

**CHIEFS OF STAFF: THE PRINCIPAL OFFICERS BEHIND
HISTORY'S GREAT COMMANDERS¹**REVIEWED BY FRED L. BORCH III²

Military libraries are filled with books about commanders—understandably so, given the importance of command in military operations.³ But, while Judge Advocates have served as commanders in both war and peace,⁴ Army lawyers spend most of their military careers as staff officers advising commanders and their staffs. It follows that Judge Advocates should look for ways to enhance their abilities as staff officers—and reading this new, unique, and groundbreaking study of chiefs of staff in modern history is a great start.

¹ 1 DAVID ZABECKI, CHIEFS OF STAFF: THE PRINCIPAL OFFICERS BEHIND HISTORY'S GREAT COMMANDERS (Napoleonic Wars to World War I) (Naval Inst. Press 2008), 2 DAVID ZABECKI, CHIEFS OF STAFF: THE PRINCIPAL OFFICERS BEHIND HISTORY'S GREAT COMMANDERS (World War II to Korea and Vietnam) (Naval Inst. Press 2008).

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³ Classics on command include CHARLES B. MACDONALD, COMPANY COMMANDER (1984); JAMES R. MCDONOUGH, PLATOON LEADER: A MEMOIR OF COMMAND IN COMBAT (1986); and MARTIN VAN CREVELD, COMMAND IN WAR (1987). More recent publications on the subject include ROGER H. NYE, CHALLENGE OF COMMAND (1986) and THE ART OF COMMAND: LEADERSHIP FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO COLIN POWELL (Harry S. Laver & Jeffrey J. Matthews eds., 2008).

⁴ Two examples of Judge Advocates (JAs) who commanded in wartime are Colonel (later Major General) Blanton Winship and Major (later Brigadier General) Bruce C. Babbitt. Winship was serving as a JA in France in 1918 when, at the request of General John J. Pershing, he took command of two infantry regiments and led them in combat. Babbitt was serving as a JA in the 7th Infantry Division in Korea in 1950 when he took command of a provisional rifle battalion during the defense of the Pusan Perimeter. An example of a JA who commanded in peacetime is COL (Ret.) Earle F. Lasseter, who served as Staff Judge Advocate at the U.S. Army Infantry Center and Fort Benning in the late 1980s. Since Lasseter was the senior ranking field grade officer on the installation, he took command of Fort Benning in the absence of the commanding general.

The theme of *Chiefs of Staff: The Principal Officers Behind History's Great Commanders* is that while the commander is critical to victory in war, that commander cannot succeed without a chief of staff—the “key staff officer responsible for translating the ideas of the commander into practical plans for soldiers to execute on the battlefield.”⁵ The chief of staff must not only understand the commander’s intent, but also translate that intent into clear and succinct guidance for subordinate staff principals. Additionally, the chief of staff must manage and run the staff, and coordinate with subordinate, higher, and lateral commanders. This takes not only intelligence and knowledge, but tact and diplomatic skill as well. Finally, the chief of staff must have the ability to envisage new (and perhaps unexpected) ways for the staff to enhance mission success. The ultimate message of *Chiefs of Staff* is that commanders get the credit for great victories and are blamed for battlefield disasters. Their chiefs of staff, however, are overlooked, if not forgotten. Yet the importance of the chief of staff in military operations makes it imperative to study them.

What makes a chief of staff successful? *Chiefs of Staff* answers this question by examining more than twenty operational-level chiefs of staff from the Napoleonic Wars through World War I (Volume I) and World War II through Vietnam (Volume II). More than twenty distinguished military historians, including David T. Zabecki, who served both as an author and editor, provide biographical sketches of more than thirty German, British, French, Soviet, and U.S. officers who served as chiefs of staff over a nearly 200 year period.⁶

Each profile begins with a chronology of the subject’s military career, followed by an eight to twenty page discussion of the chief of staff’s relationship with his commander and his strengths and weaknesses as an organizer and manager. Each sketch naturally

⁵ 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 1.

⁶ Well-known historians contributing biographical essays include: James J. Cooke, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Mississippi, author of five books on World War I, and recipient of France’s *Ordre des Palmes Académiques* (Chevalier) for scholarship; Russell Hart, Professor of History at Hawaii Pacific University and author of the award-winning *CLASH OF ARMS: HOW THE ALLIES WON IN NORMANDY* (2001); Geoffrey P. Megargee, a scholar at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and author of the prize-winning *INSIDE HITLER’S HIGH COMMAND* (2000); and Spencer C. Tucker, Professor Emeritus of History at the Virginia Military Institute and author or editor of twenty-seven books and encyclopedias on military and naval history, including the prize-winning *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORLD WAR I* (Spencer C. Tucker & Priscilla Mary Roberts eds., 5 vols. 2005).

concentrates on a particular warfighting event that highlights the chief of staff's contribution to the commander's success—or failure—on the battlefield.

Zabecki, who penned two of the profiles contained in these volumes, is well-qualified to write about military history generally and chiefs of staff in particular. He served as an infantry rifleman in Vietnam and, after earning a commission, commanded at the company, battalion, brigade, and division level.⁷ Before he retired as an Army major general, Zabecki had served as the senior U.S. Army commander south of the Alps and had been the chief of staff at the 7th Army Command in Heidelberg, Germany.⁸ He also is a professionally trained historian, with a Ph.D. in military history.⁹

Chiefs of Staff begins with a quick historical examination of the evolution of the staff at the operational level of warfare.¹⁰ Although King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden was the first to develop a regimental staff in the early 1600s, most military historians view the era of the French Revolution and Napoleon as triggering the need for a warfighting-level staff. The emergence of large national armies in the early 1800s meant a commander could no longer control his troops directly. The mass warfare carried out by corps-sized organizations in an even larger army also required detailed planning to move and supply thousands and thousands of troops, and the commander simply did not have the time to do this complex and time-consuming staff work.¹¹

⁷ As a captain, Zabecki commanded B Co., 2-123 Field Artillery, Illinois Army National Guard (1979–1982); Lieutenant Colonel Zabecki commanded 303rd Rear Operations Center, 3rd Infantry Division (1991–1994); and as a colonel, Zabecki commanded 313th Rear Tactical Operations Center, 21st Theater Army Area Command (1994–1996). Major General Zabecki served as Commanding General, Southern European Task Force-Rear (2005–2006).

⁸ Colonel Zabecki served as Chief of Staff, 7th Army Command (1998–2000). As a major general, Zabecki also served as Senior Security Advisor to the U.S. Coordinating and Monitoring Mission, Israel (2003–2004), where he was responsible for the Roadmap to Peace in the Middle East. Zabecki retired in 2007 after more than forty years enlisted and officer service in the Regular Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve.

⁹ Zabecki earned his B.A. (1972) and M.A. (1973) from Xavier University. He holds an M.S. (1976) from the Florida Institute of Technology. His Ph.D. is from the Royal Military College of Science (United Kingdom) (2004).

¹⁰ 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 1–21.

¹¹ *Id.* at 3.

While Napoleon's Grand Army—more than 500,000 men by 1812—had an improvised staff of officers doing administrative work and war planning, and a chief of staff who acted as a “facilitator” and coordinator, it was the Prussians who first developed the framework for the modern general staff.¹² Operations and training, logistics and movements, intelligence, and ammunition resupply were the chief business of the staff, although administrative, personnel, legal, and medical also were part of the Prussian warfighting staff structure.¹³

Chiefs of Staff explores the German contribution to the development of the General Staff, and explains why German battlefield success in the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and Franco-Prussian War (1870) convinced early twentieth century military observers from the United States to Japan that the German staff structure was the model to emulate.¹⁴ Perhaps more important than staff structure, however, was the German development of tactical doctrine or *Auftragstaktik*, which not only guided subordinate commanders in executing military operations, but guided warfighting staffs in their work. Zabecki's profile of German General Friedrich-Wilhelm von Mellenthin (who served as a chief of staff in North Africa and on the Eastern Front in World War II) is particularly instructive because it shows how this *Auftragstaktik* or “mission orders” concept, combined with the principle of “commander's intent,” made German operational-level staff work so successful.¹⁵ As von Mellenthin explained:

To follow a command or an order requires that it is thought through on the level from which the order was given. The following through of an order requires that the person to whom it was given thinks at least one level above the one at which the order was given. The mission requires one to be able to think, or to penetrate by thought, the functions of the higher commander.¹⁶

This “mission orders” doctrine, along with “commander's intent,” remain fundamental building blocks in current U.S. Army doctrine—and

¹² *Id.* at 4.

¹³ *Id.* at 9.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 5, 15.

¹⁵ 2 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 62–73.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 73.

consequently the foundation of staff work at the warfighting level today.¹⁷

While Judge Advocates will find something of interest in every profile in *Chiefs of Staff*, the Americans examined in the two volumes merit the closest look, if for no other reason than these profiles show the evolution of the Army's staff structure in the twentieth century, and very different challenges faced by Army operational level chiefs of staff in World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.¹⁸

It was during World War I that General John J. Pershing, then commanding the American Expeditionary Force, adopted the staff model familiar to U.S. Soldiers today. While the Army had a staff system before Pershing arrived in France, it was cumbersome (consisting of more than ten sections) and "very much a work in progress."¹⁹ Pershing's experience pursuing Pancho Villa in Mexico in 1916 and 1917, however, had convinced him "of the absolute necessity of an efficient staff to support and advise the commander,"²⁰ and the Punitive Expedition had used a three-section staff system of combat (operations), administration, and intelligence.²¹ While this staff system had worked well enough with a 5000-man force, it was quickly apparent that a different staff model was needed in what would become a two-million strong American force in France.²²

Pershing studied both the British and French staff systems, but he liked the French model more because it was simple: personnel, intelligence, operations, and logistics. Pershing's lasting contribution

¹⁷ U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 101-5, STAFF ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS 5-9, 5-26 (1997) (Military Decision-Making Making Process); U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 7-98, OPERATIONS IN A LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT 6-1 (1992) (Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence).

¹⁸ American operational level chiefs of staff examined are Randolph B. Marcy, 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 60-73; John A. Rawlins, *id.* at 75-86; James G. Harbord, *id.* at 209-19; Walter B. Smith, 2 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 117-26; Hobart R. Gay & Hugh J. Gaffey, *id.* at 127-40; Eugene M. Landrum, *id.* at 169-87; Edward M. Almond, *id.* at 188-202; and Walter T. Kerwin, Jr., *id.* at 203-23.

¹⁹ 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 21.

²⁰ *Id.* at 209.

²¹ *Id.* at 211.

²² When Congress declared war in August 1917, the Army consisted of 128,000 Regulars and 67,000 National Guardsmen. By November 1918, when the war ended, there were 3.7 million Soldiers on active duty, of which two million were in Europe with Pershing. 3 REFERENCE GUIDE TO UNITED STATES MILITARY HISTORY 1865-1919, at 122-29 (Charles R. Schrader ed., 1993).

was to add a letter to the front of the staff section to reflect the level of the staff. The S-1 or S-2 was the personnel or intelligence officer at a regiment while the G-3 or G-4 was the operations or logistics staff officer at a division.²³

The explosion in the size of the Army in World War II—there were eight million men and women in Army uniforms before Germany, Italy, and Japan were defeated in 1945—required operational-level staff work as never before.²⁴ Perhaps more importantly, this staff work required a chief of staff who could facilitate and coordinate a variety of diverse efforts. *Chiefs of Staff* makes clear that Lieutenant General Walter Bedell “Beetle” Smith, who served as General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s chief of staff from 1942 to 1945, was probably the top American operational-level chief of staff in World War II, or at least first among equals. After all, it was Smith who oversaw the planning and execution of operations in North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe, including the Normandy landings in June 1944.²⁵

Judge Advocates who have served in Korea will be particularly interested in Donald W. Boose Jr.’s profile of Colonel Eugene M. Landrum, who turned in a virtuoso performance as chief of staff for General Walton H. Walker’s Eighth U.S. Army in the summer of 1950.²⁶ While Walker oversaw the execution of the successful defense of the Pusan Perimeter, it was Landrum who coordinated the planning.²⁷ As Boose shows, his most significant contribution was to come up with the ad hoc mobile reserve forces that Walker used as fire brigades up and down the line of the Naktong River. In the absence of Landrum, it is doubtful whether the Pusan Perimeter battle—and the entire Korean War—would have been an American success.²⁸

Finally, students of the Vietnam War will want to read James Jay Carafano’s profile of Major General Walter “Dutch” Kerwin, who served as chief of staff at Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, under both Generals William C. Westmoreland and Creighton Abrams.²⁹ Kerwin

²³ 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 21.

²⁴ THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1192 (I.C.B. Dear & M.R.D. Foot eds., 1995).

²⁵ 2 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 122–23.

²⁶ *Id.* at 175–79.

²⁷ *Id.* at 176.

²⁸ *Id.* at 180, 186 n.43.

²⁹ *Id.* at 205.

faced a number of difficult challenges, starting with a theater rotation policy that “moved officers through the MACV staff in less than a year.”³⁰ Officers served one year in Vietnam, and since most wanted to command as well, this meant in practice that few served even one year under Kerwin.³¹ Yet this staff had to coordinate large-scale conventional combat operations (being carried out principally by units at U.S. Army, Vietnam), counter-guerilla, pacification, and civil-military operations.³² The greatest test for Kerwin and his staff came on 30 January 1968, when the Viet Cong launched a series of coordinated attacks that became known as the Tet Offensive.³³ During this challenging time, Kerwin proved to be a chief of staff who could act as the commander’s advisor and counselor, yet simultaneously “manage the blitzkrieg of coordination and logistical tasks” that ultimately defeated the Viet Cong—at least militarily.³⁴

Chiefs of Staff shows that being an effective and efficient chief of staff—or staff officer—is an art and not a science. This is principally because every commander has a different style or technique of command, and consequently the chief of staff or staff officer must shape his or her efforts to complement that commander. For example, some commanders prize personal loyalty, but do so for different reasons. Pershing wanted this quality in his top staff officer because he wanted to share his most intimate thoughts and wanted them kept confidential.³⁵ General Douglas MacArthur, on the other hand, prized personal loyalty because his ego required it.³⁶

Other commanders look for diplomatic qualities, as did Dwight D. Eisenhower in World War II. Lieutenant General “Beetle” Smith, who served as his chief from 1942 to 1945, had been assigned in Washington, D.C., and these tours “taught him tact, diplomacy, and the art of evasive conversation.”³⁷ All were critical to Smith’s success in handling the rivalry between General George S. Patton and Field Marshal Bernard

³⁰ *Id.* at 211.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.* at 213.

³³ *Id.* at 217.

³⁴ *Id.* at 219.

³⁵ 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 209.

³⁶ 2 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 193.

³⁷ *Id.* at 121.

Montgomery, as well as the rivalry between Allied air commander General Carl A. Spaatz and Sir Arthur Tedder.³⁸

Finally, some commanders look primarily for a chief of staff who can anticipate their requirements and decisions, and even act as an assistant commander. *Chiefs of Staff* shows that George S. Patton, for example, wanted a chief of staff who was a “chief doer.”³⁹ But Patton also expected his chief to fill his shoes as an assistant commander. Brigadier General Hugh Gaffey, who served as Patton’s chief of staff at Third Army, was often away from headquarters visiting units at the front in August 1944. Gaffey served “primarily as another set of eyes and ears to help direct units of the Third Army” and ensure that Patton’s orders were followed.⁴⁰ That same month, Patton placed Gaffey in command of a provisional corps.⁴¹ Gaffey had successfully commanded the 2d Armored Division in Sicily, and this certainly explains why Patton trusted Gaffey to take command on very short notice.⁴² The import of Patton’s selection of Gaffey, however, is that it illustrates that Patton wanted a chief of staff who also could act as a deputy commander.⁴³ It also demonstrates that what a chief of staff does, and how and where he does it, very much depends on the commander’s requirements.

Like all books, there are some things about *Chiefs of Staff* that could be better. First, it would have been better as one single volume rather than two separate books. While there is a natural division between World War I and World War II—the break point in the two volumes—and some readers might only be interested in reading either the first or second volume, *Chiefs of Staff* would work better as a single book. For example, one volume would have meant a comprehensive introduction (rather than two separate introductions) and a comprehensive bibliography (rather than two separate lists of articles and books). On the other hand, two volumes means that Richard Holmes and Dennis Showalter, two of the most respected military historians alive today, each wrote a foreword. But a single volume would have given the reader and researcher a more complete picture of the development and evolution of chiefs of staff over 200 years. Since each book may be purchased separately from the

³⁸ *Id.* at 122.

³⁹ *Id.* at 131.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 134.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.* at 133.

⁴³ *Id.* at 131.

publisher, there is nothing to ensure that a reader will understand that the books, in fact, belong together. This is bad.

Second, more than twenty different contributors means a wide variety of approaches in examining an individual chief. These individual variations are also reflected in content. For example, Andy Simpson covers two World War I British chiefs of staff in less than eight pages plus one page of endnotes.⁴⁴ On the other hand, John Jay Carafano's piece on Walter T. Kerwin is almost seventeen pages plus three pages of endnotes.⁴⁵ This uneven content means that some profiles are more complete—and more helpful—than others. While Zabecki has done a masterful job as the editor in melding the various profiles into one coherent product—and getting absolute uniformity among so many different scholars is a mission impossible—the fact is that some of the essays are simply better than others.

But these are otherwise minor criticisms of a unique and groundbreaking study that deserves the widest possible audience. Nothing like *Chiefs of Staff* has previously been published in book form, and the examination of planning and thinking at the operational level is thought-provoking. Since the career goal of most Judge Advocates is to serve as a legal advisor at the division, corps, and combatant command level, this two volume set provides invaluable insights for Army lawyers into how staff structures and procedures, when combined with personalities and abilities, determine the outcome of military operations.

⁴⁴ 1 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 199–206.

⁴⁵ 2 ZABECKI, *supra* note 1, at 205–23.