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## The Gentle Warrior: General Oliver Prince Smith, USMC

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felled him, and he was relieved of command. Rather than retiring gracefully, however, Puller fought the medical examiner's board for over a year before the secretary of the Navy informed him in October 1955 that he would be retired.

For Puller, his forced retirement from active service was the ultimate betrayal by the commandant and Headquarters, Marine Corps. In his twilight years, however, Puller mellowed a bit and took personal satisfaction in seeing his family reach maturity. He volunteered for active service during the Vietnam War (his request was understandably denied). A vocal critic of government policy during the war, Puller watched his son, Lewis Puller, Jr., carry on the Puller name in combat.

As a sidelight, Hoffman provides an intimate portrayal of the relationship between father and son in the elder Puller's last days. Lewis Jr., who later recorded his own experiences in a Pulitzer Prize-winning autobiography, *Fortunate Son*, was at his father's side when Chesty Puller, the greatest Marine in history, succumbed to pneumonia and kidney infection on 11 October 1971.

The Puller who emerges from these pages is not an altogether appealing figure but one who merits the accolades that generations of Marines have bestowed upon him. The fact that his Navy Crosses were awarded for leadership during critical stages of battle as opposed to individual acts of bravery in no way diminishes what Puller accomplished during his distinguished career. An unparalleled warrior and an enlisted leatherneck at heart, Chesty Puller remains the most famous and most revered Marine. It is fitting that we finally have a biography that does justice to this extraordinary officer.

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La Bree, Clifton. *The Gentle Warrior: General Oliver Prince Smith, USMC*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 2001. 268pp. \$32

Oliver Prince Smith was not present at Belleau Wood or Chateau Thierry. Neither did he chase Sandino in Nicaragua. He never served in Shanghai with the 4th Marines. He missed the fighting on Guadalcanal and Tarawa—early 1941 saw him with the 1st Marine Brigade in Iceland, returning to the United States in May 1942 for an eighteen-month stint in the newly formed headquarters Division of Plans and Policies. Consequently, Smith's first taste of combat did not come until early 1944—fully twenty-seven years after commissioning—at New Britain, where he served initially as chief of staff for the 1st Marine Division and shortly as commander, 5th Marines, for the Talasea Peninsula assault. Subsequently, at Peleliu he had the distinct misfortune to serve as assistant commander of the 1st Marine Division under Major General William H. Rupertus. He would finish his World War II service as Marine deputy chief of staff for the Tenth Army at Okinawa.

Smith went through the Reserve Officers Training Corps program at the University of California, Berkeley, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1917. He was ordered to Guam, followed by shipboard duty, then Washington, D.C., three years in Haiti, and the Army's Field Officer School at Fort Benning in 1931. Subsequently, Smith taught at Marine Corps Schools in Quantico, following which he became the first Marine officer to matriculate at the French *École de Guerre*. Returning to the United States, he was again assigned as an instructor at Quantico, where, because of his obvious

intellectual power, he acquired the nicknames “the professor” and the “student general.”

Smith was not a colorful character. A practicing Christian Scientist, he did not drink (although he did smoke a pipe), and he did not use profanity. In fact, when he spoke at all he rarely raised his voice above a normal speaking level. “Taciturn” probably describes him best.

Consequently, when in spring 1950, after serving as Marine Corps assistant commandant, Smith received orders as commanding general, 1st Marine Division, there was not a little heartburn among other Marine general officers, which only intensified when that division deployed to Korea.

Yet if ever there was an officer with the right qualifications at the right place at the right time, it was Major General Oliver Prince Smith.

It was O.P. who worked closely and effectively with Rear Admiral James H. Doyle on a very short time line to plan the September 1950 landing at Inchon, with higher echelons back-dating their operation orders to conform with those produced at the lower levels. Like Doyle, O.P. was a practical-minded, hardheaded professional who cared not a whit for high-blown rhetoric or elegant maps, only for getting the job done. It was O.P. who wisely resisted great pressure from his corps commander to accelerate his division’s advance on Seoul in order to meet an artificial schedule for securing that city; urgings to make a dangerous night attack once in Seoul; and attempts to interfere in his division’s internal chain of command.

The extraordinary performance of the 1st Marine Division at Chosin is widely known. Less obvious was O.P.’s

contribution to that performance. Again, he wisely resisted considerable pressure from his corps commander to quick-pace the division’s advance to the Yalu. Cognizant of the danger posed by the Chinese entry into the war, O.P. doggedly strove to keep his division concentrated. Smith developed a main supply route with defensible redoubts that made possible the division’s long fighting retreat from Chosin to Hamhung. Earlier, in the belief that the war would extend well into the bitter Korean winter, he had insisted on cold-weather gear for his Marines. He kept in continuous personal contact with his regimental commanders by means of helicopter (the first field commander to do so) and jeep, and yet he refrained from interfering with their exercise of command.

By these deeds, this reviewer is persuaded that O. P. Smith saved a great many fine men from certain capture, injury, or death. Much beloved by his men, O.P. reciprocated; in his personal log he kept handwritten daily and running casualty figures for the division. Perhaps the best-known photo of O. P. Smith is of him standing alone among graves of his men in the cemetery at Hamhung.

Smith was neither good news material nor well known outside Marine circles; he was a very private and modest person. For example, he confided to his wife his deep embarrassment on receiving a Silver Star from General Douglas MacArthur, an award he deemed inappropriate for a division commander not directly in the line of fire. Such humility and personal reserve neither attract biographers nor render their task easy (in Korea he was easily eclipsed by his 1st Marines commander, the colorful “Chesty” Puller). Thus, the absence of a biography of Smith until now is no surprise, but the lacuna has been a serious one. That there

is now such a biography is owed to the perseverance of the publisher's executive director, who served in the 1st Marine Division after the Korean War.

Fortunately for his biographer, O.P. kept meticulous records of his professional life, comprising some three dozen boxes in the Marine Corps University Archives and, more important, a detailed, daily personal log of his Korean War service. La Bree conducted interviews with officers who had served with O.P. to help fill in the blanks.

*Gentle Warrior* would have benefited had the author provided a broader context for the historical events in which its protagonist participated. It would also have been improved by more attention to the first decades of O.P.'s career, which are largely omitted—official records could have provided at least grist for the mill here. That O.P.'s youth and college years are absent from this account is due principally to his family's desire for privacy, which the author respected. Thus we do not really know the father to the man—the account really starts with O.P.'s deployment to Iceland.

Nonetheless, this is a good, honest book. It is probably not the definitive account of O.P.'s life and career, but we are fortunate to have it. He emerges as a consummate, dedicated professional military officer who served his country and his Marine Corps extremely well and did so with little fanfare or expectation of public approbation. On more than one occasion, Smith risked his career to speak truth to power. In short, there is much worth emulating in the character and career of O. P. Smith. Serving officers would do well to read this book and absorb its lessons.

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Probert, Henry. *Bomber Harris, His Life and Times: The Biography of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur Harris, the Wartime Chief of Bomber Command*. London: Greenhill, 2001. 432pp. \$34.95

In the 1920s, early in his career, when Arthur Harris commanded 45 Squadron in Iraq, he was concerned with improving the accuracy of his unit's bomb aiming. Can this be the same man who, twenty years later, was responsible for leading the Royal Air Force Bomber Command's area-bombing campaign against the cities of the Third Reich, the apogee of which was the apocalyptic raid on Dresden in February 1945?

Yes and no. As Henry Probert demonstrates in his admirable biography of this most controversial Allied airman, Harris did indeed stress the need for his bombers to operate efficiently and effectively as they policed their corner of the British Empire, and he continued to emphasize these qualities for the remainder of his career. Harris cannot be made to bear personal responsibility for either the area-bombing strategy in general, or the Dresden raid in particular. Although Harris became a lightning rod for post-war criticism of the strategic air offensive, the critical decisions were made higher up the chain of command by the Chiefs of Staff, the War Cabinet, and Winston Churchill. In pointing out this simple but often overlooked fact, Probert, like Robin Neillands in his recent *The Bomber War* (Overlook Press, 2001), seeks to debunk myths and set the record straight by putting Harris in his proper historical context.

In some respects this task is not an easy one, but Probert is well qualified to make the attempt. A retired RAF air commodore with a long record of service,