

**Dogface Soldier: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.**<sup>1</sup>

Reviewed by Major John J. Gowel\*

*General Truscott rose, walked to the podium, did a sharp about-face, and proceeded to address not the guests but the graves holding the bodies of men whom he had so recently commanded. . . . Truscott apologized to the dead for their presence in the cemetery. He went on to say that “everybody tells leaders it is not their fault that men get killed in war, but that every leader knows in his heart this is not altogether true,” asking that any soldier resting there because of a mistake that he made forgive him but acknowledging “that was asking a hell of a lot under the circumstance.”*<sup>2</sup>

**Introduction**

The short list of great World War II U.S. Army generals contains many familiar names: Marshall, Bradley, Eisenhower, Patton, and MacArthur. A name that should be included, but that history has all but forgotten, is General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr. Little has been written about General Truscott largely because of *where* his victories and innovations in warfare occurred. He did not appear upon the main stage of Normandy and northern France. Instead, Truscott’s innovative and brilliant efforts came in the Allied Force’s opening acts in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Southern France.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Wilson A. Heefner, a retired physician and Army officer, seeks to set right a “miscarriage of history,” namely, General Truscott being overlooked despite his being “a faithful and consummate soldier, commander and leader of men, victorious general, and warrior of the Cold War.”<sup>4</sup> Dr. Heefner asserts that General Truscott deserves attention on par with Generals Patton, Marshall, Eisenhower, and Bradley.<sup>5</sup> *Dogface Soldier* is meant to be *the* biography of Lucian Truscott and to earn him his deserved recognition.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Heefner succeeds by providing a meticulously researched and comprehensive, yet often clinical and occasionally dense, account of the life of this consummate combat leader. Through the thorough detailing of Truscott’s life, Dr. Heefner may succeed in gaining General Truscott

the attention he deserves, but it is the substance and subject of Heefner’s story that does this and not his analysis or style; *Dogface Soldier* as the messenger of Truscott’s life is not the intellectually or emotionally engaging work that it may have been.

**Analysis**

Despite minor weaknesses in form, Dr. Heefner’s is successful because he very clearly supports and defends his thesis, namely, that General Truscott ranks among the top combat commanders and leaders of World War II and post-war Germany and, therefore, deserves greater recognition.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Dr. Heefner’s support for his thesis is so great that the reader may conclude he has understated it. The factual data is so compelling that even with his clinical, dispassionate delivery, Dr. Heefner demonstrates Truscott to be even Patton’s superior in numerous areas of command and leadership: in his ability to work alongside his British counterparts,<sup>8</sup> in his care and respect for his Soldiers,<sup>9</sup> in his ability to bring his superiors to his way of thinking, and in his loyalty and sense of duty when following orders.<sup>10</sup> When Eisenhower relieved Patton as commander of Third Army, he chose Truscott to take the helm.<sup>11</sup> General Eisenhower said in 1943 that Truscott’s 3d Infantry Division was the best unit in North Africa and Italy, an opinion joined in by the German commander for the Mediterranean theater, German Field Marshall Kesselring.<sup>12</sup> In his service with the CIA, Truscott’s accomplishments are also likely without equal: he coordinated all intelligence collection efforts in

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<sup>1</sup> WILSON A. HEEFNER, *DOGFACE SOLDIER: THE LIFE OF GENERAL LUCIAN K. TRUSCOTT, JR.* (2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 246 (citation omitted).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 1 (quoting Roger J. Spiller, *Overrated, Underrated*, AM. HERITAGE, Oct. 2002, at 52, 295).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Heefner finds the other attempt to catalogue Gen. Lucian Truscott’s life lacking. He criticizes H. Paul Jeffers’ *Command of Honor: General Lucian Truscott’s Path to Victory in World War II* as being abbreviated and making insufficient use of primary sources. *Id.* at 303 n.1. Dr. Heefner praises and recommends General Truscott’s autobiographical work, *Command Missions*. *Id.* at 7–8.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 1, 295.

<sup>8</sup> Compare HEEFNER, *supra* note 1, at 58–59 (Thank you letter to Truscott for close work with British staff), with STEPHEN E. AMBROSE, *AMERICANS AT WAR 168* (1997) (describing Patton as an Anglophobe).

<sup>9</sup> Compare HEEFNER, *supra* note 1, at 121–22 (describing Truscott humbly moving out of the way of a working Soldier), with AMBROSE, *supra* note 7, at 165 (describing Patton slapping a battle-fatigued Soldier).

<sup>10</sup> Compare HEEFNER, *supra* note 1, at 120 (Truscott’s willingness to follow orders), with AMBROSE, *supra* note 7, at 254 (Patton’s refusal to follow national denazification policy).

<sup>11</sup> HEEFNER, *supra* note 1, at 120.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 3, 292.

Germany, led the successful effort to tap into Soviet telecommunications in East Berlin, opening a source of information that did not exist before, and perhaps prevented a disastrous revolution in eastern Europe, which could have led to general hostilities between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Heefner's *Dogface Soldier* shines a sufficient spotlight on this general's accomplishments and talents to earn Truscott the attention that history has so far denied him.

Dr. Heefner's provides a comprehensive examination of Truscott's life. Although he completed only his first year of high school, General Truscott's military career outshone those of many more educated officers. Beginning his professional career as a schoolteacher in rural Oklahoma, Truscott entered the Army in 1917 through an officer training camp. Dr. Heefner details Truscott's pre-World War II career as he narrowly earns a permanent commission, marries Thomas Jefferson descendant Sarah Randolph, and starts a family.<sup>14</sup> During the inter-war years, Truscott became a national polo champion and spent approximately ten years as a student and instructor at the Army's Cavalry School and then at the Command and General Staff School.<sup>15</sup> In early 1941, Truscott assumed duties as the assistant G-3 for IX Corps at Fort Lewis, Washington, whose Chief of Staff was Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower. It was there that the two met and became lifelong friends. "The close friendship . . . would play a decisive role in [Truscott's] career," so much so that a vociferous detractor said that Truscott "was carried along on the tail of Eisenhower's kite."<sup>16</sup>

Truscott began his World War II service by being hand-selected to integrate with the British staff responsible for Commando and amphibious operations. His task was to develop a plan for training American Soldiers for their first combat experiences. Truscott's efforts as part of this staff resulted in the creation of the U.S. Army Rangers.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Heefner traces Truscott's rise from his regimental command during the invasion of North Africa in Operation TORCH, through his division command and brilliant performance during the invasion of Sicily in Operation HUSKY, through his corps command where he saved the Anzio beachhead and later put the German Army on the run from southern France, to his days as an army commander driving the Germans from Italy and beginning the management of the peace in post-war Germany both as commander for Third Army and as Chief of the CIA Mission for Germany.

Dr. Heefner's extensive research is apparent throughout *Dogface Soldier* as he tells the story of Truscott's life. He uses an impressive array of primary sources to provide a multi-faceted view of Truscott. Truscott's efficiency reports, written by commanders such as Patton and Clark, place Truscott among the top leaders in the European theater.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Heefner uses General Truscott's autobiographical work, *Command Missions*, and his letters to his wife to provide recurring glimpses inside General Truscott's heart and mind.<sup>19</sup> Diaries and writings of Truscott's fellow commanders, members of his staff, fellow Soldiers, and accompanying correspondents depict unguarded moments in his day-to-day behavior and provide a more complete view of the man.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Dr. Heefner's use of the mundane business records of the Army and CIA—internal Army memoranda and directives, unit official reports, documents and medical records, and collections of CIA reports and documents—earn *Dogface Soldier* a firm foundation in authenticity and credibility.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps as an unintended consequence of this thorough research, a distracting weakness that creates distance between author and reader, is the clinical tone of Dr. Heefner's detailing of Truscott's life, with insufficient energy and passion. Dr. Heefner often provides extensive detail about commanders, troop movements, or events without enough analysis to demonstrate the significance of these details and without enough energy to hold the reader's attention.<sup>22</sup> These weaknesses are especially present until the mid-point of the book, where Truscott assumes command of VI Corps. Dr. Heefner also received similar criticism for an earlier work, *Patton's Bulldog: The Life and Service of General Walton H. Walker*, indicating that the issue may be one of the author's style and not one of subject matter.<sup>23</sup> In this work, Dr. Heefner provides a well-reasoned analysis of Truscott's life in the preface, introduction, and afterword; but the analysis of the individual battles and events within the work is almost completely lacking. Compounding the reader's frustration, the accompanying maps rarely succeed in bringing clarity and require no small

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 293–94.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 15–16.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 21, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 4 (quoting Brigadier General Paul M. Robinett, *The Tender Thread of Fate* 33 (unpublished short story) (on file with the George C. Marshall Research Library)).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 37.

<sup>18</sup> *See, e.g., id.* at 71 (General Patton ranked him 4 of 183 colonels), 163 (Major General Lucas ranked him 1 of 38 division commanders), 253 (General Clark ranked him 1 of 73 general officers).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 5. Truscott's *Command Missions* makes up approximately thirty percent of all citations. *See id.* at 303–41.

<sup>20</sup> *See, e.g., id.* at 121–22 (Ernie Pyle, while visiting the 3d Infantry Division, witnessed a Soldier trip over a napping Truscott. The Soldier, annoyed, barked, "If you're not working, get the hell out of the way." The general got up and moved farther back without saying a word.).

<sup>21</sup> *See, e.g., id.* at 343–48.

<sup>22</sup> *See, e.g., id.* at 72–85 (regarding Truscott's time as Eisenhower's deputy chief of staff), 146 (regarding the disposition of General Clark's forces across the Winter Line).

<sup>23</sup> "There is little if any insightful analysis of his character, his role in World War I operations, or his shortcomings. Much the same is true for the author's treatment of the interwar years." Samuel Newland, Review, *Patton's Bulldog: The Life and Service of General Walton H. Walker*, PARAMETERS, Summer 2003, at 137.

amount of effort to reconcile with the text. For example, a map of the southern operations in Tunisia, including the battle of Kasserine Pass, attempts to show seventy days of battles and troop movements on one chart. This is overly ambitious and fails to convey what actually happened.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of analysis can affect the reader's intellectual engagement, but the author's lack of passion and energy affects the reader's interest and emotional engagement. An example is found in Dr. Heefner's description of Truscott's first combat leadership experience on the beaches of Africa during Operation Torch: "Finding that the beach was still in chaos, and fearing that French aircraft might attack the beach the next morning, Truscott directed that order be established before daybreak."<sup>25</sup> Compare the same events as relayed by Rick Atkinson, *using the same source*:

He drew on his cigarette and picked up a rifle. Every battle also was made up of small actions by generals. Bellowing over the crashing surf, Truscott ordered straggling infantrymen, stranded coxswains, and anyone else within earshot to grab a weapon and move inland . . . There would be no Dieppe in Africa. Lucian Truscott would not permit it. No sonofabitch, no commander.<sup>26</sup>

Heefner's description is logical but lacks emotion; however, Atkinson's account practically breathes. While Atkinson may have been writing to a more general audience, Dr. Heefner's account of General Truscott's first day in combat deserves more life.<sup>27</sup> This lack of attention-grabbing energy pervades the entirety of *Dogface Soldier*.<sup>28</sup>

The analysis that is present within *Dogface Soldier* is excellent and engaging; however, the credit for the analysis must usually be given to General Truscott himself, which raises its own issue. The most effective analysis techniques employed by Dr. Heefner are his use of lessons learned and summaries of the problems facing the units that Truscott inherited. For example, following the chapter on the Anzio campaign, where Truscott's efforts as VI Corps commander save the Anzio beachhead, Dr. Heefner writes,

[H]e made his greatest contribution to the battle after he became VI Corps commander by "restoring confidence and morale among all elements of the beachhead" by adhering to a fundamental principle of command: the "successful commander must display a spirit of confidence regardless of the dark outlook in any grim situation, and he must be positive and stern in the application of measures which will impress this confidence upon his command."<sup>29</sup>

The quoted language containing all of the analysis of Truscott's actions at Anzio are the words of Truscott himself. This pattern of using Truscott to analyze Truscott is repeated throughout the book, leaving a nagging question as to the impartiality of the author. Despite this weakness, Dr. Heefner generally provides ample factual detail to support Truscott's opinions.

### Application

Dr. Heefner's depiction of General Truscott overflows with leadership lessons.<sup>30</sup> Truscott's presence on the front lines, his ability to honestly assess and fix situations, and his will to win are his greatest leadership qualities.

Perhaps Truscott's greatest lesson to leaders is the importance of leading through presence. Truscott spends most of his time away from his headquarters, meeting in person with subordinate commanders, and observing his Soldiers in action. But for his presence during the failed Dieppe raid, he may never have fully understood the complexities of amphibious warfare, and perhaps he would not have become, as *Time* described him, "the ablest sea-to-land commander in the United States Army."<sup>31</sup> A leader's presence allows his subordinates to know that he shares their burden, is aware of their circumstances, and that he cares.

Truscott's life also depicts the lesson that leaders must assess and fix weaknesses in their organizations quickly. Truscott did this for each of his commands. In Anzio, his ability to identify and diagnose his unit's problems before the Germans and Italians could do so prevented failure of the

<sup>24</sup> See HEEFNER, *supra* note 1, at 76.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at 66.

<sup>26</sup> RICK ATKINSON, *AN ARMY AT DAWN: THE WAR IN NORTH AFRICA, 1942-1943* (2002).

<sup>27</sup> Heefner does state that his intended audiences are military historians with an interest in the Mediterranean theater and readers with an interest in military leaders of World War II. HEEFNER, *supra* note 1, at xi.

<sup>28</sup> Another missed opportunity for emotional connection is in the description of the death of Truscott's old friend Colonel William Darby. *Id.* at 241-43.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 180.

<sup>30</sup> For events of particular note for judge advocates (JAs), more specifically, see the anecdote of Truscott's "solution" to a problem of self-maiming to avoid combat in Sicily resulting in a fifty-year sentence to confinement for one offender. *Id.* at 106. Although Truscott's actions would likely be considered unlawful command influence today, the anecdote still holds important lessons for JAs—showing the concerns of commanders on the eve of battle, the actions that can arise from those concerns, and the need for speed in military justice actions. There are also lessons regarding the military tribunals for German war criminals which took place under Truscott's supervision. *Id.* at 263.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 2, 51.

Allied campaign in Italy.<sup>32</sup> Another clear example came after he assumed command of the 3d Infantry Division. Truscott noted the poor physical fitness of his men. He implemented a combat-focused physical training program centered on the “Truscott trot,” designed to allow his men to routinely and quickly march for thirty miles.<sup>33</sup> Within a few months, the Allied effort in Sicily relied on the “Truscott trot” over the narrow and rocky coast of northern Sicily as Truscott led the assault across ground unsuited to travel by any other means.<sup>34</sup>

Truscott’s determination and drive to win explains many of Truscott’s tactical and operational successes and serves as a final leadership lesson. When Truscott ran out of land to outflank an adversary, he used amphibious landings to bypass and destroy the enemy.<sup>35</sup> When trucks and tanks could not carry his men and equipment through the Italian mountains, he found and used pack animals and horses to do so.<sup>36</sup> When his higher commander issued bad orders, he would reason with him. When that would fail, he would press the case to his boss’s boss.<sup>37</sup> His innovation in establishing a planning board to solve staff coordination problems still survives on division and higher staffs.<sup>38</sup> He even created a unit, Task Force Butler, to exploit his anticipated success in the invasion of southern France when he thought his higher headquarters might fail to provide such a force.<sup>39</sup> Truscott’s will to win, perhaps more than his other leadership qualities, explains how he was able to so effectively contribute to victory in Europe.

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., has earned his place in American history, and his leadership style and skills are relevant and needed today. Dr. Heefner achieves his end with *Dogface Soldier* by creating a work that organizes and presents the evidence necessary to earn General Truscott the place in history that he deserves. The stylistic weakness of the book, particularly the lack of passion and energy, may delay the speed at which this evidence reaches a general audience, but Dr. Heefner’s meticulous research and clinical compilation of the facts has fixed the “miscarriage of history” for this forgotten American hero by creating an accurate record of his service. Now all that stands between General Truscott becoming a title character in the American psyche is a screenplay and an actor of George C. Scott’s caliber.

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<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 164–68.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 99.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 115–16.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 123.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 118.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 63.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* at 100.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 189.