

1988

## Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants and Their War

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### Recommended Citation

Weschler, T.R. (1988) "Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants and Their War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 1 , Article 27.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss1/27>

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the reader of the author's earnest intentions. However important its subject, *Wars Without Splendor* may be safely forgotten.

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Larrabee, Eric. *Commander in Chief: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, His Lieutenants and Their War*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. 723pp. \$25

This superb history, beautifully and tightly written, is a summation of U.S. war experience as directed or influenced by the President as Commander in Chief and by his principal deputies—briefly preceding and including World War II. Not only are the Joint Chiefs (Marshall, Arnold, and King) featured, but the Unified Commanders (MacArthur, Nimitz, and Eisenhower) are included as well. In addition, three central figures (Vandegrift, Stilwell, and LeMay), key to America's involvement, are highlighted to reflect the depth and breadth of the President's awareness and the varied but close relationships he had developed within the military over the years.

Narrative in style, the author's insights provide thorough evaluations of the characters and actions of the President, his lieutenants, and allied officers. Specific battles provide insights into situations and theories of which some examples are: the mid-1943 U.S. raid on the Ploesti (Rumania) refineries as a test of strategic warfare; Vandegrift's and Nimitz' leadership in pivotal

Guadalcanal and Midway battles; and Eisenhower's brilliance in building the coalition which resulted in the successful invasion of Normandy. Special gems such as Roosevelt's put-down of MacArthur, "You must not talk that way to the President!" and the wonderful quotes from a 23-year-old Army Air Force officer, Bert Stiles, killed very shortly after having written them.

Though the book is generally based on secondary sources, extensive research and cross-checking generate fresh insights and understandings. The author is reasonably objective and shows warmth and understanding toward his principals despite their sometimes surprising deviations; exceptions being MacArthur and Stilwell. The myths surrounding MacArthur receive more than pin-pricks, and readers must weigh for themselves how deserved these "cuts to size" are. There is a certain lack of focus that makes the chapter on Stilwell the least satisfying. There is no dearth of incident, too much discussion of U.S.-China relationships at every level, but no discussion of Stilwell's relationship with the Communist Chinese. The worth of General Stilwell in the field is not developed sufficiently to justify the proposition that it was wrong to have fired him when the Generalissimo insisted.

On the other hand, President Roosevelt could not have a more sympathetic biographer. Though his strong stands against the Joint Chiefs are noted, and his divergences from Churchill and the British Joint Chiefs

fully covered, there is no hint that any of these decisions were other than right and proper. In his service to his country, it is clear that President Roosevelt relished his role as Commander in Chief and found in it his ultimate fulfillment. His life had qualified him very remarkably for wartime leadership, and his understanding of the Constitution and our democratic process insured his political success, whatever his military genius. He proved himself global in scope, brilliant in conception, sensitive to logistics and timing, perceptive in selecting major leaders, and effective in delegating. Only in Guadalcanal did he interfere directly with a military operation after it was underway. He insisted that the JCS direct every possible force to save that shoestring campaign, and his intervention proved correct.

As World War II fades into the past, especially for today's military and political leaders, this book is most timely, reminding us of such major war requirements as mobilization, rules of engagement, battle readiness, and strategic plans. *Commander in Chief* should be required reading for every War College student and military commander, every member of Congress, and every media reporter.

The tools may have changed, but the global and personal dynamics of war remain the same. This book reminds us of the fundamentals of war—the human factor, the irrationalities, the raw courage, the glories and squabbles of services and allies, the untried and variedly successful

theories, the mobilization of production, and above all, the essentiality of publicly supported objectives and an agreed basic strategy.

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Hammel, Eric. *Guadalcanal: Starvation Island*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1987. 435pp. \$24.95

For several years the Naval War College's warfighting courses have used the battles for Leyte Gulf as the primary case study of World War II. There, an overwhelming superiority of U.S. power determined the outcome—tactical brilliance and errors notwithstanding. The battles on and around Guadalcanal from August through December of 1942 offer far more thought provoking and valuable material for contemporary military leaders and planners. In today's world we no longer have a dominance of power. The early months of any future war may well resemble those months of confusion and bloodshed to control an island of no strategic importance where, as Hammel states, a "confluence of events" focused the military might of two great nations.

To his credit, Eric Hammel does not become pretentious in attempting to provide strategic overviews or draw historical implications. What he does do very well, and in chronological order, is portray small pieces of this campaign as viewed by those in the jungle, in the cockpit, and on the decks of the naval units involved.