheeled vehicle derived its nickname "Jeep" from "general purpose"—and he makes that incorrect claim twice.²⁷

Finally, at least for Judge Advocates, his discussion of Executive Order 9066, which required the forced removal and relocation of Americans of Japanese ancestry, is inadequate. Weintraub insinuates that the military was the prime mover behind this decision to put the Japanese in "remote, barren locations that were little more than concentration camps."²⁸ In fact, it was a political decision made by Roosevelt and his advisors; no one of stature dissented. Weintraub also suggests that, as "only 1,877 Japanese of the many loyal thousands in Hawaii were 'relocated,'" this necessarily means that Executive Order 9066 was both foolish and applied selectively. Serious students of World War II, however, know that the situation in Hawaii was completely different from events in California, Oregon, and Washington. First, given the numbers of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii, relocating them was logistically impossible. Second, as martial law was declared in Hawaii—and habeas corpus suspended during Army rule from 1941 to 1943—this was markedly different from the western United States where civilian rule continued. Weintraub should have been more honest in acknowledging why relatively few Japanese-Americans were relocated from the Hawaii.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.* at 37, 228. Contrary to popular belief, the word "jeep" does not derive from "vehicle, general purpose." Rather, historians see two likely origins: First, a popular Popeye cartoon character named Eugene the Jeep had the ability to do anything, and this described the one-quarter-ton, high-horsepower vehicle that became a ubiquitous mode of transportation in the military. Second, World War I soldiers called any unproven piece of military hardware a "jeep," and this military slang described the new vehicle as well.

²⁸ *Id.* at 48.

Additionally, *15 Stars* would be a better book—and more useful—if it had footnotes or endnotes. Weintraub uses what he calls “source notes” at the end of the text, but these are inadequate for the reader who wants to go directly to a specific source for some fact or event cited in the larger narrative. The lack of a bibliography also is disappointing.

These minor criticisms aside, however, this is a superb book about three great Army officers, and Weintraub’s claim that they saved the American century is not hyperbole. Judge Advocates should read the book because it shows how the careers of America’s most senior Army officers were intertwined before and during World War II, and how this interrelationship shaped both their lives and that conflict. As the war remains the single most important event of the twentieth century, that alone makes the book worth examining. But there also is every reason to believe that the careers and lives of senior officers in today’s Army are just as intertwined, if not more so given the enhanced communication possibilities ushered in by the Internet. It follows that, given the constancy of human nature in history, reading stories and anecdotes about Eisenhower, Marshall, and MacArthur may provide insights into senior-level interpersonal relationships in today’s Army.

By Order of the Secretary of the Army:

GEORGE W. CASEY, JR.
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Official:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joyce E. Morrow".

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