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## In Many a Strife: General Gerald C. Thomas and the U.S. Marine Corps, 1917-1956

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of powers is the beginning of wisdom for those who would understand the constitutional dimension of American military affairs. President Bush during the Gulf War insisted he did not need the approval of Congress for his actions, but he wisely sought it anyway. Congress insisted that he did need it and then, again wisely, made sure he got the approval to do what he would have done anyway.

Inextricably linked to this recent issue is the question of the effect of the treaty power on constitutional procedures and the exceedingly troublesome War Powers Act of 1973, whose ambiguities might cost this nation dearly some day.

All this is but to say that there is a certain intellectual chaos at the heart of the founding fathers' brilliant idea of preserving liberty by dividing power. Ours is an untidy regime but a fascinating one nonetheless. The same can be said of the chapters in the present volume—themeless and untidy throughout, but often fascinating and at times even brilliant.

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Millett, Allan R. *In Many a Strife: General Gerald C. Thomas and the U.S. Marine Corps, 1917–1956*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1993. 456pp. \$39.95

This book drums home for the military professional that the Marine Corps' story hangs not only on its Medal of Honor and Navy Cross heroes who

fought the Corps' battles "in the air, on land, and sea," but also on the officers who fought its battles on Capitol Hill and in the White House. Without powerful, politicized leaders like Gerald C. Thomas, there would be no Marine Corps today.

This work is not only a biography but a blow-by-blow account of naval-military politics in action and how the men with stars on their shoulders interact. Allan Millett has chosen the story of Gerald Thomas (an officer of whom few people outside the Corps ever heard) as a lens through which the broader story of how the modern Marine Corps was created can be seen. The author asserts that Thomas is important to the Corps because what he believed in and fought for is what the modern Marine Corps has become.

Millett introduces Thomas as a World War I sergeant who fought in the battles of Belleau Wood, Soissons, and Blanc Mount, for which he received a Silver Star, the Purple Heart, and a battlefield commission. But it was during the heavy-handed occupation of Haiti that Thomas met the man who "became his most important acquaintance in the Marine Corps," Major Alexander Archer Vandegrift. In the mid-1930s Captain Thomas served in Peking as a company commander and adjutant to Colonel Vandegrift. Thomas was still at his mentor's side when Major General Vandegrift led the Marines ashore on Guadalcanal in 1942 and when Vandegrift became Commandant of the Corps.

Thomas did not command a tactical unit until the Korean War. Major General Thomas requested and was

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given command of the 1st Marine Division, which had just battled its way back from the Chosin Reservoir. He was criticized for taking too many casualties during the battle for the Punchbowl (sixty-seven killed and 1,044 wounded—more losses than the entire Chosin Reservoir campaign); still, he received the Distinguished Service Cross.

However, most of Thomas's strife took place in Quantico and Washington D.C., where Thomas fought as a politician-general within the military-political establishment. Gerald Thomas was forceful, blunt, and loved military-political intrigue. He played the Corps' "old boy" network with great skill and helped shape the modern Marine Corps as an amphibious force in readiness. He believed that the Marine Corps' mission should be amphibious assault against defended enemy shores; that admirals should not act like generals (as had Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner at Guadalcanal); that the Marine Corps should control its own close air support (the Air Force disagreed vigorously); that the Commandant should report to the Secretary of the Navy and not the Chief of Naval Operations; and that Congress, not the Joint Chiefs of Staff, should define the Marine Corps' roles and missions. (Both he and Vandegrift feared that if it were left to the Joint Chiefs, the Army would drown the Corps. Their intense lobbying made sure that the National Security Act of 1947 protected the Marine Corps.) Finally, he was convinced that the advent of nuclear weapons required that amphibious assault convert to vertical envelopment, sending Marines to future beaches entirely by helicopter—a

view officially endorsed in 1954. Millett writes that "the decision was the most important change in Marine Corps doctrine since Commandant John A. Lejeune endorsed the concept of the waterborne amphibious assault in 1921."

Allan Millett is a retired colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve and a professor of military history at Ohio State University. He has managed to be true to both professions in this commissioned volume. The Marine Corps Historical Foundation awarded *In Many a Strife* the 1993 Wallace M. Greene, Jr., Award for the year's best work of Marine Corps history.

This book is not a page-turner; the author loves facts and uses interminable lists—of this volume's 456 pages, 103 are academic impedimenta. On the other hand, his attention to detail makes the work a valuable one for military professionals who want to analyze how things get done.

In his foreword, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, Director of Marine Corps History and Museums, says of General Thomas, "He has been called the Richelieu of the Marine Corps—the 'gray eminence'—and that is not far off the mark." Bull's-eye!

J. ROBERT MOSKIN  
author of  
*The U.S. Marine Corps Story*

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Hattendorf, John B., ed. *Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1991. 432pp. \$32.95